



SERMON TITLE: Anyone Thirsty?
SCRIPTURE: John 7:1-52

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"These things are written that you might believe that Jesus is the Christ" (John 20:31). This is how John concludes his own biography of Jesus. He wanted the young, the old, the sick, the well, the despairing, the hopeful, the skeptics, the faithful, and whoever reads his account of Jesus to believe and trust him more fully. But what did John want them to believe? He wanted them to believe that Jesus alone brought eternal life into the present, broken world. And for all who enter this eternal life with God right now, we—like John—are exiles. For all who enter a relationship with Jesus, we will very likely be marginalized and dismissed because we follow him. So, what does it mean to believe? And how do we mature in believing? What does it mean to remain faithful to God when the pressure is on? These are the things that John will help us explore by showing us the glory and beauty of Jesus.

How do you do with handling conflict? For most of us, we tend to live in some kind of conflict almost every day. There are so many different issues, so many different flashpoints, so many different expectations, so many unmet expectations it's just impossible to please everyone. Some people want to move faster, some want to move slower. Some want things to change, others want things to stay the same. Some want the temperature hotter, some want it colder. Some want the music louder, some want it so quiet you can barely hear it. We all face conflicts at home, conflicts at work, conflicts with people you love, and conflicts with people you want to avoid. And you know how draining all that can be. Simply put, conflict wears us out. But one thing that impresses me about Jesus from John's Gospel is that Jesus doesn't seem to be drained by constant conflict. He always stays on task no matter how difficult his life becomes. So, there are some important things we can learn from Jesus about handling ongoing conflict in John 7.

The Context for the Conflict: The events of chapter 6 occur about one year before Jesus is crucified. This is six months after the feeding of the 5000 and the public debate which followed, Jesus attends the Feast of Booths (Tabernacles) in Jerusalem (chapter 7). This feast was among the most important in Jewish tradition and was a hub of religious and cultural activity. The Feast of Tabernacles was an annual feast in which the people of God, the Israelites, celebrated and remembered their years of wandering in the wilderness before they got to their Promised Land. During those eight days, they acted out a number of rituals to remind themselves about how God had provided for them in the wilderness. For example, for those 8 days, many of the people would live outdoors in tents (and this happened in September and October). They did so to remind themselves how God took care of them when, after the Exodus, they actually lived in tents, when they had no permanent homes.

This passage begins with Jesus' brothers mocking him for the events of chapter 6. They assume that a man seeking publicity and fame ought to do his magic tricks at the most public festival of the year. The "brothers" mentioned here are, by all reasonable interpretations, the literal half-brothers of Jesus. That is, these are the biological sons of Mary and Joseph. Jesus, however, is still sensitive to God's timetable and chooses not to go to the feast with them. Instead, he will go later, and alone, in order to be more discreet.

This discretion only lasts a few days. Jesus will begin teaching and preaching in Jerusalem midway through the week-long feast. In this discourse, Jesus will criticize the hypocrisy of Jewish religious leaders. This criticism, along with his established reputation for miracles, will create a "crisis of confidence" in the Pharisees, Sadducees, and scribes. From the perspective of the people, there are only three possibilities—either the leaders are too weak to stop a blasphemer, too confused to do anything, or they somehow accept his claims. This only adds fuel to the religious leaders' desire to silence Jesus permanently.

So this entire chapter is riddled with conflict and controversy. Jesus provokes rumor, discussion, and eventually argument among the people. The division caused by Jesus' words will even extend to the religious leaders themselves. Nicodemus, the same man who spoke with Jesus in chapter 3, will make an appeal for due process. In response, his peers ridicule him and reject his suggestion. This makes chapter 7 a crucial passage for understanding the Pharisees, in particular. Their example is a warning about how arrogance, ignorance, and tradition can cause spiritual blindness.

The Call to Those in Conflict: Another thing they did (and this is the significant thing Jesus focuses on) was every day the priests would go to the pool of Siloam, draw water, and put it in a golden pitcher. They would walk in a procession to the Temple. The people would go along, and they would sing Isaiah 12, "With joy, you will draw water from the wells of salvation." Then at the altar, they would pour the water out every day. Why? Because again, the Feast of Tabernacles was reminding them of when they all lived in tents in the wilderness and how one time in the wilderness, God provided water from a rock. The people were "dying" of thirst. And Moses struck a rock with the rod of God and out flowed water so their lives were saved. As Jesus is watching this every day—this re-enactment of the water from the rock—finally, on the last day, he has to speak out. He has to shout because something has been building in him, something has been burning in him like a furnace and it's ready to explode. He talks about the water, and he says, "If you are thirsty, come to me, and living water will flow out from you." John Piper writes: "When we hear Jesus cry out at the feast of booths," "If anyone thirsts, let him come to me and drink," we understand him to mean to those Jews, "If you are thirsty for God if you are longing for the consolation of Israel (Luke 2:25), if you are eagerly looking for the kingdom of God (Luke 23:51), for deliverance from sin and oppression, then no longer look back to the days of old, and don't look forward to the future—look to me. In me, all the past is summed up, and in me, the future hope has arrived. If anyone thirsts, let him come to me and drink"" And notice, he is speaking these words to his enemies. He is issuing a totally open-ended invitation to everyone in that murmuring crowd to come to him and drink. And the only qualification he mentions is thirst. Verse 37: "If anyone—any Pharisee, any priest, any officer trying to arrest me, any offended person—if anyone thirsts, let him come to me and drink." There's only one condition and that is you need to know you are thirsty—that's the condition. And the action you must take is to drink. Receive the gift. There's no thought here of earning, deserving, or paying for what Jesus offers. Anyone who is thirsty is invited. Interestingly enough, the last chapter in the Bible (Rev22)—extends the same invitation— 17 The Spirit and the bride say, "Come!" And let the one who hears say, "Come!" Let the one who is thirsty come; let the one who desires take the free gift of the water of life."

Are you thirsty? Come to Jesus and drink, and out of your heart will flow the water of life.

Discussion Starters:

Icebreaker: Try to describe what it feels like to be thirsty Don't move off of this too quickly. Keep thinking about it. Try to get as specific as possible When was the last time you felt really thirsty? ...

Read John 7:1-52

Then ask: "From what you heard in Charlie's message or what we just read.

What are some of the "AHAs" you had?

What did you hear that resonated with you?

What new thoughts and insights did you have?"

When someone volunteers an "AHA," ask follow up questions to dig deeper and to keep the discussion going. Ask the group, "Anyone else have this same "AHA"?"

What do you think about this insight?"

After you've exhausted the topic, throw the original question back out to the group, "Who else had an "AHA?" Repeat the pattern above. If someone says, "I didn't really have an "AHA," it's more that I don't understand" Then go that direction. ..Ask follow-up questions to help them clearly articulate the issue. "Anybody else think about that/struggle with that?" Ask the group for input, "So, how would you answer that question?" Whoever answers, ask follow up questions, ask for input from the group on that answer (*What do you think about that?*), etc. The repeat the same conversation pattern by asking: *What's your "take-away" from the message and our discussion? What is one thing you can take-away and put into action?*

Questions to consider: Why do you think Jesus uses the metaphor of thirst to help us understand what faith/belief is like? How do conflict and thirst relate to one another? Are you thirsty for God? If not, why not?