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JESUS IS THE WATER OF LIFE

A sermon delivered by Jim Bill McInteer on May 14, 1967 at the Hillsboro Church of Christ, Nashville, Tennessee, and heard over radio station WLAC at 8:05 P. M.

Today I would like for you to think with me on the subject, "Jesus Is the Water of Life." There are speeches that are important not only for their content but also because of the occasions on which they were delivered. It was in the 1700's that a courageous person stood before a group of princes, noblemen, clergymen, outstanding leaders of his day, and made a speech. It went something like this in its conclusion: "I am called upon today to recant what I have said. But until in the light of the Scriptures themselves, and in the conscience in which I must live before God, until I am convinced that that which I have said is wrong, I cannot recant. God being my helper, here I stand. I can do nothing else." We are grateful for the Martin Luther speech. There was a flaming patriot in America who stood in a little meeting house and made a speech. The echo of it today is heard around the world. Patrick Henry said, "I know not what course others may pursue, but as for me, give me liberty or give me death." That sense of freedom has branded itself into the hearts of all of us. The occasion of its delivery was a very dramatic one.

Jesus one time stood and made a speech. It was very short. Perhaps it is just the gist of it the Holy Spirit reproduced. He stood and cried, "If any man thirst, let him come unto me and drink. He that believeth on me, as the scripture has said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water." (John 7:37.) That was the speech; that is all that is recorded.

But it had such an impact on his audience. Those who came to arrest him could not put a hand on him for they said, "Never a man spake as this man spake." Those who came to despise him left saying, "Is this the Christ?" Those who were doubtful looked at him and asked, "Could it be that the rulers believe he is the Christ and have not told us who he really is?" And there are others who felt, "If the Christ should come what more could he do than this man does?" The conclusion: "Therefore, this man must be the Christ." What was the power and the potency of that speech? What is embodied in it that made it such an impelling thing?

Look with me today to the occasion of the speech. The Jewish people (Ex. 23, Lev. 23) were commanded to keep three feasts annually. There was the feast of Passover, a very solemn type of thing that they kept in the early part of the spring. A short time later there was the feast of Pentecost. It was also the feast of ingathering, but that which was gathered was the summer grain that had become ripe and ready for the harvest. But in the fall time there came another feast, called the Festival, or the Feast of the Harvest Home, or the feast of the Ingathering, or just the Feast itself. It was such a delightful occasion. They came at that time bringing the harvested fruits of the year. Hastings, in his Bible Dictionary, said that this was the culmination of all the festive year. Although seven days are commanded in the scriptures the Jewish people had added still one further day and the eighth day was the last climactic great day of that feast. This was the end of all of the calendar year so far as the festivities were concerned, and then it started all over again. This feast was held in Jerusalem.

The feast of the Ingathering went somewhat along these lines--God Almighty commanded his people to come to Jerusalem. If you lived there you moved out of your home into the courtyard or the street or wherever it might be. If you were a stranger in the city, by the courtyard, streets, city walls, wherever you might find a place you camped. You gathered the palms, the leaves, the branches, and you made a house of boughs. They were not so thickly thatched that you could not see the sky with the sun in the daytime and the stars at night. God said, I want my people to be acquainted with the fact that I led them through the wilderness wandering. Listen to him, "Ye shall take unto you your first day the boughs of goodly trees, branches of palm trees and boughs of thick trees, and willows of the brook, and ye shall rejoice before the Lord your God for seven days. (Lev. 23: 40.) As they lived in this little house of leaves they were to recall that the Lord God led them with a strong hand out of Egypt and through the wilderness wandering. He took them to the land that flows with milk and honey.

It must have been a joyous thing to have recalled these events. Does it not fill you today with gratitude to think on those favors that you have received? God would have that as a part of a man's background.

But there was a certain ritualism that they fulfilled on those days. I am told that the first day of the feast they took thirteen bullocks and sacrificed them. They diminished one each day until it came unto the last day and, on the last great day, they offered only one. That is a total of seventy. (I mention that, for if I do not every mathematician in the audience will start figuring to see how many that was. You know, sometimes going to a new place I mention I was born in 1921. I always tell the folks then my age before they figure it out. In the space age language, I'm twenty-nine and holding". That way you do not have to do any figuring, you see.) The very first day they sacrificed fourteen lambs and two rams. This continued through the week. On the last day they offered seven lambs and one ram. About sunrise, as this great festivity was bringing itself its closing hours, there was a colorful ritualism. One of the designated priests went down to the pool of Siloam, which means "sent". The pool was an engineering feat. They brought the water from the outside of Jerusalem, if I understand it, via a conduit chiselled through approximately 600 yards of solid limestone. The water would **dump** itself into a protected reservoir. In a time of siege the people could be protected and the enemy could not cut off their water supply. This is the spot to which Jesus sent the blind man with the clay spittle upon his eyes to wash and to be made clean. Now back to our story - the priest goes to that pool, takes a golden pitcher holding approximately two pints and from the pool of Siloam comes back toward the Water Gate, (you can understand why it is so named there at Jerusalem) enters the temple court again and goes to the brazen altar. On one side of it there was the silver receptacle which was to receive the wine offering when the priest poured it out in a certain ceremony. This was on the eastside. On the west there was another type of receptacle. Here he came with this golden pitcher filled with the two pints of water. The whole crowd walked with him. They were waving their palm leaves. It might have been that he quoted from the 12th chapter of Isaiah, when he said, "therefore with joy shall ye draw water out of the wells of salvation." They read some of the great psalms that sounded like this, "When Israel went out of Egypt the house of Jacob from a people of strange language, Judah was his sanctuary and Israel his domain. The sea saw it and fled; Jordan was driven back. The mountains skipped like rams and the little hills like lambs. What aileth thee, O thou sea, that thou fledest? Thou Jordan that thou wast driven back? Ye mountains that ye skipped like rams and ye little hills like lambs? Tremble, thou earth, at the presence of the Lord, at the presence of the God of Jacob, which turned the rock into a standing water, the flint into a fountain

of water." (Psalms 114.) Or, the 117th Psalm, the shortest that is in all the scriptures, "O praise the Lord, all ye nations, praise him all ye people, For his merciful kindness is great toward us; and the Truth of the Lord endureth forever. Praise ye the Lord."

The blare of trumpets announced the fact that the priest is come. In the midst of this great ceremony he brings this golden pitcher to the west side of the altar and pours into the waving receptacle this water that he has drawn from the pool of Siloam. Now your Bible says, "At the last day, on the great day of the feast (this was the eighth one) Jesus stood and cried, (and I love the pathos that must have belonged to the Lord; I love the motivation, the complete capturing by the situation that was his, the forgetting of all things that custom, tradition might have bound man to fulfill, (in complete abandonment of himself to the holiness of his mission, he stood and he cried) and he said, If any man thirst, let him come unto me, and drink! He that believeth in me, as the scripture hath said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water." As Tennywell notices, from ritual to reality we move; from shadow to substance we enter; from that which foreshadows and pre-figures to the actuality that was to come. We stand at that supreme moment of history when Jesus declares himself as the water of life.

What did he say, my friends? What was in this speech: What so captivated that Jerusalem audience that they were never quite the same/ He asked first, "Is any man thirsty? Oh, my friends, in the churches of today we have begged people to come to Wednesday night services, we have begged them to come on Sunday night, we have offered them every type of inducement that we know how to get them to stay to Bible study, we plead with them to support gospel meetings--Christians, talking to Christians like that! We are trying to give water to folks who are not thirsty; we are trying to slake a thirst that does not exist; we are trying to fill a man who is already full of something else! We go to that sinner friend of ours, tap him on the shoulder and say, "Why don't you become a Christian? Why not be baptized now?" We pray and agonize ourselves over the unconverted. We are trying to draw that man from the world who does not want to leave the world, and the first thing that a man needs before he is going to drink is a thirst. It was Myers in his book, Thunder on the Plain, who said, "We are knocking on doors that are not even closed." We are trying to give water to a man who does not want it. There are a lot of you who have teenage sons. I never have, when school is out at Lipscomb, had to come home from work and stand at the kitchen door and beg, plead, cajole and persuade that boy of ours to open the refrigerator door. I have felt like padlocking it to protect something for supper, but not the other way, because there is a thirst and a hunger! Jesus said, "Blessed is he that doth hunger and thirst after righteousness." (Matt. 5.) The Revelation is about to close when it invites, "The Spirit and the bride say, Come; let him that heareth say, Come; let him that is athirst come, and whosoever will take of the water of life freely." (Rev. 22:17.) If you have not developed an appetite for Jesus, if you have not developed a thirst for things that are holy, it is hard to "fill" you.

The second thing he said, "If any man believe in me. . ." The simplicity, the mystery, the power, the motivation of faith--faith that obeys, faith that works, faith that serves, faith that does, this is faith! If any man believes in me, he comes. He does not sit, he does not wait, he is not persuaded, but he comes, for he is propelled. He is drawn; there is a magnetism. "If any man believe in me - (and notice what he uses for his authority) as saith the scriptures." We are still looking for that scripture quoted. It might have been zecharias, Isaiah, Joel, or one of the Psalms. Smith said, "It is not a quotation, it is an echo."

Westcott said, "It is the sentiment of the entirety of the scriptures--anybody who wants to come to Jesus, let him come." Men ask sometime, "I am quite a sinner, do you think I can become a Christian?" I have one question, "Are you thirsty?" If you are thirsty, you can come. Do you believe in Jesus? Believe in him to the extent that you will do what he said you should do. "He that believeth in me, I will in no wise cast out." He receives them unto himself. Then did you notice what he said, "And out of his belly shall flow (not drip, stream, neither creeks nor cupsfull?--no!) 'rivers' of living water." If your life is not a blessing to your home as a Christian, you are not a Christian. If your business is not better because you are there as a Christian, you are not much of one. If everything you touch is not benefitted because you are a Christian, then that thing called Christianity does not exist in you as it should.

So I have these questions for you today -- Are you thirsty? Do you believe in Jesus? Do you think life can be a blessing if you will follow his way? Has it been for you? If you are thirsty; if you do believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God; if you will turn from your sins in genuine penitence; if you want to be baptized, why do you not come now and say so?

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