The Gospel of John: You Will Seek
John 7:14, 25-36

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25 Some of the people of Jerusalem therefore said, “Is not this the man whom they seek to kill? 26 And here he is, speaking openly, and they say nothing to him! Can it be that the authorities really know that this is the Christ? 27 But we know where this man comes from, and when the Christ appears, no one will know where he comes from.” 28 So Jesus proclaimed, as he taught in the temple, “You know me, and you know where I come from. But I have not come of my own accord. 29 I know him, for I come from him, and he sent me.” 30 So they were seeking to arrest him, but no one laid a hand on him, because his hour had not yet come. 31 Yet many of the people believed in him. They said, “When the Christ appears, will he do more signs than this man has done?”

My message will fall under three subheadings: 1) The Not-So-Hidden Messiah; 2) The Weight of Evidence; and 3) You Will Seek.

I. The Not-So-Hidden Messiah

As we return to the narrative in John 7, let me remind you of where we are. We are in Jerusalem during the annual Feast of Tabernacles. As we read in vs. 14, “About the middle of the feast Jesus went up into the temple and began teaching.” Now, if you recall, the teaching of Jesus drew a response from “the Jews” who questioned His credentials, and we saw how Jesus responded to “the Jews” who questioned Him in vss. 15-24. However, here in vs. 25, we will hear from a different group of people…those whom John describes as “some of the people from Jerusalem.” In vs. 25ff they say, “Is not this the man whom they seek to kill? And here he is, speaking openly, and they say nothing to him! Can it be that the authorities really know that this is the Christ? But we know where this man comes from, and when the Christ appears, no one will know where he comes from.”

Unlike the visiting crowd in the Temple we heard from last week who thought Jesus was crazy when He acknowledged those who were seeking to kill Him, these residents of Jerusalem have heard the rumors. They have heard that the temple leaders and authorities want Jesus dead. And so here in vs. 25 they are marveling at the courage of Jesus who is teaching boldly in the temple courts. They are wondering how it is that the temple authorities are allowing Him to teach when everyone in town knows they want Him dead. So, they hazard a theory: maybe the authorities really know that this is the Christ…that would explain why they dare not attempt to arrest Him. “But then again,” whisper the citizens of Jerusalem, “this man hails from Nazareth, and we all know that when the Christ appears, no one will know where he comes from.”

Let me explain that last part. The crowd in Jerusalem is articulating the oral tradition of “the hidden Messiah.” The tradition was based upon a saying that was quite popular in the ancient Jewish world, “Three things come wholly unexpected—Messiah, a God-send, and a scorpion.” In other words, it was assumed that the Messiah would suddenly appear, and no one would know where he came from! The hidden Messiah was clouded in mystery!
In the middle of the second century, Justin Martyr, an early church father, recorded a conversation he had with a Jewish leader named Trypho. In regards to the coming of the Messiah, Trypho is quoted as saying: “The Christ, even after his birth is to remain unknown and not even to know Himself and to be without power until Elijah comes and anoints Him and reveals Him to all.” (Dialogue with Trypho 8:4; cf. 110:1). This was the prevailing assumption surrounding the Messiah amongst the Jewish people, and that is obviously what we are observing in our passage here in John 7. Now…I know what some of you are thinking. Some of you are thinking that the life of Jesus as we learn about Him in the three synoptic gospels actually sounds pretty similar to what Trypho just said…and you’re not wrong. Jesus did remain generally unknown after His birth. The first 30 years of His life remains a mystery to this day. Many scholars have pondered how early Jesus knew of His destiny as the Christ of God, and we really don’t know the answer to that question. And who can ignore the remarkable story of Jesus’ baptism by John the Baptist…the Elijah-like forerunner of the Christ…who baptizes Jesus, proclaims Him to the world, and observes the Holy Spirit descend upon Jesus like a dove!!! So yes…the “hidden Messiah” assumptions of the Jewish people were not far off, and Jesus fulfilled that expectation. But remember, this crowd in Jerusalem doesn’t have the luxury of reading Matthew, Mark and Luke! Based upon what they know as people living in Jerusalem, Jesus is not quite “mysterious” enough. The crowds know that Jesus is from Nazareth, and as Nathaniel said in John 1:46, “Can anything good come from Nazareth?”

Church, don’t miss this. The common, humble nature of Jesus of Nazareth has been an offense to generations of people who assume that a “savior” should be “other-worldly.” Some people simply cannot accept a God who would send His Son to be so “common” and ordinary…they are convinced that God’s appearance in the world must be clouded in unusual and other-worldly mystery.

William Barclay thoughtfully reflects upon this tension in his commentary. Here’s what he writes:

This belief was characteristic of a certain attitude of mind which prevailed among the Jews and is by no means dead—that which seeks for God in the abnormal. They could never be persuaded to see God in ordinary things. They had to be extraordinary before God could be in them. The teaching of Christianity is just the reverse. If God is to enter the world only in the unusual, he will very seldom be in it; whereas if we can find God in the common things, it means that he is always present. Christianity does not look on this world as one which God very occasionally invades; it looks on it as a world from which he is never absent.

Friends, don’t overlook the brilliance of God’s incarnation as a common man from Nazareth…a man who ate and drank, loved and fought, walked and suffered and bled and died. Through Jesus, God became one of us, and His presence in the ordinary, common stuff of life has once and for all torn the curtain between the sacred and the secular. All of life…all of the common stuff of life--work, play, meals, washing, dressing, learning, fun, friendships, and the like bear the fingerprints of our Savior’s nail-scarred hands! Our God is Emmanuel, God with us, and He is never absent from the common, mundane circumstances of our common, earthly lives…thanks be to God! Our God is with us…all the time. As Jesus said, “I will not leave you nor forsake you…lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age!”
Now, upon hearing the grumbling of these Jerusalemites who were concerned with where Jesus was “from,” Jesus responds in vs. 28. John reports: 28 So Jesus proclaimed, as he taught in the temple, “You know me, and you know where I come from. But I have not come of my own accord. He who sent me is true, and him you do not know. 29 I know him, for I come from Him, and he sent me.”

The point is pretty clear: you may think you know me because of what town I grew up in, but you don’t know me. To know me would be to know why I came and the One who sent me…the True One. I know Him, for I come from Him, and He is the One who sent me. As one commentator writes, “His true origin is even more mysterious and august than that of the hidden Messiah of Jewish expectation; He comes, not from Rome or from the north, or from any unknown place of concealment, but direct from God Himself.” (Dodd, *Interpretation*, 89).

Here we feel the tension of the God/Man. The commoner known as Jesus of Nazareth is at once and the same time the Sent One from Heaven. He is both common and extraordinary; He is both a peasant and a King; He is both the Son of Mary and the Son of God! He is…the Sent One.

Church, if you’re paying attention, Jesus constantly refers to Himself as the “Sent One” and He constantly points to “the One who sent me.” Just in chapter 7 alone Jesus states that His teaching (vs. 16) is from “the One who sent me;” that Jesus seeks the glory (18) of “the One who sent him;” and now again Jesus states that the cause of His presence in Jerusalem is due to “the One who sent him” and the “the One who sent Him is true.” In John 6 Jesus said that He came to do the will of the One who sent Him; that no one could come to Him unless the One who sent him did the drawing; and that the work of God was believing in the One whom He had sent.

Can you see the irony? These citizens of Jerusalem withhold their faith due to “where Jesus came from;” and yet time and again, Jesus points to “where He came from” as the reason why people should place their trust in Him! Jesus came straight from the Father; He comes as the Father’s ambassador; as the mediator between God and men. He is the only means by which we will ever “come unto the Father,” (John 14:6). Jesus is “the Sent One.” He was sent for our salvation; and it is upon us, then, to respond to Jesus. As we respond to Jesus, so we respond to the One who sent Jesus, amen?

As we return to the narrative, John reports in vs. 30, “So they were seeking to arrest him, but no one laid a hand on him, because his hour had not yet come.” We’ve touched on this theme before, but remember that “the hour” represents God’s sovereign plan and timing for Jesus’ arrest, trial, crucifixion, resurrection, and ascension. Nobody can lay a hand upon Jesus until the hour of the Father’s choosing…and even then, those who think they are bringing an end to Jesus and His influence will actually serve God’s ultimate plan of redemption and cause the Gospel to be spread to the ends of the earth! Let us now consider my second subheading:

**II. The Weight of Evidence**

In vs. 31 John observes, “Yet many of the people believed in him. They said, ‘When the Christ appears, will he do more signs than this man has done?’” I won’t linger here, but we should acknowledge the reasonableness of these Jerusalemites who believe in Jesus. Jesus never asked the watching world to place our trust in Him as an act of blind faith. Jesus asked us to believe based upon what He said and what He did. Nobody in history has ever taught
like Jesus, and nobody in history has “done signs” like this one man did. No one has been said to heal the sick, make the blind to see, make the lame to walk, and make the dead to live other than this man…Jesus of Nazareth. In fact, when John the Baptist struggled with his faith while locked away in prison…when John the Baptist sent his disciples to ask Jesus if He was, in fact, the Promised One, Jesus instructed the messengers to go back and report to John what they had seen and heard (Luke 7:22): And he answered them, “Go and tell John what you have seen and heard: the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, the poor have good news preached to them.”

Make no mistake church, Jesus Himself certainly believed that what He did, as well as what He said, should have provided enough EVIDENCE to lead us to the same reasonable conclusion that some of these Jerusalem citizens arrived at here in John 7. But here’s what we know: even in those cities where Jesus performed so many signs and wonders…the majority of souls refused to repent and place their faith in Him. Such is why Jesus laments over the cities of Chorazin, Bethsaida, and Capernaum in Matthew 11, saying “Woe to you…if the mighty works done in you had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago…”

Church, we are accountable for what we have seen and heard. We are accountable for that which has been passed down to us about all that Jesus accomplished. Even to this day the testimonies of those who have been healed, transformed, and even brought back to life by Jesus are shared every day all over the world. Let us refrain from asking for more signs and wonders, as though our Lord has not already done quite enough on our behalf! The weight of evidence is sufficient: Jesus Christ is Lord, amen? That means we should repent and turn to Him in faith for the forgiveness of our sins. The weight of evidence demands an answer; and now is the time to respond. Let us now turn to my third and final subheading:

III. You Shall Seek

In the vs. 32 we read: “The Pharisees heard the crowd muttering these things about him, and the chief priests and Pharisees sent officers to arrest him.

You can cut the tension here with a knife. The more people in Jerusalem believe in Jesus as the Messiah, the more the religious authorities want Him off the streets. It is no longer the zealous Pharisees alone who oppose Jesus; we now hear for the first time that the chief priests are getting involved. There was only one acting chief priest of the Jews, which was a position appointed by the Roman occupiers. However, once a chief priest, always a chief priest…not unlike the way we refer to past presidents as Mr. President, so that is why John refers to them in the plural. Whereas the Pharisees were highly religious people with no power; the chief priests were another matter. Once the chief priests got involved, the power and authority of the Sanhedrin came into play. We should likely assume that the “officials” sent to arrest Jesus comprised of a few members of the Sanhedrin along with men from the temple guard.

Now, what follows next in vs. 33 may have been something Jesus said in response to this group sent to arrest Him, or it may be a stand alone saying that Jesus said in the temple that John thinks relevant to this turn of events.
Jesus then said, “I will be with you a little longer, and then I am going to him who sent me. You will seek me and you will not find me. Where I am you cannot come.”

Jesus reveals that this is the time appointed for Him to be amongst human beings on earth, and then the time will come to an end; in fact, only a short time remains. Then, Jesus will return to the One who sent Him. Once He exits this earthly stage, no amount of searching will reveal His whereabouts. Where Jesus is going, no mortal man may follow.

We know that Jesus is referring to his imminent crucifixion, resurrection, and ascension. Clearly the Father has made known to Jesus that which is to come, and all the power of the Sanhedrin is but a speck of dust in the wind as compared to the sovereign providence of God’s plan for Jesus.

Now, those hearing Jesus are naturally confused and bewildered by this saying. The Jews said to one another, “Where does this man intend to go that we will not find him? Does he intend to go to the Dispersion among the Greeks and teach the Greeks? What does he mean by saying, ‘You will seek me and you will not find me,’ and, ‘Where I am you cannot come’?”

Notice that the Jews are actually mocking Jesus a bit here. They theorize that once failing to gather a significant following in Jerusalem, Jesus will set out to the surrounding regions and try to recruit the Gentiles! Little did they know that following the death and resurrection of Jesus, the Gospel would spread powerfully amongst the Gentiles! And they would have been shocked to know that the chief evangelist would be one of their own…a young, zealous Pharisee that went by the name of Saul from the city of Tarsus!

Now…I want to wrap up my message by reflecting a bit on what Jesus says here at the end in vs. 33. Even though Jesus was certainly speaking to the specific time and occasion that God appointed Him to walk the earth and then to return to sit at the right hand of the Father, His teaching here points beyond itself and speaks to our situation today.

First of all, let us consider the urgency of what Jesus just said, “I will be with you a little longer, and then I am going…” The Gospel is always presented with this sense of urgency. The time for people to repent and place their confidence in Jesus is now…while we are still breathing air, while our hurts burn with conviction and we still feel remorse regarding our sins against God and others. Jesus never comes to a person with the invitation to “think about it and get back to me at your leisure!” Instead, the message of Jesus regularly carries with it a “now or never” sense of urgency. When Jesus called people to follow Him, the ask was NOW. When the Holy Spirit brings conviction upon a sin-sick soul, the prompting to repent is not “eventually,” it is always NOW…before it’s too late.

Church, our time is winding down. Not one of us is guaranteed a tomorrow. Christ has come to save us, to redeem our souls, and to lead us into the heavenly city where we might enjoy His everlasting presence and walk amongst the redeemed. But now is the time when salvation is offered…now is the time when repentance is still a path we can take and so receive the forgiveness of our sins, purchased by the Lamb of God on our behalf. But this window of time is limited. The door will not always remain open. As Jesus taught in Luke 13: When once the master of the house has risen and shut the door, and you begin to stand outside and to knock at the door, saying, ‘Lord, open to us,’ then he will answer you, ‘I do not know where you come from.’ Then you will begin to say, ‘We ate and drank in your presence, and you taught in our streets.’ But he will say, ‘I tell you, I do not know where you come
from. Depart from me, all you workers of evil!’ Do you hear His sense of urgency? The teaching of Jesus is consistent in this regard: there is always an urgency to the Gospel…it is now or never.

Why? Because Jesus can only be found when He makes Himself available to be found. Jesus is not our genie in a bottle. Jesus has come for us, and He has offered Himself to us for a time. Should we refuse Him long enough, He will depart from us. Once Jesus departs from us, when that door closes, it will be too late.

Consider these haunting words that Jesus speaks to those who now mock Him and seek to arrest Him: “You will seek me, and you will not find me. For where I am, you cannot come.”

Church, a day will come for all human souls when we will stand under the judgement of Almighty God. No human will escape this fate. We are all accountable, and as we heard Jesus say last week, “Not one of you keeps the law.” As our case is presented and we review the events of our lives, there will be no place to hide. Jesus states in Luke 8:17, “All that is hidden will be revealed.” I don’t know about you, but for me, that is a horrifying concept to consider.

And on that day, as our sentence is read aloud, on that day we will seek Jesus…all people will seek Jesus. All the world will seek the One who offered Himself to us; we will look for the One whose blood purchased our forgiveness; we will look for the Lamb who takes away the sins of the world. But alas, for those who refused Him in the time when He was offered, it will be too late. They will seek Jesus, but they will not find Him. For where Jesus is, they cannot come…ever. The door will close, and those unredeemed souls will spend an eternity apart from the Lamb. They will spend an eternity subject to that idolatrous “other,” a master of their own choosing, the one whom they adored in their days on earth, he who wears many faces and hides behind many names…the dark one who will show no pity, no mercy, and give them no rest.

Friends, Jesus is passing by even now. The pounding of your heart reveals the presence of the Holy Spirit, calling you to repent, to give your life to the One who gave His life for you. Call upon the name of the Lord while there is still time; seek Him now while He can be found; and seek His face every day for the rest of your life. Jesus is passing by…it is now…or never.

Will you pray with me?