

John: Who is He?

John 7:1-53

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Turn with me to John 7. We're working our way through the gospel of John and we are going to attempt to look at the whole of this chapter this evening. Hear the word of God as we find it in chapter 7 beginning at the first verse.

John 7

May God bless the reading of His word. May we pray together.

Father, we thank you for Your word. Bless us now as we turn to Your word and help us to profit from it. For Jesus' sake, Amen.

In 1714, a child was born illegitimately to an English barmaid from Gloster, England. Twenty-one years later in 1735, as a student in Pembroke College in Oxford while attending Wesley's Holy Club, he was reading Henry Scrougal's *The Life of God in the Soul of Man* and he was converted on the eve, as it so happens, of The Great Awakening. He was to make thirteen journeys, two-month journeys, across to the colonies preaching and testifying to the grace of God in Jesus Christ. Tens of thousands of people were converted under his ministries. He's buried in Massachusetts. As a twenty-one year-old, a bishop urged him with the words of John 7:37 "Let anyone who is thirsty come unto Me." I'm speaking, of course, of George Whitfield, perhaps one of the greatest evangelists that has ever lived.

We're in the middle of John chapter 7; it's the Feast of Tabernacles which is one of the great annual feasts of the Jews. It occurred in September and October. It commemorated the in gathering of the crops. It was something like harvest festival. Maybe harvest festival started its life based on something like the Feast of Tabernacles. I think there is some argument to be said along those lines. It was certainly one of the favorite feasts of the Jews. It lasted a whole week and the children would be allowed to build ramshackle booths with palms with bits of twig and wood and so on the top of the houses and they would be able to sleep out there at night. There would be special food. You could imagine that children loved the Feast of Tabernacles.

There was excitement in Jerusalem on this particular occasion because Jesus was there. And the last time Jesus was in Jerusalem He had healed a man on the Sabbath and it had caused an uproar especially amongst the Pharisees and the Sanhedrin and the Jews because, according to them, He had broken the Sabbath laws. And we read now in verse 1 of chapter 7 that there were those Jews who were seeking to kill Him. And that's the first thing I want us to see as we look at this chapter together. There is a widespread confusion as to the identity of Jesus in this chapter.

I. Who is Jesus of Nazareth?

Who is this man performing these miracles, doing these might works. Who exactly is He? You heard all the questions there as we read the chapter. He's not *this*, is He? He's not *that*, is He? They're asking all manner of questions.

There are four discernable groups of people in this chapter. The first are what we might call the Galilean folk. These are the people that we've been looking at and watching in chapter 6 of John's gospel. You remember they had been crisscrossing the northeast shore of the Sea of Galilee following Jesus from one side of the sea to the other. Some of these have now come down to Jerusalem because it's the Feast of Tabernacles, and they're still agog by all the things that Jesus has done. They would have stood out in Jerusalem; their accent would have been different, their clothes would have been different, the food that they brought down with them would have been different. Many of these were beginning to think that perhaps Jesus was the prophet, perhaps He was the Messiah, perhaps He was the Christ.

Then in verse 35, John identifies the Judean crowd or, as John calls them, the Jews; and he means Jews, probably to distinguish the Judeans from the dwellers in Galilee. He doesn't specifically mean Jews in Jerusalem, but Jews who lived in Judea as opposed to northern Galilee. They were much less sure what to make of Jesus. Jesus had said, "Where I go, you cannot come." They can't understand that. They don't understand what it is that Jesus is saying.

Then thirdly, there's the Jerusalem crowd; the Jewish crowd that specifically lived in Jerusalem. John mentions them in verse 25. Some of the people of Jerusalem are confused because they don't understand why the authorities in Jerusalem are allowing Jesus to speak in public. "How can He be the Messiah?" they are saying. At least, according to them, when Messiah comes He will come suddenly, and no one will know where He comes from. Now, who knows where they got this teaching from, but that is the prevailing attitude in Jerusalem. Everybody *knew* where Jesus had come from. He'd come from Nazareth up in the north, and Joseph was His father and Mary was His mother. That is what they believed.

And then there's an inner crowd, a fourth group of people. And they are the leaders. They are the Sanhedrin and John mentions them in verse 32. The Pharisees heard the crowd muttering—the chief priests, the Sanhedrin—and they are determined to get rid of Jesus. Lots of questions as to the identity of Jesus and John, I think, is introducing that here in chapter 7 and drawing attention to it because that's the purpose of John's gospel.

John wants us to ask this question and he wants us to arrive at an answer to this question: “Who is this Jesus of Nazareth?” Who is He *really*? Is He just another miracle worker, is He just another prophet, is He just a voice in the wilderness like John the Baptist, or is He really the Messiah, is He really the Son of God who is come into the world to save sinners.

You see, all eternity hangs in the balance in the answer to that question. Who is Jesus of Nazareth? Maybe you've wandered into our prayer meeting here at First Presbyterian Church tonight, and we're delighted that you're here. But maybe that's where you are; you're wondering who Jesus is. Maybe you've heard about Him since the day you were born; maybe you've heard about Him from pulpits all over this city; maybe you've heard conflicting views about Jesus of Nazareth and you're asking the very same question that these people are asking. Who *is* He, really?

II. Opposition to Jesus.

There is in the second place the mounting opposition to Jesus now as we go through John's gospel. It is hinted at in verse 25. Some of the people of Jerusalem therefore said, “Is this not the man whom they are seeking to kill?” Obviously there were rumors at the Feast of Tabernacles of all things this joyful feast that children loved. There were rumors in Jerusalem that there was an attempt to plot, to kill Jesus of Nazareth. Look at verse 30, it gets a little stronger. “So they were asking, they were seeking to arrest Him but no one laid a hand on Him.”

There's this mounting opposition; it comes in particular from the quarter of the Sanhedrin or the Pharisees in Jerusalem. Do you know the amazing thing, as you look at John 7, how people who would normally be in opposite camps, people who would not be reconciled on any other basis but in their opposition to Jesus. You often see it in TV shows. People who have absolutely nothing in common with each other but they dislike Christianity; and they dislike what they call fundamentalism; and they dislike, with a passion, people who believe their Bibles and carry their Bibles about with them. And you see it here on the eve of the crucifixion, where you see Herod and Pontius Pilate, who are enemies and have nothing in common, and yet, on the eve of the crucifixion they are lock stepped with one another in their opposition to Jesus Christ. There's a lesson here that you can expect the world to be united in its opposition to the gospel and

to Jesus Christ.

III. The Messianic promise.

And the third thing I want us to see here is the Messianic revelation that is given because Jesus gave this revelation in verses 28 and again in verse 37. Jesus proclaimed—actually you could translate that as He shouted—because there was something that He was now going to say that needed to be heard. It's the great event of the Jewish calendar. Rabbis used to say that if you've never rejoiced at the Feast of Tabernacles, then you've never rejoiced. It was worth paying money to see the Feast of Tabernacles and to see the ritual that took place. For seven days the priests would go to the pools of Siloam and there would be carrying golden pitchers; they would fill those pitchers with water and then make their way through the streets of Jerusalem towards the temple precinct and they would be singing the praises of God from Isaiah chapter 12, "Let us draw water from the wells of salvation." The streets would be crowded with tens of thousands from people from all over Judea and Galilee and the Diaspora would make their way to Jerusalem and on those seven days they would gather in the streets to watch this procession as these golden pitchers were carried by the priests towards the temple. And then one of the priests would take the pitcher and pour water beside the altar of sacrifice in the temple where the daily sacrifice would be offered. And the people of God would wave their branches and they would cry out, "God is our Savior; let us draw water from the wells of salvation." And then on the last day of the feast, they would do this and they would come to the altar and the priests would go round the altar once, twice, and seven times, and then the chosen priest would pour the water beside the altar. And when he had done this he would raise his hand and the whole congregation would fall silent.

It was the climax of the Feast of Tabernacles. And at that moment of silence Jesus cries out, "If anyone is thirsty, let him come to Me and drink." Can you imagine it? "Whoever believes in Me as the Scriptures have said out of his heart will flow rivers of living water."

We're not sure what Scripture Jesus was actually alluding to. He may have been alluding to Isaiah 12, he may have been alluding to Ezekiel 36, He may have been alluding to Ezekiel 47, but John has been trying to say from the very first chapter of his gospel that only pictures and symbols come from Moses. That's all you are ever going to get from Moses—pictures and symbols. But now in the coming of Jesus Christ, the fullness has arrived! All that went before was only type and shadow and preparation, like a man who is trying to look over a wall, and he jumps as high as he can and he can just glimpse over the wall for a second or two, and then he falls down. But now he's on the other side of the wall, and Jesus is saying, "Do you realize this Feast of Tabernacles ritual that you've been doing for *centuries* and centuries is all about *Me*." And He's speaking to people who are thirsty and who, in Pascal's words, have "a God-shaped void in

their hearts that can only be filled by Jesus Christ.”

Now there's a rather important issue here especially in the translation of verse 38. “Whoever believes in Me out of *his* heart...” Who is the “his” there? Is it out of the heart of the believer will flow rivers of living water? As one side of the church has said from the earliest of times or rather, as I think it really is, not out of the heart of the believer will flow rivers of living water but out of the heart of Christ will flow rivers of living water. Of course, He's talking about the Holy Spirit, and this is the prophecy, if you like, this is the *indicator* of what happens on the day of Pentecost. As a result of the death of Jesus, and the resurrection of Jesus, and the ascension of Jesus to the right hand of God, as a consequence of the Father delighting in all that Jesus has offered and done and accomplished, He pours out the Spirit of Jesus. It's a wonderful text and it's not accidental that it is the gospel of John that has Jesus cry on the cross, “I thirst.” He took our thirstiness upon Himself in order that our thirst might be quenched by faith in Him. To those who are thirsty He hands the thirst-quenching Spirit. That is what John is saying.

There was a Brazilian teenager I was reading about the other day. Her name was Christina and she had longed to leave the poverty of her neighborhood for life in the big city. Her mother was distraught of course; went to look for her and couldn't find her. And she stopped in a photo shop to make a photo of herself for the mother. After she bought her bus ticket to the big city, she took as many photographs as her money allowed and she went everywhere in the big city. She went to bars, seedy places, bathrooms, hotels, anywhere and pinned up her own picture on the wall, on the mirror. She couldn't find her daughter. Then one day Christina saw a picture of her mother on the wall and on it were these words “Whatever you have done; whatever you have become; it doesn't matter. Come home.” It's a true story.

I heard the voice of Jesus say, “Come unto Me and rest; lay down, O weary one, lay down your head upon my breast.” I came to Jesus as I was, weary and worn and sad; I found in Him my resting place, and He has made me glad. I heard the voice of Jesus say, “Behold, I freely give the living water; thirsty one, stoop down and drink, and live. I came to Jesus and I drank of that life-giving stream; my thirst was quenched, my soul revived, and now I live in Him.” Let's pray together.

Father, we thank You for this extraordinary chapter in John's gospel, and as we've just flown over the surface of it this evening, we thank You for that central truth that Jesus and Jesus only can quench the thirst that lies within the human soul. And we pray from amongst the numbers gathered in this auditorium here this evening, that if there is anyone here who still does not know what it is to have that thirst quenched in Jesus, Lord, by Your sovereign power draw them to the wells of Your salvation and cause them to drink and live, to believe in Jesus Christ. For Jesus' sake we ask it, Amen.

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