

## **Confused About Jesus?**

John 7:1–52

Studies in John #16

I NEED to start on a sore subject. Pete: please forgive me! In the first game of the NBA finals the huge underdog Cavs are tied with the defending champ Warriors with 4.6 seconds left. The Cavs miss their free throw; J.R. Smith gets the rebound under the basket but dribbles all the way out to half court, realizes they're *not* winning when LeBron James screams at him to pass or shoot, then the clock runs out. They lose in overtime. He was simply put, confused. He didn't know the score or situation in the game. As we turn to the Gospel of John again there's lots of confusion about Jesus. I don't want you leaving today confused either.

Chapter 6 was around Passover in the Spring. Chapters 7–8 fast-forward six months to the Fall Feast of Tabernacles (7:10). Here begin the final six months of Jesus' life. Tabernacles required all males to go to the temple to live in tents for a weeklong remembrance of the wilderness journey (Lev. 23:43). It was also a festival of thanksgiving for the grape and olive harvest (Deut. 16:15). By Jesus' time there was a daily ceremony of pouring water to remember the water from the rock (Ex. 17) and anticipating the "water" from the wells of salvation (Isa. 12:3) being poured upon all nations. There are three scenes of Jesus' teaching and his hearers' confusion in this story.

## BEFORE THE FEAST (vv. 1–13)

The first scene is BEFORE THE FEAST. Sometime **after** he turned water into wine **Jesus** continued **in Galilee** but **not in Judea because the Judean leaders** (οἱ Ἰουδαῖοι) **were seeking to kill him** (v. 1). But when **the...Feast of Booths was at hand** (v. 2) Jesus' **brothers**<sup>1</sup> tried to convince him to **“leave...and go to Judea”** (v. 3). Interestingly the verbs they use aren't the typical “go up,” which was used for pilgrimage; instead, because it's been six months since disciples dropped like flies they think Jesus needs a permanent change of scenery from Galilee to Jerusalem. Why? **“That your disciples also may see the works you are doing”** (v. 3). There's a captive audience in Jerusalem. I mean, if you're going to build your brand **“no one works in secret if he seeks to be known openly...show yourself to the world”** (v. 4). Their big assumption is that he **seeks to be known**. That's not surprising since they don't **believe[...] in him** (v. 5). They're thinking merely in outward terms. Their chant might as well have been, “What do want? The kingdom. When do we want it? Now!” At this point in their lives, Jesus' brothers are a cautionary tale. Confessing Christ only because you think he'll bring you prosperity shows you're not a believer. The so-called Word of Faith movement has infected the church and affected so many people with false faith. We need to be aware, too!

Jesus rebukes his own brothers' "faith": "**My time has not yet come**" (v. 6). In chapter 2 he spoke about his "hour" (2:4; ὥρα), meaning, going to the cross. Here he uses a different word—καίρῳ—speaking of his time to go to this Feast.<sup>2</sup> The contrast between him and them—"but your time is always here"—is "you can go when you want; I need to wait for my Father." They have no worries since "**the world cannot hate you...but it hates me because I testify about it that its works are evil**" (v. 7). So he tells them to "**go up to the feast**" but that "**my time has not yet fully come**" (v. 8). The contrast is that he's not going when they want; he'll go when his Father's wants.

His brothers were confused about him; so were the people at the Feast: **there was much muttering<sup>3</sup> about him** but because everyone fear[ed]...**the Judean leaders** (τῶν Ἰουδαίων) **no one spoke openly of him** (v. 13). While some said, "**He is a good man,**" others said, "**No, he is leading the people astray**" (v. 12). According to the Babylonian Talmud Jesus was crucified because he practiced sorcery and led Israel astray.<sup>4</sup> Confusion abounded.

#### THE MIDDLE OF THE FEAST (vv. 14–36)

Unfortunately the confusion continues in the next scene at THE MIDDLE OF THE FEAST. *Jesus teaches* (vv. 15–24). **The Judean leaders<sup>5</sup>...marveled.** The sense is that they're offended. Why? "**How is it that this man has learning,**

**when he has never studied?”** (v. 15) Like *us* is the implication. What’s a telltale sign you’re talking to a seminary student? They tell you what their professors say. It was the same then. But Jesus is citing no one: **“My teaching is not mine, but his who sent me”** (v. 16). He was sent from the father’s bosom to declare the Father to us (1:18); what he sees the Father do he does; he came down not to do his will but his Father’s.

Then Jesus throws down the gauntlet: **“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”** (v. 17). No one can come to me unless the Father draws (6:44). You’re being drawn when your mind is open to the truth, your heart to God’s love, and your will to his will. But they don’t! This is not felt board Jesus! This is not affirming, progressive Jesus! He throws down against the rabbis: **“the one who speaks on his own authority seeks his own glory”**—I wonder who he’s speaking of here?—**“but the one who seeks the glory of him who sent him is true, and in him (in me!) there is no falsehood”** (v. 18). He turns up the heat: **“Has not Moses given you the law?”** “Of course, and we’re its gatekeepers!” **“Yet none of you keeps the law.”** Wow! He drives the wooden stake of the sixth commandment right into their undead hearts: **“Why do you seek to kill me?”** (v. 19) Then **the crowd** accuses

Jesus: **“You have a demon!”** (v. 20) He reminds them, **“I did one work** of healing the man invalid for thirty-eight years on the Sabbath **and you all marvel** or are offended **at it”** (v. 21). But they also “work” on the Sabbath when they obey God’s command to circumcise boys on the eighth day after birth (v. 22). Jesus poses a question using an argument from the lesser to the greater: **“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?”** (v. 23) If one part of the body can be consecrated on the Sabbath why not the healing of an entire person? In fact, one rabbi said, “If circumcision, which affects only one of a man’s members, supplants the sabbath, how much more saving a life supplants the sabbath?”<sup>6</sup>

Jesus is making minced meat out of the rabbis but *the crowd is confused* (vv. 25–31). Some were confused because their leaders were **seek[ing] to kill** him, but if he’s so bad, why aren’t they doing anything about him when he’s right here **speaking openly**? Perhaps this meant **“the authorities really know that this is the Messiah?”** (vv. 25, 26) Others said he can’t be the Messiah since **we know where this man comes from, and** there was a common first century belief that **when the Messiah appears, no one will know where he comes from”** (v. 27). He’d be an unknown person who would just appear. Jesus turns

this against them with passion. The verb **proclaimed** is not John's usual word for Jesus' replying. It's a word that only used for proclamatory, prophetic speech such as John the Baptist's (1:15). It has the force of "cried out" (ἐκράξεν). "**You know me, and you know where I come from**" in an earthly sense; "**but what you don't know is that I have not come of my own accord. He who sent me is true, and him you do not know**"...but "**I know him**" (vv. 28, 29). Even when the authorities tried to arrest him...no one laid a hand on him, because his hour (ῥῶρα) of being delivered up to death had not yet come (v. 30), confirming some people's earlier suspicion so that **many of the people believed in him** (v. 31). They at least had a faith because of his miracles, citing another common belief that the Messiah wouldn't be a man of miracles, but here's Jesus: "**will the Messiah do more signs than this man has done?**" (v. 32)

Adding to the confusion about Jesus was *the leadership seeking his arrest* (vv. 32–36) in particular **the Pharisees** or strictest party of the Jewish leadership who **heard the crowd muttering** (γογγύζοντος) **these things about** Jesus (v. 32). There's always been opposition to Jesus and his people. And this can make faith a mess. I was reading how in February China imposed strict religious regulations that are being applied especially against Christianity.

Non-government approved churches have to register with the State. In one city alone police went door-to-door and closed over 100 house churches! Visible crosses have been demolished, minors under 18 cannot attend worship, believers can't display Christian decorations on their homes, low-income residents are being threatened with the loss of welfare benefits, and members of the Communist Party who have professed faith have been pressured to stop. Pastors have been told to start each service with the singing of the national anthem.<sup>7</sup> What a mess! It adds to the confusion. Maybe some like Jesus' brothers are seeking glory, maybe some think he's a good man, maybe some call him a heretic, maybe some are seek to kill him by killing his followers, maybe some believe because of a miracle.

#### THE END OF THE FEAST (vv. 37–52)

The final scene at THE END OF THE FEAST follows the same pattern of Jesus teaching, confusion among the people, and the leadership seeking his arrest. *Jesus teaches* (vv. 37–39) again. Imagine the scene on this culminating day of the Feast of Tabernacles. Every day the priests would process down to the pool of Siloam, fill a pitcher with water, process back to the temple where the *shofar* or ram's horn was blown three times. The priests processed the pitcher around the altar of burnt offering while the Levitical choir sang from Psalms 113–118. Each male held a branch in his right hand and piece of fruit in his left

in celebration of the harvest and exclaimed three times: “Give thanks to the Lord!” Then that water would be offered along with the morning sacrifice. Then Jesus **stood up** in the midst of the thronging worshippers **and cried out** (ἔκραξεν)—there’s that significant word again. Let there be no confusion: **“If anyone thirsts, let him come to me and drink”** (v. 37). Jesus is saying, “I am the fulfillment of the feast!” He speaks similarly to Isaiah 55: “Come, everyone who thirsts, come to the waters...come to me...that your soul may live” (vv. 1, 3). Let there be no confusion: **“Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, ‘Out of his heart** (literally, “stomach,” signifying the center of who you are) **will flow rivers of living water’”** (v. 38). What an image! Faith in Jesus is like drinking the most satisfying water for our parched and thirsty souls. And that water so satisfies us that it then flows out of us like a river! If Jesus is the water, what’s the river? **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** (v. 39). Pentecost!

Again *the crowd is confused* (vv. 40–44). We hear faith: **“This really is the Prophet!”** **“This is the Messiah!”** We hear doubt: **“Is the Messiah to come from Galilee? Has not the Scripture said that the Messiah comes from...Bethlehem”** (vv. 40, 41, 42). Jesus causes **division** (v. 43).



Again *the leadership seek his arrest* (vv. 45–52). When **the officers** sent to arrest him didn't "**bring him**" with them (v. 45) they say "**no one ever spoke like this man!**" (v. 46) This led **the Pharisees** to respond: "**Have you also been deceived? Have any of the authorities or the Pharisees believed in him? But this crowd that does not know the law is accursed**" (vv. 47–49). And when Nicodemus spoke up, "**Does our law judge a man without first giving him a hearing and learning what he does?**" (vv. 50–51), the leadership again replied in an accusatory way: "**Are you from Galilee too? Search and see that no prophet arises from Galilee**" (v. 52).

Confusion abounded. Jesus' brothers were seeking earthly gain and glory. Some called him good; some believed merely because of his miracles; some called him the Prophet Moses prophesied; some called him the Messiah; some doubted his place of origin; some called him a heretic; some sought to kill him.

There may be confusion with us, but Jesus clearly and unmistakably tells us who he is: the eternal Son sent from the Father to give those dying in the desert of sin reviving water; and as we're revived, that water flows from us like a river to revive others until he comes and the whole earth is renewed in a lush garden of the Lord. Don't be confused; believe!

## Endnotes

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<sup>1</sup> Carson, *John*, 305–306. See also my sermon on John 2:12–22, “Destroy this Temple,” pp. 2–3 at <https://media.sermonaudio.com/mediapdf/34181837186.pdf>.

<sup>2</sup> Carson, *John*, 307–308.

<sup>3</sup> γογγυσμός; cf. 6:41.

<sup>4</sup> Carson, *John*, 310.

<sup>5</sup> Contra Carson (*John*, 311) and Ridderbos (*John*, 262 n28) who take this instance of οἱ Ἰουδαῖοι as referring to “the people in general, not just the authorities.”

<sup>6</sup> Cited in Ridderbos, *John*, 265 n38.

<sup>7</sup> Taken from [https://world.wng.org/2018/04/persecuting\\_the\\_province](https://world.wng.org/2018/04/persecuting_the_province) (Accessed June 5, 2018).