

“The Response to Jesus”

April 26, 2026

John 7:37-52

I. Introduction

Since the Feast of Tabernacles was a celebration and reminder of the 40 years the Jews followed Moses in the wilderness, for the 7 days of the festival, people lived in tabernacles or booths. It was also a reminder of the various times Moses had given the thirsty, complaining people water to drink. Turn to Exodus 15:22-25, Exodus 17:1-7 (which we read a couple of weeks ago) and Numbers 20:1-11 record other times that Moses had brought water from a rock. With that in mind, at the beginning of each day of the Feast of Tabernacles the high priest would go outside of the temple grounds and draw water from the pool of Siloam. As the priest filled his golden pitcher with water, the temple choir would sing the words from Isaiah 12:3, “With joy you will draw water from the wells of salvation.” As he carried the water up to the Temple, the people would follow in a large procession. They would be carrying branches and twigs in their right hands, reminding them of the shelters their ancestors built as they wandered in the wilderness. In their left hands they carried a lemon or a branch from a lemon tree or some other fruit tree as a sign of the harvest. At the Temple, the priests would march around the altar one time while the temple choir sang. Then at the time of sacrifice the priest would go up to the altar and pour the water through a silver funnel as an offering of thanksgiving to God.

The last day or 7th day of the feast, the priests would march 7 times around the altar, chanting from Psalm 118:25: “Save now, I beseech thee, O LORD: O LORD, I beseech thee, send now prosperity.” Since it was the last day, the crowd following in the procession and gathered at the Temple would be at its largest for the week. It may have been at that point, as the high priest poured out the water, that Jesus stood and shouted His great invitation to thirsty sinners, “If anyone is thirsty, let him come to me and drink.” In today’s Scripture, John recorded Jesus’ invitation and the response of the crowd on the last day of the festival.

II. Jesus' Invitation

At the height of the moment Jesus made His invitation, "If anyone is thirsty, let him come to me and drink." The high priest's symbolism reminded them of the time and place at Meribah when Moses faced a thirsty mob in the wilderness crying for water and he struck the rock and, as Num. 20:11 says, "Water gushed out, and the community and their livestock drank." But Jesus was not just talking about water in the desert. As He told the Samaritan woman in John 4:14, "Whoever drinks the water I give him will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life." The Jews were reenacting a tradition that could never satisfy the heart. But Jesus offered them living water and eternal satisfaction. Jesus was talking about the Holy Spirit.

Three key words summarize Jesus' gospel invitation: **thirsty, come, drink**. First, the **thirsty** ones are those who recognize their spiritual thirst or need. In Isaiah 55:1 God said, "Come, all you who are thirsty, come to the waters; and you who have no money, come, buy and eat!" In the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5:6 Jesus said, "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled." The first step is that people need to recognize their need.

But if those who recognize their need are going to find relief, these thirsty individuals must **come**. They must come to Jesus, the only source of living water. Only Jesus can satisfy. Jesus said in John 14:6, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me." Later, when Peter stood before the Sanhedrin, he said in Acts 4:12, "Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved." But recognizing the need and coming to Jesus isn't enough. A person must **drink**, i.e., let Jesus come into his heart. Turn to the story of the rich young man—turn to Mark 10:17-23. Recognizing his need, the young man had come to Jesus, but he was unwilling to take the critical third step and drink—he was unwilling to let go of his love for money and accept Jesus as his Lord and Savior (Romans 10:9). One must accept Jesus on His terms.

Back in John 7:38, Jesus went on to say that "whoever believes in me, streams of living water will flow from within him." Believers aren't to be just pools of stagnate water. Believers are to be channels

through which streams of living water are passed on to others. Just as water satisfies thirst and produces fruitfulness, so the Spirit of God satisfies the inner person and enables the believer to bear fruit—the fruit of the Spirit from [Galatians 5:22-23](#) as well as carrying out the Great Commission of [Mathew 28:19-20](#).

John added a footnote that when Jesus gave His invitation, “the Spirit had not yet been given since Jesus had not yet been glorified.” The Holy Spirit had been active in the Old Testament—for example, in [Psalm 139:7](#) David wrote, “Where can I go from your Spirit? Where can I flee from your presence?” But it wasn’t until after the death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus to heaven—His glorification—that the Holy Spirit was given to believers in a new way. In [John 14:16](#) Jesus said, “I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Counselor to be with you forever.” After the coming of the Holy Spirit on the Day of Pentecost, all believers are filled with the Holy Spirit. [Turn to Romans 8:9-10](#). Now all believers have the Holy Spirit living in them; now living water can flow from them.

III. Responses to Jesus’ Invitation

A. The Convinced John then described several responses to Jesus’ invitation. First, there were the convinced—“*Jesus is from God.*” “On hearing his words, some of the people said, ‘Surely this man is the Prophet.’” They were convinced that Jesus was the Prophet Moses wrote about in [Deuteronomy 18:15-18](#). For some this meant Jesus was the forerunner of the Messiah. Although their knowledge about Him may not have been complete, they were at least convinced that Jesus was sent from God. As they continued to search, their faith and trust would be able to grow.

Others had a clearer understanding of who Jesus was and “said, ‘He is the Christ.’” They may have been quiet earlier during the festival, but now that they were convinced of Jesus’ identity. Now they were willing to tell others what they thought. These were thirsty people who had accepted Jesus’ invitation to come to Him and drink of the living water that He provided. Now streams of living water were coming from them as they reached out to others with their message, “He is the Christ.”

B. The Scoffers But not all in the crowd were convinced of Jesus’ identity as the One sent from God—there were the scoffers. The scoffers were skeptical; they said, “How can the Christ come from Galilee?”

Does not the Scripture say that the Christ will come from David's family and from Bethlehem, the town where David lived?" Basically, they were saying, "*Jesus cannot be from God.*"

The scoffers were right about the Messiah, but in their smug attitude, they failed to examine the data. Jesus met the qualifications. As Matthew and Luke record, He was a descendent of David ([Matthew 1:1](#); [Luke 1:32](#); [3:23](#), [31](#)); He had been born in Bethlehem ([Matthew 2:1](#); [Luke 2:4-7](#), [11](#), [15](#)). But the skeptics assumed that since Jesus grew up in Nazareth, He must have been born there. And, to their eternal loss, they had no interest in investigating the truth.

Once again "**the people were divided because of Jesus.**" Some wanted to believe, others wanted to seize Him for blaspheme. But for the third time since Jesus arrived in Jerusalem for the Feast of Tabernacles (the other two times are in [verses 30](#), [32](#)), they were unsuccessful. It wasn't the right time in God's plan.

C. The Confused A 3rd group was the confused. Unlike those in the crowd who either accepted or rejected Jesus, the temple guards were baffled or confused by Him—"*Who is Jesus?*" They had been sent several days earlier by the chief priests and Pharisees to arrest Jesus. They had listened and gathered evidence but, eventually, they returned empty handed. They didn't claim that the crowds prevented them, instead they said, "**No one ever spoke the way this man does.**" "*This Jesus is more than a man! No mere man speaks as he does!*" These weren't just trained soldiers; these temple guards were religiously trained Levites and Jesus' words left them confused. While they didn't accept Jesus as the Messiah, neither could they reject Him. They didn't know what to do with Him, so they came back without Him.

D. The Judgmental Then, there were the judgmental. The religious leaders refused to face facts honestly but passed judgment on the basis of their prejudices and their superficial examination of the facts. *They refused to accept Jesus.* Their rebuke of the guards was for the guards' lack of spiritual judgment. They accused them of being deceived by a trickster and placed them on the same level as the uneducated crowd. In contrast, the Pharisees self-righteously crowed, "**Has any of the rulers or of the Pharisees believed in him?**" The arrogant implication was that if Jesus were really the Messiah, the religious experts would have been the first to recognize Him.

The judgmental Pharisees continued to belittle the crowd as “this mob that knows nothing of the law.” The Pharisees viewed themselves as the spiritual elite. In their minds, they were above the possibility of being wrong about religious matters. In their minds, only those who were gullible, uneducated, and simple-minded could be deceived by Jesus’ claims. Such people were accursed for their ignorance of God’s law. Paul wrote about the difficulty of “smart religious people” coming to the Savior. Turn to 1 Corinthians 1:26-31. 1 Cor. 3:19 adds, “For the wisdom of this world is foolishness in God’s sight.”

E. The Thoughtful No doubt the rulers would have sent the guard out again, but Nicodemus, the one “who had come to Jesus earlier” in the night, spoke up. In John 3:2 he had said, “You are a teacher who has come from God,” but he wasn’t convinced yet, but his mind was open to Jesus’ claims. He represented the thoughtful: open but not yet convinced. He had probably been doing a great deal of thinking and studying since his first interview with Jesus, and he was not afraid to take his stand for truth. Nicodemus did not openly defend Jesus, but he pointed out that the council was not giving Jesus an honest hearing. “Does our law condemn anyone without first hearing him to find out what he is doing?” The rulers had already passed judgment and were trying to arrest Jesus before He had even been given a fair and lawful trial.

You can hear the sarcasm and contempt in their reply, “Are you from Galilee, too!” They refused to admit that Nicodemus was right in asking for a fair trial, but the only way they could answer him was by means of ridicule. **Their** minds may have been already made up but Nicodemus continued to pursue the truth and eventually became a believer; he helped take Jesus’ body down off the cross (John 19:38-42).

IV. Conclusion

Jesus’ invitation is still open today. Years after Jesus ascended into heaven, the Apostle Paul told the Philippian jailor in Acts 16:31, “Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved-- you and your household.” Romans 6:23 says, “For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.” Later, Romans 10:13 says, “Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.” But Scripture also has a warning, Isaiah 55:6 says, “Seek the LORD while he may be found; call on him while he is near.”

The responses to the invitation of the Gospel are just as mixed today as it was in Jesus' day. But they really come down to just two choices: reject Jesus or accept Him. Jesus warned in [Matthew 7:13-14](#), "Enter through the narrow gate. For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it. But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life, and only a few find it."

For some, it's just too good to be true—they basically refuse to accept God's free gift of eternal life. For some, Jesus may have been a good man and even a good teacher, but that is as far as they are willing to go. Contrary to the words of this "good" teacher, they say that all religions lead to the same end—sincerity is what counts. There are some who, contrary to God's Word, are unable to accept that they are sinners who cannot earn their way into heaven. They say that "*they are as good as anybody else.*" They don't need God or anyone—they are OK by themselves. In [Psalm 14:1](#) David wrote, "The fool says in his heart, 'There is no God.'" Then there are those who accept Jesus for who He is and what He said. They are convinced of their need for a Savior. They accept God's Word as truth. They accept and believe that Jesus died on the cross to pay the penalty for their sins; that He rose from the grave 3 days later; and that He is now in heaven. Because of this faith, they ask Jesus to be their Lord and Savior.

If you name Jesus as your Lord and Savior, "streams of living water" must flow from you. As we have been reminded several times in the last couple of weeks and months, life is short, and as [Hebrews 9:27](#) says, "Man is destined to die once, and after that to face judgment." We aren't to be stagnated pools watching the world go by. The Great Commission says to "Go and make disciples of all nations." [1 Peter 2:12](#) says, "Live such good lives among the pagans that, though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day he visits us." Later, [1 Peter 3:15](#) adds, "But in your hearts set apart Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have." Do the things you do, the things you say, the things you think demonstrate that Jesus is your Lord and Savior? Are streams of living water coming from you as you live your life day by day and as you reach out to others as you tell them of God's gift of eternal life? Can those around you see that you are a Christian by your life, by your love? Where is your hope?