

**Martin White. 13<sup>th</sup> April 2008. John 7:37-39 & 8:12**

### The Feast of Tabernacles

Next month - 18<sup>th</sup> May (6 weeks from today) we will be hosting an event called "Front Edge". This is something that has run for a few years now across different Newfrontiers churches, where all the best evangelists are sent to preach in different churches and also to pray for God's power to heal.

We will be hosting someone called Gary Fry who is an evangelist and also leads the church in Weymouth, Dorset (as part of this initiative, we will also be sending Steve Holland down to do the same in a church in Bristol.)

The aim is that we invite as many people as possible along to the meeting, where Gary will pray for the sick, and then simply preach about the Good News of Jesus. When I spoke to Gary about this last, he said that he has already done about 6 Front Edge events and said that the main feedback he has been given is that it's not at all 'cringy' and people wish that they had invited more friends along to it.

We'll give more details about it nearer the time,

In the meantime, I believe that if we look at how Jesus interacted with people it will stir us again both to have faith and compassion and hopefully will encourage us to be active in inviting and bringing friends along to the Front Edge Sunday (and any time!) and, as the Bible says, explaining to people the reason for the faith we have.

Last week I talked about an amazing encounter that happened between Jesus and a man with leprosy - an intimate, one-on-one, life-changing moment.

John 7 & 8 cover a few days in Jesus' life when he went to celebrate the Feast of Tabernacles in Jerusalem, and I want to look at a few verses from these chapters that contrast with the one-on-one meeting from last week, in that this is Jesus addressing one of the largest crowds of people that you could come

across at the time in the middle east, of people who have arrived in Jerusalem as pilgrims for the festival.

The Feast of Tabernacles:

- Remembered the time when God delivered the Israelites from captivity in Egypt - leading them across the Red Sea and then into the desert, where they lived for 40 years.
- The festival lasted 8 days and took place in September/October
- At the feast, everyone had to live in tents/shelters made from palm branches (often on the flat roofs of their houses.)
- On the first 7 days of the feast, a large amount of water was drawn from the pool at Siloam (near the Temple) and then poured down the steps of the Temple as a commemoration of God providing water when Moses struck the rock in the desert. Then, on the last day, no water was poured out, to remind the Israelites about a verse in
- Isaiah 12:3 which says:

**"With joy you will draw water from the wells of salvation." Isaiah 12:3**

- Throughout the week, a massive oil lamp burned from the top of the Temple, as a reminder of the way God led the Israelites through the wilderness with the pillar of fire. No-one is quite sure how big this was, but there are records of how they used to keep all the priests old trousers and plait them together to make the wick.

Given this background, it's easy to see the relevance of what Jesus said to the crowds:

**"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." By this he meant the Spirit, whom those who believed in him were later to receive."**  
John 7:37-39

There has been gallons and gallons of water pouring down the steps of the Temple and into the streets over the last week, and then it stops as people are to remember and rejoice that they can "draw water from the wells of salvation"

- and then Jesus stands up and shouts to everyone "You get that from me; I'm the source, I'm the fulfillment of the Old Testament promise, and I will fully, totally satisfy you!"

What a claim to make! What an offer!

Later on, towards the end of the feast - possibly as they are putting out this huge lamp that would have been visible from all over Jerusalem, Jesus says this:

"When Jesus spoke again to the people, he said, "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life."

John 8:12

"I am the light of the world; that lamp has been reminding you of the pillar of fire that represented God's Presence, but it has been pointing to me - I am the fulfillment of this. I am God's presence in the world, and if you follow me, you will be saved and have life never walk in darkness!"

If last week's encounter was an intimate, personal account of one man's life being changed as he met Jesus, I think that these two encounters are like Jesus' booming, echoing voice reaching across nations and down through generations throughout history.