

A SATISFYING DRINK - JOHN 7:37

DAVID BRAINERD'S LIFE VERSE

From all outward appearances, it was a perfect evening as David Brainerd knelt to read his Bible and pray by that rock in the dense woods along the shores of the Susquehanna in the early summer of 1744. The trees that stood out against the setting sun casting shadows on the dense undergrowth were breathtaking in their beauty. Just a few yards away from him, some beavers were busy constructing a dam across a part of the stream. David was filled with both anticipation and apprehension as he pondered his task for the next day. For David Brainerd had made this long trip into this pristine wilderness for a single purpose - he had come to the forks of the Delaware in N.J. in order to carry the gospel message to a tribe of Indians who had the reputation for being particularly savage. He was under no delusions. He knew that this might be his last night on this earth. But he was following the burden that God had laid upon his heart - to reach Indian tribes with the message of the gospel.

Little did David Brainerd know that evening that just as he was watching the beavers build that dam, a

few dozen human eyes were watching him from the silence of the surrounding woods. And it was coming time for the kill. Their plan was that David Brainerd would never get the opportunity to reach the Indian village.

As a strong Indian warrior raised his bow to bury an arrow into Brainerd's unprotected back, the chief next to him suddenly raised his hand. He had seen something move in the brush beside the missionary. As the warrior lowered his bow, the Indians watched as a rattlesnake slithered out from near the rock where the missionary was now focused in fervent prayer. The Indians looked at one another with a smirk on their faces. They would watch with pleasure as the snake did their job for them.

The rattlesnake approached Brainerd who was unaware of his presence. The snake then coiled and prepared to strike. But as the Indians watched with keen interest, an amazing thing happened. Instead of striking

the man, the snake suddenly uncoiled and slithered away from him.

As David Brainerd prepared to enter the village the next morning, he couldn't help but feel butterflies in his stomach. Imagine his amazement when the chief and all of his tribe met him on the road and gave him a royal welcome. They had come to the conclusion that the Great Spirit was with this white man and they wanted to hear the message that he brought to them.

The verse that had laid open on that rock before David Brainerd the night before is the verse that we would like to study this evening. The life verse of David Brainerd - John 7:37,38.

Time and time again in his journal, Brainerd refers to this verse. He most often spoke to the Indians from it. He tells of times when *there were scarce 3 in 40 that could refrain from tears, and the more I discoursed on the love and compassion of God in sending His son to*

suffer for the sins of men, the more they wept. What would bring these normally unemotional Indian warriors to tears? The message of the Lord Jesus offering them water that would never make them thirst again.

Turn to John 7:37,38 with me.

On the last and greatest day of the Feast, Jesus stood and said in a loud voice, “If anyone is thirsty, let him come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, streams of living water will flow from within him”. John 7:37,38.

"If anyone is thirsty, let him come to me and drink." was Christ's gracious invitation. Just as he had previously invited the Samaritan woman at Jacob's well to partake of his water that would become in her a spring of water, welling up to eternal life (John 4:14), so he now makes an open invitation in John 7, inviting all to come to him and drink. This invitation was given by Christ in the midst of great criticism and controversy. The feast of Tabernacles was one of the 3 times during the Jewish year when every man 20 years old and older was to make a pilgrimage to Jerusalem, so this city was packed full of people. And it was at this feast, late in the public ministry of Christ, that the Jewish leaders started to gather public opinion against Jesus. There were divided opinions. John records "among the crowds there was widespread whispering about him. Some said, he is a good man. Others replied, No, he deceives the people." (John 7:12). Later in the chapter John records

that they actually tried to arrest him, but they were divinely prevented because God's timing was not yet ripe. "At this they tried to seize him, but no one laid a hand on him, because his time had not yet come." (John 7:30). So at this feast of the tabernacles, there can be no question that Jesus was the central controversial figure. The Jewish leaders were doing their best to discredit him. But at the same time, many of the pilgrims who were hearing his teaching were recognizing the truth that he was the Messiah and were believing on him. It was in this context that Jesus invited all those who were thirsty to come to him for he was the living water.

Now water is foundational to all of life. We can go many days without eating food and still survive, but we cannot go very long without drinking water for our bodies are 70% water. If we begin to dehydrate, we are in very serious danger of losing our life. So of everything that we need to sustain our lives, water is the

most basic element. We can't even imagine life without water, because it wouldn't exist as we know it today.

What water is to our physical lives, Jesus Christ is to our spiritual life. Just as it would be impossible to begin physical life without water for the embryo is formed in mother's water sac, so it is impossible to be born again into the family of God without Jesus Christ. And just as it would be impossible to sustain physical life without a continuous supply of water, so it is impossible to grow as a Christian without a living relationship with Jesus Christ. Jesus offered himself as the living water to anyone who was thirsty.

Now before we examine that invitation which Jesus offers, let's first of all remind ourselves of the context in which it was given because this is most important to our understanding.

We have already mentioned that it was the time for the feast of tabernacles in the Jewish calendar. Now this

last of the sacred festivals that began 5 days after the day of atonement celebrated God's provision for the Israelites as they wandered around in the wilderness for 40 years preparing to go into the promised land. It was a joyous festive occasion, not only because of the remembrance of God's good hand of blessing, but also because the final harvest of the year had just been completed, so the people had just reaped all of the fruit of their hard work. During this 8 day feast, the people all lived in tabernacles or booths, little tents, reminding them of how their forefathers had lived during their wilderness wanderings.

The last day of the feast was the most important day. This year formally marked the conclusion of the religious year, and it was celebrated by several religious ceremonies. One in particular is important to note in light of Christ's invitation for it helps us to see the impact that our Savior's words would have had on the

people and why it would have caused such a controversy among the Jewish leaders.

On every morning of the 8 day feast, there would be a procession from the pool of Siloam to the temple. These processions would build to the climax of the 8th and final day. On this day, the priest would take a golden pitcher to the pool of Siloam which was just outside of the temple mount area. He would fill this golden pitcher with water from the pool. Then the priest would lead a great multitude of the pilgrims thru the city streets of Jerusalem as they joyously chanted the words from the prophet Isaiah 7:3- "Ye shall draw water with joy out of the well of salvation". The ceremony, fitting in with the theme of the week, celebrated God's miraculous provision of water for the Israelites from the rock which Moses smote. So then, we can picture this scene in our minds. Thousands of pilgrims, filled with joy because their harvests were now completed and they were

enjoying the good company at this final religious feast of the year, eating and drinking and camping out together, dancing down the streets of Jerusalem following the priest with the golden pitcher filled with water, chanting together "Ye shall draw water with joy out of the well of salvation", as they made their way towards the temple to pour out this water from the golden pitcher at the altar as a libation to the Lord. The atmosphere of this feast of tabernacles was so positive that the Jewish rabbis would often say that one who had not been present at this specific ceremony did not know what joy was.

Now we can only begin to imagine the thoughts that were going on in the mind of Jesus and the sorrow that he felt in his heart in the midst of all of this outward celebration of joy on this final day of the feast. After all, the rock that Moses struck was a prophetic picture of Him. The Apostle Paul would later write a commentary on that wilderness experience and he would say, "They

(the Israelites) all ate the same spiritual food and drank the same spiritual drink; for they drank from the spiritual rock that accompanied them, and that rock was Christ." (1 Cor. 5:3,4). So here is Jesus Christ, the antitype of that wilderness rock, standing there watching these pilgrims dancing thru the streets towards the temple, following the priest with the golden pitcher filled with water held above his head. These people were rejoicing in God's past provision for them, but they were completely missing the spiritual significance of it. They were remembering a time a long time ago when God met the need for water for their forefathers, but they were blindly dancing right by the son of God himself who came to be the living water for them, water that would allow them never to thirst spiritually again.

I can almost hear Jesus scream out. "Can't you see, pilgrims, that I am the rock. I am the living water. The one who drinks of me will never thirst again. If anyone

is thirsty, let him come to me and drink. You are going thru this religious ritual, but you are totally missing its real significance.”

Lest we be too critical of these pilgrims, we must remind ourselves that what was happening in their lives can all too easily happen in ours as well. It is so easy to look at God's great provisions of the past and revel in them- the way that God provided miraculously for his people in the O.T., the way that Christ met every need of the apostles who walked by his side, the way that the early church was filled with power, even the way that God provided miraculously for the Rockford Baptist Church during those early days of struggle and uncertainty when it was being formed into the great lighthouse that it is today, it is so easy to look at God's great provisions of the past and revel in them and completely miss what God wants to do today in our lives. The God who lives with us today is the very same

God who provided water from the rock in the wilderness to quench the thirst of those 4 million people. The God who lives with us today is the same God who raised Lazarus from the dead after he had been in the tomb for 4 days. The God who lives with us today is the same God who miraculously spared the Apostle John after he was thrown into a boiling caldron of oil by the Roman Emperor. The God who lives with us today is the very same God who led the original church members of the Rockford Baptist Church in their steps of faith. And he desires for us to know his power and his guidance in our lives today as well.

Now there are 2 results which occur in a person's life as he realizes Jesus Christ to be the fountain of living water. Christ brings these out in his brief statement, and I would like to look at these with you this evening.

1. First of all, when we recognize Jesus Christ to be the living water, our spiritual thirst is finally satisfied.

John records that Jesus stood and said in a loud voice, “If anyone is thirsty, let him come to me and drink.”

Implied in that statement are 3 truths:

a. the fact that we have a spiritual thirst within us, that we have a void in our spiritual souls that only relationship with God can fill.

This spiritual need that we have as human beings originates in our created purpose. God first created human beings to have fellowship with him. So it would be natural for him to have created us with a void in our beings that can only be satisfied with divine fellowship.

Now there are many today that are denying the existence of a spiritual void. They claim that man is not the product of divine creation, but that man is the product of an evolutionary cycle. Man, they claim, has no more need for fellowship with God than any of the other animals, since he is just an animal albeit on a higher branch of the evolutionary tree. But the denial of

a spiritual void does not erase it- it is still there. And man apart from God is trying desperately to fill this void in his life. He will try alcoholic beverages, he will try all sorts of drugs, he will try career obsession in attempt to bring satisfaction to his soul, he will try all kinds of sexual addictions. But in the end he finds that every counterfeit only brings bondage to him; it does not bring lasting satisfaction.

Every person has a spiritual thirst, a spiritual void in his or her life.

b. But there is a need to recognize this spiritual thirst for what it is. "If anyone is thirsty" Jesus said. We must come to the place where we recognize this spiritual thirst.

There are many people in the world who , having convinced themselves that there is no spiritual needs in their lives, spend the remainder of their lives going from one source to another trying to find fulfillment to that

void in their lives. The prophet Jeremiah spoke of the broken cisterns of water that people would go to and drink out of instead of the living water that only God can give.

I have seen this illustrated so clearly in my generation. I am a baby boomer, born right at the end of W.W.2. The generation of my birth thought victory in the war would bring lasting happiness- the war to end all other wars. But they quickly found out that war victories do not bring satisfaction to that inner void. So then the pendulum swung to anti-war, and the peace of brotherly love movements of the 60's came. But they did not bring lasting satisfaction either. They only brought the bondage of drug addiction and the curses of sexual promiscuity which have plagued our nation every since. So this very same generation did another about face and moved from the protest and picket line into the executive circles. The anti-establishment people became

very much institutionalized, gathering and hoarding material toys. But material goods do not bring lasting satisfaction either. And so on and on, from broken cistern to broken cistern, trying to find refreshing water.

Some time ago, I read a study taken to demonstrate the lack of nourishment in highly refined and bleached bread. A group of rats were given only white bread to eat. The study went on to show how that each rat in time died of starvation- there wasn't enough nutrition in the bread to sustain their lives. But what was interesting to me was the comment made near the end of the study. The scientist said that the rats seemingly were content right up until the day they died. Their stomachs were full and they seemed to be content. They were starving to death, but they starved to death with full stomachs.

What a picture of so many in the world today. Drinking polluted water from broken cisterns, they have not yet come to the realization of their need for the

living water, but have rather convinced themselves that they can be satisfied without him. If anyone thirst- we must come to the place where we recognize our need for Christ.

c. If we realize that we have a spiritual void, and if we come to the place where we thirst to have it filled, then we are in a position to recognize Jesus Christ as the one who can be living water to us. If anyone is thirsty, let him come to me and drink, Jesus said. Jesus Christ claimed to be able to meet that spiritual longing in our souls. And there is not one who has ever come to Jesus Christ who has left disappointed.

Yes, these pilgrims in Christ's day were dancing thru the streets in great joy as they celebrated God's provision of water from the rock during the wilderness journeys of their forefathers. But this joy would be short-lived. And they soon would be back home getting ready for another planting season. The emotional high that they were

experiencing now would lead to a corresponding low in a few days. And the void would still be there. It would be there because they had failed to recognize the true rock from which all spiritual blessings flow- the son of God, Jesus Christ himself. It is only he who can bring permanent healing to our souls as the divine physician.

2. But now let's conclude quickly with a second result that is brought forth by Jesus Christ. The one who comes to Jesus Christ to drink of the fountain of living water not only finds himself satisfied, but he also becomes a fountain of blessing for others as well. READ John 7:37-38.

On the last and greatest day of the Feast, Jesus stood and said in a loud voice, "If anyone is thirsty, let him come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, streams of living water will flow from within him". John 7:37,38.

Streams of living water not only flow into him to

satisfy his soul, but they also flow thru him to bring satisfaction to others.

We do not have time this morning to dwell on the marvelous truth of the indwelling Spirit of God to which Christ is referring here. John brings this out in his commentary on Christ's words in verse 39.

³⁹ 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 Bible teaches us that God's intended purpose in fellowshiping with man was finally achieved in the death of Jesus Christ upon the cross of Calvary when man's sins could finally be paid for, when God's righteous and holy character could finally be satisfied. All of those who drink from the living water of Jesus Christ have the righteousness of the very son of God himself imputed to them so that they stand in absolute

perfection before God. The barrier of sin being removed, God in the person of the Holy Spirit can now come and dwell within them so that the very living water which Jesus Christ was speaking about here might flow forth from that divine source from within their lives. What a miracle this is. That we, born in the bondage of sin, might not only become partakers of the living water of Jesus Christ so that we can have our spiritual thirst forever quenched, but that we might also become a source of living water for others as we allow God himself to work thru our lives.

It is critically important for each of us to learn this great lesson that Jesus was pleading with these pilgrims to learn. How easy it is for us to go thru life as these who had come to the feast of tabernacles. They were good people, they were very religious people, they were having a good time, partying and enjoying each other's fellowship. But they were going thru their religious

celebrations walking right past the one who was the fulfillment to all they were doing. They were following that priest into the temple area to make the libation sacrifice remembering God's provision of water from the rock for their forefathers, and they were walking right past the one who was the source of that spiritual, living water.

David Brainerd only ministered to the Indians of our land for 5 years. He was a rather weak and sickly person - and he died at the young age of 29. We might be tempted to think that he didn't accomplish that much in life - serving the Lord for only 5 years.

But David Brainerd realized the truth contained in these verses that we have studied tonight. That the one who drinks from Christ's well will not only thirst no more, but will become a spring of living water for others.

David Brainerd left behind a journal of his 5 years

of ministry. Even though John Wesley never met David Brainerd, he did get a hold of his journal and was very impressed with the spirituality of this young man. John Wesley gave Brainerd's journal to another young man with the advice that it was a good book to read. That young man's name was William Carey. Carey would later confess that it was the journal of David Brainerd, this obscure missionary who ministered for just 5 short years to American Indians, that lead him to his vision for foreign missions. William Carey as you will recall from our discussion of his life verse early this summer is remembered today as the Father of Modern Missions.

Just think of all the missionaries who have served the Lord because of the influence of David Brainerd and William Carey.

Often we have no idea of the influence that we have in life. But the person who drinks of the Lord Jesus Christ finds both his own spirit fully satisfied and also

finds that he will become a source of light and life for others as well.