

Are You Thirsty?

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 23 May 2021

Preacher: James Lapping

[0 : 00] Cheers, Jamie. Thanks so much, sir. Thanks, Simon, for reading. You should find a little pink slip on your seat that will give you a stare through the sermon, or at least give you some hope that we're reaching the end.

And if you're watching at home, there should be some slides up to guide you through the talk. But let's pray as we begin. Loving Heavenly Father, we come to you tonight as those who are thirsty. Please, won't you satisfy us? Please help us to drink deeply from Jesus this evening, from living waters, that we might have rivers of living water flow from within us, gushing out to clean us, to heal us, to teach us how to live, and to bring us to God.

By your Holy Spirit. Amen. Amen. Amen. Well, as I begin, I wonder if I can ask you a question. Are you thirsty?

In our reading tonight, Jesus says, Let anyone who is thirsty come to me and drink. If you are thirsty, come to Jesus and drink.

[1 : 15] A couple of years ago, I was lucky enough to go on a camel ride with some Bedouin in the Sahara. And although it was a warm day, nothing prepared me for just quite how warm the desert was.

You see, it was warm in the scrub land on the edge of the desert, but no sooner had we got onto our camels and headed into the sands, into the dunes, did I realize just how hot and warm it was. It was as if all the liquid in my body was trying to evaporate through my pores. I grabbed two liter bottles of water and I downed them.

And before they'd sunk down into my body, they evaporated from within my throat. So let me ask you, have you ever been thirsty?

But it's not just a physical thirst that we struggle with. You might be someone who is here tonight who has a different kind of thirst. A thirst where no matter what you do in life, you still feel empty, restless, and hopeless.

[2 : 27] The monks of years gone past, they used to speak of the curse of the noonday devil. And what they meant was when they were in their cells cloistered away studying, around noontime they found that they would be restless for no real reason.

They would be irritable. They would be lethargic without knowing why. And as we've gone through lockdown, maybe you felt a bit like that, that where even the most mundane of tasks become quite hard work.

You might be someone here tonight who is looking in to the Christian faith because you may be very successful in lots of areas in your life, but you still feel restless and dissatisfied.

Or maybe you're here tonight or watching at home, and you know that you are broken and thirsty. So let me ask you, do you feel thirsty?

And Jesus says, let anyone who is thirsty come to me and drink. And we're in a little section of John's Gospel where Jesus is teaching at the Feast of the Tabernacles in the temple in Jerusalem.

[3 : 42] And the Feast of the Tabernacles was where, at the feast, God's people would go down to the Pool of Siloam, which was fed by the Gihon Spring, and collected living water.

And by living water we mean spring water, fresh water, not stale water. As fresh as highland spring water. And they'd collect this water, and they'd carry it up to the temple, and they'd pour it out in these basins around these candelabra, these massive candlesticks that they put up in all the squares and courts of Jerusalem.

And as they did this, they would look back and remember how God had led them by a column of fire in the night, out of slavery in Egypt, and how God had provided for them fresh, living water, water from the rock, better than highland spring water, in the middle of the rock desert, on their way to

God's promised land.

But they also looked forward to the day when God's King forever, His Messiah, would come and reign over His people, where God would be with them as light, and as a living water flowing in the midst of His people.

And so here Jesus says, at the highest point of the feast, He stands up and He says, God the King is here. The feast is fulfilled. Let everyone who is thirsty come to Me and drink.

[5 : 20] Are you thirsty? Well, let's get our bearings where we are slightly in John. There's a couple of things to remember when we come to John.

And the first is that John wants us to think about Jesus. He's all about Jesus, Jesus, Jesus. And in doing this, he is deliberately controversial.

He's the awkward person who says the awkward thing. And in this section, we see that there is lots of controversy. So verse 43, the people were divided because of Jesus.

And as our readings go on on Sunday evenings, it gets more and more black and white. Those who are for Jesus and those who are against Jesus.

And John asks you, which one are you? The next thing that John wants us to see, so be there on our sheet, is John wants us to see that Jesus is the Messiah.

[6 : 20] And he does this by spelling out how Jesus fulfilled, commonly held expectations of the Messiah in his days. So I'll give you one example there. John's hearers thought that the Messiah would be the prophet, that great prophet that Moses promised in the book of Deuteronomy 18, verse 15, where Moses says, the Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among you, from your fellow Israelites.

You must listen to him. And so John writes in verse 40, on hearing these words, some people said, surely this man is the prophet, i.e. he is the prophet.

And then we look down later, and we see the verdict of the temple guards. And they were not guards as in big muscular traps, but they were Levites.

They were priests. They were folk who had read their Bible, knew their Bible. And they were sent off to arrest Jesus on last Sunday's evening reading. And here we see their verdict on Jesus, verse 46. No one ever spoke the way this man does. What are they saying? Listening to Jesus is like listening to God.

[7 : 36] And then finally, see on our sheet, John wants us to believe in Jesus. I wonder if you spotted the repeated word in this passage. That comes up time and time again.

Verse 38, whoever believes in him. Verse 39, those who believed in him. 48, have any of the rulers or the Pharisees believed in him?

And John's answer is, yes, you should actually, if you haven't believed him. And so, in our reading, Jesus stands up at the Feast of Tabernacles, and he gives a sermon, very much like tonight.

And in a nutshell, it goes, the king is here, and this is what it's going to be like to trust the king. So let me ask you, are you thirsty?

And what we're going to do is, we're simply going to unpack verses 37 and 38. We're going to look at Jesus' sermon, and how John interprets it for us in verse 39.

[8 : 43] And so, we're over the pink sheet there. The first thing that we notice is that trusting in the king means having God live in you. So look down at verse 38.

Whoever believes in me, as Scripture has said, rivers of living water will flow from within them. And then John says, in 39, by this he meant the Spirit, whom those who believed in him were later to receive.

By that time, the Spirit had not been given. And what Jesus is saying is that when we trust and believe in Jesus, he gives us God's Holy Spirit that lives in us.

God the Holy Spirit, the third person of the Trinity, comes and lives in you. The life of God in the soul of man. And the mark of the Christian is someone who has God's Holy Spirit.

And just to be clear, he's not saying that the Christian has God's Holy Spirit independent of Jesus. And he's not saying that once you have God's Holy Spirit, you're exactly like Jesus in every way and no longer need Jesus.

[9 : 58] But that me having the Holy Spirit is always dependent on me trusting and believing in Jesus. Jesus. And the picture that he gives of the Holy Spirit is of a river, a spring of living water welling up and overflowing from within the life of the believer so that they will never be thirsty again of life coming into the desert and barrenness of our soul without Jesus.

Well, I've got a picture there of the Okavango Delta. I wonder if you've ever heard of the Okavango Delta. Maybe give me a nod if you have or no, not many. Well, the Okavango Delta is really in northern Botswana.

It is the perfect Africa experience. You have not been to Africa if you've not been to the Okavango Delta.

And it's really an inland river delta that pools into the desert and that's caused by seasonal flooding. And what happens is the rain falls in the highlands, flows down into the middle of Africa as it were because the middle is basically a big flat basin and it pools there.

And what happens is it forms a broad flat delta of thousands of kilometers squared and animals and wildlife flock from everywhere and the plants flourish and bloom.

[11 : 28] and what Jesus is saying is that when you trust in God, God lives in you by His Holy Spirit and makes your entire life bloom like rivers of living water in the desert.

I was chatting to some friends about what is the most misunderstood part of the ministry of the Holy Spirit and I think it's this, that before you have it, you are a slave and you do this and you do that and you live by the rules.

But when you receive the Holy Spirit, you become a son or a daughter of God. No longer under rules but under grace. And Jesus becomes your brother.

So let me ask you, are you thirsty? The next thing to notice is that trusting in the King means being made clean.

So if I had an ancient Israelite here, Jeremiah the Israelites, and I asked them, what do I use living or spring water for? They would say, among other things, it makes the unclean clean.

[12 : 41] And what they mean is, if a person was a leper or had some skin disease or if they touched a dead body or a dead person, they would become ritually unclean and they would be banished and put outside of the camp of God's people into the wilderness.

But if they wanted to rejoin the camp, rejoin God's people, they would need it to be sprinkled with living, fresh spring water to become clean again.

And so when Jesus says that if you believe in Him, you will receive, that you will have rivers of living water flowing from within you, He is saying, you will be cleaner than the whitest snow.

And so when God lives within us by His Holy Spirit, because God cannot tolerate uncleanliness, He declares you clean.

No one can ever call you unclean. No one can ever hold anything against you. Whatever you've done, whatever is on your conscience, that keeps you awake at night. When you trust in the King, it is washed away.

[13 : 49] Not only that, but God's Holy Spirit works within you to make you what God has already declared you, to make you clean, little by little.

And obviously, with some of us, the Spirit has more work cut out than others, I know. But it's working to make you clean. And when you trust in the King, He gives you His Holy Spirit and declares you clean.

And so that whatever sin is left in you, the Spirit works to clean you from it. So let me ask you, are you thirsty? Do you want to be clean?

Next thing we notice is three there. Trusting in the King means being taught to live God's way.

When I mean being taught to live God's way, I mean learning to live wisely, learning to live well as we study the Bible.

And we all know some Christians who are very faithful but who struggle to live life well. And earlier this year in the evenings, we studied the book of Nehemiah and we read how the people of God celebrated the Feast of the Tabernacles there.

[15 : 04] And we also read how they understood the work of the Holy Spirit. So in chapter 9, verse 20, we read this on the work of the Holy Spirit. You gave your good spirit to instruct them, instruct the people of old.

And what they're saying is that as we prayerfully read our Bibles and look to understand them, God will teach us by His Spirit how to live wisely in the infinite number of situations that we'll be faced with on any given day of the week.

And so, trusting in the King means being taught to live God wisely. So let me ask you, are you thirsty? Do you long to live life well according to God's way?

And the implicit question in this passage that we haven't really looked at, but is, and the temptation that we all face as people who are thirsty is what will we try to satisfy our thirst with if not Jesus? Where will we drink from? Will we go to success and respect of our peers? Will we look to satisfy our thirst by pleasure, by doing all the best things in life, by experiences, will we look to satisfy it, by family and relationships.

[16:35] And we may well drink of these, and they're not all bad things, but they will not satisfy in the end. They might satisfy for a bit, but they'll be like drinking salt water or eating snow.

In the end, they will leave you more thirsty than you were at the start. But Jesus says, let anyone who is thirsty come to me and drink.

Whoever believes in me, as Scripture has said, rivers of living water will flow from within them. Well, you might wonder how is it that Jesus can give us such an extraordinary gift?

How can he give us such a wonderful gift? And the answer there really comes in our fourth point on our sheet, that trusting in the king means trusting in his death.

I wonder if you just look at the end of verse 39. Up to that time, the Spirit had not been given since Jesus had not yet been glorified.

[17:37] And by glorified there, John means Jesus' death on the cross. And John says glorified. He uses that word of glory there because the greatness of the giver is determined by the glory and the greatness of the gift.

And in John's Gospel we read that Jesus gave us the greatest gift and manageable. Intimacy with God through his Holy Spirit.

We get sucked into the love of the Father for the Son and the love of the Son for the Father united with Christ by his Holy Spirit.

We go from being a slave to becoming a son or daughter of God. And that's what it is to have rivers of living water, to have God's Holy Spirit, to have every thirst satisfied in the best imaginable way.

But in order for this to happen, Jesus has to swap places with us and become like us in every way. You see, although Jesus had never thirsted in his life, he was always satisfied by the love of God, his Father, yet on the cross we read, he became thirsty for us.

[18:53] So John writes right at the end of his Gospel, later, knowing that everything had been finished, and so that Scripture would be fulfilled, Jesus said, I am thirsty.

And what John is saying is that when Jesus was crucified, he became like us. He knew what it was to thirst, to be cut off from God, his Creator, to be under sin.

And then when the Roman soldiers came to him to see if he was dead, John writes, but when they came to Jesus, they found he was already dead. They did not break his legs.

Instead, one of the soldiers pierced Jesus' side with a spear, bringing a sudden flow of blood and water. And as Jesus dies, as his side is pierced, so rivers of water flow that become the source of rivers of living water flowing from within us.

The promise of the gospel is that when we trust the King, our sin is laid on him and his perfect life and intimacy with God become ours through the Holy Spirit.

[20:02] God makes his home in us. Here's how the hymn writer Augustus Toplady put it. Rock of ages, cleft for me, let me hide myself in thee.

Let the water and the blood from thy riven side which flowed be of sin the double cure. Cleanse me from its guilt and power.

Loving Heavenly Father, we thank you that Jesus became thirsty for us. We say sorry for the many ways that we've tried to satisfy our thirst outside of Jesus.

We thank you for the Holy Spirit. We pray that we look to honor you in all the various multitude of ways that we can through the gifts that you've given us as your Holy Spirit works within our lives. It's your praise and glory. In Jesus' name. Amen. Amen.