

John 7:25-52: Biblical Reading and Reflections

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Date: 15 January 2020

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[0 : 0 0] John chapter 7 verses 25 to 52. Some of the people of Jerusalem therefore said, Is not this the man whom they seek to kill? And here he is speaking openly, and they say nothing to him. Can it be that the authorities really know that this is the Christ? But we know where this man comes from, and when the Christ appears, no one will know where he comes from. So Jesus proclaimed as he taught in the temple, You know me, and you know where I come from, but I have not come of my own accord. He who sent me is true, and him you do not know. I know him, for I come from him, and he sent me. So they were seeking to arrest him, but no one laid a hand on him, because his hour had not yet come. Yet many of the people believed in him. They said, When the Christ appears, will he do more signs than this man has done? The Pharisees heard the crowd muttering these things about him, and the chief priests and Pharisees sent officers to arrest him. Jesus then said, I will be with you a little longer, and then I am going to him who sent me. You will seek me, and you will not find me. Where I am you cannot come. The Jews said to one another, Where does this man intend to go that we will not find him? Does he intend to go to the dispersion among the Greeks and teach the Greeks? What does he mean by saying, You will seek me, and you will not find me, and where I am you cannot come? On the last day of the feast, the great day, Jesus stood up and cried out,

If anyone thirsts, let him come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as the scripture has said, out of his heart will flow rivers of living water. Now this he said about the Spirit, whom those who believed in him were to receive. For as yet the Spirit had not been given, because Jesus was not yet glorified. When they heard these words, some of the people said, This really is the prophet. Others said, This is the Christ. But some said, Is the Christ to come from Galilee? Has not the scripture said that the Christ comes from the offspring of David, and comes from Bethlehem, the village where David was? So there was a division among the people over him. Some of them wanted to arrest him, but no one laid hands on him. The officers then came to the chief priests and Pharisees, who said to them, Why did you not bring him? The officers answered, No one ever spoke like this man.

The Pharisees answered them, Have you also been deceived? Have any of the authorities or the Pharisees believed in him? But this crowd that does not know the law is accursed. Nicodemus, who had gone to him before, and who was one of them, said to them, Does our law judge a man without first giving him a hearing and learning what he does? They replied, Are you from Galilee too? Search and see that no prophet arises from Galilee. In the second half of John chapter 7, the question of Jesus' origins reappears.

Jesus has been teaching in the temple, and the crowd are surprised because they think that Jesus is a wanted man. The authorities had wanted to get their hands on Jesus after his healing of the infirm man on the Sabbath in chapter 5. After that healing, he had connected his own work with that of the Father in a way that made him equal with God, and turned their desire to lay hands on him into a desire to put him to death. Confused by the fact that Jesus is teaching in public, the people start to speculate that Jesus may in fact be the Messiah, and the authorities know it. Yet there is a prevalent belief, the source of which is unclear, that the person who is the Christ will be of unknown origins.

[3 : 2 9] The crowd, however, knows where Jesus is from. He's a Galilean. Perhaps surprisingly, though he easily might do so, Jesus does not dispute this. On one level they do know his origin, and the fact that he is from Nazareth is not inconsistent with the fact that he is also the Messiah. In Matthew chapter 1 verse 23, the fact that Jesus is a Nazarene is seen as a fulfillment of prophetic statements.

Of course, there were other prophetic statements saying that the Messiah would come from Bethlehem. Unbeknownst to the crowd, this was also true of Christ. Ironically, this made what they thought was evidence against the claim that Jesus was the Christ, evidence for that claim. Of course, neither Nazareth nor Bethlehem were the ultimate origin of Christ. His ultimate origin truly was a place they did not and could not know. Without disputing the fact that they knew Jesus' geographical origin, he challenges their sense of his origin by speaking about his personal origin, about the one who had sent him. While they may on one level know his geographic origin, what they do not know is the far more important personal origin, the father who had sent him into the world. In John 6, people had failed to recognize Jesus' ultimate origin, focusing rather upon his earthly connections and his family relations. Verse 30 might perhaps be seen as a heading for what follows, the attempts to arrest him and their failure. Throughout John's Gospel, there are several references to the coming hour of Christ and the fact that at certain points his hour had not yet come. Until that hour came, none of the attempts to bring Jesus down would be successful. While there were differences among the crowd, many in the crowd, at least on some level, believed in Christ, reckoning that Jesus had performed enough signs to mark him out to be the Messiah. The chief priests and the Pharisees, concerned by such reports, sought to lay hands upon him. In verse 33 following, Jesus seemed to address them in front of the crowd. The presence of the crowd presumably protected Christ from being captured. As we see elsewhere in the Gospels and in the book of Acts, the religious leaders were afraid of the crowds. Ideally, they wanted to separate Jesus from the crowd and take him when he was alone. Jesus speaks to them in a cryptic way concerning his coming departure. They think that maybe he's going to be going to the dispersion among the Gentiles, the Jews that were scattered within the various nations around the Mediterranean. Although the hero of the Gospel knows that Jesus is referring to his death and resurrection and ascension, the religious leaders were puzzled by Jesus' statement, not knowing what he could be referring to. They aren't able to recognize that he will be returning to his Father in the ascension, an event that will serve to confirm his true origin. Jesus is provoking divisions among the general population and among their leaders. Some believe that he is the prophet, or the Christ, and others that he has a demon. There is a pattern that plays out twice in this chapter, first in verses 14 to 36, and then again in verses 37 to 52, beginning with Jesus teaching in the temple, people speculating about his identity, and then a failed attempt to arrest him. In the first instance, it's the middle of the Feast of Booths, and in the second, it's the last great day of the feast. The last great day of the feast may be the seventh or the eighth day. The Feast of Booths was a seven-day celebration, followed by an eighth day with a holy convocation. Ramsey Michaels argues that it must be the eighth day, whereas many commentators connecting what Jesus says here with the water drawing ceremony from the Pool of Siloam believe that it must be on the seventh day. Within these verses, we see another instance of the continuing water symbolism within the Gospel of John. We've seen it in chapter 1 with the baptism of John the Baptist, in chapter 2 with the water turned into wine at the wedding feast, in chapter 3 with the conversation with Nicodemus and the baptism of John again, in chapter 4 with the conversation with the woman at the well, and then in chapter 5 with the healing of the man by the sheep pool. Here once again there is mention of living water, water flowing out of the heart. As I've noted, many have connected this with the water drawing ritual of the Feast of [7 : 30] Tabernacles. Water will be drawn from the Pool of Siloam and then brought to the temple and poured out. This ceremony was associated with the expected rains. It was also a time of great rejoicing. One of the Jewish leaders, only a few decades after this, was said to have done a headstand and to have juggled eight lighted torches as part of this celebration. On this occasion, Jesus makes a great promise of water to those who are thirsty, recalling his conversation with the woman at the well in chapter 4.

We might also think of invitations such as Isaiah chapter 55 verse 1. Come everyone who thirsts, come to the waters, and he who has no money, come buy and eat. Come buy wine and milk without money and without price. We might also see something of a development here. In chapter 4 verse 14 there's a fountain of water springing up, and now in verse 38 of chapter 7, rivers of living water are flowing out. The rivers of living water, depending on how we translate this, proceed either from the heart of the believer or from the heart of Christ. I believe ultimately it's referring to Christ, but these things also apply to the believer who has Christ within them and his spirit. Later, blood mixed with water will come forth from Christ's pierced side. Christ is akin to the Garden of Eden, which has a river that divides into four rivers in Genesis chapter 2 verse

10. We might also recall the water flowing out of Ezekiel's temple in chapter 47 of his prophecy. Water also comes from the rock in Exodus chapter 17 in the story of the Exodus. In Zechariah chapter 14 verses 8 and 9, a passage associated with the Feast of Booths, we are told that living waters will flow from Jerusalem.

The people do not truly understand what Jesus is speaking about. The hearer of the gospel is informed that he's referring to the Spirit. Those who believed in him would receive the Spirit, but the Spirit had not yet been given because Jesus was not yet glorified. Throughout the gospel, Jesus is presented as the man of the Spirit. People do not know where the Spirit comes from or where it goes, nor do they know where Jesus comes from and where he will go. He has received the Spirit without measure. He will later baptize with the Holy Spirit. While we see the activity of the Holy Spirit in the Old Testament, the ascension and glorification of Christ would bring about an epochal change in the mode of the Spirit's operations. Moses had given the people water from the rock in the wilderness, and some of the people respond to Jesus' statement by speculating that he is the prophet, the prophet like Moses that Moses himself foretold in the book of Deuteronomy. However, once again, the question of Jesus' origins causes problems. The fact that Jesus is from Galilee does not fit with claims that he is the Messiah. The Messiah should come from the city of David, and so the people are divided on the question of Jesus' identity. The officers who had been charged by the chief priests and Pharisees to lay hands on Christ, came back empty-handed. Questioned by the Jewish authorities, they end up bearing witness to Christ's uniqueness. No one ever spoke like this man. Annoyed by this response, the Pharisees asked the officers whether they themselves had been deceived by Jesus, and they start to wonder whether there are dissenters even in their own ranks. Of course, the ignorant and untrained crowd can't be trusted to judge rightly on these matters. Nicodemus, who had privately spoken to Jesus earlier in John chapter 3, questions whether they are following proper procedure. If they are to be just judges, they need to hear the man out before they judge concerning him. However, the minds of the body of the Pharisees have already been settled on the matter. Jesus is neither the Messiah nor any prophet. Neither would come from Galilee. Even for raising such a mild question, Nicodemus' own sympathies are cast under suspicion. A question to consider. Jesus' seemingly known yet unknown origins are an important theme in this chapter. How does this relate to the character of Jesus' mission more generally?