

John 7:25-39

Introduction

Jesus is in Jerusalem during the Feast of Booths, teaching in the temple. That's where we left off last week, and now we pick up in verses 25-26:

I. John 7:25–26 — Some of the people of Jerusalem therefore said, “Is not this the man whom they seek to kill? 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?”

Back in verse twenty, “the crowd” of Jewish visitors and pilgrims to Jerusalem said to Jesus: “You have a demon! Who seeks to kill You?” Here in verse 25 it's the people who actually live in Jerusalem (“the people of Jerusalem”) who say to one another: “Is this not the man whom they seek to kill?” They know better the true state of affairs than does the Jewish “crowd” of pilgrims. But now they're annoyed. Here Jesus is, speaking openly—the very one the authorities are seeking to kill—and they say nothing to Him!” Why is this?

“Can it be that the authorities really know that this is the Christ?” Of course, that's a sarcastic question and the answer is assumed to be “no.” But for John's readers—for *us*—the question is left hanging in the air, and John means for us to be pondering the true answer. As a matter of fact Jesus *is* “the Christ,” even if the authorities don't know this, and as a matter of fact this *is*—ultimately—why the authorities have not yet seized Him – because *as the Christ* His times are not determined by the plans and purposes of men, but by the will of God. But, of course, the people of Jerusalem are blinded to these things. They dismiss as ludicrous the idea that Jesus could be the Christ on these grounds:

II. John 7:27 — “But we know where this man is from, and whenever the Christ comes, no one will know where he is from.”

There was a tradition in Judaism, based on a questionable interpretation of various Old Testament Scriptures (cf. Mal. 3:1-2), that when the Messiah appeared on the scene He would come, as it were, from out of nowhere. They weren't thinking of an apocalyptic coming on the clouds of heaven. They were thinking of a previously unknown and unrecognized man who suddenly proclaims himself and takes the world by storm. Jesus doesn't fit this Messianic stereotype. He's been on the public scene, now, for probably at least two years and in all that time, He's not yet got around to doing anything that the Messiah was expected to do. That's why the people of Jerusalem are so smugly confident. They know where Jesus is from. Therefore, they know all they need to know in order to conclude that Jesus can't be “the Christ.”

Jesus doesn't challenge the belief that “whenever the Christ comes, no one will know where He is from.” But He does challenge whether they really and truly know where He is from.

III. John 7:28a — So Jesus cried out, as he taught in the temple, “You know me, and you know where I am from.”

There is some truth to their words. Jesus doesn't deny that there is *somewhat* that they can know about Him in fleshly or human categories, but He does deny that this is *all* there is to know of Him. He does deny that these fleshly and human categories are sufficient to make any "true" judgments about Him. "You know Me, and you know where I am from," Jesus says, but then there's also this:

IV. John 7:28b — "And I [whom you "know" in these fleshly and human categories] have not come of myself. He who sent me is true, and him you do *not* know."

When Jesus says, "He who sent Me is true," He's saying that *He Himself* is *true* in so far as the one who sent Him is true. The "trueness" of the one who sent Jesus guarantees and requires the "trueness" of *Jesus* – a "trueness" that transcends all of our fleshly and human categories. But it's precisely this one who sent Jesus that the people of Jerusalem **do not know**. And if they don't know the one who sent Jesus, how can they truly know the one whom He has sent? How can they truly know Jesus—or even where Jesus is from—if they "know" Him only in fleshly and human categories? So while on the one hand they do know Him, it must also be said with equal force and truth that they know Him not at all. That's why after saying, "He who sent me is true, and him you do not know," Jesus goes on to say:

V. John 7:29 — "I know him, for I am *from him*, and he sent me."

You know where I am *from* in fleshly and human categories; but these categories are wholly insufficient to make any true judgments about me. You know where I am *from*, yes, but on the other hand, you are wholly ignorant of that one **from whom I am** and **from whom I was sent**. And if this is the case, then Jesus is also saying: "How can you know the one who sent Me if you don't know and recognize Me – that I am *from Him* and that *He* sent *Me*?"

By now, we know that these claims aren't just coming from out of nowhere. They're part of an entire matrix of self-authenticating testimony—some of which we've just seen earlier in this conversation (7:16-24). Rather than coming from out of nowhere, these words are the summation of this whole body of testimony and are themselves a part of this testimony. So listen again to the testimony of Jesus:

"You know me, and you know where I am from. And I have not come of Myself. He who sent Me is true, and Him you do *not* know. I know Him, for I am *from Him*, and He *sent me*." On the one hand, these words are condemning words. On the other hand, these are words of invitation. Jesus is inviting the people of Jerusalem to know Him truly; not merely in fleshly and human categories but *as the one from Him who is true* and *as the one sent by Him who is true*. But their response only reveals the blindness and hardness of their hearts.

VI. John 7:30 — So they were seeking to seize him, but no one laid a hand on him, because his hour had not yet come.

Just a moment ago, the people of Jerusalem were questioning why the authorities didn't do something about Jesus. And yet now, when they themselves are seeking to seize Him, no one lays a hand on Him. They might have given various reasons for this, but John gives the reason

that stands behind all the others: “because His hour had not yet come.” It’s not the religious authorities *or* the people of Jerusalem in control of Jesus’ destiny but Jesus Himself – as He submits obediently, moment by moment, to the will of His Father.

“The people of Jerusalem” were seeking to seize Him...

VII. John 7:31 — Yet many of the people believed in him. They said, “When the Christ appears, will he do more signs than this man has done?”

At the human level, this is one reason no one was laying a hand on Jesus – because so many of the people were believing in Him. But whether their believing was of the truly saving kind or not, we read in verse thirty-two:

VIII. John 7:32 — The Pharisees heard the crowd whispering these things about him, and the chief priests and Pharisees sent [temple] officers to arrest him.

A time of public festival wasn’t the ideal time to arrest a man who was popular with so many of the people. On the other hand, if the authorities don’t do anything they’re afraid that more and more of the people will go after Jesus and that things will get more and more out of control. So, finally, they send officers to arrest Him – no doubt with instructions to look for the most opportune time. Jesus knows—or else He hears—of their plans:

IX. John 7:33 — *Therefore* Jesus said, “For a little while longer I am with you, and then I go to him who sent me.”

Who’s really in control here? Is it the chief priests and the Pharisees who send officers to arrest Jesus, or is it Jesus who, when He hears of their plan, says: “For *a little while longer* I am with you, and *then I go* to Him who sent Me”?

Jesus *came from* the Father and now Jesus says He is *going back to* the Father. When Jesus is finally arrested and put to death, this will be for Him the pathway of His return to the one who sent Him—in the Father’s own appointed time. No one listening to Jesus at the time could have understood this fully, but Jesus would have them know that no matter what the plans of the chief priests and Pharisees might be, those plans can only be subservient in the end to His own mission in *coming forth from* the Father and *going back to* the Father who sent Him. Therefore Jesus calls the people, no matter what the plans of the chief priests and Pharisees might be, to believe in Him now before it’s too late. If they continue in unbelief then a day will come, Jesus says, when:

X. John 7:34 — “You will seek me and you will not find me. Where I am you cannot come.”

They will seek Jesus not for who He is or for any true love of Him, but only for the deliverance from wrath that they’ll finally understand can only come from Him. They’ll seek Him, but He won’t answer. Where He is, they won’t be able to come. Because then it will be too late, and the day of salvation will be past. Jesus’ words remind us of the words of wisdom personified in Proverbs chapter one and are a warning to all of us against persisting in unbelief:

- Proverbs 1:24–33 (cf. Ps. 18:41; Isa. 1:15; Jer. 11:11; 14:12; Ezek. 8:18; Mic. 3:4; Zech. 7:13) — Because I have called and you refused to listen, have stretched out my hand and no one has heeded, because you have ignored all my counsel and would have none of my reproof, I also will laugh at your calamity; I will mock when terror strikes you, when terror strikes you like a storm and your calamity comes like a whirlwind, when distress and anguish come upon you. Then they will call upon me, but I will not answer; they will seek me diligently [to escape their punishment] but will not find me. Because they hated knowledge and did not choose the fear of the LORD, would have none of my counsel and despised all my reproof, therefore they shall eat the fruit of their way, and have their fill of their own devices. For the simple are killed by their turning away, and the complacency of fools destroys them; but whoever listens to me will dwell secure and will be at ease, without dread of disaster.

Whether any of the crowd heeded Jesus' warning, we don't know, but "the Jews," at least, can still only judge of the things Jesus says in fleshly and human categories. If they know where Jesus is *from*, then where can He possibly *go* that they cannot go?

XI. John 7:35–36 — 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 [the Greek-speaking (Hellenistic) Jews]? What does he mean by saying, 'You will seek me and you will not find me,' and, 'Where I am you cannot come'?"

As usual, "the Jews" don't direct their questions to Jesus because they're not interested in any answer Jesus would give. And they're not interested in any answer Jesus gives because they think they already know Jesus and where Jesus is from. But their very inability to comprehend Jesus' words proves that they know Him not at all. How can they know Jesus if they know Him and hear Him and judge of Him only in fleshly and human categories?

Jesus doesn't respond to their "confusion" about where He intends to go, but later on, at the end of the feast, He does respond again to the unbelief that stands behind all their "confusion." He proclaims to them those spiritual "categories" by which, alone, they can know Him truly.

XII. John 7:37a — On the last day of the feast, the great day...

John obviously sees a wonderful beauty and importance in the *timing* of what's about to happen: "On the last day of the feast, the great day..." So we need to stop now and understand the meaning of the Feast of Booths.

The Feast takes its name from the fact that the people would gather leafy branches and construct "booths" in which to live for the duration of the week-long feast. Living in these booths was to be a reminder to the people of life before they entered the Promised Land, when they were living in tents in the wilderness, and so also a reminder of how grateful they should be for all the rich blessings of a *settled* life in the land God had given them. Even the materials from which the booths were constructed was a reminder of these blessings of life lived—as Moses says—in "a land of **brooks of water**, of **fountains** and **springs**, flowing forth in valleys and hills; a land of wheat and barley, of vines and fig trees and pomegranates, a land of olive oil and honey; a land where [they could] eat food without scarcity" (Deut. 8:7-9). Notice the intimate connection

between the fruitful produce of the land and an abundance of water. So now we read these instructions in Leviticus twenty-three:

- Leviticus 23:40 (cf. Neh. 8:15-16) — You shall take **on the first day [of the Feast of Booths]** 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.

If living in booths—and even the materials of the booths themselves—was a reminder of the blessings of a settled life in a watered and fertile land, then so also was the timing of this feast in the seventh month of the year (September/October on the Jewish calendar). One commentator writes:

“[In the seventh month] the dry hot summer draws to an end, the grapes and olives are picked [as well as any second-crop grains], and the Israelite starts to look forward to **the coming of the rains**. In a good year these would begin in October [the early rains] and last until March [the later rains]. **The seventh month, then, marked the end of the agricultural year and the beginning of a new one.**” (Wenham)

That’s why the Feast of Booths could also be called the Feast of Ingathering.

- Exodus 23:16 (cf. Lev. 23:39) — You shall keep the Feast of Ingathering **at the end of the year**, when you gather in from the field the fruit of your labor.

But, of course, the people could never presume on these blessings of a settled life in a watered and fruitful land. The fertility of the land was dependent on the rains from heaven and God warned that He would withhold these rains if the people were disobedient and turned away from Him. This is why every seventh year at the Feast of Booths, the Law was to be read before all Israel (Deut. 31:10-12; Neh. 8:18). The Feast of Booths wasn’t just a joyful celebration of the year’s harvest; it was also a joyful prayer for and anticipation of the fruitfulness of the land in the coming year as the people looked to the Lord to send the rains in preparation for the next year’s planting (cf. Zech. 14:16-19). So we read in Deuteronomy eleven:

- Deuteronomy 11:10–15 (cf. Lev. 26:4; Jer. 5:24) — The land that you are going over to possess is a land of hills and valleys, which drinks **water** by the **rain** from heaven, a land that the LORD your God cares for. The eyes of the LORD your God are always upon it, from the beginning of the year to the end of the year. And if you will indeed obey my commandments that I command you today, to love the LORD your God, and to serve him with all your heart and with all your soul, he will give the **rain** for your land in its season, the **early rain** and the **later rain**, that you may gather in your grain and your wine [grapes] and your oil [olives]. And he will give grass in your fields for your livestock, and you shall eat and be full.

It was only natural in the end that a settled life in a perennially watered and abundantly fruitful land—celebrated and anticipated in the Feast of Booths—should come to be a picture of the *eschatological* blessings of life in the coming kingdom.

- Joel 3:18 (cf. Amos 9:13-14) — In that day the mountains shall drip sweet wine, and the hills shall flow with milk, and all the streambeds of Judah shall flow with **water**; and a fountain shall come forth from the house of the LORD and water the Valley of Shittim.
- Isaiah 30:21–26 (cf. Ezek. 47:1-12; Zech. 14:8) — Your ears shall hear a word behind you, saying, “This is the way, walk in it,” when you turn to the right or when you turn to the left. Then you will defile your carved idols overlaid with silver and your gold-plated metal images. You will scatter them as unclean things. You will say to them, “Be gone!” And he will give **rain** for the seed with which you sow the ground, and bread, the produce of the ground, which will be rich and plenteous. In that day your livestock will graze in large pastures, and the oxen and the donkeys that work the ground will eat seasoned fodder, which has been winnowed with shovel and fork. And on every lofty mountain and every high hill there will be **brooks running with water**...

Notice again the connection between rivers and brooks fed by the rains from heaven and the abundant fertility of the land. And notice, too, the connection with repentance and true obedience.

Living in booths was to be a reminder to the people of life before they entered the Promised Land – when they were still living in tents in the wilderness. But even in the wilderness God had given them a foretaste of the abundance they would one day enjoy in the land.

- Psalm 78:16 — He made **streams** come out of the rock and caused waters to flow down like **rivers**.
- Psalm 105:41 — He opened the rock, and water gushed out; it flowed through the desert like a **river**.
- Cf. Isaiah 48:21; Deut. 8:15; Neh. 9:15; Ps. 114:7-8

The **rivers** in the *desert* anticipated the “**river** whose streams make glad the *city* of God, the holy habitation of the Most High” (Ps. 46:4).

- Psalm 65:9–13 (cf. Ps. 107:35-38) — You visit the earth and water it; you greatly enrich it; the **river** of God is full of water; you provide their grain, for so you have prepared it. You **water** its furrows abundantly, settling its ridges, softening it with **showers**, and blessing its growth. You crown the year with your bounty; your wagon tracks overflow with abundance. The pastures of the wilderness overflow, the hills gird themselves with joy, the meadows clothe themselves with flocks, the valleys deck themselves with grain, they shout and sing together for joy.

It’s passages like these that help us to understand the joy and the longing of the Feast of Booths.

If the rivers in the desert anticipated the blessings of a settled life in a watered and fruitful land (celebrated in the Feast of Booths), then they also pictured the *eschatological* blessings of life in the coming kingdom (cf. Ezek. 47:1-12; Zech. 14:8).

- Isaiah 41:18–19 (cf. 43:18-21) — I will open **rivers** on the bare heights, and **fountains** in the midst of the valleys. I will make the wilderness a pool of water, and the dry land **springs** of

water. I will put in the wilderness the cedar, the acacia, the myrtle, and the olive. I will set in the desert the cypress, the plane and the pine together.

Notice again the connection between rivers fed by the rains from heaven and the abundant fertility of the land. And notice also the inexpressible joy of God's people.

- Isaiah 35:5–8, 10 — Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf unstopped; then shall the lame man leap like a deer, and the tongue of the mute sing for joy. For **waters** break forth in the wilderness, and **streams** in the desert; the burning sand shall become a pool, and the thirsty ground **springs** of water... A highway shall be there... and the ransomed of the LORD shall return and come to Zion with singing; everlasting joy shall be upon their heads; they shall obtain gladness and joy, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away.

All of this background, taken *all together*, is what helps us understand this Feast of Booths in Jerusalem here in John chapter seven (see the commentaries for the practice of bringing water from the pool of Siloam and pouring it out before the Lord on each day of the feast; cf. 1 Sam. 7:6). Only now, because of the “exile” and oppression of God's people, the main emphasis at the Feast was prayer for and joyful anticipation of the eschatological blessings of the coming kingdom, when the prophecy of Jeremiah would be fulfilled.

- Jeremiah 31:12 (cf. Isa. 12:1-3; 58:11) — [Then] they shall come and sing aloud on the height of Zion, and they shall be radiant over the goodness of the LORD, over the grain, the wine, and the oil, and over the young of the flock and the herd; their life shall be like a **watered garden**, and they shall languish no more.

All of this historical and prophetic background, taken *all together*, is what helps us to truly grasp and stand in awe at what we read now in verses 37-38:

XIII. John 7:37–38 — On the last day of the feast, the great day, Jesus stood up and cried out, “If anyone is thirsty, let him come to me and drink. He who believes in me, **as the Scripture has said**, ‘Out of his innermost being [lit. “belly”] will flow **rivers** of living water.’”

Jesus cannot be known truly in fleshly and human categories. He can only be truly known as the *fulfillment* of the Feast of Booths – the fulfillment of all redemptive history. Jesus is the one to whom we come for drink in the desert. Jesus is the one who settles us in our inheritance. Jesus is the one who causes rivers of living water to flow from our innermost being so that our life is—and will one day be—like a watered garden. And Jesus is the one who does all these things because Jesus is the one who gives the Spirit and because the Spirit is the one who unites us with Jesus and who now applies to us all the saving blessings of His death, and resurrection, and ascension, and of His everlasting kingly rule. John explains:

XIV. John 7:39 — 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*.

The prophets were clear that this life of abundance in the eschatological kingdom was to be the result of the Lord pouring out His Spirit upon His people (cf. Isa. 63:11; Hag. 2:5).

- Isaiah 44:3 (cf. Joel 2:28-29) — 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.
- Isaiah 32:14–15 — The palace is forsaken, the populous city deserted; the hill and the watchtower will become dens forever, a joy of wild donkeys, a pasture of flocks; until **the Spirit is poured upon us** from on high, and the wilderness becomes a **fruitful field**, and the fruitful field is deemed a forest.

Now that Jesus *has* been glorified, it's the life of *this* glorified Jesus that the Spirit mediates to us so that we drink now “from a spring whose fullness for everyone who believes will never be exhausted” (Ridderbos) – so that now out of our innermost being there flow rivers of living water.

Conclusion

Do you “know” Jesus only according to human and fleshly categories? Or do you know Jesus truly, as the one who stands up in the temple on the last day of the Feast of Booths, the great day, and cries out: “If anyone is thirsty, let him come to *me* and drink. He who believes in me, as the Scripture has said, ‘Out of his innermost being will flow rivers of living water.’”

- Ephesians 3:14–19 — For this reason I bow my knees before the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named, that according to the riches of his glory he may grant you to be strengthened with power through his **Spirit** in your inner being, so that **Christ** may dwell in your hearts through faith—that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may have strength to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.