

Are We Following the True Jesus?

John 7:25-44

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If you live in University City like I do, you may know about the Feast of Booths or Tabernacle. It occurs in the Fall and is still celebrated by Jews today. Where we pick up the story, Jesus' brothers were on their way to celebrate this same festival. They and the crowd wondered who this Jesus really is.

This question still is debated today. Who is this Jesus guy? The question for you and me in church today is "Are we following the true Jesus...or some suspicions of who we think he may be?"

Lets' look at our story beginning in verse 25.

John 7:25 At that point some of the people of Jerusalem began to ask, "Isn't this the man they are trying to kill?²⁶ Here he is, speaking publicly, and they are not saying a word to him. Have the authorities really concluded that he is the Christ?²⁷ But we know where this man is from; when the Christ comes, no one will know where he is from."

²⁸ Then Jesus, still teaching in the temple courts, cried out, "Yes, you know me, and you know where I am from. I am not here on my own, but he who sent me is true. You do not know him,²⁹ but I know him because I am from him and he sent me."

³⁰ At this they tried to seize him, but no one laid a hand on him, because his time had not yet come.³¹ Still, many in the crowd put their faith in him. They said, "When the Christ comes, will he do more miraculous signs than this man?"

³² The Pharisees heard the crowd whispering such things about him. Then the chief priests and the Pharisees sent temple guards to arrest him.³³ Jesus said, "I am with you for only a short time, and then I go to the one who sent me.³⁴ You will look for me, but you will not find me; and where I am, you cannot come."

³⁵ The Jews said to one another, "Where does this man intend to go that we cannot find him? Will he go where our people live scattered among the Greeks, and teach the Greeks?³⁶ What did he mean when he said, 'You will look for me, but you will not find me,' and 'Where I am, you cannot come'?"

³⁷ On the last and greatest day of the Feast, Jesus stood and said in a loud voice, "If anyone is thirsty, let him come to me and drink.³⁸ Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, streams of living water will flow from within him."³⁹ By this he meant the Spirit, whom those who believed in him were later to receive. Up to that time the Spirit had not been given, since Jesus had not yet been glorified.

You've heard the jokes before about not knowing where we are going, but making good time, right? Usually I have a good sense of direction and understand myself to be a decent guide. But on one mission trip to Guatemala, my inner compass lost its true north.

We were walking to a certain spot in a city and I was in the lead. I roughly knew how to get there...you just travel that way and sooner or later...well you can imagine how this little jaunt went. We wandered and wandered, and by the time we saw the same site the second then the third time, some in the group determined it was time to follow someone whose compass was working!

This group was following me because they thought I knew where I was going and so did I. But the truth is I was leading them in the wrong direction. It would have helped if I had a good map to show us where to go.

On that day I misunderstood where I was going and led the group in the wrong direction. Sometimes our hearts are led off the pathway of following Jesus because we misunderstand who he is. We have assumptions and thoughts about God and at times, these assumptions are not true. We misunderstand who Jesus is, what he wants for us, what he calls us to do in this world.

We need to continue to return to the map, the Word of God, to ensure we understand him correctly, see him with clear eyes and submit ourselves to follow him wherever he leads.

In our text this morning, Jesus calls us to follow him, not in the way the crowds and world define him, misunderstand him. He provides for us to know him.

I. Don't follow the Misunderstood Jesus

In Jesus' day, the crowds had differing understandings of who he was and what he came to do. That's not all that different from today, is it? After he had gone to the Temple and began to teach, the crowd listening catalogued their objections to him. He couldn't possibly be the one the Jews waited for. There were too many discrepancies and oddities about him.

a. Faulty Origin (verse 27)

He can't be the Christ because, **John 7:27** says: But we know where this man is from; when the Christ comes, no one will know where he is from."

The Jews thought that the Messiah would be unknown by the crowds until he came to fully and completely bring about the salvation of Israel. When he emerged, there would

be no doubt as to who he was. There would be no debate about whether he is or is not the Messiah. He couldn't be the Christ. His plan of action seemed weak. He wasn't kicking out the oppressive Romans. He was preaching and instructing people's hearts.

b. Looking to Miracles (verse 31)

Some began to wonder about him because of what he could do for them. **John 7:31** Still, many in the crowd put their faith in him. They said, "When the Christ comes, will he do more miraculous signs than this man?"

Jesus' miracles split the crowd in two. Some wanted to follow him because of what he **could** do for them. Verse 31 can be summarized like this: "Will we get a better deal anywhere else? Are you waiting for somebody better? This guy can give us bread." The other group, the leaders, were afraid because his spectacular deeds led the crowds away from them. They feared losing power to this man who could provide bread.

The two groups misunderstood Jesus. One group considered following him simply because of what they could get out of him. That kind of faith won't last because Jesus has not come to make life easy or peaceful or simple for his people. He has come to employ us in a struggle against our flesh, the world and the devil. He calls us to fight against the sin in our lives. Following him simply for some temporary benefit like a full belly won't get us very far. Miracles simply point us to the type of Savior Jesus is and what his best is for our lives.

Certainly the leaders misunderstood him by thinking they could control him. If we don't understand him and fear his power, we must silence him. Friends, none of us will fully understand all his ways, yet trying to muzzle his work in our lives or in the world puts us at odds with his great plan of redemption. We don't have to understand everything about his plan in order to submit it, to submit to him.

c. Faulty Kingship (verse 42)

A third misunderstanding of Jesus was whether he could be truly king, because the Jews knew the Messiah would come from the line of David. They wondered, "Does not the Scripture say that the Christ will come from David's family and from Bethlehem, the town where David lived?" (verse 42)

This is especially tragic because as we know and readers of the Gospels know, Jesus was from Bethlehem, from the line of David. The crowds thought they knew him, but didn't. Often people operate from assumptions about who Jesus could or should be without taking the time to study and investigate the truth about him from his Word.

Do we have misunderstandings of Jesus in our culture, within our own hearts? Most certainly we do. We've discussed some already: considering him the cosmic candy machine – we will follow him simply for what we can get out of him today. He can make my life easy and remove my struggle, so I'll follow. The problem is that simply isn't true.

Another way we Christians misunderstand Jesus is that we say to ourselves, "Jesus wants us to be happy." I have to do what I have to do in order to be happy. That is true in a certain sense. Proverbs 3:13 says Happy is the man who finds wisdom, the man who gains understanding, but the sort of happiness that God desires for us is the one seeking and living out his wisdom. God has designed our lives in pursuit of holiness; happiness and true joy is a genuine byproduct of his holiness and wisdom working its way throughout our whole lives.

How have you misunderstood Jesus? Do you have faulty perceptions about his role in your life that need to be brought into line with the truth of who he is?

II. Follow the Real Jesus

The really good news is that Jesus teaches us over and over again exactly who he is. He defines for us his role and will for our life, and we turn to Jesus' self-disclosure in this passage.

a. A Person only He could be

Jesus' brothers had gone up to the Feast of Tabernacles to celebrate this important religious observance. You may recall from earlier in chapter 7 that Jesus did not go with his brothers. They taunted him saying things like if you are who you say, then do your deeds in public. They didn't believe. Jesus didn't go with them to the celebration. He went to the Temple to teach, which is more spectacular.

The Feast of Tabernacles was a seven day feast to commemorate God's provision for the people when they wandered in the desert after the Exodus. He brought them water in the desert, twice miraculously from a rock. He provided food for them and a harvest.

Each of the seven days the High Priest would go fill a ceremonial jar with water from the pool of Siloam and march in procession with the water back to the Temple. As the procession entered the inner court of the temple the people would blow the shofar, the ram's horn, and sing Psalms 113-118. When they reached the end, the water would be poured out before the Lord as a thank offering for what he had done to provide water for them, to quench their thirst. They celebrated a God who could supply endlessly what they need, even in desperate circumstances of wandering in the desert. It pointed

them with anticipation of the age of the Messiah, when they believed that water would flow from the sacred rock and flood the whole earth with living water!¹

Also in the Old Testament background stands Ezekiel 47, which speaks of the age when the Son of Man (Jesus) would observe water, living water, flowing from the temple so that he lands around them are flooded. This water that flowed would be living water, turning the death of the salt water into fresh, life-giving water. When the Messiah draws near, he would do what only he could do: pour forth life and joy from the presence of the Lord. Little did they know their Messiah stood among them.

Now do you see the significance of Jesus going to the Temple to teach? He didn't need to go celebrate the Feast, he came to proclaim that the age they celebrated had drawn near! He proclaimed that the one you wait for is near, standing right next to you, ruling, teaching, leading, pouring forth life into you if you only care to listen.

Jesus stepped into their religious celebration and said **I AM HERE!** God's provision for your most basic needs has drawn near and I stand among you! I have come and you wait no longer. Your God is near.

What does it mean for you and me to follow Jesus, since he is NEAR to us? It means to take note of what he's doing in your life and following there. His leading may take us to places we don't want to go, expose things in our lives we'd rather keep hidden, but he is near, giving us life that only he can give. He will be present with us in circumstances we can barely withstand. He can reach into the depths and darkness of life and speak truth and have our soul well up with living water.

It means to have eyes that look for Jesus at work in the everyday circumstances of life. In kind words spoken. In repentance offered when we didn't expect it. In the miracle of healing in someone's life who we thought was on death's door. In the miracle of spiritual life in a person who we love and thought we never see trust Jesus. In our own hearts when we feel him stir after a season of feeling alone. When we find strength to turn from sin that has trapped us and yet by some gift of a Jesus who is NEAR me in the midst of my struggle, giving energy and strength and life to fight against that present sin just one more day.

Do you feel Jesus near you? He has come to proclaim the age of the Messiah is here. He has come to pour out life for you and me? Can you see him at work in your life?

b. A Job Only He Can Do (verses 33-34)

¹ Carson, D.A. *The Gospel According to John, PNTC* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), p. 321-322.

When the Pharisees came to try to arrest Jesus, he made a cryptic remark to them that we understand as readers of the Gospel. Jesus said, "I am with you for only a short time, and then I go to the one who sent me.³⁴ You will look for me, but you will not find me; and where I am, you cannot come." (verses 33-34)

As you can imagine, the leaders were non-plussed by the response of Jesus. They added their own quips in vs. 35-36 intimating there is no where he can go beyond their reach. If we want to arrest him, we can find him! Even if he goes all the way to the Greeks, we can find him because we have people there too.

What is Jesus talking about? To close readers of the Gospel, Jesus is talking about his journey to glory, returning to his Father, which leads through the cross. He is about the plan of redemption to purchase sinners by giving his life for ours. He is returning to his Father in heaven in glory planning his return to gather all of us into a glorious new heavens and new earth one day. In short, Jesus was going to do the work that only he could do: give his life as a ransom for our sins. His plan was to fix the brokenness of this world and restore its glory.

He **alone** can fix the brokenness of this world, but that doesn't stop us from thinking we have the power to fix ourselves, or this world. Maybe you can identify with me. At times I really want to...and think I can...fix the people around me.

I have a friend who is gay, a very close friend, and for years, I've wanted to fix him, talk him into health and restoring relationships. I've pled with him. Said harsh things to him. Given him space. And yet, frequently, **my efforts** ended up alienating in a lot of ways because he has felt like my project to fix. All that work to pressure him into change, and in reality, I didn't often turn to God, who can really change his heart. I wanted to fix him, and haven't gone about seeking his change in the power of God, who alone can do it! I think if we are honest, we do this with all kinds of relationships. With friends, spouses, and especially children.

We work and struggle against sin and evil, but it is only Jesus who can fix this world. We don't have that power or responsibility.

What's the difference in trusting our efforts versus Jesus'? Trying to fix others looks like confidence in our abilities, our ability to argue someone well enough to change their mind. We think that if we present a compelling case strong enough, or apply enough pressure to their life then they will comply.

I'm certainly not saying we should not plead, apply consequences or work hard for change in our life or someone else's. I believe in that. I believe wholeheartedly in seeking counseling for broken lives. **The difference in our trying to fix others versus taking them to Jesus is our sense of helplessness!** Trusting Jesus embraces our

helplessness versus trusting our strategies will work without his supernatural involvement.

How many of you adults have tried to set up a TV, with digital cable, a DVR, and a DVD player attached? I have. It is complicated...to me. You plug all these cords into unmarked holes, lines running this way and that. It is a maze for me to try and fix myself. In reality I'm helpless when I am confident in my abilities to get it right. Utter helplessness. But if I call someone, the repair man, or even better yet...a teenager, they can whip it into shape in just a few minutes. You must call upon the right person, the person who has the ability and the power.

We are helpless to try to ultimately and eternally redeem others, to repair the holes in their hearts, to redeem their lives from wreckage. Jesus isn't helpless. He is strong to save, to do the work only He can.

Paul Miller reminded me this week that the more mature we become in our walk with Christ, the more helpless we become in our own estimation and the stronger he becomes. He is filled with glory, we are helpless, relying on his strength. The more mature we become in our faith, the more we rest on the truth that Jesus alone can do his work. We pray more because we see that we are weak and he is strong. We may find ourselves talking to the person less about their need and talking to Jesus more about it.²

We work hard to bring hope to the hopeless, to repair brokenness in lives precisely because we know that Jesus is at work. If we try to fix others, we can be left feeling burdened and despair when things don't go according to plan. But because Jesus is at work doing the work only he can do, you and I can fight and struggle for health and holiness in this life. We struggle and we pray.

We put no trust in government to ultimately and eternally repair lives. On this July 4th weekend, we recognize there is no bailout plan to repair a soul, to restore a broken life other than the work that Jesus can do.

If want to see humility in our children or friends, not our job to humiliate them into humility. Being harsh or critical. The BEST thing we can do is pray for them along with our pointing them to Jesus in his Word, because we can't fix their hearts. But Jesus is in the business of redeeming this broken world. Turn yourself to him and fight for his work.

c. A Gift Only He Can Give

But what do we do when we fight and seem to have given all we have to give? What do we do when the well of our soul runs dry?

² Miller, Paul. A Praying Life (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 2009), p. 56.

John 7:37 On the last and greatest day of the Feast, Jesus stood and said in a loud voice, "If anyone is thirsty, let him come to me and drink.³⁸ Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, streams of living water will flow from within him." By this he meant the Spirit, whom those who believed in him were later to receive.

Jesus hasn't left us alone to fight. He has given us a profound gift of the Holy Spirit. That Spirit, he says bubbles up life from within our souls. Remember the image of the living water from the feast and Ezekial 47. This is water that gives life, can change the death of salty water to fresh. Jesus sends the Spirit so we can experience the life of Christ welling up within us. He takes what belongs to Jesus and gives those blessings to his children.

The Spirit changes us from the inside out, brings forth life into our souls when we feel like we don't have anything left to give ourselves. When we are in the darkness and despairing, the Holy Spirit shows us the life of Jesus springing forth within us. He replenishes our soul with his well of living water that will never run out. When you feel your well is dry, cry out to the One who can give living water, His life within us. He is here and will not leave us alone.