

Message #29

Kurt Hedlund

John

7/8/2018

## RESPONDING TO JESUS

### JOHN 7:37-52

I.

Christmas is probably the most celebrated holiday around the world--- although Eastern Orthodox Christians celebrate it at a different time than Christians in the West do. In terms of civic holidays, probably Independence Day is the most significant holiday for us in the US. It is, after all, our nation's birthday. Historian James McPherson, Professor Emeritus at Princeton University, says that the most memorable Independence Day in US history was July 4, 1863.

At 10 AM on that day the United States Military Telegraph transmitted this message: **“The President announces to the country that news from the Army of the Potomac... is such as to cover that Army with the highest honor, to promise a great success to the cause of the Union, and to claim the condolence of all for the many gallant fallen. And that for this, he especially desires that on this day, He whose will, not ours, should ever be done, be everywhere remembered and revered with profoundest gratitude. ABRAHAM LINCOLN.”** The reference was to victory at Gettysburg. Two hours later, General Ulysses S. Grant accepted the surrender of the Confederate army at Vicksburg, Mississippi.

The first century historian Josephus says that the biggest holiday in Judea in his day was the Feast of Tabernacles. It was actually an eight day feast. It was the best attended feast, or holiday, of the year. It was the climax of the religious calendar of the Jews. The center of festivities was the temple in Jerusalem. The most memorable Feast of Tabernacles in Israel's history is described in the passage before us this morning. We are going to examine it to see what continuing significance it has for us.

We have reached the conclusion of #7 in John's Gospel. Tension is growing as Jesus shows up in the middle of the feast to teach in the temple. He came late because He was aware that the Jewish leaders were already wanting to kill Him. We saw last week that there were divided opinions expressed toward Jesus. But the religious leaders put out a warrant for His arrest. Today we will see how the plot continues to unfold.

I.

So we are going to begin by looking at vv. 37-39 of #7 in John's Gospel, which is p. 893 in the black Bibles under many of the chairs, as we consider THE CLEAR INVITATION (PROJECTOR ON--- I. THE CLEAR INVITATION). According to vv. 37 & 38, **"On the last day of the feast, the great day, Jesus stood up and cried out, 'If anyone thirsts, let him come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, "Out of his heart will flow rivers of living water."'"**

One of the Old Testament descriptions of the foundation of this annual observance is found in Leviticus #23 vv. 39-43. (LEVITICUS 23:39) There we read, **"On the fifteenth day of the seventh month, when you have gathered in the produce of the land, you shall celebrate the feast of the Lord seven days.** So part of the purpose of this feast was to give thanks for the fall harvest. **On the first day shall be a solemn rest, and on the eighth day shall be a solemn rest.** So the detailed ceremonies, only partially described here, happened on the seven days of the feast. On the eighth day there was a separate Sabbath day. So sometimes the Feast of Tabernacles is described as a seven day feast. Sometimes it is described as an eight day feast.

(LEVITICUS 23:40) Verse 40: **"And you shall take on the first day the fruit of splendid trees, branches of palm trees and boughs of leafy trees and willows of the brook, and you shall rejoice before the Lord your God seven days.** (LEVITICUS 23:41) **You shall celebrate it as a feast to the Lord for seven days in the year. It is a statute forever throughout your generations; you shall celebrate it in the seventh month.** (LEVITICUS 23:42) **You shall dwell in booths for seven days. All native Israelites shall dwell in booths...** These were tent like structures that were put together with tree branches. Still today religious Jews will make these booths in their backyards or on their balconies to observe this holiday. (LEVITICUS 23:43) **that your generations may know that I made the people of Israel dwell in booths when I brought them out of the land of Egypt: I am the Lord your God."** So the feast was also designed to remind the Jews of how God provided for their ancestors during the forty years that they wandered in the wilderness after their escape from Egypt.

The same basic rituals and ceremonies were followed on each of the seven days of the feast. (PROJECTOR OFF) The events on the eighth day were different. Booths were dismantled. Different sacrifices were made. People prepared to go home. The events in our passage are said to happen on the last day of the feast, the great day. There is uncertainty about which day is being described. Some early sources seem to describe day eight as the last day of the feast. Some sources seem to describe day seven as the great day of the feast.

Alfred Edersheim was born into a religious Jewish family in Vienna, Austria. He studied at the University of Vienna. He went to Hungary and became a Christian. In England and Scotland he became a pastor and scholar. In the 1880s he wrote a massive two volume book entitled *The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah*. Conservative scholars who write on the life of Jesus still all refer to this book. I tell you this to say that Alfred Edersheim says that the day in view in our story is the seventh day of the feast. If that is indeed the case, then we know in considerable detail what happened as background to our story. For the ancient Jewish writings known as the Talmud describe in detail the procedure that was followed in Jerusalem in observance of this feast.

The passage that we looked at last week described what Jesus did on one day in the middle of the feast. Apparently Jesus laid low until this last day of the feast. Now He made a dramatic appearance on this great day of the feast. To appreciate what Jesus said and did, you need to know the rituals that were followed that led up to His dramatic proclamation.

Early on this morning religious pilgrims showed up at the temple. In their left hands they would carry a small bundle of branches, as was described in Leviticus #23. Branches seemed to symbolize the vegetation that their ancestors encountered in their wilderness journey. The piece of fruit in their right hand symbolized the promise of fruitfulness that awaited them in the Promised Land.

There would then follow a procession that would be led by a priest carrying a golden goblet. (PROJECTOR ON--- SILOAM ROAD) Pilgrims would follow the priest as he headed south of the temple down to the pool of Siloam. That pool was fed by an aqueduct that came from a spring on the east side of the city. There the priest would fill his goblet with water from the pool carved out of the rock. This part of the ceremony was designed to remind the people about the dramatic incidents which occurred toward the beginning of the forty years and toward the end of the forty years. In both of those incidents, Moses was commanded by God to call water out of a rock to provide for the thirst of the people.

As the priest took the water out of the pool, the religious pilgrims chanted words that came from Isaiah #55 v. 1 and Isaiah #12 v. 3: **“Ho! Everyone who thirsts, come to the waters. Joyously draw water from the springs of salvation!”** (TEMPLE 01) Then the priest and the pilgrims would return to the temple in time for the usual morning sacrifice. Upon their entrance to the temple, they were greeted by three blasts from a shofar.

The pilgrims would proceed to go toward the inner temple courtyard. (JERUSALEM TEMPLE 8) The women had to stop in this courtyard surrounding the outer walls of this inner temple. The Jewish men, as many as could fit, would proceed into the outer courtyard of this inner structure. The priest with his water would go into the courtyard right in front of the Holy Place. There is where the altar of burnt offering was located.

(TEMPLE ALTAR) The priest then walked up the ramp to this altar of burnt offering. On one side of it was a spout. Into this spout he poured the water from the Pool of Siloam. That water drained out beneath the altar. This was done as an expression of faith in the coming Messianic kingdom. For in Ezekiel #47 we are told that when the Messiah comes to rule over His earthly kingdom, water will flow from under the altar of the temple to make a stream that flows toward the east. This stream will grow in size and depth. When it reaches the Dead Sea, the salty waters of that sea will become fresh and life will appear in it and beside it.

At this point the worshipers would recite from memory Psalms 113-118. The Levites would lead them in chanting this antiphonally. (TEMPLE 3) Thousands of worshipers were packed into this area, and they were all reciting Psalms 113-118. At the same time they would shake the branches in their left hands and the fruit in their right hands toward the altar.

Toward the end of this recital (PSALM 118: 19-20) they would be quoting the closing words of Psalm 118: **“Open to me the gates of righteousness, that I may enter through them and give thanks to the Lord. This is the gate of the Lord; the righteous shall enter through it. (PSALM 118:21-22) I thank you that you have answered me and have become my salvation. The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone.** Who is the stone who will be rejected? It is Jesus. (PSALM 118:23-24) **This is the Lord’s doing; it is marvelous in our eyes. This is the day that the Lord has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it.** Do you remember the song that we sang earlier--- “This is the Day?” This was a day that was truly unique and special. This was truly a day for rejoicing. For Israel’s Messiah was about to reveal Himself.

(PSALM 118:25-26) **Save us, we pray, O Lord! O Lord, we pray, give us success! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! We bless you from the house of the Lord.** Who was it who should be the object of their blessing and prayer? Who was it who came to save them? He was standing right there among them. (PSALM 118:27) **The Lord is God, and he has made his light to shine upon us. Bind the festal sacrifice with cords, up to the horns of the altar!** Who was about to be bound and to serve as a sacrifice for them? He was standing right there among them. (PSALM 118:28-29) **You are my God, and I**

**will give thanks to you; you are my God; I will extol you. Oh give thanks to the Lord, for he is good; for his steadfast love endures forever!** Who was Israel's God? He was standing right there among them.

It was at this point in the ceremony where there was a moment of reverential silence before animal sacrifices were offered on the altar. (TEMPLE 3) It was at this point in the ceremony, in the midst of thousands of worshipers, when Alfred Edersheim says that Jesus cried out: **"If anyone thirsts, let him come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, 'Out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.'"** Jesus was the rock who provided water for their ancestors in the wilderness. Jesus was the One who would provide water in the temple in the Messianic kingdom. Jesus was the One who had come to provide salvation for His people. Jesus was the One who soon would be bound to provide the final sacrifice for the sins of the people. Jesus was the Messiah who had come to provide salvation for His people.

It was a stunning, never-to-be forgotten moment. I can imagine that some of His disciples reacted, "I can't believe that He is doing this. Doesn't He realize that the religious leaders are going to seize Him right now and haul Him off to jail?" I can imagine that another disciple like Peter, who had a reputation for impulsiveness, who could be an in-your-face kind of guy, could have reacted, "Yes, Jesus. Stick it to them. Now is your chance, people, to recognize Jesus for who He is." (PROJECTOR OFF)

Jesus' message is as relevant today as it was in the first century. "If anyone thirsts, let him come to me and drink." If there is something missing in your life, if your inner soul is seeking something more, if career success or money or pleasure or addictions have not provided ultimate satisfaction, come to Jesus.

The promise of v. 38 is that by virtue of a connection with Jesus, we can have an overflowing life. This is consistent with the promise that Jesus made to the Samaritan woman in #4. (PROJECTOR ON-- 4:14). There in v. 14 He told her, **"...but whoever drinks of the water that I will give him will never be thirsty again. The water that I will give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life."**

Jesus in our passage says that this promise is consistent with Scripture, that is, the Old Testament. There is no one verse that says this exactly. Probably Jesus is referring to a number of Old Testament passages. Among these would be Isaiah 12 v. 3 and Isaiah #44:3. (ISAIAH 12:3). Isaiah 12 v. 3 says, **"With joy you will draw water from the wells of salvation."** Chapter 44 v. 3 (ISAIAH 44:3) declares, **"For I will pour water on the thirsty land, and streams on the dry ground; I will pour my Spirit upon your offspring,**

**and my blessing on your descendants.”** As a result of our connection with Jesus, the promise is that we will become a channel of blessing to the rest of the world.

In v. 39 of our passage the Apostle John adds this comment about the words of Jesus (PROJECTOR OFF), **“Now this he said about the Spirit, whom those who believed in him were to receive, for as yet the Spirit had not been given, because Jesus was not yet glorified.”**

The Holy Spirit was around in Old Testament times. He came upon some believers for special empowerment. But there was no promise of a permanent presence within the lives of believers. That was to change at Pentecost. What was necessary was the death of Christ. Calvary was the necessary antecedent to Pentecost. It was after the death of Jesus that the Holy Spirit would come to live permanently within every genuine believer.

Notice that in v. 38 that this presence of the Holy Spirit is a promise to everyone who believes in Jesus. Salvation brings the presence and fullness of the Holy Spirit. There is no necessity for a second work of grace to accomplish this.

Thus we have the invitation from Jesus, which was applicable then and now, that coming to faith in Jesus brings eternal life. It brings the overflowing power of the Holy Spirit.

II.

In v. 40-44 we come to THE POPULAR RESPONSE (PROJECTOR ON--- II. THE POPULAR RESPONSE) The Apostle John tells us, **“When they heard these words, some of the people said, ‘This really is the Prophet.’ Others said, ‘This is the Christ.’ But some said, ‘Is the Christ to come from Galilee? Has not the Scripture said that the Christ comes from the offspring of David, and comes from Bethlehem, the village where David was?’ So there was a division among the people over him. Some of them wanted to arrest him, but no one laid hands on him.”**

As we saw last week, Jesus and His claims produce division. He receives a divided response. One faction in this holiday crowd associates Jesus with the Prophet. Jesus’ miraculous provision of bread in the miracle by the Sea of Galilee and now His claim to provide living water at the Feast of Tabernacles bring to mind Moses and his actions centuries ago. Moses promised that there would be a coming prophet who would bear some resemblance to him.

In Deuteronomy #18 vv. 17 & 18 (DEUTERONOMY 18:17-18) the people of God were told, **“I will raise up for them a prophet like you from among their brothers. And I will put my words in his mouth, and he shall speak to them all that I command him.”** Jesus was the fulfillment of that promise. But in the popular thinking of that day, the Prophet and the Messiah were two different people. (PROJECTOR OFF)

Some in the crowd that day did wonder if Jesus was the Christ. “Christ” was a Greek word that meant “anointed one.” It was the Greek equivalent for the Hebrew term “messiah.” These religious pilgrims were educated enough in the Hebrew Scriptures to know that Micah #5 v. 2 predicted that the Messiah would come from Bethlehem, five miles to the south of Jerusalem. The popular understanding was that Jesus was from Galilee to the north. Jesus had been raised in Nazareth in Galilee. But they did not know the whole story. Jesus was born in Bethlehem.

Some in the crowd on this eventful day buy into the understanding of the religious leaders that Jesus is a false prophet. He is a fake. So they want Jesus seized. Last week we saw that the Apostle John recognized that there was a divine timetable at work here. It was not yet God’s established time for Jesus to be seized.

I can imagine that Jesus’ pronouncement in this setting came as a shock to everyone. This was a sacred moment in this greatest day of the Feast of Tabernacles. No one was to speak in this moment of silence in the ceremony. Yet Jesus did. People were stunned. It was one of those situations where there was no protocol for a response. It was such a forceful declaration with divine authority behind it that people were taken aback. There may have been murmuring. There were divided opinions. But no one took action against Jesus.

Still today there are divided opinions about Jesus. Some say that Jesus was a prophet of sorts, a great teacher perhaps. Some think that He was a fraud, or perhaps a myth. Some may suspect that He was the Messiah. But even among them there is sometimes a failure to make a commitment.

III.

We come then to THE OFFICIAL RESPONSE, described in vv. 45-52. (PROJECTOR ON--- III. THE OFFICIAL RESPONSE) According to v. 45, **“The officers then came to the chief priests and Pharisees, who said to them, ‘Why did you not bring him?’”** We saw back in v. 32 at the time when Jesus taught in the temple in the middle of this festival week, an arrest warrant was issued by the governing authorities. Apparently

the temple police were given some flexibility in terms of the circumstances of the arrest of Jesus. The leaders wanted to avoid a big disturbance.

Jesus dropped out of sight after that initial appearance. Now He made a public appearance again. Probably most all of these chief priests and Pharisees were present on this great day of the feast. Many of them probably heard the words of Jesus. Now they wanted to know why these officers did not apprehend Jesus.

These officers would have been Levites. They had more religious training than they did training in law enforcement. Like most of the other religious pilgrims in this situation, they were taken aback by what happened.

Thus we read in v. 46, **“The officers answered, ‘No one ever spoke like this man!’”** Jesus spoke with divine authority. The Apostle John recognizes the irony in this. Jesus did not speak like any other man. For He was the God-man. The police were sent out to arrest Jesus with their weapons. But Jesus arrested them with His words.

Verses 47 & 48: **“The Pharisees answered them, ‘Have you also been deceived? Have any of the authorities or the Pharisees believed in him?’”** The Pharisees were the traditionalists and the legalists. They had developed and promoted detailed applications of the Old Testament law. Their applications of the Old Testament law included detailed rules about the Sabbath. They had decided that healing was prohibited on the Sabbath, and Jesus had done healings on the Sabbath. So He had to be bad. In the process these Pharisees had lost sight of the intent of God’s law.

Most of the rabbis were Pharisees. They were well represented on the Sanhedrin, the high council of Judaism which exercised considerable civil authority in Judea. The other primary religious group was the Sadducees. The chief priests belonged to this religious group.

It seems that the Pharisees have taken a lead in the action against Jesus. They are unaware that Nicodemus, one of their own, has taken a positive interest in Jesus. In #12 we will find out that there are others among the Sanhedrin who are supportive of Jesus. Because of the intensity of hatred toward Jesus among the majority of the leaders, it is understandable that those with positive feelings about Jesus remain mostly silent.



The Pharisees declare in v. 49, **“But this crowd that does not know the law is accursed.”** These people in the crowd who have favorable attitudes toward Jesus are the deplorables. We are the ones who know the law. We are the ones with an education. We are the ones who have PhDs. These deplorables are the same ones who believe in intelligent design and creationism.

So these people are accursed. So much for great spiritual leadership in Israel. One of the fundamental commandments of the law of Moses was to love one’s neighbor. These Pharisees have no love for the people entrusted to their care.

Then in vv. 50 & 51 we read, **“Nicodemus, who had gone to him before, and who was one of them, said to them, ‘Does our law judge a man without first giving him a hearing and learning what he does?’”** So we have an appearance of Nicodemus again. He was the chief rabbi who was so impressed by the miracles which Jesus performed during His first public visit to Jerusalem that Nicodemus came to Him by night to interview Him. Nicodemus had difficulty in understanding Jesus’ words about the need for a spiritual rebirth. We see now that Nicodemus still has positive feelings toward Jesus. We can also understand his timidity in the face of the hatred of his fellow Pharisees toward Jesus.

There is also irony at work here. These Pharisees are condemning the commoners for their lack of understanding of the law. But here Nicodemus is pointing out a basic tenet of their own law that Jesus should not be condemned without a hearing. These guys are hypocrites. We find this statement in the Talmud (EXODUS RABBAH): **“Unless a mortal hears a plea that a man can put forward, he is not able to give a judgment.”** These religious leaders have already rendered a judgment in violation of their own law. Their curses are falling on their own heads. (PROJECTOR OFF)

Verse 52: **“They replied, ‘Are you from Galilee too? Search and see that no prophet arises from Galilee.’”** Again these religious leaders are showing ignorance and hypocrisy in a couple of ways. They are implying that no legitimate prophet could arise from the sticks of Galilee. Yet their Hebrew Scriptures indicate that Jonah and Nahum and perhaps a few other prophets came from Galilee. Then also these leaders are ignorant of the fact that Jesus was born in Bethlehem and that he was a descendant of David. They have not done their job of properly investigating Jesus and His background.

Such is the danger of elitism. People can be educated beyond their intelligence. They can become so prideful that they lose awareness of their own blind spots. When the elitists are religious leaders, the danger is that they can lose a humble love for God and for people.

IV.

We come then to OUR RESPONSE. (PROJECTOR ON--- IV. OUR RESPONSE) Jesus extended an invitation to the Jews of His day to come to Him, to believe in Him, to trust Him as their Messiah. The response of the majority of the religious leaders was to want Him to be killed. The response of the crowd was mixed. Some thought that Jesus might be the Prophet. Some thought that He might be the Messiah. But there seemed to be little enthusiasm, little willingness by most in the crowd to make any kind of significant commitment.

Such is the challenge that we still have today. We have to decide what we will do about Jesus. If He is the Messiah, if what He says is true, we need to accept Him as our Savior. The offer of forgiveness of sins and eternal life is a gift that we can only accept by faith. It is not something that we can earn.

If we do accept that gift, it is only appropriate that we demonstrate some kind of ongoing commitment to Him. What that commitment will look like will vary according to the individual situation that we each have. It would seem that a basic commitment would involve some kind of regular prayer and Bible study. It would seem that it would involve some kind of service. We have many opportunities for that around here. Jenny is always looking for helpers in the children's department. We could use additional volunteers to help occasionally with chaperoning for our van ministry on Sundays. I have been on the lookout for several years for someone who would take more of a lead in men's ministry.

But there are also opportunities for service beyond the church. Some in our midst serve as salt and light in various community organizations. Some of us also serve as caregivers, which is an important Biblical responsibility. Others are involved in prison ministry.

Charles Colson gives us this challenge: **"...beyond the ramifications for society as a whole, beyond even the obvious necessity of Christian commitment, when we refuse to commit, we miss out on one of the great joys of life. When we obsess over ourselves, we lose the meaning of life, which is to know and serve God and love and serve our neighbors. .... By abandoning commitment, our narcissistic culture has lost the one thing it desperately seeks: happiness. Without commitment, our individual lives will be barren and sterile. Without commitment, our lives will lack meaning and purpose. After all, if**

nothing is worth dying for, then nothing is worth living for. But with commitment comes the flourishing of society--- of calling, of marriage, of the church--- and of our hearts. It's the paradox Jesus so often shared when he bid us to come and die that we might truly live."

"If anyone thirsts, let him come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, 'Our of his heart will flow rivers of living water.'"