

RUF Bible Study – John  
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John 7 – A Cry for Living Water

Do you recall times when you had significant outbursts? On just this last Sunday afternoon, Julie and I were driving back from a young married couples retreat. We were sitting in Braums in Denton, Texas, with the Kramedjians and the Barnes. All of a sudden, Julie gasped and put her hand over her mouth. She had seen a little girl licking the glass divider between the booths, covering the glass with her tongue. Gross.

I had another gasp this past week. Della Kramedjian (of the aforementioned Kramedjians) sat on my couch late Sunday night. Her husband and I were playing Munchkin with a few friends. All of a sudden, she stood up. I can't remember what she said, but it was a embarrassed panic. Then she said, "I either just peed myself or my water broke!" Her water had broken all on my couch. Julie took her and Chris to the hospital, and she had her son about eight hours later.

There have been other cries in my life. When Missouri lost to Colorado in the famous fifth down game. When I asked Julie to marry me. When she told me she was pregnant. When Ruth starting coming three months prematurely.

We have a text here where Jesus cries out, where he gasps all of a sudden. Let's look at how and why this happens.

### *The Opposition to Jesus*

This chapter continues our theme of opposition to Jesus. In the preceding chapter (six), he had the masses eating out of his hands (almost literally). He had upwards of 20,000 who would have followed him anywhere. Yet, he turns that crowd appeal to a mere 12 people when he begins talking about his death and resurrection. When he challenges them with the concept that he is the bread of life, their true source of fulfillment.

Time has passed – about six months. It's now September or October, and the Feast of Tabernacles is starting. This was a huge camping trip for the Israelites. They'd put up tents, or rickety structures, and tell stories about when their people were displaced back in Exodus, when they wandered around in the wilderness. Families were instructed to go there, and many did. It was a festival. A Jewlapalooza. It was bigger than OU-Texas in Dallas. It was a huge party.

It would have been the natural time for Jesus to reveal himself and his miracles. That's what his brothers want him to do at the beginning of the chapter. "If you do these things, show yourself to the world." His brothers don't believe Jesus is God. They didn't follow him in their lifetimes, though we know that his brother James does after Jesus' death and resurrection. I'm sure they were rather annoyed with Jesus. Many of you have older brothers who say they don't do anything wrong – here was one for whom that claim was accurate. I have two sons, and Drew is both in awe and disgust at Cal, his older brother.

The brothers want him to go to the epicenter of attention. They want him to try out for American Idol. They think he's going to be an epic failure, and then – hopefully! – he'll come home in humbled, wounded and quiet. He'll be exposed on national television as a fraud.

This is only one of the responses to Jesus in this chapter. There are so many others. He is finally being opened up to general opinion. His miracle of turning water to wine was localized, only for a wedding party in Cana. He talked one on one to Nicodemus, and it's doubtful Nicodemus would be anxious to relay the content of that conversation. He spent the day with a woman in Samaria, which most people wouldn't take as credible. That would simply be unbelievable, so they'd dismiss it. He did heal one man on the Sabbath half a year ago. That created a decent stir. And then he did something really big and word got around. It's hard to keep 20,000 people quiet.

So what next? People have heard about him. There's a buzz in the air.

When I was just finishing seminary, I had the opportunity to go to the St. Louis Cardinals' spring training in Florida. I actually had befriended J.D. Drew, and outfielder for the Cards, and stayed with him at his place. He got me into the games, and I was able to meet some of the players. It was a huge thrill.

I kept on hearing about a young third basemen I'd never heard of before. People were talking about him all the time. He was the next big thing, they said. Tony LaRussa, the manager, wanted to keep him down in the minor leagues, but he just was too good to do that. It was Albert Pujols, who later switched to first base. People talked about him, wondered about him, and craned their necks to see him. I got his autograph, and I'd never seen him play, so he could have been a bust.

People are hearing about Jesus. They are talking about him in their tents. Who is this guy?

They want to know a few things, and we see John's trial motif come up again as Jesus answers questions.

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For this series, I used commentaries on John from Boice, Skip Ryan, Gary Burge, D.A. Carson, Hughes, Wright, Calvin and Leon Morris and listened to sermons by as many people as I can find, especially Tim Keller, Ricky Jones, Fred Harrell and Scott Sherman. The reader should assume that none of the ideas expressed are original to me.

<i>Scene</i>	<i>Question</i>	<i>Answer</i>
One	Where did Jesus go to school? 7:15	Heaven
Two	Where is this man from? 7:25-27	Heaven
Three	Where is this man going? 7:35	Heaven <sup>2</sup>

They want to know Jesus' credentials. Rabbis studied with other rabbis, and you wanted to be able to show which "school" you came from. Jesus didn't do that – he was a carpenter's son from Nazareth. Yet he spoke profoundly, knowledgeably and with authority. He gives an unconventional answer – I was trained from heaven.

They want to know where he was from. There was a thought going around that the Messiah would just suddenly appear out of the sky. This goes along with the Driving the Romans To the Sea Messiah they wanted. So if they knew where Jesus came from, he couldn't be the one they'd been waiting for. Jesus says, Well, I came from heaven. Yes, I was born in Bethlehem, which is the right place, but I came from heaven.

And they want to know where he's going. They think he certainly cannot go to the Greeks!? That would be the Gentiles, and we they thought salvation is only for the Jews. Jesus tells them he's going to heaven. He's going to the Greeks, yes, and to the Egyptians, and the Indians and all the way over to the Barbarians and beyond. He's going to be in heaven, directing and reigning. Of course, they don't know what to make of this.

There are many reactions to Jesus in this chapter, and I think in our lives and world now. Some are denying him. They don't want to, or won't, believe. Others want to arrest him. If he is a prophet, and he's not from God, then they should arrest him. Not only arrest him, but kill him. That's what the authorities want to do, and we're seeing the animosity toward Jesus grow and fester. He should be dead. He needs to be shut up. If he'd keep quiet, then maybe we could let him live, but he just doesn't know when to stop. There is a cynical hostility here. A dismissiveness. A fear of Jesus. Many are antagonistic to Jesus. They curse him. Some are just ignorant of Jesus.

Could you find yourself in this group at all? Are you angry with Jesus? Do you wish he would just go away? Are you sick of hearing about him all the time? You thought you could go to college and get away from all the Jesus talk! He doesn't have any place in the classroom or the dorms. You get upset if your suitemate invites you to RUF or church or Bible study.

Maybe you don't have a negative reaction, but you're just bored with Jesus. You grew up in church. Eh. You shrug your shoulders, and are ready to move on. It all seems like youth group to you. It doesn't move your soul at all. You're indifferent to Jesus.

There are some others here who ask good questions: is this the Messiah? Is this a good man? Is he from the right place? They're engaging with the topic. They're receptive. They have an interest and respect for Jesus. They're curious. They're genuinely open. We see this at the end of the chapter with Nicodemus' brief interjection to the religious officers. He's saying, Has anyone actually listened to Jesus? Have you heard him? We know about Nicodemus' meeting with Jesus, and we have to wonder that conversation keeps playing over and over in his mind.

I'd suggest you be honest with where you are with Jesus. Are you mad? Then be mad. Don't let your upbringing keep you from being mad. But talk about it with people. Are you curious? It's okay to admit that too. Get in a study group, a small group Bible study, and explore who Jesus really is. Are you confused? Join the club. We're trying to say that none of us have Jesus figured out. So we can talk about him together, being honest with each other, and be surprised at what he's doing and saying both in the text of Scripture and in our lives.

Jesus isn't going to be surprised at your negative response to him, if that's what it is. He knows, and says that he gets that the world hates him. The system of the world is set up against God's world. The world order doesn't love Christ. So if you don't love Christ, it's not really a shock.

What would be a shock would be if you started going against that world order flow. If your heart were changed. Maybe it would start with a new curiosity. Maybe it would begin with a new investigation, that perhaps what you thought about Jesus was wrong. That what you'd learned was erroneous. That your experience with him was clouded.

We need to reevaluate Who Is Jesus? You may think you have that settled, but I'm asking and suggesting you reexamine that issue. We have a worldly opposition to Jesus, one of darkness. This worldly darkness (picking up themes from John) is "skilled in asking religious questions and feigning spiritual interest, but such inquiries are nothing more than disguised, sophisticated rebellion."<sup>3</sup>

But there is also a religious opposition to Jesus. The "good" people are the ones who want to kill him. These people have a huge respect for God. They do good things. They're moral people. They care about the Bible. And they hate Jesus. So don't cram people into good and bad categories quite so easily. It's more nuanced than that. There are plenty of folks, and you may be one of them, who are good people, moral people, God-fearing people, but they don't like Jesus. Are you one of those?

Jesus is the most talked about person of all time. He's faced debate and ridicule time and time again. He can withstand your pressure too. He will not shirk from it. But you need to come with at least the humility that he has withstood the test of time. People believe in him, and they're not all stupid. It could be that he is who he says he is. Come and find out.

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<sup>2</sup> From Burge

<sup>3</sup> Burge, 234

### *The Cry of Jesus*

In the middle of this trial chapter, Jesus does something really interesting. In 7:37, we read, “On the last day of the feast, the great day, Jesus stood up and cried out...” Jesus had been laying low for the week during the festival. He hadn’t wanted to attract a ton of attention, because, as he said, “My time has not yet come.” It wasn’t time yet for him to die for his people. But he did go to the feast after all. And he did talk with people during the week, enough so that they marveled about and discussed his knowledge and teaching ability.

However, on the last day, he couldn’t hold himself back any more. Why would he do this? Why would he risk so much – he knows they want to kill him. But he must say something. He stands up and cries out, “If anyone thirsts let him come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, ‘Out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.’” (7:37-38)

Huh? Is this some random outburst? Not at all. You need to know some more about the Feast of Tabernacles.

Not only did they sleep in tents and remember the Exodus, but this was an important water ritual. Every day the priest would draw water from the pool of Siloam in Jerusalem. He would lead a procession back to the temple. They people would sing and chant Psalm 118:25: *O Lord, do save, we beseech you! O Lord, we beseech you, do send prosperity!* He would ceremoniously pour the water out in a bowl near the altar in the temple. Everyone would be crowded around pressing in. They wanted to see the water. They got as close as they could, and they sang Isaiah 12:3: *With joy you will draw water from the wells of salvation.*

On the last day, this would be repeated seven times. The crowd would be in a frenzy. This is when Jesus speaks. In the midst of a festival celebrating the God of life, the God of salvation, the God of provision, the God of the temple, Jesus says, Believe in me! I am the living water. I am life. I am salvation. I am provision. I the temple. I will give the spirit. I will give my presence to you if you believe in me.

You can see that this had an interesting effect. Some then knew he was the prophet and the messiah. But others knew they wanted to kill him.

We know Jesus had tremendous courage to do this. Have you ever wanted to interrupt an established ceremony? It takes guts to do. Jesus needed to say something to the people. So what did he mean exactly?

I think he meant a few things.

This festival was celebrating and also asking for God’s blessings. In this sense, it was similar to other water rituals in other pagan religions. It’s a common theme. We need water from the drought or else we’ll die. So it’s not especially special to the Jews.

Jesus is saying this festival is about more than that. Jesus is saying, I am that water. I am your provision. I will quench your thirst and provide for you. Jesus quenches the thirst of the religious and the irreligious. He is water. He is provision. He is the oasis in the desert. For all of you and for me. Are you thirsty? What do you think will get at that thirst? What are you thinking you have to have? Success? Recognition? Marriage? Someone to want you? Center stage? He’s saying that HE quenches the thirst. It’s interesting that he seems to quote from the Scriptures here. There isn’t any one verse that he’s quoting, but he is summarizing themes from the whole Bible. It talks about thirst quite a bit. In other words, when the Bible talks about the rivers of living water – it’s talking about *me*.

Back in Exodus, when the people were starving in the desert, God sent them manna. This is the backdrop of John 6. Bread from heaven. Jesus says he is the bread from Heaven. There was also a time when God’s people were desperately thirsty in Exodus. In chapter 17, they started asking, Have you brought us out here to die? To kill us with thirst?” This was an honest question, though it came out of a non-trusting place in their hearts. After all, hadn’t God already provided for them in astounding ways?

In their thirst, God provided water from them. He had Moses strike the rock and water flowed out from it. Another miracle of provision for them.

Jesus is standing there and he’s saying, I am the rock. You can come to me. I will be struck down, so you can live. I will be beaten, so you can have life. I will go thirsty, so you can fulfill your thirst.

Jesus is also saying that this water will flow out from him to the followers who believe in him and then out to the whole world. “*Out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.*”

Let me take you back to two more Old Testament passages that I think were on Jesus’ mind. The first is Haggai 2. In this prophecy, we read what God says: *My Spirit remains in your midst. Fear not. For thus says the Lord of hosts: yet once more, in a little while, I will shake the heavens and the earth and the sea and the dry land. And I will shake all nations, so that the treasures of all nations shall come in, and I will fill this house with glory, says the Lord of hosts.*” God is saying that he will bring in the nations, all nations, and that will fill his house with glory.

Next look at Ezekiel 47. Half of the chapter is the end of a vision Ezekiel has about a future temple. But there’s something strange about this temple – water flowed at the base of the building in every direction, and the water kept rising and rising. What we see here is that from the temple will be a river flood, one that encapsulates all peoples, all types of peoples, all nations – and this will be for the good of the world.

Jesus is saying, I am that temple. I am those streams of living water. And water doesn’t only flow from me to you, but from you to others. In a quick, cryptic way, he’s talking about worldwide evangelism and missions. He’s saying that we are

going to be the new temple. He certainly is the temple, but so are we. We are a part of his mission of living water. We aren't to dam it up, but to give it out. It flows from us to others as we invite them to know and believe this water source, as we invite them to come and drink from Jesus.

He says one other thing. John says Jesus is talking about the Holy Spirit. *Now he said this about the Spirit, whom those who believed in him were to receive, for as yet the Spirit had not been given, because Jesus was not yet glorified.*

This is interesting, partly because it's not exactly "true." I mean, that the Holy Spirit had come many times to God's people. It came upon many people in the Old Testament, and you can go back and see and read when it happens for Abraham and Jacob, Samson, Gideon and many others. When God came upon them it was his Spirit, his presence.

John is saying that, although the Spirit had come, it hadn't come like this before. It was going to be so different, as to render the previous way non-Spirit. The Holy Spirit was going to explode onto the scene. Before the Spirit had been localized and particular, but soon it was going to be everywhere and not containable. There would be an outbreak in Spirit.

I want you to think about it like this: The Holy Spirit is God's presence. His presence is going to come to you when Jesus is glorified – when he dies. So you are able to get God because of Jesus' death, applied to you, sealed to you, given to you by the Holy Spirit.

That is an amazing thing. People have wanted to get close to God since the beginning of time. Religion is based on trying to get close to God. Through rituals and formulas. Through chants and priests. Through morality and special places. How can we know God is listening to us? How can we know God cares about us? How can we know God is *here*?

People want to know that. You want to know that. You want to know if God is listening to you and if he cares about you.

Jesus is saying right here that through him you can get the presence of God, the Holy Spirit. It comes from Jesus' death for you. That's how you tap into the presence of God. It's not mediated through any other sort of thing or place. There doesn't need to be a special place any more, because God's presence is no longer only residing in the temple. The temple is no more. You are the temple, and the Holy Spirit is in you and works through you.

That means today. Right now. In the room. In this place. And that you can give that water and Spirit to others. The temple moves around because the temple is you and me, the church working together for God's glory to bring in the nations.

The analogy here is one of water. What does the Living Water, the Holy Spirit do for us and how can we recognize it?<sup>4</sup>

*Water renews.* The Spirit is a water that will quench your thirsts. The Spirit of God does this by preaching and glorifying *Jesus*. We can get very focused on the Holy Spirit and its manifestations and works and power. But the Spirit is focused on highlighting Jesus. The Spirit spotlights Jesus. He brings Jesus to your attention. He makes you think of Jesus' works and attributes in your life. Is that happening to you? If it is then the love of God becomes what Rev. Tim Keller calls "a thirst quenching reality." If I know that God loves me, then it's okay for me to be rejected. I cannot be rejected by God, so if someone rejects me, I'm sad but I'm still okay. That moves the love of God from a concept to a reality. The wisdom of God became a thirst quenching reality. If I understand and embrace the wisdom of God then I don't worry. I know that God takes care of me and loves me much more than I do myself. So I'm renewed and changed. The Holy Spirit is working in my life to renew me. The love of God, the wisdom of God, the sovereignty of God, the kingship of God, the peace of God, the justice of God. These things aren't just concepts any more, but a reality, a logic on fire.

*Water cleanses.* We clean things with water. The Holy Spirit is the same. It comes in, and things have to go. This may be slowly or immediately, but things you thought were okay don't seem to be okay any more. You can check this out by asking your friends if they see you changing or not. If the Holy Spirit is at work in you, if the Living Water is there, then you should be changing – are you changing? Is the Spirit in your life?

*Water flows out.* This is connected with one of our previous points about the water flowing out from us because we're temples. The water doesn't flow into the temple, but out from it. We become a fountain for others, life and water for others. Are you a fountain of life for others? Are you a fountain or a drain?

It's perhaps surprising to find out the Spirit is a person, and one who points to Jesus. If you are wanting more Spirit in your life, or more of Jesus as the Living Water in your life, then you need to pursue him like you would a person you want to like or you want to like you. Talk to him. Study him. Find out what he likes. Initiate with him. Do the things that make him happy.

The Spirit and the Living Water spoke to Nicodemus in the darkness about being born again. The Living Water and the Spirit spoke to the woman at the well about quenching her true thirst. Instead of man after man, she could answer her loneliness in the true Bridegroom.

It seems the spirit "gravitates toward the truly needy. One dear brother in our church put it this way: 'The Spirit cannot resist weakness.' Where are you weak? Rejoice! Where is your life falling apart? Rejoice, because the Spirit of God is eager to move into your life in those weak places – not in the places of your strength, where you don't feel the need for Jesus. It

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<sup>4</sup> Thoughts from Keller

is in the place of your weakness that you need the gospel, so live in your weakness. Don't try to do those things that, humanly speaking, eliminate weakness from your life."<sup>5</sup>

Water flows to the weak places. It finds the cracks and goes there and fills the holes. That's why I can't keep it out of my basement.

But what if that water were healing water? What if instead of weakening the foundation and rotting the joists, it somehow gave it strength? I wouldn't want to seal the cracks after all.

To make the point, but change analogies – singer songwriter Peter Mayer told a story before he sang a song. He says that in Japan, the most valuable teacups are the ones that have been broken the most. When a teacup is broken in Japan, it is put back together, remade and sealed with gold. The more breaks, the more gold, the more valuable it is.

We find The Living Water and the Holy Spirit when we admit our thirst and believe in the one who provided for us. The Holy Spirit is God's presence and is with us when we believe in Jesus, especially evident in his death and resurrection.

There is an old Sprite commercial that had as it's theme or motto Obey Your Thirst. Your thirst points to and is fulfilled in Jesus. There are many questions about him and who he is, and I invite you to ask away. He can take them. But ultimately your answers will rest in how he has been provided for you so you can no longer be thirsty. And that message should compel you to tell others.

God invites the thirsty person. That's the sort of person who gets to know God, to be in his presence and gets salvation. We just naturally think that it is the good people who get to see, hear and know God. That makes sense to us. But both God and Jesus say it's not the good person, but the thirsty person. Being thirsty is an absence of something. It's coming to God with what you don't have, not with what you do have.

A good person wants to come to God with her goodness. She thinks God owes her. She is miffed and angry when God isn't working out her way. A good person says, I know I've sinned, but I'm a good person and I deserve to be treated better. She says, "Give me drink."

A thirsty person comes to God in his lack. He knows that he cannot be good enough for God and is glad when God provides for him despite or because of his weaknesses. He is humble and thankful for God's provision. He admits his emptiness and weariness.

Are you thirsty? Do you have desires that aren't being met? Is there a weariness in your soul? That is thirst. Jesus says, Come to me and drink. You don't have to have money to come and buy. (Isaiah 55:1). Just come. Come in your brokenness and neediness and emptiness. That is what is required – thirst.

At the very, very end of the Bible, in Revelation 22, Jesus says the people who will enter the new heavens and the new earth are the ones who respond to his invitation of "Come, you who are thirsty." You have to realize your lack in order to drink from him.

A new friend was telling me this week about a reality show on TLC or Discovery. You submit your house to the show, get picked without your knowledge, and some men who used to be thieves break in and steal all your stuff. They film it so you can see how truly vulnerable your house is to robbers.

So you get to know your weakness. It gets exposed. No one likes that, not even if you signed up for it on the show. But that's what makes you strong. That's what gives you strength. Until you knew your weakness, you could be taken over. But once you saw your foolishness, you could be made strong. The reality for Christianity would be if Jesus moved into your house and went through that process room by room – but he stayed there with you, fought for you and protected you himself. You have to admit your weakness first.

Can you come to him? Do you feel your need of him? He invites you to come, so come.

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<sup>5</sup> Ryan, 187