

Engage the World with the Gospel
Who Is Jesus?
John 7

What a year, so far, in the life of Grace Community Church. In addition to recovery from major surgery, the starting of a new phase of cancer treatment, and biopsies and other medical tests, we said goodbye to several precious saints who are now in the presence of the Lord. None of those who died are members here, but they are relatives of members – father, mother, aunt, grandparent, etc. It is a rather audacious claim, don't you think to say that relatives who have died are alive and well in the presence of Jesus? Here's a hint - our confidence resides in the name I just now invoked – Jesus.

So, what does Jesus have to do with heaven? Everything! if the NT means anything! John 14:6 is just one place that describes his role in our salvation: “Jesus said to him (Thomas), ‘I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.’” So many of those who passed from death to life in these past months professed faith in Jesus, and we have the promise of the Savior himself, who said in John 6:37: “All that the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never cast out.”

When you talk about God in our land, people may affect a pious look on their faces and nod solemnly, as in, “Oh, yes – it is good to think about God in that part of one's life.” If you should choose to speak of Jesus, though, eyebrows will be raised and defenses will immediately appear. It should not surprise us, though, because Jesus himself said in Matthew 10:34-36: “Do not think that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I have not come to bring peace, but a sword. 35 For I have come to set a man against his father, and a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law. 36 And a person's enemies will be those of his own household.”

Jesus was referring to the differences of belief, even within families, about the claims that Jesus made that he was God and that the only hope of salvation was to believe in him. What it meant to believe in Jesus would come fully into focus after Jesus was raised from the dead and after the Holy Spirit came at Pentecost to indwell believers. If it seems clear to you, remember that it is not clear to everyone, and while we acknowledge the privilege of sharing Jesus with the world, we do so knowing that proclaiming the name of Jesus is controversial and not everyone will believe our message.

Our text today is John 7. The entire chapter. I have titled the message “Who is Jesus?”, but it could have just as easily been titled, “Confusion about Jesus.” You will see what I mean as we work our way through the chapter. The entire chapter, that is, except for the last verse. Obviously, if the text is 52 verses long, there will not be time for a lot of commentary. That’s okay, for two reasons. First – and this would be more than enough – God’s Word is powerful and always accomplishes the purpose for which it was intended. In fact, that will be the focus of a message next month—the necessity and effectiveness of God’s Word in our witnessing efforts.

Second – there are some very important truths and principles in John 7 that will inform our outreach efforts. It never hurts to understand the big picture when looking to a verse here or there. While I will make a few comments about the text, I am more than confident that God’s Word will minister to your hearts and minds today. Since the entire chapter is our text, I will ask you remain seated rather than standing for the reading of Scripture, but let’s begin our time with prayer for God to open our hearts to his truth.

The 7th chapter of John’s Gospel:

1 After this Jesus went about in Galilee. He would not go about in Judea, because the Jews were seeking to kill him.

There are long gaps of time in John's Gospel. So, when he says, "After this," we are not sure if it followed immediately on the heels of John 6 or if it fell after another conflict and interaction with the religious leader of the Jews. You will see later in this text that John refers to "the Jews" in his account of the events recorded in John 7. Whenever John used the term "the Jews," he almost certainly meant the Jews who were opposed to Jesus. John was, himself, Jewish, so he most certainly was not an anti-Semite. In the next verses, we will see Jesus' own brothers mock him. Well, they were half-brothers, since Jesus did not have an earthly father. Verse 2:

2 Now the Jews' Feast of Booths was at hand. 3 So his brothers said to him, "Leave here and go to Judea, that your disciples also may see the works you are doing. 4 For no one works in secret if he seeks to be known openly. If you do these things, show yourself to the world." 5 For not even his brothers believed in him. 6 Jesus said to them, "My time has not yet come, but your time is always here. 7 The world cannot hate you, but it hates me because I testify about it that its works are evil. 8 You go up to the feast. I am not going up to this feast, for my time has not yet fully come." 9 After saying this, he remained in Galilee. 10 But after his brothers had gone up to the feast, then he also went up, not publicly but in private.

Jesus was not lying to his brothers. His timetable was different from the one on which they thought he should teach and work. Whenever you see one of the gospel writers say, "It was not Jesus' time," they meant the time of the crucifixion and resurrection. Verse 11:

11 The Jews were looking for him at the feast, and saying, "Where is he?" 12 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.” 13 Yet for fear of the Jews no one spoke openly of him.

And so begins the intense debate about Jesus that is recounted in John 7. We have already been told in verse 1 that the Jews were looking to kill Jesus, so we know that was on their minds as they looked for him. They obviously thought of Jesus as a heretic for claiming to be equal with God. Some of the people, like so many today, said, “No, Jesus is not a heretic. He is a good man.” The response was, “How can you be so naïve? Can’t you see he is a deceiver, a false prophet who is leading people away from God?” All of this was going on in private, though. Most were afraid to speak openly about Jesus because government officials hated Jesus and were none too pleased with his followers. Do you ever feel as though there are people in powerful positions who do not want you to say that Jesus is the only way? Verse 14:

14 About the middle of the feast Jesus went up into the temple and began teaching. 15 The Jews therefore marveled, saying, “How is it that this man has learning, when he has never studied?”

Jesus had not studied at the rabbinical schools, and it made the rabbis mad that he had such a large following. People were eager to hear him teach and even the religious leaders were quite taken aback with the depth of his teaching. They knew that his teaching was biblical and they knew that he was a threat to their power structure because he appealed directly to the Scripture, not to the teachings of the rabbis and to the hundreds of man-made and man-centered additions to the law that the Jewish leaders had added over the years. Then, Jesus issued a profound challenge to the Jews that if understood, may be a great help in your outreach efforts. Verses 16-17:

16 So Jesus answered them, “My teaching is not mine, but his who sent me. 17 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.

This was a first century way of saying, “I am not teaching as a rabbi. I am not even teaching as a mere human being. My authority and my instructions come directly from God, who sent me. If you desire to know God, follow my teaching and you will understand that my teaching is directly from heaven.”

When Jesus said that he only taught what he had received directly from heaven, it was code for “I am equal with God.” That may seem strange to you, but the Pharisees got what Jesus was saying. If you keep reading, you will find Jesus even more direct about his divinity in John 8 than he is in John 7 – so much so that the Jewish leaders will pick up stones to stone him for blasphemy.

As the context shows, this is a very public debate. Jesus’ response was not so much an attempt to convince his opponents as it was meant to convince those who were listening to the debate. Remember that the next time someone challenges you publicly – you may not convince your challenger, but there may be some who hear that will be attracted to Jesus.

Jesus’ challenge in verse 17 is not an attempt at winning a debate point, although you can be certain that Jesus won every debate. Rather, it is a challenge to faith. The world says, “Show me that you are God and I will believe.” Jesus says, “Believe me, and I will show you not only that I am God, but you will know that I am your Savior.” While the Christian faith is quite logical, most people don’t see its logic until after they believe. You never know how much impact you may have on someone when you say, “Jesus said to believe him and then he will show you that he is real.” Verse 18:

18 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. 19 Has not Moses given you the law? Yet none of you keeps the law. Why do you seek to kill me?” 20 The crowd answered, “You have a demon! Who is seeking to kill you?”

When you are seeking to share Jesus with others, don't expect a fair debate. The Pharisees employed many logical fallacies to refute Jesus. They were experts at ad hominem attacks, such as, “Who is trying to kill you? You have a demon!” We have already been told that the Jews were seeking to kill Jesus and when he called them on it, they said he was demon possessed. Verse 21:

21 Jesus answered them, “I did one work, and you all marvel at it. 22 Moses gave you circumcision (not that it is from Moses, but from the fathers), and you circumcise a man on the Sabbath. 23 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? 24 Do not judge by appearances, but judge with right judgment.”

The “one work” Jesus mentioned was likely referring to the healing of the invalid at the Pool of Bethesda, recorded in John 5. Jesus did a lot of his miracles on the Sabbath. Why? Maybe it was to challenge the Jewish traditions that had been added to the law. Jesus was not breaking the Sabbath to tell the man who was healed to take his mat and go home. That was, however, one of the 39 rules that the Pharisees had added to the Lord's command to do no work on the Sabbath. Jesus desired to teach the crowds that the Jewish leaders had added to the law and were no friends to grace or to the people. Verse 25:

25 Some of the people of Jerusalem therefore said, “Is not this the man whom they seek to kill? **26** 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? **27** But we know where this man comes from, and when the Christ appears, no one will know where he comes from.” **28** 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. **29** I know him, for I come from him, and he sent me.” **30** So they were seeking to arrest him, but no one laid a hand on him, because his hour had not yet come. **31** 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 debate continued, but Jesus’ time – or, his crucifixion and resurrection – had not yet come, so no one was able to do anything that would derail God’s plan. The Pharisees didn’t believe God was controlling events in Jesus’ favor so they decided to put a stop to this nonsense. Verse 32:

32 The Pharisees heard the crowd muttering these things about him, and the chief priests and Pharisees sent officers to arrest him. **33** Jesus then said, “I will be with you a little longer, and then I am going to him who sent me. **34** You will seek me and you will not find me. Where I am you cannot come.” **35** 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? **36** What does he mean by saying, ‘You will seek me and you will not find me,’ and, ‘Where I am you cannot come’?”

Now the Jews have begun to mock Jesus. “Where do you think he is going so that we cannot find him? What does he mean that he going to the one who sent him and we won’t be able to follow? You don’t suppose he will go to Antioch or Ephesus, where some of our Jewish

brothers and sisters were taken during the Babylonian Captivity, do you?” Verse 37:

37 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. **38** Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, ‘Out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.’” **39** 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.

I wish I had time to talk about the symbolism of this last activity of the feast when Jesus said, essentially, “All of the law, all of the prophets, all of the feasts, the Sabbath, the temple – all of it – points to me!” Jesus’ words created quite a stir. Verse 40:

40 When they heard these words, some of the people said, “This really is the Prophet.” **41** Others said, “This is the Christ.” But some said, “Is the Christ to come from Galilee? **42** Has not the Scripture said that the Christ comes from the offspring of David, and comes from Bethlehem, the village where David was?” **43** So there was a division among the people over him. **44** Some of them wanted to arrest him, but no one laid hands on him.

Here is another fallacy the Pharisees employed in refuting Jesus. They used a cherry-picking fallacy, or, incomplete evidence fallacy. The Pharisees pointed to Jesus’ hometown – Nazareth – to discredit his credentials as Messiah. Everyone knew the Messiah would come from Bethlehem. But in the next chapter, when Jesus calls the Pharisees the children of the devil, they respond with “We were not born as illegitimate children like you were!” They knew enough to know that Mary was pregnant before she and Joseph were married, and surely they knew that Joseph and Mary traveled to Bethlehem, where Jesus was born. Conveniently, they left this bit of information off when speaking of Jesus’ heritage. Fortunately, this

sort of incomplete evidence is never used as a debating tactic in 2017, especially not in the political realm. Verse 45:

45 The officers then came to the chief priests and Pharisees, who said to them, “Why did you not bring him?” 46 The officers answered, “No one ever spoke like this man!” 47 The Pharisees answered them, “Have you also been deceived? 48 Have any of the authorities or the Pharisees believed in him? 49 But this crowd that does not know the law is accursed.” 50 Nicodemus, who had gone to him before, and who was one of them, said to them, 51 “Does our law judge a man without first giving him a hearing and learning what he does?” 52 They replied, “Are you from Galilee too? Search and see that no prophet arises from Galilee.”

The crowds were divided, but the council was set on putting Jesus to death. Well, almost set. Nicodemus bravely defended Jesus in the Sanhedrin, which was the Jewish Council in charge of law and order for the Jewish people as long as it did not conflict with Roman law. You probably know from John 3 that Nicodemus had visited Jesus in secret at night. Jesus said that Nicodemus and all his Jewish kin would need to be born again if they were to enter heaven. Nicodemus had quite possibly mocked Jesus at that meeting, saying, “Oh, how can a man be born again? Must I re-enter my mother’s womb so that I can be born another time?” Whether he was sarcastic or just confused in the earlier meeting, Nicodemus seems to have made progress by this point, in John 7. In John 19, after Jesus had been crucified, Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea prepared Jesus’ body for burial, which seems to me to be a clear indication that Nicodemus had by that point believed Jesus.

And that is John 7. Three quick observations from the text, beginning with:

- 1. You must bring people to a decision about Jesus – yes or no**

There is no middle ground with Jesus. He was not merely a good man, nor was he merely a prophet or an extraordinary teacher. He was either who he said he was or he was an imposter. One of the things I will often use to engage people about Jesus is to use John 14:6 – “I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.” I will then say, “You may not believe that Jesus was telling the truth, but you must admit that he claimed to be the only way to heaven. If this is what he said, and Scripture says that it is, then either I believe he was telling the truth, or I believe that he was misguided and/or a liar.”

When you are confronted with the truth, sooner or later, you must deal with Jesus. Do not assume the gospel, when you are witnessing to others. Even though, as we have discussed, it is not always the best idea to continually call people to a decision for Christ when they know what we believe and what we desire for them, it is true that they need to know that Jesus is the crux of the matter, and while it is nice to hear that people like to pray and have an increased interest in spiritual matters, they need to know that, above all, they must confront, and be confronted by, Jesus. That’s first. Second:

2. There will be a price to pay for sharing your faith

One of the reasons many of us are reluctant to witness is that we are afraid of what people will think about us. They may mock us or even become angry and possibly violent. That’s true. There is no way that you can be a faithful witness for Jesus without people thinking you are a fanatic. That’s okay. As Paul said in Philippians 3:10, my heart’s desire is “that I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death.” The more you suffer with Christ, not only will you enter into his sufferings, but he will enter into yours. There will be a price

to pay for sharing your faith, but the blessing of intimacy with Jesus is well worth the cost. Last:

- 3. Keep the conversation going whenever possible – some believe over time**

Nicodemus came to faith. Never give up in your efforts to share Christ with someone who seems not to care. It is not up to you to save the people with whom you share Christ, but it is your privilege and responsibility to witness about the one who saved you and who changed your life. One sows, one waters, but it is God who brings the fruit. Let's pray.