

The Gospel of John

Lesson 11: Rivers of Living Water at the Feast -- John 7:1-52

Jerusalem is packed. It is the Feast of Tabernacles, one of the great pilgrim festivals, and the city is buzzing with rumors about the teacher from Galilee. Some say He is a good man. Others say no, He is leading the people astray. Everyone is talking about Him, but no one speaks openly, because they are afraid. Afraid of the authorities. Afraid of being on the wrong side. Even His own brothers do not believe in Him and half-mock Him, telling Him to go show off in Judea if He really is somebody. And Jesus, in the middle of all this swirling speculation, waits, and then goes up quietly, and begins to teach in the temple courts.

What strikes everyone is the authority. "How is it that this man has learning, when he has never studied?" He has no credentials, no rabbinic pedigree, yet His teaching carries a weight the trained scholars cannot match. And Jesus tells them why: "My teaching is not mine, but his who sent me." Then He says something that cuts to the heart of every honest seeker: "If anyone's will is to do God's will, he will know whether the teaching is from God." The issue was never really evidence. It was the will. The people who would not believe were not lacking proof; they were unwilling to obey.

Then comes the great moment. On the last day of the feast, the climactic day, when the priests had been pouring out water drawn from the pool of Siloam in a ceremony begging God for rain and remembering the water He gave in the wilderness, Jesus stands up in the crowded temple and cries out with a loud voice: "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." John tells us He was speaking of the Spirit, whom believers would receive. Into a ceremony about water, Jesus shouts that He is the source of the only water that can satisfy the soul, and that those who come to Him will not just be filled but will overflow.

The crowd splits. Some say, "This really is the Prophet." Others say, "This is the Christ." Others scoff. The officers sent to arrest Him come back empty-handed, saying, "No one ever spoke like this man!" Nicodemus, the night-time visitor from chapter three, dares a careful word in His defense and gets slapped down. The whole chapter crackles with division, with the question that the festival crowd, and every reader, must answer: who is this man, and will you come to Him and drink? Read it and listen for the loud voice in the temple still calling the thirsty to come.

Group Discussion: Jesus said, "If anyone's will is to do God's will, he will know whether the teaching is from God" (v. 17). Why does Jesus tie knowing the truth to a willingness to obey it, and how have you seen willingness, or unwillingness, shape what people are able to believe?

Personal Reflection: Jesus cried out, "If anyone thirsts, let him come to me and drink" (v. 37). Where is your soul most thirsty right now, and what would it look like this week to actually come to Christ and drink rather than looking elsewhere?

Read John 7:1–52

Study Questions

1. Jesus said, “My teaching is not mine, but his who sent me” (v. 16). What does it mean that Jesus’ teaching came from the Father, and how does this shape the authority we give His words?
2. Jesus tied the ability to recognize truth to a willingness to do God’s will (v. 17). Is there a truth you suspect God is asking you to obey, but have hesitated over because obeying it would be costly? What is it?
3. On the last day of the feast Jesus cried, “If anyone thirsts, let him come to me and drink” (v. 37). How does this invitation, given during a water ceremony, reveal who Jesus claims to be and what He offers?
4. Jesus promised that out of the believer’s heart “will flow rivers of living water” (v. 38). Beyond being filled yourself, where might Christ want His life to flow out of you to others, and what would that look like?
5. John explains that Jesus “said this about the Spirit, whom those who believed in him were to receive” (v. 39). What does it mean that the living water is the Holy Spirit, and how does this gift mark life under the New Covenant?
6. The crowd was divided, some afraid to speak openly about Jesus for fear of others (vv. 12–13). Where does fear of others’ opinions still keep you from speaking openly about Christ, and what would courage look like there?
7. The temple officers returned without arresting Jesus, saying, “No one ever spoke like this man!” (v. 46). What was it about Jesus’ words that so arrested them, and what does this reveal about the unique authority of His teaching?
8. Nicodemus quietly urged the council to give Jesus a fair hearing and was mocked for it (vv. 50–52). When has standing up even cautiously for Christ or for truth cost you something, and how did you respond?
9. The whole chapter is full of division over Jesus’ identity, with the crowds debating whether He is the Prophet, the Christ, or a deceiver (vv. 40–43), while the leaders reject Him out of prejudice about His origins. What does this division teach us about why people reject Jesus, and how does it show that the real barrier is often the heart rather than the evidence?
10. Look back over this chapter and the loud invitation at its center. What is one specific way Jesus is forming you to come to Him and drink, and to let His living water flow out to others?

Now or Later

Reflect on these passages: Isaiah 12:3, drawing water with joy from the wells of salvation; Isaiah 44:3, God pouring water on the thirsty and His Spirit on offspring; Ezekiel 47:1–12, the river flowing from the temple bringing life everywhere it goes; John 4:13–14, the living water welling

up to eternal life; Acts 2:38–39, the gift of the Holy Spirit promised to those who repent and are baptized.