

December 7, 2014
Sunday Morning Service
Series: John
Community Baptist Church
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To Ponder . . .

Questions to ponder as you prepare to hear from John 7:40-52.

1. List the three different positions people took as they disagreed about Jesus.
2. What was the real reason the officers did not arrest Jesus?
3. Describe the contrast in this text between the control of circumstances the Pharisees desired and the control they had to accept.
4. Do you think Nicodemus was a believer at this point?

WHAT KIND OF PEOPLE REALLY KNOW CHRIST? John 7:40-52

The Gospel accounts from Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John provide us a wonderful example of character studies. There are consistently four groups of people portrayed in these accounts, with the major focus being on three groups.

First there were the people who were fairly disconnected with the “Jesus” phenomena. These were typically the Roman soldiers, governors and such. Their only concern was the empire and they only got involved if someone or something threatened the stability of Rome.

Second there were the masses. These people look like the waves of the sea. When Jesus was handing out free food, offering free medical care, and giving lessons on how to get along with your

neighbor, there was generally a large crowd of these people gathered around Him. But when He laid down the cost of following Him, these folks dissipated like fog on a sunny morning.

Third, we find the antagonists. These were the established religious leaders. Their roots went back in Jewish culture many generations. They liked to appeal to Moses and Abraham as their sponsors. They were ardently opposed to Jesus because His teaching and practice flew in the face of their favorite rules. They hounded Jesus to the death.

Finally there were the genuine followers. These were few. The most well-known of them were eleven apostles who literally followed Jesus to death within thirty years (except John). They believed Jesus, loved Jesus, lived for Jesus, and died for Jesus. They are our example of what we should be like if we really follow Christ.

In our text, we find two of these groups represented. It is a story of confusion, deception, false accusation, logical fallacies, and wrong conclusions. It is a picture of our world’s response to the incarnate Son of God. Because of this broad confusion, many people have concluded that it is better to say “Happy Holidays” rather than take the chance of offending someone by saying “Merry Christmas.” Religious people need to take great care to be politically and culturally correct. In contrast, the followers of Jesus like to say, “Celebrate Christ.”

People Disagree about Who Jesus is (vv.40-43).

“The people” had various opinions about Jesus. There was division among the people based on the words Jesus spoke. It came about when the people heard His teaching. *When they heard these words (v.40a)*. A particular Greek word is used here that does not seem to be translated by the ESV. The word (ojvclot) refers to a crowd or sometimes a throng or even a mob. Especially during a major feast there would have been quite a crowd gathered around Jesus as He taught.

And as He taught, the people drew divergent conclusions. John recorded, *So there was a division among the people over Him (v.43)*. We have already seen this division beginning in chapter 6 where people started turning away from Christ. One day they said, “Let’s

make Him King” (6:14) and the next day they turned back and went home.

That same fickleness was again obvious in the crowd that gathered at the feast. Everyone seemed to have their own opinion. And all of the various opinions were based on the Scripture, though not a clear understanding of Scripture. There were some positive affirmations – like the folks who were convinced that Jesus was the Prophet. *Some of the people said, “This really is the Prophet,” (v.40b).* The people who had witnessed the feeding of the 5,000 were fully convinced at the time that this was “the Prophet.” *When the people saw the sign that he had done, they said, “This is indeed the Prophet who is to come into the world!” (John 6:14).*

The people in that setting and the people at the feast concluded that Jesus from Nazareth was the prophet like Moses who gave the forefathers manna. Moses had promised, *The LORD your God will raise up for you a Prophet like me from among you, from your brothers – it is to Him you shall listen (Deuteronomy 18:15).* Ever since then (generally speaking), the people of Israel had been waiting for Him with anticipation. The rulers even suspected that maybe John the Baptist was the promised Prophet (John 1:25).

Not everyone held that opinion of Jesus. Other folks said, *“This is the Christ” (v.41a).* That is the point of the disagreement. This group of people argued, “No, Jesus is not the Prophet. He is the Christ!” What’s the difference? First century Jews were convinced that the Christ and the Prophet would be two separate people. Christ was to be the promised Messiah, the King, which is different than the Prophet. No one understood that Jesus was both Prophet and King as well as Priest.

There were also some negative responses about who this Jesus really was. Some people argued that He could not be the Christ because the Christ cannot come from Galilee. *But some said, “Is the Christ to come from Galilee?” (v.42a).* It seemed like everyone agreed that Messiah would not come from Galilee. Why not? Well there just were not any Scriptures to support the idea of Messiah coming from the hill country.

But the Old Testament was clear that the Christ must come from Bethlehem. Some of the people knew that and argued, *“Has not the Scripture said that the Christ comes from the offspring of David, and*

comes from Bethlehem, the village where David was?” (v.42b). People in Jerusalem were real big on the idea that the Christ would be born in David’s line. Jerusalem was David’s city and Bethlehem had been his birthplace. The family name was there, and probably his records were in the local courthouse! The wise and scholarly religious leaders were fully convinced that Messiah would be born in Bethlehem. That truth came to light when the Magi showed up in Jerusalem looking for the new king of the Jews. *When Herod the king heard this, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him; and assembling all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Christ was to be born. They told him, “In Bethlehem of Judea, for so it is written by the prophet: ‘And you, O Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah; for from you shall come a ruler who will shepherd my people Israel’” (Matthew 2:3-6).*

If the religious leaders were aware of this promise, did they somehow forget over the last thirty years of His ministry that Jesus had been born in Bethlehem? Maybe they never realized that Jesus had been born in Bethlehem. Notice that even John, over fifty years after this conflict at this feast took place, when the facts had been made clear, did not get embroiled in this argument by pointing out that the people were obviously ignorant of the fact that Jesus had been born in Bethlehem. Here is a good principle: There is often no need to correct when the facts are clear. It is a sign that the facts won’t change the nay-sayers’ minds.

There is still much division about Jesus. All of the questions about Jesus that people bantered about at the feast are settled by the New Testament record. Here were three well-known, common views and people took sides. One was that Jesus was the promised Prophet like Moses. “NO!” a second argument resisted. “He was the Christ, the Messiah who would rule as King.” Yet a third group argued, “No, He could not be either one because the Messiah had to be born in David’s line, at the very least in Jerusalem, but most likely in Bethlehem.”

God gave us the New Testament records in order to sort out all of this disagreement. We have no reason to argue about who and what Jesus was. The Bible is clear that He is indeed the promised Prophet, Priest, and King who redeems His people with His own blood and

will reign over us for eternity. But most people are not so easily convinced.

There are a couple of important principles to consider. Because the world is very divided about Christ, don't expect following Him to be a popular choice. Even among Christians there will be divisions based on divergent understanding or misunderstandings of Scripture. Sincere believers will differ, not about Christ's person and work, but about how He would live if He was on earth now. Why speculate about such a thing? Because if we are His representatives, we need to live like He would.

So what is the solution when we hit these points of disagreement? First, we must attempt to draw sound conclusions based on honest and accurate exegesis of Scripture. If there are extenuating facts, consider them honestly. Like in this issue, the fact of Jesus being born in Bethlehem. Second, when we differ, we ought to differ graciously. Often this is where the "wrong" view will become obvious. As in the example before us, there were people who held a wrong view of Jesus. How did they respond? They wanted to get rid of Him. When it looked like their opinion was ignored or rejected, they became irate, manipulative, and belligerent. When personal pride trumps truth, adherents become very defensive. That is often where we are able to discern between truth and error.

Proud People Will Fight for Their Wrong Opinion of Jesus (vv.44-52).

The Pharisees were angry that their will was not accomplished (vv.44-49). They had actually expected the officers to arrest the Creator (vv.44-45). Of course, they never would have acknowledged that Jesus was their Creator, but that truth does help us see how ridiculous their efforts were. That the Pharisees wanted to arrest Jesus is clear from John's record. *Some of them wanted to arrest Him, but no one laid hands on Him (v.44).*

This is the second statement indicating that people wanted to arrest Jesus during this week of the Feast of Tabernacles. When Jesus declared that He knew God because He was sent from heaven by God, some of the people were stirred up enough to try to arrest Jesus (John 7:30). In that same setting, the Pharisees sent officers to arrest

Jesus (John 7:32). Again on this last day of the feast (v.37), the Pharisees and the people wanted to arrest Jesus. No one was successful in their attempts because it was not time for Jesus' crucifixion yet according to God's timetable. John uncovered the reason by writing, *So they were seeking to arrest him, but no one laid a hand on him, because his hour had not yet come (John 7:30).*

God's timing is set and perfect in all matters of eternity—especially matters involving His people. We easily fail to trust God when His timing does not meet our preconceived conclusions. Part of God's timing is intended for our maturing, our growing in faith toward Him. Always God's timing requires that all details of His will and plan be completed. The reason God has not answered your prayer yet is because He is working out the details of His will for you, which includes your maturing in faith.

Well, the temple guard didn't bring back Jesus, and the Pharisees were not happy that the officers did not carry out their wishes. *The officers then came to the chief priests and Pharisees, who said to them, "Why did you not bring Him?" (v.45).* Probably the Pharisees had sent the temple police to arrest Jesus a few days earlier. We know that Jesus began to teach at about the middle of the feast (v14). We also know that the Pharisees sent the officers (temple police, Levites) to arrest Jesus on that same day (v.32). Now here it was three or four days later and the police showed up empty-handed.

The Pharisees were not at all happy because evil men demand that their desires be met. Wicked people are not happy when others fail them. Notice the contrast that is obvious around us all the time. No one can arrest Jesus because God is in control of all things. Therefore, the police don't arrest Jesus which proves that the Pharisees were not in control. That they were obviously not in control is what made them so angry. We see that principle lived out regularly in our culture.

Those evil religionists concluded that even their own police force had been deceived (vv.46-49). It is true that the officers were very impressed with Jesus' teaching. When asked to explain their failure, *The officers answered, "No one ever spoke like this man!" (v.46).* Probably the issue is not that the Levites (temple police) were beginning to think that Jesus wasn't such a bad egg after all. Rather, they were confused. Being religious men themselves, they were

familiar with Old Testament truth. Jesus unfolded and explained that truth better than any scribe these men had ever heard.

So why did their bosses want to arrest Jesus? Their response proved that Satan is the author of confusion. Satan is the great deceiver and when some people are deceived and others are not, there is going to be disagreement, debate, arguing, and confusion. Having no grounds on which to arrest Jesus, the guys returned to the authorities who sent them.

But the Pharisees wondered if the Levites had been deceived. *The Pharisees answered them, "Have you also been deceived?" (v.47).* The implication was that these men being Levites should have seen through Jesus' "false teaching." How could He be sent from heaven and be equal with God? Everyone knew He was from Nazareth. Yes, but what about His authoritative teaching and His miraculous powers? And the Great Deceiver Satan says, "Ignore all that kind of stuff. Just exercise human wisdom and conclude that no one who looks and dresses just like us could possibly be equal with God!" More aggressively than ever, the religious deceivers continue to be deceived while they accuse followers of Christ of being deceived.

How ironic that the first sin that brought the ruin of God's prefect creation was rooted in deception from Satan. Paul pointed out, *and Adam was not deceived, but the woman was deceived and became a transgressor (1 Timothy 2:14).* And so it continues, *while evil people and impostors will go on from bad to worse, deceiving and being deceived (2 Timothy 3:13).*

The Pharisees chided the Levites who didn't arrest Jesus by telling them that none of the smart and important people were deceived. *"Have any of the authorities or the Pharisees believed in him?" (v.48).* What were they saying about the intelligence or character of their own police force? In logic, this fallacy is called *Argumentum ad Verecundiam* (appeal to authority). It means that because the Pharisees considered themselves to be the authorities, the temple police needed to think like they think. Christians fall into this fallacy all the time. How often do we hear an argument based on, "Because Dr. So-and-So said it, it must be true. Everyone knows that Dr. So-and-So is a good guy." Better for us to be like the Bereans

who *received the word with all eagerness, examining the Scriptures daily to see if these things were so (Acts 17:11).*

Furthermore, the Pharisees argued that only the fools who make up the masses can be deceived by Jesus. *But this crowd that does not know the law is accursed (v.49).* It is true that the masses did not know the Law of God as well as the Pharisees did. They also did not know the traditions the Pharisees enforced because they seemed unnecessary to the people.

And still the people who follow Christ are considered ignorant and unthinking. We are mocked by the leaders of false religion who have created their own god and their own means to please their imaginary God. But, I don't want to know all those false teachings because they disagree with each other as well as with the Bible. We are mocked by intelligent sinners who pride themselves in having full knowledge of scientific evidence and conclusions. But, I don't want to be fully taught the speculations of brilliant scientists because I have lived long enough to witness their conclusions change over and over.

I am content to preach Christ and be considered foolish by the popular people. I will stand alongside Paul who wrote, *But we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles, but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. For the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men. For consider your calling, brothers: not many of you were wise according to worldly standards, not many were powerful, not many were of noble birth. But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong; God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are so that no human being might boast in the presence of God (1 Corinthians 1:23-29).*

The Pharisees even turned against one of their own (vv.50-52). Pharisee Nicodemus presented a fair approach to the matter (vv.50-51). Nicodemus had experienced personal contact with Jesus. *Nicodemus, who had gone to him before, and who was one of them, said to them (v.50).* Early on in Jesus' ministry, this teacher in Israel sought Him out (John 3). We are not sure what the man wanted to learn because as soon as Nicodemus admitted that Jesus had God's seal of approval, Jesus launched into the most important thing the

Pharisee needed to learn – how to be born again. Even in that conversation it appears that Nicodemus was a bit frustrated because he could not grasp the truth of regeneration through human wisdom.

Nicodemus is a classic example of how human wisdom can get quite close to explaining the new birth, but only the divine wisdom of the Holy Spirit can make it clear. So here he tried to reason with the leaders from law and common sense. *Does our law judge a man without first giving him a hearing and learning what he does (v.51)?* He was not in favor of arresting Jesus with no grounds or evidence. Okay, maybe the Pharisees' conclusion that none of them believed Jesus was a fallacy called *hasty generalization*. So was Nicodemus one with the ignorant masses who did not know the law and was condemned to hell? He was a lone voice of reason in a cacophony of over reaction. This Pharisee simply pointed out that the hasty response that this Teacher was a deceiver (7:47) who should be arrested (7:32) and even executed (5:18) was in violation of the Law of Moses which the Pharisees claimed to love and protect (Deut. 1:16-17).

The fellow Pharisees didn't care for the argument from Nicodemus and chided the sincere man. *They replied, "Are you from Galilee too? Search and see that no prophet arises from Galilee" (v.52).* Nicodemus pointed out that the "guardians of the law" were guilty of breaking the law in their response to Jesus. Instead of admitting the truth or even trying to defend themselves, the Pharisees committed another logical fallacy: *Argumentum ad Hominem* (argument against the person). To imply that Nicodemus was from Galilee was an attempt to insult him as being uneducated, backward, and unapproved by the acceptable religious leaders, the Sanhedrin.

In their frustration, the arrogant, religious authorities were incorrect to proclaim that no prophet came from Galilee. Their Bible, the Old Testament, teaches that Jonah and Nahum came from Galilee. It is possible, even likely, that some others did also – in that we do not know for sure where they came from. Or maybe they meant that the Scripture clearly taught that "The Prophet" would not arise from Galilee.

Here we see human nature at its worse in religious conflict. The Pharisees were absolutely sure they had a corner on the truth about Scripture. They were offended by Jesus from the outset. In their

opinions, He was a hillbilly from the backwoods of Galilee. He was not trained in their seminaries. He did not hold their traditions. He continually exposed their inconsistencies and hypocrisies. Now He claimed equality with God.

They were ready to fight for their brand of truth. The sad application of this principle is observed among many individuals and groups who claim to be Christians – like Christ. They plant themselves firmly on questionable or preferential teachings. They refuse to budge, and they belittle and castigate everyone who does not agree with them. Oh but wait! Should we not be willing to die for the truth about Jesus Christ? The truth about Christ is plain enough. That generally is not the issue. The points of contention are more likely, "What would Jesus wear, what music would He sing, and what version of the Bible would He use?" These questions are difficult to answer emphatically based on scriptural evidence alone.

Each Christian must be convinced in his own mind about his orthopraxy (practice of Bible teaching), stand firmly on his conviction, and be gracious regarding his preferences. Thousands of believers have already walked to the end of the road with Jesus where they died because of their relationship with Him. Real Christians face the ultimate test with grace given by God, not with rioting, picketing, and vicious threats. As you live for Christ, live graciously. When you die for Christ, die graciously like Peter did, like Paul did, like Andrew and a host of saints who have gone before us have already done. The apostles were absolutely convinced that Jesus was their Savior, and they loved Him to the death. The Pharisees were absolutely convinced that Jesus was their Judge and they hated Him to the death. Both attitudes are eternally obvious.