

John 7:37-39
Promise to the thirsty

Introduction

Here is one of the most wonderful statements Jesus ever made. It has had an enormous impact on people's lives, and has been the inspiration of many great sermons and thrilling hymns. The context is important. All Jews within 20 miles of Jerusalem were expected to attend the three great festivals in the capital – Passover, Pentecost, and Tabernacles.

At the Feast of Tabernacles, people would leave their houses and live in little booths made of branches on their flat roofs or in the streets or gardens, to remind themselves of their desert wanderings. 70 bullocks were sacrificed over the 13 days of the festival – 13 the first day, 12 the second day.. down to 7 on the seventh day. Water from the Pool of Siloam, carried in a golden vessel, was poured at the base of the altar of the burnt offering. Hallel (Psalms 113-118) was sung, a reminder of God's provision of water when Moses struck the rock at Meribah. The inner court of the Temple was lit up, a reminder of the pillar of fire at night. Trumpets were blown every day. But on the eighth day, when the feast ended, no water was carried to the Temple. And it was at this point that Jesus seized His opportunity. In the silence, Jesus stood up and cried **If anyone is thirsty, let Him come to me and drink. Whoever believes on me, as the Scriptures has said, streams of living water will flow from within Him** (John 7:37-38). The Spirit was not yet given since Jesus was not yet glorified.

A case supposed

If anyone is thirsty. Jesus' audience knew all about thirst, more so than we do. We may say we are dying for a cup of tea – but we aren't really. This was a hot dry country, with blazing sun overhead, the people knew all about dry throats and swollen tongues. Water was not always plentiful or accessible. Thirst was painful and agonizing.

Jesus speaks of people who have a spiritual thirst like that. He speaks of "anyone" – this text is applicable to all, whoever we are. But note the condition – we must have an intense spiritual longing or thirst, be desperately in need. You may not be a believer, but know you are wrong with Him. You are in danger. Your conscience tells you so. Or you may have once been an earnest Christian but are now a backslider; things are not what they used to be. You may be an inconsistent Christian – growing in height – but your words and life do not match. You may be some sort of dilemma, caught up in some folly because you thought you could manage without God, but failed badly, and are defeated. You may lack assurance, beset by doubt about your standing with the Lord. You may long for fruitfulness in service and spiritual power, or holiness of life. Your prayer life may be dead and dry, going through the motions, but no reality. What do you long for most? What is the burden of your prayers?

Is this you? Are you longing for that spiritual need to be met? Will you go to any lengths for it to be met? Is that how much you thirst? The big question is – is there a

thirst? Is there a deep sense of need? Is there the desire to have the need met? This is the condition of blessing. If you are self-satisfied, content with life (even though you know all is not as it should be), then the Lord has nothing to say to you and nothing for you.

The big problem with our lives is often our prayers. We pray for all the right things, but we are not serious. We are play-acting. There is no raging thirst in our prayers. God has nothing for triflers, only for those in need, in earnest and despair. If no sense of need, this is the first thing you need to go to God to ask Him for. Ask Him to create a desire. If you are restless, yearning, longing, knowing something is wrong – thank God for that. It is the most hopeful sign. God is at work in your life and waking you up to the situation. Blessed is the man who can say with the Psalmist **My soul thirsts for God** (Psalm 42 & 63).

A remedy proposed

Let Him come to me and drink. Take action, make a definite step. Don't just wish, or talk about it, or intend to do something. Take action. Come to Christ. Then drink, i.e. receive. Appropriate the fountain flowing for thirsty souls.

Here we are right at the core and centre of the Gospel. Would that every unbeliever would look at Christ and keep looking at Him. Look to Christ – not to a church meeting, a preacher, the sacraments, an experience, and above all not to self. Must be dealing directly with Christ.

God has given His Son to us. His death, resurrection and indwelling in our lives make Him the perfectly adequate Saviour. The supply is endless and inexhaustible for all thirsty souls and needy souls. When they come and confess failure, acknowledge that they are weary of self, in despair, tired of trying, so they come to touch Him. Their emptiness turns to fullness. Helplessness turns to divine power. Come in failure, bankruptcy, emptiness and dryness. Come, not to bring Him anything, but to receive all from Him. Lean whole weight on Him. Let Him be everything to you.

How simple the remedy is. But how difficult it can be to persuade people to try it. If we were to ask them to make a great sacrifice, contribution, difficult task, punish self – they would do it with zeal. But simply to come to Christ as empty sinners to receive His fullness – here is the blockage in many lives. And not just to come once, but to keep on coming. Come daily. Yesterday does not do for today. Today does not do for tomorrow. Need to get closer, to know more of His power, taste more of the joy of fellowship with Him.

As we grow up in our human family, we gain increasing independence. But as we grow up in our Christian family, we become increasingly dependent. Whatever our spiritual needs are between here and glory, He will supply. He will give without limit or stint. Expect God to manifest Himself to your soul continually. We put so much emphasis on the initial act, and expect no more. D.L.Moody recalled a day when God revealed more of Himself to him. "What a day... too sacred. I had such an experience of His love that I had to ask Him to stay His hand." Have you ever known that? Heart so filled with a sense of His love for you that you thought it would burst?

Whether you are a believer or unbeliever, your entire spiritual needs can be met in Christ. But remember the condition – you must be thirsty, dead earnest, mean business with the Lord, desperate. No progress till you reach that point. Then come, helplessly broken, at an end of self, in total submission. Something will assuredly happen. You will make a glorious discovery. **He satisfies the longing soul and fills the hungry soul with good things** (Psalm 107:9).

Promise to those who keep on coming and keep on thirsting

Jesus promises that he who keeps on believing in Him, out of his inner man (his heart), will know streams of living water flowing within him. The promise is to relieve the needs of thirsty souls, whatever they are - pardon, peace of conscience, fruitfulness, renewed prayer life, strength for duty, comfort in trouble, guidance in perplexity, light in darkness, support in trials, victory over sin, adequacy in every situation.

Not only selves that will be affected. Streams of living water will flow out to others as well. As the Holy Spirit flows into us, it flows through us to others, refreshing and blessing them, wherever God has placed us. Alas most sinners are far from being flowing rivers – more like dripping taps – and that only occasionally. The promise is for rivers and streams. There is no end to the influence we can wield, however obscure and unknown we think we are. We count for God all over the world. Sometimes it happens in the lives of people who have been believers for a very short time. Sometimes the rivers still flow after the person's death, through memories and books.

But the condition is linked with the previous condition, but put in other words (John 7:39). It was not happening at that time because Jesus was not yet glorified, i.e. His death and resurrection and ascension had not taken place yet. It was not till after that that the Spirit was poured out. And it still does not happen in individuals till Jesus is glorified. We, our pride, own glory, own importance, has to be crushed and cast out that Christ might be all in all. If this is more than we can take, then blessing will be held back in our lives. This happens when we are unwilling for self to go to the cross with our reputation and pride and all we hold dear that Christ might have all pride and pre-eminence. Lot of Christians have to die, and until they do, nothing will happen in their lives. But when they do, the Lord will guide them continually and satisfy their soul in drought. **You shall be like a watered garden and like a spring of water whose waters do not fail** (Isaiah 58:11).

Conclusion

Christians – here we come face to face with a challenge about our relationship with the Lord. Do we really know a spiritual thirst for God and His best? Do we really want to get back to where we once were? Are we willing for self to die and Jesus to be glorified? With self, pride, ambition and self-confidence must die also. Take action now. He is only a prayer away. Drink.. receive... take.