

Heavenly fountains for hazardous fallout

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Date: 18 March 2020

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[0 : 01] Just before we begin, just to say this will be the last Wednesday lunchtime service for the foreseeable future. This will be the last lunchtime service for the foreseeable future.

We'll consider what we do in the future from there on and we'll let you know. But in the meantime, don't come next week. There'll be nothing on. Yes, we're in John chapter 7 today.

Some of you have had the sheets of paper. If you don't, if you have your Bibles, it's John chapter 7, verses 32 to 52. Let me read it for us.

The Pharisees heard the crowds muttering these things about him, and the chief priests and the Pharisees sent officers to arrest him. Jesus then said, The Jews said to one another, Where does this man intend to go that we will not find him?

Does he intend to go to the dispersion among the Greeks and teach the Greeks? What does he mean by saying, You will seek me and you will not find me? And where I am, you cannot come.

[1 : 26] On the last day of the feast, the great day, Jesus stood up and cried out, If anyone thirsts, let him come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as the scripture has said, Out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.

Now this he said about the Spirit, whom those who believed in him were to receive. For as yet the Spirit had not been given, because Jesus was not yet glorified.

When they heard these things, some of the people said, This really is the prophet. Others said, This is the Christ. But some said, Is the Christ to come from Galilee?

Has not the scripture said that the Christ comes from the offspring of David and comes from Bethlehem, the village where David was? So there was a division among the people over him. Some of them wanted to arrest him, but no one laid hands on him. The officers then came to the chief priests and Pharisees, who said to them, Why did you not bring him?

[2 : 33] The officers answered, No one ever spoke like this man. The Pharisees answered them, Have you also been deceived? Have any of the authorities of the Pharisees believed in him?

But this crowd that does not know the law is accursed. Nicodemus, who had gone to him before, and who was one of them, said to them, Does our Lord judge a man without first giving him a hearing and learning what he does?

They replied, Are ye from Galilee too? Search and see that no prophet arises from Galilee. Well, let me pray for us.

This is an encouraging time together, shall we? Father, though we are few in number, we trust your promises that when a few of us are gathered together, you especially present yourself amongst us. And we pray as we unpack your word now, that we would meet you, that we would be amazed at Christ, and thankful for him. And we pray this in Jesus' name.

[3 : 40] Amen. Amen. Picture the scene for a moment. There's been a major chemical disaster.

Everywhere you look, people are covered with hazardous material. The area is in lockdown. It's a bit close to comfort, isn't it? And there's only one way out of the quarantined area to safety.

The problem is that only those who are unaffected by the chemical fallout are allowed through the door. There's that clear plastic sheeting absolutely everywhere, men in white hazmat suits and face masks on, guarding the door.

They're testing absolutely everyone, and only people who haven't got the substance on them are allowed through the door. Everybody around you is hopeful that they will be able to get through the door.

Hopeful that they've escaped the effects of this chemical tsunami that has seemingly hit everybody else around them. But yet nobody, none at all, are granted admittance through that door.

[4 : 49] The men in white say that they can't risk allowing anybody with these chemicals on them through the door and to the untainted world beyond. They can't have you corrupting the world outside the one that you find yourself in.

But then in amongst all this chaos, all this confusion, one man stands up. He stands up and says that he is the only person who's able to get through the door.

Nobody else. Just him. What do you think in that moment? If you're there in that crowd, what do you make of the person making that claim?

Well, we see something very similar happening in our passage today to that analogy. Hopefully as we go through the passage that will become more evident to you.

Our first point is that only Jesus can ascend to be with the Father in his heavenly kingdom. Looking at verses 33 to 36.

[5 : 58] Let me set the scene. It's now the last day of the Feast of Tabernacles. Jesus had already got up earlier in the feast, a few days earlier, in the temple and spoken in front of everyone.

What he had said a few days earlier had caused such a stir. Some questions were raised whether he really was who he claimed to be and yet some people just wanted him dead for what he said.

And an arrest warrant had been granted. Verse 32. We can only presume that after that arrest warrant was granted that Jesus lay low for a couple days in Jerusalem.

But with a feast coming to its climax on the seventh day, Jesus does something quite remarkable. He stands up in front of absolutely everybody in the temple who's worshipping and proclaims that he's the one person that can go through the door.

He's the one person who can enter that heavenly kingdom. He's the one person unstained from that chemical fallout we were discussing in the analogy. And thus the only person who can go through the door into the untainted kingdom where God himself resides.

[7 : 07] Do you see that? Verse 33 and 34. Jesus then said, I will be with you a little longer and then I'm going to him who sent me.

You will seek me and you will not find me. Where I am you cannot come. Jesus says that he's going somewhere and that no one else can follow him.

Nobody else stands a chance of getting through the door except him. So it begs the question where is it that he is going? And why is it that nobody else can follow him?

For the Jews seem rather confused by what Jesus says don't they in verses 35 onwards. The Jews said to one another where does the man intend to go that we will not find him?

Does he intend to go to the dispersion among the Greeks and teach the Greeks? What does he mean by saying you will seek me and you will not find me? And where I am you cannot come.

Jesus says he's returning to the one who sent him.

[8 : 12] He's already told us in John's gospel that he comes from God the Father who reigns in his heavenly kingdom. So that is where he is going to be with his father in an unspoilt heavenly kingdom.

Why can't anybody else follow him? Well those in the temple are just like the people in that chemical fallout. They're covered in hazardous material and it would be wrong to let those covered in those chemicals into the world beyond because they would sully it.

God wants to keep his heavenly kingdom untouched by human sin and thus only those who are perfect can enter. And these people are far from perfect are they?

We saw the great contrast that John made between Jesus and the teachers of the law last week. John painted a comparison between Jesus and the teachers and who were meant to be the least sinful of all the people in Israel and yet the chasm between Jesus and these religious leaders was absolutely enormous.

Jesus spoke the truth. The religious leaders proved themselves deceivers and liars. Jesus kept and fulfilled the law and even the most religious squeaky clean people in Israel found themselves guilty of breaking three of the commandments and wanting to murder the son of God himself and lying about it.

[9 : 40] And here's where the question about Jesus' origin from last week becomes important too. We saw last week that Jesus is the only one with heavenly origins whereas everybody else originates from this tainted world that we live in.

The reason why Jesus is the only one who can go through the door surrounded by that clear plastic with those men in white suits guarding it is because he actually has come through the door in the

first place into this catastrophic world.

He's the one man unaffected. He's come from out with the quarantine zone. He hasn't been hit by this catastrophic tsunami like everybody else. And thus he's the only one person who can know with absolute certainty that he can make it back through that door.

Everyone else is tainted and stands no hope at all. And we see the extent of their taintedness in today's passage as well. Firstly, they've unjustly warranted Jesus' arrest for what he said two days earlier in the temple.

Secondly, after some people become convinced of his teaching in verses 37 to 39 which we'll come to in a moment, the Pharisees show their true colours, don't they?

[10:57] The temple officers refrain from arresting Jesus because they're in awe of the claims that he makes and are no doubt wrestling with the claims that he's made thinking this might be true.

He might really be who he says he is. And what is the Pharisees' response? They say, none of us have believed in him and we surely know better than the rest of you.

We're the people of the book, not you. So stop thinking about what Jesus says. If we say that he's a liar and a fraud, then that's what he is.

They are utterly censorious and arrogant. They dismiss those who are genuinely engaging with Jesus and call them accursed so they don't know the law.

And they're willing to ride roughshod over the law, verses 51 and 52, so long as they can get this man arrested and killed. It's a mini portrait here of the so-called best of humanity.

[12:00] Deluded, arrogant, self-deceiving, cruel, and only concerned with their own self-interests, not with the glory of God.

It's like the religious leaders have a shoot-on-sight order that they're following. As soon as they come across truth that exposes what they are truly like and shows us what God is like, they shoot it down without questions being asked.

That's the natural sinful tendency of the human heart. And of course, people like that, with that reckless disregard for God and his kingdom, surely cannot be allowed into his kingdom.

Only Jesus can go through. But what good is it for us if we cannot follow him? What difference does it make to us that he can get through if we have to stay here in the fallout zone?

Is there hope for humanity? Are we destined to perish in this toxic state we find ourselves in? Well, thankfully not.

[13:13] Our second point for today, only Jesus can wash us clean that we too can enter, looking at verses 37 to 39. Though we've been in chapter 7 for a few weeks, I haven't actually told you what happened at the Feast of Tabernacles.

Before we answer the question, is there hope for us? We need to understand a bit more about the feast. The Feast of Tabernacles was a time where everyone in Israel gathered to Jerusalem and camped out in booths for a week to remember that journey from Egypt to the Promised Land, where they slept in tents and God provided for them in the wilderness.

There were two major ceremonies that occurred during this seven-day festival. One was a light ceremony, which Jesus will capitalize on talking about in chapter 8, when he talks about himself being the light of the world, which reminded people of the fiery pillar that guided them through the wilderness.

And the other ceremony was a water ceremony, which he now capitalizes on talking about, which reminded them of God's provision by giving them water from the rock in the wilderness.

The water ceremony occurred on the last day of the feast, at this time when Jesus stands up to speak. This is what happened at the water ceremony. The priests would leave the temple in the morning and go through the streets of Jerusalem to the pool of Siloam, where they would draw water from the pool.

[14:50] After drawing that water, they would then lead a procession through the streets of Jerusalem back up to the temple. Crowds would follow in their wake, singing songs, singing psalms about the coming kingdom of God, and trumpets would be blasted.

And then when they arrived in the temple, scriptures would then be read aloud to the people. Some of those scriptures were to remind them of God's great act of salvation in the past, bringing them out of Egypt into the promised land.

After all, without God's great provision of water in the wilderness, none of them would have made it to the promised land, would they? See where we're going with this?

Without the provision of water, God's rebellious people would have never entered the promised land. Without the provision of water, God's people couldn't get through that polythene door, guarded by the men in white, with no entry sign above it.

And yet the people also recognized that though they had arrived in this promised land, this kingdom of God on earth in Canaan, it wasn't what it should be. It was still tainted and not as it should be.

[16:01] People were still rebellious. It wasn't perfect. It wasn't heaven come down to earth that was described in some heavenly terms. The kingdom wasn't yet fully realized.

It was just a foreshadow of what was to come. So as well as looking backwards to God's salvation in the past at this feast, the people of Israel also looked forward with anticipation, looking forward to the day when God would bring about an even greater act of salvation, when his heavenly kingdom would finally come to earth in fullness, not just partially like they experienced it there and then.

This time, bringing in an uncorruptible kingdom to earth, a perfect heavenly kingdom where sin was no more and God's people could properly dwell with their God.

That's what they looked forward to. That's what the pouring out of water symbolized at this feast. In the Old Testament, it's packed full of prophecies regarding that future day.

And many of them talk about it in terms of light and water, the two things that the Feast of Tabernacle really highlighted. They prophesy that when the Messiah comes, that one in David's line would come and a new age would be ushered in.

[17:24] There would be no more night, for light would shine out from Jerusalem to the whole world. And water would rush down from the temple to all the coastlands.

Let me give you a flavor of some of those verses, but talk about that. Zechariah 13, verse 1. On that day, there will be a fountain opened up for the house of David, and the inhabitants of Jerusalem to cleanse them from sin and uncleanness.

Zechariah chapter 14. On that day, there shall be no light, cold or frost, and there's no night, cold or frost, and there shall be a unique day, which is known to the Lord, neither day nor night, but at evening time, there shall be light.

On that day, living waters shall flow out from Jerusalem, half of them to the Eastern Sea, and half of them to the Western Sea. The prophets anticipated a day in the future when the Christ would come and light and water would pour out from Jerusalem.

The light symbolizing the knowledge of God that would be revealed to Jerusalem and then to the world, and the water symbolizing the washing away of sin. of those in Jerusalem, and then those in the rest of the world too.

[18:47] Thus, messianic hopes were high at this moment in time in Jerusalem, at this time of the feast. These verses were being read in the open air. Psalms about God's coming king were being sung in the streets.

The priests brought the water up through Jerusalem, poured it out on the altar, representing the need for all Israel's sin to be cleansed. The atmosphere must have been feverish with expectation. They were longing for the coming of God's kingdom here on earth, longing for the Messiah to come to usher in this new heavenly age, to wash away people's sin and reveal God to man that they might dwell with him forever.

And then into that atmosphere, one man, a wanted man, who everyone knew the religious leaders wanted dead, gets up and says these words.

Verse 37. If anyone thirsts, let him come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as the scriptures have said, out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.

[20:03] Jesus had just said that there is no hope of anybody entering God's kingdom apart from him. Only he can walk through the door. But here he claims that he will provide a way for them to join them.

He offers them water. He talks here of drinking water rather than being washed with it. But the idea is the same. He's speaking of the Holy Spirit coming to the sinner and washing them clean of their sin by tethering them to Christ that their sin may be dealt with and put to death.

And we see that in verse 39 in John's explanation of Jesus' words. Now this, Jesus said about the Spirit, him, those who believed in him were to receive.

But as yet, the Spirit had not been given because Jesus was not yet glorified. If we go back to our analogy, it's a bit like this.

When Jesus enters his perfect kingdom beyond the door, he doesn't leave those in the fallout area to perish. Rather, he's willing to send someone just like him who is able to hose people down and decontaminate them that they too may pass through the door.

[21 : 22] He provides the mean for all that toxic waste that we carry, all that sin to be washed down the plug hole and make people fit for this untainted heavenly kingdom that is coming to earth.

Of course, the analogy isn't perfect. None is. I'm sure it breaks in multiple places if you stretch it hard enough. One of them is that the toxic state we find ourselves in is our own doing, isn't it? We're not just the victims of a toxic chemical fallout, are we? We play a part in it. But, you know, you get the point, don't you? The point is that Jesus is the only one who can send the spirit who washes us clean and makes us fit for this heavenly age to come.

So what are the conditions then of receiving this water, of being washed clean? Well, the answer comes in verse 37, and it's very simple indeed, isn't it?

That you come to Jesus and that you believe in him. That's it. Come to him and believe in him. For once Jesus had ascended to the Father, he then takes his throne in heaven after finishing all his atoning work, and he then brings the world to its climax, to its finale.

[22 : 48] And we live in those final days, that finale. We live in an age where Christ now pours out his spirit bountifully from heaven upon earth so that people can become part of his kingdom, be washed clean like never before in all history.

It's a very privileged age we live in. Starting in Jerusalem, Jesus poured out his spirit to wash people clean. And like the prophecies in Zechariah and Isaiah that were read at the feast declared, that watery deluge then flowed out to the ends of the earth.

And we're the benefactors of that, aren't we? Washing all those who believe in Jesus clean and making them fit for this heavenly kingdom that's coming to earth. When Jesus stood up in the temple, that is what he was offering.

That was what he was proclaiming about himself. He was proclaiming that he is the hinge point of all history. The world you long for and have anticipated has arrived.

That's what he's saying. Heaven is now touching earth. The spirit will be poured out from heaven on earth and will make it clean and fit for God to dwell with man again.

[24 : 03] That's what he's saying is happening. And Jesus is the only one who can do that from his throne in heaven. He's the only one with the power and authority to do it. And only by coming to him in belief and trust can you ensure that you're washed clean and enter his kingdom too.

Jesus is the door to the untainted land. Well, what does that mean for us? Well, for those of us who are not believers, it means that only through Jesus can you have access to the world you long for. Free from corruption, sorrow and death. He is the only means of access to that world. The only hope you have of that world ever coming to pass. Education will not bring about the perfect world that we all long for.

government legislation will not bring about the perfect world we all long for. Jesus is the only one who can bring about the world we long for.

For the washing away of sin. And for us who are believers, well, shouldn't we be so thankful for what Jesus has done for us and amazed at the uniqueness of Christ.

[25 : 17] How he's the only person who is able to do this. But also, I think we should have real boldness to proclaim the uniqueness of Christ to those around us.

For he really is the only hope that our friends and families have, of being cleansed from the toxic state that they find themselves in. We should be bolder than any of God's people in history too, despite our seemingly discouraging circumstances around us.

Because Jesus really is doing what he claimed to do. Claimed he was going to do here in John chapter 7. He is pouring out his spirit abundantly from heaven in a manner unprecedented in all of human history ever since the resurrection and the ascension of Christ.

And we've seen that, haven't we? If you look at history over the last 2,000 years, the church just keeps on growing. People have been washed clean and dwelled by the spirit and becoming part of his heavenly kingdom every single day.

History testifies that Jesus is at work and is doing exactly what he promised. Therefore, I think we should have greater expectations than we do.

[26 : 30] Because Jesus is in the business of pouring out his spirit and bringing people to life. He loves doing it. That is what he is doing from his heavenly throne.

Constantly. So let's expect him to do it here. Surely then we shouldn't be timid about pointing our friends and family to him or timid about striking up conversations with our neighbors, which we'll have plenty of time for in the coming few weeks.

For Jesus is enthroned in heaven and is thoroughly in joy. He's pouring out his spirit on all mankind that we might be washed clean. That we might enter the promised world that he has prepared for us.

So let's pray as we seek God's help to do that in the coming few weeks. Father God, we are astonished at the uniqueness of Christ.

We thank you for him. We thank you that he left that heavenly kingdom to come to earth and to all our mess, all the catastrophe that we face here.

[27 : 37] To make a way for us to come back to the Father. That we might enter this heavenly kingdom that he's preparing. Thank you so much for what he has done for us.

And Father, we thank you for what he continues to do. Thank you that he is on his throne in heaven and that he is fulfilling these promises he makes here in John. He is pouring out his spirit abundantly on the earth.

And one day the whole earth will be washed clean and we will be with you fully forever and we long for that day. But Lord, please raise our expectations.

Give us boldness. Help us to trust your promises. And as we spend time over the next few weeks helping our neighbors, having conversations with them more than ever before likely.

Give us boldness to proclaim the uniqueness of Christ to them. And help us to pray with expectation that you will pour out your spirit upon them too. And wash them clean.

[28 : 40] And bring them into your kingdom too. And we pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.