

Series: Vision Sunday

There is More

John 7:37-39

Sermon by Lead Pastor Paul Joslin

Waterstone Community Church, Littleton, Colorado

Sunday morning, September 7, 2025

Good morning. Come on. “Good morning.” Thank you. I am Tim Lancaster. I am one of a series of guys with short hair and half beards who will be talking to you this morning. No, we are going to do a reading from John 7:37-39: “On the last and greatest day of the festival, Jesus stood and said in a loud voice, ‘Let anyone, anyone, anyone who is thirsty, come to me and drink. 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. Up to that time, the Spirit had not been given, since Jesus had not yet been glorified,” the word of the Lord. “Thanks be to God.”

Paul: Short-haired guys with a half-beard, I think I resemble that. It is good to be with you today. This is a little bit of a weird weekend, if I am honest with you. I am sure all of you saw the e-mail that went out or the app notification that we had to cancel Saturday night service last night, which was really weird for us. The whole neighborhood did not have power. Around 1:30 p.m., they said it was supposed to be back on. It did not come back on. They said by 6:30 p.m., we should have it back, and that is like way after service is over, unless I go really long, and so we were like, that is not going to work, and we actually thought for a little bit. I thought maybe we should just have Saturday night meet outside and do our thing acoustic style, and that would be fine, but the more I thought about it and I talked with Billy, we made the decision to move everyone to Sunday, because this weekend is Vision Weekend at Waterstone, and I just thought, man, I would love for everybody to be together, and so if you are usually a Saturday night, attendee, welcome. We love you. So glad you are here on Sunday. If you see someone that you do not recognize, it is probably because they attend a different service from you, and so make sure to say hello to them, but here is the thing. When we get to this time of year, the week after Labor Day, we almost always try to do a vision weekend where we talk about where we are going as a church, and sometimes we will unleash new initiatives or maybe like a three-year plan for where we are going and what we want to do, and it is probably not that different than maybe rhythms that you have in your own life.

A couple of weekends ago, Stephanie and I were starting fall. Our kids are going back to school, and we realized like, man, we need to have like a team meeting, right? We got to figure out who is going where, when, what are we doing with our finances, how we are like going to stay on the same page with all of the chaos and the different things that are pulling attention in different directions, and so we hired a babysitter, Addie Deutschman. I don’t know, is Addie here today? Nope, she’s not. She is our babysitter. One of the great things about being in a church is there are a lot of good babysitters in our student program, and so you can, yeah, you should get a babysitter from here, but we called Addie, and we were like, “Hey, Addie, we really need some help. Can you come watch our kids for a few hours? We are going to go get coffee,” and then we got a room at the library. We got a big whiteboard, and we tried to write out our whole calendar for the fall and our schedule and taking pictures of it and trying to figure things out, right?

That is a little bit of what today is. There is no whiteboard up here with me, but we are going to have just a little bit of a conversation about where we are headed as a church, and one of the things you have to talk about when you want to talk about where you are going is where you are now, and so I just want to pause for a moment and give you some of the highlights of where we have been this past year.

Many of you know, unless you are relatively new, that we went through our first pastoral transition this past year. It was about November of last year, so we are coming up on almost a year that I have been the lead pastor here, and it has honestly, it has been such a great year. Thank you, one person. No, that is, it has been such a great year. There are different markers for how we can look at the health of the church. Any time a church goes through a transition from one lead pastor to another, what they often say is you should expect a dip in giving and attendance. We have not seen either of those. In fact, we have had one of the healthier years financially that we have had as a church in the last few years, so we are so grateful for the generosity of this church. It is awesome. If you are going to clap for me, clap for you. We have not seen a dip in attendance. We have actually been growing a little bit, which is beautiful to see.

One of the things I am most excited about is we have already baptized over twenty people this year, which is phenomenal, and personally, I just have to say I am really excited about what is happening in our student program and our kids' ministry. We intentionally went into this year, and we put a little bit more effort, resources, and energy into our kids and our next Gen programming, so we hired Kay Szyugi at the beginning of the year to be our associate kids' director. I am not sure if she is in the room. She is probably working with kids, but she has been awesome. We hired Hannah Arata, who is leading the middle school ministry right now as our student pastor. She has been phenomenal. They are both crushing it, so excited about what is happening there.

I do not know if you know this, but actually, there have been studies that have been done, and for years and years and years, it was saying and telling us that the next generation is leaving the church in droves, and I want to tell you the tide is actually turning, and what we are seeing is that actually this generation right here is one of the only generations in America for whom attendance in church is actually increasing right now. They are coming back to church, so we are really excited about what is happening with the next Gen, and we want to see that here. Truthfully, I think if there was a hiccup that I would point to, it is probably Wednesdays at Waterstone. Signups have been a little low for that. I am not sure I picked the great classes for you and if there is a lot of interest there, and so we are a little low there, which is a bummer, but if you want to sign up, there is still about a week left to do so.

Here is what I would say, even just on a personal level, is that it has been such a joy to lead this church for the past year. When I think of the last year and all that God has done here, the baptisms and people that have given their lives to Jesus and proclaimed faith for Him, when I think of how generous this church is, or honestly, I was just blown away standing up here with my wife and just listening to how loudly you worship. It is such a gift to lead this church. You guys show up for each other by providing meals when someone is going through a hard time. It is just such a privilege to be a part of this church and to be asked to lead it, and I am so grateful. Even just on a very personal level, the number of people in this church who have come up to me or my wife Steffi this year and have just said, "Hey, we are praying for you. We know that you are a young family. We know that you have two kids under six, and Steffi is getting a PhD, and you stepped into this new role before you expected to," and the number of people who have

just supported us through prayer and made that vocal has been such a gift to my family. It means more than you know, so there are so many beautiful things that are happening here.

Now when it comes to a Vision Sunday, what often happens and what pastors typically do is they outline the five-year plan, the new initiatives, the things that they want to do, and to be honest with you, I do not know that I am like a lot of pastors, and that is not what I am going to do with you today. What I would like to do with you instead is just pretend that we are sitting down for coffee and that you asked me, “Hey, Paul, what are your hopes and dreams for Waterstone?” and this message is the answer to that question, and as I was thinking about diving into this message, about what my hopes and dreams are for Waterstone, and it has been rattling around within me for the last couple of months. We had our baptism at the lake event a couple of weeks ago, and there was a student there who she has actually just graduated, but her name is Hailey Cole, and she shared her story, and I am going to invite her up, because when she, yeah, you guys can welcome Hailey right now. When Haley shared her story at outdoor baptism, it just captured in so many ways the answer to this question of what my hopes and dreams are for our church, and so I asked her a couple weeks ago if she would be willing to share. She has just graduated this past year, and this year she is currently serving and working with Outdoor Lab, so if any of you have kids that are in Outdoor Lab, they might see Hailey up in the mountains and stuff. She also does P.E. here at the preschool on Mondays, and this is the craziest thing. Her family moved here about 14 years ago, 15 years ago. She was in kindergarten at Waterstone, and now she is here serving in so many different capacities. We are so thankful for her. Can you just tell us a little bit about yourself before you dive into your story?

Hailey: Of course. Paul: Oh, are we off? There you go. Hailey: Okay, so I, well, Paul already told you, but I grew up here. I have been here since I was in kindergarten. My mom has been a teacher here for the better half of the last decade, and she has passed on her love of teaching to me. That is why I am at Outdoor Lab now, and yeah, that is what I have for you. Paul: Yeah, awesome. I am going to turn it over to you, and I would just love for you to share your story with us.

Hailey: All right, so this is my testimony that I wrote for my baptism. I have grown up in the church. My Sundays were spent learning about God and questioning his existence. It is hard for me to admit this, but when I was twelve, I actually started to cringe at the thought of Christianity. I would never fully believe or say that I was Christian, but I was also very careful to never fully say that I was not. I now know that was God holding on to me, even when I did not want him to. John 7:38: “Whoever believes in me, as scripture has said, rivers of living water will flow from within them.” The night I gave my life to Jesus, I felt that river flowing through me. I did not really understand what that feeling was until I started reading John with my dad, and now I know that it was the Holy Spirit bringing me home. I had no idea how thirsty I was for God’s love until I felt the living water flow within me, and now I will drink from that water for all of my eternal life. John 4:14: “But whoever drinks the water I give them will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give them will become in them a spring of water welling up to eternal life.”

Paul: Thank you so much. We appreciate it. Thank you for sharing your story. When Haley shared her story at baptism a couple of weeks ago, she quoted from this passage that Tim just read to you and that has been sitting in my heart for the last couple of months. I do not know if you caught it in her story, but her journey started with a little bit of skepticism, a little bit of cringe around Christianity, and God did

not let go of her, and now she has experienced what life with God is like, and I am so grateful for her sharing that story, because that is so much of what my hope is for Waterstone.

If there was a phrase that as I have been thinking about today and our time together, it has been rattling around in my heart and in my soul, it is the phrase, “There is more.” There is more that I think is available to us. God is doing so many incredible things at our church, but my answer to the question about what my hopes and dreams are for Waterstone is that we would experience this reality, that there is more.

I do not know if you resonate with this, but throughout my journey in Christianity and following Jesus, there have been different times in my life when I have felt a little bit of cringe around Christianity. Like, is this really all that there is? Is this really what I want to give my life to? Is this really the thing that is most important? Is this really the thing that is worth dedicating all of who I am to? And sometimes that answer comes back. I do not know if you have experienced this disappointment with the church or questions that you can’t find answers to, or maybe the Bible does not make sense to you in some sort of way, and you just get to that place where you are like, “I am not quite sure.”

Maybe it is not even any of those things. Maybe it is just that slow malaise of life where you are just tired and distracted and worn out, and you come to church on Sundays because that is what you do with your family, but if you were to honestly assess your relationship with Jesus, you would not say that you are experiencing the abundant living waters of Jesus Christ in your life, that maybe things are a little dry. Maybe you are spiritually dehydrated a bit, and the teaching today from Jesus addresses that longing that I think so many of us encounter. So many of us experience this spiritual dehydration, and Jesus in John 7, stands before a community of people that is not unlike this one, and He proclaims these words. They are gathered together for a festival in front of the temple in Jerusalem, and He says this. “On the last day of the festival, Jesus stood and said in a loud voice.”

Now I want you to imagine for a moment, just pause and get a picture of what Jesus is doing. It is a worship service not unlike this one, but it is a festival, so it might be more akin to like Christmas Eve for us, where everybody is gathered together. There is energy, there is excitement, and there is enthusiasm. Everybody is worshiping until their throats are raw. There is a longing in their eyes for Jesus to come and show up in their lives, and in that moment, as the worship service is coming to a crescendo, Jesus stands in front of everyone who is worshiping, and He turns the attention of everyone on Himself by saying in a loud voice, “Let anyone who is thirsty come to me and drink,” but can you imagine the interruption in this moment? When everybody is gathered together, they are worshiping, they are longing, they are crying out to God, they want God to show up in their lives, and Jesus cuts through all of it and says, “Hey, if you want God to show up in your life, you should look at me. I am the one that you are all longing for,” and He goes on to say, not only, “Let anyone who is thirsty come to me and drink,” but then He says, “Whoever believes in me, as scripture has said, rivers of living water will flow from within them.”

Now there is so much that we can unpack about this story and what Jesus is doing here, but to really understand Jesus’ interruption of this worship service where He turns everyone’s attention on Himself and He says, “I am the thing that you have been longing for. If you are thirsty, you need to come to me, and I will give you the living waters of life,” and what Jesus is doing in this moment is He is actually pulling on a thread that goes all the way back to the very beginning of scripture. As He steps into the story, he is asking everyone there to step into a very particular story that he is trying to call their

attention to, and He says this line, “Whoever believes in me, as scriptures have said, rivers of living water will flow from them.” The question is, what scriptures is Jesus talking about that said living waters will flow from them? What kind of thread is He pulling on here from scripture?

As I said, it goes all the way back to Genesis, all the way back to the very beginning. The first place we encounter waters in scripture is in the very first lines of scripture: “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth, and the earth was formless and empty. Darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters.” In the ancient Near East, the waters, and what is happening here in the creation story is that they were not calm. If you talk about water, you may think of something like a babbling brook on a mountainside. It might be something that is calm and peaceful to you, but waters in the ancient world, they were symbolic of chaos, of disorder, of the unknown, of uncertainty, and so what the pages of scripture are telling us from the very beginning is that the earth was formless and void. It was chaos. It was disorder, and the waters were just tumultuous, and there was chaos everywhere, and the Spirit of God is hovering over those waters, and as God begins to speak, the Spirit of God begins to take that disorder and create order, and so we see things like land coming up out of the chaos of the sea, or light coming out of darkness, and we see God taking the things that are disordered, that are scary, that are unknown, and creating order and peace and a place for people to exist with Him. We see that out of this chaos, God brings a garden named Eden, and you know how Eden is described is that at the center of the garden, we think of the two trees, but near the two trees at the center of the garden, there was a river watering the garden that flowed from Eden into the world, and so we see this idea of waters again. What is the point? What am I trying to say? It is that what we see in the very beginning of scripture is that God is channeling the chaos of water into a river that gives life to the garden and to the world beyond. The story that we see from the very beginning is that the Spirit of God takes what is dark and terrifying and makes it into an oasis teeming with full and vibrant life.

Now we know that is not how the story ends, because we just look around at anything that is going on in our world, and we say, well, it does not look like it is a calm, peaceful place teeming with life. Instead, we have an order of chaos and disorder, and we have a world full of violence and people struggling, and we know that very early on in the story, this perfect oasis that God created devolved into chaos. Adam and Eve rebelled, and God had to exile them from the garden, and He sent them away, and what we are told is they went east of Eden, and as they went east of Eden, they spread the disease that was within them everywhere they went, and so their sons, they committed acts of violence, and their sons and daughters committed acts of depravity, and this disease spreads throughout the entire world, and everything begins to fall apart, and what we had once experienced as a world of joy and delight and wonder became a place of confusion and dysfunction and disorder.

Every day when we wake up, we feel the thirst of living in a world that is not as it should be. We experience marriages that fall apart. We experience the difficulties and the challenges of parenting kids in the modern world. We experience the violence and the depravity of our fellow man as we harm one another in the workplace or in international affairs. We see evidence everywhere we look of a world that was created to be beautiful and ordered, that has devolved into disorder, into chaos, into dysfunction, and it leaves us with a longing for something to be better. That is the story that God steps into, and the story that begins with this image of waters and chaos and symbolizing death and dysfunction and disorder, as

scripture progresses, the waters begin to represent something different. They begin to represent not disorder, dysfunction, or chaos, but actually the waters in scripture begin to represent the presence of God Himself, the Spirit of the living God coming to live amongst his people, and so if you go to Proverbs or Psalms or the different prophets, you will see this imagery of waters popping up all over the place, and it is this symbolism that God is doing something in the midst of the disorder, the chaos, and the dysfunction, that God is working to bring back order through his Spirit.

There is not really a place in scripture that is clearer on this idea than the prophet Ezekiel. In Ezekiel 47, the prophet sees something stunning. He is given this vision where he is ushered into the temple in the throne room of God, and he sees at the throne room of God this trickle of water that begins to come down from the throne room of God, and as it flows away from the throne room of God, it begins to grow and grow and grow, and he is invited to the banks, and he sees this trickle become a stream, become a river, become a flood of God's presence entering into the world, and it gets so deep that he initially wades in, and it is only knee deep, and then he continues to wade in as this flood begins to grow, and suddenly he is just swimming in this current, and this river, it flows into the desert, and beyond the desert it flows into the Dead Sea.

Now, have you heard the joke about why the Dead Sea is dead? Does anyone know? Because it is dead. There is nothing that grows in it at all. It is lifeless. It cannot grow anything in the Dead Sea. It is actually nine percent saltier than any ocean on planet Earth, and so nothing grows there. Fish can't live there. Nothing organic can grow in the Dead Sea, and as this flood from the throne room of God flows into the Dead Sea, do you know what happens? Ezekiel sees this vision of the Dead Sea, the salt water of the Dead Sea being turned into a body of water that can support life, and the saltiness of the water becomes fresh water, and he suddenly sees that in this water that once killed anything within it, that suddenly it is teeming with fish and with life, and fishermen come from all over the world to fish its shores, because there is so much life there. In his vision, he sees these trees that suddenly line the banks of the Dead Sea that are growing deep roots, and they are getting the nutrients that they need, and the fruit is so good that it feeds all of the nation, so there is no more hunger, and the leaves from the tree are so healthy that they actually heal disease and sickness of the world. Ezekiel sees this vision of this stream flowing from the presence of God, from the throne room of God into the world, making life come from where things have been dead.

Ezekiel longed for what we long for. He longed for God's presence that could heal the world, and just like us, Ezekiel and the other prophets, they knew what it was to be spiritually dry, to go through the motions of faith and to wonder why it feels incomplete, to do all of the religious things, but to still feel restless, and they were thirsty for more. This vision that Ezekiel has turns into this festival, this religious ceremony that the ancient Israelites would do every year. It was called the Festival of the Tabernacle. where everybody would travel to Jerusalem, and they would live in tents for the week, and they would celebrate for seven days, and it was this amazing festival of feasting and worship and everybody gathering together to celebrate God's presence, and then the pinnacle of this festival, the high point of worship, was where the priests, they would gather together, and they would get these big cisterns, these big jars of water, and they would go to the temple, and they would take these jars of water, and they would pour out the water on the steps of the temple, and it would begin to flood the city of Jerusalem, reenacting this prophetic

vision that Ezekiel had. They would pour out the water, and everybody would be singing hymns and worshipping, and everybody's throat would be raw, and the cry of the people, the prayer of the people in this moment was, "God, please send the river. Pour out your Spirit. Make us whole again." They are crying out, asking for God to make that prophetic vision come true, make our world whole, heal the nations, bring life where there is no life. They are crying out this deep longing that we all have since the very beginning of the story, this deep ache that we carry for more life, life that is more than what we can manufacture on our own, more than our better schedule or more vacations or another cup of coffee that pushes us through the day. They are asking and longing for living water that will change their lives and that is powerful enough to change the nations.

That is their cry, and it was this moment that the entire week had been building towards, this celebration, and in that moment of longing and crying out for God, that is the moment that Jesus chooses to stand up in front of everyone and say in a loud voice, "Let anyone who is thirsty come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as the scriptures have said, rivers of living water will flow from within them." Jesus takes the climax, the pinnacle of this entire celebration, and He turns and directs everyone's attention to Himself, and He says, "Are you thirsty? Have you ever looked at the world and looked at your life and felt like it is not quite enough? Have you ever had that experience where you feel like you are doing all of the right things and going through all the right festivals and showing up to all the right worship, and it still feels like you are restless in your religion? Because the thing that you are longing for is not a better schedule. It is not a better worship service. It is not a better preacher. What you are longing for is found only in me. If you are thirsty, come to me, and you will find the source of life that you have always been looking for, that within me you will experience rivers of living water that will flow through you and into the world." Jesus takes this entire story of how we experience thirst and spiritual dehydration, and He says, "The whole reason that you are searching for meaning and purpose and finding the world wanting is because you are looking for it in the wrong places. I am the only one who can satisfy the deepest longings in your soul, and all you have to do is come to me, and you will find what you are looking for."

The question is, what do we do about this story, and what does this have to do with Vision Sunday? It was like, "Paul, I thought you were just going to give us five things that we want to do as a church this next year, and that sounded fine, and then I can go home and watch football, go Broncos, right?" That is the thing that we expect, and here is why I did not want to do that today. It is because we could come up with five strategic things. We could come up with a new vision. We could have some sort of plan for initiatives and things we want to try to do, but if we miss this, if we get all of the programs and all of the things that people want and all of the things that people need, but we miss the presence, then it does not matter at all. It does not matter at all.

When Jesus stands up at the middle of this ceremony, and He says, "Anyone who is thirsty can come to me and find what they are looking for," there is an assumption Jesus is making. He is not saying, "If anyone happens to be thirsty at some point in their life." What He is saying is, "Anyone can come to me, because all of you are thirsty. Anyone is welcome to come to me, because everyone is looking for something that will fill them up and that will satisfy them, and only I am able to do that." So, the question we have to ask as a church and something we need to wrestle with is, "Do we recognize that the world is desperate for Jesus? Do we realize that we have what the world is longing to experience?"

Sometimes I think, and I will say this humbly as someone who has lived this and walked this for so many years, that I can get into this place where I am so familiar with Jesus, that I have been walking with Him for so long that I forget how good He actually is, and I just think, “Yeah, Jesus is like the better option out of a bunch of options,” but what Jesus is saying is that He is the only option to people finding what it is that they need and what they are looking for. When we look at the world, do we recognize that what they long for, what they need, what they are searching for and trying to find in a better family schedule or in raising their kids a certain way or trying to get them a certain job or a certain house or whatever it is that they are scrolling through their phone to try to find, all of those things will leave them empty and lifeless, and that what they need is Jesus. When we are walking with our friends to school, when we walk into our places of work, and we see the coworker who is struggling, do we think to ourselves, “Do you know what that person really needs? It is not a pay raise, not their boss that is terrible to be fired, but Jesus.” Is that what we believe? What Jesus is saying is, what He is claiming is that everyone in the world is thirsty and longing for Him.

I do not know if you know this, but it is estimated, and it depends on what study you go with and where you look, but it is estimated that ten percent of the people of the Front Range or the Denver metro area, the area that most of us live in, ten percent of the Front Range would say that they go to a Jesus-following church. I want you to think about that for a moment. That means that nine out of ten people that you interact with on a daily basis, whether it is at the grocery store or at Starbucks or at your school or at your work or at your kids’ soccer practice, nine out of ten people do not know that Jesus is the one who will satisfy the longing of their souls. That almost makes this part of the city an unreached people group. Like we are not far away from those kinds of statistics.

There is a church that is actually launching today called Proclamation Church in Chatfield High School, just down the road from us, and I met with the pastor a couple of weeks ago. Some of you might have heard about it. It is a church plant out of Storyline, which is a church up in Arvada. It is a great church, a beautiful church. They are doing so many great things for the gospel, and I talked to a few people because when they heard that Storyline was planting a church right in our neighborhood, in our backyard, people are like, “Are you worried? They could take your people.” My point was, no, there are so many people who need Jesus, and we have Mosaic across the street, and we have Foothills right over there, and we have West Bowles right here, and we have Waterstone right here, and none of us are in competition with each other, because there are so many people in our neighborhoods that do not know Jesus. If we are worried about pulling sheep from other pens, then we have lost the plot and the purpose and the mission.

So, like, pray for Proclamation Church today. They are launching their first Sunday this morning. I hope that they have 250 people show up, or more. That is a small number. They can probably do better than that. Let’s pray for God to show up in Chatfield High School. We do this partnership every year where we as a staff and a few people from our church, we go and we do lunches for the teachers at Chatfield, and we actually partnered with Proclamation, this church this year, because we were like, “If you are going to be in the building, you need to make these connections, and it is not our place. We don’t need to be territorial about this. Let’s turn this over to you and work together to see what can happen and what God can do.”

There are so many people in your lives who do not know Jesus. If nine out of ten people are not involved in a church, that means that just about every time you go to a restaurant and see a waiter, every time you pick up your Starbucks in the morning and you encounter a barista, every time you go to your kid's soccer practice and talk to another parent, chances are the majority of them do not know Jesus, that they are dying of thirst, and you have the answer that can satisfy their souls, so are we desperate for the world to know Jesus and to experience Him?

Part of the vision that Jesus has is He is fulfilling this prophecy of Ezekiel and saying, "All of this longing, that trickle, that stream, that is actually me. I am the one who comes down from the throne of heaven, that flows east of Eden to where all of you are lost, all of you are searching, all of you are longing, and I am the one who shows up to chase after you to bring you home," and here is the really important thing. It is that we could nod along. "Yeah, the world is desperate for Jesus. Yeah, I see that every time I watch the news, and all of them out there, they are really struggling," and that is one thing to believe that and nod along and to want to reach them. Here is the deeper question, "Are you desperate for Jesus?" Because one of the things that I see in our culture and that I am guilty of too, is that we can show up, and we can do church, and we can pray, and we can sing songs, and we can listen to the pastor, and we can even serve, and we can do all of the right religious rituals, and still be lifeless and still not have the life that Jesus has on offer to us. One of the things that Jesus is saying in this story, one of the things that He is pulling out of us is that we need to be desperate for Jesus.

When I became lead pastor this last year, that was one of the things that our elders began praying for, that would we just be a church that is desperate for Jesus. Would we recognize that it does not matter how many people we have or what programs we have or how good the budget is or any of those things? If we do not have Jesus, then it does not matter. If we are not desperate for the Lord to show up in our lives, if we do not think that we need Him to make it through the day, if we think we can do this on our own, then we are deeply flawed as a church. We have to understand that we need Jesus in our lives to be effective parents, to be good workers, to be people that are on mission for the kingdom of God. We need to experience Jesus in our lives. We have to be desperate for Him. If we are not desperate for Jesus, then we will not have anything to offer a desperate world.

Jesus, as He says, this idea that He is the one who will provide living water for those who come and drink of Him, John gives this little addition at the end, this theological footnote, and he says, "By this," by the living waters, "what Jesus meant was the Holy Spirit, whom those who believed in Him were later to receive. Up until that time, the Spirit had not been given, because Jesus had not yet been glorified." What John is saying is that at that moment when Jesus promises living water, it was not actually available to his followers at that point, because Jesus had not died and risen from the dead and ascended on high and sent the Spirit to the people.

Now here is the problem. I think many of us are living like that has not happened yet, that we are living in our own little world, and we are following Jesus, and we are doing the right Jesus things, but we are waiting on something to happen in our lives, some experience with God, to experience life with the Spirit, hoping that it will show up in our lives and maybe do something to wake us up, but we are still waiting for it to happen, and Jesus said it happened two-thousand years ago, that the Spirit is already available to you now.

Sometimes I think the reason why we as followers of Jesus still experience spiritual dehydration is because we do not understand the life that is available to us in the power of the Spirit, that it is not just something, that following Jesus is not just about checking a box of being nice or following the rules or showing up to church, but it is actually the people of God being unleashed to be the river that brings life into the dead places of this world. There is more available to us.

Sometimes I think that we have this view of Christianity, and it is a little bit like a half-baked cake. It still tastes pretty good, but the texture is awful, right? No one wants to eat a half-baked cake. It does not satisfy the same way that an actual cake will satisfy, so we have the ingredients, we have all the right pieces, but we do not have the thing that is necessary for it to actually satisfy, and I am here to tell you, and what I am becoming more and more convinced of is what many of us are missing is life with the Spirit. At Waterstone, and I say this very humbly and very gently and as a part of the problem, that for so long we have been a very heady church, and we know a lot about the Bible, and I do not want that to change. I mean, I will not let that change. We just did an intergenerational service with first graders in the room, where we talked about a sword coming out of Jesus' mouth from Revelation 19. We are not moving away from that, but if we know stuff without experiencing Jesus, one of the easiest things in the world for Christians, especially in the West, in our area, to do, is to know the right stuff about following Jesus, and to have all of our faith reside from the shoulders up. Jesus does not want just your mind. He wants your mind, your heart, and your soul, and all of your strength. We can live in this place where we know the stuff, but head knowledge is such an easy place to stay cynical and to stay skeptical. If I just leave it up here, and I try to figure out all the right things, then I never actually have to live it out.

I think one of the places that God is calling us to stretch ourselves as a church is to not let go of the knowledge of scripture, who Jesus is, but to understand the actual Biblical definition of knowing. You have probably heard this before. When the Bible talks about knowing God, it is not just head knowledge. It is whole life experience. It is experiential knowledge. I think when Jesus is talking about this idea of rivers of life flowing into the world, one of the main ideas from that is that we need to be a people who have experienced life with God, who understand not just with our heads, but with our hearts, that life apart from Him is meaningless and has very little value, that it is only in Him we will find what we are looking for. Ezekiel saw the river that was flowing out of the temple of God, this presence, the Spirit of God that was flowing into the world, and do you know what the invitation was? To swim in the waters, not to just look and to understand, but to experience and to swim in the waters that were bringing life to the world.

So, my friends, this is the question for you today: "Are you settling for a sip, when Jesus promises rivers of living water? Are you settling for just a taste, when there is so much more available to us?" That is what I mean when I say that there is more. I believe that there is more growth, more transformation, more baptisms, more salvation for our neighbors, more mercy and justice for our city, more generosity, more ability to live the kind of life that Jesus actually has on offer to us. When Jesus came and said, "I want you to have life and have it to the full, and that when you drink of me, you will never thirst again," He is not asking you to settle for a life that is less than fulfilling, that He is actually promising to do what He says He came to do, which is to bring life to you, that the waters of life will flow to you, and then they will flow out of you into the world that is desperate to experience Jesus.

One of the things about the Dead Sea and what makes it dead, and I do not know if you know this, is that there is actually only one body of water that flows into the Dead Sea, the Jordan River, and a few other little streams, but why the Dead Sea stays dead is because the water flows into it, but there are no outlets in the Dead Sea, and so all the water just stays there, so all the minerals build up, and the only way the Dead Sea empties is through evaporation. It just disappears, and that is what makes it lifeless. The church is never supposed to experience blessing for the sake of itself that never leads to life. The church is supposed to experience life in the living water, so that they can be conduits of the blessing and life of God to the world. We are filled with the Spirit to pour out the Spirit on the world that is desperate for Jesus, and that is really my vision for Waterstone. It is not programs or busier calendars. There is no five-year plan, and those things are important, and we will work on that kind of stuff, but if we miss this, if we are not a Spirit-filled people, then we cannot have the kind of impact that Jesus has called us to as a church. I think the vision of what the church is supposed to be in a dry and thirsty world is an oasis, a place where people can come, and they can find healing, and they can be made whole, and they can find restoration, and I pray that you find that here too, but we experience all of those things so that we can turn those blessings back over to the world and invite those people to the same oasis where they can find healing and wholeness and redemption and salvation, because that is what Jesus does.

So today, as we wrap up our time together, I will say one last thing, and then we are going to go to a time of communion. We are going to come to the table, which is a reminder that only in the body and blood of Jesus do we find what our souls are longing for. This is the last thing I want to say before we get to that point, though. I think so many times when we do not experience the life that we are looking for in Jesus, it is because we have set our sights too low on what life with Jesus is supposed to look like. We say a lot around here that Jesus did not die to make you a nicer person. Jesus did not die on the cross so that you would say less swear words and watch less R-rated movies. Jesus died on the cross, not so that He could make bad people good or good people better, but to make people who were dead come back to life, and that is what is available to us, and that is what Jesus has called us to share with the world, and that is what He has placed on Waterstone, to experience life with the Spirit, to know the goodness of life with Jesus, so that when someone says, “What is it that makes a difference in your life?” It is not, “Yeah, I just found a new exercise plan, and I am waking up at 5:00 a.m. now instead of seven.” It is that Jesus has changed me, and Jesus is changing me, and my marriage was falling apart, but Jesus did something, and now we are figuring it out, and I do not know what to do with my kids, but Jesus has been helping me figure that out, and I do not like my boss, but Jesus helps me understand that he is created in God’s image, and so I need to love him,” so He changes everything immediately. When we understand what is available to us, there is a promise of life that Jesus has said He wants to fulfill in your life and in our life as a community. Are we open to that invitation?

47:40 minutes

Edited by Tom Kenaston

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