

PASSAGE READING:

We're continuing our series through *John* today, but before we read our passage, I wanna ask you to consider a question. Consider this: *Knowing what you know about Jesus to this point in John, what kind of message do you think, could provoke Him to - at the highpoint of a party, in which there are in attendance MULTIPLE people who want Him dead - provoke Him to risk delivering that message?* What message would be SO important that He'd risk his life to speak it?...Consider that as we hear now the reading of God's word/Would you stand with me?...

INTRO:¹

Quite simply, what you have here is: Jesus' presence at a week-long Jewish festival known as the Feast of Booths, which we discussed last week, prompting a lot of discussion and even more confusion. For example, you see in **vv.25-30**, that you've got confusion about where Jesus is from. Despite numerous OT prophecies that the Messiah would come from Bethlehem, which of course was where Jesus was born, many still thought that the origins of the messiah would be unknown until salvation was established for Israel...Similarly, down in **vv.31-36**, you've got confusion, not just about where Jesus is from, but where He's going too. He says, *"I'll be with you a little longer; and then I'm going to him who sent me,"* which of course is an allusion to His death and resurrection, but at the time, the Jewish Leaders thought He was speaking literally, about perhaps, going to what was known as the Dispersion/these different regions of the Roman Empire in which Jews had been scattered...And then finally, you see in **vv.40-52**, confusion about Jesus' pedigree and credentials - that despite being from Galilee, which was considered a sorta backwoods part of town, He nevertheless astounded people with His teaching - temple officials going so far as to say in **v.46**, *"No one ever spoke like this man!"*...So just a ton of confusion and REALLY hostility boiling up around Jesus.

And YET, in the middle of all of it/on as it says in **v.37**, *"the last day of the feast, the great day"/* the closing ceremonies: JESUS/at great risk to Himself, *"stands up and cries out, 'Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, 'Out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.'"* In the midst of this incredibly public setting, where friends are confused about Him and enemies are looking to kill Him, Jesus' heart is so filled up with NOT a lecture or a 3-point sermon, but a simple, 1-verse message that shows you **5 things** that REALLY get at the heart of Biblical Christianity: **5 things: A Simple Reality; Simple Assumption; A Simple Condition; A Simple Invitation; and A Simple Assessment.** Let's take a look at those 5 things...

First, the Simple Reality. And the simple reality with this FESTIVAL was that, as a part of the festivities, each morning a large, golden jar of water was brought by temple priests, from a specific pool, to the temple. And kinda like the Olympic torch procession - as the priests processed TO the temple, those in attendance would sing and worship, UNTIL those priests poured out the water around the temple altar - The whole thing being a celebration of how God

¹ Works consulted:

- The Gift of the Spirit - Gospel of John, Part 1 - May 19, 1991 - John 7:37-44 - Timothy J. Keller, *The Timothy Keller Sermon Archive* (New York City: Redeemer Presbyterian Church, 2013).
- The Indwelling of the Spirit, the Common Privilege of All Believers - Sermon 38 - George Whitefield, *Selected Sermons of George Whitefield* (Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc., 1999).

had not only provided water for His people during their OT desert-wanderings, by commanding Moses to strike a rock out of which flowed this water that literally saved their lives - BUT even more, how God had promised to one day pour out his Spirit and save all humankind. These festivities were a looking forward to that day when God's LIFE, as it were, filled, nourished and saved our lives!²... So Jesus is in the middle of all this and not being able to contain Himself stands up and basically says, *"Everyone/Listen: I know who the real rock is that's ultimately gonna be broken. I know what it means to provide for those who need saving. - 'Whoever believes in me... 'Out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.'"* And what's crazy is not only Jesus saying that He's the FULFILLMENT of this whole festival, but more importantly that at the heart of LIFE itself is an experience of GOD'S life coming in and flowing out of you!

Which I have to say feels incredibly important. Since doesn't it seem like every day there's a new article/new study/piece of commentary lamenting how we/especially in the West, are so empty? Ya know, battling rising suicide rates, mental health challenges, racial tensions, addictions, trauma, even just the seemingly new phenomenon of "quiet quitting," where ya give up on your job/your employer, but don't actually tell em. Just this endless number of scourges that, I think if you're honest, really do show, as Sam Alberry said, *"the world isn't right as both a consequence and demonstration of the fact that WE'RE not right."*³ - That the **reality** of our problem as human beings goes a lot deeper than something merely political, social or even religious. And AS such requires a solution BEYOND us. Requires something like God's life flowing in and out of us. **THAT'S the reality!**

And if you keep going you see, **Second**, that Jesus really does **Assume** that reality/makes a **Simple Assumption** regarding our NEED for God's life in and through us. Cuz remember, this festival is essentially a celebration of God having poured out His life and basically reasserted His management OVER life. The reason Israel was hungry and thirsty way back in the wilderness was because she'd begun to think that God had mismanaged her life. At multiple times you see the Israelites, especially in the book of **Exodus**, complain to Moses that God didn't care and was gonna let em die in the desert UNTIL God provided manna and water from the rock. The whole thing being a picture of both God's power to provide, but also His mercy and grace. - That instead of "breaking" Israel for her grumbling and disobedience, He broke the rock/laid punishment on the rock in order to "save" Israel. That's what this whole festival commemorated and AS SUCH is almost like a parable of our lives **isn't it?** Cuz just like Israel, we too are living our lives/which God has in His hands, but then something goes wrong. And **what's almost our default response?** Same as Israel's **right?** *"God what are you doing? You're not doing it right! I know what to do! I'll take it from here."* And in different ways we start reaching up, as it were, trying to grab our life outta God's hands and reassert OUR management over it... To which God says, *"you understand that's not just stupidity, given the brokenness that comes when you attempt to take your life out of the hands of the GIVER of life - it's cosmic rebellion too!* It's attempting to overthrow God's rule and management of the life HE'S given you, and consequently needs to be

² Insight on festival from: A. Knowles, *The Bible guide* (Mineapolis: Augsburg Books, 2001), 513-514.

³ <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/what-christianity-alone-offers-transgender-persons#When:2017-01-10T06:00:00+00:00>

punished!...And YET, *the beauty of the Gospel Friend*/what this whole festival foreshadowed, is that GOD has taken that punishment on Himself/allowed Jesus on the Cross, to take the blow you and I deserved. He became the broken rock, so that you can get the water of life...So you see, in stepping up and inviting people to “*come to Him*,” Jesus is quite literally **assuming** that given the reality of God’s life/God’s Spirit, you see your need for Him to’ve taken the blow you deserved in order to GIVE you that life. Cuz you understand, either Jesus has BORN your punishment or YOU will bear your punishment. You NEED His life for yours! And in the meantime, you NEED His life flowing in and OUT of yours, given your inability/all our inability to manage life...That’s the **assumption** Jesus is making. ***Do you agree with that assumption?***

Cuz if you do, then **Third** thing you gotta see is the **Simple Condition** Jesus gives. Which is just...to be “*thirsty*.” He says, “*if anyone THIRSTS come to me...*” ***You know what it means to be “thirsty?”*** It means to be empty. When Israel was thirsting in the wilderness they cried out because they knew they were empty, both literally and spiritually, cuz they were incapable of saving themselves. Remember the woman at the well in **John 4**? Every day, trudging to that well. Isolated from friends, full of shame, broken heart multiple times over, each trip triggering all that. ***Remember what Jesus said to her?*** “*Everyone who drinks of THIS water will be thirsty again, but whoever drinks of the water I give will never be thirsty again.*” ***Why’d He tell her that?*** Cuz He was trying to get her to admit her emptiness/her inability to save herself, in her case, through men and romantic relationships. To be “*thirsty*” is to be empty! So when Jesus says, “*if anyone thirsts then come to me...*” He’s telling you: the ONLY condition for getting-in on the life of God - that He assumes YOU see you need - is admitting you shouldn’t get in! I love the way commentator Dale Bruner puts it. He says, “*In short, the kingdom (and) the Spirit, is for people who don’t feel they’re worthy of IT or him; who know all too well they’re not good enough to deserve IT or him, and who bring only one disposition: ‘I need you, Lord.’*”⁴ **That’s the condition...Are you empty? Are you “thirsty?” Have you, like C.S. Lewis said, “tried really hard to be good, only to find out how really bad you actually are?”** Cuz you understand, trying to be good/trying to be better, moral, put-together; that’s not the same as being empty. I mean sure you might think things like, you’ve fallen short; you’re not always the greatest; even that you’ve sinned. And IN thinking those things communicate a kind of “emptiness,” but I’m also sure you’ve/because this is what “good/moral people” think - “*But look how I’ve changed. Look at what I’ve accomplished. Look how good of a neighbor, friend, spouse, parent, boss, even Christian I am.*” That’s not empty. That empty...ish. But just like there’s really no such thing as being “kinda dead” or “kinda pregnant,” there’s really no such thing as being “kinda empty.” You either are or you’re not. And as long as you’re NOT/as long as you’re unwilling to admit your emptiness/your inability to live up to the standard, then ironically, you won’t meet the standard. Cuz **the ONE condition** is being thirsty/empty! ***Is that you?***

Well, if it is then **Fourth**, you gotta see the **Simple Invitation** Jesus gives...which is to “*come and drink.*” He says, “*If anyone thirsts, let him come to me and drink.*” And then just to make sure we don’t get hung up on the metaphor there, He says, “*Whoever BELIEVES in me...*’*Out of*

⁴ Frederick Dale Bruner, *The Gospel of John: A Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2012), 487.

his heart will flow rivers of living water.” In other words, “*coming-to and drinking Jesus in*” IS BELIEVING in Him. **Now think about how radical that is:** Jesus has just said that what you and I need more than anything is to have God’s life flowing in and out of us - His Spirit take up residence in your heart so that you’re alive with feeling and emotion for God. And that the ONLY requirement is that you simply recognize your need for that! That’s what He’s just said! And so it’s like a job posting. ***You’re looking for a job, what do you do?*** You look at the requirements section ***right?*** Are you an applicable candidate? Then once you see that you are - requirement’s to be empty/“thirsty”/check - ***what do you do next?*** You figure out how to apply! Jesus says, “*You’re thirsty? Here’s how you apply...Don’t! Just come to me.*” It’s an utterly radical **invitation**, because most of us/really every religion and worldview OUTSIDE of Christianity assumes that basically life is like a giant episode of the Amazing Race/or Indiana Jones, where there’s this treasure of “life and happiness” out there. But to GET that happiness, you gotta go through all these ordeals/pass all these tests, and basically summon all this courage and skill. And God’s role, if there’s a God, is simply to give you the treasure map to help you DO that! I mean that’s like THE natural way we think about life ***right?***...UNTIL Jesus comes along and says, “*No! Just come to me! Life isn’t about you navigating some quest. It’s about you being willing to TRUST that I’ve already COMPLETED the quest. You’re not Indiana Jones; I AM. You’re not applying for the job. It’s already been offered to you.*” That’s why, you see, He DOESN’T say, “*GO and drink,*” but “*COME and drink.*” Because the treasure/the happiness/the job has already been secured. It’s utterly radical!

But also, it’s radical because a lot of people, even after they DO see this - become Christ-followers - still have in the back of their minds this idea of needing to be filled with the Spirit. Cuz Jesus says ***right?***, that when we trust Him “*rivers of living water will flow out of us,*” which again John tells us in **v.39** is a reference to the Spirit. So the assumption - CORRECTLY so - is that we don’t just RECEIVE the Spirit, we also need to be continually FILLED with the Spirit... The problem is: We assume those require two different things! That “yeah,” we receive the Spirit by trusting Jesus, but THEN being FILLED with the Spirit, well that requires something different. Effort, strategy, certain spiritual disciplines...But again, look at what Jesus says. He says “*whoever BELIEVES in me, out of His heart will flow living water.*” Which again, John equates to those who’ve “received the Spirit.”...In other words, IT’S THE SAME! Belief/belief in Jesus/belief in the Gospel is BOTH how you RECEIVE the Spirit/to become a Christian - since the Apostle Paul plainly says in **Romans 8:9** that “*if you DON’T have the Spirit, you’re NOT...*” a Christian - BUT ALSO how you’re continually FILLED with the Spirit. It’s the same! Just like breathing both GIVES you life, and KEEPS you alive, so breathing-in or believing the Gospel both gives you life in the Spirit AND keeps you FILLED with the Spirit. Cuz see Friends, the Gospel is not something we enter into Christianity with, but then graduate from to more important things. Ya know, like what the Bible says about sex, or heaven, or if they’re gonna be sex in heaven. No! As I’ve told you before, the Gospel isn’t the elementary ABCs of the Christian life; it’s the A TO Zs. It’s not just the diving board into Christianity; it’s the deep end of the pool. And so Jesus’ **simple invitation** is to simply believe the Gospel!

Which brings me ***Finally and Very Briefly*** to the **Simple Assessment** He gives for how you can tell IF you're believing the Gospel and therefore IF the Spirit of God is IN and working-IN you. And the assessment is found in the water-metaphor Jesus uses here. In other words, He wants you to think about the work of the Spirit like you think about water. And if you think about water, you know it does at least 3 things. ***It revives, renews, and flows!*** In the same way, you can know the Spirit of God is in and working-IN you when you're being revived, renewed, and your life is flowing out to others. For example, if you're thirsty/about to DIE from thirst, the first thing drinking water will do is revive you ***right?***/bring life and quenching to you. That's what the Spirit of God does. As Tim Keller says, "*He takes ideas - about Jesus, life, church, community, mission, generosity, hospitality, etc - and He turns em into thirst-quenching realities.*" So the love of God, for example, instead of being just something to ponder when there's nothin' else on Netflix; becomes an actual sustaining/empowering REALITY for you. Something that, for example, allows you to take criticism and rejection well. Cuz you see how much God, in Christ, loves you as to've been willing to die for you. So no matter WHAT other people say, it's ok, cuz you're loved by the only person whose opinion really counts. A way you can know the Spirit is working is if the truths and promises of God in Christ are becoming more real to you. You're ***revived*** by em...But two, you're being ***renewed*** as well, which is to say, things you used to be able to live with, you can't anymore. Things you once loved; you don't love anymore. Things you once did - ways in which you dishonored, disobeyed, or distrusted God - it's not that you NEVER do those things again; it's just that NOW you feel conviction about em. That's because you're being ***renewed***/literally made...new. And if you don't know, ask somebody. Ask a friend/your spouse/or if you really wanna get spiritually punched in the face...ask a child! Ask em if you're less worried than you used to be? Less ashamed/full of self-pity? Ask em if you're more approachable. Cuz these are all indicators that Spirit of God is ***renewing*** you!...And then finally, you can know the Spirit is working in you if your life is more-and-more ***flowing*** out to others. Cuz water flows ***right?*** God's intention for your life is that it would flow out in blessing to others. That's why Jesus says NOT "*rivers of living water FILL you,*" but ***what?***, "*rivers of living water will overflow FROM you.*" So ask yourself: ***When people get around you, do they feel nourished or sucked dry? Are you a fountain or drain?***...Cuz a person in whom the Spirit is at work is a person, who with their time, talents, passions, their money, is always flowing out to others. The Spirit of God revives, renews and causes your life to flow out to others. Like water. That's how you can **assess** if the Spirit is IN and working-IN you! ***Is he?***

CONCLUSION:

I'll close with this: In 1938 Harvard began investigating what makes people flourish. This particular study started with 724 participants from all kinds of backgrounds, then grew to incorporate the spouses of those original participants, and most recently, over 1,300 descendants OF that initial group. It's by-far the longest, in-depth, longitudinal study on human life ever done. And here's the conclusion that just recently got published FROM this study: ***You ready?*** I quote, "*Good relationships lead to health and happiness.*"⁵...2000 years ago, in the middle of an incredibly public setting, where friends were confused about Him and enemies were looking to

⁵ <https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2009/06/what-makes-us-happy/307439/>

kill Him, Jesus' heart was so filled up with a simple, 1-verse message that He was willing to risk His life to deliver it! **Why?** Because that message, as we've seen, was ALL ABOUT not just A relationship, but THE most important relationship you'll ever know. One in which the very presence of God comes to reside in your heart in such a way that you're not just brought into life WITH God; your life overflows, as it were, FROM God. And Jesus knew, that if YOU didn't know that, you'd miss the one relationship that TRULY leads to REAL health and happiness! *"If anyone thirsts, let him come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, 'Out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.'"* ...**Let's Pray**