

Living water from Jesus

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[0 : 00] So, the other day I watched a really interesting movie. It was a documentary about the 1980 hijacking of the Iranian embassy in London.

I don't know if you were around then, you might remember the news when that happened. Armed gunmen stormed into the embassy and took 26 hostages and held them captive for six days. It was a very tense period. And over that time, police negotiators contacted the hostage takers, finding out what their demands were, and tried to negotiate a peaceful solution to the crisis. But thing is, at the time, the prime minister was Margaret Thatcher. And she was known as the Iron Lady, and she had that reputation for a reason, because it became clear after a few days that negotiations were failing.

They weren't going anywhere. And so, Margaret Thatcher ordered, true to her reputation, she ordered the feared SAS special forces into the embassy, who, on her orders, stormed the embassy and, suffice to say, brought a quick and violent end to the crisis, leaving only one of the hostage takers alive.

[1 : 16] And it was, in fact, the first example of a government not being willing to negotiate anymore with terrorists, which, of course, is many Western governments' policies today.

But why am I talking about that? Well, as we pick up the story of Jesus in John 7, we find a similar kind of point of crisis in the story that we've been following along.

We find the enemies of Jesus in a similar position. So talking hasn't worked. Jesus has been trying to explain to the Jewish authorities who he is and why he came.

But it's clear that by now, by John 7, they've pretty much had enough. And so they make the decision by the end of this chapter to send in the big boys, the Jerusalem Temple Guard.

Now, this is kind of the closest thing you could get to the special forces of the day, because the Jerusalem Temple Guard, they were hand-picked warriors drawn from the tribe of Levi who were charged with the protection of the holiest site in Israel.

[2 : 22] They were no ordinary soldiers, no ordinary policemen. And so they, the top guards of the Jerusalem Temple were sent after Jesus.

Now, a funny thing is that not even they could arrest him when they eventually caught up with him and found him, because if it's not his time, which it wasn't, not even the Jerusalem Special Forces can touch Jesus.

And that is quite a striking thing. Just throughout this chapter, we see Jesus talking about his time and his time not yet coming. And no amount of resistance can stop him if his time has not yet come. He is in total control of what's going on, despite all the resistance against him. But that's not so much the point of this chapter. The bigger point of John 7 is to show us how, just how much Jesus' enemies have grown in their hostility towards him.

How they've come to the point of non-negotiation with him. And here, at this point in the story, they start making the arrangements for his eventual arrest and his execution, which is going to happen a mere six months after these events.

[3 : 30] And this is basically where the point of no return is. And here, as we read about this, as we read about the enemies of Jesus, we can't help but wonder why did Jesus have so many enemies in the first place?

Have you ever wondered that? What is it about this guy that made people want to kill him? It's a good question. Because lots of people wanted Jesus out of the picture.

Why? Well, that's what we get to find out in this chapter. Because we discover not just why people then wanted Jesus gone, but why, if he came today in today's world, the story would not be that different.

This passage, you see, doesn't only teach us why the Jewish authorities wanted to silence Jesus back then, 2,000 years ago. No, it teaches us something about ourselves.

It forces us to reflect on our own hearts and consider why, by nature, we all resist Jesus in our own way. We all want to silence him in our own way, whether or not we know it.

[4 : 40] That's what this chapter is really about. So let's have a look at what we learn. So it starts in Galilee, with Jesus' own brothers in his family urging him to go to Jerusalem and to publicly make a name for himself at the next major festival.

Great opportunity to get some exposure. Now, I wouldn't be surprised if his brothers, his family, was a bit embarrassed by him by this point, based on the last chapter, where Jesus had lost most of his followers.

You can look back to that if you weren't here last week. And so now, his brothers, they kind of take it upon themselves to act as his personal PR consultants, you know, to try to get his image back, to help him get his popularity back by going to Jerusalem.

But now, look at how he responds to them. It's very important to understand what he's saying here. So it's from verse 6. He says to them, Okay, so he's saying, first of all, that he's not actually here to get popular.

Rather, he's here to fulfill his father's mission in his father's time. He came to earth for a specific purpose, and it wasn't to win a popularity contest.

[6 : 00] And because of that, well, actually, because he's going about his father's mission, rather than seeking popularity, he says he'll never really get popular with the world.

He'll never be popular with the world, he says here. No matter how many miracles he does, no matter how great his teaching is, the people of the world will always hate him, he says. Now, this is a stark and sobering truth.

People of the world will always hate Jesus. Why? I mean, what's so bad about him? He seems like a nice enough guy. Well, Jesus tells us why the world will always hate him, because he testifies that their works are evil.

That's the simple truth. People didn't like Jesus. People wanted to kill him because of what he revealed to them about themselves. He revealed to them about themselves something that they didn't want to hear, namely that their works are evil.

Now, this is especially offensive, if you think about it, to the people that he was talking to, religious, super-religious Jews, who thought themselves, you know, very particular about obeying the law and doing good deeds and ticking boxes, and they made much effort to make sure that they were adhering to the law.

[7 : 22] But the thing about Jesus is that he sees past all of that outward pretense. He sees the heart. Jesus sees the motives. He knows all men, we learned earlier in John. He knows what is behind people's outward actions.

And he sees that these people's hearts, despite all their law-keeping, despite all their religion, their hearts are actually against God rather than for him.

And then he goes on to give us an example of this in verse 19. So he eventually does go to Jerusalem for this feast, and then he confronts the Jewish leaders, the religious Jews at the temple, and he shows them how, despite their religion, their hearts are actually intent on doing evil, not good.

And this is how he does it. Let's look from verse 19. Has not Moses given you the law? Yet not one of you keeps the law. Why are you trying to kill me? You are demon-possessed, the crowd answered.

Who is trying to kill you? Jesus said to them, I did one miracle, and you are all amazed. Yet because Moses gave you circumcision, though actually it didn't come from Moses but from the patriarchs, you circumcise a boy on the Sabbath.

[8 : 32] Now if a boy can be circumcised on the Sabbath so that the law of Moses may not be broken, why are you angry with me for healing a man's whole body on the Sabbath? Stop judging by mere appearances, but instead judge correctly.

Okay, so what is Jesus talking about here? He's referring to the miracle that he did back in John chapter 5 that we saw a few weeks ago. Remember how he healed that crippled guy on the Sabbath, and then he got into trouble with the Jewish leaders for working on the Sabbath.

They said he was breaking the law, and they were very angry with him. They actually wanted to execute him for that. They took it that seriously. And so here he says, okay, think back to that. Think back to that miracle. You ignored the miracle and rather decided you want to kill me for healing on the Sabbath. But now take the example of circumcising a baby boy that according to the law has to be circumcised on the eighth day after birth.

What if the eighth day falls on the Sabbath? What are you going to do? Well, you're going to do the work of performing the circumcision, and that's fine. Well, how much more important is it to work on the Sabbath to heal a man?

[9 : 38] And yet instead of recognizing me for who I am, you condemned me. So you see his point. He's showing these religious people their double standards.

These Jews condemned him for doing something that they themselves do. That's the point he's making here. Now why did they condemn him? This is the interesting point. Why did they condemn Jesus for doing something that they themselves do?

Because, well, they were never really interested in what God actually wants. And they were never really interested in whether Jesus is from God or not. They were only looking in the law for a way to kill Jesus.

They weren't looking in the law for a way to please God, but they were using the law as an excuse to, you know, have ammunition against Jesus. They were abusing God's word.

And so in pretending to be really good, law-abiding religious people, they showed that they were actually lawbreakers at heart. They were actually murderers.

[10 : 38] The complete opposite to the image they try to portray. And that is Jesus' point here. His point is to expose how people use religion to cover up their sinful hearts.

And not only then, because it's as true today, isn't it? How people use religion to cover up what's really sinful, what's wrong inside.

People are often very particular, aren't they, about keeping religious rules and ticking boxes and doing good works while ignoring all the time that their hearts still have evil, selfish thoughts and motives.

And in fact, the more religion people do, the more boxes they tick, the less that they have to admit what's wrong inside. People use religion to cover up their sinful motives, then and today.

But you see, Jesus, now Jesus comes along into our world, and he has a tendency to expose those motives like no one else can do. And that's why people don't want to listen to him.

[11 : 48] Especially these Jews who spent their whole lives covering up their sinful hearts, and now Jesus comes and blows the cover off it, and exposes them for who they really are.

No wonder they wanted to kill him. No wonder they don't want to listen to him. Not because... And I say again, it's the same today.

People don't want to listen to Jesus. Not because they've got a legitimate problem with him. But because he shows people up for who they really are. He speaks the truth, and the truth hurts.

The truth hurts. We don't like to hear the truth about ourselves, do we? No. We don't like to hear the truth about ourselves when people tell us. But we especially don't like to hear the truth about ourselves when God, who knows us inside out, tells us.

Because the truth hurts. And so people will find any excuse to ignore Jesus. And we see that as well in this passage. Did you notice, when Adrian was reading it, how many times people mention where Jesus is from?

[12 : 54] Do you notice that? They had these debates about where Jesus was from. Now, what's their obsession with that? Well, let's look at it. So, verse 27, you can just look in your Bibles. He says, but we know where this man is from.

When the Messiah comes, no one will know where he's from. Verse 41, still others ask, how can the Messiah come from Galilee? Does not Scripture say that the Messiah will come from David's descendants and from Bethlehem, the town where David lived?

Verse 52, they replied, are you from Galilee too? Look into it, and you will find that a prophet does not come out of Galilee. Okay, so all these references to talking about where Jesus is from.

But what's interesting, first of all, to notice is how these statements already contradict each other.

Did you notice that? So, the first one, when the Messiah comes, no one will know where he's from. And yet, a few verses later, they say, when the Messiah comes, he'll come from Bethlehem.

Okay, so you do know where he's going to come from. And then the Jewish leaders, getting crossed with Nicodemus for sticking up with Jesus later, they say, well, look into it, and you will find that a prophet does not come out of Galilee.

[13:59] Which is a weird thing to say, seeing that both Nahum and Jonah, recognized Old Testament prophets, actually came from Galilee. And besides, they obviously hadn't looked into it themselves, otherwise they would have discovered that Jesus was actually born in Bethlehem.

But the point of all this, the reason of all these contradictions, and all of these kind of denials of the truth, is that they don't want the truth.

You see, they're just using this argument about his origin, his birthplace, as a way to ignore the truth. And we see it over and over again. They want any excuses not to listen to Jesus.

The leaders and the people alike, they're clutching at any straws they can find for a reason to ignore Jesus. But again, this chapter teaches us about ourselves.

It teaches us about human nature in general. People in every age have been trying to find reasons to ignore Jesus, haven't they? Many scholars today, scholars, Bible scholars, trained in the Bible, people with far more degrees in the Bible than I have, spend their careers trying to disprove the reliability of the biblical accounts.

[15:15] Why? For an objective pursuit of the truth? No. It's because they don't want to have to listen to Jesus, and so they will do anything they can to find a reason not to listen to him.

And so will you, and so will I, by nature. If you're a Christian this morning, think back to when, if you can, think back to before you became a Christian.

Why did you ignore Jesus before that time? You had your own reasons. You did. You rationalized it in your head as to why what Jesus says is not applicable to you, why you don't need to hear what he says.

You had your own reasons for ignoring Jesus, because that's what people do. That's what human nature is programmed to do, to ignore God, to try to silence God when he speaks.

And of course, because God has ultimately spoken in his son, Jesus Christ, the proof of people wanting to silence God is seen in how they treat Jesus today.

[16:23] It's not for no reason that he is the only historical figure whose name is used as a swear word. No other historical figure bothers people, but Jesus bothers people.

Why? Because he is God's word. And when we hear God's word, what do we learn? We learn that we are sinners. It exposes our hearts for what they really are.

We learn that we are fallen, that we are under God's wrath, and that even our seemingly good works are done with evil intent, and that we are far more corrupt than we like to think.

And even now you might be listening to this and saying no, and wanting to leave, or wanting to shut this off. But that only proves that it's true, doesn't it? Jesus says, the world hates me because I testify that its works are evil, then and today.

And if that's true, if that's our worldly nature, and we all have a worldly nature because we are all originally people of the world, right? We come from the world.

[17:32] We were born into the world and into the world's ways of thinking. And so if that's true, if what Jesus is saying here is true, it has implications for us. We've got to come to realize something about our own natures, our own worldly natures.

Because what this is saying is that your nature, my nature, is to silence God. That is our instinct. Our instinct is to run away from Jesus rather than towards him.

You know, while part of you might really want to open your Bible and read and go to church and listen, there's another part of you that wants to keep that Bible closed and wants to keep you away from church.

Because your human nature will look for any excuse, any distraction to keep you away from Jesus, to silence him during your week.

What distractions does your human nature look for intently to keep you away from Jesus? It does, doesn't it? Every day your human nature is looking for something, some reason to ignore God.

[18:42] To silence God. Are you going to let it? You see, we must realize that if we give into that, our natural instinct, it is going to destroy us.

It is ultimately self-destructive because Jesus came to save you from that very nature. Jesus came to save you from that worldly person who is a sinner against a holy God, who is that rebel, who is under God's wrath and will face God's judgment.

Jesus came to save you from being that person. And that is the good news here. Jesus came to save you from that very person that keeps you away from God.

because look at what he goes on to offer us in verse 37. You see, despite all the hostility of the Jews and despite their obvious desire to shut him up, to silence him, he still, still, patiently, graciously, undeservedly offers them something amazing.

Look what he offers them. Verse 37. On the last and greatest day of the festival, Jesus stood and said in a loud voice, Let anyone who is thirsty come to me and drink.

[20 : 09] Whoever believes in me, as scripture has said, rivers of living water will flow from within them. By this, he meant the Spirit, whom those who believed in him were later to receive.

Now, as we read through the section of John, Jesus is attending a number of Jewish festivals. And the festivals he attends are actually important background information.

At the moment, he's at the festival of tabernacles. And it was a remembrance, an eight-day holiday, remembering how Israel camped in the wilderness, in the desert, and how to keep them alive, God supplied water to them.

And so on the last day of this festival that Jesus is at, the greatest day, there was a special water-pouring ceremony that the Jews had in Jerusalem.

They would go get water from the Pool of Siloam. They would take it with a convoy through to the temple, and they would pour it out at the altar to commemorate God's provision of life to his people.

[21 : 13] And it's here. It's at this day. Probably, I wouldn't be surprised if it's as they're taking this water through and pouring it out, that Jesus stands up and says, whoever is thirsty, come to me and drink.

See, it's got real significance at that moment. Because what he's saying is that God is providing life again through him, eternal life.

Not just life temporarily to survive in the desert, but eternal life to survive in eternity, even though we're sinners. Even though we're thirsty.

Even though we can't supply that life to ourselves. Jesus is offering us that life through dying on the cross for those sins that destroy us.

That is why he can offer this new life. So that's his message. Jesus, that God is providing life again. And it's through Jesus Christ, who was going to go on to die for sinners six months later.

[22 : 14] But that's not all. Because we know after Jesus died, he rose again. And what he talks about here, what he did when he rose again, is that he sent his spirit to live, to dwell in those who believe in him, those who trust in him.

And that is the water that he's talking about here. That is the true water that gives life. And we need that spirit. We need that water. Because, think about it, there's no way that a rebellious sinner who is programmed to ignore God can have any real relationship with him and have eternal life.

It's impossible. Unless their heart is changed. Unless they are reprogrammed. And that's what the Holy Spirit does in the life of a believer.

He reprograms us. He comes to live in us. And through the word, he changes us and gives us what we need to listen to God and obey him.

Things that we are unable to do apart from the work of the Spirit. Let's not underestimate the work of the Holy Spirit. Which, I must admit, churches of the more conservative conviction are often prone to do to ignore the Holy Spirit.

[23 : 32] To ignore the active, living, spiritual work that he does in us day to day. We mustn't ignore the work of the Spirit. We must realize from this chapter, if nothing else, how much we need the Holy Spirit every day in our lives.

The point of this chapter, I think, is to prove to us how much we need this water, the Holy Spirit that Jesus is offering. Because we've seen, haven't we, that all people are naturally inclined to silence God.

You and me included. And so the first thing we need to take from this, there's basically two things I think we need to take this morning from this chapter as we conclude. The first thing is to realize how important it is to let the Holy Spirit dwell and work in us day to day.

And how do we let the Holy Spirit work in us? How do we allow the Holy Spirit to do that reprogramming? Well, we do it through the Christian disciplines that God has given us and encourages us to do in His Word.

Of course, the first and primary Christian discipline is reading the Word, spending time in God's Word. We don't just read the Word to learn stuff. We don't just read the Word to increase our knowledge.

[24 : 48] We read the Word, we spend time in God's Word because the Word is the Spirit's primary instrument of spiritual surgery, if you like. You know how doctors, they've got their various instruments that they use on the operating table, the scalpel, all the other stuff that I don't know.

But they've got these tools that they use to perform surgery. The Spirit, the Holy Spirit has a tool to perform spiritual surgery on you and it is this.

but it doesn't work if it's closed. You've got to let the Holy Spirit work on you through the spiritual discipline of spending time in the Word but also the spiritual discipline of prayer.

There's many spiritual disciplines. Prayer, fellowship, reading the Word, meditation on His Word.

But the discipline of prayer is vital as well in allowing the Holy Spirit to work on you.

Asking Him, actually asking the Spirit daily to reprogram how you think, to change your desires and your attitudes. Are those the kind of things you pray for? Or is it just, Lord, please help me in my job today.

[25 : 58] Please provide for my family. Please protect me. Are you praying, Lord, work in me. Change my desires. Help me to turn from my sin. Teach me how to obey God and to desire what God wants in my life.

Are you praying those things in your life? Because He will do that if you let Him. He will work on you, but He doesn't force His way on you.

You've got to let Him work on you. And that's the first thing I think we take away from this chapter. It's just a stark reminder of how much we need the Spirit to work in our lives.

But there's another thing this chapter teaches us. And that is that we mustn't be surprised when other people react in a hostile way when we talk about Jesus. We mustn't be surprised.

God willing, later on this afternoon, the St. Mark's outreach team is going to go in our community and share the gospel with our neighbors. Please pray for us as we do that.

[26 : 59] But I already know not everyone will react well to that. Not everyone we speak to is going to like what we have to say. I mean, look at all the reactions Jesus Himself got in this passage.

some people will be openly hostile when we share the news of Jesus with them. But even then, we needn't be surprised at that given what we learn here.

And we needn't be deterred by that. We must keep going because the very fact that they resist us is proof that they desperately need what we have to give them. Which is the news of how God offers them rescue from themselves.

Rescue from their own sinful nature that they are trapped in. Their own sinful nature that forces them to have no choice but to resist God, to shut God up in their lives.

Jesus comes to offer them rescue from that. And He comes to offer more. He comes to offer living water. The promise of His Spirit to dwell in those who come to Jesus by faith.

[28 : 10] So that despite their rebellion they can come and they can drink without limit. And they can find eternal life. What great news that is. What a great rescue.

Such is the grace of God for hopeless sinners. And that's the final thing that we realize in this chapter. Just the grace of God.

These Jews didn't deserve anything that Jesus has offered them. And despite all the hostility, despite all of the resistance against them, despite their desires to kill Him, He still offers them living water.

Because that is why He's come to this earth to save us from ourselves. To save us from the very natures that don't want to hear from Him. Such is the grace of God for hopeless sinners.

So let's finish by praying for His Spirit to continue to work in us in this coming week and beyond. Let me pray for us all. Let's bow our heads.

[29 : 07] Yes, Lord, we thank You for this reminder in Your Word. The sobering reminder of our sinful natures and how we're so prone to ignore You and to shut You down in our lives.

Lord, we thank You for Your grace that undeserved sinners like us can come back to You in a real relationship through Your Holy Spirit who You offer to us without limit. Lord Jesus, thank You for Your sacrifice on the cross to pay for our sins.

And we pray, Lord, that Your Holy Spirit would work in us, would reprogram our thoughts and our minds to cause us to orient our lives towards You and not away from You.

Lord, help us to avoid those distractions in this coming week that our sinful natures are looking for to take us away from You. Help us to spot those distractions and to be disciplined in our Christian disciplines of reading Your Word, spending time with You, praying.

Lord, help us not to quench the Spirit. Help us not to stop or impede the Spirit from working in our lives this week and beyond. And so be with us, change us, transform us into the people You want us to be.

[30 : 25] In Jesus' name we pray. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen.