

Rivers of Living Water

by Fred Tomlinson

This sermon emphasizes the deep thirst within every person that can only be satisfied by God. It delves into the concept of drinking from the living water offered by Jesus, leading to a transformation of the heart and a life filled with the Holy Spirit. The speaker highlights the need for total obedience to God, surrendering to His will, and allowing rivers of living water to flow from within, as evidence of a genuine relationship with God.

Scripture: John 7:37, Psalm 42:1, John 4:14, Galatians 5:22, John 14:15, Ezekiel 36:26

Topics: "Spiritual Thirst", "Living Water"

Description

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Transcript

Well, Fred Tomlinson here and it's a pleasure to be able to share and speak to you today. I want to read a few verses from the Gospel according to John. They're actually verses that I've turned to so many times over the years and I'll do it again today.

I'm in John chapter 7 and I'm reading from verse 37. 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. He that believeth on me, as the Scripture hath said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water.

But this spake he of the Spirit, which they that believe on him should receive. For the Holy Ghost was not yet given, because that Jesus was not yet glorified. You know, as we read through the Scriptures, we know how that right at the beginning of the story, Scripture tells us, it tells us how the human story began, how it began in a place called Paradise, Eden.

And Adam and Eve were at that time God's latest creation and had been designed to become the centre of the Lord's attention. Another life form, the master of deception, he engaged with the garden dwellers and he distorted God's Word. You'll remember his opening words, Has God said? You know, in my personal incredibly loose paraphrase of what he would go on to say, I think it would sound something like this, it sounds something like this in my mind at any way.

Ignore what God said, there's more that you can enjoy than what he has made available to you. They took the bait, they rejected God and immediately they lost their fellowship with God and forever man's self became his God. The consequences continue to be catastrophic.

But you know, deep in man's heart there is a longing for something that nothing can satisfy. Man exists on a kind of a treadmill of perpetual dissatisfaction. He's driven to slake that inward thirst within man's self, which as we read on in the scriptures and we're reading in the epistles of the Apostle Paul, we alter the word self and we use the word flesh as Paul did.

It's interesting that if you spell the word self backwards and add an h, f-l-e-s-h, there you have the connection. At least that works in the English language, I know it doesn't occur in other languages. But driven to slake this inward thirsting of man's inward self or man's inward flesh, he is constantly pursuing ever bigger and better material or bigger and better emotional fixes of one sort or another.

This is the story, it's the story of our culture. We know that today this very inward thirst is driving the advertising industry and much of modern industry across the spectrum, appealing continually to those thirsting souls who are driven to have better clothes, to have a better job, a better automobile, a better home, a better marriage, a better appearance, better abilities and so on. And you know, modern Christianity is not immune from this seductive drive.

I think, to be fair, without realising what it is doing, it's created a huge marketplace providing substitutes for the knowledge of God. Included in this provision, these words, I think we would find mind satisfying teaching and emotion pleasing music. And we could go on, we could talk about it for a long time and formulate a whole list.

But the fact is that the human heart is fundamentally thirsting for God without realising it. It was Augustine, one of the ancient church fathers who addressed this in what has been said to be the greatest sentence that has ever been written. He wrote, because you have made us for yourself, our hearts are restless till they find their rest in thee.

Amen. That thirst at the core of man's being is a thirst for God and for the most part he is completely ignorant of that and continues to pursue the treadmill experience of looking for fulfilment and satisfaction in a hundred different places. You know, but let's be very clear about something as we carry on here and it's this.

We've been hearing a wonderful song just a few minutes ago about the matchless grace of God in sending Jesus to this world to pay the price of our redemption. But let me say this, Jesus did not come simply to deal with man's restlessness as an end in itself. In his own words, that is in the words of Jesus, he came to bring life.

I am come that you might have life and have it more abundantly. In actual fact he came to this world and gave up his life on the cross sacrificially so that we could actually become partakers of his life even while we continue in this world. In these verses that I've just read to you we have Jesus talking and he's talking to a very sincere and genuine group of worshippers of God.

They were existing under the Old Testament, not one of the people that he was addressing, not one of the people that could hear him was a Christian as we would understand what a Christian is. Not one of them knew anything about the saving grace of Christ at this point. They're just listening to this interesting rabbi.

I put the word interesting in quotations so far as they're concerned. But he's been following the group through the various stages of the Feast of Tabernacles which we could talk about in particular and find some interest there certainly. But they've arrived at the last day, at the eighth day, and on this occasion as the group are gathered together he, Jesus, he's chosen the moment.

Let me just pause there as I say those last words. He chose the moment. He may be choosing this very moment for you who is listening to me today.

I can't tell. But I do know this, that God has a plan for the lives of men and women and he has a timetable as well. And his plan is not always man's plan and his timetable is frequently not man's timetable.

But I believe this, that God as he works with us, as he seeks to draw us well, we're completely dead to him and ignorant of what he's doing. He's arranging circumstances, he's preparing our lives and he's preparing us for the moment which, as I said I think in the meeting last week, using that phrase, in the fullness of time. There comes a fullness of time, a divinely appointed moment when a person is ready and God is prepared to speak that life-imparting, faith-communicating word of truth.

And that could be happening today even through this poor broken vessel that he's speaking through perhaps to your heart today. He's continually organising everything until everything is ready. Amen.

So he's chosen this moment in time recorded in this text and in the last day, that great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried with a loud voice and he said, if any man thirst, come unto me and drink. You will have noticed, and perhaps you've observed this many times over earlier years of reading, that the last verse I read to you of that little group of three was the 39th verse which is in a parenthesis. In other words, John the Gospel writer included this verse to help the readers understand.

It's here, I believe the Holy Spirit himself put it there, so that we today could understand more clearly what Jesus was talking about when he said, come to me and drink. Let me re-read John's words. He said, but this, what Jesus has just said, this he, Jesus, spake of the Spirit which they that believe on him should receive.

For the Holy Ghost was not yet given, because Jesus was not yet glorified. Amen. The substance of what Jesus was talking about was the person of the Holy Spirit of God.

He would later, in the unfolding of the pages and the truth, he would refer to this receiving as receiving power from on high. Amen. You know, the question that comes up time and again, I've been asked this question many times over the years, but how do you do this? Okay, we understand what Jesus is saying, we think.

We believe we understand what he's talking about and we certainly are increasingly aware of our own need for something from outside of us to bring about this transformation that's so vital, but how does it happen? And what is particularly interesting about this moment is the way Jesus frames this timeless and all-important statement that he's making here, the intent of his message. He frames it in such a simple context. He says, if anyone's thirsty, then come to me and drink.

Now there's a profundity behind these words, but there's a sense in which this is so simple. He's talking about drinking, you know. It was Charles Spurgeon who made a comment on this very text a long time ago, and he said this, he said, any fool knows how to drink, and how true.

You know, to drink something, you don't have to work. It's not like eating even. A dear sister wrote a comment just a day or so ago to one of my messages with just one word or two words.

She said, I'm hungry. Well we understand because the scriptures present the gospel and the provision of God in many different ways to highlight and help us understand his meaning and our response that's required. On this occasion, Jesus is not talking about eating.

He just says, if you're thirsty, if you've got this aching thirst inside of your devoutly religious hearts, in this case, he says, come to me and drink. Any fool knows how to drink. We don't have to work to eat.

All you have to do is open your mouth and receive what is being made available. Isn't that something? You know, drinking really is something that I don't understand what I'm saying here, but I believe it to be true. It's something that's written into our DNA because I'm told that even when the embryo is forming in the mother's womb, something's taking place.

There's a particular stage where that little life puts its little thumb into its mouth and it's teaching itself how to drink, how to drink from its mother's breast. It's there. It's within us.

So in other words, what Jesus is talking about here is profound in the extreme, and yet with the question, how do we receive it? It's as though he's at a loss, as it were, if I may say that, concerning him, to reduce this to any more simple terms. He says, all you have to do is just drink. Just, as it were, just open your mouth, just open your heart as God is seeking to minister to you and receive.

You don't have to work at it. You don't have to become anything. It's wonderful.

And the fact of the matter is, Jesus is saying basically that that thirst within you will then be slaked. You'll be satisfied more deeply than you ever could have realized. When you or when any person begins to drink in the person of the Holy Spirit, isn't that a profound statement to even make? I don't know a better word.

It's so profound, and yet it has the potential to satisfy man's deepest longings. The actual satisfying of our lives and making us satisfied so that we're not constantly treading the treadmill is, I think I could suggest, it's a by-product. It's what happens.

But Jesus didn't die just to keep us all happy and keep us all satisfied. He comes to meet the deepest needs of the human heart that we scarcely even begin to know exist. Yet we know that something's wrong, that something seems to be, as it were, like a car is hanging in front of us.

We're constantly trying to reach it, to find human fulfillment, emotional satisfaction, and yet it constantly evades us. Jesus is saying, if you are experiencing that kind of thirst, even if it's within the context of your Christian community and you're doing all the right things and the appropriate things, and we're not here to judge or condemn anything. We're just simply saying we can do so much and engage in so much and listen to so much and enjoy listening to so much, possibly.

But if it's not bringing you to that place where you're discovering the miracle of drinking in the Holy Spirit into your life, you're missing something. And I'm suggesting that that something is the most important thing in the world, and Jesus knows it. Isn't it interesting when he stands up to speak to this huge crowd, which will immediately become his audience? Think of all the things he's not talking about.

I mean, they're engaged, for example, in activities which relate to their national history. He's also relating to something which is prophetic. These people, these gatherers, they're all, to put it into the common buzzword today, they're engaged in end-time issues, because they're looking for the Messiah to come.

That's what they're engaged in. And Jesus is saying, essentially, he said, you know, I'm here. Listen to me.

And it's wonderful. The primary effect of engaging in this simple act, of responding to the Word of God and drinking what he is offering, will be the enthronement of Christ within your inward being. And the immediate, a net result of that enthronement of Christ within your heart will be the dethronement of self, the flesh that we've referred to.

We won't have to work at doing this. We don't have to work at anything. This is his grace.

We receive what he is offering to us. We embrace it. We drink it into our inner man.

And lo and behold, it changes everything for us in the most profound sense. Our whole lives are turned around. Our whole value system is turned around.

Everything's turned around. Everything's become new. Whole things have passed away.

All things have become new. If any man becomes a new creature in Christ, I'm quoting verse backwards, but it's true. But you know, there is, without a question, there's a visible evidence of this indwelling life of which I'm speaking to you.

And I think Jesus, again, in choosing his words and speaking here, we want to be very careful that we pick out of or draw from his words, everything that he's saying here. Not only is this an offer of God, it's not only something that is so simply received, but he's saying there will be a consequence, there'll be a result that will be visible. He that believeth on me as the scripture hath said, and that's an interesting phrase, that last phrase.

We don't know which scripture is being referred to there, so I think we can draw on other scriptures which seem to apply. One thing we know that God consistently promised in the Old Testament that he was going to do something when the time was fully come. It would be like pouring water on dry ground, on desert ground, and so on, or opening a fountain in Jerusalem, and so on, and so on.

But the thrilling thing is, he says, he that believeth on me as the scripture has said, and out of his belly, or out of his innermost being, or another translation wants to say, out of your heart, out of your inner man, something will flow, and that something will be rivers of living water. Think of it. Jesus, in choosing his words, he's making it plain to his hearers that he's not talking about some kind of trickle, some minute sort of alteration, some minute change in some particular area of our lives.

No. You know, he's not even saying, as the result of drinking his life into you, there'll be something like a river flowing out of you. He doesn't say that.

It's in the plural. He said, out of your innermost being shall flow rivers of living water. What a wonderful thing.

And if you drink and keep drinking, this is the tense that is being used there by the way, if you drink and keep drinking what he is making available to you as a natural consequence there will be life flowing and

will keep flowing out of your inward being. Amen. You know, this I believe, this outflow, this above everything else is the evidence of what is going on, what's coming into your life, what comes out is what has come in that sense.

And, you know, there's a sense in which these rivers of living water, however we are to understand their significance and their meaning, they will become the proof positive that here is a man or here is a woman who is responding to this gracious gift of God being spoken by Jesus on this occasion. It's the proof. It becomes, can I suggest it this way, it becomes a kind of benchmark, a point of reference for everything else.

You know, the benchmark or the point of reference, it's that point from which everything else must be measured. I don't know very much about this, but I know a little bit about building and I know and I have sons who have worked in the building trade for many years, but I do know this, when they've, on a piece of ground which has been allocated and they're about to make a start, the house has to be situated in a certain way on the piece of land and of course it's all got to sort of, I don't know, it's all got to be sort of properly set up, but they start with a point of reference, a point, a position is marked and every other measurement for that house and the positioning of it and the construction of it are in relation to that point of reference. What then is the point of reference in a man or a woman's life who is calling themselves Christian? What is the benchmark? What is that certain something that enables us to understand and perhaps even listen to whatever else is being said by that person? And I believe Jesus is referring to it here.

You see, the issue, the point of reference is not going to be how much you know. That's an inappropriate benchmark because we know a lot of things, but whether we truly know them is something else. The benchmark is not how clever I am or how clever I am at preaching or teaching.

That's not the issue at all. Men are, in many cases, very clever and very well read and they're filled with lots of information and it's all so good in its place. I'm not questioning that, but we're saying, you know, Jesus put it in different words altogether on occasion.

Do you remember? He said, by this shall all men know that you are my disciples. It's reasonable and appropriate that we should assess what someone is claiming and someone is teaching or someone is preaching on the basis not of what they're saying, which may in itself be very important, but it's who is it speaking to me? Does this person understand? We can talk about drinking in the Holy Spirit, but what is the evidence that this individual is actually drinking in this precious Holy Spirit of God? The huge problem, and I think it is a huge problem today, is that so many people within the Christian framework or context, they really don't know what normal is. That's the problem.

They know what the average Christian life looks like, you know, in their set, in their group or whatever and so on, but few really know what normal looks like. Few really know what fresh tastes like. You know, someone may pull the milk out of the refrigerator and, you know, pour it in a glass and begin to drink it and you might perhaps hear the words, this milk is off.

Well, how do you know it's off? You see, you can't tell what is fresh until you've tasted it and the same is true in this area. You know, we can, let me put it this way, when you've been exposed to fresh, when you've tasted fresh, you'll know it. Yes, there's just something about, again changing this into a different setting again, but still with Jesus' words, he says, my sheep hear my voice.

They know me. There's just something. I can't explain it, how it works, but there's something within the inner parts of a man and a woman who has been targeted by God and prepared by his Spirit when they hear the truth or when they see the life, there's just an amen, there's like a yes that rises inside.

We've been exposed to the real deal, as they say today. Amen. You know, this life, these rivers that Jesus speaks about, again, we could catalogue a whole variety of different scriptures that we can find that will throw some light on this.

But I can say one or two things here. I can say that this presence of the indwelling Holy Spirit, as it flows out from a man or flows out from a woman, it will always carry the fragrance of Jesus. It will always carry it.

And once you've been exposed to it and your heart is positioned appropriately to receive it, you'll recognise immediately this is genuine. This is not just a very kind or generous or loving person. There's a fragrance that's unique about this.

As I'm speaking, you know, I'm conscious that there's one man who is listening to me and he stood on a platform in a train station in Manchester many, many years ago. And Billy Graham had got off that train with his friends and was walking along the platform and walked very close to my dear friend. And he said, as this man walked past him, you were just conscious of his presence, of the Lord's presence.

Amen. This is what we're talking about. These rivers, there's a flowing of the love of God, love that never fails.

Amen. It flows from those who are drinking it. There's a peace that passes understanding that flows from this person.

There's a grace that knows no limit that flows. There's a joy that is unspeakable and full of glory, says the Apostle Peter. There are these riches of Christ that are implanted by the Holy Spirit and they're flowing through that man of God or through that woman of God and they're no longer merely ordinary.

They are extraordinary. I remember speaking a long time ago from an Old Testament scripture and without digressing to tell the story, a woman said to her husband on one occasion, she said, I perceive that this is a man of God that walks past us continually. I remember that scripture for a number of reasons, but I remember it not least because in my brief time as a police officer, I was invited to speak at a Christian police association gathering and I preached on that text.

And I was basically saying, this is how God wants to move in your life. And so even though you're wearing a uniform, the uniform for police officers, you walk around the neighborhood. The same response may be that I perceive that this is a man of God that passes by us continually.

I perceive that this is a man of God who is selling these automobiles or that is working in this office or this woman is a woman of God in this grocery store who is serving me. Amen. Jesus said on another occasion, that if we drink of the water that he is offering, you will never thirst again.

We used to sing a song around those words in Sunday school when I was a boy and the boys would sing, what? Never thirst again. And the girls would say, no, never thirst again. And so it was repeated through and so on.

But the whole object of that exercise was to somehow underline and highlight this great truth that Jesus enunciated when he said, he that drinks of the water that I will give him shall never thirst again. Isn't that wonderful? Think of the old treadmill and all of that endless reaching for something bigger and better. And Jesus comes by his Holy Spirit and changes everything.

And we drink of him. We learn to drink of him not just as a once in a moment experience 20 years ago, but where it becomes the very pattern of our lives continually. He that drinks and keeps drinking out of him shall flow and keep flowing rivers of living water.

You know, before I close, there's something I think that many may miss, and this is important, that this statement which Jesus was making to the crowd around him was by any assessment outrageous. It was an outrageous thing. These people were devoutly religious.

They were focused on prophecy and prophecy being fulfilled and the Messiah coming. And here's this man standing in their midst and he says, I am he. That's the essence of what he says.

And he says, if you're thirsty, come to me. He might as well have been putting it in the words I've just mentioned and say, well, I am the fulfillment because indeed he was. He was.

Amen. In the same way, I think each of us must be aware that this one who is speaking and the Holy Spirit he was speaking about is the Lord God Almighty. And when you drink his water, here's the point, when you drink his water, you launch into a life of total obedience to him.

To drink his water, you give yourself to that act, to that experience, to that grace. You drink his water, you surrender your life to him. And if you're continually drinking that water, your life is being lived, surrendered to him, continually.

You know, I think, I don't know a better way to say this, but you know, when he is enthroned in your heart, he insists on calling all the shots. That's about the way we say it today. That's total obedience.

Anything less than that is no total obedience. This is how Jesus lived. He said, I do always those things that please the Father.

Amen. This is what, this is the normal. This is not the average.

This is the normal Christian experience. It's drinking in, it's being filled with his life, it's having rivers flow out, each and every one of the rivers speak of Jesus in one way or another. And you're satisfied, so you're not looking to other fountains anymore.

Amen. And he speaks to you, and he leads you, and he directs you, and we listen, and we rejoice in obeying his bidding, and seeking to do his will. Amen.

You know, I'm going to close now, but I don't know a better way to close off what I've been sharing with you, than to go back to a story which one or two of you listening to me will have heard me tell before. Because you tend to retell the best stories that have really sunk in deeply. But you know, this story is of a Plymouth brethren couple, a man and his wife, they're missionaries, they've got three sons, and they're in Central Africa.

And they're travelling together as a family unit to reach a new tribe that they've never been to before. This is a true story. And there's no road, there's no real trail, they've got a compass, and they're following that.

And as they're pursuing their journey to this tribe, they know that they're moving further and further away from the water supply that they had known. And they reached a stage where the water that they brought with them was exhausted completely, and they were becoming incredibly thirsty. And you know, they sent out, there were a few carriers that were with them and helping them, they sent them out in different directions to just see if they could perhaps find some possibility of some water.

And one day went by, and two days went by, and three days went by, and things were desperate. They were actually reaching, they believed that they were looking at death in the face now, this lovely Christian couple and their three boys. And you know, they made a decision.

The father said, let's just kneel down and let's pray. And as they knelt down, the sun was blazing, there was not a solitary cloud in the sky to be seen. And the father lifted up his voice and prayed.

And this was his prayer, he said, Father in heaven, in the name of your son, we're ready for the ultimate sacrifice. But you are sovereign, and I cry to you, Lord, send us rain. And that man is recorded in his journal.

And he said, as God is my witness, clouds began to appear. He said there was thunder and lightning, and a deluge of rain. He said everything was water.

They filled everything they had with water. But he said this, and this is the important part, he said, we drank, and we drank, and we drank. Are you thirsty like that, my dear friend? What else has captivated your heart and your attention? Or are you thirsty to truly know God? If you are thirsty like that, give yourself to God.

And drink, and drink deeply, my dear friend, and keep drinking. Never stop drinking, not ever. Let me just pray, and I close.

Father, we commit this word and the truths, Lord, from scripture that we've sought to gather together here, and to hear the voice of your Holy Spirit speaking to the hearts of each and every one of us afresh. Lord, have your way. If this is the appointed time for one or another, or perhaps for many, Lord, I pray that you will find those hearts leaping in response to you, Lord.

And in that simple and yet profound way to open the innermost heart to you, and receive and drink in your Holy Spirit, your life-transforming Spirit, your Spirit who reveals Jesus in and through our lives, we pray in Jesus' name. Amen. If you're watching on our YouTube channel, and turn to the scriptures with Fred Tomlinson, can I encourage you to click on the subscribe thing? You know what that does? It doesn't commit you to anything really, but it purely assures us that there are those out there who are identifying with us, and who are praying for us.

May God bless you all. Amen.

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