



The Book of John

Chapter 7, Part 1

December 3, 2017

John 7:1 – *After this Jesus went about in Galilee. He would not go about in Judea, because the Jews were seeking to kill him.*

As we start out reading in the 7th chapter of John we find Jesus “laying low” so to speak. Why would Jesus do this when he knows that his whole purpose for being here in human form is to be the sacrifice for our sins? Why not just get it over with?... because it was not his time yet or, more specifically, the time that God had established for him. We should keep this in mind as we go through our own trials and troubles and we plead with God to end our suffering or waiting. It’s not that God is not listening, it just may not be our time to be delivered yet.

John 7:2-5 – *Now the Jews’ Feast of Booths was at hand. ³So his brothers said to him, “Leave here and go to Judea, that your disciples also may see the works you are doing. ⁴For no one works in secret if he seeks to be known openly. If you do these things, show yourself to the world.” ⁵For not even his brothers believed in him.*

It sounds at first like Jesus’ siblings are making a supporting statement for his ministry. But, John quickly clarifies that they weren’t. They were just making a statement like anyone else would say to a family member, “Hey, if you want to be a ‘big shot’ and influence people then get out there and show them what you’re made of!” They erroneously assumed that Jesus was merely wanting to grab some limelight and didn’t truly understand at this point just exactly who he was and what he was here to do.

Jesus states in Mark 6:4, “*And Jesus said to them, ‘A prophet is not without honor, except in his hometown and among his relatives and in his own household.’*” Here is proof of that statement. It’s always toughest for family members to see you for who you are and what you’re capable of because they’ve lived with you every day and seen you at your worst (although it’s hard to imagine if Jesus could even have a “worst”). Since they had grown up with him from children, it would be somewhat understandable that they would have trouble perceiving him as the long-awaited Messiah.

Speaking of which, can you imagine the rivalry and resentment that would exist being the sibling of the perfect Son of God! Let’s talk about sibling rivalry for a minute. It can be tough in even the best of families where parents try to make all their children feel equally loved and special. But in this case, Jesus truly was better in every way than his siblings since he literally was the Son of God. Most mothers love all their children equally, but could that even be possible here for Mary? All all, she was told before Jesus was even born that he would be called the Son of the Most High and he would reign over the house of Jacob forever!

So, let’s get back to the celebration. According to Wikipedia, the Feast of Booths (Sukkot) was celebrated on the 15th day of the seventh month, Tishrei (which varies from late September to late October). During Jesus’ time, it was one of the Three Pilgrimage Festivals on which Israelites were commanded to perform a pilgrimage to the Temple. It’s a week long holiday where families camped out in “booths” or temporary dwellings to remember God’s



Figure 1: Sukkah booths where Jewish families eat and sleep throughout the holiday

faithfulness to Israel during their wandering in the wilderness. As you can see, this was a big deal and not just some simple holiday like Labor Day or St. Patrick's Day.

John 7:6-10 – ⁶ Jesus said to them, "My time has not yet come, but your time is always here. ⁷ The world cannot hate you, but it hates me because I testify about it that its works are evil. ⁸ You go up to the feast. I am not going up to this feast, for my time has not yet fully come." ⁹ After saying this, he remained in Galilee. ¹⁰ But after his brothers had gone up to the feast, then he also went up, not publicly but in private.

Jesus tells them to go ahead to the Feast because he's not going. Then, he later secretly followed and went to the feast. Did Jesus perhaps lie by telling them he wasn't going to the feast but then did? No, he really didn't. A look at many of the early manuscripts reveal that what Jesus actually said was that he was "not yet" going up to the Feast. Again, Jesus had to lay low because he knew the religious leaders were looking for him and not in a good way. Arriving with an entourage of his family members would definitely attract more attention.

Now, could it also be that he was sparing his earthly family of some of the stigma of being closely associated with him due to his pending persecution and crucifixion?

John 7:11-13 – ¹¹ The Jews were looking for him at the feast, and saying, "Where is he?" ¹² And there was much muttering about him among the people. While some said, "He is a good man," others said, "No, he is leading the people astray." ¹³ Yet for fear of the Jews no one spoke openly of him.

I would imagine that when sitting around in a Sukkah for 7 days that boredom abounds and there's sure to be a lot of gossip. And, it appears that the hot topic at this particular Feast celebration was about Jesus. Is he truly good or not? The reactions were mixed. Then, as well as now, Jesus divides people. But in either case, whether for or against him, they discussed quietly because they were afraid of the Jewish leaders. It was not like in our society today. If you crossed or offended a religious leader back then, you could be in deep trouble.

John 7:14 – ¹⁴ About the middle of the feast Jesus went up into the temple and began teaching.

So it was that around the 4th day of the Feast or so, Jesus goes into the temple and began teaching. We don't really know why it was this day and not sooner or later in the Feast that Jesus made his presence known. It might even be that Jesus didn't know. That's the way God's will often works, even for the Son. We may never know why we're led to do things or when. That's not really important. The important thing is that we respond and obey.

Have you ever had an experience where you felt led by God to respond in a certain situation in a certain way and you later realize how perfect God's timing was? If so, please briefly share with the class your experience.

John 7:15-17 – ¹⁵ The Jews therefore marveled, saying, "How is it that this man has learning, when he has never studied?" ¹⁶ So Jesus answered them, "My teaching is not mine, but his who sent me. ¹⁷ If anyone's will is to do God's will, he will know whether the teaching is from God or whether I am speaking on my own authority.

The religious leaders had lost track of what was important. They were so focused on *how* Jesus had obtained his learning that they failed to learn from *what* he was teaching.

Let's take a moment now to look at how education was handled in Galilee at this time. According to noted author Ray Vander Laan¹, the Mishnah (an authoritative collection of exegetical material embodying the oral tradition of Jewish law and forming the first part of the Talmud) describes the educational process for a young Jewish boy in Jesus' time:

At five years old [one is fit] for the Scripture, at ten years the Mishnah (oral Torah, interpretations) at thirteen for the fulfilling of the commandments, at fifteen the Talmud (making Rabbinic interpretations), at eighteen the bride-chamber, at twenty pursuing a vocation, at thirty for authority (able to teach others). This clearly describes the exceptional student, for very few would become teachers but

indicates the centrality of Scripture in the education in Galilee. It is interesting to compare Jesus' life to this description. Though little is stated about his childhood we know that he "grew in wisdom" as a boy (Luke 2:52) and that he reached the "fulfilling of the commandments" indicated by ones first Passover at age twelve (Luke 2:41). He then learned a trade (Matt. 13:55, Mark 6:3) and spent time with John the Baptist (Luke 3:21; John 3:22-26) and began his ministry at -about thirty- (Luke 3:23). This parallels the Mishnah description quite closely. It certainly demands a closer look at the education process in Galilee.

Schools were associated with the local synagogue in first century Galilee. Apparently each community would hire a teacher (respectfully called "rabbi") for the school. While this teacher was responsible for the education of the village he had no special authority in the synagogue itself. Children began their study at age 4-5 in Beth Sefer (elementary school). Most scholars believe both boys and girls attended the class in the synagogue. The teaching focused primarily on the Torah, emphasizing both reading and writing Scripture. Large portions were memorized and it is likely that many students knew the entire Torah by memory by the time this level of education was finished. At this point most students (and certainly the girls) stayed at home to help with the family and in the case of boys to learn the family trade. It is at this point that a boy would participate in his first Passover in Jerusalem (a ceremony that probably forms the background of today's bar mitzvah in orthodox Jewish families today.) Jesus' excellent questions for the teachers in the temple at his first Passover indicate the study he had done.

The best students continued their study (while learning a trade) in Beth Midrash (secondary school) also taught by a rabbi of the community. Here they (along with the adults in the town) studied the prophets and the writings in addition to Torah and began to learn the interpretations of the Oral Torah to learn how to make their own applications and interpretations much like a catechism class might in some Churches today. Memorization continued to be important because most people did not have their own copy of the Scripture so they either had to know it by heart or go to the synagogue to consult the village scroll. Memory was enhanced by reciting aloud, a practice still widely used in Middle Eastern education both Jewish and Muslim. Constant repetition was considered to be an essential element of learning.

A few (very few) of the most outstanding Beth Midrash students sought permission to study with a famous rabbi often leaving home to travel with him for a lengthy period of time. These students were called talmidim (talmid, s.) in Hebrew, which is translated disciple. There is much more to a talmid than what we call student. A student wants to know what the teacher knows for the grade, to complete the class or the degree or even out of respect for the teacher. A talmid wants to be like the teacher, that is to become what the teacher is. That meant that students were passionately devoted to their rabbi and noted everything he did or said. This meant the rabbi-talmid relationship was a very intense and personal system of education. As the rabbi lived and taught his understanding of the Scripture his students (talmidim) listened and watched and imitated so as to become like him. Eventually they would become teachers passing on a lifestyle to their talmidim.

This information is very illuminating to those of us not familiar with the customs of that time. Those that chose to follow Jesus were doing what was common to do at the time. But, what was not common was that Jesus chose his talmidim, The Apostles, instead of them being the ones to seek him out.

John 7:18 – ¹⁸ *The one who speaks on his own authority seeks his own glory; but the one who seeks the glory of him who sent him is true, and in him there is no falsehood.*

What Jesus is saying to them here is that if they were to understand that his motivation was to serve the Father and do His will then they would see there was no falsehood and ulterior motives in his words and actions.

With work, we can be the same. Look at the Apostles. The more time they spent with Jesus and became like him, the less their own personal agenda ruled their lives and actions.

Jesus has touched on a very deep truth here that we should ponder a moment before moving on. We must be very careful when listening to or studying the words of others, especially when that person has something to gain by what they're saying. Every person who has walked this earth has an agenda. Whether they are consciously aware of it or not, *everyone* has an agenda that comes out in their actions, their words and their deeds. This agenda is almost always a personal one. The only one whose agenda was not even partially personal was Jesus. He genuinely sought to only do his Father's will.

If we can understand the motivation behind someone's words then we can separate the truth worth hearing in what they say and what is merely being said to steer us in the direction they desire us to move. This applies to anything that's said, from praise to criticism.

John 7:19 – ¹⁹*Has not Moses given you the law? Yet none of you keeps the law. Why do you seek to kill me?"*

Jesus points out the obvious hypocrisy of the religious leaders. They wanted to kill Jesus for doing things like healing on the Sabbath which they saw as a transgression of the law when killing was actually a violation of one of the higher laws, the Ten Commandments.

Of course, Jesus would know why they were seeking to kill him. He knew their hearts. So, his question "why do you seek to kill me?" is obviously rhetorical. Jesus had no problem with the Law since he came to fulfil it. He did, however, take issue with the additional rules that men built up around the Law to try and make sure the Law was observed which in turn became more important to these leaders than the underlying law. What are some "rules" we have created that might have dubious Biblical basis?

John 7:20 – ²⁰*The crowd answered, "You have a demon! Who is seeking to kill you?"*

It was the crowd, not the religious leaders, who answered Jesus with surprise in verse 20 like he was being paranoid about someone trying to kill him. This indicates it wasn't the common Jew who was out to kill Jesus. In fact, they thought he was crazy to think someone was trying to kill him. It was the religious leaders whose duty it was to defend the Law who were bent on breaking it because they saw Jesus as a threat to their position and power. So, just because someone has the mantle of authority, be it in the church or most surely the government, doesn't mean they're always right or their motivations are always pure. That's why we must search the Scriptures and pray that God will show us the truth.

John 7:21-24 – ²¹*Jesus answered them, "I did one work, and you all marvel at it. ²²Moses gave you circumcision (not that it is from Moses, but from the fathers), and you circumcise a man on the Sabbath. ²³If on the Sabbath a man receives circumcision, so that the law of Moses may not be broken, are you angry with me because on the Sabbath I made a man's whole body well? ²⁴Do not judge by appearances, but judge with right judgment."*

Jesus basically goes on in verses 21-24 to point out that we need to be concerned with obeying the spirit rather than the letter of the Law in our lives. Let's take a closer look at exactly what Jesus is saying. But, first let's examine a bit of background.

We know that keeping the Sabbath holy is the Fourth Commandment.

Exodus 20:8-10 – ⁸*"Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. ⁹Six days you shall labor, and do all your work, ¹⁰but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the LORD your God. On it you shall not do any work, you, or your son, or your daughter, your male servant, or your female servant, or your livestock, or the sojourner who is within your gates.*

And to emphasize the importance placed on doing this we have these verses from Numbers.

Numbers 15:32-35 – ³²*While the people of Israel were in the wilderness, they found a man gathering sticks on the Sabbath day. ³³And those who found him gathering sticks brought him to Moses and Aaron and to all the congregation. ³⁴They put him in custody, because it had not been made clear what should be done to him. ³⁵And*

the LORD said to Moses, "The man shall be put to death; all the congregation shall stone him with stones outside the camp."

Pretty harsh, right? We won't debate the relevance of keeping the Sabbath holy today but suffice it to say that the Israelites knew they weren't supposed to work on the Sabbath at this time.

Next, let's look at what the Bible has to say about circumcision.

Leviticus 12:3 – ³*And on the eighth day the flesh of his foreskin shall be circumcised.*

So, the Israelites were to circumcize a boy on the 8th day after his birth. But, what if these two events should coincide? In that case, the religious leaders decided that the law on circumcision would override the law on keeping the Sabbath holy where no work was to be performed.

Jesus did something far greater than just performing a simple medical procedure. He was making a man physically whole. I'm sure in the religious leaders mind they thought, there's no law that says you can heal on the Sabbath therefore it is not allowed. They were being very legalistic and interpreting the Law to the letter. However, if they had stopped to consider that greater good was being done by the healing than the strict observance of the Law then they would not have condemned Jesus.

Jesus summed it up in Mark when he said this:

Mark 2:27 – ²⁷*And he said to them, "The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath. ²⁸So the Son of Man is lord even of the Sabbath."*

That being said, we regular mortals must be careful that we don't justify to ourselves the disobeying of God's commands to make things more comfortable for ourselves. It can be really easy to do. Examining the motivation for our actions can help to reveal whether or not we are doing what is right.

In closing, I would like to emphasize two points: The first point we can take away from this lesson is that we need to learn patience and wait on God's timing in all things just as Jesus did. The fact that God holds the world in His hand and has foreknowledge of *all* things makes Him infinitely more qualified to decide when and how things should happen.

The second point I would stress is that we must read and *know* the Scriptures intimately ourselves so that we may not be led astray by those with less than pure motives, those like the Jewish leaders were doing in this case.

ⁱ <https://www.thatttheworldmayknow.com/rabbi-and-talmidim>