

The Church of the Servant King

Survey of the Bible Series – The Gospel of John (SB_JN7B_Controversy During the Feast)

Introduction

We concluded our previous lesson with a study of verses 1-13 which detail the controversy surrounding Jesus prior to the Feast. In that lesson, we also observed that chapter 7 of John's gospel could be outlined as follows:

- ❑ 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)

In the second section of chapter 7 where we begin today's lesson, the controversy during the Feast was precipitated by Jesus' response to the Jews' consternation over Jesus' lack of formal educational background. In verse 15, the Jews' puzzlement is expressed by their question that they openly declared – "How does this man know letters, having never studied?"

The Jews whose lives had been shaped by a certain cynicism and lack of spiritual inquisitiveness (positive volition) over the years had no capacity to distinguish truth from error in regards to Jesus' teaching, ministry, and life. One cannot conclude that Jesus was only a "good" man as did some of the Jews (v. 12). Either Jesus was telling the truth when He claimed to be the unique Son of God and accepted equal honor with God the Father or He was a liar and a deceiver. A "good" man doesn't make claims such as Jesus did.¹

Principle: The person who is content with allowing spiritual questions to go unanswered in his/her life is a person who has become a casualty in the greater purpose of human history, i.e. the angelic conflict.

Application: Does your attitude toward unanswered questions in your spiritual life reflect a practical agnosticism or an underlying, covert cynicism about spiritual matters?

Application: Which of the groups in chapter 7 would have felt most spiritually compatible to you?

- ❑ The Jewish religious leaders involved in cosmic 2 hatred of Jesus?
- ❑ A Jew trying to sort it all out while at the same time manage all of the exigencies of daily life.
- ❑ Part of the Jewish multitudes who were easily swayed the charismatic religious leaders whose arguments were so deceptively convincing to the spiritually dull.

Those who thought that Jesus was a good and decent man were afraid to say so openly until the religious hierarchy had opined in a similar way. This made the religious hierarchy nothing more than a mafia. They had already indicated that if anyone openly confessed Jesus as Messiah, they would be put out of the synagogue (9:22). The dilemma of the Jews was how Jesus was anything but a liar or deceiver of men if His claims were not true (e.g. 5:21-23, 25; 10:28). He seemed to know so much having not studied in the conventional way. Was there something correct about the claims of the religious leaders since His educational background and teaching was so non-conformist in nature?

¹ This is the premise for Josh McDowell's booklet entitled *More Than A Carpenter* (Wheaton, Illinois: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., 1977).

Controversy During the Feast (7:16-36)

Jesus Responds to His Inquirers and Critics (16-18)

Jesus responds to His critics in verses 16-18. First, He states that the authority for His teaching is not inherent in Him, but because it comes from the Father. Jesus had spent His youth saturating His mind with the Scriptures as He visited the synagogue frequently. He was born and raised in an impoverished set of circumstances in the obscurity of a carpenter's shop, far from universities, libraries, or "enlightened" society. For a time in his youth, His family was nothing more than migrants as they fled to Egypt to avoid the persecution of Herod (Matt 2:13-15). Therefore, there was nothing of this world to which Jesus could claim as the basis for His authority. His authority was strictly related to the fact that it was from the Father. This would be a preposterous claim given the statements Jesus made about Himself if they were not true. In fact, Jesus would have been guilty of blasphemy had they not been true.

Principle: It is impossible to commune with Christ (God) through His Word and by the ministry of the Holy Spirit (Jn 4:24) without an enlargement of one's mind with a spiritual set of priorities that govern one's life and thought patterns.

Application: Those whose speech, thought and actions that are totally consumed with the trivial reveals a lack of meditation upon God's word and the principles, promises and doctrines related to it. See Isaiah 55:9.

Next, Jesus logically builds upon His first reason with His second rationale. There was a wisdom in Jesus' teaching that the multitudes could not deny. They had to decide. Ultimately, faith in Jesus is not the result of rationalism or empiricism. The Greeks demonstrated the former and the Jews the latter. One's intellectual capacity is not the determining factor. Faith in Jesus for eternal life is the product of the ministry of the Holy Spirit in the unbeliever's life (Jn 16:8-11) combined with one's volitional choice to accept the evidence presented. The unbeliever's lack of faith can always be traced to a basic arrogance – a selfish, unwillingness to do God's will, i.e. accept His authority. Some unbeliever's manifest a sincerity in all that they do, yet it is grounded in a basic arrogance that has set the course of their life toward either a cosmic 1 and in some cases a cosmic 2 pattern as they selfishly pursue the arrogant pattern inherent to the sin nature. However, as Jesus indicates in verse 17, the person who humbles himself and honestly deals with the issues, will find that his/her faith is rooted in reasonable facts and reliable evidence. The arrogant unbeliever wants the reverse scenario to play out – "Let me see a miraculous sign or resolve all of my intellectual questions and then I'll believe, but 'til then leave me alone as I pursue what's in my own best interest."

Finally, the authority of Jesus' teaching is backed by His conduct. This is the argument Jesus makes in verse 18. Every action of Jesus was designed to glorify the Father. In addition, His actions were designed to fulfill the Law of Moses.

The Controversy Escalates – Jesus Highlights the Contradictions in the Practice of the Mosaic Law in Religious Israel (19-24)

In verse 19, Jesus concludes His argument regarding His character by accusing the Jews of breaking the very Law that they accused Him of violating with His healing and other miracles performed on the Sabbath. The religious Jews were breaking the Law by seeking to kill Jesus. In the middle of Jesus' statements to the multitude, Jesus is interrupted by someone whose question characterizes the thought pattern of many. "Who is seeking to kill You?" Jesus ignores this emotional outburst and continues with His argument.

Principle: Spiritual maturity is manifest by poise in adversity.

Application: Do you have poise in adversity? Do you recognize and appreciate this quality when it is demonstrated in spiritual men and women? To the extent that the believer does not have spiritual poise in adversity is the extent to which he or she lacks the spiritual perspicacity to appreciate its presence in others.

The “one work” to which Jesus referred was the healing of the paralytic man on the Sabbath at the pool of Bethesda (5:1-15). As we noted, this event marked a turning point in John’s account of Jesus’ ministry. After this event, the Jews sought to kill Jesus (5:16, 18). In addition, Jesus even equated Himself to God (v. 18), thus raising their ire even more. No wonder Jesus made a point to highlight their violations of the Law (7:19, 21-23).

If the eighth day after the birth of a male infant happens to fall on a Sabbath, then in order to keep the Law (Lev 12:3), the circumcision would need to be performed on the Sabbath. This activity would have broke their own tradition, yet they were angry with Jesus for healing a whole man on the Sabbath (5:1-15).

Jesus emphasis in this passage is summarized in verse 24. Jesus exhorted His listeners to live according to the true spirit of the Law, not just the letter of the Law. This message is consistent with His teaching in Matthew 5 and 7.

Jesus Responds to Controversy over His Person (25-31)

In verses 25-27, we note four questions and observations by the people that reflects the confusion of the masses:

- ❑ Amazed at Jesus’ courage in light of the threat to kill Him (v. 25)
- ❑ Amazed at the silence of the religious leaders (v. 26)
- ❑ Questioning whether the rulers accept Him as Messiah (v. 26)
- ❑ Disbelief that He is the Messiah because of His origin (v. 27)

There was a popular notion that the Messiah would suddenly appear on the scene without anyone knowing from whence He came. It is possible that this notion was based upon a misinterpretation of Malachi 3:1.

Behold, I send My messenger, and he will prepare the way before Me. And the Lord, whom you seek, will suddenly come to His temple, even the Messenger of the covenant, in whom you delight. Behold, He is coming, says the Lord of hosts.

Ponder this: Put yourself in the position of the Jews of Jesus’ day – no Gospel accounts, no New Testament revelation, just what we call the Old Testament and 2000 years of Jewish history and tradition. There was no written record yet that pulled together all the facts about Jesus so that one could collectively assess them. The masses had witnessed miracles, yet even the Hebrew prophets of old had performed miracles. False prophets and demon possessed evil men could perform miracles. Here stood Jesus proclaiming to be the Son of God and performing incredible miracles that exceeded those of any prophet of old. Was He for real? Would you have been any different? Would you have been willing to believe that He was the Messiah of Israel even if you had witnessed a miracle? What would it have taken to believe that He was the Messiah? Overthrowing Roman ruler-ship? His death on a Cross? But if He was killed, how could He be the Messiah? The Messiah would not be killed, but the Messiah would defeat His and Israel’s enemies.

Because of His claims of divine origin, the religious leaders sought to arrest Him (v. 30). While their desire is expressed in chapter 5:16 & 18, this is the first real attempt on Jesus’ life. John’s statement that “His hour had not yet come” should not be interpreted as some type of miraculous intervention that prevented the Jewish opposition from touching Jesus. Most likely, they conspired outside the periphery of the crowds who were accepting Him (v. 31). As the crowds began to murmur louder, the religious leaders then sent officers to take Jesus (v. 32).

Obviously, there had been no miraculous intervention that prevented Jesus' opposition from confronting Jesus.

The arrival of the officers probably reminded Jesus of His approaching death and resurrection. In verses 33-34, Jesus reminds His hearers that His time with them is short. They need to take advantage of the time they have. Of course, this only confused the Jewish crowd of people. Could Jesus be referring to a future ministry to the Jews of the dispersion, i.e. the Diaspora? Was Jesus going to teach the Gentiles? Surely, He wouldn't teach a group of non-Jews.