

West Valley Church
04/03/11

**Elemental Faith:
Water, part one:
Living Water**

Water. *(all said while pouring water out of pitcher and into a basin)* We can't live without it. Three fourths of the earth's surface is covered with it, and people are made up of two thirds water. And did you know that the earth is a closed system? That means that the amount of water has remained constant—evaporating, raining, running off, over and over. Each day the sun evaporates a trillion tons of water, which eventually returns to the earth in rain, and the amount of water itself remains constant. That means when you drink water out of your faucet, you could be drinking molecules that were in the water that Moses commanded to come out of a rock in the desert, or water that dripped off of Jesus after he was baptized in the Jordan River. In a 100-year period, a water molecule spends 98 years in the ocean, 20 months as ice, about 2 weeks in lakes and rivers, and less than a week in the atmosphere. Water is essential to the earth's ecosystem, and to you. A person can live about a month without food, but only about 3-4 days without water. If a human does not absorb enough water, dehydration is the result. A person must consume at least a half-gallon of water daily to live healthily. Humans drink an average of just under 20,000 gallons of water throughout their life.

Water. Today we begin a three-part series on living water, in which we will learn more about Jesus, the Living Water, and what he can do in and through our lives.

Jesus is our source of life-giving water (John 7:38), he is the well-spring of water (Jeremiah 2:13), and the river of living water (Revelation 22:1). Water is an image very closely associated with Jesus. Take your notes out of your worship folder and keep track of what we talk about today and what you want to make sure you remember after you leave here, and use the application questions on the back for your small group or personal study.

Here is the Scripture we are going to look at today, out of John's Gospel, chapter seven. It's a dramatic scene: On the final and climactic day of the Feast, Jesus took his stand. He cried out, "If anyone thirsts, let him come to me and drink. Rivers of living water will brim and spill out of the depths of anyone who believes in me this way, just as the Scripture says." (John 7:37-38, the message)

We want to understand what Jesus was saying about Himself, so we need to see first

1. The setting

Notice that in the verses we're looking at, it starts out by saying that Jesus made this statement on the final day of the Great Feast. You've got to know that everything Jesus did, he did intentionally and significantly—he didn't do anything accidentally. So Jesus made this statement about himself on purpose, and in this setting on purpose. In order to understand what he's saying, let's look at what the feast and festival was.

Jesus said this at the Festival, or the Feast, of Tabernacles. It's described in Leviticus 23:33-44, but let me summarize it for you. It was a week of celebration for the harvest, ending sometime around October 15. During this festival the people would live in booths or temporary shelters that they made out of branches, and they would offer various sacrifices. Its purpose was to remember that God led the Israelites out of slavery in Egypt, through the desert, until they finally arrived in Canaan, or the promised land. On their journey they lived in temporary shelters because they would only stop for a night or a few nights and then move on. This festival was to remind them that God delivered them and provided for them through all of that. It was a festival of the harvest because it celebrated the fertility of the land in Canaan, which was the Promised Land that God led them to and gave them.

Each day of the festival the people came carrying palms and willows with them to the Temple in a procession, holding them over their heads making a collective roof over themselves as they marched around the Temple. At the same time a priest took a golden pitcher (*hold up*) that held a little over 2 pints and he would go down to the Pool of Siloam and fill it with water. It was carried back through the water gate in the wall around the Temple, while the people recited Isaiah 12:3—"With Joy you will draw water from the wells of salvation." The water was carried up to the Temple altar and poured out as an offering to God. While the water was being poured, what was called the "Great Hallel" or "The Great Praise," was sung by the Levites, accompanied by flutes (Psalms 113—118). When they came to the words, "O give thanks to the Lord," (Psalm 118:1), and verse 25—"save us O Lord, Save us!" and then finally to the closing words of verse 29, "Give thanks to the LORD, because he is good, and his love is eternal," the worshippers would shout and wave their palm branches toward the altar. What I want you to see is that this whole thing was a great, dramatic ceremony that involved thousands of people. In a great sense, it was a vivid way for the entire nation to thank God for his good gift of water, a prayer for him to provide rain, and a reminder for them of how God provided water from a rock when the Israelites were in the desert (Exodus 17:1-7). All this would happen each day. Then on the final day, the people would go through the same thing, except this time they would march around the huge altar of the Temple seven times, re-enacting when Joshua led the Israelites around the

walls of the enemy city of Jericho and the walls all came down. (Daily Study Bible Series, William Barclay, "John," pages 247-250)

It was against all this backdrop, and probably on the very moment that they finished the last march on the last day, that Jesus stood up and shouted loudly (He had to shout in order to be heard), "If you are thirsty, come to me and drink! Have faith in me, and you will have life-giving water flowing from deep inside you, just as the Scriptures say." (John 7:37-38, cev)

If Jesus wanted to make a point, then he most certainly made it! By saying and doing what he did, the entire ceremony became a living, participatory, object lesson of who he is—

2. The source of living water.

By standing up on that festival on that day at that moment and making that statement, Jesus was saying, "I am the fulfillment of what you are praying for and re-enacting. I am the one who is the source of living water for your life!" That's a bold statement.

Have you ever been really, really, thirsty?

During the liberation of Palestine in WWI, a combined force of British, Australian, and New Zealand soldiers was chasing the Turks as they retreated from the desert. As the allied troops moved northward past Beersheba they began to get far ahead of their water-carrying camel train. When the water ran out, their mouths got dry, their heads ached, and they became dizzy and faint. Eyes became bloodshot, lips swelled and turned purple, and mirages became common. They knew that if they did not make the wells of Sheriah by nightfall, thousands of them would die – in fact hundreds already had died. Literally fighting for their lives, they managed to drive the Turks from Sheriah. They finally arrived at the wells and water was systematically distributed to the soldiers from the great stone cisterns. The more able-bodied men were required to stand at attention and wait while the wounded and those who would take guard duty could drink first. It was four hours before the last man had his drink. During that time the men stood no further than twenty feet from thousands of gallons of water. Drinking that water had been their consuming, agonizing passion for many days. One of the officers who was there said, "I believe that we all learned our first real Bible lesson on that march from Beersheba to Sheriah Wells. If such were our thirst for God, for righteousness and for His will in our lives, a consuming, all-embracing, preoccupying desire, how rich in the fruit of the Spirit would we be?" (E.M. Blaiklock, "Water," Eternity, August 1966, p. 27.)

God used the Festival of Tabernacles to remind his people that they once had that kind of thirst in the desert. As Israel re-enacts that kind of thirst, and after the

priest pours out that symbolic water, Jesus stands up and declares that he can quench that kind of thirst in our spirits. It's a reminder of what Jesus told the woman at the well: "those who drink the water that I will give them will never be thirsty again. The water that I will give them will become in them a spring which will provide them with life-giving water and give them eternal life." (John 4:14, gnb)

In Jewish culture and writings water is a very rich symbol. God himself is called "the spring of living water" (Jeremiah 2:13; 17:13). Do you remember that Jesus is called "The Word made flesh"? That Word, the Old Testament, is now come to life in flesh—in Jesus himself. God's promise of Isaiah is fulfilled: "And I will always guide you and satisfy you with good things. I will keep you strong and well. You will be like a garden that has plenty of water, like a spring of water that never goes dry." (Isaiah 58:11, gnb)

The cries of the psalmists are answered. David prayed, "O God, you are my God, earnestly I seek you; my soul thirsts for you, my body longs for you, in a dry and weary land where there is no water" (Psalm 63:1). The writers of Psalm 42 sang, "As the deer pants for streams of water, so my soul pants for you, O God. My soul thirsts for God, for the living God. When can I go and meet with God?" (Psalm 42:1-2). Both of these psalms go on to speak of meeting God in the temple: David has seen God in the sanctuary (Psalm 63:2), and Psalm 42 speaks of "leading the procession to the house of God, with shouts of joy and thanksgiving among the festive throng" (Psalm 42:4). This is important, because when Jesus cries out on the last day of the Festival, at the end of the Feast of Tabernacles on this particular day, the worshipers came to the sanctuary to worship God--and there stands Jesus, the Son of God, saying "If anyone thirsts, let him come to me and drink. Rivers of living water will brim and spill out of the depths of anyone who believes in me this way, just as the Scripture says." The longing for God that this entire festival symbolized, is quenched with Jesus' invitation to come and be satisfied. God desires to meet mankind, so in the Old Testament he created the Temple. Now, in Jesus, God's own desire to be with us is accomplished, and our desire for God is satisfied. All that the Temple represented, all that the festival and ritual symbolized, is now found and fulfilled in Jesus. Jesus here says the he will give us the Holy Spirit—God's presence in our lives—to give us this thirst quenching water. He's telling us that he can satisfy our ultimate thirst for God.

Here's something else that is interesting—it's not just the culmination of the festival that makes the point. When Jesus tells us to come and drink it's also the culmination of a whole series of references to water in John's Gospel: first was when Jesus turned the water into wine in chapter 2, then Jesus spoke to Nicodemus about the water of the new birth (chapter 3), then the scene with Jesus talking

about living water with the woman at the well (chapter 4), then the cleansing, healing water at the Pool of Bethesda when Jesus heals and forgives a man (chap. 5) and then Jesus' calming of the stormy waters (chapter 6). Now in chapter seven all of these have revealed Jesus as the One and Only who brings God's gracious offer of life-giving water to us.

Stop a minute. Think about God. And you. If you are willing to stop long enough to get below the busy surface of your life, you will discover your own thirst for God. Can you feel it? Well that thirst itself indicates you really do have a need for the reality of God. CS Lewis, in his book Mere Christianity, writes, "Creatures are not born with desires unless satisfaction for those desires exists. A baby feels hunger: well, there is such a thing as food. A duckling wants to swim: well, there is such a thing as water. If I find in myself a desire which no experience in *this* world can satisfy, the most probable explanation is that I was made for *another* world. If none of my earthly pleasures satisfy it, that does not prove that the universe is a fraud. Probably, earthly pleasures were never meant to satisfy it, but only to arouse it, to suggest the real thing." C.S. Lewis, Mere Christianity (HarperCollins, 1952)

Mankind has a thirst for God—every culture throughout history has some expressive desire to fulfill their thirst for a god. Now in Jesus, our desperate thirst is finally quenched.

Physical thirst is the most painful thing. Science has identified three levels of thirst: Eudipsia is normal thirst. Hyperdipsia is temporary intense thirst, and Polydipsia is sustained excessive thirst. That third is the most severe; it affects every organ in the body, depleting the very cells of their water, resulting in spasms in muscles, and shutting down the organs, electronic misfiring in the brain resulting in hallucinations and mania. That kind of thirst drives one to drink anything. It's what drives sailors stranded in the ocean to drink sea water. The three kinds of thirst are Eudipsia—normal everyday thirst, hyperdipsia, or temporary intense thirst, and polydipsia—sustained, excessive thirst.

Spiritually speaking, which of the three describes your thirst for God? Are you casually thirsty for him? Or do you find that, at times, you are very thirsty—but not always? Like maybe when things are going badly for you? Or are you driven by an all-consuming thirst for Him all the time? We ought *always* to thirst for him, and Jesus will quench your thirst, even as your desire for him remains strong. And if you turn to him, he will become in you a spring of living water. That's the last thing that Jesus said: that in you will be

3. The *spring*

Jesus intends for this life-giving water in you to be poured out into the lives of others, so they will know that He can quench their thirst too.

Jesus said, "If you are thirsty, come to me and drink!

Have faith in me, and you will have life-giving water flowing from deep inside you" (John 7:37-38, cev)

Notice Jesus didn't say, "Water flowing inside you" or "into you," but he said flowing FROM inside you. That means *out of you*. This water was never intended to only fill you up. It was intended to fill you up so much that it would flow *out of your life to others*.

In making this statement, Jesus has in mind the promises from the prophet Isaiah: "For I will pour water on the thirsty ground and send streams coursing through the parched earth. I will pour my Spirit into your descendants and my blessing on your children. They shall sprout like grass on the prairie, like willows alongside creeks." (Isaiah 44:3-4, the message)

And "The LORD will always guide you and provide good things to eat when you are in the desert. He will make you healthy. You will be like a garden that has plenty of water or like a stream that never runs dry." (Isaiah 58:11, cev)

The point is that we are filled with the water of life—the Holy Spirit whom Jesus gives—that never stops flowing. It keeps going. When we are filled with the water Jesus offers, which is the Holy Spirit—the presence of God—it does not stop with us. *It gushes out of us!* It keeps flowing and touches those that we touch. We become, in effect, a former thirsty person showing thirsty people how and where to get water.

We have living water that gives us power, joy and hope, and the promise isn't only that *we* will be satisfied, but that we will be *satisfying*. We should and will become a blessing to others. We will share the water—the power, and the joy. We will share the hope. This life-giving water will flow out of us to others. That's why the Bible says, "And may the Lord make you increase and abound in love to one another and to all." (I Thessalonians 3:12, niv)

A Christian should not be a pool of love and blessings, but a river of love and blessings. We are not a bucket but a pipe. We are to become, according to what Jesus said, like a mighty river of life that flows out of us and touches others' lives, too, so they can encounter Jesus, the living water.

My deepest soul-thirst is not just to be a receptacle, but to be a river. And you know what? Rivers can't be held back!

Try to stop the Amazon, the Nile or the Mississippi.

No, they can't be held back, and neither should we.

Just as rivers are places of life, we are never more alive than when the Spirit is

flowing through us. And rivers change things! They don't keep the status quo. They constantly clean their environment. They change course.

They change the depth and run deeper. Sometimes, they even overflow the banks. With rivers there is always progress, there is always a pushing forward.

The Jordan River is one of those rivers. It flows from the top of Mount Herman where the snow melts and travels into the Sea of Galilee—a lush, rich area for farming and fishing to this very day. The water flows through the Sea of Galilee down to the lowest point on the continental earth, the Dead Sea. The Dead Sea is at an elevation of 1378 feet below sea level. There is a huge difference between the Sea of Galilee and the Dead Sea. Clear, sweet water from underground springs and the Jordan River flows into the Sea of Galilee. And the Sea of Galilee flows south into the Jordan. Galilee is a gorgeous, active lake, full of life that has sustained fishermen in the region for millennia. It still does—they still fish commercially out of it. The Dead Sea, by contrast, is a shallow collecting basin with no outlet. It hoards the water that flows into it. Some water evaporates, leaving behind brackish, clouded water so dense with minerals that swimmers bob like corks. The whole sea is dead; nothing can live in it. Here's the point: *when we as Christians do not let the water of life flow through us, we too can become spiritually dead and stagnant. Instead of our faith being attractive, life giving and fruitful, we become as offensive as a stagnant pond. (repeat)*

God has used the history of his people—re-enacted at the Festival of Tabernacles—to set the stage for the reality of His Son, the only one who can satisfy the thirst in our lives. And, when we've received that water, we are then to let it flow out of us into the lives of others.

Have you accepted the proven water of life? He alone will quench your thirst. Is he flowing from your life? Are you living to be a blessing to others? Loving others? Meeting the needs of others? Don't become stagnant.

(Water motion back) Pray

We began this message by pouring water out of this pitcher. Last week if you remember we completed our series called "earth" in which we learned to have a right perspective of ourselves, and we finished it by bringing the clay that represented our lives, and placing them on the wheel. We did that show our desire to allow God to shape our lives. When we do that, he pours his presence into our lives so that he can be poured out of us into the lives of others.

This pitcher has been made by a local artist that we commissioned to make it out of that same clay that you placed on the potter's wheel last week! (hold up) This is what can happen when we come together, give ourselves to God, and ask him to

fill us! Then, through us, His Church, he can be poured out into the world around us.

Talk about Easter