

## Title: “Living Water”

Chris Ryan

John 7:37-39

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**Service Readings:** Leviticus 23:33-43, John 7:37-44

*The Festival of Booths reminds us of the provisions of God, but it also points to Jesus as the source of our living water.*

### Message:

Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ.

There is no getting around it; if you were Jewish during the time of Jesus you attended these many festivals throughout the year. You had no option, and the thought that you *just might* have one probably never entered into your mind because you were Jewish and this is what the community did. You see, back then, there was no separation between your religion and the rest of who you were. The two were bonded together so tightly that no one could successfully pull them apart. Your entire identity was defined by your lineage. And that lineage was rooted in the acknowledgement that God existed and you were his chosen. Now this wasn't unique to them during that time. In fact, the identities of all people were tightly coupled with the religion of their heritage. And because of that, the rest of the world would not have been phased by the festivals of the Jewish people. They would have seen these activities as simply something that this particular community did. And so, when the Festival of the Tabernacles came around, if you were Jewish, you would participate. Period.

And that is what they all did. Every single one of them. This festival was a harvest festival and so it was held during the time that the people were out in their fields gathering their bounties. It was a busy time for them but they would set aside their work, and even their homes, and build a temporary dwelling... think something like a tent. The construction of it was specified by God and each material had special meaning. And so they would build it and then dwell in it for seven days. Yes. Seven days. And during this time they would do no work but instead celebrate the provisions of God and remember that he is their provider. And they would look back to the time when their people wandered in the wilderness, living in temporary shelters. And they would remember that even during that time God led his people and provided for them, such as when he produced water that flowed from a rock.

This festival was a time when they not only looked backward to the time when their ancestors wandered in the desert under the guidance, protection, and provisions of God, but would also look forward. They would anticipate the time when the prophecies of the prophet Zechariah would be fulfilled. He promised the restoration of a temple and a time when Israel would live as though they were in paradise. The prophet wrote about living waters that would flow from Jerusalem, the city of God, and would bring with it forgiveness and restoration of Israel under their true king. And so during this festival, water was a major focus as it was drawn and the paraded to the temple each day where it was ceremonially poured out, along with wine into silver bowls and then poured onto

the altar. That water connected them to the past as well as the future because it associated them with the waters of creation, the waters that flowed from the rock in the wilderness, and the waters that Zechariah promised in the future.

And so you can imagine what they must have thought when Jesus stood in the midst of the crowd on that last day and made claim that *he* was the living water promised by the prophet! Our gospel passage records it:

<sup>37</sup> 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. <sup>38</sup> Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, ‘Out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.’” <sup>39</sup> 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.

It is no wonder that some wanted him arrested. He was claiming to be the fulfillment of Zechariah! He was claiming to be the source of this living water that would bring forgiveness of sins and the restoration of a broken relationship with God! He was doing more than upsetting the delicate balance of this festival, he was redefining the identity of God’s people! He was making a claim that those who believed in him would be given a new one. It would be an identity rooted in Jesus, himself! This would change the very foundation of who they were, how they saw themselves, and how the world would look upon them. Jesus wasn’t merely adding to their identity, or even modifying it! He was recreating it and that was a step many couldn’t take.

And many didn’t. Especially the leaders of the Jewish community. They didn’t send him to the cross just because his presence was a nuisance and distracted from the work they were trying to do and the festivals they were trying to lead. They didn’t even send him to the cross just because his teachings competed against theirs! They sent him to the cross because the claims that he made demanded a change in identity – for an entire nation, a nation chosen by God! To them, he was not the fulfillment that Zechariah promised. He couldn’t be because he was a person, a man! Zechariah wrote of someone being sent by God, someone who would usher in the new age when God would live *among* his people. The most that Jesus should be able to claim is that he was that person. But that was not his claim at all. It was more than that. He wasn’t just going to pave the way for God, he *was the way* to God. And that would mean they were mistaken that God would live among them in a way that would keep their current identity intact. Quite the opposite! It would mean that the only way to live *with* God was to live *in* Jesus. And that just couldn’t be correct.

And so they sought him out, tried him, and handed him over to Pilot to be killed. And he was. And on the cross they watched as his life left his body. This would be the end of him and it would be a satisfactory end because living water can’t flow from a dead body. But they were wrong. For when the soldier pierced his side, immediately flowed blood and water, just as Zechariah had foretold!

Do you think any of the leaders made the connection that day? Do you think any of them saw that blood and water and thought back to Jesus’ teaching during the Festival of Booths, and then to Zechariah’s prophecy, and then to Ezekiel’s prophecies? Do you think they then connected those back to the water flowing from the rock in the wilderness, the water that gave Moses and the Israelites life? And do you think that they connected that to the waters of creation? Here, in front

of them hung the dead body of a promise they had long awaited. Here, in front of them hung the dead body of an identity that they should have welcomed. Here, in front of them, hung the dead body of God.

But that body would not stay dead for long and the water of the Holy Spirit would spring from it. It would flow out of Jerusalem to the east and to the west. It would flow in summer and continue in winter. And those who would drink from this living water would cast aside their old identity, an identity of the world, and be clothed with a new identity, an identity in and of Jesus Christ.

Lent is a festival of sorts for us. It is a time where we are reminded that God provides all our needs. It is a time when we reflect on the bounty and blessings that he has bestowed upon us. But it is also a time where we are reminded that Jesus is our living water – water that flows from his cross and over us. Water that washes us with forgiveness and cleanses us of our sins. Water that creates in us a new identity. Water that brings us eternal life.

Lent is a festival, indeed. Not one of booths, but of water.

Please pray with me.

Lord, you are the source of living water that wells up in our souls.

Through you we find forgiveness

Through you we find identity

Through you we find eternal life

Keep us, always.

Amen.