

## JESUS AT THE FEAST OF TABERNACLES

(John 7:1-24)

<sup>1</sup> After these things Jesus walked in Galilee: for he would not walk in Jewry, because the Jews sought to kill him. <sup>2</sup> Now the Jews' feast of tabernacles was at hand. <sup>3</sup> His brethren therefore said unto him, Depart hence, and go into Judaea, that thy disciples also may see the works that thou doest. <sup>4</sup> For *there is* no man *that* doeth any thing in secret, and he himself seeketh to be known openly. If thou do these things, shew thyself to the world. <sup>5</sup> For neither did his brethren believe in him. <sup>6</sup> Then Jesus said unto them, My time is not yet come: but your time is alway ready. <sup>7</sup> The world cannot hate you; but me it hateth, because I testify of it, that the works thereof are evil. <sup>8</sup> Go ye up unto this feast: I go not up yet unto this feast; for my time is not yet full come. <sup>9</sup> When he had said these words unto them, he abode *still* in Galilee. <sup>10</sup> But when his brethren were gone up, then went he also up unto the feast, not openly, but as it were in secret. <sup>11</sup> Then the Jews sought him at the feast, and said, Where is he? <sup>12</sup> And there was much murmuring among the people concerning him: for some said, He is a good man: others said, Nay; but he deceiveth the people. <sup>13</sup> Howbeit no man spake openly of him for fear of the Jews. <sup>14</sup> Now about the midst of the feast Jesus went up into the temple, and taught. <sup>15</sup> And the Jews marvelled, saying, How knoweth this man letters, having never learned? <sup>16</sup> Jesus answered them, and said, My doctrine is not mine, but his that sent me. <sup>17</sup> If any man will do his will, he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God, or *whether* I speak of myself. <sup>18</sup> He that speaketh of himself seeketh his own glory: but he that seeketh his glory that sent him, the same is true, and no unrighteousness is in him. <sup>19</sup> Did not Moses give you the law, and *yet* none of you keepeth the law? Why go ye about to kill me? <sup>20</sup> The people answered and said, Thou hast a devil: who goeth about to kill thee? <sup>21</sup> Jesus answered and said unto them, I have done one work, and ye all marvel. <sup>22</sup> Moses therefore gave unto you circumcision; (not because it is of Moses, but of the fathers;) and ye on the sabbath day circumcise a man. <sup>23</sup> If a man on the sabbath day receive circumcision, that the law of Moses should not be broken; are ye angry at me, because I have made a man every whit whole on the sabbath day? <sup>24</sup> Judge not according to the appearance, but judge righteous judgment.

After Jesus fed the 5000 and after he walked on the Sea of Galilee and after he gave his famous "Bread of Life" discourse he continued walking around in Galilee. It was too dangerous to go back into Judea because the Jews sought to kill him.

Even though we are only in the seventh chapter of this gospel, we are drawing closer to the cross. You will notice in verse two that the Jewish Feast of Tabernacles was at hand. This feast was in the fall of the year to give thanks for the fall harvest. And so it was about six months before the next Passover feast in which Jesus would be slaughtered for the sins of the world. So, Jesus has only six months to live.

By now, the Jews are seeking in earnest to kill him. They are not just talking about it. They are making their plans. They are plotting how they will kill Jesus when he comes to Jerusalem. And so, Jesus is biding his time in Galilee and avoiding the plots of the Jews in Jerusalem.

Now according to the Jewish historian, Josephus, the Feast of Tabernacles was the most popular and well attended of all the feasts. It was a great celebration. And people came flocking to Jerusalem for this feast every year. Now when these many thousands of people would come into town, they would build themselves little makeshift structures from branches and leaves and they would live in these little tents during the seven days of the feast. This is why the feast is called the Feast of Tabernacles, because everyone had their own little tabernacle to live in while the feast was in progress.

So the situation that we find at the beginning of chapter seven is that the Jewish rulers in Jerusalem are plotting to kill Jesus. The sense is that they are actually making their plans. They are devising their strategies as to how to lay hold of Jesus without causing an uproar among the people. They are scheming. They are having committee meetings to devise plans to trap Jesus.

You will notice in chapter eight, they brought an adulterous woman to Jesus and John says that they did so in order to tempt Jesus.

*This they said, tempting him, that they might have to accuse him.*  
John 8:6

This poor woman probably was set up by the Jewish rulers. I am sure that she was guilty. But she was only a pawn in the hands of the Jews. They may have planned this days in advance. And their interest was not in protecting the integrity of the law but in trapping Jesus. You see how the Jews were seeking to kill Jesus even before he came to the feast.

What hatefulness was in their hearts! What jealousy! What fear! This was the only righteous man on the face of the earth and they wanted to kill him. They would just as soon let Barabbas go, but by all means, kill Jesus.

Now remember that while the Jews are plotting to kill Jesus in Jerusalem, Jesus is still in Galilee, where it is not quite as dangerous. And you will notice that his brothers had a little advice for him.

*His brethren therefore said unto him, Depart hence, and go into Judaea, that thy disciples also may see the works that thou doest. For there is no man that doeth any thing in secret, and he himself seeketh to be known openly. If thou do these things, shew thyself to the world.*  
John 7:3, 4

It is clear that Mary had other children after Jesus was born.

*Is not this the carpenter's son? Is not his mother called Mary? And his brethren, James, and Joses, and Simon, and Judas? And his sisters, are they not all with us?*  
Matthew 13:55, 56

Now from our passage, we find that during Jesus' public ministry these brothers were unbelievers.

*For neither did his brethren believe in him.*  
John 7:5

And Jesus once stated that he had no honor in his own household. (Mark 6:4) It does appear that his brothers eventually became believers, probably after his resurrection. And Jesus appeared to them in the upper room. (Acts 1:14) But in our text, they are represented as being unbelievers.

And so, Jesus was the oldest of at least six siblings. They all had the same mother, but of course, Jesus had a different Father, Jesus being conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Now, in Roman Catholicism, it is strongly held that Mary was a perpetual virgin. And they say that when this passage says, "his brethren," it refers to his near kin, possibly cousins. But, there is no reason to believe that these "brethren" were actually cousins or other close relatives as taught in Roman Catholic theology. This is an attempt to preserve the perpetual virginity of Mary. But there is no reason to demand such a doctrine. The perpetual virginity of Mary has no significance in true biblical theology. Her virginity before the birth of Jesus is the critical factor, not after. There is no warrant at all in the Scriptures for worshipping Mary or for attaching any merit or moral

value to her continued virginity. And so, it seems clear that Jesus had younger brothers and sisters by Mary. Let's take a closer look at these brothers.

I. They were unbelievers.

*For neither did his brethren believe in him.*  
John 7:5

They were unbelievers first and foremost because they were fallen men. We saw in the last chapter that all men are unbelievers until God draws them and regenerates them. And even Jesus' brothers were sinful, unbelieving men.

Humanly speaking, they had difficulty believing because of their familiarity with Jesus. Jesus said,

*A prophet is not without honor, but in his own country, and among his own kin, and in his own house.*  
Mark 6:4

And the principle certainly applied to his own family. A prophet hath no honor in his own family. These younger brothers were so familiar with Jesus that they found it difficult to accept his deity.

This would suggest to me that Jesus' humanity was so real and his life was so utterly human that even his closest relatives had difficulty seeing past it. Because of his humanity with all its limitations, they could not recognize his divine nature. They had seen Jesus get hungry and thirsty and weary. They had seen him suffer pain. They had seen him grow in stature and in wisdom. And I am certain that until he was an adult, they never once saw him exercise the prerogatives of deity. So, even now, almost three years into his public ministry, John tells us they are still unbelievers.

Note: Does this not tell us that men are not saved by birth into a family? If anyone should have been deemed a covenant child by virtue of their family, it was these brothers. They were born to Joseph and Mary. Their brother was the Savior himself. And yet, they are as lost as the next man. This is why we should not baptize infants just because the parents are Christians. These children were born into the preeminent Christian family, but they were unbelievers.

II. They had the presumptive arrogance to command Jesus.

*His brethren said unto him, Depart hence, and go into Judea . . .*  
John 7:3

Had they had any idea who they were talking to, they would not have dared to tell him what to do. Had they known they were addressing the Creator of the universe, they would certainly not have presumed to offer him advice. It is the height of arrogance and ignorance to try to dictate to God. Man does not tell God what to do. Rather, God tells man what to do. And yet, these younger brothers try to instruct Jesus.

They tell him to go to Judea. Do you want to be an actor, then go to Hollywood. Do you want to be a country singer, then go to Nashville. Do you want to engage in high finance, then go to Wall Street. And the brothers advised Jesus to go to Judea to advance his religious cause. There was only so long, they thought, that Jesus should relegate himself to the rural areas. He should now go to Jerusalem and make a name for himself.

You will notice that they wanted him to go to Judea to do miracles.

*His brethren therefore said unto him, Depart hence, and go into Judaea, that thy disciples also may see the works that thou doest.*

John 7:3

“Come on Jesus, let’s go to Jerusalem and show off a little. Only this time let’s do it publicly in front of the Jerusalem rulers and the priests and the temple authorities. Let’s take your ministry to bigger and better things. If you really want to be somebody, you must do these things in Jerusalem.”

*For there is no man that doeth any thing in secret, and he himself seeketh to be known openly. If thou do these things, shew thyself to the world.*

John 7:4

Now this admonition from the brothers, that Jesus should go openly instead of secretly, would indicate to me that the general tenor of Jesus’ ministry was quiet understatement. Jesus operated in the back country. He did his miracles quietly and without fanfare. He never advertised himself. He didn’t put out flyers telling people to come on such and such a day to see his great miracles. He simple quietly healed the sick and had mercy on those in need. He was not interested in fame for fame’s sake. He was interested in one thing, doing the Father’s will. And he went about his business quietly and many times privately. But these unbelieving brothers say, “Go public. Take your game to the world. Strut your stuff.”

It seems to me that these brothers didn’t even truly believe that Jesus was really a miracle worker.

*If thou so these things, shew thyself to the world.*

John 7:4

They had seen some astonishing things, but in the minds of the brothers, these things may have been tricks. They may have been slights of hand. These works of Jesus may have been by cunning and deceit rather than by the power of God. And so, they say, “If you do these things, do them openly.”

### The Response of Jesus to his Brothers

- I. It was not the right time for him to go to Jerusalem.

*Then Jesus said unto them, My time is not yet come: but your time is always ready.*

John 7:6

Now the immediate meaning of these words is that it is not time for Jesus to go to the feast, but his brothers could go at any time. They were free to go, but Jesus was not free to go. The brothers could go now or later, but Jesus could not go now.

When Jesus said, “My time is not yet come,” he uses a different word than the one he used in John 2:4. In John 2:4, he told his mother that his hour (hora) is not yet come. And the Greek word is *hora*. But in John 7:6, it is the Greek word *kairos*. When Jesus said, “Mine hour is not yet come,” he meant that the hour of his death is not yet come. But by using a different word, this would suggest that Jesus is not talking about the time of his death, but rather, the time or occasion of his trip to Jerusalem. So, Jesus tells his brothers that it is time for them to go to Jerusalem if they want to, but it is not yet time for Jesus to go.

This suggests that Jesus was on very meticulous schedule. He was on the Father’s schedule. Jesus arose in the morning at the appointed time. He went to bed at the appointed time. He did his works at the appointed time. He met the woman at Samaria at the appointed time. He healed the man at the pool of Bethesda on the appointed day. Everything that Jesus did was on the Father’s schedule.

It is hard for us to imagine how Jesus could do everything in his life exactly on schedule. Everything that he did was done perfectly according to the predetermined will of God. He never took a step that was not appointed of the Father.

Now you and I also take our steps according to the plan of God. God has determined what shall be the course of our life. But many of our steps are taken according to the permissive will of God. He allows us to err. He allows us to go astray. He allows us to take steps according to the dictates of our evil nature. But here is the remarkable truth about Jesus. Every step he took was according to the preceptive will of God and the perfect will of God. Jesus is the only man who ever had a pure heart with a perfect inclination to do the will of God. And his pure heart led him to always do pure deeds and to say pure words and to follow the perfect plan of God in his life. And so, there was always a perfect time schedule for Jesus. And in this case, it was not time for him to go to Jerusalem.

II. It was not the right circumstances for him to go to Jerusalem.

*The world cannot hate you; but me it hateth, because I testify of it, that the works thereof are evil.*  
John 7:7

It was not wise counsel for Jesus to go to Jerusalem openly at this time. And the reason is that he was hated there. The Jews sought to kill him. And they were probably watching the roads into the city. They were manning the gates. And they had their evil eye out for Jesus.

Now Jesus told his brothers, "The world cannot hate you." What he meant was that his brothers were of the world. They were part and parcel of this whole world system. They were sinners. Their hearts were cold and dark. And the world had no reason to hate them.

You see, sinners love the company of sinners. Sinners are not threatened by other sinners. And therefore the world did not hate Jesus' brothers because Jesus' brothers were like-minded sinners. But Jesus – this was a different story. Jesus said, "But me it hateth."

The world hated Jesus. That is, the world of sinners hated Jesus. And this included the sinners in Jerusalem. They hated him because he was not of this world. They hated him because he was different. And in our text, they especially hated him because he opened his mouth and testified against them.

*But me it hateth, because I testify of it, that the works thereof are evil.*

You may remember how pointedly Jesus spoke to the Jews during the "Bread of Life" discourse. He openly told them that they were unbelievers. (John 6:36) He told them that of their own will they cannot come to Him. (John 6:44) And Jesus told them that they had no life in them. (John 6:53) And hate began to well up in the hearts of the Jews toward Jesus and they plotted to kill him.

So, Jesus told his brothers, "They hate me, but they don't hate you. So go on up to the feast, it's not time for me to go up yet."

*Go ye up unto this feast: I go not up yet unto this feast; for my time is not yet full come.*  
John 7:8

### The Secret Operations of Jesus.

His brothers went on up to Jerusalem. This was a great festival and they didn't want to miss the party. And so, they left their older brother behind and they went on up. But you will notice that later Jesus also went to the feast.

*But when his brethren were gone up, then went he also up unto the feast, not openly, but as it were in secret.*

John 6:10

The key thought in this verse is secrecy. Jesus used a good deal of discretion at this feast. And the first secret thing that he did was to come to the feast alone. You see that he went to the feast secretly. There was no fanfare. He didn't come with his family. He secreted himself away from the group and he went to the feast secretly. Maybe he took the back roads. Maybe he stayed off the roads altogether. At any rate, he was able to avoid notice when he came into Jerusalem.

And it appears that his clandestine operation continued when he was in the city.

*Then the Jews sought him at the feast, and said, Where is he?*  
John 6:11

The Jewish leadership was now searching the city for Jesus. It says they sought him. Maybe there were going door to door. Maybe they were questioning the people. But they were searching for him because they wanted to kill him. And they were frustrated because they were asking, "Where is he?"

But not only were the Jewish rulers looking for him but the people were also talking about him.

*And there was much murmuring among the people concerning him: for some said, He is a good man: others said, Nay; but he deceiveth the people.* <sup>13</sup> *Howbeit no man spake openly of him for fear of the Jews.*

John 6:12, 13

It seems that the whole city was talking about Jesus. Jesus was the main attraction. But no one could find him. There was electricity in the air. There was great interest and curiosity about Jesus. Everywhere you looked around the city, people were gathered in little groups talking about Jesus. They were asking, "Where is he?" And they were debating. Some thought Jesus was a good man. Others thought he was a deceiver. And the whole city was abuzz over this man Jesus.

But there was a good bit of fear in the city as well.

*Howbeit no man spake openly of him for fear of the Jews.*  
John 6:13

### Jesus at the Feast

*Now about the midst of the feast Jesus went up into the temple, and taught.*  
John 6:14

#### I. The Jewish response to Jesus' teaching.

Even though he came to the feast secretly and he hid himself up to this point, the time finally came for him to be seen. And as was his custom, he went to the temple to teach. And of course, the Jews (the rulers) quickly spotted him and came to hear what he said. Now, they didn't come with a pure heart. They came to find some error in his teaching. They came to gather evidence against him. They hoped to hear him blaspheme or to advocate the breaking of the law. But even though they came with an evil heart, they couldn't help being awestruck with the expert learning of Jesus.

*And the Jews marvelled, saying, How knoweth this man letters, having never learned?*  
John 6:15

The Jewish rulers who were trying to kill him, couldn't help being amazed at his doctrine. They found themselves listening intently and forgetting for a moment that they hated him. And they marveled

that a man with no schooling was a man of letters. When it says he knew letters, it probably means that he displayed an astounding knowledge of the Old Testament Scriptures and Jewish traditions.

## II. Jesus' Response to the Jews.

The Jews wanted to know how it was that Jesus had such amazing knowledge of the Scriptures. And now Jesus will tell them about his doctrine.

### A. My doctrine is God's doctrine.

*Jesus answered them, and said, My doctrine is not mine, but his that sent me.*  
John 6:16

The Jews were amazed at his doctrine and Jesus was assuring them that his doctrine was not some new invention. It was not new doctrine. It was no new invention. It was the age-old doctrine of God. It was the Old Testament Scriptures revealed. Jesus was opening up the Old Testament and demonstrating what it really mean. It was Jesus showing them the true meaning. It was Jesus teaching them about the true meaning of the manna in the wilderness. It was Jesus teaching the true meaning of the Law of Moses. It was Jesus teaching the true meaning of the Sabbath. And the Jews were stunned at his understanding.

### B. My doctrine is comprehended by those who want to do the will of the Father.

*If any man will do his will, he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God, or whether I speak of myself.*

John 6:17

It seems here that there is a key component which is necessary before a man can understand and comprehend the true meaning of Scripture. Remember that "*The natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God.*" (I Corinthians 2:14) And Jesus tells these Jews that there must be a right disposition of the heart before a man can know true doctrine. If there is a disposition in anyone to do God's will, then he will know his doctrine. If a man wants to keep his commandments; if he wants to do the will of God, if he wants to yield his heart and will to his requirements; if he has a disposition to do his will; if he is ready to yield his intellect and his emotions and all that he has to Him; if he is fully ready to be governed by the doctrine of God; then he will know the doctrine.

Such a man, who has his will bent toward God will find the doctrine of God very commendable to his reason and to his conscience. He will find the doctrine to be consistent with the perfections of God. He will find God's doctrine to be such as to make him pure and happy. And he will find such doctrine to be from God.

An honest desire to obey God will lead a man to embrace the great doctrines of the Bible. He will find first of all that his natural heart is depraved and inclined to evil, and he will see and feel the truth of the doctrine of depravity; he will find that he is a sinner and needs to be born again; he will learn his own weakness, and see his need of a Savior, of an atonement, and of pardoning mercy; he will feel that he is polluted, and needs the purifying influence of the Holy Spirit. Thus we may learn,

1. An honest effort and a true desire to obey God is the starting point if one wants to become acquainted with the doctrines of the Bible.

If you are a rebel against God, if you are a pretender to the faith, if you are like those Jews who sought to put him to death, then you will never understand the marvelous doctrines of God. You may marvel at it, but you have no capacity for it. You have no desire for it. The pull of your heart is against the

doctrines of grace which are everywhere in the Bible. Your fallen nature causes you to strive against them. And you can never know them until God has bent your will to see them and to accept them and to cherish them. As long as your will is bent against God, you will twist and turn the Scriptures into the doctrine of works, when the Scriptures everywhere say, "*Not of works lest any man should boast.*" You will turn the doctrines of God into the doctrines of man. You will find every way possible to glorify man rather than God. And all of this, because your heart is not right with God.

2. Those whose hearts are inclined toward God will not bite and chaff at the true doctrines of the Scriptures.

Biting and chaffing and resisting the truth is a mark of an unbeliever. Look how the Jews reacted when Jesus told them they must eat his flesh to live.

*I am the living bread which came down from heaven: if any man eat of this bread, he shall live for ever: and the bread that I will give is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world. The Jews therefore strove amongst themselves, saying, How can this man give us his flesh to eat?*

John 6:51, 52

Laying hold of the true doctrines of God lays within every man's reach. It does not require great learning to be a Christian, and to be convinced of the truth of the Bible. It requires an honest heart, and a willingness to obey God.

3. A messenger of true doctrine seeks the glory of God and not his own glory.

*He that speaketh of himself seeketh his own glory: but he that seeketh his glory that sent him, the same is true, and no unrighteousness is in him.*

John 7:18

In this verse we find a great principle stated. And that is, "The false teacher seeks his own glory. The true teacher seeks God's glory." Jesus told these Jews, "He that speaketh of himself, seeketh his own glory." And that is a good thing to watch out for. It is a good thing for preachers to watch out for because speaking of yourself is a sign that the message is not true.

True preaching and true doctrine has nothing to do with the preacher and everything to do with God and his glory. When the preacher has preached his message, the congregation should not be thinking of the preacher but of the Savior. And if the congregation is marveling at the greatness of our awesome God, then there is every likelihood that the message was true.

Of course, in this context, the reference is to Jesus himself. Jesus only spoke the words of the Father. Jesus never sought any worldly advantage for himself. His message was never about his own earthly glory, but rather about the glory of the Father. And by this we know that his message was true.

#### Jesus' Assessment of the Jews

- I. They were lawbreakers.

*Did not Moses give you the law, and yet none of you keepeth the law? Why go ye about to kill me?*

John 7:19

This is the first and most glaring assessment of the Jews. They were law breakers. They had received the Law from Moses, and yet none of them kept the Law. This is obviously a universal truth which we know well. However, I doubt that the Jews considered themselves law breakers. They were

very self-righteous. They were very self-absorbed in their religious rituals. And they thought of themselves as law keepers. But Jesus said, "None of you keep the law."

This must have infuriated the religious leaders even more. They were trying to trap Jesus and accuse him of some law violation. And he beats them to the punch and accuses them! He tells them that they are trying to kill him.

Notice the blindness of sinners. They think Jesus is worthy of death for healing a man on the Sabbath. Jesus did a good deed on the Sabbath day and the Jews hate him. They are pretending reverence for the law when in fact they have murderous intent in their own hearts for Jesus. They want to condemn Jesus for doing good, and excuse themselves for doing evil.

II. They were miracle lovers.

*Jesus answered and said unto them, I have done one work, and ye all marvel.*  
John 7:21

They were interested in the sensational. They enjoyed the entertainment. They enjoyed the show. But they didn't believe Jesus was the Christ. They didn't believe he was God. They would not have him as their Savior.

#### Jesus' Defense Against Sabbath Breaking

You might remember that Jesus made a nice defense against the charge of breaking the Sabbath back in chapter five. And essentially he said, "God works on the Sabbath and therefore I work on the Sabbath." (John 5:17)

But here he gives another good defense.

*Moses therefore gave unto you circumcision; (not because it is of Moses, but of the fathers;) and ye on the sabbath day circumcise a man.<sup>23</sup> If a man on the sabbath day receive circumcision, that the law of Moses should not be broken; are ye angry at me, because I have made a man every whit whole on the sabbath day?*

John 7:22, 23

Here is the logic. Moses gave you the requirement of circumcision. (Of course circumcision really predated Moses. It came from Abraham) Now the Law says don't work on the Sabbath. But the Law also says circumcise every male child on the eighth day. Therefore, there is a hierarchy of precedence in the Law. And which takes precedence under the law, circumcision or Sabbath keeping? If the eighth day falls on the Sabbath, then the requirement of circumcision prevails over the requirement of the Sabbath. You see, Sabbath keeping is not absolute even under the Mosaic Law.

Now Jesus is telling the Jews that by their actions virtually every Sabbath Day in circumcising their children, they demonstrate that there is a higher principle than Sabbath keeping. Circumcision is one such higher principle which is explicitly stated in the Law. And the Jews acknowledged this every day.

Now circumcision was merely a ritual. It was a type. It was sort of like registering your deed at the Register's office to let the world know that property belongs to you. Circumcision let the world know that you were a Jew. It was a sign of the Covenant. And in that sense it was the perfection of a child's claim to be an Israelite.

But when Jesus healed this man, it was an even greater sign. Jesus said, I have healed the whole man. "I have made him every whit whole." The Jews simply cut the foreskin away and considered it

a fine reason to override the Sabbath requirement. Jesus made the entire man whole and therefore his act should also be an override of the Sabbath requirement.

And Jesus asserted another higher principle when he healed this man on the Sabbath. And that principle is that healing the whole man is also allowed on the Sabbath.

Therefore the conclusion:

*Judge not according to the appearance, but judge righteous judgment.*

John 7:24

Circumcision may appear at first glance to be a violation of the Sabbath. But, upon closer inspection, it is not a violation. Likewise, healing a man on the Sabbath may seem to be a violation. But just like circumcision, it is not a violation.