

Thirsting For Christ

John 7:37-44

It was at the Feast of Tabernacles when Christ stood up and cried the great invitation, “If any man thirst, let him come unto me, and drink.” What was the Feast of Tabernacles?

Bible historians tell us that the most joyous of all festive seasons in Israel was that of the 'Feast of Tabernacles.' The Feast of Tabernacles was the third of the great annual festivals, (the other two were Passover and Pentecost) at which every male in Israel was to appear before the Lord in the place which He should choose. Three things specially marked the Feast of Tabernacles: its joyous festivities, the dwelling in 'booths,' and the peculiar sacrifices and rites of the week.

The Feast fell on a time of year when the hearts of the people would naturally be full of thankfulness, gladness, and expectancy.

All the crops had been long stored; and now all fruits were also gathered, the vintage past, and the land only awaited the softening and refreshment of the 'latter rain,' to prepare it for a new crop.

One commentator writes, “It was appropriate that, when the commencement of the harvest had been consecrated by offering the first ripe sheaf of barley, and the full ingathering of the corn by the two wave-loaves, there should now be a harvest feast of thankfulness and of gladness unto the Lord.”

How did Christ fulfill the Feast of Tabernacles?

Dr. Lee Warren wrote an article entitled, *The Spiritual Significance of the Feast of Tabernacles*. He writes, “

“The Messiah’s mission was to fulfill (Mt. 5:17-18; Lk. 24:44-45) or bring to an end this Old Covenant of feasts, ceremonies, sacrificial worship of Jehovah (Rom. 10:1-4) and to establish a New Covenant (Heb. 8:6-13) where we worship Jehovah in Spirit and in Truth (Jn. 4:24; Col. 2:14-18). The Messiah brought The Feast of Tabernacles to a physical end when He appeared in the temple during the midst of the feast and began to teach (John 7:14).”

Christ had sent His disciples to the feast earlier and secretly came later by Himself since the rulers of Israel sought to kill him (Jn. 7:2, 8). Prior to His speaking at this feast, the people had a great deal of doubt about the Messiah (Jn. 7:12). They wondered whether Christ was a good man or a devil because He healed on the Sabbath when work was forbidden (John 7:19-24). After hearing Christ preach, the Jews marveled at His words of grace and wisdom.

On the last day of the feast, during the final ceremonies, He spoke these astounding words that caused many to believe He was the Messiah, ***“If any man thirst, let him come unto me, and drink. He that believeth on me, as the scripture hath said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water. (But this spake he of the Spirit, which they that believe on him should receive: for the Holy Ghost was not yet given; because that Jesus was not yet glorified.)”***

Why did Christ speak of ‘living water’ during the Feast of Tabernacles?

One has to know the rituals and ceremonies the priests performed during this day to understand Christ’s mention of water. What Christ was referring to was the water the priest dipped with a golden

pitcher from the Pool Siloam and poured out at the base of the altar for the last day of the feast. Thus, Christ told Israel that living water would be poured out at Pentecost. His words of truth represented the ‘living water’ which is the Holy Spirit that many who believed on Him received at Pentecost.”

On the great and solemn feast of Tabernacles, Christ stood up, whereas at other times he used to sit, and spoke with a loud voice, both to show his fervour and earnestness, and that all might hear: saying, “if any man thirst, let him come to me and drink.” I would like to preach on the theme, *Thirsting For Christ*. Let us consider first that,

1. Thirsting For Christ Is A Spiritual Thirst.

In Psalm 63:1 we read of David thirsting for the Lord, “O God, thou art my God; early will I seek thee: my soul thirsteth for thee, my flesh longeth for thee in a dry and thirsty land, where no water is;”

John Gill writes in his commentary regarding John 7:37, “It is to be understood not of a natural thirst, though the allusion is to it, as the instances of the Israelites in the wilderness, Samson after he had slain the Philistines, and our Lord upon the cross, show; much less a sinful thirst, a thirst after the riches, honours, and pleasures of this life; but a spiritual thirst, or a thirst after spiritual things, after salvation by Christ, and a view of interest in it, free and full pardon of sin through him, justification by his righteousness, a greater degree of knowledge of him, more communion with him, and conformity to him, and after the sincere milk of the word, and such that thirst after these things, and eagerly desire them, and are in pain and uneasiness without them, as a man is, who has a violent thirst upon him, are such as are regenerated and quickened by the Spirit of God.”

Christ stood during the Feast of Tabernacles and invited sinners to come to Him, not to Moses and his law, moral or ceremonial, and to obedience to them, and works of righteousness done by them, to any creature, or creature acts;

for these are cisterns without water, where no true peace, joy, righteousness, and salvation are to be had; but to himself, who is the fountain of gardens, the well of living waters, and who is as rivers of water in a dry land, to thirsty souls.

When we come to Christ, which is by believing in Him, we are encouraged to drink; that is, to take of the water of life freely, or to take of his grace freely; salvation by Him is of free grace, and the pardon of sin is according to the riches of grace, and justification is freely by his grace, and so all other blessings; and of this they may drink abundantly, we may partake of it largely: there is a fulness of grace in Christ, and there is an abundance of it communicated to us His people; it is exceeding abundant; it flows, and overflows, and may be drank of to satisfaction, till our souls are as a watered garden, and we are satisfied with the goodness of the Lord.

Martin Lloyd Jones writes, “what is our greatest need? Our greatest need is life. Most people today are but existing; they have no life. When their pleasures are shut off, when because of war the cinemas and theatres and public houses and dance halls have to be closed they have nothing. They have

not got life; they are but existing, and dependent upon things outside themselves; they need life. But where can life be found? It is Christ again who has said, 'I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly' (John 10:10). Life means spiritual life; life means a relationship to God and an enjoyment of His fellowship; and Christ our Lord has it in all its fulness. He says, 'He that cometh unto me shall never hunger, and he that believeth on me shall never thirst' (John 6:35). 'The water that I shall give you', He says to the woman of Samaria, 'shall be in you a well of water springing up into everlasting life'. Though the world may take everything from you, though you may be naked and bereft of all things, this life from Christ will still go on springing up eternally within you."

Do you thirst for Christ today? Or do you thirst for the world and sin? Is Christ the object of your desires and thoughts? When Christ speaks does it have the same effect on you that it had on the temple guards in verse 46, "The officers answered, Never man spake like this man."

Thirsting For Christ Is A Spiritual Thirst.

2. Thirsting For Christ Is Initiated By The Holy Spirit.

The reason a person thirsts for Christ is because the Holy Spirit is at work within him. Such work by the Holy Spirit is how He causes a Christian to be "spiritually minded."

We read in Romans 8:5, "For they that are after the flesh do mind the things of the flesh; but they that are after the Spirit the things of the Spirit."

An aspect of the ministry of the Holy Spirit is to cause us to have God ward thirsts and longings, such as to cry "Abba, Father;" in Romans 8:15, as well as other signs of spiritual vitality.

Charles Spurgeon comments on the blessing of thirsting, “When a man pants after God, it is a secret life within which makes him do it: he would not long after God by nature. No man thirsts for God while he is left in his carnal [i.e., unconverted] state. The unrenewed man pants after anything sooner than God: . . . It proves a renewed nature when you long after God; it is a work of grace in your soul, and you may be thankful for it.”

The Holy Spirit initiates spiritual thirst in order to satisfy it. God does not fire a thirst for Himself in order to mock us or frustrate us. The Lord Himself declared, "I did not say to the seed of Jacob, 'Seek Me in vain'" (Isaiah 45:19). God creates a thirst for Himself so that He can satisfy it with Himself.

Psalm 107:9, “For he satisfieth the longing soul, and filleth the hungry soul with goodness.”

Christ assured in Matthew 5:6, “Blessed are they who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they *shall* be filled.”

Jonathan Edwards writes, “Seeing that reason does so undeniably evidence that saints shall, some time or other, enjoy so great glory, hence we learn that there is undoubtedly a future state after death, because we

see they do not enjoy so great glory in this world. . . . All the spiritual pleasure they enjoy in this life does but enflame their desire and thirst for more enjoyment of God; and if they knew that there was no future life, it would but increase their misery, to consider that after this life was ended they were never to enjoy God anymore at all. How good is God, that he has created man for this very end, to make him happy in the enjoyment of himself, the Almighty. Once beholding His glory, believers will testify that "They shall be abundantly satisfied with the fatness of thy house; and thou shalt make them drink of the river of thy pleasures." (Psalm 36:8).

Martin Lloyd Jones writes about the unsearchable riches of Christ in Ephesians 3:8, "If we could but see what is in Christ! But it is unsearchable, untraceable. This reminds us of our definition of the word *mystery*. It is a mystery, but it has been revealed. Thank God that this is so, otherwise we would know nothing at all about it. It follows that no man can ever find and lay hold on those riches in and of himself. Many a man has tried to do so.

Many a man has approached Christianity philosophically, and he has tried to understand it from the outside. He might as well have given up at the beginning for it can never be done. The riches are untraceable, they are unsearchable; of himself man is incapable of getting at them.”

Do you thirst for Christ? Cry to Christ and He will quench your soul thirst.

Thirsting For Christ is Initiated By The Holy Spirit

3. Thirsting For Christ Increases In The Heart Of Believers

If you possess a true thirst for God, you will long to long even more. As Edwards insisted, "true and gracious longings after holiness, are no idle ineffectual desires."

The satisfied soul thirsts for God precisely because he is satisfied with God. He has tasted and seen that the Lord is good" (Psalm 34:8), and the taste is so uniquely satisfying that he craves more.

Thomas Shepard, founder of Harvard University and an influential New England minister, explained the cycle of satisfaction and thirst this way: "There is in true grace an infinite circle: a man by thirsting receives, and receiving thirsts for more."

Knowing Christ is so spiritually thirst quenching because no person, possession, or experience can produce the spiritual satisfaction we find in Him. Communion with Christ is incomparably satisfying also because there is no disappointment in what you find in Him. There is no lack of satisfaction in knowing Christ, but neither has God designed us so that one experience with Christ satiates all future desire for Him.

Here's how Jonathan Edwards described the relationship between the spiritual good enjoyed in fellowship with Christ and the thirst for more that it produces:

“Spiritual good is of a satisfying nature; and for that very reason, the soul that tastes, and knows its nature, will thirst after it, and a fullness of it, that it may be satisfied. And the more he experiences, and the more he knows this excellent, unparalleled, exquisite, and satisfying sweetness, the more earnestly he will hunger and thirst for more, . . .”

Has your worship of Christ provided you with ravishing tastes of what A. W. Tozer called the "piercing sweetness" of Christ, only to leave you with a divine discontent for more? Would the following prayer of Tozer reflect your own aspirations?

“O God, I have tasted Thy goodness, and it has both satisfied me and made me thirsty for more. I am painfully conscious of my need for further grace. I am ashamed of my lack of desire. O God, the Triune God, I want to want Thee; I long to be filled with longing; I thirst to be made thirsty still.

Such desires, Christian brother or sister, are marks of a thirsty soul.

Thirsting For Christ Increases In The Heart Of

Believers.

4. Sinners will only be satisfied when they thirst for Christ

The unconverted man or woman has an empty soul. Devoid of God, he is constantly in pursuit of that which will fill his emptiness. The range of his mad scramble may include money, immorality, power, houses, lands, sports, hobbies, entertainment, fame, significance, education, etc., while basically "fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind" (Ephesians 2:3). Always searching and never resting, the empty soul turns from one pursuit to another, unable to find anything that will fill the God-shaped vacuum in his heart.

Thirsting and searching, the empty soul is blinded to his real need. Nothing or no one on earth fully and lastingly satisfies, but he doesn't know where to turn except to someone or something else "under the sun." Like Solomon, he discovers that no matter who or what he at first finds exciting, ultimately "all is vanity and grasping for the wind" (Ecclesiastes 1:14).

A Bible commentator writes, "A Christian observes the man with the empty soul and knows that what he is looking for can be found only in the One who said, "whoever drinks of the water that I shall give him will never thirst" (John 4:14).

Occasionally an empty soul searches in more serious-minded or spiritual ways that lead some Christians to think that he is thirsting for God. But the world has no such thirst. "There is none who understands," "there is none who seeks for God" (Psalm 14:2 and Romans 3:11). Until and unless the Holy Spirit of God touches the spiritual tongue of the empty soul, he will never want to "taste and see that the Lord is good" (Psalm 34:8). Just because a man longs for something that can be found in God alone doesn't mean he's looking for God. A man may pine for peace and have no interest in the Prince of Peace. Many who claim they are questing for God are not thirsting for God as He has revealed Himself in Scripture, but only for God as they want Him to be, or a God who will give them what they want.

We read in Isaiah 55:1-2, “Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters, and he that hath no money; come ye, buy, and eat; yea, come, buy wine and milk without money and without price.

Wherefore do ye spend money for that which is not bread? and your labour for that which satisfieth not? hearken diligently unto me, and eat ye that which is good, and let your soul delight itself in fatness.

Sinners Will Only Be Satisfied When They Thirst For Christ.

Christ stood up during the Feast of Tabernacles and cried, “***If any man thirst, let him come unto me, and drink.***” Thirsting after Christ is a spiritual thirst, it is initiated by the Holy Spirit, it increases in the heart of believers, and it is the only thing that can satisfy the heart of man. Are you thirsting for Christ to save you from sin? Are you thirsting for Christ to sanctify you? May we all be able to experience the words of Isaiah 12:3, “Therefore with joy shall ye draw water out of the wells of salvation.” Let us pray.