

John 7:25-53

Responding to Words Powerfully Spoken

The officers answered, Never man spake like this man – v. 46

We've seen already a number of miracles performed by Christ. He turned water into wine back in chp. 2; He healed the nobleman's son in chp. 4; He healed a paralytic in chp. 5 who had been in that terrible condition for 38 years; He fed 5,000 in chp. 6 and then walked on water and brought the disciples safely through the stormy sea.

In our last study we considered how His brethren thought that miracles should be the thing He does in Jerusalem while everyone was there for the feast of tabernacles. *For there is no man that doeth any thing in secret, and he himself seeketh to be known openly. If thou do these things, shew thyself to the world.* Alas, his brethren were still unbelievers at that point and didn't understand who Christ was or why Christ had come.

So His brethren went up to the feast ahead of Him and He came a little later and was discovered not by any miracle He had performed but by His teaching in the temple. And even though He had entered Jerusalem in secret and had begun to teach in an unassuming way that wasn't designed to draw attention to Himself, that attention would nonetheless come as another discussion heated up between Him and the Jews.

There were those, you see, who wondered about His credentials. *How knoweth this man letters, having never learned?* – some of them wondered. There were yet others who took Him to be that prophet that Moses predicted would come (Deut. 18:15) – *Of a truth this is the Prophet* they say in v. 40. Others in the crowd raised an interesting argument of logic. Look at what it says in v. 31 *And many of the people believed on him, and said, When Christ cometh, will he do more miracles than these which this man hath done?*

Because this opinion of Him was beginning to gain momentum, the Pharisees became concerned. *The Pharisees heard that the people murmured such things concerning him; and the Pharisees and the chief priests sent officers to take him* – v. 32. Now the heavy hitters were called in, you could say. The people themselves had tried to apprehend Him back in v. 30 but had been unable. Now as word gets around that some are actually harboring the notion that He's the Messiah, the Pharisees send the Temple Police to apprehend Him. I remember hearing many years ago when I was a fairly new Christian about the Jewish Temple Police, that they were quite a force to be reckoned with. In this chapter they're sent to apprehend Jesus, but to the surprise of the Pharisees who sent them, they come back empty handed.

Why have ye not brought him? – the Pharisees ask in v. 45. And in a statement that you find that's unlike any other statement in all the New Testament, these officers reply - *Never man spake like this man.* I think it's important to note the setting for these words and note who actually said these words. These words were not spoken by Christ's disciples. We could certainly understand someone like Peter or John or James saying *never man spake like this man.* But these men were the officers of the temple. They were, in a

sense, the servants to the highest authorities in Jerusalem who ruled over the Jews. If you could picture a SWAT team, fully armed and trained to go after a certain kind of criminal only to return to the higher ups and say to them *never man spake like this man*, you might get a pretty good picture of what was taking place with Christ.

And we learn something about Christ with these words and in this setting. We learn that His word was as powerful as His miracles. It's no wonder that John identifies Him as the Word in the opening verses of his gospel. Jn. 1:1,2 *In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God.*

It was by His word that He created the universe. And it was by His word that He stilled the stormy sea. And now it's by His word that He restrains those that would apprehend Him before His hour had come. What an incredible statement, then, by these officers of the temple. You'd do well to keep these words in mind each time you turn to the gospels and read the words of Christ. These are good heart preparation words to contemplate as you set yourself down and open you Bible. It makes good devotional sense to say to the Lord in prayer – *O Lord, you have spoken as no other man spake. And you have spoken with authority and power. May my heart be open to hear your words as I read them just now.*

What I want to do this morning is to look at the words of our text:

Never Man Spake Like this Man

And if this statement is true, and it certainly is – then the question we need to consider this morning is simply this – What should your response be to the words of Christ if never man spake Like Christ did? If, over the entire course of the history of civilization, there has never been anyone who has come close to speaking the way Christ spoke, then what kind of impact should that have on your life and how should you respond to the words that Christ spoke? Let's think first of all that if *never man spake like this man*, then:

I. We Should Listen to What He's Said

Two things that I want to highlight under this heading – we should listen to what He said with regard to Himself. This is what infuriated His audience. You get the impression that at first the people were leaning toward accepting His claims. Or at the very least they were confused by His claims. Notice what they say in vv. 25,26: *Then said some of them of Jerusalem, Is not this he, whom they seek to kill? But, lo, he speaketh boldly, and they say nothing unto him. Do the rulers know indeed that this is the very Christ?* And then they make an evaluation which in one sense was the right thing to do even though they came to a wrong conclusion.

They knew he was from Galilee. One commentator cites some Jewish sources which express the view that Christ would appear and then disappear and then reappear. Ironically this was the pattern of Christ's life when He appeared in Bethlehem, then disappeared into Egypt and then reappeared in Nazareth of Galilee. The point that I'm making now, however, is that the people knew that when it came to discerning who Jesus was, they

should consult the Scriptures. Look at the words of v. 40 *Many of the people therefore, when they heard this saying, said, Of a truth this is the Prophet. 41 Others said, This is the Christ. But some said, Shall Christ come out of Galilee? 42 Hath not the scripture said, That Christ cometh of the seed of David, and out of the town of Bethlehem, where David was?* We know, of course, don't we, that Christ did come of the seed of David out of the town of Bethlehem. The point I'm making now, though, is that however you may fault the Jews for their confusion and for their rejection of Christ, they show us very clearly that they knew what source to go to for trying to discern the truth. They went to the Scriptures.

But let's zoom in now on the words that Christ spoke – these are the words that were spoken unlike any other. They're found in vv. 28, 29: *Then cried Jesus in the temple as he taught, saying, Ye both know me, and ye know whence I am: and I am not come of myself, but he that sent me is true, whom ye know not. But I know him: for I am from him, and he hath sent me.* Jesus was sent from God. That's what He's saying. And in so saying He's making the claim to being God Himself. Unlike them, He knows God and was sent by God.

And it was that particular saying in particular that so infuriated His listeners that we go on to read in v. 30 *Then they sought to take him.* Another version says that they sought to arrest Him, still another version says that they sought to seize Him. He was claiming to be God, you see. He was claiming to being sent from heaven. Earlier in the chapter when the crowd wondered about His credentials Christ said to them: *My doctrine is not mine, but his that sent me.*

So He came from heaven. His doctrine was from heaven. And it was His Father that sent Him. And this so infuriated the crowd that they sought to arrest Him and yet they couldn't. You see this on no less than two occasions in this chapter that they sought to apprehend Him but they couldn't. The people sought to take Him in v. 30 and then the Pharisees sent officers to take Him in v. 32 but neither succeeded in apprehending Him.

You could say here, I believe, that never man spake as this man, in terms of the power of His word to restrain them. They wanted to take Him but for some strange reason they couldn't. And when those officers were asked why they didn't apprehend Him they pretty much reveal that it was the power of His word that restrained them. *Why have ye not brought him?*, they ask in v. 45. And then v. 46 *The officers answered, Never man spake like this man.*

What power there was and is in the word of God. Christ's word restrained them from apprehending Him. We know, of course, that eventually they would apprehend Him and even on that occasion His word would knock them down to the ground before they would be allowed to apprehend Him. (cf. Jn. 18:6).

So we do well this morning to raise the matter of our response to His words, in particular His words that identify Him as being sent from God, His Father. The proper response to these words is that we believe them and affirm them by faith and confess Jesus to be that

Messiah sent from His Father. If we could look ahead in John's gospel in order to draw a lesson from doubting Thomas, we could do no better than to follow the example of Thomas in response to the words of Christ by bowing before Christ in our hearts and confessing as Thomas did – *My Lord and my God* (Jn. 19:28). This is where Christ's words should lead you. And if you've known anything of the power of His word then you have been led to say – indeed one of the primary reasons we come to church each Sunday is to say (or confess) that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

So we do well to listen to His words when He identifies Himself as the Messiah, sent from His Father in heaven. But we also do well to listen to His words when those words invite us to come to Him and drink in order to quench the thirst of our souls. Look at v. 37: *In the last day, that great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried, saying, If any man thirst, let him come unto me, and drink.*

I suggested to you in our last study that these words seen in the setting of the Feast of Tabernacles bring us to the climax of this entire 7th chapter of John's gospel. If you could picture the ritual taking place on this last great day of the feast, you would have to envision the sacrifice being offered that day. The feast of tabernacles was that feast that commemorated the wilderness wanderings of the Jews and how they dwelt in booths or tents during that time of their history. It was also a harvest festival and was celebrated as a thanksgiving feast for the harvest.

Easton points out in his article on the feast of tabernacles that it was actually during this feast that the temple of Solomon was dedicated. So we're able to get a pretty good idea of what this feast looked like by looking at that dedication service which is recorded for us in Kings and Chronicles. It was a joyous occasion, similar in some ways, I suppose, to our own Thanksgiving season that we've just come through.

Later in the history of the Jews there was added an appendage to the feast which is described by Easton as *that of drawing water from the Pool of Siloam, and pouring it upon the altar as a memorial of the water from the rock in Horeb*; Picture if you will that particular in this ritual when you find the priest making his way to that pool in order to fill his vessel with water and then making his way back to the altar. And in connection with that trip back to the altar to pour out that water on the altar, the silence is broken by a loud cry that comes from Christ – *If any man thirst, let him come unto me and drink.*

Surely never man spake as Christ spoke on that occasion. And what a bold claim He makes. He offers Himself as the source for satisfying the deepest longings of man's soul. You were made for God, you see. You were made to glorify God and enjoy Him forever. You may gain the whole world, but if you don't have Christ then you're a thirsty soul. And if you do have Christ then you have more, way more, than all that this world can offer.

If any man thirst, let him come unto me and drink. And to drink of Christ is to believe in Christ and to worship and commune with Christ. It's to abide in Him and He in you. And it's to hear Him say to your soul the very thing the Psalmist prays Him to say in Ps. 35:3 *say unto my soul, I am thy salvation.*

Have you heard Him say that to your soul? Do you believe in Him? If, as our text says, *never man spake like this man*, then we do well to hear His words and respond to His invitation to come to Him and drink. But let's move on now to consider next that if never man spake like this man then:

II. We Should Make Sure that We Land on the Right Side of the Divide

Look at the words of v. 40 ff and note the strife between the people that heard Christ speak: *Many of the people therefore, when they heard this saying, said, Of a truth this is the Prophet. 41 Others said, This is the Christ. But some said, Shall Christ come out of Galilee? 42 Hath not the scripture said, That Christ cometh of the seed of David, and out of the town of Bethlehem, where David was? And then in a summary capsule given us in the next verse we read in v. 43 So there was a division among the people because of him.*

Some were beginning to believe that He was indeed the Christ. This is what prompted the Pharisees to send the temple police to arrest Him. It appears that a growing number of people were recognizing His claim to be the Messiah. And when those officers came back to the Pharisees empty handed and admitted that *never man spake as this man*, then the Pharisees showed just how wide the divide was between them and Christ.

Look at v. 47 *Then answered them the Pharisees, Are ye also deceived? 48 Have any of the rulers or of the Pharisees believed on him? 49 But this people who knoweth not the law are cursed.* This is the kind of argument, you know, that's been used ever since the days of Christ to deny Christ.

Do any of the experts believe in Him? Today we could read that to say – *Do any of the scientists believe on Him? Do any of the high ranking officials of our day believe on Him? Do any of the modern day professors from the Ivy League schools like Princeton and Yale and Harvard believe that Christ is God or that the Bible is God's word?*

And the obvious answer is *of course not*. So don't be deceived by the claims of rabid fundamentalists that Jesus claimed to be God. Nobody that is anybody in this world believes something so preposterous as that. Some things never change in this world. Basically the Pharisees said to those officers that nobody who knows anything believes in Christ. And those that do only do so because they're deceived and ignorant and cursed.

This is the reproach that must be borne by the followers of Christ in our day. And the hostility against believers is unlike anything I've ever seen in my lifetime. There's certainly a division in our culture between the followers of Christ and the followers of secular humanism. If you're a Christian today then you're a white racist and a homophobe etc. etc. Don't be surprised by such a divide. It can be traced all the way back to the very days that Christ walked this earth.

The thing you need to be concerned about is what side of the divide have you landed on. There's a very serious warning given by Christ, you see, that applies to those that have landed on the wrong side of the controversy about Christ. Look at vv. 34, 35: *Then said Jesus unto them, Yet a little while am I with you, and then I go unto him that sent me. 34*

Ye shall seek me, and shall not find me: and where I am, thither ye cannot come. We're in a time of salvation now. But that day will not last forever. In the days that preceded the flood of Gen. 6, we read the word of the Lord in v. 3 *And the LORD said, My spirit shall not always strive with man.*

In Prov. 1 this same truth is conveyed in very solemn words: *When your fear cometh as desolation, and your destruction cometh as a whirlwind; when distress and anguish cometh upon you. 28 Then shall they call upon me, but I will not answer; they shall seek me early, but they shall not find me: 29 For that they hated knowledge, and did not choose the fear of the LORD: 30 They would none of my counsel: they despised all my reproof. 31 Therefore shall they eat of the fruit of their own way, and be filled with their own devices.*

That's why the matter of salvation must be taken as a matter of the utmost urgency. So we read in 2Co 6:2 *For he saith, I have heard thee in a time accepted, and in the day of salvation have I succoured thee: behold, now [is] the accepted time; behold, now [is] the day of salvation.*

To put off the matter of salvation is to land on the wrong side of the divide created by Christ's words. Twice in the epistle to the Hebrews the author of that epistle drawing from Psalm 95 stresses the urgency of today:

Heb 3:15 *While it is said, Today if ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts, as in the provocation.*

Heb 4:7 *Again, he limiteth a certain day, saying in David, To day, after so long a time; as it is said, Today if ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts.*

To land on the wrong side of the divide created by Christ's words is to ban yourself from heaven. *Where I am* Christ says to His adversaries *thither ye cannot come.* Unfortunately His hearers couldn't hear or see beyond this world. And so they became confused about Christ's meaning. Verse 35: *Then said the Jews among themselves, Whither will he go, that we shall not find him? will he go unto the dispersed among the Gentiles, and teach the Gentiles?* It seems that all they could do was scratch their heads and become angry.

You know, though, where Christ is now. You know where He went once He rose from the dead. You have the account at the end of Mark's gospel and in the 1st chapter of the book of Acts of how He ascended into heaven. That's where He is now and that's where those on the wrong side of the divide won't be able to come.

So Christ's words were unlike any other words spoken by any other man. *Never man spake like this man.* And His words created a divide between those who would receive them and receive Him and those who would not. Those who wouldn't made their excuses. We're the experts or we want to align ourselves with the experts and the experts have all rejected Him. Only deceived and ignorant people receive Him.

What side of the divide are you on? I'll willingly take the world's reproach just as my Savior took that reproach. Will you be on the right side of the divide? Will you, like Peter

in the previous chapter say: *Lord, to whom shall we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life* (Jn. 6:68).

So the right response to words that were spoken by Christ which were unlike any other words spoken by man must be a response of listening and when I say listening I mean listening with all the power of your inward soul to pay attention to what He says. Listen to Him. Listen to His word. And then make sure you land on the right side of the divide created by His words. His words are controversial. That has always been the case and that's certainly the case today. Make sure you listen to Him and not to "experts" so called.

And finally let me say that if Christ spake as no man spake, then a right response to His words must be that:

III. We Live by His Words

He describes the life of those who hear His words and who come to Him and drink in v. 38 *He that believeth on me, as the scripture hath said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water.* And then John, the author of the gospel, adds a comment in the next verse, v. 39: *(But this spake he of the Spirit, which they that believe on him should receive: for the Holy Ghost was not yet given; because that Jesus was not yet glorified.)*

Christ's words in v. 38 bring us back to the words He said to the woman at the well. Those words are similar to what we find Him saying here in Jn. 7. Listen again to what He said in Jn. 4:10 *Jesus answered and said unto her, If thou knewest the gift of God, and who it is that saith to thee, Give me to drink; thou wouldest have asked of him, and he would have given thee living water.* And let's add v. 14 because those words also tie so closely into what we have in Jn. 7. *But whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst; but the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life.*

When you look at both of these statements of Christ, one in Jn. 4 and the other in Jn. 7 and then you add John's comment to Christ's words, then it becomes clear that what Christ is talking about is the Spirit-filled life. It is the Spirit, you see, that satisfies our deepest longings by ministering Christ to our hearts.

Jesus is the One who satisfies our deepest longings. Jesus is the One who meets us in our every need, especially the deep needs of our hearts. And the gift of God that Christ references in Jn. 4:10 is the gift of eternal life. We were looking at the word *gift* in our Bible study at Crown Point last Tuesday. We noted the specific things that are called *gifts* in the New Testament.

The Holy Spirit Himself is called *the gift* in Acts 2:38. The gift of *righteousness* is mentioned in Rom. 5:17. The gift of *eternal life* is mentioned in Rom. 6:23. *Thanks be unto God for His unspeakable gift* – 2Cor. 9:15 and in that case Paul is referencing Christ Himself. And then there's the gift of *faith* in Eph. 2:8.

These are all things that contribute to our lives and they're things that are ministered to our souls by the Holy Spirit. So when Christ invites us to drink of Him, He's inviting us to

believe in Him and to walk with Him in the light of His word. And this is what we must never forget in terms of maintaining the vitality that we should have in our spiritual lives.

Never man spake like this man – our text says, and in so saying we gain a very important clue as to how we're to live. We're to live by the words that Christ spoke. This was the very thing Christ said when He battled the devil and was tempted to turn stones into bread. Mt. 4:4 *But he answered and said, It is written, Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God.*

And as we commune with Christ over the words that were spoken by God and Christ, then a number of things happen. Our sins are dealt with and they're dealt with through the gospel. And we receive the guidance we need in the matter of day to day living. And Christ's love is ministered to our souls. I love the way Paul puts this in Rom. 5:5. It sort of makes me wonder whether or not Paul consulted with John or was at least familiar with what John wrote. Rom. 5:5 *And hope maketh not ashamed; because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us.*

This shedding abroad in our hearts of the love of God comes as the Spirit of God leads us to Calvary and shows us Christ's love and then ministers the reality of that love in its breadth and length and depth and height. And when Christ says *He that believeth on me, as the scripture hath said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water* – I believe He's making reference to an overflow of this living water out of the heart of the believer.

And it's this overflow that makes its way to others within the family of God and without to the world. This is the power and the blessing of Christ's words then. What Peter said in the previous chapter really is true – Christ has the words of life. And if, as our text says, *never man spake like this man* then we can do no better than to make sure we listen with utmost attention to what He's said, and we land on the right side of the divide, for His word does divide, and we live by His word by indulging ourselves in it.

This doesn't necessarily call for long periods of time spent in God's word. I know that can be challenging given how busy we all are. But a chapter, a verse, a portion of a verse. I use to carry verse cards with me. Now with all our electronic devices we're able to read and highlight verses. It's a good exercise, you know, to go back and review verses that you've highlighted. *Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom; teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord* (Col. 3:16).

This is how you live by His word. May each one hear come to recognize, then, what those officers of the temple recognized when Christ spoke. *Never man spake like this man.* If that's true, then may we find the needed grace to hear and heed the words He spake.