

Water Unlimited

Face to Face: Encountering the Messiah – Part V

John 7

Introduction

Turn with me in your Bibles to the gospel of John, chapter 7. We will begin with verses 1 and 2.

And after these things Jesus was walking in Galilee; for He was unwilling to walk in Judea, because the Jews were seeking to kill Him. Now the feast of the Jews, the Feast of Booths, was at hand.

You need to understand that this was one of the three festivals that was obligatory. Any Jewish male who lived within fifteen miles of Jerusalem was required to attend. It might have been a burden, but instead, it was a time of harvest celebration.

It was also a memorial of God's provision while their forefathers lived in the desert after leaving Egypt, when Pharaoh finally let them go. As a part of the memorial, the people made little booths of palm branches. They slept there, under the stars, for seven nights, as a reminder of how their forefathers lived as runaway slaves.

It was a time of special celebration, and the city of Jerusalem swelled to overflowing with the masses of men, women, and children who took part in this feast time.

The Family of Jesus

Continue to verse 3.

His brothers therefore said to Him, "Depart from here, and go into Judea, that Your

disciples also may behold Your works which You are doing."

Now, you may have noticed the mention of brothers. In fact, Matthew, chapter 13, verse 55, gives us the names of Jesus' four brothers. It goes on, in verse 56, without naming them, to inform us that He also had more than one sister. Now since Jesus was born of a virgin, He would not be considered Joseph's natural son, but would be considered Joseph's legal son. This would make the rest of the children His half brothers and half sisters.

The view that Mary remained a perpetual virgin is not biblical. In fact, both Matthew and Mark tell us that Joseph and Mary went on to have at least seven more children. Bless their hearts!

Now, the Bible records the bad feelings between Jesus and the rest of the tribe. Look again at John, chapter 7, and skip to verse 5.

For not even his brothers were believing in Him.

The brothers of Jesus thought he was . . .

1. They thought He was a fraud; a fake; a power and popularity hungry young man.

How do I know that? Go back to the first part of verse 4 for the clues.

[they said to him] "For no one does anything in secret, when he himself seeks to be known publicly."

In other words, “C’mon, if You really want the spotlight, stop hanging out in the shadows of insignificant Galilee – head for the big city of Jerusalem!”

They are accusing Jesus of just wanting to be known.

The brothers of Jesus doubted His . . .

2. Secondly, they are doubting the credibility of Jesus’ miracles.

Look at the last part of verse 4.

*. . . **If You do these things, show Yourself to the world.***

There is nothing more painful than being considered by your own family members as a little disconnected with reality! “All that Christianity stuff. Man, did you turn into some kind of fanatic or what?!”

Or worse yet, the attitude of, “Well, I guess if you need Jesus, if you’re a little weak, that’s nice, but I’m capable of living without crutches.”

And you wish they knew, as you know, Jesus Christ is not a crutch, He is the cure!

Principals of Encouragement

Allow me to pull, from this passage, two principles of encouragement from the example of Jesus Christ.

Jesus Handled It

1. The first principle is, if you are encountering family pressure, remember two ways that Jesus handled it.

Jesus never retaliated in like manner

- Jesus never retaliated in like manner.

“Back off! I know you’re just mocking me. You’re no saint yourself. If anybody needed the Messiah, you guys are definitely in need!”

He did not reveal their inconsistencies, even though they tried to uncover his. The key phrase is in verse 4a.

For no one does anything in secret, when he himself seeks to be known publicly.

Do you know what is tough about being belittled for your faith? You know good and well all the problems that they are having. You know the pride and backbiting, the frustration and materialism, and on and on. “Hey, you accuse me of sin, well, let me tell you about yourself.”

Jesus could have pointed his finger at his little brother James, and said, “James, I know that dirty thought you had yesterday. I know that unkind word you said last week to that man. You are saying I’ve got problems! Well, let me tell you!”

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You would think, since these were the half brothers of Jesus, children born into the family of Mary and Joseph, that these would be the people that Jesus would deliver His most vocal, stirring, convicting messages to. Has it ever occurred to you that there is not one recorded sermon in the gospels that Jesus preached to his family?

Surely, He would unload the dump truck of divine knowledge in their front yard about His deity. Surely He would perform some private miracles for them to prove that Judaism was a thing of the past!

What does He do? He encourages them to go to the feast that He Himself is the fulfillment of!

The issue will not be solved by a change in religion – there are a lot of people in church, today, who will die and go to hell. Religious? Yes! The issue is solved by a personal encounter with the living, victorious, interceding, head of the church – Jesus Christ.

Now, I am not suggesting that you do not witness to them. Do! Do not preach at them – witness to them in a winsome, loving way that circumvents angry debate and personal attack. And, remember that they are the most difficult people in all the world you will ever witness to, so take note of the example of Jesus Christ.

Jesus Promised It

2. The second principle of encouragement is, if you are experiencing family friction because of your faith, remember Jesus promised it.

People, have told me, “Christianity can’t be the truth, it has split families wide open, it has divided loved ones.”

Jesus said it would.

There are individuals in our congregation who have come to faith in Christ and I have baptized them, according to the biblical pattern of disciple’s baptism.

But their families would not come to watch. In fact, they accused them of abandoning their heritage and betraying their past.

Listen as Jesus spoke, in Luke, chapter 12, verses 51 through 53.

Do you suppose that I came to grant peace on earth? I tell you, no, but rather division; for from now on five members in one household will be divided, three against two, and two against three. They will be divided, father against son, and son against father; mother against daughter, and daughter against mother; mother-in-law against daughter-in-law, and daughter-in-law against mother-in-law.

So remember Jesus experienced this truth first hand! When those you love, whose approval you long to have, minimize or belittle your faith, you can recall that Jesus felt what you are feeling – He experienced the struggle of rejection from His own family.

So, if you are in the middle of it, remember Jesus’ kind, winsome example.

Views About Jesus Christ

Now, this family feud has actually expanded into a national debate. The entire population is talking about this Jesus. The women are sharing the latest stories, as they mingle in the market place; the religious leaders are sequestered away, trying to strategize against His latest miracle; the common peasants have, within their hearts, a swelling hope that perhaps, this is the Messiah.

Now, in John, chapter 7, you should underscore verse 12 and verse 43, for they serve as two bookends for the content of this chapter. The chapter opens with grumbling and it ends with division.

Sandwiched in-between are at least seven different views about Jesus Christ. He is:

- only a good man (verse 12),
- a deceiver (verse 12),
- a scholarly teacher (verse 15),

- a paranoid lunatic (verse 20),
- a great miracle worker (verse 31),
- the prophet (verse 40), or
- the Messiah (verse 41).

I happen to believe that this chapter includes every possible category of opinion about Jesus Christ.

Also that, within this chapter, is your opinion of Him, expressed and felt by someone in this chapter two thousand years ago.

The question is, which opinion is yours?!

Now of all the views presented, I want to spend a little time on the first opinion, which is that, “He is a good man.” This is simply because it is the most commonly held one, even to this day, and because it is the one opinion that is absolutely impossible to believe.

Let us begin at verses 10 through 12a.

But when His brothers had gone up to the feast, then He Himself also went up, not publicly, but as it were, in secret. The Jews therefore were seeking Him at the feast, and were saying, “Where is He?” And there was much grumbling among the multitudes concerning Him; some were saying, “He is a good man” . . .

Reasons Jesus Cannot Be Just a Good Man

Now, let us stop here. There are a number of reasons why either Jesus was God or He was a very bad man, but He cannot be just a good man. Let me explain, briefly, why.

If Jesus Christ was not God, then . . .

1. First, if Jesus Christ was not God, then He was a deluded imposter.

Why? Because He claimed to be able to forgive sins. Now think about that for a moment. If one of you stole something from me, that would be a sin. I might say to you, should you confess it to me, “Okay, I forgive you.”

Or suppose someone hits me with their fist, full in the face. If they apologize, and pay the medical bills, I might say, “That’s alright, I’ve forgiven you.”

BUT, what if that person came and stole from you and hit you in the face? Then, you came to me and

said, “Stephen, he hit me in the face and he stole from me.”

What if I should say, “That’s okay, I’ve forgiven him.”?

HA! I have no right to forgive him – he did not directly sin against me!

Well, here is Jesus Christ claiming the ability and the right to forgive sins committed not only against Himself, but everyone else in the whole world!

What an incredible claim!

. . . Your sins have been forgiven.

He said to a woman, in Luke, chapter 7, verse 48.

. . . My son, your sins are forgiven.

He once said, in Mark, chapter 2, verse 5.

The onlookers said, in verse 7, of that chapter,

Why does this man speak that way? . . . who can forgive sins but God alone?

THAT IS PRECISELY THE POINT! Either Jesus was God or He certainly was not a good man – He was an imposter.

If Jesus Christ was not God, then . . .

2. Secondly, if Jesus Christ was not God, then He was an incredible egotist.

On one occasion, in John, chapter 8, verse 53, they asked Jesus,

Surely You are not greater than our father Abraham; who died?

In verse 58,

Jesus said to them, “. . . I say to you, before Abraham was born, I am.”

Look at His teaching – who was his primary subject? HIMSELF!

In John, chapter 10, verse 9, He said,

I am the door . . .

In John, chapter 14, verse 6, He said,

. . . I am the way, and the truth, and the life . . .

One time, He even said that the Old Testament was written mainly about Himself!

If He was not God, He was an egomaniac, and He was not a good man!

C. S. Lewis wrote,

You can shut Him up for a fool, you can spit at Him and kill Him as a demon; or you can fall at His feet and call Him Lord and God. But let us not come with any patronizing nonsense about His being a great human teacher. He has not left that open to us. You must make your choice. Either this man was, and is, the Son of God, or else a madman.

Who is Jesus?

Now look back at John, chapter 7, at verses 14 through 16.

But when it was now the midst of the feast Jesus went up into the temple, and began to teach. The Jews therefore were marveling, saying, “How has this man become learned, having never been educated?” Jesus therefore answered them, and said, “My teaching is not Mine, but His who sent Me.”

Now watch this, in verse 17, carefully.

If any man is willing to do His will, he shall know of the teaching, whether it is of God, or whether I speak from Myself.

“Or, whether I just made it up.”

Did you catch that? Your discernment of the truth of the Bible hinges on your obedience to the author of this Book.

In other words, *your ability to understand God’s Word is related to your availability to obey God’s will.*

And so, many people today will never know the will of God. Why? Because, if they did, they would not follow it anyway, so why would God bother to reveal it?!

Go back to the first part of verse 17 again.

If any man is willing to do His will . . .

The word “willing,” is from the Greek text, “thelo,” and is a very strong word. It means to “seize with the mind or to be resolved”. So, ultimately, this was a challenge to the Jewish leaders. They believed they “knew the Word of God and the will of God”. Jesus was telling them that they were illiterate.

That is the point of verse 19.

Did not Moses give you the Law, and yet none of you carries out the Law? Why do you seek to kill Me?

Now, at this point, the crowd jumps in. Continue to verse 20.

The multitude answered, “You have a demon! Who seeks to kill You?”

In other words, “You’ve gone mad! Who in the world is trying to kill you?”

Jesus, however, knew the secret plot. Turn back to John, chapter 5, verse 18.

For this cause therefore the Jews . . .

(This is a reference to the Jewish leaders, not the Jewish population at large.)

. . . were seeking all the more to kill Him, because He not only was breaking the Sabbath, but also was calling God His own Father, making Himself equal with God.

Now move ahead to chapter 7, verses 28 and 29.

Jesus therefore cried out in the temple, teaching and saying, “You both know Me and know where I am from; and I have not come of Myself, but He who sent Me is true, whom you do not know. I know Him; because I am from Him, and He sent Me.

Now notice verse 30.

They were seeking therefore to seize Him; and no man laid his hand on Him, because His hour had not yet come.

In other words, “Let’s lock him up.”

Why seize Him? Because He was claiming to be equal with God.

Now, the next paragraph, verses 30 through 36, include a prophetic warning. Look at verses 33 and 34.

Jesus therefore said, “For a little while longer I am with you, then I go to Him who sent Me. You shall seek Me, and shall not find Me; and where I am, you cannot come.”

But didn’t Jesus say, in Matthew, chapter 7, verse 7,

. . . seek, and you shall find . . .

Now He says, in John, chapter 7, verse 34,

. . . You shall seek Me, and shall not find Me . . .

The balance came from the pen of the prophet Isaiah who wrote, in Isaiah, chapter 55, verse 6,

Seek the Lord while He may be found . . .

Here is a nation, embroiled over the debate about whether or not to accept Christ’s claims. Jesus warns them, “One day, it will be too late.”

He is telling them, “You are clinging to the Law, but, one day, the Law will judge you as lawbreakers instead of save you! You think you are safe, but, one day, the Law will condemn you.”

Many years ago, toward the end of the twelfth century, Scotland’s great King Robert the Bruce was being chased by English soldiers. They were almost upon him. When he realized that he was not making the speed he should, he left the path and darted through the thick forest, hoping to escape. Robert ran mile after mile. But then, just as he was telling himself that perhaps he had escaped the vengeance of King Edward, he heard a sound that made his blood run cold. It was the baying of his own bloodhounds. The English, fearing that they would lose him in the thicket, had let loose his own bloodhounds to put them on his track. The animals, which were supposed to protect their master faithfully, were actually going to bring about his capture and death. Desperate now, and exhausted, he stumbled, suddenly, upon a clear mountain stream, several feet deep. At once, he plunged in, allowing it to sweep him several miles downstream. Then, he came out on the other side of the forest, where he hid and listened, as the hounds came barking and baying to the waters edge. They were able to go no further. The scent was gone. Robert had escaped.

The Law, which is supposed to do us good, actually, in the end, betrays us. My friend, you think you are safe – your church will save you; your works; your morality; your ethics. One day, they will, like baying bloodhounds, hunt you down. You will be lost, until you plunge into that one stream which will wash out the scent of sin forever.

Had I been Jesus, I would have gathered up my robe and stormed away, after delivering the warning. Yet, Jesus is not finished. Something amazingly wonderful is about to happen. Continue, in chapter 7, to verse 37.

Now on the last day, the great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried out, saying, “If any man is thirsty, let him come to Me and drink.”

I want you to get this picture – water was a very significant part of this feast. Every day, during this festival, the priest would take a golden pitcher and

parade through the streets of Jerusalem until he reached the pool of Siloam. He would fill the pitcher with water and then, walk back through the Water Gate, while the people following would chant Isaiah, chapter 12, verse 3,

. . . you will joyously draw water from the springs of salvation.

The water would then be carried to the temple altar and poured on the altar. This was a symbol of the water gushing from the rock in the wilderness that gave life to the Israelites.

On the last day of the feast, which is the context of verse 37, the people would gather their palm branches, from which they had constructed their little booths. They would then parade through the streets, as the priest went to get water. When they returned, they all marched around the altar seven times and poured the water. Along with the praise, from Isaiah, they would chant the prayer, "O bring now then salvation."

With that as a background, suddenly, the air is pierced by the voice of Jesus, Who stood and, in verse 37, cried out,

If any man is thirsty, let him come to Me and drink.

In other words, "God is answering your prayer! He is bringing your salvation! Just as the early Israelites were saved by drinking from the water, so Christ offers the water of eternal life."

This is an open invitation. The drink of eternal water is offered.

Notice verse 38.

He who believes in Me, as the Scripture said, "From his innermost being shall flow rivers of living water."

This is a:

- reference to Christ, the smitten rock (Psalm 78:20),
- challenge to receive the gift of eternal life, and, I think, the implication is even more than that,
- promise of fulfillment and satisfaction.

Look at verse 39a.

But this He spoke of the Spirit, whom those who believed in Him were to receive . . .

Now, if you combine this commentary with the unique phrase, "innermost being," I think you will get the picture. Your translation of "innermost being" may read, "belly," which is synonymous with the Hebrew idea of "kidney". The kidney was their seat of emotion and feeling.

Our seat of emotion and feeling is the heart. Aren't you glad it is not the kidney? Imagine, you would not call her your "sweetheart," but your "sweetkidney". You would send a card to her that reads, "I love you with all my kidneys," or "This message is from my kidney to yours!"

But, the place where satisfaction was felt, where longings were felt, where emotion and love emanated, for the Jew, was the belly.

Jesus says, "You take a drink of living water and, just as the water goes into your belly, so the Spirit will come in and fill your deepest longings; He will satisfy your greatest needs."

Well, the chapter ends like it started, there is debate and discussion. The decisions are varied:

- He is a prophet, let's follow Him around (verse 40),
- He is the Christ, let's invite Him in (verse 41),
- He is an imposter, let's lock Him up (verse 44), and
- He is a great teacher, let's hear Him out (verse 46).

Well, we have catalogued a lot of opinions about Jesus. What is yours? He is a good man? He is a good teacher? He is deluded? He is a crutch? He is my Messiah?

If Abraham Lincoln, or George Washington, or Thomas Jefferson were to walk in here, we would rise out of respect. If Jesus Christ were to walk into this auditorium, we would kneel.

While the invitation is open, will you come and drink of this fountain of life? THE WATER IS UNLIMITED, but the time is not. For right now, there is still some left!

This manuscript is from a sermon preached on 2/28/1994 by Stephen Davey.

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