The Gospel of John:  The Hour and the Time  
John 7:1-13

1 After this Jesus went about in Galilee. He would not go about in Judea, because the Jews were seeking to kill him. 2 Now the Jews' Feast of Booths was at hand. 3 So his brothers said to him, “Leave here and go to Judea, that your disciples also may see the works you are doing. 4 For no one works in secret if he seeks to be known openly. If you do these things, show yourself to the world.” 5 For not even his brothers believed in him. 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. 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.

The title of my message this morning is  The Hour and the Time, and it will fall under three subheadings: 1) the Lonely Road; 2) the Hour and the Time; and 3) He Who Demands an Answer.

I. The Lonely Road

Our text begins with this summary statement from John in vss. 1-2: 1 After this Jesus went about in Galilee. He would not go about in Judea, because the Jews were seeking to kill him. 2 Now the Jews' Feast of Booths was at hand.

I hope you can appreciate the context and the vibe that John is communicating here. Let me paint the picture for you. If you recall, from John 4 right up to the end of John 6, Jesus has been performing powerful signs and developing a significant following. The pinnacle of His growing popularity up to this point was an evening not long ago near Bethsaida when thousands proclaimed, “Surely this is the prophet who has come into the world!”

But then, as we saw last Sunday at the end of John 6, Jesus delivered his Bread of Life sermon, and it deeply offended many people, including most of His “would-be-disciples.” The Twelve chosen disciples remained faithful, but most of the people who had been so excited about following Jesus abandoned Him that day there in Capernaum. In many respects, at least for John’s gospel, that great exodus of disciples in Capernaum marked “the beginning of the end.” In other words, the general popularity of Jesus has begun to wain and the controversy surrounding His identity and His teaching is increasing daily. Though other crowds would gather from time to time—impressed with His miracles--the teachings of Jesus would regularly cause the majority of people to fall away. People in Galilee could not accept the claims this “local boy” made about Himself, and Jesus was already aware that the high-ranking Jewish officials in Jerusalem were eager to snuff out the man who cleansed the temple and rebuked them publicly.

So, John tells us that for some time “after this,” Jesus went about in Galilee because it was not safe for Him to yet return to Judea (more specifically, Jerusalem). Now…the three synoptic gospels contain many stories of what Jesus did during His tour through Galilee, so John does not recap those stories at this point. John is not interested in reporting all the stories of Jesus’ ministry in Galilee. Instead, John sets the stage for Jesus’ first return to Jerusalem since He
healed a crippled man on the Sabbath. John gives us some context by mentioning that the Feast of Booths was at hand. I won’t get into the Feast itself this morning, but you should know this was one of the great feasts that the Jews journeyed to Jerusalem each year to enjoy. It was the annual celebration of the harvest; it typically lasted 8 days; and it always took place at the end of what we call September or perhaps early October. Now, we know that the feeding of the 5000 and the Bread of Life Sermon happened during the Passover (the spring of the year), so we might assume that it has been 6 months since the great exodus of disciples in Capernaum.

Now, as we zoom in, John recalls a conversation that took place between Jesus and His brothers, a conversation that likely took place in Capernaum where Jesus typically lived when not traveling. By the way, in case you are wondering, we learn in Matthew 13 and Mark 6 that Jesus had four brothers: James, Joseph, Judas, and Simon. And here’s what the brothers say, beginning in vs. 3 So his brothers said to him, “Leave here and go to Judea, that your disciples also may see the works you are doing. 4 For no one works in secret if he seeks to be known openly. If you do these things, show yourself to the world.” 5 For not even his brothers believed in him.

The scene John paints here is a sad and lonely one for our Lord. His own brothers are essentially mocking Him. They are giving Him “advice,” which is essentially kicking Him when He’s down. No doubt they witnessed the great exodus of disciples that took place several months ago there in Capernaum. Although Jesus has been traveling throughout Galilee for the past few months, you can still cut the tension with a knife when Jesus returns home. People are whispering amongst themselves, avoiding Jesus, and from the perspective of his brothers, big-brother-Jesus has experienced abject failure. So, they try to convince Jesus to step up His game in Jerusalem. They are “challenging” Him to leave the redneck obscurity of Galilee and make a go of it in the capital city. Maybe He could get a new group of “followers”…right? Notice the mocking tone when they say: “If you do these things, show yourself to the world.” In other words, “If you can actually multiply the bread, raise the dead, and turn water into wine…get out there and ‘show them what you got’ on the biggest stage in Israel! Come on bro, what are you afraid of? Put your money where your mouth is!”

You know, lots of people can hurt us…but nobody can hurt us as deeply as our own families. Many of us know what it is to be mocked by our own family…it is an indescribable pain. Keep in mind, Jesus was the oldest sibling among the five brothers and multiple sisters. Most scholars observe that Mary’s husband Joseph is conspicuously absent from most of the stories of Jesus’ family, which would suggest that Joseph died when Jesus was relatively young. We should assume then, that Jesus helped his mother to raise his brothers and sisters, as is often the case with the firstborn, right?

So can you feel it? Can you feel the pain of being rejected by the siblings you practically raised? Can you feel the loneliness of having your own family members condescendingly give you advice, all the while knowing that they did not believe in you…that they did not support what mattered most to you in the world?

Make no mistake friends: the suffering of Jesus was not limited to the whips and nails of the Romans. Jesus endured a lonely journey that few of us could possibly comprehend, and that loneliness was only intensified by the rejection of His own brothers. Listen to the pathos…the emotional intensity…that is woven into His response to His brothers beginning in vs. 6: My
time has not yet come, but your time is always here. The world cannot hate you, but it hates me because I testify about it that its works are evil. You go up to the feast, I am not going up to this feast, for my time has not yet fully come.”

Jesus is not His own. He does not belong to the world. Jesus is bound by the specific orders and timing of the Father, and he makes no decision apart from the Father. He teaches only what the Father tells Him. He is always, at all times, 100% obedient. Who else ever lived that kind of life? And because of His obedience to the Father, Jesus lives as one HATED by the world. His glorious light revealed the darkness of men…and they hated Him for that.

The brothers of Jesus don’t get it. They see Jesus as a misguided failure, and they mock Him.

Church, can you see Jesus in this conversation? Can you see His pain? Can you see the frustration of having his younger siblings mock Him? And can you see His infinite patience? Imagine all the years that Jesus felt his baby siblings, washed them—he taught them to read, taught them how to plant and how to fix things. Can you see Him playing games with his brothers and sisters; breaking up their squabbles, and loving them all as only the firstborn son can do in the absence of a father? Can you see Him wince as these very siblings now mock Him? Can you feel what He is feeling? Oh that you would see Him now, and love Him all the more for the lonely road He travelled to save us all.

Church…let’s be honest: if we are living a truly obedient life to the Father, the world is likely not going to be our biggest fan, either. Jesus said in Matthew 10:22, “…you will be hated by all for my name’s sake. But the one who endures to the end will be saved.” There are times that our faith will require us to walk a lonely road; but let us remember: we do not walk alone. Our Lord first walked this path; and He walks with us even now no matter how lonely we may feel.

Let us now turn to our second subheading…

II. The Hour and the Time

Something a bit confusing happens here early on in John 7, and I want to tackle it in order to avoid misunderstanding. Look at how the story reads beginning with vs. 6 when Jesus says to His brothers: My time is has not yet come, but your time is always here…you go up to the feast. I am not going up to this feast, for my time has not yet fully come. After saying this, he remained in Galilee. But after his brothers had gone up to the feast, then he also went up, not publicly but in private.

What just happened? Did Jesus tell a lie? Jesus said He wasn’t going up to the feast, but then Jesus goes up to Jerusalem anyways. So, what’s the deal?

Jesus did not lie; nor did He have a change of heart. Our English translation does not capture the nuance found in the Greek words, so let us look carefully at the Greek words that John employs here. When Jesus responds to His brothers first in vs. 6 and then again in vs. 8, Jesus mentions that He is not going to the feast because His “time has not yet (fully) come.” Now, whenever we hear that, most of us think that Jesus is referring to the fulfillment of God’s revelation and redemptive work in His death and resurrection. However, we should note that when Jesus says
something in regard to God’s plan for Jesus, as He does to his mother in John 2, Jesus usually says, “My hour has not yet come.” The Greek word “hora”—hour—in John 2 is quite different from the word “kairos”—time—that John now employs here in John 7. In the Greek, the word “hora” refers to a specific occasion or appointment, whereas kairos is a word that means “opportunity.” These words are important for us understand what is happening in our story, so let me give you an illustration to help you understand the difference.

Suppose it’s time to take final exam in college. You sit down at your desk just as the professor announces: “The hour is at hand!” Now, we know what that means, right? It means that the exam is going to start NOW. However, if the professor states, “My computer locked up, so the exam is delayed. You should make the most of this time to prepare, and we’ll take the exam tomorrow.” We know what that professor means by making most of “this time” right? The professor is referring to kairos…it is a unique and important opportunity for us to cram for the exam with a very specific window that is now open but will soon close, right? That’s kairos.

Keeping that illustration in mind, listen to what Jesus is saying to His brothers: My best window of opportunity has not come, your window of opportunity is whenever, so you go. I am not going up to the feast, for my window of opportunity has not yet come. Does that make sense?

So, as we return to the story, the brothers depart without Jesus, and we should assume that they arrive in Jerusalem in time to enjoy all of the festivities, the worship services, the sacrifices, etc. that would take place during the first 3-4 days of the Feast. However, Jesus delays his trip to Jerusalem. He leaves a few days later, and note: Jesus does not travel to Jerusalem to observe the Feast. He told the truth. We can assume that by the time Jesus arrives Jerusalem, He has missed out on several days of traditional festivities, and even then, John reports in vs. 10 “…he also went up, not publicly but in private.” Jesus did not observe the feast. Instead, Jesus keeps a low profile; He travels alone; no one knows He is there or where He is staying until when? Until His “time has come.” Next week we’ll read that Jesus enters into the Temple and begins to teach, but we should note that He will enter the Temple at exactly the right moment. Now, when was that moment? I don’t know! If we understood a bit better what happened on each day of the feast, we might guess that Jesus walked into the temple at the exact moment that some kind of sacrifice was to be made, because Jesus is the Lamb of God…the ultimate sacrifice, right? We might discover that Jesus enters the Temple and begins to teach at the exact moment that the High Priest traditionally gave his famous address to the all the people! Why? Because Jesus is our one and only High Priest who makes intercession for the sins of the world! The text will not reveal the details, but based on what Jesus said, we know that He stepped into the Temple at the ideal moment, and by doing so He made a statement that everybody in the Temple understood loud and clear! That’s how Jesus rolled—He was always very conscious of the hour and the time!

Now…is that still how Jesus rolls? Absolutely! If you have ever attempted to follow Jesus, here is one thing I know you will agree with: Jesus is all about the timing, amen? This week I received a few letters and phone calls from single parents who had received a check for $1000 from Colonial and a love letter from Jesus! In every single instance, it was the TIMING that just blew their minds! One gentleman had a huge bill show up the day before that had robbed him of his sleep. He was at his wits end, and then the check from Jesus showed up! Another lady had
to pay rent--it was the 11th hour--and the check from Jesus arrived just in time. Another person had just fed the last of her food to her son and had no money at all, and the check from Jesus arrived just in time. She had heard the Lord promise that He would provide, and then He provided at exactly the right moment…it was a Kairos moment…it was the perfect moment. Church, somebody testify! I know many of us could tell a story of when Jesus showed up at exactly the right moment…you remember those kairos moments, right?

Listen…we are all impatient. We all want what we want when we want it, right? But pay careful attention to how Jesus lived His life. He never moved until it was the hour and the time! If that is how Jesus lived then, we should assume that is how Jesus is living even now in relationship to all of us…His Church. We must come to trust His timing…it is always perfect and according to the will of the Father. I know that is a huge thing to say, but it’s in the text. Jesus always moved according to the hour and the time…and it was always the perfect time. Let me wind up now with my third and final subheading:

III. He Who Demands an Answer

Our thought unit this morning ends with these words from John:
The Jews were looking for him at the feast, and saying, “Where is he?” And there was muttering about him among the people. While some said, “He is a good man,” others said, “No, he is leading the people astray.” Yet for fear of the Jews no one spoke openly of him.

I think it’s clear why Jesus did not show up at the beginning of the feast. Clearly by now Jesus is a lightning rod. The people are talking about Him; they are looking for Him; and the Jewish authorities are on high alert. Had Jesus entered Jerusalem at the outset of the feast, He would have likely been the center of attention, and we get the sense that Jesus did not want to upstage the feast. Instead, he waits until the feast is mostly over; and then, very strategically, He enters the temple. We’ll pick up the story there next week.

Now, I want to close with a few observations. As we’ll see all throughout the Gospel of John, people are always talking about Jesus. Whether people loved Jesus or hated Him, nobody ignored Him! As one commentator wrote: It is impossible to treat Jesus with indifference!

In our text this morning we see examples of the ways people perceived Jesus in the first century which are not so different from the way people perceive Jesus today. NT scholar William Barclay masterfully categorizes these responses in his commentary on John. I will cover just a few in closing.

First, we see the brothers treat Jesus with tolerant contempt. Though they did not buy his message, Jesus’ brothers egged Him on and pretended to be “for Him.” I can’t think of a better description for how our “tolerant” culture and liberal press views Jesus and His followers. I was watching an interview the other night with a well-known Christian who was on the ground in New York, helping to serve the sick and dying with Samaritan’s Purse. He was enthusiastically glorifying Jesus and the work that was being done in His name. He was observing how, through the love, mercy, and generosity of the Christian ministry, people were coming together all over the city and all over the world to help those in need. You could see the TV news anchor wincing and wriggling in her chair. As the Christian leader finished his statement, she forced a smile and
said, “Well, yes, let’s hope for the silver lining!” You could cut the tolerant contempt with a knife.

Next, we remember the Pharisees who showed sheer contempt towards Jesus. Never mind that Jesus healed a man bound to a mat for 38 years…the Pharisees were furious that He healed the man on the Sabbath and instructed the man to carry his mat on the Sabbath. These people hated Jesus because they perceived Him as a rule breaker…they felt that He disrespected the status quo and the leaders of the status quo. The Sadducees had sheer contempt for Jesus, but for a totally different reason. Jesus acted like a Messiah…a Messiah that might cause political unrest. Jesus clearly threatened their comfortable status quo and shady arrangements with the Romans. Lots of people still hate Jesus with sheer contempt for similar reasons as the Pharisees and the Sadducees.

Some people in our text came to the verdict that Jesus was “a good man.” They weren’t wrong…Jesus was good in every sense of the word; and Jesus was a man…but that is an insufficient verdict regarding Jesus. Napoleon once remarked: “I know men, and Jesus Christ is more than a man.” Jesus could not simply be a good man. Good men do not call themselves the Way or the Truth or the Life. Only one who is the Son of God as well as the Son of Man could make such a claim.

Still others said, “He is leading the people astray.” These people concluded that Jesus was a troublemaker and a seducer. They felt that Jesus was a cult leader, leading people to subscribe to a perverted religion of false hope. This was certainly the opinion of Karl Marx who famously qualified Christianity as “the opiate for the people.”

If you are a student of history, philosophy, religion, ethics, or politics, you simply cannot ignore this man, Jesus of Nazareth. If nothing else, Jesus is certainly the most interesting person who has ever lived! His teachings on forgiveness; showing love towards one’s enemy; and servant leadership have challenged and informed every generation for the past 2000 years. But Jesus was more than an interesting teacher. Jesus made claims about Himself that simply cannot be ignored. Jesus claimed to be the Son of God; One with the Father; and the fulfillment of all the prophecies. Jesus said, “I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life…no one comes to the Father except through me.” Jesus described the end of the world and said that He would sit upon His throne and judge all the nations, separating them as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. He said that unless we eat his flesh and drink his blood, we would have no life within us!

Jesus made claims that demand an answer, and no thinking person for the past 2000 years to could hope to ignore Him. The philosophers, the scientists, the leaders of other religions, and people from every tribe and tongue throughout the world universally know this is true: Jesus demands an answer.

A 19th century a Scottish preacher named John Duncan first articulated what he called a trilemma (Colloquia Peripatetica, p 109). He defined the trilemma this way: Christ either [1] deceived mankind by conscious fraud, or [2] He was Himself deluded and self-deceived, or [3] He was Divine. There is no getting out of this trilemma. It is inexorable. In 1936, Watchman Nee made a similar argument in his book, Normal Christian Faith, and later, in 1952, C. S. Lewis
articulated the same “trilemma” in his book *Mere Christianity*. Myriads of thinkers and writers agree that when it comes to Jesus, there are only three possible conclusions: He was either a liar, or a lunatic, or He is the Lord.

So, was Jesus a lunatic? Did He suffer illusions of grandeur? Was he a psychotic, narcissistic egomaniac? No. Jesus’ teachings are lucid. His parables are timeless and profound. He was gentle and humble. His love for the poor and the marginalized comes across as authentic and consistent. And, when backed into a corner, Jesus was brilliant and as calm as a cucumber!

Was Jesus a liar? Was he a calculating deceiver who lied about His identity and His agenda? Did he intentionally deceive and manipulate people in order to further his lust for power, wealth, or privilege? No. Jesus told the truth. No one ever accused Him of lying or falsehood. In fact, it was His truth-telling that got Jesus into so much trouble with people who could not stand to hear the truth! And we know that Jesus did not enjoy privilege, power, or wealth. On the contrary, Jesus “had no place to lay his head” and lived a generally nomadic existence in the final years of His young life.

If Jesus was not a lunatic or a liar, we are left with only one other possibility: Jesus was in fact who He claimed to be! He is The LORD, the Lamb, the Son of God who came to us as the Son of Man. He is the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End. He is the Lion of Judah and the Anointed One…the Messiah…the Christ! He is the One who came for us; the One who died for us; and the only One who rose again and defeated death!

Who do you say He is? His place in the center of history demands an answer. Liar, lunatic, or lord? For me and my house, we declare: Jesus is Lord! Amen? Let’s pray.