The Gospel of John: Is Jesus Legit?
John 7:14-18

Scripture:
14 About the middle of the feast Jesus went up into the temple and began teaching. 15 The Jews therefore marveled, saying, “How is it that this man has learning,[a] 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[b] will, he will know whether the teaching is from God or whether I am speaking on my own authority. 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.

My message this morning is entitled Is Jesus Legit? and it will fall under four subheadings: 1) The Fulfillment of Prophecy; 2) Subordination to the Father; 3) Knowing by Doing; and 4) The One Who is True.

I. The Fulfillment of Prophecy

   Early on in our study of this gospel, you might remember that John wrote these words in John 1:9-11: “The true light, which gives light to everyone, was coming into the world. He was in the world, and the world was made through him, yet the world did not know him. He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him.”

   Our text this morning is a perfect example of what John said in the preamble to his gospel. Jesus came into the world as the Light, yet the world did not “KNOW” him…but they should have. That is generally John’s argument throughout his gospel, and that argument still applies to this day. Jesus came into the world and left an indelible mark upon history. Thus, we will all give an account for how we responded to the coming of Jesus, and our eternity will hang in the balance. So how can we know who Jesus is, and how can we know He is legit? How can we know if He is, in fact, God’s Son and the promised Messiah? Let’s see what the text reveals.

   As we return to John 7, remember that Jesus has arrived in Jerusalem midway through the Feast of Tabernacles. Last Sunday one of our church members asked me to break down the Feast of Tabernacles during the Q&A. To be honest, I was little rusty on my “feast” knowledge; so I told you I would cover that ground in this week’s message. However, I want you to know that I owe a great debt of gratitude to our own Elizabeth Blume, who is probably one of the most knowledgeable authorities on the biblical feasts in our entire city! She sent me some wonderful resources this week, so let me pass on what I have received; but before I do, let us all thank Elizabeth for humbly teaching the teacher!

   OK, the Feast of Tabernacles (also known as the Feast of Booths or the Feast of Shelters) was the last of seven feasts that the Jews observed each year. Take a few minutes today and read Leviticus 23 where all seven feasts are laid out and explained. In Lev. 23:33-43, God commands the Israelites to celebrate and rejoice unto the Lord following the harvest, from the 15th to the 22nd days of the seventh month (called Tishri). Tishri is typically in the month of October; in fact, this year the Jews will celebrate the Feast of Tabernacles on October 2-9.
Now, as the Israelites celebrated the harvest, they recalled God’s presence and provision for the Israelites after their exodus from Egypt, and their celebration included residing in temporary structures called “booths” or “tabernacles” according to God’s instruction in Lev. 23. So that is how the Feast became known as The Feast of Booths or the Feast of Shelters or the Feast of Tabernacles…depending on your English translation of the Hebrew word, “Sukkah.”

Now, if you recall, John told us last week that Jesus did not join his family on their annual trip to Jerusalem to observe the Feast of Tabernacles. Instead, he waited a few days, and then traveled in private, arriving in the capitol city a few days after the Feast had begun. According to Jesus, He was waiting until the perfect kairos opportunity. John also reports that early on in the Feast, the people in Jerusalem “were looking for him and saying, “Where is he?”

So, picking up the story, we read in vs. 14, “About the middle of the feast, Jesus went up into the temple and began teaching.”

Now, we don’t know exactly why Jesus chose the middle of the feast to enter the temple; but we do know that His sudden appearance in the temple should have reminded the people of Malachi 3:1, “Behold, I send my messenger, and he will prepare the way before me. And the Lord whom you seek will suddenly come to his temple…”

Do you see how Jesus perfectly fulfilled this Messianic prophecy from the prophet Malachi? One of the most compelling ways we know that Jesus is legit is this: Jesus is constantly fulfilling the prophecies of scripture. Many scholars have described in detail how Jesus fulfilled a myriad of predictions, references, and prophecies that pointed to the promised Messiah of God in the Old Testament. I will admit that some biblical teachers and scholars stretch some scriptures and even some of the things Jesus said and did to create a “fulfilled prophecy,” but there are many prophecies that Jesus fulfilled that are incredibly obvious and compelling. Such is why, for the Apostle John, “His own people” should have known that Jesus was their Messiah, though for reasons that we’ll see in our text today…they mostly missed it. There is a pamphlet available on Amazon for less than $3 called, 100 Prophecies Fulfilled by Jesus (show pic of the pamphlet). I encourage you to pick one up and see for yourself how Jesus is legitimized by fulfilling prophecies. Let us now look to our next subheading:

II. Subordination to the Father

Returning to the text, Jesus, the One whom they were seeking, suddenly appears in His temple, and He begins to teach. Now, we don’t know exactly what He said on this occasion, but we know it made the Jewish leaders “marvel.” However, their marveling totally misses the point. Listen to the reaction of the Jewish leaders in vs. 15: The Jews marveled saying, “How is it that this man has learning, when he has never studied?”

Talk about missing the point! Instead of dealing with WHAT Jesus said, these pompous leaders of the temple call into question His credentials. Jesus hails from Nazareth, so they are impressed that He can even read! But where does this guy get off teaching as though He is some kind of a learned Rabbi? He hasn’t been through “the process!” He can’t be legit! He did not study under the great and learned Rabbis like Nicodemus, or Paul’s teacher, Gamaliel. What’s more, when
Jesus teaches, He fails to quote the great, legendary Rabbis. In fact, Jesus never quotes anyone! He teaches as one with authority, but as one with no “credentials.”

Church, this reaction from the Jewish intelligentsia is painful but all too familiar, right? In our modern world of higher education and professional degrees, we practically idolize the “experts” in any field, right? However, if we don’t like what somebody is saying (even if it’s true!), we know we can call into question the credentials of the speaker.

Let’s face it: calling a person’s credentials into question is a convenient excuse for ignoring what they said. And that’s exactly what the temple leaders are doing. So, let’s hear how Jesus responds in vs. 16. Jesus answered them, “My teaching is not mine, but his who sent me. 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.”

Jesus makes two really important points here. First, Jesus resists the temptation of “originality.” Listen, everybody in the western world LOVES to think they are original, special, and somehow uniquely insightful. But learn from Jesus, people! To be legit is to know and to acknowledge that you are NOT original! Jesus resists claiming his “doctrine” as original, as something He came up with Himself. Jesus has come as God’s messenger, the Sent One, the Word made Flesh, and His teaching comes straight from the Father. Jesus is not communicating His original thoughts; He learns from the Father and passes along what He has heard to those who will listen.

The best song writers know this, by the way. They know their songs were given to them by God. The painters and the sculptors know their works came from God. The best doctors know their talents are only the means by which God accomplishes healing in their patients. The best scientists know they are only discovering what God has already put into place. The best judges know they are ruling on the law of morality and justice established by God Himself. No truly great and gifted person would ever come to the conclusion that they were “original.” As the great pre-Christian philosopher Plato observed, the “original”…the perfect, original form of every thought, song, and subject is in God’s mind…and whatever we are doing is an imperfect derivative of His perfection! Friends, please stop trying to convince the world that your music or your art or your ideas are “original.” You have nothing that does not first and finally belong to your Creator.

Let us now consider my third subheading:

**Knowing by Doing**

So how can we know that Jesus is legit? How can we know that the doctrine of Jesus is from God Almighty and not some novel concept conjured up by the carpenter’s son from Nazareth? Here’s what Jesus just said: “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.”

It’s in the “doing,” that we come into the “knowing.” You won’t KNOW that what Jesus said came from God (which authenticates His identity as God’s Son) unless you have committed your heart and your will to actually desire and to DO God’s will. That’s a loaded statement, so let’s put a teaching of Jesus to the test. Jesus taught in Matthew 5 that we are to love our enemies. He taught us to show our enemies kindness; to pray for our enemies; and to behave this way
because that’s what it means to be “sons of your Father.” Now…intellectually, “loving our enemy” sounds not only foolish, but dangerous. Such an “original” teaching would be the very kind of thing that people might think comes from the naïve carpenter’s twisted mind rather than the God of justice in heaven. So how do we know if this teaching of Jesus comes from the Father? We do it…we attempt to live it out as a means of obeying God’s will. And as we do it…as we seek to honor God by loving our enemies, what do we discover? We discover God’s pleasure…we witness God’s activity when our enemy is won over and becomes our friend…we observe within the experience of obedience that Jesus’ teaching aligns perfectly with God’s character of mercy, compassion, and forgiveness. But listen: you will never know just how brilliant this teaching of Jesus is…you will never know just how legit Jesus is…until your will is committed to do God’s will.

Here’s the problem with most people, including me on most days: we are committed to accomplishing our own will, and if God wishes to help with some kindly advice, we’re willing to hear what He has to say. If we don’t like what He has to say, we’ll discredit the messenger, right? If God’s word doesn’t jibe with our agenda, we’ll question just how trustworthy the Bible is. We’ll question the credentials of the speaker. We’ll twist the teaching of the Bible to fit our pre-determined agenda, or we’ll just dismiss the teaching altogether. As those who are fully bent on doing our own will, we should hardly hope to KNOW the power and brilliance of Jesus’ teaching as that which comes straight from God. However, should we repent of our stubborn and selfish motives; should we actually long to do God’s will…it is then that we will begin to know and find great conviction that the teachings of Jesus come straight from heaven…straight from the Father…and that is how we will know that Jesus is legit. Make sense? Let us now conclude with my fourth subheading:

IV. The One Who is True

Jesus finishes this line of thought with a powerful remark. It’s so powerful that I want you to stop texting, chatting, commenting, or cleaning something, and pay really close attention! In vs. 18 Jesus states: 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.

Church, hold this saying of Jesus close to your heart and use it as a filter for every book you read, every sermon you watch, and every speaker you listen to…including my sermons! Human teachers are incredibly inclined to seek their own glory…sadly, I am no exception. Apart from the grace of God, we all like to be thought of as brilliant, insightful, and God-forbid…original! You will find admirable, talented, charismatic “speakers” in every field who will no doubt impress you. They tell amazing stories; they speak with such authority; they don’t even use notes! But here is the question we should always be asking: whose glory do they seek?

Dr. Fredrich Bruner…a man who has served God’s church faithfully for many years, wrote these rather blunt, but accurate, words:

Jesus was not an original, he was a subordinate. This is exactly what makes Jesus and his message so original and superior. Isn’t this verse also an almost perfect definition—and indictment—of the (usual) topical sermon? Should a preacher or teacher ever speak in Church without attempting faithfully to exposit a given canonical text (to explain what Someone else said)? All self-expositing, self-selected sermons can seem to be so many quests for glory and
should probably be avoided at all costs. Jesus’ sentence deserves repeating, and pondering, “The person who talks on one’s own is a person seeking one’s own glory.”

Arthur Pink also gives a warning to the church:

Here is one test by which we may discover whether the preacher has been called of God to the ministry, or whether he ran without being sent. Does he magnify himself or the Lord? Does he seek his own glory, or the glory of God? Does he speak about himself or about Christ? Can he truthfully say with the apostle, “We preach not ourselves, but Christ Jesus our Lord” (II Cor. 4:5)? Is the general trend of his ministry, “Behold me,” or “Behold the church,” or “Behold the Lamb of God?”

Both of these quotes caused me to pause this week. It was not a happy pause. I reflected upon my twelve years of serving as your pastor…and it made me shudder. I would like to believe that I am a pastor who seeks to bring glory only to the Lamb of God; but I suspect that is not the case. I am incredibly capable of bringing glory to myself. In fact, I could write the book on how to bring glory to yourself while convincing people that you are actually quite humble. I think it’s a deadly skill commonly found amongst Lead Pastors of large churches. This conviction that I may actually be a glory seeker, knowingly or unknowingly, is so crushing that I would willingly resign my position as your pastor in a heartbeat. But I know that is not the Lord’s will for me. The Lord’s will for me is to repent, to do my job, and to seek His glory and His glory alone. Church, I do repent. I repent for every word I have ever said, every story I have ever told, every word I have ever written that glorifies Jim West. I ask for your forgiveness, even as I have asked for His forgiveness. My intent…truly…is to bring glory to the Lamb…that really is my heart’s desire. I long to be a person in whom there is no falsehood. But I’m not there yet. I still care too much about what you think of me; I still care too much about meeting your lofty expectations; I still care too much about my “legacy” and how my tenure as the Lead Pastor at Colonial will be remembered; I still care too much about how our church is perceived in this city; I still care too much about how you perceive my marriage and my parenting skills; I still care too much about my reputation…all of which has NOTHING to do with my first and primary purpose on planet earth—which is to glorify God. And Church, just so you know, that is your first and primary purpose on planet earth as well. Every person ever born was created to bring glory to God. So, before you throw the first stone, take a good hard look at your heart this week. Hold the light of the gospel up to your own reflection in the mirror and ask this penetrating question: whose glory do you seek? Do you speak on your own authority, or do you speak as one who has been sent by the Father into a hurting culture to serve as His ambassador of reconciliation? Do your stories glorify you or the Father? Do your talents glorify you or the Father? Do your accomplishments glorify you or the Father? Do your investments glorify you or the Father? Do your purchases glorify you or the Father? Does your charitable giving glorify you or the Father? Do your clothes glorify you or the Father? Do your degrees glorify you or the Father? Do your children glorify you or the Father? Does your spouse glorify you or the Father? Will your legacy…the MAIN thing that people will say about you when you’re gone…glorify you, or will your life ultimately and finally bring glory to the Father?

Have I made you uncomfortable? Listen to what Jesus said: “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”…He is legit…He is REAL “and in him/her, there is NO FALSEHOOD.”
You know what…I’m going to stop there. I’ll deal with the rest of our text next week. Your assignment this week is to shine the light of the gospel on yourself, and truly answer this question: whose glory do you seek?

I’m about to close in prayer, and then we will observe Holy Communion. So, before we enter into communion, may I suggest that we all take a minute and repent for stealing our Lord’s glory? Let’s repent for being glory-hounds; let’s repent for speaking on our own authority; let’s repent for caring so much about the legacy of our church or our reputation; let’s repent for doing anything that has caused the watching world to glorify us and not the Savior of the World.

Church, BEHOLD THE LAMB!!! Behold the Son of God crucified for our glory-hogging ways, and behold the Risen King who has forgiven you by His mercy and grace…He is the One we remember. He is the One we worship. He is the One we celebrate! He is the Master of the Harvest! He is the One who Has tabernacled amongst us! He is worthy of all the glory! His name is Jesus, and Church…He is Legit, amen? Let’s pray!