

To All Who Are Thirsty

John 7

Warm-up Question: Share a time in your life when being late caused a problem. (It might be a work situation, a relationship, a wedding, birth of a baby, etc.)

¹ After this, Jesus went around in Galilee, purposely staying away from Judea because the Jews there were waiting to take his life. ² But when the Jewish Feast of Tabernacles was near, ³ Jesus' brothers said to him, "You ought to leave here and go to Judea, so that your disciples may see the miracles you do." ⁴ No one who wants to become a public figure acts in secret. Since you are doing these things, show yourself to the world." ⁵ For even his own brothers did not believe in him. ⁶ Therefore Jesus told them, "The right time for me has not yet come; for you any time is right." ⁷ The world cannot hate you, but it hates me because I testify that what it does is evil. ⁸ You go to the Feast. I am not yet going up to this Feast, because for me the right time has not yet come." ⁹ Having said this, he stayed in Galilee. ¹⁰ However, after his brothers had left for the Feast, he went also, not publicly, but in secret. ¹¹ Now at the Feast the Jews were watching for him and asking, "Where is that man?" ¹² Among the crowds there was widespread whispering about him. Some said, "He is a good man." Others replied, "No, he deceives the people." ¹³ But no one would say anything publicly about him for fear of the Jews. ¹⁴ Not until halfway through the Feast did Jesus go up to the temple courts and begin to teach. ¹⁵ The Jews were amazed and asked, "How did this man get such learning without having studied?" ¹⁶ Jesus answered, "My teaching is not my own. It comes from him who sent me." ¹⁷ If anyone chooses to do God's will, he will find out whether my teaching comes from God or whether I speak on my own. ¹⁸ He who speaks on his own does so to gain honor for himself, but he who works for the honor of the one who sent him is a man of truth; there is nothing false about him (John 7:1-18).

When do we know that the Right Time has come?

It was the time of the Feast of Tabernacles, which falls around October in the Western calendar. It was, by most commentators' estimation, seven months away from the crucifixion. By this time in the ministry of Jesus, a great deal of antagonism had grown toward Jesus by the Jewish ruling leadership, partly because of the heal-

ing of the invalid at the Pool of Bethesda on the Sabbath (John 5:16), but also because Christ was claiming equality with God (John 5:19). He also was a threat to the authority of the priesthood because He had cleared out the money changers from the Temple. In doing so, he denied the Jewish leaders a lot of money when they charged exorbitant exchange fees for the people to pay the Temple tax (John 2:13-17). The word had gone out among those who had any leadership authority that Jesus was to be killed as soon as they could find the right opportunity. It is a truth that when we reject the light of God's truth, Christ will withdraw for a more opportune time, but if we continue to resist what God wants to do in our lives and harden our necks (The neck speaks of the will, our direction in life is turned by our neck) we can suddenly be destroyed (Proverbs 29:1).

Share a time when you tried to talk about the subject of faith in Christ with someone who was antagonistic or not open about the subject. How did that conversation go?

In the passage that we are studying today, the leadership of Jerusalem was closed to the sowing of the seed of the word of God by Jesus, so He spent time in the Galilean area of northern Israel, healing the sick and teaching the word of God. He looked for a more God directed time to return to Jerusalem and preach the word of God to those who were open to His teaching. When his half-brothers tried to pressure Him to go to Jerusalem for the annual Feast of Tabernacles, His response was one of timing. He told them, "The right time for me has not yet come..." In every instance except this one, the term He used to describe the time of His crucifixion was *hora*, a word that means "hour." But John, the writer of this gospel, uses the word *kairos*, a word that means a decisive moment in time to describe what God wanted to do specifically at the Feast of Tabernacles. Jesus was waiting for a strategic time, a defining moment that was Spirit-directed to go up to the Feast. The Father obviously wanted to reveal something new to the Jewish people about His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. For now, though, Jesus had to wait until the Lord spoke to Him,

that the kairos time, the opportune time, the defining moment, had come.

What decisive or defining moment created a turning point in your life that changed you forever?

Everything that Jesus did was one of modeling to us about how to live a Christ-centered life, even His waiting on the Lord's timing. He lived a life of dependence on the Father. Sometimes it is hard to wait for God to move. We can be so eager to go and do God's work that we can go without God. Moses acted outside of God's timing to help the Israelites in Egypt before he was ready, and had to spend forty years as a shepherd in the Desert of Midian before the Lord called him to bring the children of Israel out of Egypt (Act 7:23-30). There are things that God wants to do in us before He can use us. A.W. Tozer said, "It is doubtful whether God can bless a man greatly until he has hurt him deeply." Sometimes, just waiting on God's timing can be painful. The worst thing that can happen to a man or woman of God is to be sent out in ministry before they are ready. There are many that have shipwrecked their faith because of going before they were fully ready. We have a picture of the making of a man or woman of God found in Isaiah 49:

¹ Before I was born the LORD called me; from my mother's womb he has spoken my name. ² He made my mouth like a sharpened sword, in the shadow of his hand he hid me; he made me into a polished arrow and concealed me in his quiver. ³ He said to me, "You are my servant, Israel, in whom I will display my splendor" (Isaiah 49:1-3).

Notice the work of God in shaping the man or woman of God. First of all, there is a calling on his life. From the womb God has been at work, calling him by name. One of the most important things that have to be shaped by God is a man's word. A man's tongue is to become a sharp sword that is Spirit led and empowered. There is no room for coarse language or deceitful lips. The picture that is used is that of the making of an arrow. It has to be made pliable in the hands of the arrow maker, and straightened on a rack. The process requires being polished which speaks of being rubbed the wrong way, and heat applied to the character before it can ever be used. The hardest part of the transformative work of God is to be placed in the quiver (A quiver is a leather bag used for carrying arrows on the back of the archer)

waiting for the Master to put you into His bow to be fired at the time of His choosing. Jesus had to wait for the right time, the strategic time, before God directed Him to go to the Feast.

How does a person know that the right time for something has come? Is it intuition or logic or what? Should a person always wait for the right timing before they serve God?

Of course, it is always a good time to serve and we should never put off serving the Lord by saying that the right time has not come for us. What we are talking about here is a strategic work that God might speak to you about or use you in. It is always a good time to serve the Lord in ways that build up others, but there are just some things in life that God wants to use us specifically in, and for that strategic thing we will need to wait on God for His timing. While you are waiting in the quiver experience, you should be sharpening your character, polishing your life, so to speak, so that when you are sent from His bow you will fly true to the target that He has equipped you for.

Part of the quiver experience is to be patient and learning to listen to His voice. God is often speaking to us; the problem is often on our end. We are just not listening or perceiving His voice:

¹⁴ For God does speak—now one way, now another—though man may not perceive it (Job 33:14).

Patience is something that the Spirit has to work in us while we are in the quiver. We often want to move before God has lined up things in order for our prayers to be answered:

Shortly after Dallas Seminary, one of the foremost seminaries in the USA, was founded in 1924, it almost folded. It came to the point of bankruptcy. All the creditors were ready to foreclose at 12:00 noon on a particular day. That morning, the founders of the school met in the president's office to pray that God would provide. In that prayer meeting was Harry Ironside. When it was his turn to pray, he said in his refreshingly candid way, "Lord, we know that the cattle on a thousand hills are thine. Please sell some of them and send us the money."

Just about that time, a tall Texan wearing boots and an open-collar shirt strolled into the business office. "Howdy!" he said to the secretary. "I just sold two truckloads

of cattle over in Fort Worth. I've been trying to make a business deal go through, but it just won't work. I feel God wants me to give this money to the seminary. I don't know if you need it or not, but here's the check," and he handed it over.

The secretary took the check and, knowing something of the critical nature of the hour, went to the door of the prayer meeting and timidly tapped. Dr. Lewis Sperry Chafer, the founder and president of the school, answered the door and took the check from her hand. When he looked at the amount, it was for the exact sum of the debt. Then he recognized the name on the check as that of the cattleman. Turning to Dr. Ironside, he said, "Harry, God sold the cattle."¹

Even His Brothers Did Not Believe in Him

For Jesus, the Pharisees, Sadducees, and Jewish leadership were not just antagonistic; they were after Him to kill Him! No one will ever be able to say to God on Judgment Day, "You don't know what it was like," for God has entered into human suffering in every way, even to the point of being rejected by His own people. In this passage we are told that even Jesus' own brothers were pushing Him to go to Jerusalem even though they knew that to do so would be very dangerous for Jesus. There are some churches that say that Mary, the mother of Jesus, was a perpetual virgin, a virgin for the whole of her life, making Jesus her only biological son whose conception and birth are held to be miraculous. In this belief they elevate Mary to a higher status than scripture gives her. Those of us that hold to scripture agree that Jesus was born in a miraculous birth by the virgin Mary, but that Mary went on to have other children with Joseph, and should not be a mediator between God and Man. Scripture says, "For there is one God and one mediator between God and mankind, the man Christ Jesus" (1 Timothy 2:5). We are told that there were four brothers and at least two sisters (Matthew 13:55-56, Mark 3:31).

His brothers seem to be egging Him on in this passage, urging Him to prove Himself to the world by going up to the Feast of Tabernacles in Jerusalem of Judea where He could get public acclaim. Perhaps they thought that laboring among the common people in Galilee, healing and teaching them, were not getting Him anywhere. The world's way is to advance ourselves and become a public figure by mixing with the leadership in Jerusa-

lem, not with the commoners in Galilee. The true man or woman of God does not care about self-promotion, "Should you then seek great things for yourself? Seek them not" (Jeremiah 45:5). The man or woman of God is happy to serve and pour out his/her life in any way his/her Master wants—this attitude is pure joy. We are told that His brothers did not believe in Him (Verse 5). Of course, after the resurrection it was a different story. In fact, we know that at least two of His brothers became leaders in the early church, James and Jude, and wrote the two New Testament books that were so named.

Jesus responded by saying that the timing for Him to go to the Feast of Tabernacles, the third annual feast of the Jews, was not yet. He wanted to be directed and moved by God as to the timing.

The Courage of Christ

When Jesus speaks of the world hating him (Verse 7), to whom do you think He is referring to? Why would they want to kill Him? (Verse 1 and 25)

When scripture speaks of the world hating Christ, and us as His disciples, it is meaning the world system that is in direct opposition to Christ and His kingdom purposes. We are at war, dear brothers and sisters in Christ. There are spiritual forces at work in this world that want to stamp out anything that has to do with Judaism and Christianity. I say Judaism, because God has not fulfilled all His promises yet to the Jewish people. Even though there will be opposition for us as Christians, people are never our enemies. There are spiritual forces that manipulate people to seek to bring about the growth of evil in this world. Paul the apostle said:

¹¹ Put on the full armor of God, so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes. ¹² For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms (Ephesians 6:11-12).

Let me ask you a question. If you knew that people were waiting for an opportune time to kill you, would you go to where those desiring to take such action were waiting for you? That would either be madness or sheer courage and trust in God to do such a thing. But that is exactly what our courageous Hero did. Verse 11 tells us that the Jews, meaning those in opposition

¹ Alice Gray, *Stories for the Heart* (Multnomah Publishers, 1996), p. 268

to Jesus, were watching for Him and asking, “Where is that man?” They knew He would be there because every Jew that was anywhere nearby to Jerusalem and the Temple were to present themselves to the Lord at the Feast of Tabernacles (Leviticus 23). I’m sure that they were waiting for Him at every gate into the city of Jerusalem, waiting to kill Him (Verse 25). But He did not go to Jerusalem as they thought, with great throngs of people accompanying Him. He went up without His disciples, not publically, but in secret (Verse 10), and only at the midpoint of the Feast (Verse 14). Here we see the courage of Christ. Knowing that they were after Him, he went anyway. As He walked through the crowds of people, perhaps with His prayer shawl covering His face, He could hear widespread whispering about Him, “He is a good man,” while others replied, “No, He deceives the people” (Verse 12). It is still the same today. There is widespread thinking that our Savior is a deceiver as to His divine nature, while others have come to place their trust in Him as the Savior of the world. How about you? Have you come to a place, dear reader, where you have placed your trust in Him?

Bravely entering the Temple precincts, He stood boldly and began to teach there in Solomon’s Colonnade in the Court of the Gentiles, teaching all that would hear Him (Verse 14), staring down those who were in direct opposition to Him. How they must have fumed when He suddenly appeared in the Temple Courts, quickly gathering a crowd as He taught about His Father. His courage should inspire all of us.

Have you ever had opposition to your Christian faith from family or friends, how did you handle it?

If it was illegal for you to be a Christian, how much evidence would there be against you? How brave are you when it comes to standing up for your faith?

Thirsting for God

The Jewish people had been waiting for centuries for a man that Moses said God would send them. He would be a prophet that was similar to Moses. They were to listen very carefully to Him:

¹⁵ The LORD your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among you, from your fellow Israelites. You must listen to him..... ¹⁸ I will raise up for them a prophet like you from among their fellow Israelites, and I will put my words in his mouth. He will tell them ev-

erything I command him. ¹⁹ I myself will call to account anyone who does not listen to my words that the prophet speaks in my name (Deuteronomy 18:15, 18-19).

The people of Israel understood that the Messiah, when He came, would do similar miracles as Moses did. They expected bread from heaven just as Moses did, but the true bread from heaven was Christ. He said, “Very truly I tell you, it is not Moses who has given you the bread from heaven, but it is my Father who gives you the true bread from heaven. ³³ For the bread of God is the bread that comes down from heaven and gives life to the world” (John 6:32-33). In John’s writing of his Gospel, he tells us of another proof that Jesus was the prophet that Moses told them to look for. Christ was the giver of the water of life, the Spirit of God poured out upon them. Moses had brought them water out of a rock that was hit by his staff (Exodus 17:5-6). What Moses did was just a picture of what Jesus would do at the cross. The Spirit, typified by water, would be poured out on the Day of Pentecost just as various prophets had foretold (Joel 2:28, Isaiah 44:3, Ezekiel 36:26-27).

³⁷ On the last and greatest day of the festival, Jesus stood and said in a loud voice, “Let anyone who is thirsty come to me and drink. ³⁸ Whoever believes in me, as Scripture has said, rivers of living water will flow from within them.” ³⁹ By this he meant the Spirit, whom those who believed in him were later to receive. Up to that time the Spirit had not been given, since Jesus had not yet been glorified. ⁴⁰ On hearing his words, some of the people said, “Surely this man is the Prophet.” ⁴¹ Others said, “He is the Messiah.” Still others asked, “How can the Messiah come from Galilee? ⁴² Does not Scripture say that the Messiah will come from David’s descendants and from Bethlehem, the town where David lived?” ⁴³ Thus the people were divided because of Jesus (John 7:37-43).

Let’s try to get a picture first of what is happening in this passage of scripture. We are told that these words of Jesus about thirsting for God are given at the Feast of Tabernacles (John 7:2), the third major feast of the year which falls around the middle of October in our calendar. The seventh day of the feast was the most noteworthy (John 7:37), it was only later that an eighth day was added. On the seventh day with thousands of people looking on, the High Priest went down to the Pool of Siloam and filled up a two pint golden pitcher and carried it back into the center of the crowd that stood before the altar of the Temple. Together the crowd would circle

the altar seven times in remembrance of the walls of Jericho being brought down, and then, with the whole event accompanied by the singing of various Psalms, the Chief Priest would pour the water onto the altar as a prophetic sign that the Jewish people were ready for the water of life to be poured out, just as the prophet Ezekiel had said. Ezekiel had told of a time when, out from under the threshold of the Temple, a river of life would flow toward the east that would start ankle deep, become knee deep, and would eventually become so deep it would lift people off their feet and carry them along in its path (Ezekiel 47:1-9). Wherever this river flowed it would bring life, fruit and healing. The pouring out of the water spoke of their expectation that perhaps in their day the river of life would begin to flow as the pitcher was poured out. To the Jewish people the center of the world was Israel. The center of Israel was Jerusalem, and the center of Jerusalem was the Temple. It seems that at that very moment of the pitcher being poured out, Jesus made himself higher than everyone else, probably by standing on something, shouting with all His voice so that all could hear His words, "Let anyone who is thirsty come to me and drink. 38 Whoever believes in me, as Scripture has said, rivers of living water will flow from within them." What He was saying was that out of the temple of His life would flow the refreshing, life giving, healing power of the Spirit. When Christ lives in us and has been given full ownership to rule and reign over us, this river or spring will flow from the very center of our being, just as Jesus has told us. When Christ is enthroned on the throne room of our hearts, His Spirit will flow out to others around us. Up to the time of Jesus speaking those words, the Spirit had not yet been given, due to Jesus not yet being glorified. He had only come upon certain individuals for certain purposes. What was promised by God was that He would come into the lives of all people:

²⁸ "And afterward, I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your old men will dream dreams, your young men will see visions. ²⁹ Even on my servants, both men and women, I will pour out my Spirit in those days (Joel 2:28-29).

According to John 7:37-39, what conditions must be met for the Spirit of God to flow in and through you?

There are four conditions that I see in this passage to drinking deeply of the Spirit of God:

1. You have to have a thirst for more of God. Are you satisfied with life as it is? Our Lord loves to be pursued by hungry and thirsty people. Do not let Him go until your thirst has been quenched. Receive all that God has for you. Persevere in prayer for the Spirit to come to you and fill you.
2. You have to come to the person of Christ. He said "let him come to me." This is not about church or devotion to religious acts; this is about the Christ Himself. Do you have a love for the person of Christ? When Peter was restored by Jesus after saying three times that he didn't know Him, Jesus asked Peter three times if he loved Him (John 21:15-17), a question that each of us should answer. Ask the Spirit to reveal to you afresh all that Christ has done for you so that you may fall head-over-heels in love with the person of Christ.
3. You will need to drink. This speaks of the act of receiving the Spirit by an open transparent heart. Vulnerability and honesty are some of the hallmarks of a heart that is ready to be filled with the Spirit. There is a conscious decision to go God's way instead of our own way. It speaks of a submission of the will to follow the Shepherd wherever He leads.
4. Whoever believes in Christ (Verse 38) will receive. This is not an intellectual assent to the facts of the gospel. It is a deep settled inner belief that allows a different set of moral values to affect one's character. Jesus calls it being born-again (John 3:3). What does it mean to believe? If this is one of the conditions that God requires, we need to examine it carefully. Intellectual assent to Christianity means to acknowledge that Jesus came into the world to save sinners, but intellectual assent is not belief in the biblical sense of the word. Years ago, the great acrobat Karl Wallenda, otherwise known as Blondin, stretched a wire across Niagara Falls and offered to carry anyone across in a wheelbarrow. There were many who believed that he could do it, but no takers. To actually get in the wheelbarrow and be taken across the chasm—that is the difference between intellectual assent and personal trust. Intellectual assent recognizes that the wheelbarrow will get a person over the Falls, but doesn't get in and trust someone to take him over. Personal trust, or belief in Christ, is releasing the will over to be led by God and to live for Him by obeying His voice.

This was by no means a comprehensive list by Jesus, but these four are the most important conditions to liv-

ing out a life of faith, being guided and empowered by the Spirit. Every one of us that are Christians has the Holy Spirit (Romans 8:9), but the question is does the Holy Spirit have us! The most attractive people in the world are those that are full of God's Spirit. To be filled with God's Spirit you need to displace self from the seat of authority in your life. The greatest example to us of one filled with the Spirit is the Lord Jesus Christ. Look at the example of His life. He was so free of selfishness. He was devoted to others. William Booth, the founder and pioneer of the Salvation Army, was once ill and could not attend the Army leadership conference one year. He was asked if there was anything important that he would like to communicate to his leaders. He had just one word written on a piece of paper for them, the word was "others." His leaders were to be devoted to others. This is the heart of a man filled with the Spirit of Christ.

Even when the Temple Guards were sent to arrest Jesus (Verse 32) they came back to the Jewish ruling leadership without Him. They reported back to the chief priests and Pharisees, "No one ever spoke the way this

man does" (John 7:46).

What do you think it was that the Temple Guards saw in Christ that made them return with such words?

His sheer dynamic presence and boldness, plus the gracious words that emanated from His lips, made them disobey the rulers of the Jewish people. The response of the people to His message at the high point of the Feast was, "Surely this man is the Prophet." Others said, "He is the Christ" (Verse 40). What do you think? Have you concluded yet that Jesus really is the Christ, the Savior of the world and of your soul? If so, why don't you open your life to Him and ask Him to come into your life by His Spirit and fill you to overflowing?

Father, will you come into my life? I want to be born-again and full of your Spirit. Lord, make me thirsty for you. I want to drink deeply of the water of life. I no longer want to come ankle deep into this river, nor even knee deep. I want to be controlled and led by you in every avenue of my being. Amen!