

Day 1

Learn: Read John 7.37-39. As we saw last week, Jesus is at the Temple in Jerusalem for the Festival of Tabernacles. This festival celebrated God's provision during the Exodus from Egypt and in this day through the harvest. Each day, the High Priest would lead a procession to get water from the Pool of Siloam and then return to the Temple, where he would pour it out. This activity celebrated God's provision of water in the desert during the Exodus and God's provision of rain for the harvest. [See www.bibleplaces.com/poolofsiloam.htm for recent discoveries about this pool.] The Jews also symbolized with pouring water the prophetic end-times promise that God would put his Spirit in his people [Isaiah 44.3; Joel 2.28]. This was part of the New Covenant that God promised would come with the Messiah-savior. This covenant would bring cleansing of our nature, intimacy with God, forgiveness of sins, and Spirit empowerment for life. In this passage, Jesus used the imagery of the festival water ceremony as his metaphor, saying that those who desired these covenant promises should come to him and he would give them "living water." We have seen this promise from Jesus before, back in John 4. "Living water" in this culture meant flowing water, such as from a river or spring [the Pool of Siloam is spring fed]; the term also can mean "life-giving" water, which is a good representation of the Holy Spirit, who brings spiritual renewal, spiritual cleansing, spiritual maturity, and spiritual empowerment.

Reflect: What do each of those terms – spiritual renewal, spiritual cleansing, spiritual maturity, and spiritual empowerment – mean in your mind? What do you think it meant when Jesus said [NET], "If anyone is thirsty, let him come to me, and let the one who believes in me drink"?

Day 2

Learn: Read John 7.37-43. Some of the people were moved to wonder if Jesus was from God. Some thought he might be the "Greater Moses Prophet," whom Moses had said would come to speak God's words which must be obeyed. Some thought he might be the Christ, the "Anointed One" from God, who would come to die for sin, reconcile people with God, usher in the New Covenant, and deliver Israel from oppression. We know that God meant all along for these to be the same person [Jesus!], but some people were confused about this in Jesus' day. The Greek text indicates that someone previously mentioned in the scene started arguing against the idea that Jesus was the Christ; this probably was the group of religious leaders who were plotting to seize Jesus, who were in the part of the scene we studied last week. Whoever it was, they argued against Jesus being the Christ because Micah 5.2 made clear that the Christ would be born in Bethlehem, in the region of Judea; and other Old Testament teachings indicated that the Christ, as God's chosen king, would be a descendent of King David, whose family was from Bethlehem. As far as the common people knew, Jesus was raised in Nazareth, in the region of Galilee, so this argument would convince them that Jesus could not be the Christ. We know that Jesus actually was born in Bethlehem, to Mary and Joseph who were both descendants of King David. God the Father made sure that Jesus was born as the heir to the throne. It is interesting to speculate that the religious leaders knew much of this, since they had access to the temple records.

Reflect: John tells us that there was a division among the people about Jesus. In Luke 12.51 [NET], Jesus said, "Do you think I have come to bring peace on earth? No, I tell you, but rather division!" Because he is the true Son of God, the true standard of righteousness, the true judge and king, and the only true way of salvation, Jesus always has been controversial, but perhaps especially so in our time in which we are supposed to deny absolute truth, absolute moral rightness, anyone's right to judge us, and our need for salvation. Within the church, you should find believers who are passionate about Jesus and what he offers; but out in the world you will find non-believers who not only don't understand your faith, they are antagonistic to it, because they rightly perceive that your concept of Jesus judges them and their sinful lives [recall 7.7 from last week]. Are you prepared to identify yourself with Christ even if it means some people will not like you, that you might lose some of your friends, that people might laugh at you or scorn you? What is the worst persecution you have suffered? Do you think it would be worse if you were more overtly Christian in what you said and did? Do you think you should be more overtly Christian anyway? What could you change to be so?

Day 3

Learn: Read John 7.45-49. The “officers” are those whom the religious council, the Sanhedrin, had sent to seize Jesus [7.32], when they had been frustrated in their own attempts and had heard the crowd starting to believe in Jesus as the Messiah-savior. These fellows were priests, intellectual and religious in nature. While they waited for an opportunity to seize Jesus, they had to listen to his teaching. To their surprise and confusion, they were moved by what Jesus said. So they were not sure they should carry out their duty. This earned them scorn from the religious leaders. The religious leaders reminded the officers that they – the ruling council, the religious elite – stood unified in their opposition to Jesus; only the crowd, supposedly ignorant of the Mosaic Law and thus accursed, could be deceived by Jesus. How ironic that those who had the most religious education, were the religious leaders supposedly mediating for God among the people, and were certain they could not be deceived *by* Jesus, actually were the most deceived *about* Jesus.

Reflect: While not the main point of this story, it is interesting that the officers were so moved by Jesus’ teaching. They were among the religious leaders, though not the top echelon. They were willing to seize Jesus for his supposed crimes against God. But when they stopped to listen, they began to wonder if he really was a prophet from God. Today, a lot of people who reject Jesus and the Bible have never given themselves the opportunity to assess accurately, because they have not listened by reading the Bible itself. What could you do to help the non-believers in your life develop some interest in learning who Jesus really is? What resources might you suggest for them? Would they possibly be willing to talk with you once in a while about what you believe? What about for yourself, are you regularly amazed by Jesus and his teaching or has it become stale to you? What could you do to revitalize your own interest in learning about him?

Day 4

Learn: Read John 7.45-52. Nicodemus was a Pharisee and member of the Sanhedrin. Back in John 3, we saw that he visited for a discussion with Jesus. He treated Jesus with respect back then, calling him a prophet and teacher from God. Jesus explained a lot about salvation to Nicodemus back then. We don’t know if Nicodemus came to faith between that conversation and this one, but his peers were not aware of it. [But read John 19.38-42!] In this conversation with his peers, Nicodemus is the calm voice, seeking fairness. There is no command in the Old Testament to hear a person’s defense before condemning him, but this was Roman law and Jewish custom at the time. The other religious leaders asked him derisively if he was from Galilee too, like Jesus. People in Judea did not think much of people from Galilee, and this was especially true for the intellectual and religious elite in Jerusalem. With their question, they might have been implying he was not very bright and easily deceived like the out of town crowd. Or they might have been implying he was biased in favor of Jesus because he was from the same region. Or maybe they were just spitting venom without making sense. They certainly made no sense when they said no prophet rises up from Galilee, since Jonah was born in Galilee [2 Kings 14.25]. Ironically, Jesus wasn’t originally from Galilee, having been born in Bethlehem, in Judea.

Reflect: Probably, Nicodemus did not yet believe in Jesus’ identity as the Christ and Son of God. But what if he did? He would have known that if he confessed his faith, he would lose his friends, his powerful position, and his social status. Do you want to identify with Christ, to acknowledge publically who he is, even though that might bring you struggle? Do you readily acknowledge to yourself that who Jesus is means you must follow him and be willing to sacrifice for him and his gospel mission? How could you be better at following Jesus or better at sacrificing for him and the gospel mission?

Day 5

Learn: Jesus is the Greater Moses Prophet, the Christ, the Ultimate Davidic King, and the Son of Man. He died to bring us forgiveness and the blessings of the New Covenant. Those include the Holy Spirit coming to indwell us and empower us to live for Christ and like Christ, to represent God well by reflecting his character.

Reflect: Do you desire to identify with Christ, and receive the forgiveness, the reconciliation with God the Father, the assurance of eternal life with God that Christ promises, even though that means you will have to learn to live like him, to live for him, instead of continuing to live in sin? Do you desire to identify with Christ and receive the blessings of the Holy Spirit, even though that means change in yourself and in your life, as you grow spiritually and learn to represent God and reflect God’s character as your highest priority in life? Pray through each aspect of this.