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Series: The Gospel of John
Message: A Great Invitation

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John 7:37-53

Thirst is something we experience every day. We experience it a lot of times during the day, don't we? It's defined as the physical sensation and biological mechanism to drink something. It's a life-saving warning system working in partnership with the rest of our body. Failure to properly hydrate can lead to serious health issues. Maybe you're thirsty right now. Well, sometimes it's difficult to get a drink because there isn't a source to get a drink. I mean, consider the fact that literally hundreds of millions of people live in our world that don't have an adequate clean water source. Other times, of course, there is water, water everywhere, but not a drop to drink. Well, for the third time in our study in the Gospel of John, we are introduced to this matter of Jesus and thirst and water.

You remember way back in the second chapter, it was at the wedding celebration, Jesus turned water to wine. Then in that wonderful story in John 4 with the woman at the well, that well-known encounter that Jesus had, we're going to see it again now in the seventh chapter. And Jesus is going to remind us in our big idea that seeking to satisfy your spiritual thirst with something or someone other than Christ is to seek in vain because only he can satisfy.

I think we come to yet another amazing passage in the Gospel of John. Not like that we haven't had a few of those already, right? But I want to establish again just the setting. Because when John wrote this Gospel, and the first readers of this Gospel, they understood everything that was going on in the background of this story. When John makes comments, they're just like, yeah, uh-huh, I know what's going on. I'm familiar with that. I've done that, been there. Well, for us, we're not only 2,000 years separated, we're culturally separated from the reality of this storyline as well.

Let's jump back into the setting. I want you to see three things. I want you to see the place again that John tells us about because we are, of course, in the temple area. It is this last

day of the feast. And it is, of course, because of that, in Jerusalem, most likely in the outer court as the place of meeting.

The time, John tells us in that 37th verse, is on the last day of the feast, the great day. So, this is, remember, the feast of booths, the feast of tabernacles, in which the Jews were called upon to make little tents, little booths. They would just make these little structures. And they would literally live in them for seven days. It was a reminder to them of their time in the wilderness and what God had done in providing for the children of Israel after they left Egypt and were in the wilderness for all this period of time. It took them back, even as a people, to those times in the wilderness when God provided so incredibly for them.

So we are, in terms of the time of this, we're potentially in, John says, the last day of the feast. So it's a seven-day feast. So, it could be the seventh day. There's also the possibility that he's referencing the eighth day, which was kind of the final culmination of the whole week. But in any event, the things that are unfolding here, the activity, is what's so important.

They're remembering the wilderness time, and they're remembering especially God's supernatural provision for them, both of food and water. They're to go back in their memory and remind themselves of how God took care of his people for all that time in such a miraculous way. And that's what's happening here. On every day of the feast, at some point of time, a priest would take a small container, a pitcher, and he would walk with this procession of people. And by the way, this feast is known as the most joyful, the most festive, the most celebratory of all the feasts. They looked forward to this one perhaps more than any of the others. There was this great spirit of celebration. The priest would go with this pitcher to the pool of Siloam. And at the pool of Siloam, he would fill the pitcher with water. Then he would walk back to the temple area where he would pour out the water, symbolically reminding the people of what God had done and how he had provided. When that happened, there would be a reading of Isaiah 12. You will say in that day, I will give thanks to you, O Lord, for though you were angry with me, your anger turned away that you might comfort me. Behold, God is my salvation. I will trust and I will not be afraid. For the Lord God is my strength and my song and he has become my salvation. With joy, you will draw water from the wells of salvation, and you

will say in that day, give thanks to the Lord, call upon his name, make known his deeds among the peoples, proclaim that his name is exalted.

So, it looked back, but it also, as we're going to see, looked forward even to the Messianic kingdom. Now, within that context, within that setting, Jerusalem, the last day of the feast, just having seen perhaps the priest pour out the water, we come to Jesus's climactic appeal, and it begins, I think, in an unusual way. Verse 37 starts off and says, on the last day of the feast, the great day, Jesus stood up, and he cried out. And this invitation that Jesus gives that begins in this unusual way.

I say it begins in an unusual way because Jesus stands, and it says that Jesus shouts. Now, this is very unusual because a rabbi would traditionally sit and teach. It was understood if somebody had something important to say that they would sit down and they would teach. Now, I'm not a rabbi, so I can't stand, but this is the setting that would normally have happened up until this time. Remember, Jesus is teaching in this area during the feast. He came during the middle of it and he would have been sitting and he would have been teaching.

On this occasion, John specifically tells us that Jesus stands up, and he doesn't just speak. John uses this word that he used earlier, and it is to cry out. He shouts. Now, I think the imagery that we're supposed to get is that this is Jesus standing and in a booming voice he's announcing what he's going to say.

Some of you know our oldest son is a football coach at Yukon and Tuesday night, I went to his game. As I'm walking from the parking lot to the stadium, I'm not kidding you, I'm 100 yards at least away from the stadium and I hear this voice, and I'm like, that's not the PA. that doesn't sound like it's coming out of the speakers. The closer I get, I realize it's the voice of the coach on the other side of the field and he's got this massive booming voice that's calling out to his players, and he did this the whole game long. It's kind of like there was a coach on the field because this man's voice could be heard all through the evening as he called out different instructions to his players.

This is, I think, Jesus standing up. He's not just speaking as he would have the days previously. He is shouting out, he's making this proclamation. He's saying this is important. There's an intensity about this. There's a passion about this. There's an urgency to his message.

Jesus knows that many of these people that he is announcing this invitation to, it might be the last time they ever see or hear Jesus in their lifetime.

here is the second reason this is so unusual because Jesus is claiming to be the fulfillment of the feast. Now, this is amazing. Jesus is claiming to be the fulfillment of the feast. Look what he says. If anyone thirsts, let him come to me and drink. Now, that's an absolutely incredible claim and if we just read that and we don't keep it in the context of these people having seen the priest every day go to the pool of Siloam, fill up the pitcher of water, come back and pour out the water symbolizing what had happened for all of those years in the wilderness, then we missed the whole point of the story because that's the setting that's behind this. Jesus is literally putting himself in the middle of the celebration of the entire feast and the entire festival and he's in effect saying this. This whole week of celebration is all about me. This whole week of celebration is to point you to me.

But not only in terms of what has been done so that they're reminded, and they think back to the story, right? When Moses struck the rock and miraculously water gushes out into this dry, arid land and they satisfied their thirst. Well, of course, that's exactly what Jesus is saying. Remember that story in the Old Testament? Remember that rock being struck? That's me. That was picturing me. That's Luke 24 when Jesus is walking with the two disciples and he opens the scriptures to them, and he shows them how in all the Old Testament everything is pointing to him. Well, here he's making the point right in front of them and he's saying you've got to realize that the pouring out of the water out of that rock was looking forward to me. And not only was it looking forward to me in that way, it's looking forward to me even in the coming kingdom in which I am going to be the one who satisfies your thirst. This is in the Gospel of John. We've noted and we'll continue to note the seven "I am" sayings, right? Well, this is the unstated eighth one because Jesus doesn't say I am the living water but that's what he is in effect saying here. He's in effect making that declaration.

Now look at this. This is the amazing beginning and this incredible invitation. Now it's just sitting there, right? It's just waiting for what? It's waiting for a necessary response. Look at the rest of 37: on the last day of the feast, the great day, Jesus stood up and cried out, if anyone thirsts, let him come to me and drink. So, it starts by you and I recognizing our need. It starts by

recognizing your need. If anyone thirsts, let him come to me and drink. The invitation, even as Jonathan said, as we sang, the invitation goes out to anyone and it goes out to everyone. Calvin said this: "The invitation was not addressed to one or two persons only, or in a low and gentle whisper. Now he's standing up and he's shouting this out but proclaimed to all in such a manner that one may not be ignorant of it."

Now again, don't disconnect it from the setting. This is the same group of people largely that in our lesson last week, some of these people wanted to kill him. Some of these people want him arrested. These people have already expressed their absolute hatred for him. And here he is. He's offering to those who will that they would come. There's just one condition. There's just one requirement, right? You have to recognize your need. You have to recognize the need that you're thirsty.

Now physically, we know that. Physically, when we're thirsty, our body, if it's functioning properly, tells us, I'm thirsty. I need something to drink. Please satisfy what I need, right? That's the physical mechanism. Well, here Jesus takes that, and he steps into the spiritual realm and he says, come to me, all you who are thirsty. But you have to recognize that you're thirsty. You have to recognize that you need forgiveness. You have to recognize that what you have been living and the way you've been living is not where you want to stay. You have to recognize that the lack of needing and purpose and direction in your life is creating a spiritual thirst that only Jesus can satisfy. You have to understand that what he's saying to us, that all of the things of this world and all of the things of life, getting a new job and getting more money and getting more stuff, all of those things that you've tried that haven't satisfied, you need to come to a point of understanding that that spiritual thirst in your soul is only satisfied by me.

It takes us right back to chapter four. The woman at the well, who's this incredible illustration of chasing after one man, after another man, after another man, after another, and at the end of it all, realizing tragically yet again, that's not what my soul is really thirsting for. Jesus says to her and to us, I am the one who can satisfy that thirst.

Now, consider this. He's standing within eyesight of the temple. He's in the outer court, no doubt. He is surrounded by people who are involved in religious activity. They have come to this place, and they have enjoyed this festival because there's some motivation on their part to

do something, right? They're engaged in religious activity. And the danger is that in this place and at this time, even with what they're doing, they can still totally miss Jesus.

What do they need to do? He says, you need to come to the source. You need to come to the source. Let him come to me. Let him come to me and drink. The verbs of invitation here are present imperative verbs. There is a sense of continuous desire. There is this understanding that it's commanded. Jesus is saying this is the only way to fulfill this need within your life.

It's a picture, I think, both of salvation, yes, but as we're going to see, it's a picture even beyond that of the Christian life and walk with God. It takes us to Isaiah chapter 55 and verse 1. Very familiar, right? Come everyone who thirsts, come to the waters. And he who has no money, come, buy and eat. Come buy wine and milk without money and without price. Or go all the way to the end of Revelation 22. Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, bright as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and from the Lamb through the middle of the street of the city. Also, on either side of the river, the tree of life with its fruit. That's what Jesus is in fact saying here. That's what he's offering, right? Himself.

Let me ask you this. When he says come and drink, what in your understanding of the gospel of John is a synonym for come and drink? Starts with a B and it ends with an E. And if you want to buy a couple of vowels, there's two more E's and an I. And if I have to give you the rest, we're in trouble. It's the word "believe". That's what Jesus is saying. Come and drink. What does "come and drink" mean? Come and drink means to believe.

We don't have to guess. You don't have to take my word for it. Look at verse 38. This is what he says. There is an amazing result that takes place because in verse 38. Whoever believes in me, as the scripture has said, out of his heart will flow rivers of living water. So, to come is to believe. To believe is to come. To come is to drink. To drink is to come. This is the offer that is freely given to everyone.

Now, I look at verse 38 and there's three questions that we want to ask and answer. The first question is, what scripture? Because Jesus says, whoever believes in me as the scripture has said. Now, it's a fascinating study to look at how the New Testament uses the Old Testament. And we don't have time to do that study today. But what you have here is Jesus making this reference as the scripture says, except we don't have an exact scripture in the Old

Testament that matches exactly with what Jesus said. One of the ways the New Testament uses the Old Testament is simply by allusion. This is probably an allusion that Jesus is making to Isaiah 44, maybe Ezekiel 36 or 37. He's drawing from the Old Testament text something about himself and about this matter of coming and believing.

Then the second question is, who's in view here? When he says, whoever believes in me as the scripture has said, out of his heart will flow rivers of living water. Who is in view there? Out of his heart will flow. Whose heart? Well, Bible teachers are kind of divided at this point. Some say it's Jesus. And I think that's the obvious answer because Jesus is the source of all of this, isn't it? But I kind of think that those who look at this and believe it is us, out of us, out of our heart. I think it's a reference to the believer. Out of the heart of the believer is going to flow these rivers of living water.

That's what we have to ask then thirdly, right? What's the picture? What is the picture that is in view in verse 38? Whoever believes in me as the scripture has said, out of his heart will flow rivers of living water. I suggest to you that this is the outworking. This picture is the outworking of the work of the Holy Spirit in the life and heart of the believer. That's what he's picturing for us here.

Let's just break down what we've seen. Jesus gives this wonderful invitation. It's open to everybody. It's given to everybody. It's free, it's for everybody. And he says, all you have to do in response is to believe. All you have to do is to come. All you have to do is to drink, which is to believe, right? And then out of your heart, out of your life is going to flow these rivers of living water. It's an evidence of the Holy Spirit's work and ministry in your life. That's the promise that he gives us here. The evidence of that is in verse 39.

Now he said this about the Spirit but look at this. This is where it really kind of is mind blowing because then he says, out of your heart is going to flow rivers of living water. Now look at that little phrase. It is not a singular river, it's plural. Rivers are going to flow. He's not promising you a little pond. He's not saying you get a little lake. It's not a stream. It is plural rivers. What I think we're to envision is nothing less than a torrent of water. This is Niagara Falls. This is the Shoshone Falls. This is the largest waterfall that you want to imagine.

And he's saying about us who believe and take Jesus's invitation to heart, when we come to him, this is in fact what we should expect. This is the reality that we're to experience.

Now, I don't know about you, but when I was working through this this week, this just kind of checked me up, just stopped me. It made me stop and think about myself. And you look at that and to what extent is this true in my life? That to have come and to believe, to come and to drink now results in the daily torrent of the outpouring of the evidence of the Holy Spirit's work in my life on a daily basis. I have to tell you, to be honest with you, it was very, very convicting. But it was at the same time hope-filling. It was convicting because I had to be honest with myself and say, man, there's a lot of times when I'm not looking like a waterfall of any kind. I'm looking like a little trickle of water, maybe drying up at some point as you follow it. But then there's the hope-producing part too, isn't there? Because this is God's promise. This is something that I'm to appropriate. This is something that I'm to step into and believe and trust God for, and yes, ask Him for. Do you want that in your life? I want it in mine. Then maybe one of the things that we should be doing is asking God to give that to us, right? And it doesn't mean, I don't want to suggest that, yeah, every day 24-7 for the rest of your life is just like one waterfall. But the potential is there for us to live and walk in victory. That's what God intends for us. That's what He wants for us. That's what He provides for us.

Here's the point. To the extent that I'm walking in the flesh, this is not happening. If we step back and say, I don't see this in my life then one of the reasons that I have to be honest with is to say, sin has dammed up the flow. Sin is not allowing the full, free exercise of the Holy Spirit's ministry in my life. I'm spending too much time listening to myself and to my flesh and pursuing and seeking after things that I want. I'm too often yielding to anxiety and to worry and to a spirit of pride. Or a mouth that gossips. Or a heart of resentment or bitterness. Name it, whatever it is. Because every one of those things and a hundred more will stop the flow of the Holy Spirit's ministry in your life. I trust you. Lord. That is the reality, isn't it? And so, what He has promised to us here is to the extent that I'm walking in the Spirit, this is true. This is the reality.

This is the fruit of the Spirit. Love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, gentleness, faithfulness, goodness, self-control. What is that? That's the flow of the Holy Spirit in your life. If

you're not seeing love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control, then the Holy Spirit isn't doing the work that He wants to do in you. That's what Jesus is saying to us here.

Now look at this. We are refreshed as we walk in the Spirit. This outpouring, these rivers, this torrent refreshes me personally. But what happens when I'm refreshed personally? What happens? I refresh others. I water others. That life-giving Spirit is affecting other people around me. We all know what it's like to have an encounter with somebody who just kind of comes into your circle, and they're dry, and they're bitter, and they're envious, and they're stuck. And when they're done with you, you feel like you've been sucked dry. We also know that there are wonderful people who, and we have an encounter with them, and we're done spending time with them, we're like getting out the hanky and wiping off. We're dripping wet. The Spirit has worked such beauty in them that it flows into us, and we're well-watered people because of them. That's supposed to happen in our lives. That should be part of the value of coming together as the people of God, that we don't suck each other dry, but that we water each other, right?

Now, again, I understand there are times when we need to be honest and say, I'm struggling. I'm dry. I'm not doing well. I'm not saying that we should pretend like that's not true. But what Jesus is saying, this is the reality of one who comes and drinks, who believes the promises, the outflowing ministry of the Holy Spirit.

Look at John's explanation in verse 39, just so we don't miss it. He says, now this he said about the Spirit. So, this is John's explanation of what Jesus has just taught. Now this he said about the Spirit, whom those who believed in him were to receive, for as yet the Spirit had not been given because Jesus was not yet glorified. Well, verse 39, when you look at that verse, the symbol is the Holy Spirit. He identifies that, right? The symbol, the water, is the Spirit. This river of living water is the Holy Spirit and the Holy Spirit's ministry in our life. Jesus also takes us to look into the future because he says in that explanation, John does, that the Spirit has not yet been given. Well, what does that mean? That means that when Jesus is making this statement, the cross, obviously, is still future. The grave is still future. The resurrection is still future. The ascension is still future.

All of that has to happen before the Holy Spirit is given in the way that God has promised that the Spirit would be poured out. We know that because in John 16:7 what does Jesus say to the disciples? If I don't leave you, I can't send the Holy Spirit. But if I leave you, it's going to be even better because I'm going to send the Holy Spirit to live within you.

Now, that's an incredible thing too, isn't it? That it would somehow be better to have the Holy Spirit's ministry as opposed to having Jesus physically present with them. That's what Jesus said to them. And of course, in Acts chapter one, verses four and five, that's exactly what happened. After the ascension and 50 days after the day of Pentecost, the Holy Spirit comes, and all this that Jesus spoke of comes to pass. And the New Covenant believer now functions because we have been baptized by the Spirit into the body of Christ.

The baptism of the Spirit is something that Jesus is talking about right here. It's a one-time event. Romans 8:9 says, if you don't have the Holy Spirit, you're none of his. So, if you're a believer, you have the Holy Spirit. You're not waiting to get the Holy Spirit. 1 Corinthians 12:13. We are by one Spirit baptized into the body of Christ. Every believer is possessed and dwelt permanently by the Holy Spirit of God, and out of that flows rivers of living water.

Now, the question, again, we have to ask, is it evident in my life? Am I living the way Jesus describes? Well, what's the response to this? The response of the people. Let's look at this together. There's a mixed response, first, with the crowd, verses 40 to 44. When they heard these words, some of the people said, this really is the prophet. Others said, this is the Christ. But some said, is the Christ to come from Galilee? Has not the scripture said that the Christ comes from the offspring of David and comes from Bethlehem, the village where David was? So, there was a division among the people over him. Some of them wanted to arrest him, but no one laid hands on him.

So here, what do you have? You have this mixed response. Some believed. Some said, he truly is the prophet. Deuteronomy 18:18. He truly is the Christ. Others were confused, thinking that he's from Galilee. Well, if he was really the Messiah, what'd they say? He'd be from Bethlehem. Hello, he is from Bethlehem, right? They don't even realize that they're stuck in Galilee, but no, he's from Bethlehem. Some opposed him. Still, they want to arrest him.

Then there's the mixed response of the Jewish leaders. Verses 45 and 46, the officers then came back, came to the chief priests of the Pharisees, who said to them, why did you not bring him? The officers answered, no one ever spoke like this man. Here, the temple guards are literally awestruck by Jesus. If we were a little bit farther into the season, I would say they were thunderstruck, but right now, they're just awestruck. They're awestruck by him.

Get this, these are the same guys who were sent a few days ago to go arrest Jesus. Remember, the temple police, sent by the Sanhedrin to go and arrest Jesus. They come back, who knows where they've been for two or three days. They come back and they've got no Jesus with them. Where's Jesus? You had one mission. You were sent out to do one thing – arrest this man and bring him to us. Now, I don't know, if you were one of them, you might have come up with a different story than what they shared, but they're very courageous to me. They're very bold, obviously honest, and they basically say, this man did not sound like a man that should be arrested. This man sounded like nobody we've ever heard before. And of course, we know that, don't we?

We know that other times, people marveled at Jesus. Why did they marvel at Jesus? Why did they marvel at his teaching? Was it because he was so funny? He made them laugh all the time. He told great jokes while he taught. Was it because he was so relevant? He was so aware of the culture, and he was just constantly bringing in relevant, cool things. Was it because he was the greatest storyteller ever? Well, we know he was a great storyteller. No, you know what? It was because he spoke the truth like nobody they had ever heard before. He spoke with one who had authority. He spoke the word of God to them.

Then you have the Pharisees that are incredulous in verse 47. The Pharisees answered them, have you also been deceived? Have any of the authorities or the Pharisees believed in him? But this crowd that does not know the law is accursed. That 49th verse is said in a very snarky, snide way. Here again, you have the smartest guys in the world, right? I mean, you talk about arrogance. This group and the way they function, they're not awestruck. They're arrogant, and they're really not interested in the truth or about being wrong. They just hate Jesus so much they want him gone. But here they are once again holding out this incredulous view of Christ.

And then Nicodemus, verses 50 to 52. Nicodemus who had gone to him before and who was one of them said to them, does our law judge a man without first giving him a hearing and learning what he does? They replied, are you from Galilee too? Search and see that no prophet arises from Galilee. I mean, this is a clever move on the part of Nicodemus. You get an appreciation for why he went to see Jesus at night, right? I mean, the peer pressure that is still in play here is pretty strong, and they don't expect one of their own to be coming in any way, shape, or form to Jesus' defense, but if you're impressed with the guards and their courage and their willingness to just state it, well, here's Nicodemus, he steps out. Talk about overcoming peer pressure. He just steps out of this group, and he says, hey, you know, you guys have been talking about the law and keeping the law, and that's a good thing. Why don't we try it here? Why don't we practice what you're preaching? And we should keep the law, right? Well, then we should try this man according to the law. it really is a rather clever approach on his part, but to no avail.

We close with verse 53, and we'll pick up on this in the future. But notice, I just entitled it a sad summary. They went each to his own house, but Jesus went to the Mount of Olives. Remember, the gospel never does nothing. The gospel always does something. Here's the invitation. The invitation is given to anyone who is thirsty, to anyone who realizes that all the things that they've been pursuing and all the things that they've been trying have not satisfied. Jesus says, come to me and drink.

What do we take away? Just as Jesus caused division in his day, it's still true today, isn't it? The gospel and Jesus still are points of division. But we're called to share that gospel. We're called to share this invitation. And we do it anyway, and we announce the gospel, and we leave it to God and to the sovereign work of his spirit to draw people to himself, to show to them the thirst of their soul.

I just want to say again to you, notice this invitation. This invitation is an invitation to come to Jesus. It's not an invitation to come to a church. It's not an invitation to come to a preacher. It's not an invitation to come to baptism or the Lord's Supper or even to come to the front. It's none of those things. It's an invitation to come to Jesus. And that invitation, just as it was 2,000 years ago, is the same one we extend today.

If you sense within your soul the thirst that nothing has satisfied, stop searching in vain and recognize that Jesus alone is the one who can quench your thirst. And all you have to do is to drink. All you have to do is to come. All you have to do is to believe. Believe that you have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God. Believe that you can't work your way to heaven because you can't ever reach perfection. The only people in heaven are perfect people. And they're only perfect because they're in the righteousness of Christ. And that's what he gives to us when we believe.

Let's pray. Father God, by your Spirit again this morning, encourage us as your people to walk in this truth. Father, we would long for your Holy Spirit to be working in our lives in such a way that not only would we experience it, but that everyone around us would see this well-watered soul, this well of water springing up within us. So let that be our testimony, Father, individually and as a church. And Father, I pray right now, there surely is somebody here this morning who has not had that thirst quenched yet by the gospel. I pray, Holy Spirit of God, that you would open their heart, that they would believe and agree with you that Jesus is the way, the truth, and the life. We're grateful. In Christ's name, amen.