**JESUS PROMISES RIVERS OF LIVING WATER**

January 8, 2017

John 7:1-44

Key Verse 7:37b-38 “Let anyone who is thirsty come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, rivers of living water will flow from within them.”

In chapter 6 Jesus declared himself as the bread of life. Jesus did not come to this world to give us bread, but to be bread. Jesus Christ did not come into the world to help you in meeting desires you already had before you were born again. He came into the world to change your desires so that Jesus may be the central desire. In today’s passage, he promises that he would give the rivers of living water. This image of rivers of living water is very attractive. Most people would like their hearts to be like a deep mountain spring overflowing in rivers of living water. Even before we have a clear idea of what this image is referring to, we yearn for it. Because it seems to imply fullness and completeness to the point of overflowing. It implies refreshment, growth and life. But Jesus is not merely a poet evoking emotions by images. He is much more. Let’s listen to Jesus’ teaching and accept his invitation to the living water. I pray that Jesus may quench all our thirsty souls with his Spirit.

The background of today’s passage is the Festival of Tabernacles. It celebrated the completion of the harvest much like Thanksgiving and commemorated God’s grace to the Israelites during the time of wilderness. It also looked forward to the coming day when the Messiah would reign and the saved Jewish nation would dwell in the land in peace and prosperity.

Look at verses 3-4. “Jesus’ brothers said to him, ‘Leave Galilee and go to Judea, so that your disciples there may see the works you do. No one who wants to become a public figure acts in secret. Since you are doing these things, show yourself to the world.” Jesus’ brothers wanted him to become a political figure. They wanted their brother to become popular and famous so they could be popular, famous and rich. The brothers fancied that a large crowd of people would wave their hands, hailing them. They were hungry for men’s praise. But Jesus looked as if he had no intention of going up to Jerusalem. His brothers were disappointed. The author said in verse 5, “For even his own brothers did not believe in him.” They saw many miraculous signs performed by Jesus. But they could not see the spiritual meaning behind them. The author commented that they were men of unbelief.

Jesus said to them, “My time is not yet here; for you any time will do.” Here, “My time” refers to the best opportunity to do something for God. During the festive occasion, all the people of the country tried to please themselves or their wives, as we do at Christmas season. But Jesus didn’t try to please himself or his brothers. Because of this, Jesus could not make his brothers happy. Jesus was seeking to please God, so he appeared to be strange to worldly people. But Jesus did not mind. When Jesus wanted to please God he was hated by the world. Look at verse 7. “The world cannot hate you, but it hates me because I testify that its works are evil.” In order to please God, Jesus taught the word of God to the people. When sinful people heard his message, their sins were revealed and their pride was hurt. Because of this, the people of the world hated Jesus unconditionally. The perfection of Christ’s life showed how imperfect everyone else’s life was. Just as a straight line reveals the crookedness of a zigzag line when they are placed side by side. So Jesus’ coming revealed man’s sinfulness. Man resented this exposure of himself. Instead of repenting and crying out to God for mercy, he sought to destroy the one who revealed his sin.

After saying this, Jesus sent his brothers ahead of him to the Festival, but he stayed all alone in Galilee (9). Probably he went fishing with his disciples. Look at verse 14. “Not until halfway through the festival did Jesus go up to the temple courts and begin to teach.” How did they respond? “The Jews were amazed and asked, ‘How did this man get such learning without having been taught?’” Behind their amazement was the Jews’ agony. They were all men of achievements in scholarship, Ph.D.’s in theology. They really wanted to amaze many people with their speech. But whenever they spoke, the people of the rank and file began to doze. But when Jesus spoke, the people were moved by his words (Mk 1:27) and were filled with mysterious joy, and they perceived that Jesus’ teaching was from God.

Look at verse 17. “Anyone who chooses to do the will of God will find out whether my teaching comes from God or whether I speak on my own.” Here Jesus taught the necessity of a decision of faith. Jesus promises that those who choose to do God’s will receive enlightenment from above. We cannot know the true meaning of God’s words simply by hearing a message. The word of God is not meant to be accumulated in our heads only; it is meant to be obeyed and practiced. Here “Choosing to do God’s will” is the same as “Believe.” Only those who make a decision to obey God’s will can see God in Jesus and have eternal life. There are many people who say that they would do God’s will if only they knew what it was. But this is rebellion in disguise. They are prisoners of fear and selfishness. God knows their hearts. God is not deceived by their claims to be open to his leading. God will not give them revelation until they first make a decision to obey God’s will, whatever it may be. Only the man who does God’s will can truly understand his teaching. St. Augustine said, “Understanding is the reward of faith.” Someone also said, “Obedience is the organ of spiritual knowledge.” Those who seek only their own interest and do not give themselves to God can never know God’s will.

Jesus says that we must decide to obey God first; then we can receive God’s revelation. God told Father Abraham, “Leave your country, your people and your father’s household and go to the land I will show you” (Ge 12:1). Abraham obeyed and went, even though he did not know where he was going. Abraham entered the world of faith. Gradually God showed him his great world salvation purpose (Ge 15:12-16; 22:15-18). Making a decision of faith is a very practical matter. For example, those who want to marry with God’s blessing should first decide to obey God’s leading, no matter what it may be. After surrendering to God, they can find God’s revelation and blessing. Again, those who want to live a blessed missionary life must first decide to go wherever God wants them to go. Then they can find God’s leading and providence. Those who make right judgments about marriage and mission are the most blessed people in the world.

We know that Jesus’ teaching is from God because he chose to do God’s will. It was the thorny path to the cross. It was the path to a sacrificial life. It was the path to endless sufferings. But Jesus chose to obey God’s will because he loved God. God’s will for him was to die on the cross for the sins of the world. Still Jesus chose to do the will of God. As a result of choosing to do God’s will he was crucified on the cross. On the cross Jesus was not sorry. Rather he died without regret, saying, “It is finished.” We have to think about whether we ever chose to do God’s will. Look at verse 18. “Whoever speaks on their own does so to gain personal glory, but he who seeks the glory of the one who sent him is a man of truth; there is nothing false about him.” We know how people struggle so hard for their own future security, especially for their own honor. But Jesus worked from the beginning for the glory of God. This is the best testimony that Jesus is the Son of God from heaven. Because he came from God, he can lead us to the glorious kingdom of God. We had the summer Bible conference several years ago at Christian Horizons Conference Centre in Paisley, Ontario with the title, “Know him better.” Since none of us had been there, we prepared a map carefully. Still all of us got lost on the way. M. Sang Guk Chung got lost several times and it took him 7 hours to get there, twice longer than usual. Without Jesus guiding us, we will get lost and will never reach the kingdom of God.

But Jesus demands an allegiance to him by believing what he said. Many people were hanging on to their own understanding or the understanding of the elders instead of being willing to trust the convicting, teaching, and leading of the Spirit of God. A heated division over whether to follow Jesus or not occurred. When people did not make up clear mind to follow Jesus, they were easily manipulated by the religious leaders. For example, the religious leaders misinterpreted passages like Malachi 3:1, “Then suddenly the Lord you are seeking will come to his temple.” Or Isaiah 53:8, “Who shall declare his generation?” In other words, who would know anything about his family? So they came up with the popular idea that the Messiah would have some kind of supernatural arrival at the temple, and they wouldn’t know anything about his family. So they argued that Jesus cannot be the Messiah because they knew about his family, and they knew he came from Nazareth. Therefore, we must make up our mind about Jesus. If we do not choose to follow him and his life challenging teaching, then we may easily be deceived.

The Festival of Tabernacles lasted 8 days. The Jews had a ceremony of carrying water from the Pool of Siloam and pouring it into a silver basin by the altar of burnt offering for each of the first 7 days. This was a reminder of the time when water gushed from the rock and quenched the thirsty souls of the Israelites in the desert. (Ex 17:6) At this ceremony, they remembered God’s grace of quenching the thirst of their forefathers in the desert. And they rejoiced. On the 8th day, this was not done. The Jews had gone through this religious observance, and yet their hearts were not satisfied because they had not truly understood the deep meaning of the festival. Just before they departed for their homes, on the last and the greatest day of the festival, Jesus stood and said in a loud voice, “Let anyone who is thirsty come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, rivers of living water will flow from within them.”

This did not mean that Jesus had a bottle of water for everyone to take home with them to drink on the way. It had a spiritual meaning. The thirst Jesus refers to is spiritual thirst. Spiritual thirst is our longing for God to come and dwell in our souls. God made man for himself. Man is God’s dwelling place. Man is happy and satisfied when he has God in his heart. But because of sin, man’s relationship with God was cut off. When man lost God, he lost the life source for his soul. Man without God is thirsty. Psalm 42:1,2 says, “As the deer pants for streams of water, so my soul pants for you, O God. My soul thirsts for God, for the living God. When can I go and meet with God?” Man tries to quench this thirst with the things of the world. Some think that human love can satisfy their souls. Many young people pursue human love as though it will solve all their life problems. But human love is very limited. Others think that human honor will make them happy. They are willing to invest their lives to gain honor. But it fades away too quickly. Some think that money will buy them happiness. But we know that this is not at all true. Still others, like the people at the festival, turned to religious ritual and ceremony to find some kind of satisfaction. This too is very temporary. Things of the world are like salt water. If we drink salt water, instead of being satisfied, we become more thirsty. Jesus knows that we are thirsty and he knows why. In his grace, he invites anyone who is thirsty to come to him and drink. Then how does Jesus satisfy our thirst?

Look at verse 38. “Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, rivers of living water will flow from within them.” Jesus made a promise that rivers of living water will flow from within anyone who believes in him. This fulfills what is written in the Scriptures. In Ezekiel 47, water is coming out from the temple. It becomes a river. Wherever the river flows, it makes everything alive. It even enters the Dead Sea and makes the salty water fresh and produces abundant fish. Fruit trees of all kinds will grow on both banks of the river. This prophesies the work of the Holy Spirit as Jesus promised. It is a vision of fruitful life for those who receive the Holy Spirit after believing in Jesus Christ. Isaiah 58:11 says, “The Lord will guide you always; he will satisfy your needs in a sun-scorched land and will strengthen your frame. You will be like a well-watered garden, like a spring whose waters never fail.” This promise is fulfilled to those who believe in Jesus. The problem is that people do not know the thirst for God. Many of us have the experience of struggling with babies in order to feed them peas and green beans. When they don’t want, they struggle very hard not to take them. It is futile to feed them. But if they want to eat, it is very easy to feed them. In the same way that a baby needs to have a desire for food or drink to be willing to eat, we must also crave the presence of the Holy Spirit in our lives in order to be “filled with the Spirit.”

When we believe in Jesus, God gives us the Holy Spirit as a gift. By God’s grace, our hearts become pure. Our desires become noble, sanctified by the work of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit works in us to drive out the power of Satan in us and fills us with overflowing peace and the joy of heaven. The Holy Spirit is like the river of living water which makes our life abundant and fruitful and it will overflow from within us to be a source of blessing.