

John 44 – Streams of Living Water

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Scripture 1: (Jn. 7:37-43 ESV)

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. Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, 'Out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.'"

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.

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.

Scripture 2: (Ezek. 47:1-5 ESV)

Then he brought me back to the door of the temple, and behold, water was issuing from below the threshold of the temple toward the east (for the temple faced east). The water was flowing down from below the south end of the threshold of the temple, south of the altar.

Then he brought me out by way of the north gate and led me around on the outside to the outer gate that faces toward the east; and behold, the water was trickling out on the south side.

Going on eastward with a measuring line in his hand, the man measured a thousand cubits, and then led me through the water, and it was ankle-deep. Again he measured a thousand, and led me through the water, and it was knee-deep. Again he measured a thousand, and led me through the water, and it was waist-deep. Again he measured a thousand, and it was a river that I could not pass through, for the water had risen. It was deep enough to swim in, a river that could not be passed through.

Scripture 3: (Isa. 12:1-6 ESV)

"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 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.

"Sing praises to the LORD, for he has done gloriously; let this be made known in all the earth. Shout, and sing for joy, O inhabitant of Zion, for great in your midst is the Holy One of Israel."

Sermon:

Each of the three “mandatory attendance” feasts of the LORD were times of joyful celebration even as they were also solemn remembrances of historical events (Leviticus 23).

- The Passover, *Pesach*, and the Feast of Unleavened Bread together were a memorial remembrance commemorating the death of all Egypt's firstborn children alongside the deliverance and “passing over” of Israel's children, but it was also a celebration of the Hebrew exodus from Egypt: not only their deliverance from slavery and bondage to their cruel, foreign masters but also as their effective “Independence Day”.
- The Feast of Harvest, *Shavuot*, or the Feast of Weeks {for occurring 7 weeks after Passover} (better known as Pentecost by Christians) was a memorial remembrance to celebrate the giving of the Law at Mount Sinai and it was a celebration of thanksgiving for the start of the harvest season (the gathering of “first fruits”).
- The Feast of Booths or “Tabernacles”, *Succoth*, or the Feast of In-gathering was a memorial remembrance of the Hebrews' nomadic life for forty years in the wilderness; it was a celebration of the bountiful provision of the Promised Land and of thanksgiving at the conclusion of the harvest season.
 - Leviticus 23 describes and regulates how they were to memorialize and celebrate during this feast, “*And you shall take on the first day **the fruit of splendid trees, branches of palm trees and boughs of leafy trees and willows of the brook, and you shall rejoice before the LORD your God seven days.***” (Lev. 23:40 ESV) and “*You shall dwell in booths for seven days. All native Israelites shall dwell in booths, that your generations may know that I made the people of Israel dwell in booths when I brought them out of the land of Egypt: I am the LORD your God.*” (Lev. 23:42-43 ESV).
 - Today, orthodox Jews continue to celebrate this Feast by spending some prayerful time under a canopy outside (a common 10'x10' pop-up tent suffices for many) and they will also “wave” two items which they call a *lulav* and a *etrog*¹. An *etrog* is a Citron fruit, an agricultural ancestor of the modern lemon, while the *lulav* is a collection of palm, myrtle, and willow branches bundled together as examples of the three branches commanded by Leviticus 23:40.
 - However, the actual conclusion of the Feast was on the eighth day, when a “*holy convocation*” and “*solemn assembly*” was held and when they could do no “*ordinary work*” (Leviticus 23:36) thereby making this a special, extra-ordinary Sabbath.

I draw your attention to these details because, just as how John informed us that Jesus appeared teaching in the Temple “...*About the middle of the feast...*” (Jn. 7:14 ESV), John's note that this particular discourse occurred “...*On the last day of the feast, **the great day...***” implies that there is something important about this specific time and place because “timing is everything”.

- The events of our passage happened on “*the great day*” of the feast. This was an extra-ordinary Sabbath, since it did not necessarily fall on a Saturday, but it could also have been a “super-Sabbath” if it coincided with the regular Sabbath day (and I am of the opinion that that was the probable case, in this instance). Regardless, to them it was a very “holy” day.

¹<https://www.easyetrog.com/products/20-basic-kosher-lulav-and-etrog-sets-from-israe>

- This “*great day*” was the day when the largest crowd would have been present at the Temple worshipping and their worship would have contained an attitude of thanksgiving and jubilant praise for the LORD's good, gracious provision and mercy.

Keeping that context in mind and under consideration, we discover that Jesus's cry here (which is a very familiar and popular quotation) carries a greater weight than we ordinarily recognize.

This proclamation, as described by John, occurred while Jesus was up on the Temple Mount: an area of about thirty seven acres of sacred space {approximately 500 meters by 300 meters; the present dimensions of the Temple Mount platform are the result/consequence of king Herod's expansion and would have been in place during Jesus' lifetime}, including the Outer Courtyard (also known as the Court of the Gentiles). John does not tell us specifically where Jesus was standing within the Temple complex: He might have been within the Inner Courtyard, standing near to the great altar and in front of the doors leading into the Holy place, or He could have been further out in the midst of a greater volume of people; nevertheless it is reasonable {and safe} to assume that He and His hearers had the Temple within view.

No matter where Jesus would have been when He stood up to cry, He would have been surrounded by a large number of Jewish worshipers {predominantly men}. They would have all been waving their *etrog's* and *lulav's*: their palm, myrtle, and willow branches; before the LORD rejoicing and praising God. They would have been praying and singing; raising their voices in worship and giving God glory and honor. This is the setting when John says, “*Jesus stood up and cried out, 'If anyone thirsts, let him come to **me** and drink. Whoever **believes in me**, as the Scripture has said, 'Out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.'*”.

- This was, in today's modern parlance, a “mic drop” moment.
- This was a complete and total “show stopper”.
- This was a moment when, if a record were playing, then it would be scratched to silence.

But why? Jesus did not say something new. He said the same thing to the Samaritan woman at Sychar {Shechem} earlier back in John 4:10-15. Although she would not have been expected to understand the greater significance of what He said: since the Samaritans did not have or believe the writings of the Prophets; the majority of these hearers should **immediately** have recognized and understood what Jesus was saying and meaning.

Jesus was claiming to be God, the LORD, clearly and undeniably with this very public declaration and Jesus also announced the inauguration of the “messianic age” and God's earthly kingdom.

- Jesus invoked the prophet Isaiah with His declaration of, “*If anyone thirsts, let him come to **me** and drink.*”, identifying Himself with the “*wells of salvation*” (Isa. 12:3 ESV); with the LORD God, who has become our salvation (12:2).
- Jesus, in that particular time and place, very obviously claimed to be God with His cry of “*Whoever believes in me...*”; declaring Himself to be the rightful object of His hearer's faith; a *pisteuo* that should be reserved for the LORD.
- Lastly Jesus, in that specific place and at that specific time, evoked the prophet Ezekiel's vision of the Temple upon the return of the LORD's divine presence (Ezekiel 43-47). Ezekiel saw a purifying flow of living water issuing out from a “spiritual Temple” {since the measured dimensions did not match either Solomon's or the Second (renovated) Temple}, as John interjects and explains this with the Holy Spirit's

wisdom (in light of Jesus' teaching in John 14): a Temple which represents and includes all God's believing people.

It is a near **Zero** probability that the Jewish men who heard Jesus say this would have misunderstood, misinterpreted, or missed His divinity claim. This would have been an ideal moment and justification for “the Jews” to arrest Jesus, except they were all busy occupied with the Festival, and because of the present pressing crowd of worshipers surrounding Jesus. The continued fecklessness and inability of the Jews to silence Jesus by arresting Him, was again likely interpreted as supporting evidence affirming Jesus and His teachings; or at least evidence of their permission {where silence implies their consent or approval}.

The audacity of Jesus to make this declaration and claim, coupled with the presumed approval of the religious leadership: the so-called Experts; prompted the crowd's response of “...*some of the people said, "This really is the Prophet."*” and “*Others said, "This is the Christ."*”. Again, some people were beginning to accept and believe that Jesus might really be the Messiah, while others continued to look for reasons and excuses to doubt it, asking “*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?*” Therefore, “...*there was a division among the people over him.*”

The 1st Century Jews were naturally divided over Jesus, just like most people are today. They were:

- divided over who they thought He is (whether the Christ or not, whether God or not); and,
- divided over their opinions about Him (was He right, was He good, was He simply crazy, or was He a political and theological problem?).

Just like today, everyone had an opinion about Jesus, yet few could agree on every point. Their division again demonstrates for us that the more we think that things have changed, the more we realize how much they actually remain the same.

Now, beyond understanding this merely as being a watershed moment in Jesus' ministry, with this unopposed, public declaration of His divinity, what else is John trying to teach us here?

Working backwards, we see that with their doubtful reasoning some folks were *trying* to judge rightly but, just as in horseshoes, their “almost” does not count. However, they were asking the correct questions, yet they lacked the information necessary to reach the correct answers.

- Asking “*Is the Christ to come from Galilee?*” was a reasonable question and is one that we can only answer “Yes” to because of how we interpret Isaiah 9, having the full hindsight of New Testament Scripture and the Holy Spirit's illumination.
- Asking “*Has not the Scripture said that the Christ comes from the offspring of David, and comes from Bethlehem, the village where David was?*” was also a reasonable question and one which they answered rightly, just as the wise men had answered King Herod some thirty years earlier.

However, by asking these particular questions, they demonstrated their collective ignorance of certain important facts. John demonstrates that the general public was ignorant of the circumstances surrounding Jesus's birth. Clearly they knew the prophetic Scriptures as related to the Messiah's birthplace and they had interpreted them correctly, but they did not know that Jesus satisfied their requirements.

- The average person did not know that Jesus belonged to the tribe of Judah or that He was descended from King David.

- Why should they think that He was, since He was known as “Jesus of Nazareth”? He hailed from the province of Galilee: from a territory that had once belonged to the tribes of Zebulon and Naphtali, tribes that were now dispersed, disinherited, and most likely lost entirely after the destruction of the Northern Kingdom by the Assyrians in 722 BC. Most of the Jews living in Galilee were the descendants of loyal Jews transplanted there by the Hasmoneans, when they reclaimed and repatriated much Israel's former territory from the Seleucid Empire.
- The average person did not know that Jesus was born in Bethlehem during a Roman census, since He grew to adulthood in Nazareth before relocating to Capernaum.
- Therefore, if the average person did not know those facts, then it was also unlikely that they knew anything about the Magi, the shepherds, angelic visitations, or the virgin birth.
- It is also unlikely that they knew about any possible rumors related to Jesus' legitimacy and parentage. Even if they had, that was thirty years in the past and since Jesus had been raised as Joseph's own son and rightful heir, that kind of ancient gossip would be dismissed as unimportant and irrelevant.

John's Gospel does not recount Jesus's birth narrative, not because those events were unimportant, untrue, or unnecessary but because that evidence was not necessary to prove John's thesis that Jesus is God: that Jesus is the Son of God and God the Son; that Jesus is the *Logos* who is *Theos* and *Andros*. Instead, the Signs performed by Jesus as an adult were sufficient evidence for John's argument.

Today, some skeptics will argue against the birth narratives of Jesus by suggesting that Christians merely stole the idea from other pagan religions and cherry picked details from a half-dozen or so, unrelated myths and legends and used that to prove Jesus' divinity. Other skeptics will argue that the absence of a birth narrative in Mark or John suggests that the early church had no knowledge or tradition concerning Jesus' miraculous birth, implying that they were fabricated later on.

Myself, I would suggest the alternative argument that the reason John did not include any birth or infancy narrative about Jesus was because it was unnecessary evidence for the case He was making. John argued to prove his original thesis that Jesus is God, as Jesus **often** claimed, using the many public Signs which Jesus performed, rather than leading off with a miraculous beginning and using that to justify Jesus's wondrous works. Consider the difference between these two arguments and their impact:

- Since Jesus performed all of these supernatural Signs and Wonders; therefore, they prove that Jesus is God.
- Since Jesus' birth was the product of a divine miracle, He is God; therefore, Jesus can perform miracles.

Remember John's Gospel was written for the edification and encouragement of existing believers; so, it had a more apologetic character. Since his whole case was built upon eyewitness evidence and his own, personal testimony, it is actually unreasonable to expect that he would write about an event that he was not present for or closely connected to {John's presence is noted in almost every event recorded in his Gospel}. Furthermore, since Matthew and Luke wrote their Gospels earlier and, if John understood that his purpose for writing as to “fill in the gaps” about Jesus' ministry {as stated by Eusebius and as I argued when we began studying John's writing}, then there was no need for him to add anything more.

So really, the circumstances surrounding Jesus's birth as the Messiah likely had little to no bearing or impact upon those who were initially and originally willing to believe in Him as **a** (or **the**) Christ; they had minimal

convertive import but a greater apologetic relevance. Now they remain important for Christians to know and believe because they are examples of prophetic fulfillment and function as evidence testifying to Who Jesus is.

Next, we have John's explanation about the Holy Spirit.

- First, his interjection supports the idea that John's Gospel was written less as a polemic to convert non-believers, but rather more for the encouragement and edification of existing believers by augmenting their existing faith with evidence supporting it.
- Second, John is foreshadowing the gift of the Holy Spirit who would be received by all “...*those who believed in him...*” but whom, at this moment in the narrative of redemption, had not yet been given; reminding us that the reason was because “...*Jesus was not yet glorified.*”.
 - Jesus had not yet suffered and died, nor had He yet been raised from the dead and therefore, He had certainly not yet ascended to the Majesty on High or been glorified as He had been “...*before the world existed.*” (Jn. 17:5 ESV). Therefore, the Father had not yet sent the Holy Spirit in Jesus' Name (John 14:26).
- Third, John correlates the Holy Spirit with the two waters that Jesus speaks of, “*If anyone thirsts, let him come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, 'Out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.'*”. He implies that “*anyone who thirsts*” is: everyone who desires God; namely anyone who has been awakened to their great need for God; someone who has been called (internally) and regenerated. They may come to Jesus “*and drink*” and be satisfied. But, what are they being satisfied with?
 - They may drink and be satisfied with the justification of Christ which they receive by faith.
 - They may drink and be satisfied in their adoption by the Father and enjoy His love and favor, being now in a right relationship with Him.
 - They may drink and be satisfied with the gift and presence of Jesus Christ's indwelling and sanctifying Holy Spirit.

John implies that the natural, logical consequence of coming to Christ in faith and drinking the water He gives is that, “*Out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.*” whereby Jesus calls to mind, Ezekiel's image of the more glorified Temple from out of which a purifying flood flowed; a spiritual river of life. “*And wherever the river goes, every living creature that swarms will live, and there will be very many fish. For this water goes there, that the waters of the sea may become fresh; so everything will live where the river goes.*” (Ezek. 47:9 ESV). Thus John, cooperating with the Holy Spirit's inspiration, describes God's ultimate, transformative cleansing, regenerating work.

Which leads us to consider our point of application: the transformative work of the Holy Spirit within every believer and for their whole lives.

Whenever we finally come to Jesus: responding to His internal call upon our life; we get to drink deeply from “*the wells of salvation*” yet, our salvation is not the end of the story. After having first been foreknown, predestined, and called, now: after we drink the spiritual life-giving water that Christ freely provides; we become justified through our *pisteuo* in Him, and then soon, we shall be glorified *en toto* (Romans 8:29-30). But, before we get glorified, we first must be cleansed, washed, purified, and sanctified inside and out. The Holy Spirit, dwelling within every believer, **will** and **is** sanctifying us, constantly and consistently; filling our

hearts beyond capacity, so that His cleansing power overflows out into the world surrounding us, purifying everything it comes into contact with.

Have you ever noticed how, after a person becomes a Christian (after they are regenerated), everything about them begins to change? Ordinarily, that change follows a logical progression as they are sanctified; as they become conformed to the image of Christ (2 Corinthians 4:4).

- First, their desires begin to change: the things they want and seek and hope for. They want fewer worldly things, or they find themselves wanting worldly things less. They often become less selfish and self-centered (less focused on “Me”). Instead, they find themselves with more godly desires like wanting: Christian fellowship, Christian music, more time in the Word, and prayer.
- Second, their vocabulary begins to change: many words or expressions will fall out of use, as other (more appropriate) words and expressions replace those lost.
- Third, their preferred actions and activities begin to change. They stop doing some things and start doing others instead. They repent and intentionally stop doing things which they know are wrong and sinful. They intentionally stop going where they know that they will be tempted **by** and **to** sin. They begin to act more kindly and charitably towards others. They begin to share what they have more and perform good works of charity and love.
- Fourth, their relationships begin to change: the character of some relationships change, while other unhealthy or sinful relationships are abandoned as newer, godlier relationships are established. Non-believing friends will naturally separate themselves as a Christian becomes more sanctified, because the unholy will always seek to avoid the presence of the holy. Other previously known, Christian friends will grow closer to them as their shared and common faith becomes recognized and known, and new friends are often made with more mature Christians.
- Fifth, since most people will have noticed their change and many people may have been asking them about it (asking them: why, how, who?). Now they tend to more freely share the Good News about Jesus (beginning to confidently evangelize) and begin bringing up matters of faith in their various engagements and interactions. Then, after they recognize the good transformation that has been happening within themselves, they will begin working towards a similar transformation in their surroundings.
- Sixth, eventually Jesus becomes the primary Person, Place, and Thing that they ever think about, or want to talk about, or desire and the rule of Scripture becomes their used standard for right judgment.

Finally, the practical and observable effect of a believer's sanctification is:

- As individual Christians become more and more sanctified, and concerned with the things of God, and live for His Glory (WSC #1), the totality of their lives will be transformed to their good.
- Then particular churches, particular expressions of the Body of Christ, will become more sanctified as their members increase in personal piety and holiness. This will transform the heartfelt character and quality of their worship, and their engagement in the Church's missions of disciple making, evangelizing the nations, and loving their neighbors through works of mercy and acts of charity.
- As more churches become more sanctified, then their community will begin to be transformed towards the greater social good, as: more needs are met, more people are introduced to Jesus Christ come to trust in Him for their salvation, more people begin to live for God's glory and also in accord with His

commands (His Moral Law). Then, as a whole, they begin to be more kind, more gracious, and truly tolerant as more people rightly love their neighbor.

- As communities become more sanctified, then States and nations and the world begins to change and transform for the better; not only for the good of all those who love God and are called according to His purposes (Romans 8:28), but also for every resident and citizen, no matter their faith.
- Ultimately, global life gets better for everyone as more individuals accept and submit themselves to the Lordship and authority of Jesus Christ in their own personal capacity.

This is what I call the “Christendom Effect” (or “Cultural Christianity”²). This has improved the lives of believers and non-believers over the past two thousand years. The progressive improving impact of this effect proves that humanity does not need “Christian nations” because: so long as nations have Bible believing, Bible trusting, and Bible obeying “Christian citizens” living within them as “resident aliens” until Christ, our true and only King, returns in Glory; we will continue to live, love, and work for the good of everyone by seeking the welfare of the cities and nations wherein we live, as counseled by the Holy Spirit through Jeremiah (Jeremiah 29:4-7), because in their benefit we shall find our benefit. As Christians, we know and understand that we can never perfect the world, or make it as good as it ought to be but, we can, should, and must work for its betterment and good as the consequence of our faith and obedience to Jesus Christ.

This is the consequential impact of Jesus's declaration, “*If anyone thirsts, let him come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, 'Out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.'*”. Once a person comes to Christ in faith and are justified, then they receive and are overfilled with His gift of the Holy Spirit working inside them and with them: cleansing, purifying, and sanctifying them. Then He works through them to progressively cleanse, purify, and sanctify the world until Christ finally will return and restore everything in the New Creation. Therefore, we know that our salvation, our being saved, is not just for our own individual good but, for the good of the whole Church and, for the good of the whole world.

The reason why people have always been divided over Jesus, has less to do with whether or not they believe Jesus is the Christ and God, but more with the eschatological implication that stems from Jesus' divinity and authority: the restoration and recreation of the world with the absolute eradication of sin and wickedness. Since this is antithetical to the desire of Satan and our remaining, indwelling sinfulness, this is why people (even many believing Christians) resist submitting to the Lordship of Christ, because we are too much in love with the world and this present life, and too little in love with Jesus and the world to come.

Therefore, we all need to repent and come to Christ in faith and drink deeply from “*the wells of salvation*”. We need to believe in Christ; to believe Christ and the testimonies of sacred Scripture; and, rightly judge all things according to His divine, absolute standard. We need to be united together in Christ: by our shared faith, in holiness, with God's love for us, and with our love for one another and for Jesus Christ, alone. We each need to be so filled with His Holy Spirit that His sanctifying power and presence flows out in everything that we think, say, and do.

Therefore, let us remember our temporary time dwelling in the spiritual wilderness and so, come and praise the LORD and celebrate with thanksgiving for Him graciousness in bringing us into the “Promised Land” of His presence, our being adopted as His chosen sons and daughters, our being justified in the righteousness of Jesus Christ, and our being sanctified by His Holy Spirit.

AMEN

²<https://breakpoint.org/christianity-is-a-cultural-good/>