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Jesus, the Way to Knowing God

John 7:1-18

CAPITOL BIBLE STUDY **201st General Assembly**

- **TUESDAY (SESSION) @ 8:00 AM**
IN ROOM 203, RYAN BLDG.
- **WEDNESDAY (EVERY) @ 1:00 PM**
IN ROOM 203, RYAN BLDG.

Capitol Commission Bible studies are held on Tuesday and Wednesday. The legislator Bible study meets from 8:00-8:45 AM in Room 113, East Wing. (during session weeks). An open-to-all Bible study meets from 1:00-1:30 PM in Room 203, Ryan Bldg. (during non-session weeks). The Bible studies are nonpartisan and non-denominational, focusing on the Gospel of John for the 2017/2018 General Assembly.

– Jeff Whitebread, Pennsylvania State Minister, Capitol Commission

John 7:1-18: “Jesus the Way to Knowing God”

When my mom was trying, not for the first time, to teach me how to drive I was not a very interested student. There were a couple of incidents in a church parking lot when I took a turn so fast that it seemed like the car was on two wheels. If memory serves, at one point, a police officer stopped by to make sure all was okay, maybe one of the neighbors was concerned I was going to careen off into their yard – there concerns were well founded.

Now one of the biggest fears was this huge hill that led into my hometown of Berwick. The thought of managing the brake, gas and clutch in such a way that I did not launch myself into the car in front of me or drift back into the car behind me gave me cold sweats and kept me up at night. But the truth is, my heart was just not into it.

Well time marched on, and I was no closer to getting my license. I was planning to attend a trade school in the Allentown area about an hour and a half away. At one point, my parents sat me down and said, if you want to attend this school you need to be an experienced driver. And so shortly afterwards, surprise, surprise, I learn to drive.

We see this in many areas of life. The teenage girl who hates learning a foreign language until suddenly, while on a trip overseas, she meets an attractive young man who doesn't speak her language. Or the person who has never learned to swim suddenly is motivated to do so when all their friends are going sailing and, in order to feel safe in the boat, must learn to swim.

The same is true with Jesus, our life seems to get along just fine under our own management. We seem to have life figured out, we know what we need, and Jesus holds little interest for us. But then we face loss and failures, the loss of a job or maybe the sickness and/or death of loved ones. It could be we are confronted with the consequences of our own choices, and in a moment, we stand before the world as helpless children unsure of how to move forward.

C.S. Lewis says, “God whispers to us in our pleasures, speaks in our conscience, but shouts in our pain: it is his megaphone to rouse a deaf world.” Are we listening?

Unbelief: What Can Jesus Do for Me

John 7:1: *After this Jesus went about in Galilee*- Jesus has spent nearly six months in Galilee since the feeding of the five thousand. What is taking place now in this chapter is in and around the Feast of Tabernacles which takes place six months before his death and his last entrance into Jerusalem. Jesus has stayed away from Judea because the hostility against him has grown to the point that the Jews in Judea were looking for any opportunity to arrest him. Indeed, the threats on Jesus's life hang like a cloud over all that takes place in this chapter and will shaped the rest of the gospel account.

John 7:2: *Now the Jews' Feast of Booths was at hand* - The Feast of the Booths or Tabernacles was a time of camping for Israel. Particularly in Jerusalem, where visitors would make makeshift shelters, out of whatever was available and set them up in the open air or on roofs, all over the city. Like so many of the Jewish traditions, their purpose was to remind the people of the time when their ancestors wandered in the wilderness, living in tents, and have to depend on God. It was also an agricultural festival which came to a climax during the harvest season.

This was one of the three great feasts in Israel, the others include Passover and Pentecost. During these feasts Jerusalem would swell as tens of thousands of pilgrims would converge on the city. All kinds of lavish celebrations took place during this feast, one such example that will relate to this chapter included a water ceremony in which a procession of priests descended to the southern border of the city to the Gihon spring. There a priest filled a golden pitcher and the water was carried back up the hill to the Temple where it was poured it onto the altar. The celebration went on for a full eight days starting and ending with a special sabbath.

John 7:5: *For not even his brothers believed in him.* - This is a startling statement about Jesus' younger brothers. What must be remembered is that at the time this gospel was being written and circulated among the believers, James, the little brother of Jesus, was the leader of the Jerusalem church. When the authorities are closing in on Jesus and plotting to kill him, when his followers are leaving him, at his most vulnerable point in his ministry, not even his brothers believed in him. This fact should encourage our faithfulness, for even Jesus' own brothers did not accept him initially.

Let's take a moment to examine the nature of the unbelief found in his brothers. What is interesting is that they are not saying he is faking the miracles, and they don't appear to be ashamed of him and what he is doing, or that he should give up his work or he is not ready for the big-time; but they are encouraging him to go public at one of the biggest

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venues of the year. And now we catch the subtlety of unbelief. They don't believe in Jesus because they, like so many others, are looking to Jesus for what they can get out of him.

John 7:7: *It hates me because I testify about it that its works are evil.* - The word "evil" jumps off the page in Jesus' response to his brothers. In identifying the works of the world as evil, by implication the unbelief of the brothers aligns them with the world and is likewise evil. In John 3:36 Jesus says this, "anyone who does not obey the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God remains on him." While the purposes of the Father in sending the Son was not to condemn the world, but to save it, this choice remains ours. What Jesus' brothers highlight, and other forms of unbelief in the chapter point out over-and-over again regarding the human condition is this, we are rebels at heart. One's unbelief places a person in opposition to God and what he is doing in the world. The reason for this is because at our very core, self-interest rules. Our desire is to sit upon the throne of our hearts and boldly declare, maybe not directly but by the implication of our actions, my will shall be done.

In this Jesus steps into our lives and reveals that the actions of the world are evil because in choosing not to align their lives with his life, they live in opposition to God. He is the one who is in union with his Father in heaven, he is the one who perfectly reflects the nature, character, and purposes of God. And yet, he comes before us humbly, gently, and allows us to make our choice. Make no mistake though, he is not timid with his stance on what is good and what is evil. He stands for what is good, and all who do not stand with him stand on the side of what is evil. He will not force us to see it his way as is witnessed in this interaction with his brothers, because what he is after is something of greater value to him. And yet, by not standing with Jesus, what is actually happening is that, as Gamaliel says later in Acts, you will find yourself fighting against God (Acts 5:39) – not really a great place to find one's self.

It's Possible to Know if Jesus is Right

John 7:11: *The Jews were looking for him at the feast* – The trouble for Jesus begins with the way he is approached. For the Jews, they come to him in such a way as to see if he fits into their paradigm. They begin by evaluating his teachings to determine if he has been sent by God or not. It would be great if they are neutral observers, but that is difficult when faced with a growing national crisis from a Galilean prophet. In their minds, there are certain things which they do not want God to be saying to them; and if Jesus is saying those things, then immediately he is ruled out of consideration. This controversy will continue to grow and come to a boiling point at the close of this chapter.

John 7:12: *No, he is leading the people astray* – All the way back in Deuteronomy 13 there are warnings that false prophets and teachers would arise from Israel, performing signs and wonders in order to lead the people astray. The punishment for such actions was death. And to the

Jews, Jesus telling the cripple to carry his mat on the sabbath was a clear sign he was in fact leading Israel away from the law, and thus from God.

John 7:15: *How is it that this man has learning, when he has never studied?* – As Jesus is teaching at the temple, his hearers were amazed – and might we say a little offended – at how much he knew and the confidence with which he spoke. Everyone was aware that he did not have what might be called a "formal education," and certainly, he did not speak like a scholar. Could he really know what he was talking about? Could he be trusted? These two issues come together in the crowd's question. His response was that what he taught came to him from God, not through human ingenuity. But he did not burden his hearers with the demand to "just believe."

John 7:17: *If anyone will's...he will know whether the teaching is from God* – No, he told them that anyone who is resolved to do the will of God will know whether Jesus's teachings are from God or whether he is speaking on his own. This was the confidence of Jesus, and this must become our confidence as well. Jesus is bringing us basic truths as knowledge from God, with confidence these truths can be verified by anyone who wants to do God's will, and a way will be opened for them to know these truths.

John 7:18: *He who works for the honor of him who sent him is a man of truth* -. It is critical for the cause of Christ and the good of humanity that those who speak for Christ become men and women of truth, those who have knowledge of the basic truths and realities of the way of Christ. It is their genuine knowledge of life with Christ that they bring to the world. But sometimes our message has mistakenly become teaching what Christians are supposed to believe (perhaps what we had better believe), not what is known and can be known through fair inquiry.

Because of this mistaken idea, we think it's our job to get our hearers to believe it – or at least to commit to it, or minimally to profess it. Thus, knowledge along with belief is bypassed. We are left with converts whose faith does not govern their lives and whose "Christianity" may be only social conformity with a tinge of fear. Then great energy must be exerted on trying to get people to do things they "ought" to do. By contrast, when knowledge is the goal, one is not trying to manipulate their hearer's feelings or actions in any way. They can lay down the burden of getting people to do things. They know that passion comes from reality and do their best to help willing hearers understand and come to know the reality of the goodness of life in the kingdom of God with Jesus.

Book referenced:

Wright, N.T. John for Everyone. Louisville, KY: John Knox Press, 2002
Willard, Dallas. Knowing Christ Today. New York, NY: Harper-Collins, 2009

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PM, Room 203 - Ryan Office Building