

The Glorious Gospel Invitation

Scripture: John 7:37-52

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I want to draw your attention to the seventh chapter of John,

the seventh chapter of John. I've entitled our look at John 7, starting in verse 37 and following, "The Glorious Gospel Invitation"... "The Glorious Gospel Invitation." Here in the passage before us is a golden, priceless offer from the Lord Jesus Christ, from the Savior, an invitation really that is magnificent beyond description. It is an invitation like all of his invitations to salvation, to forgiveness, to eternal life, to Heaven. This is not the first one in the Gospel of John nor is it the last one. There have been many already. You will remember the invitation in chapter 3 in his conversation with Nicodemus. And those who were listening, you remember an invitation in chapter 5. Multiple invitations to come to him, believe in him in chapter 6 as he spoke the truth in Galilee. Here is an invitation in the passage before us. There will be another one in chapter 8. There will be a number of invitations right on down to the very end of his ministry. In fact, I doubt whether a day went by in his ministry in which he didn't invite people to salvation, to the Kingdom, to the forgiveness of sin and eternal life. There was likely not a day that he didn't invite people to believe in him, to confess him as Lord and Savior, and receive the salvation that comes only through him.

But here is one of what I think is the most dramatic and remarkable of illustrations. There are a few more like this. The next one we look at is equally dramatic, and it is an invitation given in John 7:37-39 so let me read it to you: "Now on the last day, the great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried out saying, 'If anyone is thirsty, let him come to me and drink. He who believes in me, as the Scripture said, from his innermost being will flow rivers of living water.' But this he spoke of the Spirit, whom those who believed in him were to receive for the Spirit was not yet given because Jesus was not yet glorified." The invitation comes in verse 37 initially, and it is to come and drink of the water of life. This is not the first time he has made such an invitation. You will remember back in chapter 4 and in his conversation with the woman by the well, John 4:10-14. He says to the woman, "The water that I give you is eternal or living water. Drink of this water, and you will never thirst again."

You will also remember in chapter 6 as he was speaking of himself as the "bread of life." He encouraged people to eat this bread and to drink as well. In a land where water was scarce, a very dry land, water was a great commodity to express the work of salvation, the benefit of salvation to a thirsty soul. So this is a striking invitation. There was a context for the woman at the well. There was a real well and real water, and he played off of that to talk about the water that will satisfy a soul. And that soul will never thirst again. Here again, there is a context for the analogy of water, and I'll give that to you in a few moments, and you'll see why it was so striking.

But I want to talk just a little bit about the matter of this invitation to begin with. Admiring Jesus, being impressed by Jesus, watching Jesus from afar, saying kind things about him is insufficient. It puts a person, in the end, in the same Hell as the people who hated Jesus, who hate him now, who reject him, who were guilty of his death even in Jerusalem at the Crucifixion. Admiring Jesus is not sufficient to grant eternal life. Some kind of superficial commendation of Jesus is not enough. The question is: what will you do with his invitations? What will you do with his invitations?

Six months after this, there is an incident that happens before the Judean governor, established there by the Romans, named Pilate. You will remember the story. He is really caught in a vice. On the one side, he has a blood-thirsty crowd who are screaming for him to murder Jesus. He doesn't want to do that because he knows Jesus is not guilty of anything. He doesn't want to bring the ultimate sword down – the sword of justice in Roman law – on the head of an innocent man. But he's pressured by this relentless crowd who are doing everything they can to intimidate him and threaten the loss of his position by going to Caesar if he doesn't do what they ask. On the other side of the vice, is his own conscience screaming at him and aided and abetted by what his wife told him – not to have anything to do with this innocent man.

So in an effort to sort of avoid the trap that he is in, he makes an invitation to the Jewish people. He brings out a prisoner by the name of Barabbus, and he says, "Okay, you can have Jesus, or you can have Barabbus." Without hesitation, they screamed back in unison, "Release Barabbus. Release Barabbus." At that point, Pilate utters the most profound question. He asks the crowd this, "What shall I do with Jesus Christ? What shall I do with Jesus Christ?" That is a question, by the way, that should be asked to every person that should agitate every heart – that should disturb every human heart – because on the answer to that question hinges your eternity in Heaven or Hell. And so he said, "What shall I do with Jesus Christ?" And without any hesitation, the crowd screamed back in one voice, "Crucify him. Crucify him."

That expression on that day during Passion Week was the final declaration of what the people of Israel had done with all of the invitations of Jesus. They had rejected them all. All the grand and glorious, magnificent, hopeful invitations to salvation and eternal life that Jesus had daily offered them for over three years of ministry, finally they reject and cry for his execution. That's six months down the road.

Backing up to our passage. He is still making invitations, and he will through those final six months. He is still telling people to come to him to receive salvation by believing in him. But he knows there's not much time left – not much time left. He says, verse 33, "A little while longer, I am with you. Then I go to him who sent me. And you will seek me. And will not find me and where I am. You cannot come." A little bit of time, and he'll be gone, and they will be beyond hope. So here, in the face of that little bit of time, a few months, one more potent, powerful invitation. And he has repeatedly said there is no salvation apart from him. He will say it again in John 14, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father but by me." It was the message of the Apostles in Acts 4, "There is no salvation in any other name than the name of Jesus Christ." This is the necessary choice that every human being makes. What will you do with Jesus Christ? What will you do with his invitations?

Let's look, first of all, at the invitation itself. It's really a stunning invitation. Verse 37, "Now on the last day, the great day of the feast" – that's very important. That is an exceptionally important time indicator. The Feast of Booths was one of the three main feasts of Judaism. Pentecost, Passover,

and Tabernacles are Booths. At this feast, they celebrated the wilderness wanderings for 40 years when they lived in tents and booths and temporary housing that they moved as they migrated around the wilderness for those four decades. During that period of time, God protected them, preserved them, gave them food and drink. Finally, that ended with a generation dying and a few entering into the land of promise, the Canaan land, and the birth of the nation of Israel.

To commemorate God's preservation of that nation during those years of wandering, God instituted in Leviticus 23, a feast, an annual feast of remembrance around the time of the Fall.

They were in that feast. It's a week-long, and now it's the last day. That's very very important. The last day. Very significant. Let me tell you why. Every day of the feast, there was a ritual that was repeated. As far as we can tell from history, it was repeated every day. And this is what happened. Based on Leviticus 23:40, the instruction is this: that the people, the worshippers who celebrate the feast are to take the fruit of good trees, branches of palm trees, boughs of thick trees, and willows of the brook – several different kinds of trees. They are to get the branches. That's Leviticus 23. They are to take the branches, and they are to use those branches to create booths to commemorate the wilderness wandering and the temporary housing remembering the goodness of God. That had developed into a very very special kind of ritual.

The Pharisees had instructed the people to all bring their branches, at each particular time of every day during the feast, to the main altar and to surround that altar and put up their boughs and their branches to create a kind of makeshift covering over the altar. This was in the temple area. Every day of the festival, thousands upon thousands, tens of thousands of people were there, and they would come, and they would create this covering of palm branches, willow branches, and other kinds of thick trees. They would form this kind of covering around the altar. The altar is then in the midst of this covering with all these people surrounding it – those holding the branches and those beyond. The high priest would then go to the Pool of Siloam by prescription. And he had a golden pitcher in his hand, and he would dip it in the water of the Pool of Siloam. And he would come back, and he would pour the water out on the altar as a remembrance of God providing the waters for the people of Israel at Meribah out of the rock.

And when he poured the water, historians tell us, the people were required – by the way, he came back through the water gate, which was so named because people brought water through it. So he would come back through the water gate, and historians tell us the people recite Isaiah 12:3. Isaiah 12:3 says, "With joy, shall we draw water out of the wells of salvation." "With joy, shall we draw water out of the wells of salvation."

So the whole ceremony remembers the wilderness wandering. It remembers the water provided there, but it's all symbolic of God's salvation, his deliverance of Israel temporarily during those 40 years – is merely a remembrance of God as a saving God who delivers his people and should remind them of soul salvation. The water, then, comes to the altar in the hand of the priest. It is poured out. And when it is poured out, and the people have recited the passage from Isaiah, they were required then to sing the Hallel. The Levitical choir would start the Hallel is sung 113-118. Hallel from which we get "Hallelujah," hymns of praise. They would sing Psalms 113-118. So that's the scene. I told you in the beginning of the chapter, when we first arrived at this feast, that it was the most celebratory of all the Jewish feasts. It was the celebration.

So the whole dramatic ceremony is a vivid thanksgiving for God's salvation of his people and

protection and preservation and deliverance of his people in the wilderness wandering and how he supplied water for them. They also added to the celebration a prayer for more water that God would send rain. Now what makes this especially important on the last day, is that on the last day, before pouring out the water, the people marched around the altar seven times. Why? To commemorate the march around what city? The city of Jericho because that spelled the end of the wilderness wandering.

It is on that day, at that moment, when they are all celebrating the deliverance and the salvation of God – with that as a backdrop, and perhaps – can't be certain – but perhaps, in the quiet moment when the festival reaches its apex and the priest takes the golden pitcher and pours the water, it is perhaps at that moment that Jesus says, "If anyone is thirsty, let him come and drink. Let him come to me." Jesus dramatically captures the moment – turns it to himself. He must have positioned himself in the right place.

We read in verse 37 that he "cried out." There's that *ekrazen* again that strong word for yelling at the top of his voice. He wants to be heard. And in the drama of that moment, no doubt, he picked a moment when everybody was sort of holding their breath at the drama of the celebration. Jesus says, "You are thankful to God for water in the wilderness – water that satisfied the thirst of your forefathers. Come to me for water that quenches your soul." Your soul. You understand again, in a land where there's so little water, how much water symbolized satisfaction – a necessity for life. So Jesus uses that analogy now for the third time really in the Gospel of John.

In the words that he says at that moment, there are three actions: "thirst," "come," "drink." Three verbs. They really generally correspond to what the Medieval Latin fathers used to call *notitia*, *fiducia*, and *assensus*, the three elements necessary for saving faith. "Thirst," that is the knowledge of the problem, the knowledge of the alienation, the knowledge of the deprivation, the knowledge of the condition and understanding of its implications, and including a knowledge of the source of water. Then "come," that's *fiducia*. That's trust. And then "drink," that's *assensus*.

Let's kind of break those down a little bit. It's pretty simple. The first tells of a recognized need: thirst. Thirst. Notice the general open invitation "If anyone is thirsty." "If anyone is thirsty." "If anyone is thirsty." The invitations of Jesus were always unlimited. They were always universal. They were always open-ended. "If anyone is thirsty, come unto me all you who labor and are heavy-laden, and I will give you rest." God told of the world that he gave his only begotten son that "whosoever believes shall not perish but have everlasting life." Here again is another one of those invitations. "If you are thirsty." Thirst is a craving. Thirst is a conscious craving. It's something we know about. It's something we're fully aware of. We feel it, and the more thirst increases, the more anxious a person becomes. In fact, there can actually be a kind of madness that sets in if you cannot get a drink as you become more and more seriously thirsty.

What's he talking about? He's talking about a thirsty soul. A longing for deliverance, longing for hope, longing for peace, longing for forgiveness, for salvation, for liberation from the power of sin. If you are thirsting – anyone who is thirsting – anyone whose soul is parched, that's where it all starts. It starts with that craving. Then the consciousness, the acute consciousness of that craving.

People come to Christ because they're thirsty. Do you understand that? Because their souls are empty. That's why when you do Evangelism, you don't start with "come to Christ." You start with the recognition of the desperate situation the sinner is in and try to help him understand that. So that's

where it all begins with thirst. Like the Philippian jailer who said, “What must I do to be saved?” That’s a thirsty soul crying out.

The second verb – the second action is “come.” It signifies the approach to him. ““If any man will come after me” – Luke 9:23. Seeing him as the only source of soul satisfying, nourishing, living water. Come. Come to me. Come to Christ. It means, with all your heart and with all your will, you come to him. If he were here, you would do it with your feet, but he’s not here; you do it with your heart and your mind. If he were here, you would come and stand before him in your thirst. And you would fall on your knees, and you would cry out for him to give you the living water as the only source.

Spiritually speaking, it is to move toward Jesus Christ as the only source of your need. Turn your back on the world. Abandon your sin. Abandon your self-confidence. Cast your self at the feet of incarnate grace and truth in Christ. That’s “come.” No one else you can come to? He is the way, the truth, and the life. You come to him. You come to him alone. Let me remind you the only qualification is thirst – not morality, not religiosity, not good works, not being a benevolent person, not being “a basically good person.” There is no qualification like that. The only qualification is that you are thirsty. And very often, benevolent, basically good people, religious people, moral people don’t feel the thirst. That’s why when Jesus came, all the moral, religious people hated him. And it was the sinners and tax collectors and outcasts that came. It’s the thirsty that come. Nowhere else to go but him? He is the only one who can satisfy the soul.

Thirdly, “drink.” Drink means to appropriate – to appropriate. A river flowing through the parched valley doesn’t do any good unless you drink. Drinking means to take him, receive him, make him your own, embrace him. As he said to the woman at the well in John 4:14, “Drink, and you’ll never thirst.” As he said in John 6, “You must eat and drink of me, my life, and my death.” A songwriter wrote, “I heard the voice of Jesus say, ‘Behold, I freely give the living water, thirsty one. Stoop down, and drink, and live. I came to Jesus and I drank of that life-giving stream. My thirst was quenched. My soul revived, and now I live in him.’” That’s a sentiment that every Christian can understand. I came; I drank; I took Christ in.

All of that is simply a way to break out what it means to believe. Because in the next verse, that’s what he says, “He who believes in me.” Well, what does it mean to believe in him? It means to thirst and come and drink. That’s just a theological way to express what is an analogy in verse 37. Thirst, come drink, and then you can be identified as one who believes in me.

What does it mean to believe in Christ? To come out of your sinful thirst to him and embrace him, confess him as God and Savior and Lord. That’s what it means to believe. That’s a gospel invitation. I think, again, this was a daily routine for Christ to make these kinds of golden invitations to a nation that kept rejecting and rejecting and making the wrong choice. He will pour into you soul-satisfying, living water.

But it doesn’t end there, and this may be the most remarkable part about this invitation. Look at verse 38: “He who believes in me, as the Scripture said,” and by the way, he collects from several verses in Isaiah and even makes reference to Ezekiel 37, a kind of composite statement, “as the Scripture said, from his innermost being will flow rivers of living water.” Let me give you a simple analogy. This water that flows to you when you come to Christ comes into your life doesn’t stay in you. You’re not a bucket. You’re not a reservoir. It goes through you. You are a fountain that

becomes a river. Really amazing statement. Not only do we drink and have our soul thirst forever quenched, but we become the fountain and the river of living water to others as it flows from us.

Verse 38 talks about the impact of a believer on the world. It's thrilling. We receive soul-refreshing spiritual water, which is really an analogy for spiritual life, eternal life, with all of its elements and components meaning conversion, redemption, justification, sanctification, adoption, everything. We receive all that – a constant spring of pure, cleansing water of life in us, sanctifying us, making us more like Christ. But at the same time, and the real key here is, we become a fountain that turns into a river for the world. The blessed one becomes the blessing. The recipient of sovereign grace becomes the channel of sovereign grace. And in not a trickle, but a gushing river. Oh, I understand that some of you have become stagnant ponds. You might need a dose of spiritual Drano *[Laughter]* to get the flow going. But this is how we are defined here. The water is ours. It is in us. It is springing up in us and gushing out of us for thirsty souls all over the world.

This is just an amazing statement about how much your life matters. You want your life to matter? It doesn't matter really. It doesn't matter if you're not a Christian. It doesn't matter. It all disappears into eternal judgment in the end when you die. You don't have any positive effect, eternally positive effect. When you think about who matters in society, Christians matter because they are a savior of life unto life. They're the fountain and river of living water that flows to the world. The results and people being redeemed and taken to eternal glory. That matters.

In ourselves, Paul asks, and he says to the Corinthians, "Who's adequate for such things?" This is by grace and grace alone that we should be so useful. So Jesus is saying, "You not only receive the water, but you channel the water to the world." How can that be? How can that be? Verse 39 explains: "But this he spoke of the Spirit." This happens because of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit lives in every believer, right? Romans 8:9: "Whoever doesn't have the Holy Spirit is not a believer." Every believer possesses the Holy Spirit. Your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit. He lives in you. God, the Spirit, takes up residence in you. He is the river of life that flows through you.

But for them on that occasion, the Spirit had not yet come in his fullness. The Spirit was with them. Jesus told them in John 14, "He's with you, but he shall be where" – in you, in your innermost being, the source of this river, but that was yet future. So this in verse 39 is a prophecy. He spoke of the spirit "whom those who believed in him were to receive" for the Spirit was not yet given because Jesus was not yet glorified. The Holy Spirit couldn't come until Jesus was glorified, ascended into Heaven. Then he sent the Holy Spirit, and we're studying that right now and tonight, when the Holy Spirit came on the day of Pentecost – launched the church. And then the river on the inside began to flow to the world. And it happened instantaneously because immediately on the day of Pentecost, all those Galileans who didn't know those multiple languages began to speak the wonderful works of God in all kinds of gentile languages as the river began to flow.

The gospel record shows us that the disciples before the Resurrection and even before the Ascension, could not really exercise this marvelous reality of being rivers of living water. They were having a tough enough time, post-Resurrection, to sort out everything. 40 days Jesus tried to teach them theology, but in Acts 1:8, he says, "When the Spirit is come upon you, you will be my witnesses. Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and the outermost part of the earth, the Holy Spirit will open the gates, and the river will flow." But not until the Holy Spirit comes, and the Holy Spirit doesn't come until Jesus was glorified. When Jesus went back to Heaven, he sent the Holy Spirit. John 16:7: "I tell you the truth, it is to your advantage that I go away. If I do not go away, the helper

will not come to you. If I go, I will send him to you.” He ascends the next chapter when he sends the Holy Spirit in Acts 2. Rivers of blessing begin to pour out of those believers early in Pentecost. Peter preaches, the river starts, and 3000 people are saved. They preach again; another 4000 are saved. Tens of thousands are being saved. In Jerusalem, it extends to Samaria, and we’re still living the history today. The river is unleashed on the world through the indwelling Holy Spirit. Only the Holy Spirit can make the river flow. He’s the power behind all witness – all witness.

So Jesus says, “For those of you who come to me and drink, you will not only be satisfied, but you will become a river of life to the world.” That happened seven and a half months later on the day of Pentecost. That is the work of the Holy Spirit. What an amazing invitation to say not only will you have your soul totally satisfied forever with a water that’ll cause you to never thirst again – satisfy you forever, but your life will take on eternal significance. What an amazing invitation. That’s why I say this is the golden invitation of the Gospel of John. Rivers of water, not reserved for super saints or some kind of reservoir but, belonging to all believers all of whom become fountains that turn into rivers. What an invitation.

You have, then, starting in verse 40, 4 responses – 4 responses. They are typical of responses today. First is the convinced, and we won’t spend a lot of time because this is a clear narrative, and you can see it without a lot of help. Group one: the convinced. They receive the truth. Some of the people, therefore, when they heard these words were saying, “This certainly is the Prophet.” Others were saying, “This is the Christ or the Messiah.” They’re convinced. This is the Prophet. This is the Messiah. In fact, you see the word “certainly,” *alths*. For real, genuinely, truly, these are real believers. They know who he is. He is the Prophet.

What’s the Prophet? The Prophet promised in Deuteronomy 18 – Deuteronomy 18:15, “Moses made a messianic prophecy.” This is what it says, “The Lord, your God, will raise up unto you a Prophet from the midst of you, of your brother, and like unto me unto him shall you harken.” Everybody knew that was a messianic prophecy that the Messiah would be a prophet – the Messiah would be a prophet. It would be the great Prophet like Moses.

In Acts 3, looking at the other side. Go to Acts when Peter is preaching. In Acts 3:22, he says, “Moses said the Lord God” – he quotes Deuteronomy 18:15 – “will raise up for you a Prophet like me from your brethren to him. You shall give heed to everything he says to you. And it will be that every soul that does not heed that prophet shall be utterly destroyed from among the people.” This is a statement that Jesus is that Prophet who must be heard and heeded.

The Jewish people talk about the Prophet. That was familiar to them. That was part of their vocabulary - the Prophet who is to come. The Prophet who is spoken of by Moses. Jewish people were looking for that Prophet. We saw that all the way back early in the Gospel of John that they were looking for the Messiah that they were looking for the Prophet.

In chapter 7:12, some were saying, “He’s a good man.” Others were saying, “No, on the contrary, he leads the people astray.” They weren’t too sure exactly who he was. That was kind of the general feeling, but now we find some people who know that he is, in fact, that Prophet. If you go back to John 1:21, we read, “They kept asking him” – literally – “what then?” This is speaking to John the Baptist: “Are you Elijah?” And he said, “I am not.” “Are you the Prophet?” And he answered, “No.” They didn’t have to qualify it anymore than to just say the Prophet. Everybody knew who the Prophet was.

In chapter 6:14, you remember, “Therefore when the people say the sign which he had performed, they said, ‘This is truly the Prophet who is to come into the world.’” They were all looking for the Prophet – capital P – who was the Messiah. Now these people say, “This certainly is the Prophet,” and others of them, “This is the Messiah.” Here’s a group that confesses Jesus as Messiah, Savior, Lord. This isn’t the first time.

Back in chapter 1, we read about Andrew, Simon Peter’s brother who comes to Simon and says, “‘We have found the Messiah. We have found the Messiah.’” John 1:49: “Nathanael, ‘Rabbi says to Jesus, ‘you are the king of Israel. You are the Messiah.’” Chapter 6:69: the disciples say, “To whom shall we go? You, and you alone have the words of eternal life. Why? Because you are the Holy One of God.”

So there were all along disciples being collected who believed he was the Prophet Moses spoke of. He was the Messiah. These, then, are part of God’s remnant. They would be collected with the apostles and disciples of Jesus. They are the believing remnant that’s talked about in Romans 9 and Romans 11. They are those who came to the narrow gate, the narrow way, as Jesus put it in the Sermon on the Mount. They thirsted. They came. They drank. These would be some who would be part of the 120 on the day of Pentecost who were in the upper room when the Holy Spirit came. So this prophecy, this invitation, would be fulfilled in their case. Seven and a half months later, the river would flow from then – touch the world. That’s the first group. And that’s the first possibility to believe, to receive. And that’s what Jesus cries for.

The second group is – we can call them the “contrary,” the convinced. They received the truth. The contrary, they reject the truth. Against the background of these people affirming their faith in Christ as the Prophet and the Messiah, still others were saying, “Surely that Christ is not going to come from Galilee, is he?” And that expects a negative answer in the Greek construction. And it’s mockery and sarcasm and scorn, “Are you kidding?”

You remember back in chapter 1, verse 46, “Can anything good come out of Nazareth?” They had nothing but scorn for Galilee and the region of Galilee and the town of Nazareth. Who are these people? Well, these are the skeptics. These are the cynics. These are the ones who repeatedly, constantly mocked Jesus: Pharisees, scribes, rabbis, religious leaders, and the people who followed them. It’s a statement of mockery.

Galilee had a reputation for being backward – being sort of influenced by the gentile world. Nothing important happened there. So the leaders assuming that Jesus was born in Galilee and Nazareth, say, “Surely you don’t think that the Messiah is coming out of Nazareth or Galilee.” And then they quote Scripture correctly. They quote Micah 5:2, a prophecy, “Has not the Scripture said that the Christ comes from the descendants of David?”

Well, of course, that’s all over the Old Testament. Psalm 89:4 would be one direct place. And from Bethlehem, the village that was David’s village, we all know Micah 5:2, Psalm 89, he’s going to be in the line of David, and he’s coming from Bethlehem. “‘But you, Bethlehem,’” says Micah, “‘Ephrathah, though you be little among the thousands of Judah to get out of – You shall he come forth unto me that is to be ruler in Israel whose goings forth have been from old from everlasting.’” He even says that the Messiah’s going to be an eternal one who is born in the city of Bethlehem.

So they proceed in their mockery by saying, “Of course, the Messiah can’t come from Galilee because he has to come from Bethlehem. And he has to be in David’s line, or he would have no right to the throne.” Now you all know the obvious response. He didn’t come from Nazareth; he came from Bethlehem where he was born. That’s why the New Testament makes such a clear historical record about his birth in Bethlehem. And he was of the line of David. Both his father was in David’s line, and his mother was in David’s line. His father’s genealogy starts the New Testament in Matthew. His mother’s genealogy in Luke. They could have checked the temple records. They would have found his birthplace to be Bethlehem, and they would have known his lineage was Davidic on both sides of his family.

This is willful ignorance. This is willful unbelief. This is smug, self-satisfied “don’t confuse me with the facts.” And that’s unbelief. And to give them the facts may be doing what Jesus said not to waste your time doing, “Casting your pearls before swine.” They were the contrary who rejected the truth. Then they threw up a scripture as the absolute qualification. Let me mark that, please in your own mind, they said, “Messiah has to be in the line of David and be born in the city of Bethlehem.” They said that. The religious leaders of Israel said that. And Jesus fulfilled that. By their own mouths and their own declaration, they have affirmed the Messiahship of Jesus Christ while at the same time denying it. This is the nature of willful ignorance. And I love how verse 43 addresses it – a short verse – “So a division occurred in the crowd because of him.” I like that.

There were a lot of divisions. Chapter 9:16 says “There was a division in the crowd.” Chapter 10:19-21, “There was a division in the crowd.” You know, he said he came to bring a sword, didn’t he? To separate, to divide people. But why are you excited about this division? Because this division proves the genuineness of the faith of those who believed. They didn’t cave in. They didn’t cave in. They didn’t roll over for fear of the leaders, of the Jewish leaders. There were people who were afraid of the Jewish leaders. They were really terrified of being sort of unsynagogued, put out of positions of significance. They feared their leaders. But not these people, or there wouldn’t have been a division. What that means is both groups stood their ground. That’s what a division is.

So the good news is, division means the convinced ones were genuine. They held their ground. They didn’t depart. They didn’t turn. They didn’t go the other way. I don’t think they cared so much whether Jesus was born in Bethlehem, Nazareth, or Jerusalem. I don’t know what they knew about that, but there was plenty of evidence that he was who he claimed to be. And also God was at work in their heart. The Father was drawing them. Maybe they were like the blind man, who, when he was questioned said, “Who he was, and where he came from, I don’t know. But here’s what I know. I was blind, and now I can see.” Praise the Lord, the division remained. Thankful for the division. It was a real faith. They were like Peter, “To whom shall we go? You, and you alone, have the words of eternal life.”

So the first possible response to Jesus is to receive. The second possible response is to reject. That’s still true today. Still true today. Common and, by the way, most people reject. Most people reject as you well know. Christ always divides. Well the division that activated them – verse 44 – the leaders – some of them wanted to seize him; no one laid hands on him. They want to grab him right now and seize him. This is the third time in this chapter they wanted to seize him, arrest him, but they can’t. It’s in verse 30, “They wanted to seize him.” It’s in verse 32, “They sent officers to seize him.” And the officers have gone now to go to him, and in the meantime, when he’s talking, they want to seize him again. They couldn’t lay a hand on him until it was God’s time, we know that. So

you have those who are openly hostile to Christ, who reject him, resent him, hate him, despise him. And you have those who receive him.

There's a third group here, and we'll call those the "confused." The convinced, the contrary, and the confused. The convinced receive the truth. The contrary reject the truth. And the confused wrestle with the truth. Verse 45 – this is the officers, the temple police. Remember back in verse 32, they were sent to take Jesus prisoner. The Pharisees and the chief priest sent officers, temple police, to take Jesus, to arrest him. So now they come back to the chief priest and Pharisees, and they don't have Jesus. And they said to them, "Why did you not bring him? Why did you not bring him?" Well the officers could have lied, I suppose. They could have said, "Well, he kind of slipped away in the crowd, or he kind of got blocked. The crowd was pretty dense." They didn't say that. The officers answered, "Never has a man spoken the way this man speaks."

Now do you understand that these guys know what it is to be under authority? Their police, they're under the authority of temple leaders. They know what it is to be under authority. They know what it is to take orders. They know the consequences of violating those orders. They're used to people with authority, but they were not used to hearing anybody like Jesus. This is a level of authority that was far beyond their ability to respond. Literally their knees buckled under the sheer power of his authoritative words.

They had been commissioned by the Pharisees chief priest to set their hands on Jesus and arrest him, put him in chains, and they come back empty-handed. And of course, we know – "Nobody takes my life from me," Jesus says in John 19, "And I lay down by myself." They couldn't touch him unless God allowed it. They might as well have ordered the sun to stop shining. They had no power over him. Not all the hosts of Hell could have arrested him one moment before God's proscribed time. That's still six months away.

But their answer is not because of God. Their answer is, "We never heard anybody talk like this." So now we have a testimony of the Messiah coming from Bethlehem and the line of David, and that is true of Jesus. And that testimony comes from those who hate him. And now from these confused soldiers comes the testimony that his words are the most overwhelming, over powering words they've ever heard. They're in a state of bewildered amazement.

In the Sermon on the Mount, the ending of it is that the people were astonished at his words. Well, here these men are literally paralyzed by the words of Jesus. They're bewildered. They're confused. They don't know what to do. They're caught. Jesus says, "Take me. Receive me. Believe in me. And drink of the living water." Their leaders say, "Arrest him so we can kill him." Jesus says, "Receive me, and I'll give you life." Their leaders say, "Arrest him so we can give him death." They have pressure coming from both sides, and they do nothing. They're just bewildered, confused.

And in the middle of their confusion, the Pharisees move. The Pharisees then answer them, "You have not also been led astray, have you?" Another question that expects a negative answer given the benefit of the doubt. "Surely. Oh, of course not. You haven't let yourself be led astray. You're not so stupid as to be that vulnerable, are you?" So they play on their pride. They reprimand them in anger, "You can't be that stupid. You can't be that easily deceived. Surely you're better men than that." "None of us," verse 48, "No one of the rulers of Pharisees has believed in him, has he?" So now it's about loyalty. So it's about personal pride and loyalty. "You don't know any of the leaders of

Israel. You don't know any of those who are refined scholars of Scripture and students of history and spiritual reality who believe in him, do you? None of us who are spiritual, none of us who are academically prepared, none of us who know the Word of God. Oh, the only people who follow him are the cursed, *hmr*, the people of the earth, the lowlifes. You don't want to look stupid, do you? You don't want to be disloyal do you?"

I don't know what happened to those temple police. I would have loved to be surprised in Heaven to meet one because I don't know what happened. But I doubt that any of them ever forgot the confrontation if they never heard anybody speak like that. There are people who just linger in limbo. "I never heard anything like Jesus," that admiration again, that sense of respect and some kind of honor. "But then again, I don't want to be disloyal to my religion, and I really don't want to admit that I'm part of those ignorant people who need to believe that." So there are the convinced, and there are the contrary, then there are the confused. And, by the way, to be confused is as bad as being contrary. You might as well be contrary; you're going to end up in the same place.

Passage closes with the compliant. I call him the compliant; it's a synonym for yielding. There are some people who are in process. The convinced receive the truth. The contrary reject the truth. The confused wrestle with the truth. The compliant research the truth.

We'll meet an old friend here. Verse 50, Nicodemus: "He who came to him before being one of them." He was a member of this Sanhedrin, this elite ruling body, but he had spent some time with Jesus. Remember John 3, "He came to Jesus by night talked about the new birth, entering the Kingdom of God." Jesus gave him, John 3:16 and the gospel, we haven't heard anything about Nicodemus since then. Where's he been for the last couple of years? He's been in process – complying with what he knew – yielding. There's a genuine search for the truth. And so he speaks up, "Our law doesn't judge a man unless it first hears from him and knows what he's doing, does it?" He wants to defend Jesus. He doesn't want this to happen. He's processed enough about Jesus to know it's not going to be right to kill him. I don't know where he is in his own soul. He's not going to declare himself a believer in Jesus. I don't know where he is, but for now, he's going to hold them to the integrity of their own laws. You cannot arrest and execute a man until he's had a trial. You can't do that. So he defends Jesus in this legal way.

Maybe what they said in verse 48 wasn't true, "No one of the rulers of Pharisees had believed in him." Maybe they didn't know about Joseph of Arimathea, who was a secret disciple. Maybe they didn't even have any idea that Nicodemus was on the path of coming to faith in Christ. But for now, all he can do is sort of stop the lynch mob by upholding the law, and in that way, defending Jesus. And they scorn him. Verse 52, "They answered him, 'You're not also from Galilee, are you? Search and see that no Prophet arises out of Galilee.'" Well, that's selective history. That's revisionist. Did you forget Jonah? Did you forget Nahem? Did you forget Josea? All of whom came from Galilee. But again, this is all selective data that they're throwing around here.

So they mock one of their own – one of their own elite Sanhedrin members. They mock him. They heap scorn on him, "You're not from Galilee, are you?" Why do I say he's compliant and searching for the truth? Because turn to 19 – John 19:39, we'll start in 38: "After these things, Joseph of Arimathea being a disciple of Jesus but a secret one for fear of the Jews, asked Pilate that he might take away the body of Jesus and Pilate granted permission so he came and took away his body." Look at 39, "Nicodemus, who had first come to him by night, also came bringing a mixture of myrrh and aloes, about 100 pound weight. He took the body of Jesus, bound it in linen and wrappings with

the spices as is the burial custom of the Jews. They laid him in a new tomb in a garden.” There is Nicodemus with the body of Christ burying, now. his Lord and Savior. Some people believe. Some people reject. Some people remain in limbo. But some people are in process, aren’t they? And that was Nicodemus, honestly seeking. And God says, “If you seek me with all your heart, you’ll” – what? “You’ll find me.” What will you do with Jesus? That’s the question, isn’t it? What will you do with this golden invitation?

Let’s pray. Thank you, Lord, for your truth, for its consistency, its power, its clarity, its very life. Thank you for the wonderful privilege we’ve had today to be with the Savior through the lens of holy Scripture. I pray that you’ll work in every heart here. Thank you for those who are the convinced, who receive the truth and believe. I pray for those who are contrary, those who are confused. I pray for those who are just compliant, who are yielding. Lord, may you continue to finish the work which you have begun in them. We all have to make the final decision, what will I do with Christ? May we make it by believing in him, confessing him as Lord and Savior, receiving him, and becoming the children of God. To as many as receive him, to them he gave the right to become the children of God even to those who believe in his name. May that be the experience of all of us today. For your glory and our eternal blessing, we pray in Christ’s name. Amen.

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