

## DEVELOPING SPIRITUAL VITALITY

### INTRODUCTION

- A. Conviction from God's Word
1. Jesus' words in John 7:37-39 are convicting, *Now on the last day, the great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried out, saying, "If any man is thirsty, let him, come to Me and drink. He who believes in Me, as the Scripture said, 'From his innermost being shall flow rivers of living water.'" But this He spoke of the Spirit, whom those who believed in Him were to receive; for the Spirit was not yet given, because Jesus was not yet glorified.*
  2. Does my spiritual life resemble that which was promised by our Savior?
  3. Am I parched and don't even know it?
  4. Let's ask God to bless our study of spiritual vitality.
- B. Examining Jesus' promise in John 7:37-39.
1. Spiritual vitality is a promise from God for every Christian.
  2. One of the most famous sermons ever preached was by Jonathan Edwards (18<sup>th</sup> C), entitled, *Sinners in the hands of an angry God.*
  3. This message will focus on how God responds to those who place faith in Christ alone. I call it, *Saints in the hands of a loving God.*

### SAINTS IN THE HANDS OF A LOVING GOD, JOHN 7:37-39

- A. A Promise of Spiritual Vitality
1. Background
    - a. Feast of Booths (37), *Now on the last day, the great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried out, saying, "If any man is thirsty, let him, come to Me and drink."*
      - 1) The event is the Feast of Booths which is also called the Feast of Tabernacles, John 7:2, *Now the Jewish festival of Booths was near.*
      - 2) It combined a celebration of harvest and the dwelling in booths, or tabernacles. These commemorated the time when their fathers lived in such booths after their Exodus from Egypt.
      - 3) Each day, for seven days, there was a procession from the temple to the pool of Siloam. A priest filled a gold pitcher with water while the choir sang Isaiah 12:3, *With joy you will draw water from the wells of salvation.* Then they returned to the altar and poured out the water. This ritual reminded them of the water from the rock during the wilderness wanderings and it spoke prophetically of the coming days of the Messiah.
    - b. Response of the crowds to Jesus
      - 1) John 7:14, *How has this man become learned, having never been educated?*
      - 2) John 7:26, *The rulers do not really know that this is the Christ, do they?*
      - 3) John 7:31, *When the Christ shall come, he will not perform more signs than those which this man has, will He?"*
  2. Interpretation
    - a. Condition (38a), *He who believes in Me,*
      - 1) Jesus identifies Himself as the One Who provides living water.
      - 2) It demands faith in Him.
    - b. Confirmation (38b), *as the Scripture said,*
      - 1) Many believe it refers to Zechariah 14:8, *On that day living waters shall flow out from Jerusalem, half of them to the eastern sea and half of them to the western sea; it shall continue in summer as in winter.*
      - 2) Note Ezekiel 47:1-10
        - a) Water from the right side of the altar of the millennial temple.
        - b) Living waters, Ezekiel 47:9, *Wherever the river goes, every living creature that swarms will live, and there will be very many fish, once these waters reach there. It will become fresh; and everything will live where the river goes.*
        - c) Waters from the temple will bless everything they touch.

- c. Contrast (38c), *'From his innermost being shall flow rivers of living water.'*
  - 1) The Feast of Tabernacles celebrated the temporary water provided during the wilderness wanderings.
  - 2) Jesus declared that He would provide rivers of living water.
- c. Conduit (39), *But this He spoke of the Spirit, whom those who believed in Him were to receive; for the Spirit was not yet given, because Jesus was not yet glorified.*
  - 1) Christians can experience this blessing now because the *living water* is the gift of the Holy Spirit.
  - 2) We are the temple of God today, 2 Corinthians 6:16, *What agreement has the temple of God with idols? For we are the temple of the living God; as God said, "I will live in them and walk among them, and I will be their God, and they shall be my people."*
- d. Contemplation
  - 1) Do I sense the blessing of God on my life?
  - 2) Are *living waters* flowing from within me?
  - 3) Am I a blessing to others?

## B. A Prescription for Spiritual Vitality

1. Reflect on God's love (37), *If any man is thirsty, let him come to me and drink.*
  - a. Unbelievers need relationship.
    - 1) Morgue illustration - a cadaver doesn't need exercise, it needs life; spiritual vitality demands spiritual life, John 5:24, *Very truly, I tell you, anyone who hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life, and does not come under judgment, but has passed from death to life.*
    - 2) *A medieval monk announced that he would be preaching the following Sunday evening on "The Love of God." The congregation gathered in the dimly lit cathedral. In the darkness of the altar, the monk lighted a candle and carried it to the crucifix. First, he illumined the crown of thorns, next, the two wounded hands, then the marks of the spear. He then blew out the candle and left the cathedral. There was nothing more that could be said. It is a relationship based on God's love manifested through Jesus Christ.*
  - b. Believers need fellowship.
    - 1) It is not based on what we do.
      - a) John Kavanaugh, a teen counselor, *Amy, aged 15, had always got straight As in school, and her parents were extremely upset when she got a B on her report card. "If I fail in what I do," she told her parents, "I fail in what I am."*
      - b) In our society, what we do is more than who we are.
    - 2) True worth is based on whose we are.
      - a) Christian are children of God, Galatians 3:26, *for in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith.*
      - b) And, joint-heirs of God with Christ, Romans 8:17, *and if children, then heirs, heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ—if, in fact, we suffer with him so that we may also be glorified with him.*
    - 3) It demands a signpost mentality
      - a) The nation of Israel placed signposts or markers, to commemorate God's faithful working in their lives.
      - b) Christians need to constantly look back to God's signposts, times when the divine intersects humanity.
      - c) In every believer's life, the first signpost is the Cross.
2. Recognize the need to love God (38), *From his innermost being shall flow rivers of living water*
  - a. Jesus promises satisfaction
    - 1) Living water will flow from one's innermost being.
    - 2) The actual word is belly which could be interpreted, one's heart.
  - b. Dissatisfaction comes from focusing on natural desires.
    - 1) It is deadly, Romans 8:13, *for if you live according to the flesh, you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live.*
    - 2) It is idolatrous, William Cowper's hymn, *O For a Closer Walk with God, The dearest idol I have known, Whate'er that idol be; Help me to tear it from Thy throne, and worship only thee.*

- c. Satisfaction comes from spiritual desires.
  - 1) G. K. Chesterton, *The true happiness is that we don't fit. We come from somewhere else. We have lost our way.*
  - 2) Living water flows from a heart in love with God, 1 Corinthians 2:9, *But, as it is written, "What no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the human heart conceived, what God has prepared for those who love him"—*
  - 3) Let's stop looking for the world to meet our deepest needs when our hearts long for our true home.
- d. Jesus' basic plan for spiritual satisfaction in Matthew 22:37-39.
  - 1) Love God with all your heart, and will all your soul, and with all your mind.
  - 2) Love your neighbor as yourself.
- 3. Respond to God's loving Gift (39), *But this He spoke of the Spirit, whom those who believed in Him were to receive ...*
  - a. The gift of the Holy Spirit is received by every believer.
    - 1) He baptizes (places) every believer into the Body of Christ, 1 Corinthians 12:13, *For in the one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and we were all made to drink of one Spirit.*
    - 2) He indwells every believer.
      - a) Romans 8:9, *But you are not in the flesh; you are in the Spirit, since the Spirit of God dwells in you. Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him.*
      - b) 1 Corinthians 3:16, *Do you not know that you are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in you?*
  - b. The filling of the Holy Spirit is available to every believer.
    - 1) He commands every believer be filled, Ephesians 5:18, *Do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery; but be filled with the Spirit,*
    - 2) He demands obedience.
      - a) Disobedience limits the flow of the Spirit, 1 Thessalonians 5:19, *Do not quench the Spirit.*
      - b) Obedience to the Spirit produces life and peace, Romans 8:6, *To set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace.*

<b>CONCLUSION</b>
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- A. True spirituality is possible because we are saints in the hands of a loving God.
  - 1. Reflect on God Who loves you.
  - 2. Recognize your need to love Him.
  - 3. Respond to His loving Gift of the Spirit.
- B. Too often we want intimacy with God but don't cultivate relationships with those for Whom God sent His Son.
  - 1. Husband, love your wife.
  - 2. Parents, love your children.
  - 3. Elders, love your flock.
- C. Bernard of Clairvaux, *Never despair of finding Him...Seek Him by desire, follow Him through action, and in faith you will find Him.*
- D. The psalmist clearly expressed a heart for God that will produce spiritual vitality, Psalm 73:25-26, *Whom have I in heaven but you? And earth has nothing I desire besides you. My flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the strength of my heart, and my portion forever.*
- E. Spiritual vitality is a promise from God for every Christian.
- F. May we rejoice that we are saints in the hands of a loving God.