

**SHARING LIFE AT FBC ON SEPTEMBER 22, 2019 BY PASTOR BOB BENDER
“CHOOSE TO DRINK IN THE RIVERS OF REVIVAL” FROM JOHN 7:37-39**

Today I want to talk to you about a river as an illustration of God’s working in our lives. The Mississippi River begins up in Minnesota at 20 feet wide. At its widest, it expands to 11 miles wide...small beginnings into a mighty river. These are the ways of God—a small trickle into a mighty river representing the life of God or revival. Church history began at Pentecost as a little stream of Jewish believers. The stream grew larger to include Gentiles and then peoples of every tribe, tongue, and nation. Several things characterize rivers that symbolize our relationship to Jesus.

Channels are where traffic takes place. Are you in the channel of the river? Are you moving down the channel of God’s life? Buoys are meant to keep us in the channel—God’s Word; His Spirit; His community of believers.

Tributaries are new truths that God is sharing with His people enriching and enlarging your personal life which is hopefully happening today. God adds tributaries to church life which He will do beginning next Sunday with Refuel and Life Action. God adds tributaries to purify polluted lives and churches. Refusing tributaries leads to narrow, shallow, and polluted streams. New tributaries create turbulence, but the result is new life. Every time a new one is added, something has to break loose; so every time God adds a stream, a part of our hellish lives breaks loose.

Mainstream is not always midstream. Sometimes we have to overemphasize some truths to bring us back to the center. Don’t get stuck in the shallows where there is dislike of turbulence and we get weary in well doing and neglect the fresh flow of God’s new life. Sometimes it takes a charisma in left field to get us charisphobiacs in right field to wind up in centerfield.

Eddies are waters often at the bank’s edge that spend in a circle furiously going nowhere sucking people under. Are you stuck in an eddy or bad situation today? Today is your day of deliverance!

Oxbows are where rivers flow back on themselves like an ox’s yoke. Have you been floating down river just to find yourself back to where you were before? Are you at the same place spiritually you were 12 months ago?

A **wadi** is a dried up ravine or channel that used to funnel water but has dried up for lack of water. People dry up. Churches become wadis. Between 6-10,000 churches in the US close every year. That’s almost 200 this week or one every hour.¹ As I was walking around NYC this week for a conference, I came across this church locked up: the Second Reformed Church of NYC (pic). This church is no longer a river but a dried up wadi.

Streams also represent groups of churches in the Christian world today. There are basically six:

- 1) The evangelistic stream emphasizing evangelism and missions—Baptists
- 2) The holiness stream emphasizing purity and power—Nazarenes
- 3) The charismatic stream emphasizing the Holy Spirit and worship—Assemblies of God
- 4) The social justice stream emphasizing acts of mercy and social action—Methodists
- 5) The contemplative stream emphasizing knowing and listening to God—Quakers
- 6) The biblical/academic stream emphasizing an intellectual approach to Scriptures—Presbyterians/ some Bible churches

Which stream was Jesus in? Was Jesus a 1? a 2? a 3? a 4? a 5? a 6? Jesus was all of them. There are many streams and one river. Let us celebrate the stream God has us in and at the same time cooperate with the other streams that when combined with ours make up the one great river of life or personal and corporate revival.²

It is October of 29 A.D. You and your Jewish family along with many other pilgrims have made your way to Jerusalem to celebrate the Feast of Tabernacles. This feast celebrates God’s protection during your forefather’s wilderness wanderings. Thousands from the city and countryside arrive for a week of living in booths made out of branches where a holiday spirit prevails.

On each of the seven mornings of the eight day feast, the officiating priest leaves the temple courts in company with the festive throng and makes his way down to the nearby pool of Siloam. As the people celebrate, he dips his golden pitcher into the pool and lifts it out of the water while the crowd chants Isaiah 12:3, “With joy shall you draw water out of the wells of salvation.”

Today is the last and great day of this week-long celebration. At the very moment the smoke of the morning sacrifice begins to ascend from the sacred altar, this procession of people led by the priest reaches the temple. Silver trumpets give a three-fold blast of welcome. For the last time the priest reaches the altar of burnt offering and raises the golden pitcher and empties its contents at the base of the altar. This pouring of the water commemorates the water that gushed out of the rock at Meribah quenching the thirst of their forefathers in the desert wanderings.

When the enthusiasm and excitement reaches its zenith, a clarion call rings out from a stranger at the front of the crowd near the altar. Just as the priest at the altar has lifted his hand to signify the completion of this ceremony, the effect of this cry on the multitude is like a thunderclap from heaven. He cries out with a loud voice to be heard by all, "If anyone is thirsty let him come to Me and drink. He who believes in Me as the Scripture said, 'From his innermost being shall flow rivers of living water.'"

The effect was electric. Every eye turns in the direction of His voice. Most wonder who this man was? Others recognize Him as the new young prophet Jesus. The imagery was familiar and there was no mistaking His meaning. He is claiming to be the outpoured water—the Messiah. Even the temple guards come under His spell, powerless to lay hands on Him. "Never a man spoke like this man" was their excuse for their failure to arrest Him.

What intensity there was in His invitation! Usually Jesus would sit down and speak but now He stands and cries out, "If any of you would come and drink of Me; from out of his innermost being shall flow rivers of living water." What passion and what urgency there was in His plea!

His raised voice reached the largest number of people possible there, but its tones have reverberated down through the centuries until they fall on our ears today. Jesus stands and makes this same cry and appeal to us. How will you respond? Just as Jesus appealed to these first century Jews to experience the spiritual reality of His person, so Jesus invites you to become a river of revival. Let's allow Jesus' words in John 7:37-39 impact us as they did several centuries ago <read>. You have a choice to make today.

/CHOOSE TO BE THIRSTY—THE SUBJECT OF THE RIVERS OF REVIVAL (V. 37)

"If anyone is thirsty"—the way Jesus states this indicates that some will indeed thirst, but it will not be many. Every person does not thirst in the sense in which Jesus speaks. A great many Christians are contented with being self-satisfied rather than being spiritually thirsty. Such thirst is all too rare.

There is a great difference between emptiness and thirstiness. On occasion I have allowed the gas tank in my car to run empty of fuel but never yet has it been thirsty. It would be perfectly content to sit by the side of the road rusting away. Many of God's people are spiritually empty but not thirsty. A thirsty person will pay any price for a drink of water. A child at bedtime asked for a drink—first once, then a second time. The exasperated parent thinking that it's just an excuse to stay up says, "If you ask me one more time, I am going to punish you." Five minutes pass and the child states, "Mom, when you come to punish me, would you bring me a drink of water?"

There is a sense in which all people are thirsty. We all desire significance and soul satisfaction in life. Everyone fills that God-shaped vacuum with something. The problem is that when we fill it with anything other than Jesus and the fullness of His Spirit, it's like a thirsty person in a raft adrift on the sea drinking saltwater. It only makes us thirsty for more. The more we drink, the worse off we become. However, with Jesus and His Spirit it's just the opposite. The more we thirst for Jesus and the fullness of His Holy Spirit, the more we have. But instead of becoming a dammed up stream, we become a river of revival to others. The key to all of this is becoming thirsty.

How do we become thirsty? The call of Jesus makes us thirsty. The moving of God's Holy Spirit makes us thirsty. Adverse life situations make us thirsty as we are pressed into Jesus. Other people make us thirsty. Jesus said, "Blessed are those who are thirsty for righteousness for they shall be filled."

Are you thirsty today for the fullness of God's righteous Holy Spirit? You have all of God you want. You are as spiritual as you want to be. Choose thirst. Say it with me, "I choose to be thirsty."

//CHOOSE JESUS—THE SOURCE OF THE RIVERS OF REVIVAL (V. 38)

Jeremiah 2:13 was certainly being fulfilled in these people's lives as they lifted up broken cisterns of empty religion, so Jesus calls them to Himself. Some Christians are content to be like the pitcher the priest dipped into the pool of Siloam—held aloft, poured out, and emptied having to wait for next year's festival to be filled again. Jesus says choose Him for a continual overflowing river 24/7/365.

Jesus says, "Come to Me." He did not say to come to the church, to the pastor, or to the Bible study group, to youth camp, or even to the Bible—even though God uses these. Jesus calls us to Himself, for only He can quench our spiritual thirst. A revival source is always a fresh encounter with Jesus Himself—life on life.

Notice verse 39 says that Jesus spoke of the Spirit which had not yet been given because Jesus was not yet glorified or lifted up. The Spirit does not come down until Jesus is lifted up. This is true historically. Jesus could not send His Holy Spirit until He first was lifted up on the cross and taken up unto heaven. Remember also that this is true experientially. We will know nothing of the power of the Holy Spirit and nothing of the outflowing river of life and revival until Jesus has been lifted up and reigns on the throne of our hearts and lives. But once He has been given His rightful place as Lord, we will then know of the uninterrupted flow of the Spirit of revival through our lives in the form of rivers of revival.

Remember the Roman soldier at the cross who pierced His side with a lance as recorded by John in 19:34—"And immediately blood and water came out." Perhaps John, who was the master of dual meanings is pointing to that event as the occasion when the living waters began to flow. The Lord becomes a source of living water when He is lifted up on His cross and then into heaven.

Someone has said, "There is a reward for obedient disciples. There is power and authority for faithful disciples. But there is the whisper of His love, the joy of His presence, and the shining of His face for those who love Him for Himself alone. For what profit is it that we dwell in Jerusalem, if we do not see the face of the king?" Say it with me, "I choose You, Jesus."

///CHOOSE THE HOLY SPIRIT—THE SUPPLY OF THE RIVERS OF REVIVAL (V. 39)

This fullness of the Holy Spirit flows out of our innermost being. The Spirit-filled Christian is never self-centered. Rivers always flow outward. Many barren and fruitless Christians try to reverse the process and cause the rivers to flow inward. The Dead Sea remains that way because it greedily welcomes all the waters that flow into it but pours none out in return. Is there a flow or a glow in your life?

Notice the promise is rivers; not a river singular. When a supply of the rivers of revival overflows by the Holy Spirit, it flows in different directions and takes on different forms. Rivers of revival are best seen in Galatians 5:22-23 in the fruit of the Spirit.

Notice Jesus quotes an Old Testament verse or concept—"as the Scripture said." What Scripture? **Ezekiel 47**—where the water that flows from the temple of God. In the Old Testament God had a temple for His people; in the New Testament, God has a people for His temple.

Notice the supply's source (v. 1). It is the altar of God and His very presence.

Notice the supply's course (vv. 3-5). Many of us have sacrificed depth for width, and we have a swamp instead of a river. Notice the deep places (v. 5); the desert places (v. 8); and the dead places (v. 8b).

Notice the supply's force (vv. 9, 12). The revival's force is for meat (v. 9) and medicine (v. 12). Where the river flows, health will glow, the fruit shows where the trees grow and there the fish will go. Now that's revival!

But the real question in this text is, how deep is the water in your life—ankle deep (v. 3); knee deep (v. 4a); waist deep (v. 4b); enough to swim in over your head (v. 5)?

In the words of an old southern gospel song sung by Gold City, "How deep is the water? I'm stepping out farther. I've stayed here on this old dry shore for too much too long. I've got to get in deeper to see if the water's running sweeter. Maybe in the water I may never pass over. Come on in; the water's just right!" Say with me, I choose You, Holy Spirit."

///**CHOOSE TO COME AND DRINK—THE SECRET OF THE RIVERS OF REVIVAL (VV. 37-39)**

The tense of these verbs is in the imperfect tense meaning a progressive action which has a beginning in past time (I began drinking at such and such time and now am continuing to drink because of my present thirst). For us, there was a point in time in our past when we began to come to Jesus, drink, believe, and receive but we must continue to come and drink, believe, and receive.

Consider the newborn baby. It needs no instruction in the art of drinking. It just knows innately to suck and drink. We need no teaching or training in coming to Jesus and drink. We need no lessons or seminars on how to become thirsty. By nature, a believer is thirsty for Jesus. It is only when we quench our thirst with inappropriate things or relationships that our thirst for the things of God decreases.

What are you using to satisfy your thirst—materialism, immorality, self-pity, unforgiveness, bitterness, or judgmentalism? If so, Jesus says in John 4:14, “You will thirst again.” You will become self-serving. You will be like a drainpipe that just sucks all the water down rather than a revival that provides water for others. Only when we are thirsty for God are we filled to overflowing and become a blessing to others. What is the secret of the rivers of revival? Simply come to Jesus, drink, believe, and receive.

Jesus here speaks of the vitality and reality of the Holy Spirit. The Baptist trinity is God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Bible, rather than God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. Soon after I was saved if someone were to ask me the same question in Acts 19:2 that was asked of these disciples of Ephesus—“Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?” I probably would have come up with the same answer—“I have not even heard whether there is a Holy Spirit” even though the Holy Spirit of God resided in my life. Perhaps you are in the same condition. You have been baptized into John's baptism of repentance and yet have not realized that you also have been baptized with the Holy Spirit.

We all have the need to be continually filled with His Spirit. A humorous story is told of a man who repeatedly prayed aloud during the weekly prayer service, “O Lord fill me, fill me with Your Spirit.” Finally, his disturbed wife cried out, “Don't do it, Lord. He leaks.” Well, all of us have a tendency to leak. How are we filled with the Holy Spirit of God? Jesus says, “Come to Me and drink and believe.”

Here we see Jesus' concept of the Spirit-filled life. Many people's response to Jesus' invitation concerning the Spirit is seen in verse 44—resistance by the religious crowd. The same has been true down through Christian history and even up until today. It is the religious folk who oppose the move of the Spirit of God. We want to be as spiritually-minded as Jesus desires for us to be and allow the Spirit of living God to fall fresh on us becoming rivers of revival through us.

A preacher was touring the countryside when he came upon a man in the distance furiously pumping a water pump in someone's yard. This intrigued him so that he came closer only to find that it was a wooden figure. He wondered how this wooden figure was pumping this water. Upon arriving at the scene, he noticed that instead of the wooden figure pumping the water, that the water source was a living spring of water flowing through the pump. Instead of the man's hand pumping the water, the water was pumping the man's hand. What a beautiful picture this becomes of the Spirit-filled life. Jesus desires all of us to be so filled with His Spirit that out of our lives flow rivers of living water.

Will you today become rivers of revival? Choose to be thirsty; choose Jesus; choose the Holy Spirit; choose to come and drink. Come on in, the water's fine! And what does “come and drink” mean? It means pray and seek. Join me at the altar as we kneel before the Lord our Maker and seek personal and corporate revival in preparation for our Life Action meeting beginning next Sunday. We pray out of a sense of need. Lord deliver us from being like the church in Laodicea in Revelation 3:17—“I have need of nothing!”

In the words of the song by Vineyard Worship, “All who are thirsty; all who are weak, come to the fountain; dip your heart in the stream of life. Let the pain and the sorrow be washed away in the waves of His mercy as deep cries unto deep.”

¹<https://factsandtrends.net/2018/01/16/hope-for-dying-churches/>

²Some of these analogies are taken from a message entitled *The River* by Peter Lord.