

ROYAL STEWARDS OF LIVING WATERS

by Charlie Watkins

Scripture text: John 7: 37-44

Additional Readings include: Ex. 17: 5, 6; Is. 12:3, 4; 1 Cor. 10:4; Rev. 22:1-7

Good morning! John 7:37-39 is our primary text this morning. (*Note: have all stand, stretch and read Jesus' words loudly*).

*“On the last day, that great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried out, saying, **if anyone thirsts, let him come to me and drink. He who believes in Me, as the Scripture has said, out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.** By this He spoke concerning the Spirit, whom those believing in Him would receive; for the Holy Spirit was not yet given, because Jesus was not yet glorified.”*

Pray. Open Hearts, Silence the Enemy's voice, H.S. free. Recall gifts, dreams and hopes

The context of our Scripture text, an eyewitness account from the Apostle John, is both beautiful and tension-filled. **First the beauty.** As part of the seven day celebration of the Feast of Tabernacles, a priest would fill a golden pitcher with water drawn from the Pool of Siloam (recall the man born blind receiving his healing there; John 9:7) and carry it to the temple, while the people would follow in procession quoting Is. 12:3, “with joy we draw water from the wells of salvation.” Upon arriving at the temple, the priest would pour out the water onto the altar, remembering God's provision of water in the wilderness (Ex.: 17). **Now for the tension.** Traveling nearly alone, Jesus has quietly joined the Feast (John 7:10). It is sometime during His last year on earth and He is facing fierce opposition. His clear, strong message is provocative; He is the Messiah. He knows the deep spiritual thirst of His people at this particular time in history, and, in direct contrast to a once a year, ceremonial pouring of a mere pitcher-full of water, Jesus unashamedly identifies Himself as the source of endless spiritual waters to all who are thirsty and will come (1 Cor. 10:4).

Question: Do you want God's Living Waters to flow more freely and fully in your life today? REPEAT.

To help answer our question today, I want to share a perspective on the Holy Spirit and stewardship that you may not have previously considered. I won't be speaking today about the Holy Spirit of gift of giving, at least not directly, but about a lifestyle that includes stewarding every resource entrusted to us by God.

Note: copies of this message including over 50 scripture references and an outline on Biblical giving will be made available afterwards.

I am excited to be here today to share a word that has been a "happy burden" to me over the last two months. During this time some specific warfare victories and answered prayers tell me clearly that this message will be helpful and timely. I am here today to bless the Lord and to encourage you in this incredible role of Royal Steward. I will bring a Bible teaching, an encouraging word and a personal story all in an effort to help us get God's living waters flowing more freely and fully. Ready?

This larger concept of stewardship is consistent with God's Genesis command for man to exercise dominion over the earth and God's essential way of living, a kind of divine order that I'll explain in a moment. This stewardship also includes a place for those of us who have trusted in Jesus Christ in a vital and fulfilling role I'm calling, "**Royal Steward of Living Waters**". REPEAT.

I use the word Royal because we are called a royal priesthood in 1 Peter 2:9; that is, we are a people who minister "unto the Lord". I use the word steward because once we are saved, we are called to a life of discipleship, stewarding, or managing on behalf of the Lord, the resources entrusted to us. Finally, I use Jesus' words Living Waters to include all the mysteries of God as revealed through Jesus Christ by the Holy Spirit (Matt. 13: 11,12 and Is. 45:3), plus our own God-given gifts and resources.

Let's look at God. There exists an order within God Himself wherein each member of the triune Godhead, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, carries out different and specific responsibilities in deference or, in service to another. This is the divine order whereby God lives and will live forever (Gen. 1:26, 28 and 2:16, 17). We are most familiar with God the Son, Jesus Christ, who defers entirely to the Father, yet remains equally God. John Chapters 14 through 16 are especially full of such evidence. Here are just a few of Jesus' own words:

I only do what I see the Father doing; I speak only what the Father has taught me. I do what the Father commands. There are many others (John. 8:28 and John. 14:31; See also John 14: 10, 24 and John 15:15).

Jesus is steward of the Father's image and words, including the words of creation (Gen. 1:1; John 1: 1-5 and Heb. 1: 2,3).

Likewise, **God the Holy Spirit** is steward of Jesus' words and does everything to glorify Jesus, yet remains equally God. Jesus explained that the Holy Spirit would not speak on His own initiative but would hear from Jesus and disclose to them the things to come (John 16:13-15). The Holy Spirit is the steward over all the words of Christ, including that word implanted in our hearts that brings us new life, the living Word of God (1 Cor. 2:13).

Finally, the Father. Over what resource does He exercise stewardship? The awe inspiring answer is: His glory. His magnificent, transcendent glory, the most precious element in the universe. The Father is steward of His own Glory; there is nothing higher.

This is God's divine order of stewardship, each delighting in His role, submitting to another, and enjoying absolute security as equals because love drives every thought and action (See also John 1:2 and Deut. 6:4). I share this insight as foundational to joyful stewarding: there is a way God exists, and if God Himself lives happily, lovingly and effectively within a lifestyle of deference and mutual service, what does this say to us, those who bear God's very image? Isn't our culturally-driven god of hyper-independence and self vastly overrated in its ability to deliver real joy?

Let's next look **our place** in this divine order. God graciously invites us to join this happy fellowship and to play a vital role. As royal stewards, we have been granted access to the King's treasury, including God's wonderful truths, Holy Spirit gifts, insights and Word, all alive and revealing the spiritual realities of what is happening behind the scenes of this physical world.

We are the means whereby God's will, already fully accomplished in heaven, is to be established on earth. God gives gifts to us to enable this reality (Matt. 6:10 and Ps. 119: 90, 91). Welcomed into a secure, loving relationship with God, we find joy as we participate (Jn. 15:5,11).

Work with me on a simple but powerful exercise we can use every day to **take our place** as Royal Stewards of Living Waters. We begin with the first essential: connecting to our Source by lifting our hands in praise to worship God in heaven. Isaiah 12: 3, that hymn of praise recited during the feast of Tabernacles, is followed by verse 4 and the words, “give thanks to the Lord.” The word, translated give thanks, literally means, “lift your hands.” So lift your hands in praise if you are able. Go ahead, practice it a few times. Praise aligns our heart with God’s; it also causes great violence to the kingdom of darkness while imparting spiritual power and gifts to us.

Next, our feet are touching the earth, shod with the gospel of peace (Eph. 6:15), bringing good news (Is. 52:7). Move your feet if you are able. Go ahead and practice that a few times. Okay, we have our strategic position; now we need to get God’s Living Waters fully flowing.

Water. A healthy water system must have a source, a vessel in which it is stored and distributed and a recipient who receives the outflow. Think about God’s living waters as a spring-fed pond. The endless source is from deep beneath, the pond provides a place of nourishment for all who drink from it and the outflow or overflow brings life to recipients downstream, while at the same time, cleansing and renewing the pond itself. Source, vessel and recipient. Simple enough? Now, who is responsible for making this work?

First, God’s part. God is the source and supplies the Holy Spirit (Gal 3:5), the Living Waters (John 4:10).

God will clean the vessel, upon our request, to rid it of the debris of sin and self and fear and shame that clog its channels and reduce its flow (Ps. 139:23,24; Eph. 5:25,26).

God will replenish the waters, even increasing the source-flow in response to our obedient distribution of more and more (Rev. 7:17).

God also takes responsibility for the effect of the waters upon the recipient, multiplying their effect.

And finally, God will do something wonderful within us, His vessel, but more on that in a moment.

Clearly, God is responsible for a lot but not for everything. That brings us to **our role** and this is where it gets interesting.

Again from our text, *“Jesus stood and cried out with a loud voice, saying, **if anyone thirsts, let him come to me and drink.**”* Note the kindness of Jesus: He first offers us Living Water to quench our spiritual thirst. When Jesus spoke these words that day in the Temple, the overwhelmingly prevalent condition of his people was thirst. They hadn’t had a word from God’s prophets for hundreds of years, and, at the same time, were burdened by hundreds of rules imposed on them by the religious leaders. This was an **“all feet and no hands”** works-only religion, driving people to bitterness and hardness of heart. Are you thirsty today? Then come to God and drink. Every person must first be born again, receiving what Paul called, “God’s indescribable gift” (2Cor 9:15; John 3:5-7).

Next, we must agree to be God’s vessels or living sacrifices. This is our heart choice and requires this spiritual vision: to see the Lord as King and Source of Living Waters, inviting us into His grand story. Have you seen Him this way? Having seen Him, have you accepted His invitation? I hope so (Rom. 12:1). PAUSE

Next, we are called to treat the vessel as holy (1 Cor. 6:19), honoring it as precious, paid for by the high price of Jesus’ blood. Don’t get hung up on that sometimes intimidating word, holy, or make this too complicated. Instead, answer this question: are you respecting yourself with the same respect God shows you (2 Cor. 7:1)? Perhaps you need to simplify some small aspect of your life or forgive that person who disrespected you to make room for God’s best (1 Pet. 1: 17-19). You are valuable to God; receive this word today.

Finally, we are also called to be distributors of God’s Living Waters. Us, not God. As our text says, *“Out of his heart shall flow Rivers of Living waters.”* This means that outflow is God’s assumed expectation. It is the normal response to what God reveals in our hearts during worship or time in the Word. These are our responsibilities.

Now I want to offer a word about these outflows. I do so as an unapologetic, non-recovering praiser. Before I learned what I am about to share, I would praise and worship the Lord, even to the exclusion of other parts of Kingdom living. Then the Lord showed me something. If, as Pastor Jack Hayford teaches, praise is

an instrument of violence, a kind of air assault against the enemy's atmosphere of sin, sickness, despair and confusion, then our response to times of praise is the ground assault where we reclaim the territory with God's righteousness, divine health, hope and clear thinking. Praise and its love-response are designed to go hand in hand.

Please listen carefully. Unlike the people Jesus was speaking to that day in the temple, our times are characterized by a different kind of thirst. Whereas they were "all feet, no hands" we have something closer to the opposite situation. Many of us are well-supplied at the source. We have Bibles, wonderful sermons, devotionals, mentors, sweet fellowship and real community. We bask in the glow of beautiful praise and worship music. We are rich in God's Source supplies and these are all essential blessings. Yet despite all this, we are perplexed to find ourselves still thirsty. We want a remedy, so mistakenly, we seek even more from the Source.

Here's the word; please receive it as the Holy Spirit leads: to truly quench our thirst, we may need to augment our wonderful inflows with more outflows. Our worship needs to include Holy Spirit-directed actions, the love-responses to our years in the word and in worship (John 14:21). We may need to give, to overflow, to release and to bless. In other words, we need to give out of the abundance of gifts we have already received. This will free up the Spirit of God to resupply fresh waters, quenching our thirst. So, will you give your gifts away?

Now we have the whole package working together: we have assumed our strategic position and Living Waters are flowing in and out. All of this works together for God's glory and our joy, but it all has to be working together (John 15:9-11).

And please hear me: all our giving and doing should be done in God's strength, relying on the Holy Spirit, and not our own will power, lest we grow weary and lose heart (Heb. 12:3). Paul says it this way in 2 Cor. 4:7: "We have this treasure in jars of clay (sounds like a vessel) to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us."

This stewardship lifestyle is meant to work right where we live, in the everyday lives God has given us. I simply want to remind us today that people nearby us

are thirsty and we hold THE Water that will quench their thirst and bring joy to us.

Let me illustrate with personal story. This happened to me at a time when my own Living Waters were not flowing very fully or freely. Perhaps you can relate. The place was London, England, the time was February, 2000. I had recently ended my employment with a company in Charlotte, NC, where our family lived at that time, after an exciting but exhausting experience leading a promising start-up company. Another story. God had engineered an amazing transition for us into a promising opportunity in Europe, where we expected to relocate. It was an exciting time, to be sure, but the truth is that I never caught my physical or spiritual breath after leaving that company. I wasn't honoring this vessel, neglecting proper rest, nutrition and exercise. I had become overly concerned with earthly matters, anxiously focused on my new deal. I was also traveling back and forth on overnight flights between Charlotte, NC and London with many additional trips to Paris. Our children were in college so Blythe travelled with me to London, oftentimes.

It all sounds very heady, but mostly it became consuming and exhausting. During one particular trip, which I made alone, I was speaking on the phone with Blythe from my London hotel after a long day of work. It was February 16, 2000. Hearing something deeper in my voice than simple fatigue, she did not suggest I go to sleep early, as I expected, but encouraged me instead to go over to Holy Trinity Brompton ("HTB") church, where we had been attending, and to listen to Nicky Gumbel teach that week's evening Alpha lesson. Tired, but thirsty, I listened to God, speaking through my wife, and went.

The church was entirely full that evening. I was directed to the balcony. I was seated next to a man who spoke little English; we introduced ourselves. His name was Myagaa ("me-a-guy") and he was from Mongolia. He was a 25 year-old computer engineer and married father of 2. He told me that a friend of his at the BBC, where he was working as an intern, had dropped him off at church. "Trying to make me Christian, he said."

The praise and worship was especially rich to me that evening. Nicky brought forth the word. Worship and the Word. I was opening my heart to the Source. Living Waters flowing in (hands raised). As the meeting ended, and people

started to disburse, Myagaa began to ask me questions. Lots of questions. The blessing of the evening was now beginning to feel like a burden. I wanted to go back to my hotel and sleep! But, there was no escape. More questions. What was Nicky talking about? What is Christian life? How does Jesus move into hearts? Yes, Lord.

I settled back into my seat. I began showing him passages in my Bible. My energy level was rising for the first time in months. Waters flowing out. God was very near. Myagaa eventually became quiet as his questions ceased; he seemed to be pondering what he had heard. After a few minutes, he arose to say goodbye and I sensed the Holy Spirit nudging me to give him my Bible. Yes, Lord. More Waters flowing out. He accepted the gift, smiled, wrapped his arms around the Bible and said, "Good gift." Two weeks later I received this email from him.

"Dear Charlie,

We met at HTB church at Alpha course. And you gave me your Bible. Now I want to say (to) you that I'm Christian. I decided it last Thursday. I want to love God and to love friends and people. I want to live by the way God said to us.

Thank you (for) your kindness

Myagaa"

I will share the remarkable ending of that story in a moment. As Royal Stewards of Living Waters, we are God's receivers, holders and givers, watching for opportunities with the eyes of Jesus and listening for the Spirit's instructions to act. This is about bringing an attitude of stewardship to all of the gifts God has entrusted to us. By making our lives available for God's use, we join into God's grand love story, whereby we, along with the recipients, are blessed and changed. That's right, the vessel changes. Over time, we move "from communication to communion to union," as Dallas Willard writes in his book, Hearing God (ref. page 201). This is why Jesus could make the outlandish promise that as we abide in Him, we can ask for anything in His name and He will do it (John 15:7; Gal. 2:20; Col. 1:27).

Back at HTB, as Myagaa and I were leaving our seats in the balcony, one of the ushers (interestingly enough, they call them "stewards" over there) approached

us. "Excuse me, sir," he said, looking at me. "Am I to understand that you just gave this man your Bible?" I nodded. He then said something very important for this vessel to hear that evening and I believe for all us vessels to hear today. He said, "Well, sir, the strangest thing just happened. A woman just walked into the church downstairs, having come from Harrods Department Store (which was nearby HTB). She said she had been shopping in the store when the Lord spoke to her. She said that the Lord told her to purchase a Bible, to take it over to HTB and give it to a steward. The steward would know what to do with it." Then the steward looked directly at me and said, "Sir, I believe you need this Bible." And he handed me this Bible. PAUSE.

Now, even though I showed up that evening with nothing but a Bible and a trickle-flow of Living Waters, God engineered a message I couldn't miss!

My friends, let's receive afresh these two unchanging truths about stewarding God's Living Waters today:

- 1. Praise, worship and the Word are irreplaceable, but they bring inside of them H.S. gifts He wants us to use, and,**
- 2. When Living Waters are given away, God always replenishes the supply; it never runs dry. REPEAT (Rev. 21:1, 2 and Zec. 4:18).**

Biblical stewardship lovingly addresses a deep spiritual need within each of us: giving is something we need to do. We were made to be givers, just like our King, whose image we bear!

Now, a bit on the enemy's strategy, as we will be opposed in this holy undertaking: he doesn't want you to be a royal steward or a kingdom giver and has lots of good sounding reasons for you to hold back. He has told you that you're unqualified, among other lies. He has intimidated many good pastors into being reluctant to even mention the words: money, tithe, giving or stewardship from the pulpit. He doesn't want God's blessings to flow to you and me; he wants us believers living unhappily off the crumbs of our own sweat and toil, despite the readily available riches of Redemption. You might remember that was the same lousy deal he offered to Adam and Eve. He wants us, either through our own ignorance, or, by his deceiving us to disobey, to settle for his

miserable, enslaving, works-based lifestyle. Resist him and his lies; crowd him out of your mind with the weapon of your praise.

So like Jesus in the Temple that day, I'm here today to proclaim this in a loud voice: **"Say YES to God, and take up your full commission as God's Royal Steward!" Say yes to God!**

And know this: the God who calls us into a life of worship and giving also models it for us right alongside us.

So worship God with all your heart,

dive deeply into His Word,

use those H.S. gifts to bless others, and

give,

knowing it will be given back to you (Lk. 6:38),

knowing Jesus will see you right where you are, just like he did me that night in London (Gen. 16:13).

And when the enemy stokes that fear that you won't have enough, remember that God's love, flooding into your open heart, will overcome your fear to grasp and cling to this world's stuff. Have faith in God;

He will provide (1 John 4:18).

PAUSE.

So, let me ask you:

Isn't this the life we were meant to live?

Isn't this the people we were meant to be?

Isn't this the person you were meant to be?

Let's tell Him so as we PRAISE THE LORD.

A final thought before we respond and continue to worship with Communion.

There is much to get excited about as we embrace our role as Royal Stewards of Living Waters. There's the thrill of being used by God, of seeing miracles and

becoming more like Christ, but **THE** greatest thrill (hands raised; feet moving), is to be intimately connected to God and getting to know Him in so many new, wonderful ways.

So, how to respond to this today? I propose the following: begin with God right where you are in the quiet of your own heart. If this is your day, receive Him as Lord and Savior and be born again! To believers: affirm or re-affirm your desire to be His vessel. Ask Him for just what you need today to revive the flow of Living Waters from within you, even if it runs counter to your personal preferences or previous understanding.

Do you need more from the Source? Then soak in the waters of praise, worship and the word (raise hands). Pause.

Do you need cleansing? Then receive God's forgiving, restoring flow based on the blood of Jesus. Settle that matter with God today, and forgive yourself once and for all. Pause.

Do you need more outflow? Then let God's love for you melt away your fears, and give, remembering that God sees you and will replenish to overflowing, all of the energy, time, talent and treasure you will ever need (move feet).

You young-in-Christ believers and married couples here today, establish the tithe like we did 35 years ago and never look back. Align yourselves with all of God's order for Royal Stewardship, remembering that He promises you a lifetime of provision, revelation and blessings.

Whatever God is speaking to your heart today, bring your response forward during Communion in a few moments and seal it into your life by the Holy Spirit.

Bill Copeland. Communion.

Prayer. Let us pray. Heavenly Father, Source of Living Waters, we praise you. We open our hearts afresh at this moment to you, Holy Spirit, so you might flow more freely and fully in and out of our lives. Help us to be faithful in our role as your Royal Stewards, learning when to drink, when to ask for cleansing and when to give.

So we thank you for fresh inflows and for forgiveness. We thank you for loving us and vanquishing our fears whereby we cling insanely to this world's stuff. We thank you for modeling a lifestyle of giving whereby we can get your mighty waters moving again. Remind us again today that you are always supplying, always replenishing, and always seeing us. Thank you most of all for the joy of knowing you and being intimately and fully connected to you.

In the name of the one who came not to be served, but to serve, the name of Jesus. Amen (Matt. 20:28).

APPENDIX.

A short summary on Biblical financial stewardship. Giving, like all spiritual gifts, is a form of worship and is a very big deal. Here's a 4 point summary:

1. All resources, including the wealth we receive from our work, come from God, who is Lord of all; God is a loving giver who gave His only begotten Son and freely gives us all things to enjoy. He is worthy of imitation (John 3:16; 1 Tim. 6:17; Deut. 8:18a).
2. The first 10%, or tithe, is to be returned to Him. It belongs to Him. He says, 'It is mine.' By returning the first 10%, we acknowledge the blood covenant God has made for us (Mal. 3:8-10).
3. God, in response, removes the curse of the evil spirit of Mammon from our finances, breaking the enemy's power to deceive us regarding the false security of earthly riches; He then blesses the other 90%, extending and multiplying its use, pledging Himself to provide for us (Matt. 6:24 and 13:22).
4. Finally, our Holy Spirit-led giving, beyond God's tithe, becomes part of our stewardship role and a key way we partake in strategic, purpose-filled kingdom living and enjoy intimacy with God.