
Jesus, the Great Divide

John 7:25-53

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Lots of things divide people:

Our favorite sports teams...

Our thinking about what is important in life...

Our political or economic views...

Our desires that drive wedges splitting our relationships...

Make no mistake, often the Bible portrays Jesus as being the great divider.

He divides the Old Testament from the New Testament...

He divides Israel from the church...

He divides truth from error.

He divides unbelievers from believers...

He may divide families, friends and associates...

This is important and necessary. Jesus' being the great divide is like a river that divides two states or two countries. It establishes a boundary, a border. Who know whose you are and where you are in relation to the border. Except that Jesus' divides along the lines of faith, of how we respond who He says He is and what He requires of us.

And people did not and do not respond to that well. Some, hearing words like we will read this morning, tried to arrest Him and eventually executed Him. Hmmm...

Explained by What Jesus Declares**(v. 25-39)**

That Jesus divides is explained by what He teaches, what He declares.

Because of where He is from**(v. 25-31)**

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. 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." 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?"

Here is the fundamental question facing the Jews of Jesus' day. It also faces us as well. Is this person really who He claims to be? Is He truly the Messiah? Now, why is this important to us? This is vital to us because this man, Jesus, is claiming to be the complete and total fulfillment of all that the Old Testament promised and prophesied. He is not only the Jewish Messiah, but He is the Son of God and the Son of Man.

But you see, they couldn't get around the fact that they knew Him personally. They knew what village He was from. They knew who His mother was and some may even have known His brothers. Didn't His life contradict His claims? How can He be the Messiah when they knew his hometown and his home folks.

Jesus challenges them. "You *know* where I am from?" No, they don't. He is not just from here on earth. He is from heaven. He is from His Father. This is more than just a question of location, but of identity and authority. He is here on the mission given Him by His Father. He is sent. Because they do not acknowledge Him, they show that they do not know His Father. They may be Jewish by physical birth, but they are not true, spiritual Israelites.

So, rather than believing in Him and bowing to Him some seek to Him arrested. Others are convinced because of His miracles and thus believe in Him. Here is the dividing line. Do you believe that Jesus is who He says He is?

Because of where He is going**(v. 32-36)**

Jesus not only declares where He is from but also where He is going. Notice how the attention now turns to the religious leaders.

³² The Pharisees heard the crowd muttering these things about him, and the chief priests and Pharisees sent officers to arrest him. ³³ Jesus then said, "I will be with you a little longer, and then I am going to him who sent me.

³⁴ You will seek me and you will not find me. Where I am you cannot come." ³⁵ 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?" ³⁶ What does he mean by saying, 'You will seek me and you will not find me,' and, 'Where I am you cannot come'?"

Well, word gets around. The religious leaders hear about the disturbance Jesus is causing and send the Temple police to arrest Jesus.

Jesus looks out over the crowd with the officers on the edge and announces that He is going away and where He is going no one can come (yet). He again asserts that He is God because He is going back to the One who has sent Him. He is not merely going to a place; He is returning to a Person. Since they do not believe in Him, they cannot come where He is going. From this point forward in the gospel of John, there is a growing sense of the importance of Jesus' going away.

His going away will be a final demonstration that He is who He is. His going away will enable the sending of the Spirit in His place. He is going away to heaven and to His Father and that is something those who believe in Him delight in.

Their unbelief is put on clear display. They do not understand what He is claiming. They did not believe that He was from heaven so how could they understand that he is talking about returning to heaven? They wonder what He means. Is He going into hiding? Sarcastically, they ask, "Is He going to preach to the Jews who were scattered under the Assyrian captivity?" Why do that? After all He has true, God-fearing Jews right here to preach to.

Certainly John is being ironic. The religious police have sought Him in order to arrest Him. They have found Him. Here He is. They better take advantage of it because there is coming a day when they will want to seek Him to worship Him and He will not be around to be found. Do you seek Jesus in order to decide about Him, to judge Him, to evaluate His claims. Or, do you seek Jesus to believe in Him and bow to Him?

Because of what He brings

(v. 37-39)

³⁷ 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. ³⁸ Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, 'Out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.' "

³⁹ 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.

What is important about this particular day of the feast? On the seventh day of the feast, the last day, the rites of water and light took place. The Old Testament had established the feast of tabernacles. But these additional rites were added sometime after the return from the Babylonian exile. The high priest carried a golden urn of water up to the altar. As he marched around it, the shofar horns were blown. The people waved a willow branch in one hand and squeezed out the juice of a citrus fruit. At this dramatic moment, Jesus stands and interrupts the proceedings. Can you imagine? What a shock. What is He doing? Has He lost it? Here is the guy the religious leaders want to kill and He is interrupting one of their greatest moments.

Two amazing proclamations are made.

Jesus is the source of water to the truly thirsty. Jesus had spoken earlier about His being the bread of life. Now, He is the thirst-satisfying water. He is the source of living waters. For woman at the well He was the well of living water. Here, He is the spring of living waters. He offers His living waters to the thirsty. There are lots of waters that we can drink from that will keep us from being thirsty for God. This is not a good thing. The best thing in all the world is to be hungry for the bread of life and to be thirsty for the living waters. The best thing in all the universe is to hunger and thirst for Jesus Christ. Do you?

Those who believe will have a river flowing from their inner being. What Jesus gives as the source, the believer receives and becomes the channel of. When we thirst for Christ and drink deeply from Him, then in us springs up a fountain of living water. He the source; we the vessel and channel.

When we hear Jesus says this, we are meant to remember Moses' bringing forth water from the rock. God's people will be amply and fully supplied from the living waters flowing from the rock. And that Rock is Christ.

Jesus and John also are pointing us to Isaiah 55:1-3:

¹ "Come, everyone who thirsts, come to the waters; and he who has no money, come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without price. ² Why do you spend your money for that which is not bread, and your labor for that which does not satisfy? Listen diligently to me, and eat what is good, and delight yourselves in rich food. ³ Incline your ear, and come to me; hear, that your soul may live; and I will make with you an everlasting covenant, my steadfast, sure love for David.

This leads to the call of verses 6-7;

⁶ "Seek the LORD while he may be found; call upon him while he is near; ⁷ let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts; let him return to the LORD, that he may have compassion on him, and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon.

And finally, we hear Zechariah 13:1;

¹ "On that day there shall be a fountain opened for the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem, to cleanse them from sin and uncleanness.

Do you thirst at all? Have you spent your life slacking your thirst on that which does not satisfy and that which will not bring life? Do you thirst for God? Do long for the satisfying life He offers? Will you then seek, come and call while He is near? Will you believe in Him? Your believing in Him is drinking from Him.

What is this water that Jesus is talking about? John makes it very clear. Jesus is talking about the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit had not yet been given in the New Covenant sense. The disciples had the Spirit in the Old Testament sense. Only Jesus had the fullness of the Spirit. After His resurrection and ascension, He sent the Spirit in the fullness of the New Covenant sense.

Now we know what "water" represents in the gospel of John. It represents the Holy Spirit. It represents the life that is given by the Spirit. John wants to be very clear that we understand that Jesus is the only source of the Spirit. The Old Testament and its law system could not bring the full and satisfying flow of the water of the Spirit. It could make us thirsty. It promised us that the Spirit would come. It told us in many ways how satisfying drinking deeply would be. And on this occasion, Jesus stands and says that He is the One and only source of all that satisfying stream of living water. Now, since He has died has been raised and has ascended to His Father, He has given the promised Spirit. So you can believe and drink and be thirsty no more.

But why is the flowing of the Spirit rising up in the heart of the believer? I was amazed at the consternation of the commentators over this. Why is it so hard? Jesus is the source of living waters that will satisfy thirst. Those who come to Him believe in Him. Now, those who believe will have this river flowing up in their own inner beings. This is in no way making the believer the source of the Spirit. It is making the believer the receptacle and the channel of the Spirit.

Will turn away from the polluted and poisoned streams and thirst for Christ? Will you stop drinking the Cokes and Mountain Dews and Coffees and Kool-Aids that are sweet and tasty but do not satisfy your thirst and will not give you life? Will you drink deeply by believing in Jesus and bowing to Him?

Exemplified by How People Respond to Him (v. 40-52)

All through John's gospel, he has given examples of different groups of people responding to Jesus. In their reactions to him, we see our own questions, struggles and responses to Jesus. Some are because of what He claims and some because what He teaches.

The Division over His Identity (v. 40-44)

John shows us how the ordinary people respond to Jesus.

⁴⁰ When they heard these words, some of the people said, "This really is the Prophet." ⁴¹ Others said, "This is the Christ." But some said, "Is the Christ to come from Galilee?" ⁴² Has not the Scripture said that the Christ comes from the offspring of David, and comes from Bethlehem, the village where David was?" ⁴³ So there was a division among the people over him. ⁴⁴ Some of them wanted to arrest him, but no one laid hands on him.

So there is division over who He is. Is He a great prophet or teacher? Even Muslims and Mormons and Hindus recognize Jesus as a great prophet. Does this mean they are saved? No, it does not. While Jesus is the great Prophet and the teacher without peer, He is so much more.

Is He the Jewish Messiah? Is He the fulfillment of God's promises and Israel's hopes? Yes. He is that. Is that all He is? No, He is even more than the "Jewish" Messiah. He is so much more than just the king over a Israel.

But notice that they have the facts wrong. They understand that the Messiah was to come from Bethlehem as the offspring of David. Yet they think Jesus is from Galilee. They don't have all the facts. Yet this is not the cause of their unbelief. Here is an odd irony in John's writing. If they had only known He was actually from Bethlehem, would they have believed?

So, the One who has come to save His people is also the One who causes division. Is this a bad thing? It appears not. It is important for you to know where you are. It is important for you to know whether you believe in Christ or not. That is the most important dividing line Jesus brings.

The Derision over His Origins (v. 45-52)

Religious leaders also react to Jesus. At first, this might sound strange in our ears. Nevertheless, the religious leaders of Jesus day had to decide what they were going to do about Jesus.

⁴⁵ The officers then came to the chief priests and Pharisees, who said to them, "Why did you not bring him?" ⁴⁶ The officers answered, "No one ever spoke like this man!" ⁴⁷ The Pharisees answered them, "Have you also been deceived?" ⁴⁸ Have any of the authorities or the Pharisees believed in him? ⁴⁹ But this crowd that does not know the law is accursed." ⁵⁰ Nicodemus, who had gone to him before, and who was one of them, said to them, ⁵¹ "Does our law judge a man without first giving him a hearing and learning what he does?" ⁵² They replied, "Are you from Galilee too? Search and see that no prophet arises from Galilee."

Jesus had rattled the temple police. They came back empty handed. No Jesus in handcuffs. I love this interaction. Why didn't you capture Him? Well, no one ever spoke like this One. What, have you believed in Him too? Have you been deceived? Has anyone who really knows what is going on believed in Him? Only the ignorant follow Him.

A hand goes up in the room. Nicodemus, who had spoken to Jesus privately earlier speaks up. Here is one of the religious leader who is not ignorant and yet seems to be moving toward belief. Basically he asks, "Isn't he innocent until proven guilty?"

Now the religious leaders show their own ignorance of Jesus Himself. They also show their bigotry. Both are examples and expressions of their unbelief and growing hatred of the Lord.

Reflect and Respond

The text this morning penetrates our hearts in several ways:

Have we come to grips that a Christianity that is primarily trying to unify everyone is not the Christianity of the Bible?

The Lord Jesus Christ, in where He is from and who He is, is the greatest dividing line in all of history. There is a line in the sand of your life. On one side is unbelief and on the other side is belief. On one side is being a sinner bound for eternal judgment and hell. On the other side is being a saint reconciled to God and bound for eternal joy and service to the King of heaven. Where are you?

Believing only a part of who Jesus is and denying other parts will not do. Even the demons believe like this. While you may not know all that the Bible claims, you must be poised to accept, embrace, believe in all that the Bible says about this Jesus. Do you?

Jesus makes not apology for drawing this line in the sand. For those of you who believe, do you? Are you willing to look friends and family in the face and say, "Believing in Jesus is the most important thing in your life." Are you willing to risk your relationships in order to speak like Jesus speaks. Is the gospel really true to you? Does it matter enough to say it clearly and lovingly?

On this note, please do not hear me to be advocating being rude, strident, callous or harsh. If you bust up relationships because you are using the gospel like a sledgehammer, then that is on you. That is not what we are referring to. But too often, we speak like wet noodles. Sometimes we speak in such a way that people do not even know where the issues are. Do the neighbors, friends, family members you have witnessed to now actually know what the gospel declares and requires?

All glory to the One who brought the dividing line between the Old and the New, between sin and holiness, between condemnation and reconciliation, between heaven and hell. Soli Deo Gloria.