



Sermon – October 29, 2017

Verses Covered This Week

John 7:37 - 39

Well thank you Brother Chris. I look forward to being here. We had thought we'd come and hear you preach. We've done that a number of times. We get hungry for really good exposition and this is a good place to come for that. But happy always to speak a good word. It's like coming home for us. Carol Ann and I have been married 61 years. That's a long time, right. Yet it seems just like yesterday. So you youngsters watch out. You're going to get older fast. So we made it. But our first church two weeks after we were married was Steep Hollow, just about three miles as the crow flies over here. That's where we began our pastoral ministry and we have some sweet friends from Steep Hollow here today and it's always good to see them. So we cherish this.

I mean A&M was an experience. I was a senior at Baylor. My first game to attend was the Baylor/A&M Game my freshman year. I wore white coveralls with Baylor Bears sign on it and sat in the middle of the student section and unfortunately John David Crow and Charlie Krueger, that whole bunch, were there and we didn't do very well that day. But when we came to Steep Hollow we found out why people love A&M and how A&M people love the Lord. The only problem I had was the kids thought that when you prayed you said A&M after your prayers. So we had to get that little theology straightened out. Nevertheless, we're glad to be back. Thank you, Brother Chris, for the opportunity to be here.

I want you to take your Bibles with me and turn to John chapter 7. John chapter 7. Now I know you know this, but whenever you read scripture, context is everything. Now I know Dr., soon to be, Dr. Osborne preaches that to you. So the context is significant. Now there are two things about the context that you need to know. Number one is its period of time as you read the seventh chapter, everybody's wondering who Jesus is. Is He the Messiah? How can He do these wonders? Early in the chapter, it even says His brothers didn't believe in Him. So even His family didn't believe in Him. The crowd was divided over Him. Some said, "He's the Messiah." Some said, "No He's of Satan." They were debating the Pharisees. His enemies were debating who He was and they weren't willing to receive Him as a messenger from God. So it's the context of wondering who Jesus is.

Now the second thing is that according to verse two in this chapter, the Feast of Tabernacles is at hand. Now you will not understand the text, we're going to read beginning in verse 37 here in a moment, you will not understand it if you don't understand the context of the Feast of Tabernacles. Now the Feast of Tabernacles, I don't know how to describe it to you. It's kind of like a Christian Mardi Gras. That give you some kind of, I mean unbelievable. Leviticus 23 gives us instructions on how you're to do this. But the people were told that they were going to move out of their homes and build booths. Sometimes this is called the Feast of Booths. We're in East Texas so it's the Feast of Lean-Tos. You know what that is? So anyway, they were told to move out of their homes. That was a reminder there was a time when they did not have permanent homes. They did not have a place to live. And they were instructed how to, how they were to build those, those little tabernacles, those lean-tos. They were to use branches of trees. It even describes the branches of palm trees, and of thick trees, and tells them what to do. And they were to build them so that you could see through the slots and the side and the top so the wind could blow and the sun and moon could be seen and it was a time for them to, for seven days, they lived in booths in the city of Jerusalem. And in the Old Testament when it started, it was a seven-day feast and the eighth day was a solemn assembly. A day of solemn assembly, a time of prayer, repentance. By the time of the New Testament that eighth day had been kind of caught up in the Feast of Tabernacles itself. And so it was part of the feast. Now I wish I had time and I won't take it, but it's unbelievable what they did. The Feast of Tabernacles, Josephus, the Jewish historian, said, "It was the highest and happiest feast of the Jews." I mean it was like Easter and Christmas and Fourth of July and New Year's, Thanksgiving all rolled up into one. It was a time of Thanksgiving for the water and the rains that had come to give the early harvest. And it was an acted out prayer for more rain for there was still harvests to come. It was a reminder of their time in the wilderness when God gave them water and food in the wilderness. So it was a time of remembering, a time of celebrating what God had done, and it was a festival, it had games for the kids, special building projects went on. The women and the men were separated and so for the Feast of Tabernacles they built a grandstand overlooking the area where the men would usually be and the women would be in the grandstand. So they had that grandstand. They put about fifty foot poles all around the temple area and on top of them they'd had a little oil cups and baskets and they would keep it full of oil so that the lights burned continually for eight days. It was an incredible time of celebration and I could go on and on, but you're not interested and I don't have time. So that's OK. We'll just stop there. OK. But there was a ceremony that took place every day and a white-robed priest would carry a golden pitcher down, out of the temple area, through the water gate, down to the Pool of Siloam. He would lead a procession of priests, each holding a pitcher, and they would fill the water from the Pool of Siloam and they would come back up, now the people were told to bring their branches and they would line the way all the way from the temple down to the water gate and the people were there with their branches and when the procession came back up from the Pool of Siloam, they sang the Haleil. Every time it came to He is good, God is good, His love endures forever, the people would shake those branches and roar. It was a time of great celebration. It came through the gate and back into the temple area. They marched around the big altar one time. Then the priest, one at a time, would pour the water into the funnel over the great rock of the altar and water would splash all across the altar. And when it did, the people would erupt in a cheer kind of like when the Aggies score a touchdown. I mean it was a raucous, loud, celebration of roar of approval. And that went on for seven days.

On the eighth, well let me just look here and pick up in verse 37.

³⁷On the last and most important day of the festival, Jesus stood up and cried out, “If anyone is thirsty, let him come to Me and drink. ³⁸The one who believes in Me, as the Scripture said, ‘Will have streams of living water flow from deep within him.’” ³⁹He said this about the Holy Spirit, those who believed in Jesus were going to receive the Spirit; for the Spirit had not yet been given, because Jesus had not yet been glorified.

So it's the last day, the last day when Jesus says, “If anyone's thirsty let him come to Me and drink.” Now the Feast of Tabernacles was basically a feast about water. It was a celebration of God's provision through water. Historically in the wilderness and season by season the water that brought in the crops. So it's basically about water. Now on the eighth day they repeated that ceremony with two changes. First one was, well they did everything the same down to the Pool of Siloam, came back in through the water gate, oh by the way they had trumpeters stationed around the perimeter, and they would trumpet triumphantly as they came back into the area where the altar was in the temple. And they did the same thing on the eighth day; two exceptions. They walked seven times around the altar. I'm assuming that that was the reminder of the seven trips around Jericho before the walls came tumbling down. And then when the priests came to the funnel to pour the water to splash over the altar, on the eighth day there was no water in the pitcher. It was dry. It was a reminder that their ancestors, their forefathers had drunk water in the wilderness, but they died. It was a reminder to them that the promised Messiah had not yet come. The Christ that had been promised, the Old Testament prophecies, had not arrived, had not come, and so the water was, and instead of a roar, there was stony silence. It was at that moment Jesus stood up. And in the stony silence he cried out, “Anyone's thirsty let him come to Me and drink.” He's announcing Himself to the people. They've been questioning, they've been wondering who is this, who gives Him power to do these things, is He from God, is He from Satan, even His brothers didn't believe in Him, they've been debating all of this. He stands to announce that the Messiah has come. He seeks to turn the people from the ceremony to the substance. From the shadow to the fulfilment. From the prophecy to the person. He's trying to say, “Here I am. Here I am.”

Now the clue that makes this stand out is in two words in this text. And it's good to study the words because every once in a while they just jump out at you. The word stood up. Jewish rabbis never stood up when they talked. Don't you remember the Sermon on the Mount? First one. Matthew 6. What does it say? And when He had sat down, then He delivered it. Jewish rabbis never stood when they were teaching or preaching as we'd call it. Never did that. But Jesus stood up. That's very unusual. In that culture the only ones who stood up to speak to a crowd were those who represented Caesar or the governor. It was, it had a political announcement or national announcement to be made. Jewish rabbis never stood up. And then the word cried out, it's not the normal word. It only appears in the gospel of John in chapter 1 where John the Baptist is said to be crying out in the wilderness. I appears in chapter 7 twice that he cried out. And then at the grave of Lazarus, John chapter 11, he cried out, “Lazarus come forth!” So it's an unusual word. It's an emotional word. It is a word packed with energy and excitement. It is a word that makes you stop and consider what is happening. It is a dramatic word with great meaning. That's the word he used. And so as I studied this passage, those two words helped me understand that this is more than just a simple statement. Oh, He had made it before in John chapter 4. You remember the woman at the well? He asked her for some water and she replied then He said, “If you knew

who was talking to you, you'd ask Him for a drink. And He gives you water that you never thirst again." So He made that statement before, but this dramatic moment at the Feast of Tabernacles where circulating rumors about who He was and questions everywhere. Jesus stood up, cried out, "Anyone's thirsty let him come to Me and drink."

Now if this was a homiletics class, I wouldn't get a good grade on this sermon because I only have two points and I don't have a poem. So it would just take two, OK, we're going to take two points. First of all, there is a provision that is offered. Jesus says, "If anyone is thirsty," It's interesting that He used the word thirst. Because thirst is the most craving desire of the human body. You got to have water. Two-thirds, at least, of your body is water. Doctors will tell you that everything good that happens in your body happens in water. You can't live long without water. I once had a staff member that went 43 days without eating. But he couldn't go 43 days without water. Water's essential. There's nothing the human body craves more than water. So this provision, Jesus is saying, He doesn't specify, it is wide open, He says, "If anyone's thirsty." If you have any thirst, what is the need of your life, what is the concern of your heart, if there's anything in your life that you're seeking for, Jesus can say, "I can satisfy that." It is a provision that is offered to everyone. And everything we can possibly need, Jesus offers to us. Do you desire recognition? Sure you do. All of us, none of us wants to feel like we live for nothing. We just, we're a number in the seven plus billion people on the earth and it doesn't matter whether we're here or not. We want to feel like we made some difference somewhere. Could Jesus provide for that? Absolutely. Both Peter and John, in Revelation, says, "We're a royal priesthood. We are kings and princes." I mean we're somebody. Do you realize the unique thing about Christian faith is that everybody is somebody. There's nobody that's nobody. Everybody is significant. So you desire significance to be recognized. That's what He offers. He offers to receive you and you are valuable because He died for you. What about wisdom? Surely we need wisdom. What crazy times we're living in. How are we going to make decisions, navigate the troubled waters of our culture and of our world? Need wisdom, James 1:5 says if anyone lacks wisdom let him ask of God. He gives freely. He doesn't grab it back, take it away from you. He gives wisdom to us. He will give you wisdom. You need forgiveness? Everybody needs forgiveness. Possible He could give us forgiveness? If we confess our sins, John said, "He's faithful and just to forgive us, cleans us of all unrighteousness." Do we need salvation to be saved? Gospel is the power of God to salvation to everyone that believes. Whatever you need, whatever you want, whatever craving you have, it is a universal offer that He makes to you. It is a provision that He makes for you.

Now that comes with a cost. You said, "I thought salvation was free." It is. But here's the cost. Here's the demand. You've got to come and drink it. You just got to do it. Nobody can do it for you. I usually when I preach this sermon I have somebody fix me up with some water because I get a little thirsty just preaching this. Now are you thirsty? If I had a cup of water here, I could drink it. But you know if I drank the water it wouldn't do you any good. It wouldn't quench your thirst. Why? Because nobody can drink water to sustain your life but you. Nobody. You're not a Christian because you were raised in a Christian family. You're not a Christian because you live in a Christian atmosphere or community. You're not a Christian because your parents were good Christians. You're not a Christian because your siblings or your cousins or your friends were Christians. You're only a believer when you come to drink the water of life yourself. You have to do it. Here's the good news. You can do it. Nobody can keep you from it. Nobody can do it for you but they can't keep you from doing it. So here's the question that we all have to ask

ourselves. If I died today would I go to heaven? That's a sobering question. Hey, listen. I have a new stat for you. One out of one people die. Now we're going to get older, and by the way for us old folks, the trick is we get older but we can't get old. Don't get old. You get grumpy and grouchy and complaining when you get old. Just get older. But hang on, hang on to everything that's precious to you, but just don't get old and grumpy. Don't do that. We're going to get old, older. But we need to understand that we have to do business with God ourselves. Nobody can do it for you. Nobody can keep you from doing it. If you do not know for sure that if you died today you'd go to heaven, make sure today. Drink that water today. You say, "How do you do that?" Well John makes it real simple in verse 37. He says, "To those who believe." I love John. John is so simple. Do you want to drink the water of eternal life? Well, believe. It's by faith that you grab it. It's by faith you take it. By faith you receive Him into your heart and you drink the water and it satisfies.

Now I have to move on because there's one other thing. There's a promise here. He says, "to him who drinks," let's see what he says here. "The one who believe in Me, as the Scripture has said, 'will have streams of living water flow from deep within him.'" Now he had hinted at that in John 4 when he talked to the woman at the well because He told her, "If you knew who I was, you would ask Me for water and if you drank you'd never thirst again." And then He said, "From within you wells of living water would, would rise up within you to salvation." So it's not a new thing, but here's the thing he's trying to say. God didn't save you to take you to heaven. If He saves you to take you to heaven, when you got saved, you'd go to heaven. He left you here. Why? Because He says, "When you drink the water, I want you to be a distributor of the water. I want you to share the water." The more you share the more there is. The water is never diminished. It is never shut down, it is, it never comes to an end. The more you give, the more you have. That's the testimony down through the centuries. So the promise is, we receive Christ and we welcome Him into our hearts, we become believers, and then we become distributors of the gospel of Jesus Christ. That's why God left us here. That's why the church is here. This church doesn't exist for your comfort. Doesn't exist for your pleasure. Doesn't exist for your preferences. It is here as an instrument of God as a testimony to this community and to the world that there is a Gospel of Good News that people who are nobodies can become somebody through Jesus Christ. Everybody is significant and God forgives and eternal life is a free gift. That's why we're here. So we ought to plan everything we do around how does it help us do that? How does it help us do that?

Well there are two bodies of water in what we call the Holy Land today. If you've ever been, they're beautiful bodies of water. There's the Sea of Galilea and there's the Dead Sea. Now the Sea of Galilea, the surface of it is below sea level, somewhere around 600 and some odd feet below sea level. It's only 147 feet deep. But it gives live to the whole area. Israel today is blooming like a garden from North to South because of water that is pumped out of the Sea of Galilea and it is distributed all over the land and things grow and flourish and fruit and flowers are everywhere because of water from the Sea of Galilea. It is a life giving body of water. But out of the Southeast end of the Sea of Galilea flows the Jordan River. Now if you're in a canoe it's about 200 miles down to the Dead Sea. If you're on a crow's back it's about 75 miles. But it winds its way down and empties into the Dead Sea. It's a beautiful sea; crystal clear. It's incredible. But it's dead. Nothing lives in the Dead Sea. Maybe some microscopic something or other. But nothing lives. The mineral content is so thick that you could, you could read the newspaper sitting up in water over your head and you wouldn't get the paper wet, because you can't sink. I mean it's just dead.

Now listen carefully. The same water is in both bodies of water. Same water. The water from the Sea of Galilea flows down into the Dead Sea. Now why is the Sea of Galilea life-giving and the Dead Sea just dead? Here's the secret. Follow carefully. From the Northwest there are three mountains up there. And there are three rivers that flow out of those mountains and they empty water into the Sea of Galilea. When the snow melts from the mountains in the Springtime, the water from the melted snow flows into the Sea of Galilea. So it receives water. And then out of the Southeast end it gives water. It receives and it gives. It receives and it gives and it lives. But in the Dead Sea it receives and receives and receives and never gives and it dies. Now listen carefully to me. You are either going to be a Sea of Galilea or a Dead Sea in your life. You're either going to have a life that lives and sparkles and gives life. You've received God's Spirit, you've received God's blessings and you give it and you live or you're going to be the kind of person who receives and receives and receives and it's never enough and you never give and it dies. Now here's the key. Listen carefully. You don't have a choice about whether or not you're going to have one of those bodies of water reflect in your life, it's going to happen. But you do have a choice about which one it's going to be. Will you be a Sea of Galilea or will you be a Dead Sea? It's your choice. You have to make that choice. You have to decide that you're going to be a person who gives. You're a person who's going to give encouragement and love and support and you're going to help people and grieve with them and rejoice with them. You're going to be giving of yourself and all the while you're receiving and you'll be the kind of person that people are always glad to see and always hate to see you go. You can be that kind of person. You're going to learn how to receive to give. Give of yourself. Give of your talents. Give of your spirit. You'll be a Sea of Galilea if you do. But if you are one of those people who always is complaining about what you don't have, what you don't like, what you're unhappy with. You get grumpy and cantankerous, nothing pleases you and nothing's ever enough. You're going to be a Dead Sea.

Now, very honest, let me tell you. I am getting very old. There are not many of you here over 82. I was 82 last month. No, this is still October isn't it. This month. OK. Just a senior moment. When we get old, we can get so self-centered that we stop giving and think that we've got some entitlements. People ought to be giving to us. Now you have to decide what kind of person you're going to be. A true believer is someone who has received the grace of God, the gift of God, the life that He offers to us, and you share that and you give that and your spirit is one of encouragement and helping others realize their dreams, you bring the best out in people, they're always glad you're there. Or you're going to be the kind of person when they see you coming they're going to say, "Oh, no. Here he comes again." Dead Sea. There's a provision, if you're thirsty, come and drink. There's a promise if you come and drink if you believe. From deep within you will flow rivers of living water.

Well I need to tell you one more story. So Steve just give me a couple of minutes. There's a lot of mystery about the rivers in the world. Let me tell you about one of the great rivers of the world. High up in the Andes mountains, way up above the freeze line where the snow never really melts and it's always below freezing, but when the sun is just right, the wind's just right. On the face of an ice-clad rock you can see a little bubble, a little gurgle of water trace a hesitant course across the face of that rock. It comes down and drops down into a rock below and you have little rivulets, then you have little streams, then little rivers and tributaries, until 3,600 miles later the Amazon River flows into the Atlantic Ocean at a rate of 188,000 cubic feet per second. It is so powerful that the Atlantic Ocean is freshwater for 60 miles. You may feel sometime that you're just one

person. Who of us hasn't thought that? What can I do? You may see yourself as just one of those gurgles of water trying to survive on an ice-clad rock. But then you join other little gurgles of water, little rivulets, little streams, until all together it's what our churches are all about. It's not the only church in the world. A church working with many other churches. When you put us all together, God designed us to flow into a polluted culture and bring life everywhere we go. You see you're not the church just when you're here on Sunday morning. You're the church when you go home. Imagine the impact of little gurgles of water who join together with such a powerful force that the entire culture is impacted. Just one person, many persons, many churches. God promises if we'll drink, receive the gift of eternal life, rivers of living water will flow from within us. We can do it. You'll either be a Dead Sea or a Sea of Galilea. Which will it be? That's your choice. And by the way, you young people, people live a lifetime and you may get as old as some of us are. But you have to start now. If you're going to be a Sea of Galilea, you need to start now. Every one of us. We never get too old for it. God helped rivers of living water to flow from deep within those of us who believe.