

Meeting With Christ

Practical and Exegetical Studies on the Words of Jesus Christ

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Based on sermons of Pastor Eric Chang

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RIVERS OF LIVING WATER

John 7:38

The Feast of Tabernacles was probably the most popular feast among the Jews. Because of its popularity, it was simply called The Feast (1Kings 8:2). It was celebrated to remember how God protected Israel in its travel across the wilderness to the Promised Land, providing the nation with manna and even water. During that seven-day festival, a priest stood in front of the Temple with a pitcher of water and poured the water on the altar. This action commemorated the water that came out of a rock which gave the Israelites water to drink. On the 8th day, no water is being poured out. People simply prayed publicly for continued rain.

It was on the 8th day of the Feast that Jesus stood up in the Temple and made that statement to the crowd, *If anyone thirsts, let him come to Me and drink.* This, we can read in John 7:37.

And then, in the following verse, Jesus made this other amazing statement. John 7:38.

John 7:38. He who believes in Me, as the Scripture has said, out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.

This verse will be the focus of our lesson today.

He will become a fountain of water

Now try to picture the scene in your mind. The Feast of the Tabernacles has just ended. There are thousands of voices all praying to God for rain and for a fruitful season in the coming year. And suddenly, piercing the air comes this thundering cry, ‘If you are thirsty, come to me! If you believe in me, come and drink. I have water for you. For the Scriptures declare that streams of living water will flow from within the person who believes in me.’ *He who believes in Me ... out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.*

I find that this is one of the most precious, and at the same, one of the most challenging statements of the Lord Jesus. Think about it carefully. Jesus says that out of our heart, there will flow forth rivers of living water. When you meditate on it, you realize that this verse actually tells us what it means to be a Christian. What happens to somebody who believes in Christ? Out of his person, there will come forth rivers of living water. This verse describes the normal Christian. But how many believers are able to say that? ‘Out of me, you can see rivers of living water.’

Earlier in the gospel of John, in John 4:14, Jesus said to a Samaritan woman, *Whoever drinks of the water that I shall give him will never thirst; the water that I shall give him will become in him a*

spring of water welling up to eternal life. There we find the same idea. The person who drinks of the water that Jesus provides will become himself a fountain of water, which will flow up to eternal life. A Christian is not just a Bible believer. He should not be like a sponge, i.e., always taking in and never giving out. When a person becomes a Christian, something happens to him. From the selfish person that he was, he becomes a self-giving person. He becomes a fountain which gives out living water.

From a heart of stone to a heart of flesh

This tells us something about the wonderful work of Jesus in our life. Our heart was like a rock in the desert. It was lifeless. It was dead. When Jesus touches that rock, something miraculous happens. Out of that rock flow rivers of living water. Just as it was in the wilderness. Remember that incident that we read in the OT. People have been in the wilderness for a while. They were thirsty and they were beginning to murmur against Moses. Then Moses did what the Lord told him to do. He struck the rock with his rod and water came out abundantly. People were then able to drink. Exodus 17:6: *Behold, I will stand before you there on the rock in Horeb; and you shall strike the rock, and water will come out of it, that the people may drink. And Moses did so in the sight of the elders of Israel* (see also Numbers 20:11).

During the Feast of Tabernacles, when water was poured out each day over the altar by the priest, it was to make people remember the water that flowed out of the rock and which allowed the Israelites to drink in the wilderness.

The apostle Paul tells us that the rock from which water flowed miraculously was a type of Christ. 1Corinthians 10:4: *All drank the same spiritual drink. For they drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them, and **that Rock was Christ.***

When we are united to Christ at baptism, we become like Christ, the Rock that gives water. We become a source of living water that can quench people's thirst. We become a source of living water because our nature is being changed by God.

Our hearts are like rocks. Ezekiel 36:26 says that we have a stony heart, i.e., a heart without life. But God is able to change it and put life into that heart.

Ezekiel 36:26. A new heart I will give you, and a new spirit I will put within you; and I will take out of your flesh the heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh.

God strikes our stony heart with a rod, with the cross, and transforms it into a heart of flesh, out of which flow rivers of living water. So when the cross strikes our heart, a lot of water gushes out, water that quenches the thirst of the multitude. That water of life started from the heart of Jesus, and it flows to my heart, and then it flows out to the world. In other words, he who believes in Jesus is a channel of God's life.

From the heart of Jesus to ours

You remember this story when Jesus was hanging on the cross. One soldier used his spear to pierce the chest of Jesus, injuring probably his heart (John 19:34). And the apostle John, who stood by the cross, mentioned this. 'I saw something coming out of Jesus' body. I saw not only blood. I saw water.' *But one of the soldiers pierced His side with a spear, and immediately blood and water came out.* I believe there is a spiritual meaning in that incident. You see, there the spear broke THE fountain of life and water came forth. In Zachariah 13:1, we read, *In that day a fountain will be opened for the house of David and for the inhabitants of Jerusalem, for sin and for impurity.* On that day, on the day of Christ's crucifixion, the body of Jesus was pierced by a spear. A fountain of living water was opened for the whole world.

And notice. The water of life comes forth from the heart of Jesus to ours. From his innermost being to our innermost being. This is important to observe. Water does not benefit us until we take it into our innermost being. If we want to quench our thirst, we do not pour water over our head. We drink it. We take it into our innermost being. It is only when this water of life comes into our innermost being that it has the potential to change us. And when it has changed us, we find that living water gushes out from us as well.

So remember. We are saved not just by drinking in the water of life. Salvation is not simply a matter of quenching our thirst and forgetting everything else. Salvation is not a business of going to church and getting what makes you feel good. Salvation is a matter of drinking the water of life and of giving forth what you can give. There is no salvation until there is water that gushes out from us. When that happens, then you know that you have salvation.

In the Bible, water is a picture of salvation. This is found in many places of the OT. We can take as an example Isaiah 12:3 where it speaks of the water from ‘the well of salvation.’ *With joy you will draw water from the wells of salvation.* Isaiah is saying that salvation is like a well. And the life that comes out of it is compared to the water. Every true Christian has in himself this living water that comes out of him which brings life to other people.

The mission of every believer

I pointed out at the beginning of the lesson that our passage in John 7:38 has to do with the mission of every Christian. We saw that we are saved not just to receive salvation, but also to give it. We are saved in order to be a channel of salvation. This takes us to the next point. God has made us to be fountains of water in this world. That is our mission. And in order to fulfill that mission, it is not so much by what you do. It is more by what you are. Our reflex is often to think about what we can do for the Lord instead of thinking first about what we should be. Because if we are not what we should be, then there is a real risk that what we do might not be in line with God’s will. We might do what we should not be doing.

Think about the light. Light shines because it is being what it is. Light has in its very nature the capacity to shine and therefore it shines. And wherever it is dark, it makes everything visible. By its presence, by being what it is supposed to be, light makes darkness disappear.

In the context of our passage, ‘to be what we are supposed to be’ is to let the living water flow from within us. Notice that we do not push the water to come out. A fountain is simply a channel. As long as we are willing to be a channel (notice the ‘being’), God’s blessings will flow out through us, freely. Water will keep coming out so long as that fountain is not blocked by anything. Jesus did not say, ‘He who believes in me will have to exert a lot of effort to push the living water out of him.’ No. That living water will flow out by itself as long as you are willing to be a fountain for God.

This He spoke concerning the Spirit

It is important to always remember that we carry our mission in the world by God’s power, not by our strength. We have nothing much to give of ourselves. But if we are willing to be a humble fountain, even a little fountain, then God’s life will be flowing out through us. And notice how much comes out, if we are willing to let that river flow. The Lord Jesus says, ‘There comes out, not a little stream, but rivers of living water.’ Rivers. When we follow a river up to its source, we are often surprised at the small size of that source. I live in Canada in a city called Montreal. Montreal is an island located on the St. Lawrence River. The St. Lawrence River is 3,000 km long, from the farthest headwater to the mouth. It began as a small river called North River, located in Minnesota, USA. It

ends with the mouth of the St. Lawrence River which is like a sea. In fact, the whole water system of the St. Lawrence River flows to the Atlantic Ocean. You see how a little river becomes an ocean.

Notice the sentence in John 8:39. After reporting the words of Jesus, *He who believes in Me ... out of his heart will flow rivers of living water*, John gives this explanation. *V. 39: But this He spoke concerning the Spirit, whom those believing in Him would receive ...* When Jesus said this, He was talking about the Holy Spirit. John's comment is very explicit. The living water refers to the Holy Spirit. Out of the heart of the believer will flow the grace and the power of the Holy Spirit. You see that to carry our mission in the world, we do not do it with our own efforts. It is God who provides the power, the power that comes from the Holy Spirit working in our heart.

This verse should lead us to examine ourselves honestly. Is this verse true in my life? Does anything come out of me? Maybe not rivers of living water, but at least some water, if we do not want to put too much pressure on our shoulders. Do I feel the power that is supposed to come out of me? We came to God because we were thirsty. And God quenched our thirst. He satisfied the need of our soul by providing us with the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is like a well of water in us, springing up into everlasting life. But this water should not be kept inside of us. This living water should also flow forth from us in abundance, with power, with spiritual power, to refresh all those who are thirsty. This is our mission.

Thirsting for God

Jesus said, *He who believes in Me, as the Scripture has said, out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.* 'As the Scripture has said.' The OT has no verse that says exactly that. However it contains many references describing God as the source of living water. In fact, it can be viewed as the fulfillment of prophecies like these two:

- Isaiah 44:3: *For I will pour 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.* God will pour out water upon the thirsty. Notice the parallel between 'water' and 'Spirit'. Pouring water is equated to the pouring out of His Spirit, just like in John 7 where the Holy Spirit is symbolized by the living water.
- Isaiah 58:11: *The Lord will guide you continually, and satisfy your soul in drought, and strengthen your bones; you shall be like a watered garden, and like a spring of water, whose waters do not fail.* 'God will satisfy your desires. You will be like a spring whose water never runs dry.'

You know, God created man with a sense of need for him in his soul, a need for God that is described as 'thirst' in the Bible. In that perspective, every human being is a thirsty person. Every human is looking for something to quench his thirst. The things that the temporal world has to offer can satisfy his thirst, but only temporarily. Material things (a car, a house, money, trips, clothing) and non-material things (friends, fame, children, family, career), they can all provide some satisfaction ... only for a time. This thirst, only God can quench it in a definitive manner. The natural man is not aware of that. He will spend all his life looking for something that can satisfy him, but in the end, he realizes that he found nothing. The believer has found God, and he is satisfied. In Psalm 42, the psalmist compares his yearning for God to the longing of a deer for water.

*Psalm 42:1. As the deer pants for streams of water, so my soul pants for you, O God.
2 My soul thirsts for God, for the living God. When can I go and meet with God?*

The deer's need for water to sustain its life is likened to a soul's need for God, the source of spiritual water. The psalmist shows here that God is the focus of his dependence and of his desire.

Unfortunately, some Christians are more like a camel than a deer. They can go on for a long time without desiring God. It is not that there is a lack of religious activity. They are active for God. The problem is that they have learned to be busy with God without longing for God. Yes, they have come to God through Jesus. They recognized their sins. They repented, and they say that God is the Lord of their lives. But in reality, they live as though they do not need God.

You know, we can be ‘positionally’ connected to God (having him as a source of living water), but functionally disconnected from God. It is possible to live a Christian life connected to the wrong stuff and feel that all we have is sufficient. It may be satisfactory up to a point. It will eventually collapse because we were made to have God as the only source of true satisfaction. When our spirituality is based on self-sufficiency rather than on God-sufficiency, living water cannot flow out from us. Why would it flow? If our heart is not consumed with a constant and passionate desire for him, there is not much of God’s life that will flow through us.

To be a channel of living water implies that we are thirsty for God and that we constantly cultivate a relationship with God, deeply aware that in him and him alone we have what we need to satisfy the emptiness in our soul. We allow nothing in this world to distract us from that desire.

The more you give, the more it will be given to you

Now observe this. What is a fountain? It is simply a hole in the ground. It is nothing spectacular. There is not much to admire. A waterfall would be much more interesting to watch. Here we see the principle of becoming nothing in order that God can be everything so that the full power will be from God. Spiritually, it means that you have died to self. You come to a point where you are willing to say, ‘Lord, I’m nothing. I’m spiritually nothing, no matter what the world may think that I am. O Lord, allow the water of life to fill me and to go forth from me, for your glory.’

So the first step of faith is the willingness to be nothing in this world. The second step is to allow God to be everything in your life. We say to God, ‘You are my all in all.’ In saying that, we do not allow the things of this world to satisfy our thirst. We do not allow idols to take the place of God. We build our life by making God the only priority in our decisions, in every decision, every day.

When you have honestly taken these two steps, you will begin to feel a pressure inside of you. You will feel the water, the living water of God filling your innermost being. And the love of Christ will so constrain you that you will feel that you just can’t help sharing his love to the world. Then do you know what is going to happen? The more you share the grace of God, the more the grace of God will multiply in you. You will experience what Jesus said in Luke 6:38: ***Give, and there will be gifts for you: a full measure, pressed down, shaken together, and overflowing, will be poured into your lap...*** The person who gives shall receive back much more. And notice the term ‘overflowing.’ His cup will be overflowing. That is how a small fountain can give forth so much water. That is how rivers of living water can flow from within a believer. This is happening not because of his efforts. This is possible only because God will pour into the lap of the person who gives abundant blessings. The generosity of that person causes God to give even more.

So remember. The more you give, the more you get from God. And one day, you realize that from within you, rivers of living water are flowing.