



Have you ever had news you could barely hold in?

Maybe it was a pregnancy announcement, and you could hardly wait to tell your friends. Maybe it was your engagement, and you wanted to share the good news with everybody. Whatever the moment was, you can remember the feeling. The anticipation builds and builds until it comes exploding out of you in excitement!

That's what happens with Jesus in our text for today. For seven days, he had been attending an important Jewish festival. During that time his excitement had been building up, until on the 8th and greatest day of the festival – though he knows there will be people who disagree, though he knows his life is already in danger – Jesus can't hold it in any longer. He stands up in the midst of a massive crowd, and cries out!

What did Jesus have to say that was so important? And if the Savior is so excited to share these words, why do they seem so confusing when you first look at them?

To understand the important point that Jesus is making, we need to take a couple steps back. For starters, what is this festival that Jesus is attending? How would it have colored the people's understanding of Jesus' words to them?

This festival was called the Feast of Tabernacles. It was one of three major festivals that the Jewish people celebrated every year, and it goes all the way back to the OT book of Leviticus where we hear this: READ Leviticus 23

For the festival, the people basically acted out the wanderings of their ancestors in the wilderness by building lean-tos, or tents, on the sides or flat roofs of their houses. You could almost think of it as a huge church camping outing. The people did this as a way to remember how God miraculously provided for all their needs in the wilderness.

One of those needs God had provided for was water. In Exodus 17 Moses tells us how the people, soon after their escape from Egypt, moved south and camped at a place where there wasn't any water to drink. Unfortunately, instead of trusting God who had just split the sea for them, we hear: "But the people were thirsty for water there, and they grumbled against Moses." EXODUS 17:3. Moses cried out to the Lord, and God provided a solution. We hear this: READ Exodus 17:5-6.

The Jews during Jesus' day commemorated this event specifically throughout the Feast of Tabernacles. On each day of the feast, before making the morning sacrifices, the priests would go to a special water reservoir in the city, the Pool of Siloam. They would gather some of the water in the pool in a golden pitcher, and walk it all the way to the temple while singing songs, and then pour it down the west side of the altar to give thanks for the water God had provided for them in the wilderness, and the water that he still provided for them every year.

On the eighth day of the feast, everything culminated in a massive Bible study as people heard the Word of God read to them in the temple. By that point the shelters (tabernacles) were taken down, but the experience of the festival was fresh in the minds of all the people as they heard readings from Scripture about God's continued love and care for them.

That's the scene for our verses. Thousands of people are gathered in the temple listening to Bible readings. They've just had a taste of what their ancestors felt after sleeping in little shelters for a week. The account of the water from the Rock is fresh on their minds.

And Jesus can't keep the good news to himself any longer. (READ verses again).

Still confused? See if this picture helps. (Full of Eyes pic)

Remember in Exodus 17 God tells Moses to take a staff in his hand. The rest of the Israelites probably want to see Moses get beat up with that staff. Moses probably wants to take the staff and beat up the Israelites. But what does God say? "Nobody is getting struck. Not Moses. Not Israel. Instead, the rock that my presence is surrounding? Strike that instead. And you'll get everything you need."

Those OT Israelites rebelled against God, and a rock was struck instead of them. Those people in Jerusalem had rebelled against God in their own ways too. So have we. But what does Jesus say? When he cries out this good news that's been filling him with more and more excitement for days, what does it mean? It means this. "Nobody is getting struck. Except me. I'll be struck again and again, I'll be pierced, I'll bear the wrath of God himself. And because of it you will get everything you need. You'll drink the living water of salvation. I am the fulfillment of everything in this festival. I am the end of your exile. Your thirst ends with me."

Jesus is so excited because he is talking about his glorification – something that hadn't happened yet, but was coming soon. And when was Jesus glorified? When he stretched out his arms on the cross. When he was lifted up for the salvation of all people. Jesus stands and shouts for everyone to hear because he's thinking about saving you.

That's what the words of Jesus meant. But there's another question to answer about our highlighted verse: what are we to make of that comment about the Holy Spirit? Jesus is not saying that the Holy Spirit has been doing nothing up until this point. If that were true, there would have been no believers in the OT. Instead, when Jesus hints at the work of the Holy Spirit in his words, he is basically saying, "You ain't seen nothin' yet."

Think of it this way. You're sitting in a dark theater before the start of a play. The lights are dimmed. You can make out vague shapes on the stage and of the people in the crowd but that's about it. Suddenly, the spotlight comes on and shines on a

person in the center of the stage. All the details jump out at you, and your full attention is directed at the person standing in the light.

That's how the Holy Spirit does his work. In the OT, he was present, but he was only giving hints and shadows of what the Messiah was going to do in the future. But the Holy Spirit flips the spotlight on when Jesus is glorified on the cross, showing the full detail of God's plan of salvation in a way that had never been seen before, and in a way that would totally change the world.

No wonder the Holy Spirit put on such a big show later on at the day of Pentecost! This was the transition from God working through the people of Israel to working through the church, from proclaiming God's Word primarily from the land of Israel to proclaiming it in every part of the world. All the miracles that happened were meant to draw attention to the importance of this event – but most of all they drew attention to the importance of the message. The Apostles stand in the temple and cry out in all sorts of languages the one central truth of salvation – Christ died for you!!!!

On the Day of Pentecost we spend a lot of time talking about the Holy Spirit. But with everything the Spirit says, he wants to point you to Christ. To connect you to Jesus' death on the cross through the waters of baptism so that rivers of living water flow through you.

That's what happened to 3000 people on the Day of Pentecost itself. That is what already happened to you on the day you were baptized. Through water and the Word God created faith in your heart, and that faith is like a fountain, a mighty spring of water that fills your own heart, and then pours over into the lives of all the people around you. It happens as you serve selflessly, as you proclaim the gospel to others, as you live in the joy of your salvation. This is your identity! This is who you already are because of the Holy Spirit's work!

Now after all that you might be thinking to yourself, "If every Christian including me is a gospel fountain, how come I don't see more results? Why do I still have struggles? Why isn't the church a million times bigger?"

There's a two part answer to that question. First, even though rivers of living water are flowing from the hearts of believers, the Holy Spirit is still in charge of the results. We see that in Acts. You know how many people the Apostles converted with their preaching? Zero. Not one. The Holy Spirit converted those people.

That's true for us too. You personally will never convert a single person. Let that be a relief. Can you imagine how terrifying it would be if God put the responsibility of changing the hearts of other people on you? Thank goodness he doesn't do that. And it gives us all the more reason to proclaim the gospel without fear – it's not possible to fail, because the results aren't even up to you!

One of the reasons the church doesn't look the way we would expect is because the Spirit is in charge, not us. But there's a second part to that answer. As we shift our focus to it, consider this. If somebody wanted to stop the flow of a river, what are some ways they could try to do it? I suppose you could redirect it. Where I grew up in Chicago, engineers reversed the flow of the Chicago River using a series of canals. You could build a dam so the water sits still. Maybe you could dig a hole big enough that the river just fell into it.

That's the strategy that Satan tries to use on you. He redirects you with distraction. One of the best ways to do that is to focus you on your emotions – your frustrations with everyday life, the anxiety and worry that you feel. Those emotions are useful tools to get you focused on yourself instead of the Savior the Holy Spirit is shining the spotlight on.

It also keeps you from serving others, and sharing the gospel with others. Listen to the way this pastor puts it: "My deepest soul-thirst is not just to be a receptacle but to be a river. Experience has taught us that the joy we feel as Christ flows into us eventually turns sour if it does not flow out of us in praise to God and love to men. If our hearts are not rivers of love and praise, then all our religious experience will become a brackish pond."

I can think of times in my life where those words describe me, where I have become stagnant. Maybe there are times in your life where those words describe you too. There's only one solution, one antidote to stagnation and all of the devil's other schemes. Return to the well of salvation. Immerse yourself in the message of the gospel, read God's Word about the crucifixion, the resurrection, drink those words in deeply, like a man dying of thirst. As you do the Lord will fight for you. He will remove the drains and the dams that Satan and your sinful nature try to build in your heart. The river will flow, not because of you, but because of him.

It reminds me of a prayer I read recently. It's actually in the book we studied for Bible class a few weeks ago, *Joining Jesus on His Mission*. It's written by an English explorer named Francis Drake. Here's what it says.

"Disturb us, Lord, when we are too pleased with ourselves. When our dreams have come true because we dreamed too little. When we arrived safely because we sailed too close to the shore. Disturb us, Lord, when with the abundance of things we possess we have lost our thirst for the waters of life; having fallen in love with life, we have ceased to dream of eternity. Disturb us, Lord, to dare more boldly. To venture on wilder seas where storms will show your mastery; where losing sight of land, we shall find the stars." Do any of us really have the courage to pray like this? Through the working of the Holy Spirit – yes you do!

All of us struggle with worry and timidity at times, all of us are tempted to chase the many distractions of this world. But Jesus was struck for those sins in your place. The Holy Spirit connected you to him at baptism. And through faith God gives you the boldness to confess those sins, to dare more boldly in our evangelism and our lives of service. By the Spirit's work, we do rely on God instead of ourselves so that we can in every corner of our lives not hold back, but stand and cry out the message of the gospel that was proclaimed at Pentecost and is still proclaimed by us today: Christ has died. Christ has risen. Christ will come again. And he does it all for you.