

Good morning! We are continuing in our series through the book of John, and this morning our passage is John 7:25 to 8:1 — we are going to jump right into the passage this beautiful morning, so I invite you to follow along on the screen or open your Bibles to John 7:25- this reading out of the NIV version: **(John 7:25-8:1)**

<sup>25</sup> At that point some of the people of Jerusalem began to ask, “Isn’t this the man they are trying to kill? <sup>26</sup> Here he is, speaking publicly, and they are not saying a word to him. Have the authorities really concluded that he is the Messiah? <sup>27</sup> But we know where this man is from; when the Messiah comes, no one will know where he is from.”

<sup>28</sup> Then Jesus, still teaching in the temple courts, cried out, “Yes, you know me, and you know where I am from. I am not here on my own authority, but he who sent me is true. You do not know him, <sup>29</sup> but I know him because I am from him and he sent me.”

<sup>30</sup> At this they tried to seize him, but no one laid a hand on him, because his hour had not yet come. <sup>31</sup> Still, many in the crowd believed in him. They said, “When the Messiah comes, will he perform more signs than this man?”

<sup>32</sup> The Pharisees heard the crowd whispering such things about him. Then the chief priests and the Pharisees sent temple guards to arrest him.

<sup>33</sup> Jesus said, “I am with you for only a short time, and then I am going to the one who sent me. <sup>34</sup> You will look for me, but you will not find me; and where I am, you cannot come.”

<sup>35</sup> The Jews said to one another, “Where does this man intend to go that we cannot find him? Will he go where our people live scattered among the Greeks, and teach the Greeks? <sup>36</sup> What did he mean when he said, ‘You will look for me, but you will not find me,’ and ‘Where I am, you cannot come’?”

<sup>37</sup> 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. <sup>38</sup> Whoever believes in me, as Scripture has said, rivers of living water will flow from within them.” <sup>c</sup> <sup>39</sup> 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.

<sup>40</sup> On hearing his words, some of the people said, “Surely this man is the Prophet.”

<sup>41</sup> Others said, “He is the Messiah.”

Still others asked, “How can the Messiah come from Galilee? <sup>42</sup> Does not Scripture say that the Messiah will come from David’s descendants and from Bethlehem, the town where David lived?” <sup>43</sup> Thus the people were divided because of Jesus. <sup>44</sup> Some wanted to seize him, but no one laid a hand on him.

### **Unbelief of the Jewish Leaders**

<sup>45</sup> Finally the temple guards went back to the chief priests and the Pharisees, who asked them, “Why didn’t you bring him in?”

<sup>46</sup> “No one ever spoke the way this man does,” the guards replied.

<sup>47</sup> “You mean he has deceived you also?” the Pharisees retorted. <sup>48</sup> “Have any of the rulers or of the Pharisees believed in him? <sup>49</sup> No! But this mob that knows nothing of the law—there is a curse on them.”

<sup>50</sup> Nicodemus, who had gone to Jesus earlier and who was one of their own number, asked, <sup>51</sup> “Does our law condemn a man without first hearing him to find out what he has been doing?”

<sup>52</sup> They replied, “Are you from Galilee, too? Look into it, and you will find that a prophet does not come out of Galilee.”

**8** <sup>53</sup> *Then they all went home, <sup>1</sup> but Jesus went to the Mount of Olives.*

Let’s pray.

Alright, we’re going to go on quite a journey this morning. Jesus is teaching in the temple courts in Jerusalem during one of the main festivals in the Jewish calendar, the Feast of Tabernacles, which was a seven-day harvest celebration focusing on the theme of restoration— now we can spend this whole morning talking about the Feast of Tabernacles, but mainly this festival was the last of three annual pilgrimages that the Jews would take to Jerusalem, and all Jewish men were required to attend. So the city was lively, full, bustling with people, caravans, and with a lot of noise and excitement.

Now, at this point in Jesus’ ministry, the religious rulers and pharisees were trying to find a way to kill him, and they were evidently spreading their intentions throughout the city. So the crowd listening to Jesus was very divided. Many believed Jesus because of the miracles, but some did

not. Those who did not believe were arguing about how the Messiah would appear, saying, in verse 27, “we know where this man comes from, but when Christ appears, no one will know where he comes from.” **There was a popular belief that the Messiah would appear out of nowhere, but everybody knew where Jesus was from... so Jesus responded to this argument by saying, vs. 28, “you know where I am from, but I am not here on my own authority, but he who sent me is true. You do not know him, but I know him...”** So, notice this, Jesus is very sly in his response and a little bit sarcastic, did you catch that? He kind of confirms that indeed, they don’t know where the Messiah comes from because they don’t know God, and if they really knew God then they would have recognized that he was from God and sent by him. Now it’s interesting that the Jewish Scripture experts, the ones who were supposed to know God the most, did not actually know God at all, but they took offense at his response and tried to arrest him.

**Jesus’ response is a common theme in the book of John to this point, regarding who he is and where he is from, and this was something that Jesus was telling his listeners over and over again— - that is, if you do not know and follow me then you do not know and follow God.**

If you don't know and follow Jesus then you don't know or follow God.

This world and especially our culture has so many beliefs about who God is- and there is a prevalent belief that maybe even some of you might have had, that God can be known in all religions of the world. Well, no, God cannot be known through all of the religions of the world— there is one way that God can be known, and that is through Jesus. If you want to know God, come to Jesus. If you're looking for God don't expect him to appear to you except through Jesus. If you're ignoring Jesus but looking for God, don't expect to find God! If you want to know God, come to Jesus, and if you want to help people find God, help them find Jesus!

So Jesus' response was something the religious leaders had heard him say before. They understood that he was implying that he was God, and equal with God, so they wanted to arrest him and have him killed. At the same time, Jesus' popularity was growing with the crowd, and the Pharisees heard the crowd whispering , “could this be the Messiah?” So the Pharisees sent the temple guards to arrest Jesus, but Jesus spoke in a mesmerizing way that disarmed the temple guards and left them dumbfounded— we see later how the temple guards were disarmed by Jesus when they went back to the religious rulers without Jesus— so put your finger on vs. 33 and skip down to vs. 45 to see what happened to the

temple guards. When they came back without Jesus, the Chief Priest and Pharisees asked them, “why didn’t you bring Jesus in?” and they said, “no one ever spoke the way this man does.”

So what did Jesus say? Go back to vs. 33— Jesus told them, **“I am with you for only a short time, and then I am going to the one who sent me. You will look for me, but you will not find me; and where I am you cannot come.”** So what Jesus is implying is that he is actually the one with true authority over the temple, and the physical presence of God is here in this temple right now but won’t be for long. The time has not yet come but when it does, Jesus will give his life and go back to the Father, and God’s presence or the Messiah will no longer be found or approached in this temple.

Now, I think it is interesting that Jesus would say this to the temple guards — who were the temple guards? **The temple guards were three priests and 21 Levites. The Levites were one of the twelve tribes of Israel specifically selected by God to have responsibility for different aspects of temple worship.** So, If today’s church was in the second temple era, Tim, Elaine, myself, Yam, Hailey, and just about anyone who

officially serves the church worship services in a supportive or administrative role would have all been from the tribe of Levi, a Levite.

The temple guards were Levites who strictly watched over each of the entrances, the gates to the courts, and the chambers of sacrifice, including the Holy of Holies where God's very presence resided. As well, they held the keys to the temple for the Chief Priest and Pharisees, but they were very strictly under the authority of these leading officials.

So these guards, as Levites, would have been quite serious about their roles and I think very sincere, believing that they guarded the gates leading to the very presence of God— I mean, **if anyone knew where to go to find God, it was the temple guards!** I imagine they were kind of like the information desk of the temple during the festival seasons— so imagine this, you're on a long journey to Jerusalem with your sacrificial lamb or turtle doves in tow, you finally reach the temple gate with its towering arches and expansive courts, and maybe you don't really know where to go. So you find the temple guard and say, "I've brought my sacrifices to God, where do I go?" and the temple guard points and says, "God is that way." You know, if you needed to find the way to God's presence, the

temple guards would be the people to go to, I bet they weren't as scary or intimidating as the Pharisees.

So back to the Scripture, I really believe that **Jesus was speaking to the hearts of these temple guards in a very warm and soothing way. They came to arrest him, but they were disarmed**, and I think their coming into the presence of God --Jesus-- conflicted with their own self-understanding. They were in charge of guarding the way to the presence of God, so they were left confused by their encounter with God's presence outside of the holy of holies— I think they felt the authoritative presence of God in their spirit when they approached Jesus. And Jesus' authority over the temple guards reached over the authority of the Pharisees and Chief Priest. So Jesus' words had a soothing yet authoritative effect on them. Essentially, Jesus told them in vs. 33, I am with you for a short time... but the time is coming when you won't be able to point people to God's presence in the temple anymore, and when you look for the Messiah you won't find him, and you won't be able to go where he is. What Jesus says here lays the foundation for our key verse coming up about rivers of living water.

Now, the Levites truly believed and knew that the temple was where God's presence resided, they guarded it like their life depended on it. And Jesus was letting them know that soon this was not going to be the case, that because of his coming as the Messiah, God's presence residing in a single temple in Jerusalem was soon to become a thing of the past.

I think it's awesome that Jesus let the Levites know in this way, even though they did not get it. For me, the Levites have always held a special place in my heart. If you get a chance to do a study on the Levites in the OT, I would really encourage you. I have always felt a special connection to the Levites as a worship leader, and I think the Levites held a dear place in Jesus' heart and we'll see more of how Jesus disarmed the temple guards in this next passage.

We've finally come to the climax, the main part of the story for this morning. So a quick recap for how we got to this point— Jesus is in Jerusalem teaching during the feast of tabernacles, crowds of people are listening to him in the temple courts, but they are divided. The religious authorities are looking for opportunities to arrest Jesus and have him killed, Jesus gives some responses that assert his authority as equal with God, claiming that the Father has sent him as the Messiah, and he will



soon return to the Father. The religious authorities send the temple guards, who are from the tribe of Levi, to arrest him, which they do not.

Now, vs. 37, Jesus stands up on the last and greatest day of the festival and says in a loud voice, **“Let 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.” Just to clarify quickly, Jesus was glorified after he went up into heaven, and it was after Jesus ascended into heaven that the Holy Spirit came to us. Alright- now this teaching from Jesus might seem to just pop up out randomly out of nowhere if you did not catch that interaction between Jesus and the Levite temple guards. But the truth is, **everything that Jesus said in this passage is interconnected and points to how God will lay to rest the old way of worship centered in a temple in Jerusalem for a new thing that he will do through Jesus and the coming of the Holy Spirit.**

There are contrasts brought about by Jesus' words here, contrasting with different parts of the story we've been going through this morning. The main contrast I want to point out this morning is how Jesus contrasts the physical with the spiritual. So, if you notice in the book of John up to this point, **Jesus is constantly speaking in terms of spiritual realities that contrast with what we see physically. One of his missions in coming to us is to help us see with spiritual eyes— to help us see that which is of God but that we cannot see with our own eyes.** And he often uses physical things as forms for spiritual realities. So he would speak of himself as the bread of heaven, saying things like, whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life— whoever eats bread will hunger again, but whoever eats bread from heaven will never hunger again... And he called himself the door, the way to heaven, the good shepherd— he uses water as an analogy a couple of times, saying that whoever drinks the water he gives will never thirst again. He spoke in parables that were rich with physical analogies describing or contrasting spiritual realities.

Now, I personally believe that everything on this earth, and every experience that we have is a form that points to some kind of spiritual reality. I am certain that everything that happens and everything we see in

this world exists for the purpose of helping us grasp spiritual realities, whether by contrast or by correlation— the problem is we just don't see it. Jesus came to help us see the world the way God sees the world and the problem is that we are a-lot like the people who were confused about Jesus' words here, most of us are too caught up with the physical world— I remember when I was a missionary in Thailand, I was talking to a motorcycle taxi driver about God and he wouldn't believe me, he kept patting his stomach saying God can't fill my stomach... well, look at what Jesus says! **Will you pray this little prayer with me? "Lord, help me see the world through your eyes!"**

We see that in this story, Jesus was using everything that was happening during the festival and in the temple courts to reveal true spiritual realities. During this festival on the last day, the priest poured bowls of water over the altar and a great procession would circle around it seven times— this was done because they believed that the Messiah would provide water and manna like Moses— this belief came from writings that the rabbis had called the rabbinic text, this was kind of like a handbook for priests or a commentary, and it said this, commenting on Joel 3:18 , **"As the former redeemer (Moses) made a well to rise, so will the latter Redeemer (the**

**Messiah) bring up water, as it is stated, (here is the reference to Joel 3:18), “and a fountain shall come forth of the house of the Lord, and shall water the valley of shittim.”** This is what they were expecting from the Messiah— a great river of water flowing from the temple— and Jesus was pointing to this water procession happening in the temple probably at that very moment and saying, “come to me and drink! I am the one who provides rivers of living water, which will come by the Holy Spirit within you!”

Now this saying would have really shaken the religious rulers and their traditions because they would have clearly seen and understood Jesus’ reference to rivers of living water as temple language and Messianic language. **Jesus was using temple language referring to Ezekiel’s temple and also the garden of Eden, from which rivers flowed to bring life to the land all around—** let’s look at Ezekiel’s vision of the temple, this is so good and helps us to understand what Jesus is talking about here.

In Ezekiel 47, Ezekiel is shown a temple with water coming out from under the entrance of the temple on several sides, and starting at verse 3:

**As the man went eastward with a measuring line in his hand, he measured off a thousand cubits and then led me through water that was ankle-deep. <sup>4</sup> He measured off another thousand cubits and led me through water that was knee-deep. He measured off another thousand and led me through water that was up to**

the waist. <sup>5</sup> He measured off another thousand, but now it was a river that I could not cross, because the water had risen and was deep enough to swim in—a river that no one could cross. <sup>6</sup> He asked me, “Son of man, do you see this?”

Then he led me back to the bank of the river. <sup>7</sup> When I arrived there, I saw a great number of trees on each side of the river. <sup>8</sup> He said to me, “This water flows toward the eastern region and goes down into the Arabah, <sup>9</sup> where it enters the Dead Sea. When it empties into the sea, the salty water there becomes fresh. <sup>9</sup> Swarms of living creatures will live wherever the river flows. There will be large numbers of fish, because this water flows there and makes the salt water fresh; so where the river flows everything will live.

*The New International Version (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2011), Eze 47:3–9.*

**Where the river flows everything will live**— where the river flows

everything will live!!! Think of this passage in spiritual not physical terms.

So we have Jesus pairing temple language with both himself and whoever believes in him. What he is saying in this passage is that the time is coming when God’s temple, with rivers of living water flowing from it, will not be an earthly temple in Jerusalem, but God’s presence will reside within every believer, the Holy Spirit will be the rivers of living water flowing from within every believer. And **Jesus said anyone, anyone who is thirsty is invited to come to that river**— not just the Levites, not just the Jews, not just those who perform all of the right ceremonies but ANYONE— this was mind-blowing for the first-century Jew, but they were only seeing with physical eyes, not spiritual eyes.

If you look at verse 35 just before this passage, the Jews were confused about Jesus’ earlier statement to the temple guards, saying “where does

this man intend to go that we cannot find him? Will he go and teach the Greeks?” Again, remember, Jesus is speaking in spiritual terms that provide the true meaning to what’s happening in the physical— so I’ll repeat again what he means here: **the time is coming where God’s presence and the Messiah will not be found in this temple; instead, the Holy Spirit will reside in whoever believes in Jesus, and yeah, that includes the Greeks!** There’s another sarcastic response from Jesus!

**My friends we are in that time right now!** Jesus invites you, no matter who you are or what your background or ethnicity is to come drink of the spiritual water that he gives, and the Holy Spirit will reside in you with life-giving rivers of refreshing, restoration, and healing overflowing from within. And that refreshing, restoration, and healing is not for you only, it for those around you. The rivers of living water, the Holy Spirit residing within you, will reach out from you to provide life-giving refreshing, restoration, and healing to people all around you, reaching far beyond yourself. We, my friends, are temples of the Holy Spirit and where this river flows, everything will live! Amen? I want to finish with Isaiah 58:11 as a blessing over you, **Isaiah 58:11 says, “The Lord will guide you always; he will satisfy your needs in a sun-scorched land and will strengthen your frame. You will**

**be like a well-watered garden. Like a spring whose waters never fail.”**

Amen!

Where the river flows everything will live— let’s pray!

The Lord bless you and keep you;  
The Lord make his face to shine upon you  
And be gracious to you;  
The Lord turn his face toward you  
And give you peace.