



Almost two years ago Lynn and I moved from our home of 20 years in Los Altos to San Carlos. It was one of those bittersweet things for us, but we were looking forward to meeting new friends and settling down in a new neighborhood. The house we chose sat for a long time before we came along and bought it, and even after we bought it, it sat empty for a long time before we finally moved in. During that time, there was a "Sold" sign that replaced the "For Sale" sign so everyone in the neighborhood saw someone new was moving in.

I don't know how, but a rumor started in the neighborhood. The rumor was Buster Posey had bought the house! You can imagine the buzz in San Carlos, not to mention Eaton Avenue! And you can imagine the immense disappointment people had when they found out not only was Buster **not** moving into that house, but a preacher was moving in! Who wants to live next door to a preacher? When our moving truck pulled up, people were nice, but more than a little bit sad too.

The buzz our neighborhood experienced over the possible arrival of Buster Posey matches well with the buzz the people of Jerusalem experienced during the feast of the Tabernacles. The Jews had three great festivals which brought a hoard of pilgrims to Jerusalem: The Passover, the Feast of Weeks and the feast of the Tabernacles or Booths. But the last of those was the most festive. It lasted for seven days and Jewish families would come and camp out in tents to remember the wilderness wanderings. It was also a joyful time to celebrate the fall harvest.

Jesus would have celebrated the feast of Tabernacles his entire life, but this one would be different others. Not only would it be his last, but it would be his most difficult. No doubt, there was a buzz. The buzz was over Jesus. Will he come? What will he do? Who is he? Is he dangerous? Is he the Messiah? Is he a fraud? Is he just a good man? Who is this Jesus from Galilee?

These are questions people are asking today as well. There's still a buzz about Jesus. Who was he? Modern Jews say he was an ordinary Jewish man who preached during the first century Roman occupation of the Holy Land. Buddhism says he was a wise and enlightened man who taught similar things as Buddha. Muslims say he was a true prophet sent from God, but superseded by Mohammed. Mormons believe he was a man who became our Savior, but originally he was a spirit being, no different than all the rest of us. Hindus believe he was a wise man who was also the incarnation of God akin to Krishna. I once had a very serious conversation with a guy who believed Jesus was a space cowboy. The average person today would just say he was a good man, even a great man.

Certainly, we're all entitled to our opinions, but what if I told you this is the most significant question you or I will ever answer? When snow descends on the Continental Divide, it melts and flows off either side to the West or the East, never to meet again. It's like Jesus Christ is the Continental Divide of humanity.

John 7 records the buzz about Jesus. It's a long chapter and we won't be able to read every verse, but there are three sections: 1) What took place before the feast; 2) What took place in the middle of the feast; 3) What took place on the last day of the feast. Each one of these sections reveal a divided audience when it came to Jesus.

Before the Feast

Let's begin by reading what happened before the feast.

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

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

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

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

Others replied, "No, he deceives the people." But no one would say anything publicly about him for fear of the leaders (verses 1–13).

So there are really three different groups here. First, you have the Jewish leaders. John says in v. 1 they were looking for a way to kill Jesus. Once the feast started in Jerusalem they were watching for him so they could arrest him. The hostility of this group toward Jesus will be a theme throughout this chapter.

The second group we see here are his brothers. Maybe you didn't know Jesus had brothers. Since it's Mother's Day, it's worth mentioning that the Roman Catholic Church has taught for centuries that Mary remained a virgin her entire life. They'd say these can't be brothers; they must be cousins; but there's no doubt these were his brothers, Mary's sons. Their names were James, Joseph, Simon and Jude (Mt. 13:55). They want Jesus to go up to the feast; to do his thing on a larger stage. "Stop wasting your time up here in Galilee. No one cares about Galilee. Go to Jerusalem where you can make it big." They didn't say this because they really believed he was the Son of God. John says right here, "... **even his own brothers didn't believe in him.**" Maybe they resented him. Can you imagine growing up with a perfect older brother? I can't help but think how difficult this must have been for Mary. Mary knew who Jesus was. She knew where he came from, but her boys didn't get it, and that must have been hard. Moms always want their boys to get along. The good news is later they did believe. In the book of Acts, when Luke describes the early believers in Jerusalem he lists the apostles and then he says, "**They all joined together constantly in prayer, along with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with his brothers**" (Acts 1:14). That should be an encouragement for mothers. Your sons and daughters may not believe today, but the final chapter hasn't been written.

But for now, Jesus' brothers don't believe. Jesus isn't surprised by any of this. He says, "**the world hates me because I testify that it's works are evil**" (v. 7). He's talking about the Jewish leaders; he's also talking about his brothers. He sees them all as part of a larger whole he calls "the world." That's his term for humanity in rebellion against God. The world doesn't like to be exposed. Just by being who he was, Jesus exposed them, and like bugs under a rock they scampered for darkness.

There's a third group in this section as well. It's the crowd. The crowd in Jerusalem for the feast is abuzz about Jesus. Some said he was a good man. Most people will admit to that today: "He was a good man. We should all live like he did. The world would be a better place." But there were others in Jerusalem who said he deceived people. He was a charlatan; a fraud; a huckster. But nobody would say anything because they were all afraid of the Jewish leaders.

At first Jesus refused to go to the feast. He knew the Jewish leaders were trying to kill him and he said, "**My time (hour) has not yet fully come.**" Jesus wasn't on anyone else's timetable. If he went with his mother and brothers, he'd bring much more attention to himself. He wanted to go on his own time and his own way.

The Middle of the Feast

It wasn't until halfway through the 7-day feast that Jesus finally went. Here we see what happened in the middle of the feast in verses 14–36. In this middle section, Jesus goes up to the temple courts and teaches publicly. Again, the response to Jesus is divided.

There are three questions about Jesus that dominate this section. The first one comes in verses 14–15. "**Not until halfway through**

the festival did Jesus go up to the temple courts and begin to teach. The Jews there were amazed and asked, 'How did this man get such learning without having been taught?'" The Jewish leaders want to know, "Where did you go to school? Where did you get your degree?" He taught like one who knew what he was talking about. We all know how hard it is today to gain entrance into the best universities. Back then, you didn't apply to a university; you applied to a rabbi. You became his understudy, and if you taught, you'd humbly quote your rabbi. Most likely, your rabbi would be quoting other rabbis, who in turn would quote other rabbis. So no one was really talking about the Bible; they were just talking about what other people said about the Bible. The same thing happens today. We have all these Christian books and everyone is quoting what this or that guy is saying about the Bible but no one is reading the Bible! Preachers are the worst culprits! Jesus didn't do that. He taught right from scripture with his own authority, and they could see that.

Jesus responds to them in verses 16–19. "**Jesus answered, 'My teaching is not my own. It comes from the one who sent me. 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. 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. Has not Moses given you the law? Yet not one of you keeps the law. Why are you trying to kill me?'**"

Let's not complicate Jesus' answer. Where did you go to school? Have you ever heard of the university of heaven? His teaching came from heaven; from the One who sent him. And if they really wanted to do the will of God, they'd know where his teaching came from. There are people who say intellectually they can't buy in to Jesus as the Son of God, but Jesus says your problem isn't intellectual, it's moral, it's spiritual. You just don't want to do the will of God. Then he talks about seeking glory. In essence, he says, "My rabbi is my Father in heaven. I'm not trying to bring glory to myself by speaking this way; I bring glory to him. But you're all trying to kill me, which shows you don't even keep the law of Moses that you pride yourself on." Don't you love how straight Jesus is? We saw how the crowd was so afraid of these guys, but not Jesus. He looked them right in the eyes and accused them of plotting his murder.

Speaking of the crowd, they chimed in next and said, "**You are demon-possessed,**" **the crowd answered. "Who is trying to kill you?"** (v. 20). At this point, the plot to kill Jesus wasn't public knowledge, so the crowd says he's demon possessed, which was another way of saying he's crazy; people aren't trying to kill you; you have a serious case of paranoia. Reminds me of what C.S. Lewis said: Since Jesus claimed to be the Lord, you have one of three choices: He could be who he said he was and you could worship him as such. Or he could have said he was Lord, knowing it wasn't true, which makes him a liar. Or he could have thought he was Lord, but he wasn't, which makes him a lunatic. Lewis said we have to make a choice: Lord, liar or lunatic. Forget about saying he was just a good man; that possibility isn't open to you. Well, here, the crowd decides he's a lunatic.

The second question comes from some of the people in Jerusalem down in verses 25–27. *“At that point some of the people of Jerusalem began to ask, ‘Isn’t this the man they are trying to kill? Here he is, speaking publicly, and they are not saying a word to him. Have the authorities really concluded that he is the Messiah? But we know where this man is from; when the Messiah comes, no one will know where he is from.’”*

Some of the crowd from Jerusalem ask where he's from. They're starting to wonder about this Jesus guy. Even though their leaders want to kill him, they seem to be giving him a free pass. Maybe he is the Messiah. But wait a minute. Isn't he from Galilee? This issue will come up again later (verses 41, 52). This may not seem like a big deal to us, but many Jews believed the Messiah would appear suddenly and mysteriously out of nowhere. As we'll see, others believed he'd come from Bethlehem, but not Galilee! That's like being from Winnemucca!

Jesus responds to this question about his origins in verses 28–29. *“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, but I know him because I am from him and he sent me.’”* He says, “Yeah, you know where I'm from in an earthly sense but you don't **really** know where I'm from because you don't know the One who sent me.” Jesus is beginning to repeat himself. Where did you go to school and get your learning? Heaven. Where did you come from? Heaven.

Then John records a flurry of responses to Jesus in verses 30–33. *“At this they tried to seize him, but no one laid a hand on him, because his hour had not yet come. Still, many in the crowd believed in him. They said, ‘When the Messiah comes, will he perform more signs than this man?’ The Pharisees heard the crowd whispering such things about him. Then the chief priests and the Pharisees sent temple guards to arrest him. Jesus said, ‘I am with you for only a short time, and then I am going to the one who sent me.’”*

Again, we see the response of the crowd and the Jewish leaders. The crowd is divided. Some of them are so upset they try to seize him. It's like a mob scene. Others in the crowd believed in him because of all the miracles he'd performed. Then there were the Jewish leaders. They send their temple guards to arrest him. They're like security guards. They don't really have the authority of the government of Rome behind them; they just work for the Jewish leaders.

This raises the third question in this middle section. The Jewish leaders ask in v. 35, *“Where does this man intend to go that we cannot find him.”* But Jesus has already told them back in v. 33, *“I am with you only for a short time, and then I am going to the One who sent me.”* The first question: Where did you get your learning? Answer: Heaven. Second question: Where did you come from? Answer: Heaven. Third question: Where are you going. Anybody know the answer? Heaven!

In this middle section, we've again seen the buzz about Jesus. Where did he go to school? He must be crazy. Maybe he is the

Messiah, but where did he come from? No, I really believe in him. How else do you explain the miracles? He said he's leaving. Where is he going? To Greece? Jesus summarizes most of this up in v. 24 when he said, *“Stop judging by mere appearances, but instead judge correctly.”* This should challenge us. Do we look at Jesus and draw conclusions about him based on faulty and superficial ideas of what he should be like? French philosopher Voltaire said 300 years ago: “If God has made us in his image, we've returned him the favor.” But the Christian faith insists the starting point to learn about God and about our world is Jesus. Far too often, we judge Jesus by our own external standards of how things should look and be.

The End of the Feast

Finally, we come to the last day of the feast. To appreciate the moment it helps to understand the background. Each morning of the feast, the crowd would gather at the Temple. The priest would hold out a golden pitcher and the crowd would follow him to the pool of Siloam, singing one of the ancient Psalms as they went. He'd dip the pitcher into the water and the people would recite from the prophet Isaiah, *“With joy you will draw water from the wells of salvation”* (12:3). Then they'd march back to the Temple while the priest walked around the altar once and poured the water out over the altar. But on the last day, it was a bit different. The people would stay and the priest would circle the altar seven times before he ascended the altar and raised up the pitcher of water. The crowd would shout for the priest to hold it higher because it was considered the height of joy in an Israelite's life to see the water being poured out on the altar.

I can imagine that it was in that hush and at that dramatic moment Jesus stood up to speak. *“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. Whoever believes in me, as Scripture has said, rivers of living water will flow from within them.’ 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”* (verses 37–39).

We'll come back to that amazing invitation in just a moment, but for now I want you to see the response. As usual there's a buzz in the crowd. Some say, *“Surely this man is a prophet”* (v. 40). Others say, *“He is the Messiah”* (v. 41). Still others asked, *“How can the Messiah come from Galilee?”* (v. 41). Finally, John says, *“the people were divided because of Jesus”* (v. 43). No surprise there; business as usual.

But then there is a surprise. The crowd may be divided, but the one group we expect to be unanimous in their unbelief and animosity towards Jesus is the Jewish leaders. However, listen to what happens next. The priests are all sitting around later that day waiting for the temple guards to bring Jesus in, but when they come in empty-handed, the priests aren't at all happy. In v. 45 they ask, *“Why didn't you bring him in?”* I love their answer, *“No one ever spoke the way this man does.”* Isn't that a great answer? The security guards get it! I'd love to have been there and seen the look on the those priests' faces! Then they sneer, *“You mean he's deceived you also? Have any of the rulers of the*

Pharisees believed in him? No! But this mob that knows nothing of the law -- there is a curse on them." This is elitism at its worst. They dismiss the guards as nothing but uneducated laymen. "Are you as naive and gullible as the mob? We expected better from you guys who work for us."

But just when we're ready to write them all off, someone speaks up; someone we know; someone we've met before. "*Nicodemus, who had gone to Jesus earlier and who was one of their own number, asked, 'Does our law condemn a man without first hearing him to find out what he has been doing?'*" (verses 50–51). Remember old Nicodemus, member of the Jewish ruling council? He'd come to Jesus by night and inquired about how to enter the kingdom of God. What happened to him? He just kind of disappeared, but here he is again, and before John is finished writing this story we'll see him again. We don't know if he's a true believer yet, but he's on his way. Here he stands up for justice. "Listen, you just said the mob knows nothing of the law, but let's talk about the law. Last I checked our law doesn't condemn a man without giving him a fair hearing." Have you ever been the only one in the room to stand up for something because it was right? It's not easy. You can get in big trouble doing that. You can lose your job. You can lose your friends and your status in the community. Look how they respond, "*Are you from Galilee, too. Look into it, and you will find that a prophet does not come out of Galilee*" (v. 52). There it is again—Galilee! Everyone is hung up on Galilee! And with that, the feast ends.

What have we learned? Who is Jesus? A good man? A crazy man? A deceiver? The Messiah? Or is he who he said he was? Yes, the Messiah, but not **just** the Messiah. The Son of God. The bread of life. The light of the world. The Way, the Truth and the Life. The Word made flesh.

How will you respond to his claims? Are you hostile? Are you confused? Are you open and receptive? Do you believe he's who he said he was? How we answer these questions is the Continental Divide of history. You can't be neutral. No one is neutral about Jesus, even if they pretend to be so. He divides us all.

I often even wonder about those of us today who call ourselves believers. How would we respond to him if he showed up today as he did then? Where would we be in this story? We shouldn't be too quick to answer that question. Remember, it was the most religious people who were the most resistant to him because he never fits into our preconceived ideas. In what ways have we

made him into the image of our own twenty-first century version of Evangelical Christianity?

Dorothy Sayers said about Jesus, "The dogma we find so dull--this terrifying drama of which God is the victim and hero--if this is dull, then what, in Heaven's name, is worthy to be called exciting? The people who hanged Christ never, to do them justice, accused him of being a bore--on the contrary, they thought him too dynamic to be safe. It has been left for later generations to muffle up that shattering personality and surround him with an atmosphere of tedium. We have very efficiently pared the claws of the Lion of Judah, certified him 'meek and mild,' and recommended him as a fitting household pet for pale curates and pious old ladies. Those who knew him, however ... objected to him as a dangerous firebrand."

Jesus has issued an invitation in this passage. It's an invitation extended to all ("Whoever..."). It's for the religious and the irreligious. The insiders and the outsiders. It's for skeptical younger brothers like James, Joseph, Simon and Jude and set-in-stone octogenarians like Nicodemus. It's an invitation to come to him as the fulfillment of all the Feast of Tabernacles anticipated. He's the source of living water. He was poured out upon the altar so we would never have to thirst again. We just have to come to him and drink. Why is that so difficult for some of us? Like the crowd in v. 13, are we afraid? Do we really want to do the will of God? Are we still judging by outward appearances?

In C.S. Lewis' *The Chronicles of Narnia* there's a powerful scene in which Jill first meets Aslan the great lion by a stream: "Are you not thirsty?" said the Lion. "I'm dying of thirst," said Jill. "Then drink," said the Lion. "May I—could I—would you mind going away while I do?" said Jill. The Lion answered this only by a look and a very low growl. As Jill gazed at its motionless bulk, she realized that she might as well have asked the whole mountain to move aside for her convenience. The delicious rippling noise of the stream was driving her crazy. "Will you promise not to do anything to me, if I do come?" said Jill. "I make no promise," said the Lion.

In Aslan's answer, we see that Jesus, the Lion of Judah, holds out his kingly offer of living water to all of us, but he'll not be de-clawed. Like Jill, we must believe him and trust him.

This manuscript represents the bulk of what was preached at CPC. For further detail, please refer to the audio recording of this sermon.

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