

Message #27

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John

6/24/2018

## WHY WE SHOULD BELIEVE THE CLAIMS OF JESUS

### JOHN 7:14-24

#### INTRODUCTION AND REVIEW

The first time when I remember encountering a sociopath was in the summer during my college years when I was working in a factory. A sociopath is one who has antisocial behavior and seeks to manipulate people to accomplish his or her own purposes. Sociopaths tend to have little conscience or empathy for others. Typically they are impulsive and think that life revolves around them and their issues.

The sociopath that I met also worked in the same factory. He did not have transportation of his own, and I had a car. So he set out to use me to provide transportation for him. The guy--- I don't remember his name--- had a certain charm and friendliness. There was some story he had about his ex-wife who lived in another town. He had some urgent reason that he needed to visit her. So I gave him a ride. The stories continued and the need for rides continued. The stories became more unbelievable. Then he tossed in the nugget that he used to work for the mafia. I suspect that he threw that in to give me a little fear and motivation to help him out. It was obvious that he had no concern about any inconveniences that he was causing for me. After a bit, I just refused to help him out anymore and avoided him.

It is always good to be cautious toward people who want to use us to accomplish their goals. Thoughtfulness is especially needed toward someone who claims to be God. Jesus, after all, called upon His followers to deny themselves, take up their crosses and follow Him. People ever since His time have tried to figure out exactly who He was. A few skeptics have claimed that Jesus was a sociopath. They have argued that He had an elevated view of Himself, that He tried to use people to accomplish His goals, that He didn't really care about others.

The passage before us this morning answers some of those charges. It provides us evidence for why we should believe the claims of Jesus. So we will consider carefully Jesus' interaction with His critics.

We are making our way through the Apostle John's New Testament Gospel. We have seen from #20 vv. 30 & 31 that the author describes seven sign miracles that were performed by Jesus for the purpose of demonstrating that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and so that by believing in Him, we might have eternal life. In chapters 5 & 6 we were told about Jesus' ministry in Galilee, in the north of what we know today as Israel. In #7 we have a description of events that happened in Jerusalem when Jesus went up to the Feast of Tabernacles. That eight day feast was designed to remind the Israelites of the provision of God for them during their forty years of wandering in the wilderness after their escape from Egypt. It was also a celebration of the harvest in the fall. Jesus was late in arriving at the feast because he knew that the religious leaders were plotting to kill Him. We pick up the action now in v. 14 of #7, which is on p. 893 of the black Bibles under many of the chairs.

I.

In vv. 14-17 we discover the first reason why we should believe the claims of Jesus. It is that **JESUS GETS HIS TEACHING FROM GOD.** (PROJECTOR ON--- I. JESUS GETS HIS TEACHING...) According to v. 14, **"About the middle of the feast Jesus went up into the temple and began teaching."**

We saw last week that the brothers of Jesus in Capernaum wanted Him to go up to the feast with them. But Jesus stayed back in Capernaum. He was aware that the religious leaders in Jerusalem were already planning to kill Him. So he wanted to limit their opportunities to apprehend Him. It was toward the middle of the feast, when the crowds of religious pilgrims were at their maximum size, when Jesus showed up in Jerusalem.

(TEMPLE 2) This is what the temple compound looked like in the time of Jesus. Several football fields could have been placed within the outer walls of the temple. A low wall on the near side and the far side of the compound marked the limits of the Court of the Gentiles. It was within this outer area that the priests allowed moneychangers and animal merchants to set up their businesses during the feasts. In #2 Jesus made a scene by forcing many of them out of the temple. The area closest to the temple proper was the Court of the Jews. Only Jews were allowed within this area. Archaeologists discovered a sign from the fence around the Court of the Jews which reads, **"No foreigner may enter within the balustrade around the sanctuary and the enclosure. Whoever is caught, on himself shall he put blame for the death which will ensue."**

(JERUSALEM TEMPLE 8) We know from Jewish writings that rabbis would often gather their disciples around them and teach them in this Court of the Jews, especially during the feasts when there were hundreds and thousands of extra people around. Religious pilgrims could listen in on whomever they

wished. So it was that Jesus showed up in this area when the crowds were the largest and began to teach. (PROJECTOR OFF)

Verse 15 tells us, "**The Jews therefore marveled, saying, 'How is it that this man has learning, when he has never studied.'**" "The Jews" is a term that is used in this Gospel to refer to the religious leaders of Israel, who from an early time stand in opposition to Jesus. The term that they use to describe Jesus in this verse is literally "this one." It is a term of disdain. They don't even like to voice the name of Jesus, which literally means "salvation."

A few of these leaders had been sent to Galilee to check out Jesus and His claims to be the Messiah. But the majority of them had probably never heard Jesus speak before. They cannot help but be impressed by His mastery of religious subjects, especially the Hebrew Scriptures.

Jesus preached what we know as the Sermon on the Mount during His earlier ministry in Galilee. Matthew records the reaction of the crowd to His preaching. (PROJECTOR ON--- MATTHEW 7:28) We read in Matthew #7, "**And when Jesus finished these sayings, the crowds were astonished at his teaching, (MATTHEW 7:29) for he was teaching them as one who had authority, and not as their scribes.**"

We know from other Jewish writings that it was typical for scribes, or rabbis, to start with a passage from the Hebrew Bible and then to proceed to describe its history of interpretation by quoting other famous rabbis from Jewish history. Such is still the case today. Authority was found from this thinking of previous rabbis. It was also important to the Jews to stay within the tradition of Jewish thinking. If you are familiar with the musical "Fiddler on the Roof," you will remember the famous song that Tevye sings, "Tradition."

Jesus was unique in his teaching style. He clearly understood the teaching of the Old Testament and the tradition that surrounded its interpretation. He quoted the Scriptures perfectly from memory. But He did not quote other rabbis. He spoke authoritatively. The religious leaders were astonished.

Part of the reason for their astonishment was that Jesus had not been to Harvard or Yale or even UNLV. He didn't even have a college degree. It was expected in that day that any rabbi worth listening to would have studied under another famous rabbi or would have been part of a recognized rabbinical school. Jesus had not done that. He was from the sticks of Galilee.

Later in this chapter we will find that the temple guard is sent to arrest Jesus. They come back to the chief priests and Pharisees without Him. Look down to v. 46 and see how these policemen respond: **"The officers answered, "No one ever spoke like this man!"** Wouldn't it have been great to be present on that day and listen to the teaching of Jesus?

A college or seminary education can be helpful to one who is a Bible teacher or preacher. But there are some colleges and seminaries who do not accept the authority of the Bible and undermine the faith of genuine Christians who go to study there. There are also some great Bible teachers who have a limited formal education. Billy Graham was an example of this. He preached with authority. Hundreds and thousands of people have come to faith in Christ as a result of being exposed to his preaching.

Billy Sunday was a famous baseball player from early in the last century. He was a wild guy and an alcoholic when he came to faith in Christ. He went on to be an effective evangelist. LaVada Paris, one of the founding members of our church, was converted to Christ at one of his rallies when she was living in Fremont, Nebraska. So our church has a bit of a spiritual lineage that goes back to him.

Billy Sunday had a limited education. At one point he sought to be ordained as a minister. At his ordination council there were a number of distinguished pastors. One of them asked about his opinion of a leader from early in church history. Sunday replied, **"Well, to tell you the truth, I've never heard of him. He never played on my team."** He was asked some other difficult questions. Finally, one of the council members declared, **"Let's go ahead and recommend this fellow for ordination. He's already won more souls than the whole bunch of us put together."**

Back in our text in v. 16 we read, **"So Jesus answered them, 'My teaching is not mine, but his who sent me.'"** The concern of any religious leader about a teacher who did not quote other rabbis was that he might be leaving Jewish traditional thinking. He might be coming up with his own ideas and interpretations. This was especially a concern for one who had not been taught in approved schools and by recognized rabbis.

Prophets of the Old Testament era did get their messages directly from God. They often began their messages with "Thus saith the Lord." The Jews should have been open to that possibility with Jesus. But Jesus was claiming an even closer relationship with God. He was calling Him His own Father. In Jesus' earlier visit to Jerusalem this was recognized as a problem. (JOHN 5:18) Back in #5 v. 18 we were told,

**"This was why the Jews were seeking all the more to kill him, because not only was he breaking the Sabbath, but he was even calling God his own Father, making himself equal with God."**

Jesus continues back in v. 17 of our passage, **"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."** (PROJECTOR OFF) It is difficult to make decisions about God and Jesus on a purely objective and intellectual basis. Presuppositions and emotions and motivations are all involved in this.

The Bible says that we have an additional problem in that our entire being, including our intellect, is affected by an inherent sin problem. Faith is necessary. It is not an irrational faith. But it is faith nevertheless. At the very least we need an openness to God. We need a willingness to submit to God and His authority. That is difficult. For it requires humility. We humans have this innate desire to stay in control. In the Hebrew Scriptures the prophet Jeremiah (PROJECTOR ON--- JEREMIAH 29:13) told the people of God, **"You will seek me and find me, when you seek me with all your heart."** Submission to God, rather than intellectual analysis, is foundational for understanding the truth about God and Jesus Christ.

It is somewhat ironic that Jesus' listeners are questioning the competence of Jesus. In this verse Jesus is questioning the competence of His audience as listeners. Are they able to hear the voice of God? (PROJECTOR OFF)

Most people in our culture today recognize that the teaching of Jesus is unique. But we must decide if it is truly from God. For we who are Christians, the closest that we can get to teaching from God is the Bible. It is incumbent upon us to master it to the best of our ability. Jesus was God. But in his humanity He had to learn the Hebrew Scriptures. Our responsibility is to learn it to the best of our ability.

II.

We should believe the claims of Jesus because Jesus got His teaching from God. Secondly, we should believe the claims of Jesus because JESUS SEEKS HIS FATHER'S GLORY. (PROJECTOR ON--- II. JESUS SEEKS HIS FATHER'S GLORY.) Jesus says in v. 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."**

Here is Jesus' claim to sinlessness. No mere human can rightly claim this to be true of himself or herself. All of us are guilty of speaking and conveying falsehoods. If Jesus is lying about Himself, then He is guilty of seeking His own glory. But if it is true, then perhaps He is not guilty of seeking His own glory.

The claim of Jesus and the Bible is that Jesus is God as well as human. Thus it is that we read in Philippians #2 (PHILIPPIANS 2:5-6), beginning in v. 5, "**Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, (PHILIPPIANS 2:7) but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. (PHILIPPIANS 2:8) And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.**"

Jesus emptied Himself of the glory that was rightfully His as God. In becoming a human, He submitted Himself to the will of God the Father. He also set about to serve human beings. If His own glory was His primary concern, we would have expected Him to be born into a royal household and to have lived a life fit for a king. But He never had much in terms of earthly possessions. Thus it is that Jesus declares in Mark #10 v. 45 (MARK 10:45), "**For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.**"

Jesus' humble approach to life stands in contrast to that of the religious leaders of His day. In the business that they controlled in the temple precincts, which we have already discussed, we have seen that they were focused on getting a financial cut of the action. In Mark #12 vv. 38-40 (MARK 12:38) we also get this insight into the behavior of the religious leaders in Jerusalem: "**And in his teaching he said, 'Beware of the scribes, who like to walk around in long robes and like greetings in the marketplaces (MARK 12:39) and have the best seats in the synagogues and the places of honor at feasts, (MARK 12:40) who devour widows' houses and for a pretense make long prayers. they will receive the greater condemnation.'**" In contrast to this behavior, we see Jesus in the Gospels washing the feet of the disciples at the Last Supper. (PROJECTOR OFF)

In the Christian service in which we are involved, it is good for us to remember tht we are not sinless. It is impossible to have motives that are 100% pure. So it is good to be on guard against our own temptations to self-promotion. It is also good to be on guard against preachers and teachers and other Christian leaders who are giving too much attention to self. It is not about our agenda, our vision or our legacy. The Apostle Paul (1 CORINTHIANS 2:2) writes in 1 Corinthians #2 v. 2, "**For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified.**" Jesus was the real deal. He was focused on seeking His Father's glory. We would do well to have a similar focus.

III.

In vv. 19-20 we find that JESUS PROMOTES RIGHTEOUSNESS. (III. JESUS PROMOTES RIGHTEOUSNESS) In v. 19 Jesus asks, "**Has not Moses given you the law? Yet none of you keeps the law. Why do you seek to kill me?**"

The Old Testament law was the standard of righteousness for the Jews. As a Jewish man, Jesus accepted that law. He said elsewhere that He had come to fulfill it. The Jewish people had been entrusted with that law. But that did not mean that they were carrying it out properly. In fact, Jesus is accusing them of violating the Sixth Commandment, which prohibited murder. For they are seeking to murder Jesus.

The religious leaders are questioning Jesus' teaching of the law. Jesus turns back the accusation on them. He says that they are breaking the most basic of laws, the Ten Commandments.

Verse 20: "**The crowd answered, 'You have a demon! Who is seeking to kill you?'**" The crowd is a group that is to be differentiated from the Jews, the religious leaders. The crowd is the religious pilgrims from all over the Mediterranean world who have come to Jerusalem for the feast. For many of them, this is their first exposure to Jesus. They have no knowledge about the plotting of the religious leaders against Jesus. They think that Jesus is paranoid. Earlier in the chapter, in v. 12, we were told that some among the crowd thought that Jesus was a good man. Some thought that Jesus was leading the people astray. But many of them think that Jesus is wrong about people trying to kill Him.

People in that era had little understanding of mental illness. Those who acted strangely, or who were unreasonably paranoid, were written off as having a demon. As we learn in the Gospels, there were people around who were truly demon-possessed. But no doubt, there were also people around who suffered from mental illness.

There is also irony here in that people in this crowd accuse Jesus of having a demon. The penalty of the law for being involved in the occult and demonism was death. Yet people in this crowd say that Jesus is crazy to think that some want to have Jesus killed.

The point here is that Jesus is to be believed. He consistently promotes righteousness, and He is righteous in His own behavior.

IV.

The fourth reason found in this passage why we should believe the claims of Jesus is that JESUS DISPLAYS LOVE AND SUPERNATURAL POWER. (IV. JESUS DISPLAYS LOVE AND SUPERNATURAL POWER.) According to v. 21, "**Jesus answered them, 'I did one work, and you all marvel at it.'**"

The reference is to the previously described healing by Jesus of the lame man at the Pool of Bethesda at an unnamed feast, recorded in the beginning of #5. This is the most recent visit of Jesus to Jerusalem described by the Apostle John in this Gospel. Jesus encountered this helpless man who had been lame for 38 years. He was seemingly without any support. Jesus felt compassion for him and healed him instantly. There was no doubt about the reality of the miracle. The religious leaders could not deny it. In fact here in v. 21 we are told that they marveled at it.

The miracles which Jesus performed and the compassion involved in helping people provide strong support for the claims of Jesus. The miracles could not be denied, even by the opponents of Jesus. They were seen by many people, even by some of the religious leaders. But Jesus did not fit their agenda. He was not the Messiah that they wanted.

The real Jesus often does not fit the agenda of people today. We want a Republican Jesus or a Democrat Jesus or certainly an American Jesus or a Jesus who fits the LBGTQ agenda or a Jesus who says that there are many roads to heaven or a Jesus who accepts everyone and is not judgmental. But if He indeed is God, then we must submit to Him and His agenda.

V.

We should believe the claims of Jesus because He displays love and supernatural power and, fifthly, because JESUS STANDS IN JUDGMENT OVER HUMAN SIN. (V. JESUS STANDS IN JUDGMENT...) This is the message of vv. 22-24. In #5 the Jewish leaders got worked up because Jesus told the man to take up his pallet and walk. But it was the Sabbath day, and the religious rules said that carrying a bedroll on the Sabbath was wrong. That was work. Jesus sinned badly in giving this instruction to the lame man. So Jesus was bad and could not be the real Messiah.

At other times the religious leaders got upset because Jesus healed people on the Sabbath. There was one particular incident that happened earlier in Galilee that involved such a healing. It is described in Mark #3. It appears that religious leaders had come from Jerusalem to check out Jesus. Beginning in v. 1 of #3 (MARK 3:1) we find out what happened: "**Again he entered the synagogue, and a man was there**

**with a withered hand. (MARK 3:2) And they watched Jesus, to see whether he would heal him on the Sabbath, so that they might accuse him. (MARK 3:3) And he said to the man with the withered hand, 'Come here.' (MARK 3:4) And he said to them, 'Is it lawful on the Sabbath to do good or to do harm, to save life or to kill?' But they were silent. (MARK 3:5) And he looked around at them with anger, grieved at their hardness of heart, and said to the man, 'Stretch out your hand.' He stretched it out and his hand was restored. (MARK 3:6) The Pharisees went out and immediately held counsel with the Herodians against him, how to destroy him."**

The point of the Fourth Commandment is that there should be no work on the Sabbath day. There is no indication in the text that Jesus does so much as lift a finger. There is no hint that He exerts enough energy to bring a drop of sweat to His brow. He simply speaks a word to the crippled man to stretch out his hand, and he is healed. But this is enough to get the religious leaders worked up and to get them to want to kill Jesus. Now the healing in Jerusalem at the Pool of Bethesda is the issue. (PROJECTOR OFF)

So Jesus says in vv. 22 & 23 in our passage, **"Moses gave you circumcision (not that it is from Moses, but from the fathers), and you circumcise a man on the Sabbath. If on the Sabbath a man receives circumcision, so that the law of Moses may not be broken, are you angry with me because on the Sabbath I made a man's whole body well?"** God instituted the rite of circumcision through Abraham. But it was later included in the law given to Moses on Mt. Sinai.

The law of Moses was very specific about the timing of circumcision for baby boys. We read in Leviticus #12 v. 3 (LEVITICUS 12:3): **"And on the eighth day the flesh of his foreskin shall be circumcised."** Sometimes that eighth day fell on a Sabbath. So it was understood by the rabbis that this was to be done if the eighth day fell on a Sabbath. It was also clear in the law of Moses that temple service work was to be done on the Sabbath by priests and Levites. The Talmud, which contains the teaching of the rabbis from ancient times, also specifies that certain acts of mercy are to be done on the Sabbath. For example, if a woman is in labor to give birth on the Sabbath, any kind of work is to be done that will help her with her delivery. (PROJECTOR OFF)

Circumcision involved bringing an infant boy and one part of his body into compliance with the ceremonial law of Moses. Jesus' point is that His act of healing made an entire man well. How could this act of mercy be regarded as a violation of the law of Moses?

Verse 24: **"Do not judge by appearances, but judge with right judgment."** Jesus' enemies have misconstrued His character by a flawed set of deductions from the Old Testament law. They followed a

very superficial process and came to judgments that were at odds with the intent of God's law. Now they were setting out to kill God's Son who had become a human being. They were wanting to destroy their own Messiah. But Jesus stands in judgment upon sin. For He is the ultimate Judge.

Why should we believe the claims of Jesus? Because His teaching is unique. It is inspired. It comes from God. Because Jesus sought His Father's glory. The sinless Son of God humbled Himself by becoming a human being. In His incarnation He sought to bring glory to God. Because He is righteous. His character and behavior are without sin. Because Jesus displays love and supernatural power. His resurrection from the dead was the ultimate proof of His claims. Finally, because Jesus stands in righteous judgment over sin. Someday we will encounter Him. We had best make sure that we have truly trusted Him as our Savior.

Billy Sunday describes how it happened to him: **"I was out with a crowd of the boys. Many of them were famous in their day. We had a round of drinks and were sitting idly on the curb when I heard the hymns from a religious gathering across the street. (It was the Pacific Garden Mission in Chicago.)**

**"At that moment God began to paint upon my memory a holy vision of the days when my sweet mother taught me to love Christ and His Bible. I found myself sobbing, and at that moment one of the workers stepped across the street and said to me, 'Won't you come with me to the mission?'**

**"His gentle tones help me over the last step. 'I'm through, boys.' I said, suddenly rising. 'I'm going to Jesus Christ.' And while some laughed mockingly and others remained silent, I turned my back on the gang and made my way to the little mission. There, in abject repentance, I gave myself up body and soul for always to my Savior." May that be true of all of us.**