

The Church of the Servant King

Survey of the Bible Series – The Gospel of John (SB_JN7A_Jesus Attends Feast Undercover)

Introduction

There is probably an interval of 6 months between the events of chapter 6 (Passover) and chapter 7 (Feast of Tabernacles). The Feast of Tabernacles was one of the great feasts celebrated by the Jews. It was celebrated in late September or early October. For seven days, Jewish people lived in makeshift shelters or lean-tos constructed of branches and leaves. The feast commemorated the Jews wandering in the wilderness and life in tents during the Exodus. It was one of three great feasts celebrated by the Jews.¹ The other two were Passover and Pentecost. Therefore, about one year had elapsed since the healing of the man at the pool of Bethesda where the Jews sought to kill Jesus for making Himself equal with God (5:16-18).

Many of Israel's annual ceremonies celebrated the forty year period that the Jews lived in the desert after leaving Egypt prior to entering the Land of Promise. Every morning the priests poured out water in the Temple in memory of the water that God, through Moses, caused to come out of the rock (see Ex 17:5-6; Jn 7:37-39; 1 Co 10:4). Every evening, they lighted two candelabra to represent the pillar of fire by which God led them forward at night (Ex 13:21-22). At the end of the seven days of the Feast of Tabernacles, they prepared a solemn assembly (Num 29:35). This was the day of the events of John 7:37. Josephus describes this day as the greatest and most sacred of the Hebrew feasts. It was effectively a thanksgiving for the harvest and symbolized the new life in the land of Canaan. As such, it pointed to the rest and joys of the future Messianic kingdom.

Jerusalem had become a hotbed of antagonism and hatred to the point that Jesus' life was in danger. Therefore, Jesus spent most of his public ministry in Galilee and those who were not familiar with Him thought that He came from Galilee (7:41). There is perhaps no other chapter in John's Gospel that reveals so strongly the atmosphere of open controversy and confused thinking regarding Jesus' person and authority. The chapter has clear segmentation that surrounds the events at the Feast:

- Controversy prior to the Feast (vv. 1-13)
- Controversy during the Feast (vv. 14-36)
- Controversy on the last day of the Feast (vv. 37-44)
- Controversy of the Sanhedrin (vv. 45-53)

If one were to see this chapter acted out in a dramatic production, the setting would be one of constant heckling, interruption of Jesus speech, accusations, and constant danger of arrest or even death.

In this chapter, we see many groups of people. There is controversy in Jesus' own family. The majority of the Jewish people were naïve and ignorant of the vile hatred of their religious leaders toward Jesus. The religious leaders were constantly seeking ways to arrest and kill Jesus (7:20, 30, 32, 44, 45). The commoner and pilgrim from other areas of Israel feared to speak on Jesus' behalf because of the fierce antagonism and political power of the religious leaders. This group (i.e. the commoner and pilgrim) were full of questions and confused (7:11-13, 25-27, 40-43). Towards the end of the chapter, we see our friend Nicodemus, who earlier had sought Jesus by night to question Him and who is evidently now a believer, attempt to defend Jesus before the Sanhedrin (7:50-51).

Principle: In every period of human history, the naïve sheep or group of people who are blissfully preoccupied with the exigencies of life constitute the majority of a population. Like the

¹ See Lev 23:33-36, 39-44; Num 29:12-40; Deut 16:13-17.

pilgrims and commoners of Jesus' day, they are the ones who are most susceptible to manipulation by charismatic leadership.

Application: Are you being manipulated by the charismatic personality of anyone or is your perception and interpretation of events of human history shaped by a mature understanding of Scripture and God's purpose in human history?

Controversy Before the Feast (7:1-13)

It is interesting that Jesus' first controversy in this chapter comes from His immediate family. We know that Jesus had sisters (Matt 13:56) as well as four brothers – James, Joseph, Simon, and Judas (Matt 13:55). Later, James would become the pastor of the church at Jerusalem after Jesus' ascension and the beheading of the Apostle James (Acts 12:2). He is the author of the epistle of James (see Acts 12:17; 15:13; 21:18; Gal 1:19; 2:9). Judas (Jude) is the writer of the epistle of Jude. However, at this point, unbelief prompted His brothers to put pressure on Jesus. They were impressed with His miracles and teaching; however, they were skeptical of His claims to divine origin and Messiahship. They wanted Him to get on with executing their understanding of the power of the Messiah according to their timetable. Because of their unbelief, these brothers of Jesus missed out on the privilege of being closely associated with Jesus during the first two and a half years of His public ministry that Peter and John enjoyed.

In verse 6, Jesus uses the Greek word *kairos* which means "time" or "opportunity." He does not use another Greek word for time – *hora* – which means a destined hour of God. Therefore, Jesus is simply indicating that this is not the right time or God's timing for Him to go to Jerusalem. He is timing His attendance at the Feast according to God's schedule, not His brother's schedule. If He had attended with His brothers, there is no doubt that they would have tried to set the stage for Him to display more miracles according to their desires that He manifest the full power of His Messiahship. Jesus wanted to go secretly and according to His schedule (7:10) so that He could determine the times to speak and manifest Himself according to the Father's plan for Him, not according to the plan of unbelievers. He would eventually speak in the Temple (7:14).

Principle: It is very possible to have a life of constant activity designed to meet everyone else's expectations, but have very little fruit.

Application: Is your daily schedule of priorities oriented toward God's plan for your life or someone else's plan and agenda?

The timing of the brothers (v. 6) was their own because they had no work to finish for God. Their life was not ordered in its details, but subject to emotional winds that pushed their sails. Compare this fact to statements John makes about Jesus' life (4:34; 5:30). As believers, our lives can manifest the same tendency. The result is a non-productive life spiritually (1 Co 3:12, 15).