

Jesus Gives God Glory

Lesson for September 17, 2023

Unit I: Love Completes, Law Falls Short

Adult Topic: Who is Trustworthy?

Scriptural Background: John 7:14-24

Printed Text: John 7:14-24

Key verse: “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.” (John 7:18, NIV)

W.E. Burghardt DuBois, the great black educator, sociologist, and historian, upon completion of studies at Fisk, Harvard, and the University of Berlin, was convinced that change in the condition of the American black could be effected by careful scientific investigations into the truth about the black in America. So, he proceeded. His research was flawless and his graphs and charts impeccable. After waiting several years and hearing not the slightest stir of reform, Dr. DuBois had to accept the truth about Truth: Its being available does not mean it will be appropriated.

Fred B. Craddock, *Overhearing the Gospel*

In this week’s lesson, Jesus makes it clear that the knowledge and teaching He was “appropriating” came from God, His Father.

Key Terms

1. **Demon-possessed** (verse 20) – The invasion of the body by an evil spirit or devil that gains control of the mind or soul, producing mental disorder, physical illness, or criminal behavior.
2. **Festival** (verse 14) – A time of celebration marked by special observances. A feast day; a holy day.
3. **Judge** (Verse 24) – To separate; to pick out, select; to approve, esteem; to determine, resolve.

Lesson Background

Chapters 7 and 8 represent the beginning of the end of Jesus' public ministry. In these passages, He will openly challenge the spiritual errors of the Jewish leaders and declare His own role in the salvation of mankind. In response, the religious officials' approach to Jesus will turn further towards a plot for murder. John chapter 7 begins after another leap in the gospel's timeline. The events of chapter 6 occurred around one year prior to Jesus' crucifixion. The events of chapter 7, centered on the Feast of Booths/Tabernacles, happen about six months later. This feast was among the most important in Jewish tradition and was a hub of religious and cultural activity.

In as much as the Feast of Tabernacles pointed to God's faithfulness to Israel in times past, it also signified the near completion of another year in Israel's calendar life and at the same time a new start. Following on the heels of the sixth feast (the Day of Atonement), Israel's sacrificial and temple system were ritually cleansed. Now the people could celebrate, preparing themselves for another year of life with God. The Feast of Tabernacles was a week-long celebration of victory and prayers to God to provide salvation and further victories ahead.

Chapter 7 begins with Jesus' family mocking Him for the events of chapter 6. They assume that a man seeking publicity and fame ought to do His magic tricks at the most public festival of the year. The "brothers" mentioned here are, by all reasonable interpretations, the literal half-brothers of Jesus. That is, these are the biological sons of Mary. Jesus, however, is still sensitive to God's timetable, and chooses not to go to the feast with them. Instead, He will go later, and alone, in order to be more discreet.

This discretion only lasts a few days. Jesus will begin teaching and preaching in Jerusalem midway through the week-long feast. In this discourse, Jesus will criticize the hypocrisy of the Jewish religious leaders. This criticism, along with His established reputation for miracles, will create a "crisis of confidence" in the Pharisees, Sadducees, and scribes. From the perspective of the people, there are only three possibilities: Either the leaders are too weak to stop a blasphemer, too confused to do anything, or they somehow accept His claims. This only adds fuel to the religious leaders' desire to silence Jesus permanently.

Lesson in Depth

I. The Reception of the Savior (John 7:14-15)

Jesus went up into the temple and taught: Though Jesus avoided a grand entrance, when He came to Jerusalem in His Father's timing, He taught boldly. He never shrank back from proclaiming the truth.

The sense of **know letters** is "Particularly, **scripture-learning** – perhaps because this was *all the literature* of the Jews. Probably His teaching consisted in *exposition of the Scripture*." (Alford) "His skill in interpreting Scripture and His knowledge of it is what is referred to." (Dods)

How does this Man know letters, having never studied: The Jews show amazement that a man with no professional training as an interpreter of the law should dare to expound the Scriptures. The Jewish leaders knew that Jesus had not studied or been a disciple under a prominent rabbi (as Paul studied under Gamaliel, Acts 22:3). Jesus did not follow the normal and expected course of education for a teacher. If He was merely self-taught, then (so they appeared to have argued) His teaching, so far from possessing authority, was boastful and impertinent.

If they could have condemned Jesus on some false doctrine or wrong understanding of Scripture, they would have. Since they could not, they attack the credentials of Jesus. "These words are spoken in the true bigotry and prejudice of so-called 'learning.'" (Alford)

II. The Response from the Savior (John 7:16-18)

Jesus refuted this charge by drawing attention to the divine source both of His claims to be a teacher and of the content of His teaching. He was no upstart, puffed up by His own self-gathered knowledge, nor did He aim at winning honor for Himself; He was sent by God and His supreme object was to reflect the glory of him that sent Him (v. 16). That was the hallmark of honesty and sincerity. Jesus was an eloquent, gifted teacher, but He was not self-taught; Jesus was God taught. His authority was not from any man, but from His Father.

Jesus didn't claim to be self-taught; He claimed to be God-taught, practically inviting His listeners to examine His teachings according to the Scriptures.

My doctrine is not Mine, but His who sent Me: Jesus didn't point to His credentials, but to His *doctrine*. It was as if He said, "I don't have a seminary degree, but *judge Me by My doctrine*." If the Jewish leaders listened carefully to the doctrine of Jesus, they would know that it was all rooted in the Old Testament Scriptures, and that it was from God.

There is a great spiritual principle behind the words, **If anyone wills to do His will, he shall know concerning the doctrine.** "Spiritual understanding is not produced solely by learning facts or procedures, but rather it depends on obedience to known truth." (Tenney)

He who seeks the glory of the One who sent Him is true, and no unrighteousness is in Him: Jesus contrasted Himself with the one who **speaks from himself** and who **seeks his own glory**. Jesus was different.

- Jesus sought the **glory** of God.
- Jesus **is true**.
- Jesus has **no unrighteousness** in Him.

In a sense, Jesus gave us two measures of a true teacher.

- Does the teaching come from God? That is, is it according to the revealed Word of God?
- Does the work give glory to God?

The main point is: Spiritual discernment depends on inward righteousness.

1. Commitment to obedience = key to discernment "*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.*" (v. 17)
2. Seeking God's glory = mark of inward righteousness "*He who speaks from himself seeks his own glory; but He who is seeking the glory of the one who sent Him, He is true, and there is no unrighteousness in Him.*" (v. 18)

III. The Reflecting of the Savior (John 7:19-20)

None of you keeps the law: As law breakers themselves, they are in no position to judge Him. Jesus just stated that He was absolutely sinless and true, always seeking the glory of God in heaven (John 7:18). In contrast to Jesus, the religious leaders did not keep the law. They had the law (**Did not Moses give you the law**) but did not keep it. It was a favorite cause for self-congratulation among the Jews that they were the recipients of the Law. But now our Lord points out that there is a difference between receiving and keeping the law.

Notes collected and developed by Ethel Williams

Why do you seek to kill Me? In following the thought of Jesus, He said something like this: “I am sinless and none of you keep the law. Why then do you **seek to kill Me?** You are the ones guilty under the law, not I.”

You have a demon. Who is seeking to kill You? The people didn’t know that the rulers wanted to kill Jesus because He healed a man on the Sabbath (John 5:16). They thought Jesus was crazy and perhaps paranoid.

IV. The Reaction toward the Savior (John 7:21-24)

Verses 21-23 parallel between Jesus healing on the Sabbath and circumcision on Sabbath.

If a man receives circumcision on the Sabbath, so that the law of Moses should not be broken: It was permitted – even commanded – to do a negative work on the Sabbath, such as cutting away the flesh in circumcision (Leviticus 12:3). It was even more right to make **a man completely well on the Sabbath**, as Jesus did (John 5:8-9).

“If you may wound a man on the sabbath-day, may not I heal one?” (Trapp)

Do not judge according to appearance, but judge with righteous judgment: They decided that Jesus appeared to be a sinner, and they appeared to be righteous. They were wrong each time, and they needed to **judge with righteous judgment** instead of only by appearances.

The connection between this verse and the preceding ones is dear. Christ had been vindicating His act of healing the impotent man on the Sabbath day. To His superficial critics it might have seemed a breach of the Sabbatic law; but in reality, it was not so. Their judgment was hasty and partial. They were looking for something they might condemn, and so seized upon this. But their verdict, as is usually the case when hurried and prejudiced, was altogether erroneous. Therefore, did our Lord bid them; "Judge not according to the appearance, but judge righteous judgment."

He exhorted them to be fair; to take into account all the circumstances; to weigh all that God’s Word revealed about the Sabbath. “*In it thou shalt not do any work,*” was not to be taken absolutely: other scriptures plainly modified it. The ministrations of the priests in the temple on the Sabbath, and the circumcising of the child on that day when the Law required it, were cases in point. But the Jews had overlooked or ignored these. They had judged by appearances. They had not considered the incident according to its merits, nor in the light of the general tenor of Scripture. Hence, their judgment was unrighteous because it was unfair and false.

Lesson Summary

Jesus taught at the Feast of Tabernacles. He does so in the temple, in a public place, ensuring that what He is teaching can be heard. There is nothing wrong, and everything right, with ensuring that God’s Word is proclaimed as clearly, as widely, as publicly, and as powerfully as God wills, in the power of his Spirit. The act of preaching is to put God’s Word center stage—not our own personalities, but the Word of God.

The Jewish leaders marvel that Jesus is preaching with such great learning, though he had never formally studied in their religious schools. Part of the witness to Jesus' divinity is the sheer brilliance of his teaching: no man ever taught thus. He is not only clear, he is deep; he is not only arresting, he is substantial; he is not only appealing, he can warn as well; he not only uses his stories, but He also uses logic; he uses the Bible as well as the author of the Bible, for that is who he is.

We, in our humanity, must study in order to be able to speak—as Paul tells Timothy, we are to study to show ourselves approved (2 Timothy 2:15). But Jesus was able to speak without any learning or study whatsoever. Who else can teach the Word better than the Word Incarnate?

A great secret of hearing God speak, and of understanding the Bible, is here given by Jesus: if anyone does God's will, he will know whether the teaching is from God. Intellectual insight can help, learning is a useful tool, but a resonance with the truth of God comes as we ourselves follow in that truth and echo its truth in our own desire to follow that truth. To know God's will, we must first set ourselves to do God's will. It is not surprising that the will of God remains hidden to those who break what they already know of that will.

They are out to kill him because he healed a man on a Sabbath (5:2-9). But how ironic is this! With devastating logic, Jesus exposes their hypocrisy: if a man can be circumcised on the Sabbath, why cannot a man be healed on the Sabbath? Do not judge by appearances, but judge with the right judgment. So often people do still judge by appearances, by the surface, by the form. If we are to judge rightly, though, we need to learn to discern by intent, by content, by truth, and not merely by dress codes and appearances and form.