

John 7—the Rising Opposition to Jesus

In John 7:1, we read that “after these things Jesus was walking in Galilee”, and purposefully staying away from Jerusalem. The religious leaders there had already decided to kill Jesus, but since it wasn’t yet God’s timing, Jesus was not going to make any planned or public entries into Jerusalem. What was Jerusalem to Jesus but the lions den? Just like Daniel’s antagonists thought they were in control of him, the religious leaders in Jerusalem thought they were in control of Jesus. Jesus was not living under just random chance encounters, but He was governed by the divine calendar of God. The Father would direct Him when and how He would make His public entrance to Jerusalem as king. “After these things” refers to the events in chapter 6 in Capernaum that occurred in April, and the events in chapter 7 occur at the Feast of Tabernacles in October. John’s Gospel gives us no details of what went on in the 6 months between these things other than to say Jesus was walking in Galilee. The Feast of Tabernacles was a required religious celebration for all Jews that began with the Day of Atonement, and then 5 days later there was a seven day festival of the Tabernacles celebrating the Exodus from Egypt. We can read God’s instructions to Israel in Leviticus 23:33-43 that it was a celebration with a party atmosphere, and they would build tents or booths representing that Israel lived in tents for 40 years after God brought them out of slavery in Egypt and provided for them travelling through the wilderness.

In John 7:2-5, we see that Jesus’ own brothers (see list in Mark 6:3) were not at that time believing Jesus’ claims to be the Son of God or the Christ. Therefore they challenged Him to go to Jerusalem and formerly make His claims to the priests and religious leaders. John 7:5 says, “For not even His brothers were believing in Him.” It is safe to say that after the resurrection all the brothers did believe in Jesus as we find them in Acts 1:14 after the resurrection in the “upper room” with all the other believers waiting on the arrival of the Holy Spirit. Two of Jesus’ half brothers, James and Jude, would author two books of our New Testament. Nevertheless, we can’t miss the irony that we date our calendars by Jesus and He is the most famous man ever, yet while He was alive His own nation rejected Him, and even His family did not believe until later. It was kind of like His brothers were challenging Jesus to perform and “show Yourself to the world”. They were trying to act like His public relations agents saying “You can’t get famous out here in this remote countryside, so if you are going to be the Messiah we all expect, then go to the center of population and power—Jerusalem.” Yet that was the problem—Jesus was not the political Messiah they expected.

John 7:6-13, the Unannounced Arrival

Jesus’ response to His brother’s challenge was about the timing of His public presentation in

Jerusalem. Jesus knew that if He announced His coming and came in a very showy public way, the religious leaders would arrest Him and kill Him. He had no problem with that, but His problem was with the timing of it. Therefore, Jesus said, “My time is not yet at hand”, meaning His time to be crucified. The timing of the crucifixion was determined by the sovereign God who providentially orchestrated all these events. The timing would come at the next great feast the next year at Passover. The brothers “time was always opportune” because they were part of the world that opposed Him before the resurrection. Any time or way to go to the feast would work for them since they were not going to be arrested and crucified. Jesus was not saying that He would not go to the festival, but that He would not go publicly with an entourage—He would slip in later without anyone knowing. In v.12 we see that everyone was curious about Jesus, and Jerusalem was abuzz with rumors and opinions. As they were all seeking Him, we see two opinions in v.12—Jesus was a good man, or Jesus was leading people astray. Both opinions were incorrect or inadequate. Jesus was leading people to God, and Jesus was way more than just “a good man”, He is God in the flesh.

John 7:14—24, the Teaching Ministry of Jesus at the Temple

Sometime in the middle of the seven-day festival, Jesus slipped into Jerusalem and went up on the Temple Mount to teach. There were porticos around the Temple Mount where people could sit in the shade and Jesus could speak to them in depth. Everyone was astonished at His mastery of Scripture and His teaching with such authority. How could Jesus know so much without the rabbinical training and education that all the other religious leaders had? Jesus made it clear that God the Father was the source of His knowledge as opposed to the human institutions and traditions of the scribes and Pharisees. In John 7:18, Jesus gave the contrast between His teaching and theirs, that Jesus seeks the glory of God, but they seek their own selfish agenda. They were not feeding the flock like Jesus, but they were fleecing the flock. The prophet Ezekiel 34:2-3 predicted this “Woe shepherds of Israel who have been feeding themselves, you eat the fat and clothe yourself with the wool. You slaughter the sheep w/o feeding the flock”. Then in John 7:19-20 Jesus charged the religious leaders that although they had the law of God, none of them were carrying it out. The most obvious example was the fact they were planning to murder Jesus (v.19).

In v.21-24, Jesus referred to the miracle that He did in John 5 at the Pool of Bethesda when He healed the man on the Sabbath. They were using His supposedly breaking the Sabbath as the basis for killing Jesus. He used the exception they had to circumcise on the Sabbath to prove that an act of mercy takes precedence over their Sabbath traditions.

John 7:25-36, Who is Jesus?

There was a division in the crowd as to who Jesus is. Jesus seemed to be indicating He was the Messiah, and the people saw the works He did and heard His authoritative teaching, yet the religious leaders said Jesus was misleading them. In Jn. 7:27-42, we can see three popular notions about the promised Christ that they used to dismiss Jesus. First in v.27, they thought the Christ would just appear from where nobody knows. Secondly in v.31 they expected Him to do miracles on demand, and thirdly in v.42 He could not be from a rural hick area like the Galilee, but must be from Bethlehem. In the midst of this mixed reaction, the chief priests sent Temple police to arrest Jesus, but apparently they got mesmerized by His teaching, and instead of arresting Him they just wanted to listen to Him. In v.33, Jesus explained what was happening somewhat cryptically, "I am going to be here for a little while longer, then I will go back where I came from (heaven). You will be looking for Me (after the resurrection), but you won't find Me and you can't come where I am going" (my paraphrase).

John 7:37-39, the Great Invitation

During the grand Feast of the Tabernacles that was happening in Jerusalem during the events of John 7, there was a great well known popular ritual carried out by the priests each of the seven days of the festival celebrating that God provided water for Israel while they were wandering in the wilderness after the Exodus from Egypt. The High Priest would make a grand show of a procession to the Pool of Siloam at the far south side of the ancient City of David in Jerusalem. He filled a large gold jug full of water from the Pool, and then the High Priest led the crowd back up the hill to the Temple. Entering the Temple, there were three loud blasts from the shofar trumpet to get everyone's attention. The Temple choir would sing the Hallel (praises) from Psalms 113-118. Then everyone thanked the Lord loudly as the Priest poured the water into a bowl that drained into the altar. This was all to celebrate and remember God's providing water in the wilderness following Israel's Exodus from Egypt. The water had also come to be prophetic of the future Kingdom of God as the prophets foretold that God would pour out His Spirit on His people in the Kingdom. The climax of this daily ceremony occurred the "last day of the feast", only on this day in John 7:37-39, something unexpected and shocking occurred. Jesus stood up in the midst of the crowd and yelled with a loud voice, "If any man is thirsty, let him come to Me and drink. He who believes in Me as the Scripture said 'From his innermost being shall flow rivers of living water'" (Isaiah 44:3,55:1,58:11). Jesus was inviting everyone to come to Jesus and believe in Him as their Savior, and if they did they would receive living water, meaning the Holy Spirit. Jesus was saying that He is the source of the real spiritual water that they need. In the future, believers empowered by the Spirit would be the channel through which the living water flowed to

others.

This was the perfect time for Jesus to speak out to the people and the religious leaders saying in effect, "I am the reality of the water in this ceremony, which symbolizes the life giving power of the Holy Spirit". Just as Jesus had looked at the crowd in John 6 and seen how hungry they were for the hunger of their soul, now He proclaimed that He had the water for the thirsty soul. Those who recognize their spiritual thirst must come to Jesus, the only source of living water.

What are you thirsty for? Satisfaction? Meaning? Fulfillment? Happiness? You won't find it in any worldly thing. True satisfaction for the thirsty soul is found only by drinking the living water of Jesus. As Jesus changes your heart, the living water will flow out of you to others as rivers of blessing.

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