

LIVING WATER FOR THIRSTY SOULS

"In the last day, that great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried, saying, If any man thirst, let him come unto me, and drink." John 7:37.

It was an autumn morning in Jerusalem. The Temple was crowded with pilgrims, all of whom were in festive array. They had come up to the Holy City for one of the three great annual feasts—the Feast of Tabernacles. That feast was celebrated with such universal joy that Josephus, the historian, called it "the greatest and holiest feast of the year." It was the great holiday of the nation, at which people of all ranks and professions vied with one another in their demonstrations of gladness. From every village and city, from Dan to Beersheba, there poured forth jubilant multitudes to the City of Solemnities. It was the closing and crowning festival of the year. It was a grand national harvest-home in which they sought to combine exuberant natural joy with the solemnities of a holy convocation. One design of this feast was a thanksgiving for the concluded harvest. Another object of it was to commemorate the incidents and wanderings of the Israelites in the wilderness. A third object of this feast was to celebrate by a public thanksgiving the settlement of Israel in the land of Canaan.

This feast lasted eight days, and the last day was the greatest. It seems to have been primarily a day of rejoicing before the pilgrims returned to their homes.

On each of the seven days there was a significant and joyous ceremony. The Temple services, full of strange significance, crowded one upon another during the week. The priests served in turn, and seventy bullocks were offered in sacrifice for the seventy nations of the world. The Law was read daily, and each day the Temple trumpets sounded forth a triumphant blast twenty-one times.

Each day a priest with a golden pitcher went to the Pool of Siloam followed by a throng of people. As many of the people as could get near did so and drank of the water with great joy. Filling the pitcher, he bore it down the streets amid the shouting and singing of the multitude and the sound of trumpets and cymbals. When he reached the Temple and entered, the sacred trumpets breathed out a joyous blast, which continued until he reached the altar, and the water that he had brought from the pool was poured into a silver basin. The great Hallel was sung—the 113th-118th Psalms inclusive—and the last verse, "O, give thanks unto the Lord; for He is good: for his mercy endureth forever," and every man waved the palm branch he carried in his hand. This ceremony was attended with so much joy that the Rabbi said he who had not seen it did not know what true joy meant.

On the eighth day, the last great day of the feast, and a Sabbath, the pilgrims marched seven times round the city with palm branches and music, shouting "Hosanna" in commemoration of the taking of Jericho, the first city in the Promised Land that fell into the hands of their fathers. But on this day the ceremony of drawing water did not take place; no priest went down to Siloam; the multitude did not, as on the other days, throng to the pool; and the absence of ceremony and the lack of rejoicing that attended it suggested to Christ Jesus the opportunity of appealing to the people through the typical to the real, and from the shadow to the substance.

From the middle of that festival our Lord had been present, and had openly taught the people, and they had seen Him in the midst of the throng, lifting up His hands and proclaiming His message. Even though it was the eighth day and the festival was almost over, the Saviour did not cease to preach. He continued to instruct, to invite, and to entreat. Because it was the last day, He manifested an increased ardour in so doing. He assumed a position more active, more pleading, and more

earnest than that of a seated teacher. Behold, He stood and plead! His pleading was in tones both pathetic and loud. He stood and cried, whereas on previous occasions He sat and talked. He spoke with a loud voice, both to show His fervour and earnestness, and that all might hear.

When He saw the people wearied and thirsty as they rushed hither and thither, His heart was stirred within Him. It is always so. Our Lord is a Lord of great compassion, and of unbounding pity. He saw and He cried out. Standing on a prominent place, He saw the crowds going away with aching consciences and unsatisfied minds. Pitying them, He cried aloud, like a herald. As was characteristic of His teachings, Christ spoke of man's chief spiritual needs in the terms of his greatest physical necessities. He said, "If any man thirst, let him come unto Me, and drink."

Having witnessed their ceremonies, which were quite impressive, the Saviour must have been struck with the futility of it all. For, although these jubilant multitudes sang and shouted and went into raptures, after it was all over they went home with their same old heartaches and cares and fears. It was a perfect picture of the fact that the law could never assuage the thirst of the human heart. And more than that, it symbolized the utter inability of the waters of earth, its pleasures and possessions and philosophies, to satisfy the weary soul.

But there stood among the throngs on that feast day One Who could satisfy the thirsty soul. He went out of the ordinary, and did the exceptional thing of standing, probably in some elevated position, and crying aloud to the multitude. Why did He do it? Because He had something exceptional and extraordinary to say. His soul had been moved by the vain ceremony. It was as though He had said, "Ah, you thirst for something, you know not what. These hollow ceremonies, these ecstasies of the flesh, these empty pitchers from Siloam, these waters of earth can never satisfy."

I. The Appeal.

"If any man." This urgent invitation is presented to every person who thirsts, regardless of how great, how numerous, or how long standing his sins may be. Regardless of one's race, country, condition, character, or age, this invitation is extended.

II. The Appetite.

"If any man thirst." Bodily thirst is the most painful sensation to which the frame of mortal man is liable. But if bodily thirst is so painful, how much more painful is the thirst of the soul?

This is a thirsty world. There is physical thirst, mental thirst, moral thirst, and spiritual thirst. There is the thirst of the artist for beauty. There is the thirst of the scientist for knowledge. There is the thirst of the toiler for ease. There is the thirst for wealth. There is the thirst for happiness. There is the thirst for peace.

What does thirst denote? A very real and intense desire. It is a desire which asserts itself, which will not allow any trifle to stand in the way. It is a desire which cannot be concealed or forgotten. It is a need which absorbs and dominates the whole man. A man who is really thirsty will give anything to get that one great need supplied. Thirst is an intelligent desire, as well as an intense desire.

Unsatisfied thirst is of all miseries the most severe. No metaphor could be more intense in a dry and thirsty land like Palestine. It fittingly pictures the deepest want of the human soul.

"If any man thirst." There is no distinction here. The blessing is for all irrespective of class or age. There are no distinctions with God. A well-known minister, some years ago, received three people into the membership of his church on one Sunday morning. One was a nobleman; the second was a Chinaman; and the third was a poor washerwoman. The three people stood before him, and as he extended to them the hand of fellowship, he said to the congregation, "My friends, I will have you to notice that at the cross of Christ the ground is level." God is no respecter of persons. His message is for all--the humblest dweller in a lowly cottage, or those who live in palaces. We meet where the ground is level because we meet at the cross. We are drawn there by the consciousness of our need.

III. The Approach.

"Let him come unto Me." "If any man thirst"--that is the sole condition. "If any man thirst, let him come"--that is the simple step.

"Let not conscience make you linger,
Nor of fitness fondly dream,
All the fitness Christ requireth,
Is to feel your need of Him."

Well do we remember that time when we thirsted for salvation, when we thirsted for the forgiveness of our sins. Where did we get that thirst quenched? It was at the feet of Christ, Who alone has power on earth to forgive sins, and we shall never forget the peace and joy and satisfaction which came into our hearts when we came to Him and He forgave our sins.

Another legitimate thirst is for happiness. Christ wants us to be happy and filled with joy. He alone can satisfy this thirst for happiness. If you are thirsting for happiness, come to Him and He will satisfy indeed.

Others are thirsting for holiness. They long to be delivered from the power and dominion of sin. Christ Jesus is the only One who can satisfy this thirst. He is well able to give you deliverance from your besetting sin.

He that thirsts and wants relief must come to Christ Himself. He must not be content with coming to a church, or to the ordinances, or to any man, but he must come to Christ. It is not enough to wish, to intend, to resolve, to talk, or to hope, but you must come to Christ in trust and surrender. Salvation is conditioned on this.

IV. The Appropriation.

"And drink." "If any man thirst, let him come unto me, and drink." This means if he has a spiritual thirst, or a thirst after salvation by Christ, free and full pardon of sin through Him, justification by His righteousness, a greater degree of knowledge of Him, more communion with Him, and conformity to Him. "Come unto Me, and drink." That means to appropriate. Here is the secret of all blessing--the Lord gives and we take.

"I came to Jesus as I was,
Weary and worn and sad:
I found in Him a resting place,
And He has made me glad."

Christ means to come and not just to think about it, to read about it, or to talk about it, but actually to come. What else? "And drink." "Come unto Me" represents the choice of the will; "And drink" represents the appropriation and rest of the

heart of the heart in Christ. And do not forget that this is a personal act. Nobody else can drink for a thirsty man, and no other Christian can drink this water of life for you. It is a personal act. If your thirst is to be assuaged, you must come to the Lord Jesus Christ and trust Him. You are not to bring anything to Him, but to take everything from Him, as the thirsty ground opens its mouth, and drinks in the showers, many as they may be. If any man thirst, let him receive Christ. In Him there is sufficiency and satisfaction.

Our coming to Christ to drink means that we are to receive from Him all those spiritual blessings, and all those eternal mercies that He has to bestow upon us. First, there is the pardon of all your sins. You will never have quietness of mind, peace of heart, and satisfaction of soul until you know that your sins are forgiven. The forgiveness of sins is your very primal need, and it is only through Christ that you can obtain this great blessing. He purchased it for you by His death. Second, there is eternal happiness. Of what use is all besides if you miss eternal bliss? Of what benefit are the positions, the possessions, and the plaudits of the world, if the price of them is that you finally miss heaven and descend into hell?

This invitation is extended to every kind of sinner, however great, numerous, or long-standing your sins may be. His blood cleanses from all sin. But there must be a desire for Christ. You want Him for justification, comfort, peace, power, in sorrow, in the hour of death, to represent you at the judgment, to keep you out of hell, and to take you into heaven. You need Him, and you will perish without Him. There must be an ardent desire for Christ. You must long to taste the sweetness of His pardon, the warmth of His grace, the depths of His love, the breadth of His comfort, and the length of His eternal salvation.

Why should you accept Christ's invitation? Because of the Person Who invites you. Also, because there is the consideration of your wants. How desperately bad is your state out of Christ. You are in bondage to sin. You are liable to all sorts of afflictions, to pain, to death. You are without Christ, God, and hope in the world. If you will come to Christ, all will be well with you here and hereafter. Then, there is the welcome that others have found in the Lord Jesus Christ. He has made them the children of God. He has showered them with the superabundance of His mercies. I have never seen a Christian who was sorry for having accepted Christ as his or her personal Saviour. Finally, there is the mighty plea that these much-needed benefits can be obtained nowhere else in all this wide world.

"I heard the voice of Jesus say,
Behold I freely give ---
The Living Water --- thirsty one,
Stoop down, and drink, and live;
I came to Jesus, and I drank
Of that life-giving stream;
My thirst was quenched, my soul revived,
And now I live in Him."