

John 7:1-24: Biblical Reading and Reflections

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 14 January 2020

Preacher: Alastair Roberts

[0 : 0 0] John chapter 7 verses 1 to 24. After this Jesus went about in Galilee. He would not go about in Judea because the Jews were seeking to kill him.

Now the Jews' feast of the booths was at hand. So his brothers said to him, Leave here and go to Judea that your disciples also may see the works that you are doing. For no one works in secret if he seeks to be known openly.

If you do these things, show yourself to the world. For not even his brothers believed in him. Jesus said to them, My time has not yet come, but your time is always here.

The world cannot hate you, but it hates me because I testify about it that its works are evil. You go up to the feast. I am not going up to this feast, for my time has not yet fully come.

After saying this he remained in Galilee. But after his brothers had gone up to the feast, then he also went up, not publicly but in private. The Jews were looking for him at the feast and saying, Where is he?

[1 : 0 0] And there was much muttering about him among the people. While some said, He is a good man, others said, No, he is leading the people astray. Yet for fear of the Jews, no one spoke openly of him.

About the middle of the feast, Jesus went up into the temple and began teaching. The Jews therefore marveled, saying, How is it that this man has learning when he has never studied? So Jesus answered them, My teaching is not mine, but his who sent me.

If anyone's will is to do God's will, he will know whether the teaching is from God or whether I am speaking on my own authority. The one who speaks on his own authority seeks his own glory, but the one who seeks the glory of him who sent him is true, and in him there is no falsehood.

Has not Moses given you the law? Yet none of you keeps the law. Why do you seek to kill me? The crowd answered, You have a demon. Who is seeking to kill you?

Jesus answered them, I did one work, and you all marvel at it. Moses gave you circumcision, not that it is from Moses, but from the fathers, and you circumcise a man on the Sabbath.

[2 : 0 9] If on the Sabbath a man receives circumcision, so that the law of Moses may not be broken, are you angry with me because on the Sabbath I made a man's whole body well? Do not judge by appearances, but judge with right judgment.

The context of the events of John chapter 7 is provided by the Feast of Tabernacles or Booths. We'll see later on in some of the events and some of Jesus' statements that this background is important for understanding what he's doing.

At this point, Jesus is generally operating in the context of Galilee, where he is facing opposition and rejection as we see in this and the previous chapter, but in Judea, the Jews are trying to kill him.

Again, it's worth remembering that the Jews are the Judeans and the Judean leaders in particular, and so the contrast between the Galileans and the Judeans plays out in this chapter and elsewhere.

He's facing challenge within his own family as well. Jesus' mission is surrounded by family and relatives, his mother, characters like James and John, who seem to be his cousins.

[3 : 1 5] As we compare some of the details between the Gospels, this would seem to be the case. James, the son of Alphaeus, is quite likely Jesus' cousin. John the Baptist is a relative.

The brothers of Jesus also become important in the early church. So this was a mission where he's surrounded by family members and opposition from family members and disbelief by family members.

And this provides part of the precipitating events for this chapter. They're not necessarily directly opposed to him, but they don't believe in him or understand the nature of his mission or the father's timing.

The attempt to make him a king in the previous chapter is a typical failure to perceive the true nature of Jesus' calling. John's Gospel has a number of episodes that present the greater themes of Christ's ministry in embryo, and this is one of them.

There's a surface message, a story of Jesus going down to the feast and speaking at the feast, but then there's a deeper significance. There's broader themes of openness and secrecy playing in this chapter.

[4 : 16] Knowledge and lack of knowledge. Origins and failure to perceive origins. Notice how many of Jesus' statements in the Gospel, and particularly perhaps in this chapter, are cryptic, requiring later revelation or events for their understanding.

In the Gospel of John, as in the other Gospels, there is a theme of a messianic secret. Jesus hides his identity and reveals it only cryptically.

The true character of his calling and his kingship will be revealed in time, but it will occur through the cross and the resurrection. And prior to those points, Jesus avoids a false revelation, which would suggest that he's just associated with mere human earthly power.

There are parallels, perhaps, to be observed with John chapter 2. Family members requesting signs. Jesus saying that his hour hasn't yet come. Jesus going on to perform the requested things secretly, rather than more openly, as was originally requested.

There are, of course, contrasts. Jesus' mother is never described as failing to believe in him, as his brothers are at this point. The fact that Jesus says that he is not going up to the feast, or not yet going up to the feast, in verse 8, according to some translations, has provoked a number of questions.

[5 : 36] This seems to be, if not an explicit lie, an attempt to mislead. Jesus invites misconstrual of his meaning and purpose throughout the Gospel, and perhaps it's worth thinking about the way that the messianic secret works in terms of themes of deception.

Jesus does not give his full identity out. Earlier on in the Gospel, in chapter 2, Jesus does not fully commit himself to people, because he knows what's in man.

And at this sort of point, Jesus is engaged in a veiling of his identity, a veiling of his intentions, a veiling of his destination.

Why does Jesus do this? How can we justify these actions? Well, in part, I think it is worth recognising that there are people trying to control Jesus' mission, trying to control his vocation. People who are trying to make him king by force, for instance. And his brothers have their own purpose and intention. They wish for Jesus to reveal himself openly and seek a particular type of power.

[6 : 38] And his commitment to his father's mission involves a refusal to commit himself to them, a refusal to give himself into their hands and to their purposes.

And so Jesus' deception or misleading at this point is legitimate. It's an attempt to prevent people from taking charge of his vocation, from stealing his vocation from the father.

He owes his father his loyalty, not his human brothers. Jesus' identity at this point is clearly a matter of significant debate among the people and among the Jewish leaders. We can see all these divisions arising among the Jews on account of Jesus' identity.

His teaching stands out. And as he speaks to the people, it's clear that he has not learnt this from a human teacher. He claims he has learnt it from his father, the father, not from other teachers or from any earthly father such as Joseph.

He ends by referring to the healing of the man on the Sabbath in chapter 5. This is the work that they really seem to be opposing him for the last time he was in Jerusalem.

[7 : 47] And he talks about the way in which a small part of the body can be removed in circumcision. And that can take precedence over the refusal to work on the Sabbath.

And yet he heals a man's whole body. And yet they oppose him for it. When Christ talks about the Sabbath here and in the other Gospels, Christ challenges the teaching of the Jews.

And often it's presented as if Jesus is identifying exceptions to the rule of the Sabbath. But Jesus seems to be going further than that. Jesus is presenting the true intent of the Sabbath.

That the Sabbath is made for man. And to make a man whole on the Sabbath is not merely a valid or legitimate exception to the law of the Sabbath. It's a fulfillment of it. This is the intent that God had that man would be restored and made whole by the Sabbath. And so healing on the Sabbath is not just a valid exception but a true fulfillment of what God's Sabbath means.

[8 : 45] What God's coming kingdom means. The restoration of humanity. The establishment of humanity in God's grace. One question. Where do you see John's greater themes of legal witness and authority surfacing in this passage?

The!