

October 2, 2011

# *Living Out The Gospel In Real Life*

## *All Who Are Thirsty*

John 7:25 – 39

We saw last week that there are only three possible responses to Jesus. You can either dismiss Him as a madman – or refuse Him as a charlatan – or embrace Him as King. But only one of these responses is the sane and logical choice given the testimony of His teaching, His life and His deeds. This is the trilemma all men face when confronted with Jesus – is He deceiver, deceived or Lord? But the one thing you cannot get away with is merely suggesting that He is just a good teacher, a moral guide, an inspired prophet. His very claims to Deity – to being the Son of God – to being the only way, the only truth, the only real source of life – just don't allow that view. This is what the audience in Jerusalem was confronted with – and some said He was a prophet, some said was a deceiver, and some said He had a demon – He was mad – and some thought He might be the Messiah, but were too afraid to speak up. But His presence in Jerusalem at this feast set the crowd to talking.

*So some of the people of Jerusalem were saying, "Is this not the man whom they are seeking to kill? Look, He is speaking publicly, and they are saying nothing to Him. The rulers do not really know that this is the Christ, do they?"* John 7:25-26 John indicates here that the plot to kill Jesus was pretty much common knowledge in Jerusalem and the people were first of all surprised that Jesus was speaking out boldly in the temple; and secondly that their leaders apparently were doing nothing to silence the man. The question here implies a negative answer. The people did not think that the religious leaders actually thought Jesus might be the Christ, but their inactivity looked like they might have had some reservations about their intent to kill Him.

But the crowd in general dismissed Jesus as the Christ for two reasons: they thought they knew who He was and where He had come from: *"However, we know where this man is from; but whenever the Christ may come, no one knows where He is from."* John 7:27 The prevailing thought was that the Christ would appear mysteriously and nobody would know where He came from – that is He would seem to appear from nowhere. However that was not a teaching from the Old Testament, but rather a teaching from their tradition. It was one of those kinds of statements that people make that appear to be Bible based but are really from some other source. Like many people will say 'God helps those who help themselves' and think that they are quoting Biblical truth; when in actuality they are quoting Benjamin Franklin.

But as far as the crowd knew, this itinerant preacher came from Nazareth, a little town in the despised region of Galilee. If we were to be as politically incorrect as this crowd, we would have said He came from Redneck Land – and we all know about rednecks – kinda slow, ignorant – certainly not top drawer kind of people. Or if we were Canadian we would have said He came from Newfoundland – He was a 'Newfie' – and there are lots of derisive jokes about newfies. In any case, they knew His place of origin, they knew He came from a poor family, His father was a blue-collar worker, a carpenter, and they were sure nothing good would ever come from such a background or such a region – and certainly not the Christ. Back in chapter one, Nathaniel had the same opinion – 'Can anything good come out of Nazareth'?

*Then Jesus cried out in the temple, teaching and saying, "You both know Me and know where I am from; and I have not come of Myself, but He who sent Me is true, whom you do not know. I know Him, because I am from Him, and He sent Me."* John 7:28-29 John uses a word here in verse 28 and again in verse 37 that is rather startling. He says at this point Jesus 'cries out' – *krazo* – in the Greek. And literally it means to shriek like a raven – the word is used to emphasize not just the loudness of His voice, but the cutting quality of it. A raven's cry cuts through other sounds – it is even slightly irritating because it stands out over against all other sounds. And Jesus cries out and says that although they think they know Him and where He is from – they don't know Him at all – because they don't know the One who sent Him – *whom you do not know*. This was a remarkable statement. He is telling these religious Jews, who claim to know God, who are at the temple right then involved in worshipping God – that they don't have a clue about God.

*So they were seeking to seize Him; and no man laid his hand on Him, because His hour had not yet come.* John 7:30 The crowd and the authorities were not wondering what Jesus meant by such a statement. They knew what He meant and they were offended and John says they tried to seize Him. Hearts that will not surrender to the truth will always try to stifle the message and kill the messenger. But it is always instructive to our faith and comforting to our hearts to know that behind every circumstance and situation, stands the rock of God's sovereign rule over every event. I remember talking to a friend of mine about an upcoming trip that involved airtravel and my friend was absolutely petrified of flying. I tried to comfort him by telling him that God had all his days numbered and if it was his time, it didn't matter if he was on a plane or in a car or on a bus. Evidently he wasn't too comforted by that because he said, 'I'm not worried over the fact that it might be my time, but what if it is the pilot's time?' But God has it all figured out, even if it's the pilots time and not yours. We are not to worry about that – it is in God's hands. As David Livingstone once wrote: **"I am immortal till my work is accomplished"**. Jesus' hour had not yet come. There would come an hour when their twisted, evil intentions would serve God's glorious purpose, but it was not yet. That hour was about six months away – during the third Passover of this gospel.

And John tells us that even in the midst of this hostile environment, there were some who were not yet ready to follow the crowd: *But many of the crowd believed in Him; and they were saying, "When the Christ comes, He will not perform more signs than those which this man has, will He?"* John 7:31 At least some were looking at the miracles that Jesus performed and drawing the right conclusions. But their belief was not belief that leads to a real heart change. This belief was still of the same kind we have already seen in previous chapters. It is possible to believe that Jesus is a real miracle worker and yet not have saving faith. It is possible to believe that Jesus was a teacher sent from God and yet not entrust yourself to Him. Signs and wonders, good moral teaching, wise and wonderful sayings will never produce saving faith. We have seen this over and over. The belief here is not a saving faith in God, but simply an acknowledgment of a good man, even a great man.

But there was even in that, a danger that the crowd might be won over to Jesus, and so John tells us: *The Pharisees heard the crowd muttering these things about Him, and the chief priests and the Pharisees sent officers to seize Him.* John 7:32 Essentially they recognized His commanding authority and charismatic presence and said, 'We'd better do something about this before it gets out of hand'. They might have been waiting to see if things would quiet down on their own, but when that evidently wasn't happening, they decided to step in.

And when the arresting officers arrive, Jesus gives them some fairly puzzling statements: *Therefore Jesus said, "For a little while longer I am with you, then I go to Him who sent Me. "You will seek Me, and will not find Me; and where I am, you cannot come."* 7:33-34 The words in verse 33 correspond to the same thing Jesus tells His disciples in chapter 16, indicating first of all that the time of His stay with them was coming to an end; and secondly, telling them that He has to return to the Father who sent Him. And then He tells the people that when He is gone they will keep on looking for the promised Messiah, but they won't find Him, and furthermore, where He is going they cannot come. In other words, their rejection of the Son of God who was facing them that day would have dire consequences.

But they obviously didn't understand Him: *The Jews then said to one another, "Where does this man intend to go that we will not find Him? He is not intending to go to the Dispersion among the Greeks, and teach the Greeks, is He? "What is this statement that He said, 'You will seek Me, and will not find Me; and where I am, you cannot come'?"* 7:35-36 The superiority of Judaism was so ingrained in the psyche of the Jews that it was with sarcastic scorn that they suggested that He might go to the Gentiles. But the reality of this is that it was a prophetic statement, much in the same way that Caiphas the high priest prophesied unknowingly that Jesus would die for the nation. The gospel did go to the Jews first, and then when they rejected the message, it went to the Gentiles. As Paul says in Romans chapter one: ***'For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek.*** Romans 1:16

All of this sets the stage for what happens next: *Now on the last day, the great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried out, saying, "If anyone is thirsty, let him come to Me and drink. "He who believes in Me, as the Scripture said, 'From his innermost being will flow rivers of living water' "* John 7:37-38 Again, John uses this word - ***krazo*** – to describe the incredible piercing power of Jesus' voice over the hubub of the thousands of people that must have been there. Evidently this was a message He wanted to get out. And He wasn't worried about upsetting the authorities or having His life ended prematurely. He was on a timetable and it wasn't His time.

But John tells us that Jesus waited till the last day, the great day of the feast, to make this statement. This was the eighth day of the Feast of Booths, or the Feast of Tabernacles, as it was also known. This was a God-ordained remembrance by the people of God, commanded to be held at the time of the general harvest season – to remind the people of the way in which God had provided for them during their wilderness trek. During this time the people would make little shelters, booths, out of reeds, and live in them while the celebration was going on. It was supposed to signify their life as tent-dwellers, temporary pilgrims, on the earth. And at this feast, every day the priests in procession with the people, would go **to the pool of Siloam** and draw some water put it in a golden pitcher, and then they would all march back to the temple, singing Isaiah 12: *Therefore you will joyously draw water from the wells of salvation. And in that day you will say, "Give thanks to the LORD, call on His name. Make known His deeds among the peoples; make them remember that His name is exalted."* Isaiah 12:3-4 And the priests would stand at the altar of the temple and pour the water out; and as they poured out the water, other priests would fan it out over the crowds.

And in the midst of this scene on the last day of this celebration, we have Jesus shouting out this invitation: *"If anyone is thirsty, let him come to Me and drink. "He who believes in Me, as the Scripture said, 'From his innermost being will flow rivers of living water' "* You can almost imagine the heartfelt emotion in His voice as He is watching this scene being played out before Him day after day with no recognition by the crowd of the reality of what this celebration represents. They are doing the ceremony, they are saying the prayers, they are drawing the water, they are even singing the verses – but they don't recognize that the reality of all that this is about is standing right in front of them. Jesus is reaching back into the Old Testament, into Isaiah, as He gives this invitation. Isaiah 44:3 says: *'For I will pour out water on the thirsty land and streams on the dry ground; I will pour out My Spirit on your offspring and My blessing on your descendants...'* Isaiah 44:3 And over in chapter 58 the Lord says: *And the LORD will continually guide you, and satisfy your desire in scorched places, and give strength to your bones; and you will be like a watered garden, and like a spring of water whose waters do not fail.* Isaiah 58:11 In other words, there is coming a day when the real water will come – that is the outpouring of the Holy Spirit and it will be like water on thirsty ground and streams of water in dry riverbeds. One day the reality of this celebration will come – don't hold on to the empty ritual and meaningless symbols. And one day Peter gets up in front of three thousand people as they witness the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, and he points them to the words of Joel: *'It will come about after this that I will pour out My Spirit on all mankind...'* Joel 2:28

To really understand this whole scene though, we need to go back to **Exodus 17** where the children of Israel were traveling through the wilderness and they get to a place where there was no water - Rephidim. God had been providing for these people in miraculous ways and yet when they got to this place where they didn't find water, it says that they rebelled against God, and in effect said, 'We don't like the way in which you are taking care of us – we don't like how you manage our lives'. And because God wasn't a visible presence, they took out their anger on Moses, the only visible authority figure. And because they were mad at God, they tried to kill somebody else. Isn't that how we are? They accused Moses of mismanagement and tried to kill him. But what does God do? He tells Moses to take the elders and the rod of God and go to the big rock.

And at this point we think we know what is going to happen. There is going to be a trial – the people have accused Moses of mismanagement – but God has accused the people of rebellion – and so now we're going to have judgement. We have the elders, who are witnesses in judicial proceedings, and we have the rod of God – the symbol of punishment and judgment. And we are thinking, 'God's going to sort this out – these guys are in trouble now!' But God tells Moses to assemble the people and elders around the rock with the rod of God in his hand. And then He tells him that He, God, is going to stand before him on the Rock and Moses is supposed to hit the rock. And so Moses does what he is supposed to and he brings the rod down on the rock where the presence of God is standing, and what happens? Water pours out of the rock, and the thirsty get water, and the rebellious are saved.

Do you see what God is saying here? I don't think the people in Moses' day got it – I don't think the Jews in Jesus' day got it. But don't let it pass you by today. God is saying here, 'Someday, somebody has to be punished for the cosmic stupidity of humanity, somebody must be punished for the evil rebellion of mankind – someday someone has to take the blow for the sin of the world – and one day I am going to take the blow meant for you. Someday I am going to stand in the dock, and I'll bear the shame. And they will strike this rock and water will flow – the Holy Spirit will be poured out'. The prophet Isaiah tells us: *Surely our griefs He Himself bore, And our sorrows He carried; yet we ourselves esteemed Him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted. But He was pierced through for our transgressions, He was crushed for our iniquities; the chastening for our well-being fell upon Him, and by His scourging we are healed.* Isaiah 53:4-5 And it wasn't until Jesus took the blow in our place on the cross that the water, the Holy Spirit was poured out.

That is what John is talking about when he says: *But this He spoke of the Spirit, whom those who believed in Him were to receive; for the Spirit was not yet given, because Jesus was not yet glorified.* John 7:39 Jesus wasn't talking about water – He was talking about water! The outpouring of the Holy Spirit. The outflow of the very life of God into dry and thirsty souls. **And the only requirement to enjoy the very life of God is thirst.** You have to be thirsty. The only requirement to have eternal life – the only requirement to be saved from your headlong race to hell – the only requirement to enjoy life as it was meant to be lived – is to be thirsty. In the final book of Revelation we see the kingdom of God coming down out of heaven from God and the tree of life is there and the river of the water of life is there, and the throne of God and the Lamb is in the city, and there is no longer any curse and there is no longer any night or need for the sun because God Himself is the source of light, and everything is perfection.

And then it talks about those outside the city, who don't get in: *Outside are the dogs and the sorcerers and the immoral persons and the murderers and the idolaters, and everyone who loves and practices lying.* Revelation 22:15 And we say, 'That's right – you can't have immoral people and murderers and liars and sorcerers in heaven'. But the question is, "Who is it that gets in – who is qualified to enter the city"? We might be tempted to answer by saying, 'Well it's obvious – if murderers and fornicators and evil people can't get in – it must be the good people – the moral people – the religious – the upstanding citizens – they get in'. But that is not what Jesus says. At the end of the book, Jesus stands and says 'Come, all who are thirsty, anyone who thirsts – come and take the water of life freely'. Who gets in? The thirsty get in. It's not the moral or the religious that gets in – only the thirsty. The difference between the moral and the thirsty is that the moral person is the one who says, 'Sure, I've sinned – but I'm really not so bad – on a scale of 1 to 10 I'm probably a 7 so I should get in'. The moral person, the religious person is the person that is always complaining that 'I've done my best – gave it my best shot – I should get in – God owes me'.

But they don't get in. Only the thirsty get in. They are the ones that say, 'I don't have anything – I'm dry – I'm dying here – I need water'. That's why Jesus is always telling the religious people that the prostitutes and the pimps and the bar-tenders will get into the kingdom before them. Why do they get in? Because they come thirsty. What is a thirsty person? A thirsty person is someone who doesn't have anything. A thirsty person is just someone who is willing to admit the absence of something. It's a crying out. Who gets excluded? The people who won't admit the emptiness. Only the thirsty qualify. Are you thirsty this morning? Is there an emptiness that won't be satisfied with anything else? Are there any faint longings for God? Any searching for Christ? Any weariness of soul? That's thirst. Who can enter the kingdom of God? **All who are thirsty.**

*Our gracious God and Father,*

*Let us say with the psalmist: As the deer pants for the water brooks, so my soul pants for You, O God. My soul thirsts for God, for the living God; when shall I come and appear before God? May it be that the thirst of our souls leads us to the Rock that was smitten for us where living water flows – water that gives life and cleanses and becomes in us a well of water springing up to eternal life. O Father, forgive us for all the ways in which we have tried to quench this thirst with other things and have mercy on us in our foolish addiction to the stuff of this world that dull us to the delights of drinking from the Fountain of Life. Grant that we would with joy draw water from the wells of salvation, and join the chorus of the redeemed, saying "Give thanks to the LORD, call on His name. Make known His deeds among the peoples; make them remember that His name is exalted." Let us delight ourselves in God through Jesus Christ, spreading His joy through the gospel to all people, we pray, in the saving name of Jesus Christ our Lord, Amen.*