

"Jesus and the World"
(John 7)
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After this, Jesus went around in Galilee. He did not want to go about in Judea because the Jewish leaders there were looking for a way to kill him.² But when the Jewish Festival of Tabernacles was near,³ Jesus' brothers said to him, "Leave Galilee and go to Judea, so that your disciples there may see the works you do."⁴ No one who wants to become a public figure acts in secret. Since you are doing these things, show yourself to the world."⁵ For even his own brothers did not believe in him.

⁶ Therefore Jesus told them, "My time is not yet here; for you any time will do."⁷ The world cannot hate you, but it hates me because I testify that its works are evil.⁸ You go to the festival. I am not going up to this festival, because my time has not yet fully come."⁹ After he had said this, he stayed in Galilee.

¹⁰ However, after his brothers had left for the festival, he went also, not publicly, but in secret.¹¹ Now at the festival the Jewish leaders were watching for Jesus and asking, "Where is he?"

¹² Among the crowds there was widespread whispering about him. Some said, "He is a good man."

Others replied, "No, he deceives the people."¹³ But no one would say anything publicly about him for fear of the leaders.

¹⁴ Not until halfway through the festival did Jesus go up to the temple courts and begin to teach.¹⁵ The Jews there were amazed and asked, "How did this man get such learning without having been taught?"

¹⁶ Jesus answered, "My teaching is not my own. It comes from the one who sent me."¹⁷ Anyone who chooses to do the will of God will find out whether my teaching comes from God or whether I speak on my own.¹⁸ Whoever speaks on their own does so to gain personal glory, but he who seeks the glory of the one who sent him is a man of truth; there is nothing false about him.¹⁹ Has not Moses given you the law? Yet not one of you keeps the law. Why are you trying to kill me?"

²⁰ "You are demon-possessed," the crowd answered. "Who is trying to kill you?"

²¹ Jesus said to them, "I did one miracle, and you are all amazed."²² Yet, because Moses gave you circumcision (though actually it did not come from Moses, but from the patriarchs), you circumcise a boy on the Sabbath.²³ Now if a boy can be circumcised on the Sabbath so that the law of Moses may not be broken, why are you angry with me for healing a man's whole body on the Sabbath?²⁴ Stop judging by mere appearances, but instead judge correctly."

²⁵ At that point some of the people of Jerusalem began to ask, "Isn't this the man they are trying to kill?"²⁶ Here he is, speaking publicly, and they are not saying a word to him. Have the authorities really concluded that he is the Messiah?²⁷ But we know where this man is from; when the Messiah comes, no one will know where he is from."

²⁸ Then Jesus, still teaching in the temple courts, cried out, "Yes, you know me, and you know where I am from. I am not here on my own authority, but he who sent me is true. You do not know him,²⁹ but I know him because I am from him and he sent me."

³⁰ At this they tried to seize him, but no one laid a hand on him, because his hour had not yet come.

³¹ Still, many in the crowd believed in him. They said, "When the Messiah comes, will he perform more signs than this man?"

³² The Pharisees heard the crowd whispering such things about him. Then the chief priests and the Pharisees sent temple guards to arrest him.

³³ Jesus said, "I am with you for only a short time, and then I am going to the one who sent me. ³⁴ You will look for me, but you will not find me; and where I am, you cannot come."

³⁵ The Jews said to one another, "Where does this man intend to go that we cannot find him? Will he go where our people live scattered among the Greeks, and teach the Greeks? ³⁶ What did he mean when he said, 'You will look for me, but you will not find me,' and 'Where I am, you cannot come?'"

³⁷ On the last and greatest day of the festival, Jesus stood and said in a loud voice, "Let anyone who is thirsty come to me and drink. ³⁸ Whoever believes in me, as Scripture has said, rivers of living water will flow from within them." ³⁹ By this he meant the Spirit, whom those who believed in him were later to receive. Up to that time the Spirit had not been given, since Jesus had not yet been glorified.

⁴⁰ On hearing his words, some of the people said, "Surely this man is the Prophet."

⁴¹ Others said, "He is the Messiah."

Still others asked, "How can the Messiah come from Galilee? ⁴² Does not Scripture say that the Messiah will come from David's descendants and from Bethlehem, the town where David lived?"

⁴³ Thus the people were divided because of Jesus. ⁴⁴ Some wanted to seize him, but no one laid a hand on him.

⁴⁵ Finally the temple guards went back to the chief priests and the Pharisees, who asked them, "Why didn't you bring him in?"

⁴⁶ "No one ever spoke the way this man does," the guards replied.

⁴⁷ "You mean he has deceived you also?" the Pharisees retorted. ⁴⁸ "Have any of the rulers or of the Pharisees believed in him? ⁴⁹ No! But this mob that knows nothing of the law—there is a curse on them."

⁵⁰ Nicodemus, who had gone to Jesus earlier and who was one of their own number, asked, ⁵¹ "Does our law condemn a man without first hearing him to find out what he has been doing?"

⁵² They replied, "Are you from Galilee, too? Look into it, and you will find that a prophet does not come out of Galilee."

We are now out of Jesus' teaching on the Bread of Life and begin a new section. Sometime had gone by and Jesus is continuing his ministry in the region of Galilee. We are then told that it was the time of the Jewish festival, the Feast of Tabernacles. This was one of the three major feasts that Jews celebrated each year and it occurred six months after Passover, so it was the fall. It was a festival that did two things. First, every Israelite male was to come to Jerusalem for a week and they were to live in small tents. This was to help them remember their ancestors' escape from Egypt and their 40-year journey through the wilderness where they lived in portable tents. It was meant to help them remember God as their redeemer and savior and how they lived a life of trust upon God for his daily provision and leadership. The second purpose of the festival was to celebrate the harvest. And of course, this too was to remember God as the great provider. So, the city of Jerusalem would have been filled with people.

The unbelief of the Jewish leaders

It's here that we are told that the Jewish leaders were looking for a way to kill Jesus. Now this isn't the first time we're hearing about this kind of opposition.

In chapter 5:18 John tells us,

For this reason they tried all the more to kill him; not only was he breaking the Sabbath, but he was even calling God his own Father, making himself equal with God.

Jesus is fully aware of their intent and even says so later in 7:19 where he says,

Has not Moses given you the law? Yet not one of you keeps the law. Why are you trying to kill me?

Why was there such deep hostility toward Jesus from the Jewish leaders? The reason is because when a person encounters Jesus, he completely upsets your worldview. For many of us, that's hard to see because Christianity is the air we've been breathing for most of our lives. That's all we know. We've been taught the stories since we were little, but for much of the unchristian world, when they encounter Jesus, it is life shattering in that it completely destroys everything they thought was right and true, about the world, about yourself, and about God. It's true. All people need an explanation for how the world works, for how life works. All people, even secular people, have set up for themselves beliefs that are utterly sacred to them. They're untouchable. We're not allowed to challenge those things. We dare not tamper with them. They cannot be changed and the opposing view will not be tolerated.

So, when a person like that encounters Jesus, it naturally produces incredibly strong feelings, even wanting to have Jesus dead. Let me give you some examples.

Some of you might be aware that in India, where the dominant religion is Hinduism, where they believe in millions of Gods, no longer have room for one more. The pro-Hindu government that is currently in power is making it more and more difficult for Christians to practice their Christianity. If there is any place that should be open to another God, it should be there, but they are threatened by it because people are converting, because it's challenging their own religion.

What about for a Muslim? A Muslim is deeply offended by the claims of Christianity and the claims of Jesus. If a person is a Muslim and they are not offended, then they either do not know their own religion very well, or they do not know Christianity very well, or both. Muslims deny the very cornerstone of Christianity, the resurrection of Jesus Christ. They claim that Mohammed is the last and final prophet. They deny the Trinity, which means they deny the deity of Jesus Christ. They believe him to be a great prophet, yes, a great teacher, yes, a great man of God, yes. But Jesus is God? That's blasphemy.

This reminded me of Nabeel Qureshi's conversion from Islam to Christianity that he writes about in his autobiography, "Seeking Allah, Finding Jesus." As his good friend David Wood debated him for years about Christianity and Islam, slowly, piece by piece, layer by layer, his system of belief called Islam, that he loved and held so dear, that was passed down to him from generation to generation was now crumbling. Listen to how he describes it. He says, "I did not know who God was, I did not know what the world was, I did not know who I was, and I had no idea what to do. I was in a maelstrom, flailing for something to hold on to. I made a final, desperate effort to lay hold of the life I had always lived. This was my last-ditch effort to maintain my Islamic faith: denying my ability to arrive at objective truth."

Finally, he came to the point where he knew that historically, intellectually, and spiritually Christianity was true. He knew that Islam and Christianity both could not be true. One had to be wrong, if the other was right. He also knew he had to believe, but at what cost? He knew it would come at the cost of being rejected by his family. It would bring great shame to his family since he would become an apostate. He would be committing what in Islam is considered the unforgivable sin -- that is, believing someone other than Allah is God and yet, that is what he did.

What about to a Roman Catholic? It is possible for certain strands of Christianity, like the Catholics, to care more about tradition, than about the Savior. Jesus and Roman Catholicism will have a collision course. Jesus says I am the way the truth and the life. I am the only mediator. Jesus would ask, "So why do you have so many other mediators? Why do you have Mary, and the saints, and the Pope and even the priests to act as your mediators, when Jesus is the one and only true and necessary mediator?" These aren't minor points of theological differences. These things are at the very heart of the gospel. Jesus comes in and turns things upside down.

Even to a secular person, Jesus and Christianity are complete nuisances. Secular people have no problem with religion as long as it's kept private. It should be kept to yourself. It shouldn't be brought out into the public. Look at what is happening in our culture. Christians have pretty much been silenced to speak about their belief in traditional marriage, the belief that the only true marriage is between one man and one woman until they are separated by death. Christians have been silenced to speak about their understanding of sexuality and gender. Can you imagine speaking openly at work that the only sex that is moral, that is permissible is sex in a heterosexual marriage and that all other sex is sin? You could say it, but they'd think you were from a different planet. The god of the secular person is sex. Secular people want to redefine it, they want to remove any and all boundaries and restrictions on it. They will spare no expense to defend this god. If you challenge the secular society on the topic of sex, you will pay. This is their god. And yet the teachings of Jesus and the person of Jesus challenges secularism at its very root.

Jesus says it best:

⁷ The world cannot hate you, but it hates me because I testify that its works are evil.

This is why all groups of people have such a strong reaction to Jesus. We should not be surprised at that. We should expect that. If you are investigating Christianity, if you are here looking for a tame Jesus, a controllable Jesus, an accommodating Jesus, a little pocket deity, you will not find that in Jesus. He will challenge everything you believe. Let me tell you up front what he will challenge, and we mentioned a couple things already. He will challenge all religions. He will challenge your morality. He will challenge your views on sexuality. He will challenge your love for money and things. He will challenge your attitude toward work. He will even challenge your view on family. He will challenge your quest for personal identity. Why? It's simple. He's the Lord. That means he has every right to not only challenge, but to demand your allegiance to him. Everyone is an idolater or former idolater and Christ will have no competitors.

Listen to what the late Dutch prime minister and theologian Abraham Kuyper said about Jesus. He writes, "There is not a square inch in the whole domain of our human existence over which Christ, who is Sovereign over all, does not cry, **Mine!**"

Do you see why Jesus induces such strong reactions? He wants all of you. He demands all of you. He gave all of himself for you.

When someone drops in on you like Jesus, you either bow to him or you want to be rid of him. That's why the Jewish leaders had such strong feelings toward him.

Now, let's move on to Jesus' brothers.

Let's go back to the text.

2 But when the Jewish Festival of Tabernacles was near, 3 Jesus' brothers said to him, "Leave Galilee and go to Judea, so that your disciples there may see the works you do. 4 No one who wants to become a public figure acts in secret. Since you are doing these things, show yourself to the world." 5 For even his own brothers did not believe in him.

The shocking statement is found in verse five. "For even his own brothers did not believe in him." What's going on here? Well, Jesus had several brothers. One of them was James, not the brother of John, whose father was Zebedee, but a different James who later became the leader of the Jerusalem church and who also penned the letter named after himself. So we know that at least James became a believer in Jesus Christ later in life, but at this point in the story, none of his brothers are believers in him.

The story tells us something about the nature of unbelief. In the Jewish leaders we see unbelief because it threatened their system, their beliefs, their position and so on, but what about with the brothers? What is their unbelief all about? Let's take a closer look. Remember we said that a huge festival was going on in Jerusalem and Jesus was in Galilee. Every Jewish male was to attend this festival. And his brothers tell him, "Leave Galilee and go to Judea (that is to Jerusalem), so that your disciples there may see the works you do.

I sense in these words that they are distancing themselves from Jesus. His brothers refer to them as "your disciples." They could have said "us" or "we" if they wanted to include themselves, but they don't because they didn't consider themselves disciples of their eldest brother.

What else do they say? They tell Jesus to go to Jerusalem so that his disciples may see the works that you do. So it is very obvious that the brothers of Jesus were aware that Jesus was able to perform miracles. They probably had witnessed these things themselves. But in saying this, they have a terrible misunderstanding of who Jesus is. It is not very different from when Jesus spoke to his mother at the wedding in Cana. The wedding couple had run out of wine and Mary goes to Jesus asking for help and do you remember how Jesus answered? "Woman, why do you involve me? My hour has not yet come." In addressing his mother as 'woman,' instead of mother, he creates distance, implying that even the mother of Jesus must come to believe in Jesus as Savior and Lord.

Remember the feeding of the 5000? After witnessing this astonishing miracle, the crowd tried to take Jesus by force to make him king. What did Jesus do? He withdrew himself from them. He refused to allow the people to see him as just some miracle worker. That is not why he came.

So even with his brothers, they think they know what is best for Jesus. They think they know what Jesus should do. They think that Jesus intends to be a public figure, perhaps a great religious leader, perhaps even a political leader. That's why they say, "Jesus, if you want to increase your following...if you want to establish yourself, you better leave Galilee and head on over to Jerusalem. There will be massive crowds there and if you do one of those tricks in Jerusalem, surely you will increase your influence. Since you want to be a public figure, go to where the public will be gathered. Show yourself to the world." Again, they misunderstand Jesus and his purpose, even though they are so close to him.

This tells us that close proximity to Jesus doesn't necessarily make you a follower of Jesus. You cannot get closer to Jesus than being a part of his family and yet, Jesus didn't choose even one of them to be a part of the twelve disciples. It goes to show that there is no inside track to Jesus. There are no special back stage passes to Jesus. There are no VIP suites with Jesus.

What I find peculiar and interesting, having been a pastor for over 25 years is who is and is not a Christian. It's really interesting. I sometimes come across someone who has such a rich Christian heritage. Their parents and grandparents are very devout and sincere Christians and you would think, 'gosh, if a child were to grow up in that family, he would definitely become a Christian.' But they are not Christians. They've abandoned Christianity.

One of the greatest Christian thinkers and influential people of the 20th century was a man named Francis Schaeffer, who has now passed away. He was a brilliant theologian, but he wasn't one of those ivory tower Christians, he had his feet planted solidly on the ground. He was completely engaged in culture and he wrote great books about how Christians should live and engage the non-Christian culture in which they live. Another notable thing he did was that he created a place which he and his wife Edith called L'abri, a beautiful retreat in Switzerland, which is still there today, along with several other locations, including Vancouver, where seekers, those curious in Christianity could come to investigate and explore Christianity. It was a loving and welcoming and homey environment to dialogue about life and faith. During my last sabbatical I even looked into the Vancouver location, to go and serve there, but they were moving buildings and were not taking any guests. At any rate, Francis and Edith Schaeffer have a son named Franky and from what I know he was all on board with his parents ministry, teaching Christianity when he became an adult and accompanying his father on his speaking engagements, but I was saddened when I later discovered that he abandoned the faith of his parents and even become a strong proponent against Christianity. Why does that happen?

On the flipside there are those people, some that we know personally, and you might be one of them yourselves, that had no business being interested in or attracted to Christianity. Whatever past encounters they had with Christianity were awful and always left a sour taste in their mouths. After meeting some people like that and hearing their stories, I sometimes even say to myself, "gosh, if there's a person who has every reason not to be a Christian it's him, it's her." and yet, they're Christian. Why is that?

That's what the brothers of Jesus are like. If there's anyone who should believe, it's them. If there's anyone who should know Jesus, understand Jesus, believe in Jesus and follow him and be his disciples, it should be those who know him best, but what we see in them is that even though they are so close to him, they are in reality as far away as the tribal person in the jungle who has never heard of Jesus.

Why? It's because Jesus' brothers misunderstand that the key to faith, the key to believing is not witnessing special signs and miracles. Those aren't the keys to faith. The key to faith is to listen to his teaching, it's to hear his word. The Apostle Paul later tells us in his letter to the Roman Christians that faith comes through hearing. Paul is telling us that the precursor to faith, the step that has to take place before a person can have faith and exercise faith is to hear, or listen or read the word of God, and more specifically the message of the gospel, that Jesus Christ came to die for sinners and he calls upon all people to repent, to turn from their sins, and follow him. They didn't think they needed Jesus as their Savior. He's just our older brother.

You see, the brothers of Jesus spoke as they did, because as verse five says, they did not believe in him. If you're not yet a Christian, and you're asking for a sign, you might think, doesn't the fact that I'm even asking for a sign, a miracle from God show that I have faith, even if it's just a little bit? And Jesus would say, no. Asking for a sign doesn't mean you have faith. Even witnessing a sign doesn't mean you have faith.

What then is faith? Faith is believing in the words of Jesus and believing in the person of Jesus, that's what it means to have faith. Listen to what Jesus said earlier, "For God so loved the world, that he gave his one and only son, that whoever believes in him, shall not perish, but have eternal life." Don't look for a sign, for if you do, all you'll get is a charlatan, a god of smoke and mirrors, a god that you've created that exists to do your bidding, to get you out of a bind, to make you rich, to make you healthy, not a God who can take away your sins, not a God who can save your soul from hell, not a God who can take you into heaven, not a God who is Lord and demands you to drop everything and follow him, and surely not a God who would die and suffer punishment in your place.

Friends, in coming to Jesus, in believing in him, he will indeed challenge everything you believe, literally everything. He will challenge every part of your life. And that process can and most likely will be painful, like peeling away a scab, but through that process, you will find Jesus, as your God and as your Savior. You will find Jesus who loves you like no other person could. You will find the God that you need, not one you've created for yourself, but one that comes on his own terms. Jesus calls upon you to believe in him.

Let's pray.