
Day 308 - November 4

Jesus the Christ (5 BCE-30 CE)
In Jerusalem for Feast of Tabernacles

Readings: *John 7:2-8:11*

Reflections:

- Jesus' brothers did not follow him as Messiah even though two of them, James and Jude, later become key leaders within the church, particularly after the resurrected Jesus appears to James. Here in John 7 we see them taunt Jesus, mocking him for acting in secret so often. Jesus defends his reason in keeping his ministry more in secret than in public. He states that the timing is not yet right, to either focus on a public showdown or even to go to the Feast in Jerusalem that the brothers were talking about. This feast was the Feast of Booths or the Feast of the Harvest or Ingathering. It was later in the year after the harvest had come in. Jesus' decision to remain in secret did two things. First the religious leaders were looking for him and so he did avoid confrontation. Second, it got the buzz going as more and more people were wondering about him and simply sharing the stories. This is a good lesson about getting the message out. Sometimes creating a secret is the best way to communicate with many people. Everyone loves sharing a secret. Undercover, Jesus finally does go to Jerusalem to celebrate the Feast.
- Halfway through the Feast, Jesus finally decides to teach publicly in Jerusalem and the religious leaders are again amazed at his teaching, even though he had not studied under them. This shows that there is a difference between people who are intelligent from academic studies and those that have insight and wisdom due to God's Spirit working through them.
- Jesus responds to their amazement by stating a two key insights about God's truth. First, obedience sets the stage for understanding God's truth. God's truth makes sense once you live it. To the outside onlooker, it doesn't make sense because it runs contrary to everything our self-centered nature tells us. For example, you experience the greatest joy when you serve others and lay your life down for the cause of Christ. This doesn't make sense until you actually live it. Once you live it, then you know this is God's truth about life. Second, teaching truth is about serving God, not about serving yourself by trying to bring attention to yourself. People who teach truth for their own popularity and notoriety actually corrupt the truth in the process.

- Jesus then confronts the religious leaders for not obeying the Law but rather putting their attention on trying to kill Jesus. They deny it, but Jesus continues because he knows what they are thinking. His main point is that they are upset about him healing on the Sabbath and missing the true spirit and essence of what God was trying to show them. They are only looking at appearances rather than understanding the essence of the Torah or Law.
- Rather than trying to pick up this point of argument, some in the crowd try to change the topic and undermine Jesus credibility as Messiah by suggesting that they know his background and therefore can't be the Messiah because the Messiah's background was supposed to be a mystery. This is simply some antagonists trying to find a spin to get people to doubt Jesus as the Messiah. Jesus again does not back down but points to the fact that they actually don't recognize him as Messiah because they don't know God. If they knew God, this would not be an issue. This ignites some to want to seize him although this fails apparently because God was protecting him and actually causes others to place their faith in him. His miracles and his confidence won them over. All of this commotion motivates the religious leaders to see if they can persuade the temple guards to arrest him. Jesus then responds with one of his cryptic responses. He promises that he will go away and that no one will be able to find him. They are thinking that he will leave Jerusalem but then are puzzled by the idea that no one would be able to find him. He is obviously speaking of his resurrection and return to the Father. Jesus is the master at this kind of cloaking the truth in mystery.
- On the last and greatest day of the Feast, Jesus stands up and makes a clear Messianic declaration. Ezekiel declared that out of the temple would flow living waters that would bring life to dead Israel (Ezekiel 47). He also declared the Spirit would come to change people from the inside out (Ezekiel 11:19, 36:26). Jesus combines these images and states that if people come to Jesus and drink, that living water would flow out from them. In other words, he was personalizing the prophecy about the temple and stating that this divine work of God was not to come through the religious institution but through the transformation of the human heart. In Jeremiah 2:13 and 17:13, God is called the spring of living water. In Zechariah 14:8, Zechariah prophecies about a coming day when living water would flow from Jerusalem to the west and east. Ezekiel's prophecy indicates that it will flow from the temple. Here Jesus does away with the location and the institution and says that God's presence, the spring of living water, will come into your life and flow out of you all through embracing Jesus. Jesus will give us the Spirit so that God's presence within us becomes like a spring of living water flowing out to make the dead world and lives around us become alive. What an awesome promise!
- This again provokes division as some want to kill him and others come to believe.
- Next John captures a story between the religious leaders, the temple guards and a Pharisee Nicodemus. The guards are more positive toward Jesus but the religious leaders obviously hate him. In fact, they show their lack of love for people as they call down a curse on the crowds. Leaders obsessed with religion love power and control and actually don't truly love

people. Nicodemus is more sympathetic to Jesus and calls on the religious leaders to hear Jesus out more fully. They challenge Nicodemus to examine the fact that Jesus is from Galilee and that the Prophet was not to come from Galilee. See Deuteronomy 18:15 that refers to the Messiah as the prophet. (Note: the translation probably should not be “a prophet” but rather “the Prophet” based on one of the earliest most reliable manuscripts – the Pharisees would have known that the prophet Jonah was from Galilee.) Now this assertion simply makes the religious leader look bad for not doing their homework since Jesus was born in Bethlehem and fulfilled Micah 5:2.

- The story of the woman caught in adultery is not included in the earliest, most reliable manuscripts but fits well within the ministry and context of Jesus. There were many stories from Jesus' life not included in the biographies of Jesus and this appears to be an authentic one inserted later because of its significance. A woman caught in the act of adultery (is she naked and being publically shamed?) is brought before Jesus for his approval for stoning. The man is ignored and shows the bias of the religious leaders. They viewed the woman as the cause of their sin, rather than taking ownership for their own hearts and the way the man used and abused women. They suspected Jesus might say something against the Law because they knew he was compassionate to women and to sinners. Jesus writing on the ground is intriguing. John never misses the importance of detail. God's law was written on stone and it was a law of judgment. Here Jesus is writing something mysterious in the dust, on the ground. Is this a message for the woman alone to read when everyone has left? Is this a message of grace written in the dust of our lives to be contrasted with the message of Law written in stone? Jesus asks a simple question that causes all present to drop their stones of anger and hate, the oldest ones first. “Let the one without sin be the first to throw a stone.” If there is anyone present who is sinless, let them throw the first stone and then the rest of you can stone her. There is only one person present who is sinless. It is Jesus and he did not throw a stone. What a powerful declaration of the mercy and grace of God. He is perfect but he chooses not to throw a stone at us in our sin and brokenness.
- Jesus releases the woman into grace with the command to leave behind her life of sin. Grace empowers us to live free of sin. Lavish love trains our heart to loyal devotion in a way that fear of punishment never will. Our hearts don't need rules and harsh accountability. We need love and grace to hold us fast to the truth. God knows this and that is why he sent us Jesus!