

## COME TO JESUS FOR SPIRITUAL LIFE

*7 After this Jesus stayed in Galilee; he would not stay in Judaea, because the Jews sought to kill him. 2Now the Jewish feast, the Feast of Tabernacles, was about to take place, 3[so] Jesus' brothers said to him, Leave here and go to Judaea, so that your disciples may see the works that you are doing. 4No one who wants to be known publicly does anything in private. Since you are doing these things, make yourself known to the world. 5(Not even his brothers believed in him.) 6Jesus said to them, The right time for me has not yet come; but any time is right for you. 7The world cannot hate you; but it hates me because I testify that its works are evil. 8Go up to the Feast; I will not go up to this Feast; because the right time for me has not yet come. 9After having said these things to them, he remained in Galilee. 10But after his brothers had gone up to the Feast, then he also went up—not publicly, but secretly ... 37Now on the last day, the great [day] of the Feast, Jesus stood and cried out, If anyone is thirsty, let him come to me and drink. 38Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, From within him shall flow rivers of living water. 39Now he was referring to the [Holy] Spirit, whom they who believed in him were to receive; for the Spirit had not yet been [given]; because Jesus had not yet been glorified. (Jn. 7:1-10, 37-39)*

### **Introduction**

Al lay awake in his hotel room in Norfolk, VA; he was lying there on his bed, thinking. He recalled the last Good Friday celebration he attended back in his homeland of Nicaragua:

I stood among the many villagers and watched the procession come down the rutty dirt road in the early morning. My church was acting out the events of the crucifixion. I'd either observed or taken part in these festivities since early childhood. In the distance I heard the jeering and mocking of the mob, which was part of the ceremony. Then I saw barebacked boys covered with sweat and dust, bearing the statues of Mary, Jesus, and Pilate. Another was bearing the cross.

It was my way of paying penance to relieve the boy with the cross and carry it for a mile. I lifted the heavy lumber off his tired and filthy body. He never said a word but staggered into the crowd.

I positioned the heavy oak cross on my back and methodically began trudging. The base of the cross left a trail in the dirt behind me. Soon the morning sun helped my sweat to run freely. Dust stirred up by the procession hung in the air and forced me to look down. I concentrated on the dirt in front of my feet and struggled to take one step at a time. Soon my leg and back muscles grew hard and then painful. The bitter sweat running off my forehead ran into my eyes.

Al testifies: I felt that I *had* to feel that pain and take that punishment to cleanse my sins.

Then Al thought, "Is this enough to earn salvation? Is this acceptable to God? Is this what God wants?" (*POWER*, 7/13/86, pp. 2-ff.) Indeed, is this the way to spiritual life?

In the passage of John 7 there is described for us another religious celebration: The city of Jerusalem was thronged with worshipers who have come to commemorate the yearly Feast of Tabernacles. At the climax of this great feast Jesus stood up and invited men to come directly to Him for spiritual life:

*Now on the last day, the great [day] of the Feast, Jesus stood and cried out, If anyone is thirsty, let him come to me and drink. <sup>38</sup>Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, From within him shall flow rivers of living water. <sup>39</sup>Now he was referring to the [Holy] Spirit, whom they who believed in him were to receive. (Jn. 7:37-39a)*

There is the danger that we may engage in the rituals of religion without partaking of the true spiritual life provided by Christ. Al did that for many years before he met Christ.

If you want true spiritual life, come to Jesus—because He is the Source of that life.

## **I. Come to Jesus for Spiritual Life; Do Not Look to the Rituals of Religion**

As we enter the 7<sup>th</sup> chapter of John, we find that it is the occasion of the Feast of Tabernacles—the culminating feast of the Jewish year. The Feast of Tabernacles was held in the middle of the seventh month, (the equivalent of our September or October,) and it extended for a period of seven days. It was the great feast of harvest, held at the time when the people of Israel had gathered in the fruits of the land:

*On the fifteenth day of the seventh month Jehovah's Feast of Tabernacles begins, and it lasts for seven days ... <sup>39</sup>So beginning with the fifteenth day of the seventh month, after you have gathered the crops of the land, celebrate the festival to Jehovah for seven days; the first day is a day of rest, and the eighth day also is a day of rest. (Lev. 23:34,39)*

The unique feature of this feast was the fact that the people were instructed to take leafy branches from the trees, and from these branches they were to construct thatched huts (or, booths) to dwell in during the week of celebration. The significance of this feast was to graphically remind the people that the LORD is the great Provider for His people. According to Leviticus 23:42-43, the people were to construct leafy, thatched huts so that they might know that the LORD made the Israelites to dwell in booths when He brought them out of Egypt: *"Live in booths for seven days. All native-born Israelites are to live in booths <sup>43</sup>so your descendants will know that I had the Israelites live in booths when I brought them out of Egypt. I am Jehovah your God."* By this means the people were being vividly

reminded of the fact that even in the midst of the wilderness the LORD had provided for His people shade and abundant fruit: He had abundantly provided for them. Consider Psalm 78:14-16,23-25, as passage in which the Psalmist is recounting the abundant provisions the LORD made for Israel during their wilderness journey:

*He guided them with the cloud by day and with light from the fire all night. <sup>15</sup>He split open rocks in the wilderness, and gave them water as abundant as the seas. <sup>16</sup>He also brought streams out of the rock, and caused waters to run down like rivers ... <sup>23</sup>he commanded the skies above, and opened the doors of heaven; <sup>24</sup>he rained down manna upon them to eat, and gave them food from heaven. <sup>25</sup>Man ate the bread of the angels. He sent them all the food they could eat. (Psalm 78:14-16,23-25)*

Now as the people construct their booths out of the branches of the fruitful trees of the Promised Land of Palestine at the time of harvest, they are reminded that the LORD is the Great Provider for His people.

Later in Israel's history, another element was added to this Feast of Tabernacles: On the last day of the feast a procession of worshipers would accompany a priest down to the Pool of Siloam, (located within the city of Jerusalem.) There the priest would fill a golden goblet with water drawn from the pool. The procession would then make its way back to the temple where the priest would be joined by a second priest carrying a cup of wine. The two priests then ascended the steps of the altar and poured out the water and the wine at the base of the altar; symbolizing God's gracious provisions in the wilderness and praying for His continued provisions in the future (Leon Morris, *The New International Commentary on the New Testament, The Gospel of John*, pp.417-421; Alfred Edersheim, *The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah*, pp. 156-163.)

Jesus now uses this occasion—the great day of this great feast—to issue His greatest invitation: *“Now on the last day, the great [day] of the Feast, Jesus stood and cried out, ‘If anyone is thirsty, let him come to me and drink’”* (vs. 37.) Jesus wants us to see that He Himself is the fulfillment of all that the Jewish feasts represented—they all find their meaning and fulfillment in Him and the spiritual life He provides. All of religion finds its meaning and fulfillment in the Lord Jesus Christ—and unless Jesus Christ Himself is the object of our faith, our worship, and our devotion, all of religion will be empty, unfulfilling, powerless, and futile.

On the great day, Jesus stood up and cried out His words of invitation. It was the common practice for rabbis to be seated when they spoke. Jesus' posture of standing in the temple area and calling out in a loud voice was designed to capture the attention of everyone. The Lord Jesus Christ has a passionate desire that we hear what He has to say and heed His words, for as Peter rightly expressed it, Jesus *“has the words of eternal life”* (Jn. 6:68.)

Jesus cries out, *“If anyone is thirsty, let him come to Me, and drink!”* Jesus’ invitation is extended to whomever is spiritually thirsty—thirsty for God; the kind of thirst the Psalmist expresses: *“As the deer pants for the water brooks, so my soul pants for you, O God. <sup>2</sup>My soul thirsts for God, for the living God”* (Ps. 42:1-2a.) It is a terrible thing to be thirsty. Consider the testimony of several hostages held captive by guerilla rebels in Central America: “On the whole, they treated us pretty well. But the worst thing of all was our lack of water. I never realized what a terrible thing it was to be thirsty.” The worst kind of thirst a man can experience is spiritual thirst; thirst for the living God, thirst that only the Son of God, the Lord Jesus Christ can quench. Jesus counsels spiritually thirsty people to come directly to Him. We are not counseled to join a church, or perform certain religious rituals, or make a confession to a priest or minister, or look within ourselves, or get in harmony with nature, or seek to make ourselves acceptable to God. We are counseled, invited and urged to come immediately and directly to Jesus, and entrust ourselves to Him. In the words of the hymn writer, Charlotte Elliott:

Just as I am, without one plea  
But that Your blood was shed for me,  
And that You bid me come to Thee,  
O Lamb of God, I come, I come.

Just as I am, and waiting not  
To rid my soul of one dark blot,  
To You, whose blood can cleanse each spot,  
O Lamb of God, I come, I come.

Just as I am! You will receive,  
Will welcome, pardon, cleanse, relieve,  
Because Your promise I believe,  
O Lamb of God, I come, I come.

## **II. Come to Jesus for Spiritual Life; Because He Supplies that Life to All Who Trust in Him**

In verse 38 Jesus explains that His metaphor—*“Let him come to Me, and drink”*—means that we are to trust in Him. We are simply to accept Him as He is: the Son of God and the Savior for the world. We are to simply come to Him as a helpless sinner, bound for hell, and without the hope of heaven, and in this condition entrust our lives to Him.

Buddha, Mohammed, and the many other religious teachers, offer to teach us a way of life—a way of self-discipline that is intended to result in self-purification—but the Lord Jesus Christ offers us Himself. Jesus Himself is the Way to God: *“Jesus said to him, ‘I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father, except by me’”* (Jn. 14:6.) Jesus Himself is the righteousness and sanctification we need: *“Christ Jesus ... was made for us wisdom from God—*

*righteousness and sanctification and redemption”* (1 Cor. 1:30.) Jesus Himself is our atoning sacrifice: *“he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed”* (Isa. 53:5.) Jesus Himself is our Intercessor: *“he is able to save to the fullest extent those who draw near to God through him, since he ever lives to make intercession for them”* (Heb. 7:25.) Jesus Himself is our Life: *“When Christ, [who is] our life, shall be revealed, then you also shall be revealed in glory with him”* (Col. 3:4.)

It is important to understand that Jesus’ promise is made exclusively to the person who trusts in Him: *“Whoever believes in me, as the scripture has said, ‘From within him shall flow rivers of living water’”* (vs. 38.) The Greek word for “believe” or “trust” occurs in the present participle form, indicating a present, continuing, ongoing trust in Jesus, following upon the initial act of entrusting ourselves to Him. Often times when we speak about trusting in Jesus we have in mind that initial act of commitment to Jesus, as expressed in the words of the hymn as, “the hour I first believed.” For some people, this is all “trusting in Jesus” means. They look back to that day when they first believed; perhaps it was in response to a gospel invitation made at an evangelistic rally, or a commitment made at a Bible camp, or an initial act of faith made in response to reading a gospel tract. But since that time their life has been characterized by spiritual drifting: drifting in and out of sin, drifting in and out of church, drifting in and out of faith, drifting in and out of contact with Christ—a life with little or no spiritual power, and much spiritual thirst. All this time, in practical terms—following their initial act of faith in Christ—such people as these have actually been trusting in themselves on a day to day basis: relying on their own wisdom to solve problems and handle the situations of life; relying upon their own strength in a futile effort to resist temptation and abide in Christ and sporadically to cultivate the Christian life. Consequently, such people feel like miserable failures, they fail miserably, and they are spiritually empty and thirsty.

Now, beyond a doubt, it certainly is true that there must be that moment of initial faith and commitment to Christ, that moment when you turn yourself over to Christ, receiving Him as your Savior and entrusting yourself to Him. But, according to the Bible, that moment is the beginning of the life of faith, it is not the end and summation of faith. Once you have initially believed in Jesus, you must daily exercise your faith in Him. In Ephesians 1:19 the Apostle Paul prays that we might know *“the exceedingly great power made available to us who are believing;”* i.e.; those who are exercising dynamic faith in the Lord Jesus Christ—practical and daily faith in the Savior.

You experience the truth of Jesus’ promise as you daily and simply exercise faith in Him: trusting, yielding, and resting in Him. Again we may turn to the words of the hymn writers who compose words and music from their own experience with Christ. This time the words of James Mountain are especially apropos:

Simply trusting You, Lord Jesus,  
I behold You as You are,  
And Your love, so pure, so changeless,  
Satisfies my heart.  
Satisfies its deepest longings,  
Meets, supplies its every need,  
Surrounds me with blessings;  
Yours is love indeed.

Jesus, I am resting, resting  
In the joy of what You are;  
I am finding out the greatness  
Of Your loving heart.

### III. Come to Jesus for Spiritual Life; And He will Give You the Holy Spirit

Verse 39 explains that Jesus is speaking about the Holy Spirit and His presence in the Christian's life: *"Now he was referring to the [Holy] Spirit, whom they who believed in him were to receive."*

It is the Holy Spirit who communicates to the Christian the spiritual life. The Holy Spirit gives the Christian confidence before God: *"you did not receive a spirit that makes you a slave again to fear; but you received the Spirit of sonship, and by him we cry, Abba, Father. <sup>16</sup>The [Holy] Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children"* (Rom. 8:15-16.) The Holy Spirit creates within the Christian the character of God: *"the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, <sup>23</sup>gentleness and self-control"* (Gal. 5:22-23a.) The Holy Spirit gives the Christian a divine courage from God: *"God did not give us a spirit of fearfulness, but [the Spirit] of power and love and discipline"* (2 Tim. 1:7.) The Holy Spirit ministers to the Christian the comfort of God:

*And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Comforter to be with you forever—<sup>17</sup>the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive; for it neither sees him nor knows him. [But] you know him; for he remains with you and shall be in you. (Jn. 14:16-17)*

The Holy Spirit imparts to the Christian the victory of Christ: *"if by the Spirit you put to death the misdeeds of the body, you will live"* (Rom. 8:13b.) The Holy Spirit enables the Christian to confess Christ before men:

*But when they arrest you, do not worry about what to say or how to say it. At that time you will be given what to say, <sup>20</sup>for it will not be you speaking, but the Spirit of your Father speaking through you. (Matt. 10:19-20)*

When you entrust your life to the Lord Jesus Christ, He enters into your soul and takes up His residence in your heart by the Person of His Holy Spirit:

*... if Christ is in you, your body is dead because of sin, yet your spirit is alive because of righteousness. <sup>11</sup>And if the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead is living in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit, who lives in you. (Rom. 8:10-11)*

As we trust in Christ on a daily basis—relying upon Him, yielding ourselves to Him, resting in Him—the Holy Spirit will increasingly cause the spiritual life to flow out of our hearts and through our lives like rivers of living water.

## **Conclusion**

Jesus says, *“If anyone is thirsty, let him come to me and drink. <sup>38</sup>Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, From within him shall flow rivers of living water.”*

Do you find yourself engaged in the mere rituals of religion without partaking of the true spiritual life offered by Christ? If you want true spiritual life, come to the Lord Jesus Christ, because He is the Source of that life, and He graciously supplies that spiritual life to all who trust in Him.