

### 34. WHO IS HE? (7:40-8:1)

One of the things that stands out from John 6 and 7 is the irony that Jesus uses to reveal the truth about who He is. As He does so, He also exposes the hypocrisy of His audience, and indeed in each one of us two thousand years later. In our next portion we see that despite everything that Jesus has told them, there is still great confusion and division surrounding who He is.



#### QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION OR STUDY

1. Have you ever been quick to judge or jump to a conclusion about someone without all the facts? What were the consequences?
2. Have you done to same with Jesus, whether as a non-believer or a believer?

In our text we see two major divisions occurring as a result of Jesus' teaching about Him being the Living Water, division among the people and division among the priests.

#### DIVISION AMONG THE PEOPLE (VV40-44)

Following Jesus' invitation for anyone who is thirsty to come to Him and drink, the people begin to debate as to whom they think He is, but not everyone is in agreement as mentioned in verse 43.

Basically the people are divided into three different opinions:

1. In verse 40, we see that some people think that Jesus is the Prophet. This is not the first time we have seen this title in John. Back in chapter 1 the religious leaders ask John the Baptist if he is the Prophet, to which he emphatically replies, "No I am not". Then, in chapter 6, after Jesus feeds the five thousand, the crowd exclaims, "*This is indeed the Prophet who is to come into the world!*" There they connect Jesus' miraculous provision with God's provision of manna for His people in the wilderness through the prophet Moses. In so doing, they connect Jesus to the prophecy in Deuteronomy 18:15, where Moses says, "*The Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among you, from your brothers – it is to him you shall listen*". Ironically, although they make that connection, they refuse to listen, for when Jesus proclaims that He is the bread of life that came down from heaven, all, except the twelve disciples, leave Him. Similarly, Jesus' invitation during the Feast of Booths to come to Him and drink reminds them of Moses when through him God miraculously provides water for Israel in the wilderness. All this leads some of the crowd to say, "*This really is the Prophet*".
2. Another part of the crowd says, "*This is the Christ*" (v41a). As we learned last time, Christ is the Greek form of Messiah and means the anointed one, that is, He is set apart by God for a specific task. What one needs to understand here is that to the Jews, the Prophet and the Christ are two different people. To them, the Prophet is the forerunner who prepares the way for the Christ. Therefore, this second group is effectively saying, "He's not just the Prophet, He's not merely a forerunner, no, He's the Christ, the Messiah we've been waiting for". So although their individual

statements are true, they do not put the two together in the same person. But Jesus is indeed the Prophet, and He is the Christ.

3. Another part of the crowd questions this second statement – *“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?”* (vv41b-42). This group, like the religious leaders in verse 24, do not judge with right judgement, instead they judge by appearances, because something does not fit their understanding of the Messiah. They know that the Scriptures say that He is to be a descendant of David (e.g. 1Ch. 17:12; Psa. 89:29) and be born in Bethlehem (cf. Mic. 5:2), but as far as they know, Jesus grew up in Galilee. Therefore, they conclude that He cannot be the Christ. But in the same way that they neglect to see that Prophet and Christ refer to the same person, so too with the facts that the Messiah is to be born in Bethlehem and that Jesus has come from Galilee. Yes, their references to the Scriptures are correct, however, they do not rightly understand Jesus. If only they had done some research, if they had judged with right judgement, then they would know that although He grew up in Galilee, he was born in Bethlehem. This part of the crowd dismisses Jesus as the Christ because of a lack of information and understanding about Him. Despite everything pointing to Him being the Messiah, they reject the idea based on appearances and preconceived ideas.

What is interesting here is that John does not include any further event or teaching by Jesus to correct their misunderstanding. He does not even include a statement in brackets like we have seen several times already in the gospel (e.g. 1:15, 24, 38, 41; 7:22) to at least make sure his readers know the truth. Considering John’s purpose for writing his gospel is so that we *“might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing [we] may have life in his name”*, it seems a little strange that he leaves this unresolved. In fact, we saw something similar in verse 31 when they questioned, *“When the Christ appears, will He do more signs that this man has done?”* (see also verse 36).

I believe John does not resolve any of these issues for two reasons:

1. Simply because of how he begins his purpose statement in 20:31, he wrote, *“but these are written so that you may believe”*. In other words, John is convinced that what he has written is sufficient for belief, and he does not need to include explanations for everything. In fact, even the absence of some information can cause one to believe, which leads to the second reason.
2. Rather than give us more information or evidence, John exposes the crowd’s inability to judge with right judgement which forces us to also look at the facts. Up to this point, John has provided abundant evidence for Jesus being the Christ, and so, like the crowd, we have to decide for ourselves who we believe Jesus is based on those facts.

The point John is making is that the people are divided and that none is able to determine for himself who Jesus is. Instead, they make judgements based on external appearances based on their presuppositions and prejudices.



## QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION OR STUDY

1. What presuppositions or prejudices have you come to Christ with in the past? How have those been changed as you have come to know Him more?
2. Should we approach Christ with any presuppositions or prejudices? Is there such a thing as blind faith when it comes to knowing Him?

People today are just like the crowd here who judge Jesus based solely on what they can see, or what appears to be true at a surface level. This is typically based on limited, even false, information, which leads to people rejecting Jesus as the Messiah. For example, one may look at one's surroundings or the state of the world and conclude that God is not good because all one sees is sin, death, and corruption. How can a good God allow bad things to happen? To make matters worse, we live in a social media and AI driven world where stories, comments, and fake news are literally at our fingertips. So when people read or see those things, they make judgements about God that are not based on fact. And we do exactly the same thing with people? Even God's people. We quickly make judgements about others based solely on appearances, and we are quick to condemn them, and often even of things we are guilty of ourselves. If we judge people whom we can see, how much easier is it to judge God whom we cannot see?

When it comes to judging Jesus and God, especially in the case of sceptics, atheists, and the like, the reality is they can and will always find an excuse not to believe in Jesus. That is because of his sinful nature, man does not want to be accountable to anyone but himself. He does not want to face a holy God and deal with his sin. Like this crowd, they display pride and hypocrisy. They do not see their need for Jesus and think that they are able to judge rightly, when they can not.

But, what this passage also shows, is that whatever excuse one has for not believing in Jesus, it is never valid. John shows us that Jesus really is the Christ who can set you free from sin, and any excuse you have to reject Him as Messiah is a surface level, invalid excuse. Anyone who seriously wants to know the truth about Jesus will not consult the wisdom of the world. Instead, by the prompting of the Holy Spirit, they will search God's Word, receive the wisdom that comes from above, and will discover the truth about Jesus. Unfortunately, that is not the case for the crowd in John 7. They are content to reject Jesus based only on the visible evidence and not seek to know the truth, and so, there was a division among the people over Him – a division still evident in the world today.

Verse 44 tells us yet again that some seek to arrest Him but no one lays a hand on Him. Ever since chapter 5, John has repeatedly highlighted that the opposition to Jesus is growing. Something that we will continue to see this through to chapter 19 when Jesus is crucified. However, that opposition is balanced with the fact that none of it is outside God's control. It was God's plan to send his Son to redeem sinful humanity through his death on the cross, but it was to occur according to His timing, not man's.



## QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION OR STUDY

1. If someone had to say to you that they cannot believe in God because how can a good God allow evil, how would you answer?
2. Most people cannot answer the above question. Perhaps you are struggling with the question yourself. It is one that man has wrestled with for millennia. So consider this, is God only glorified by the good, or is He also glorified by the evil? Now reconsider question 1.



## DIVISION AMONG THE PRIESTS (VV45-8:1)

But the division is not only among the people, but also among the priests – those who have the law and should know better. If anyone in Israel at the time could have judged Jesus rightly and dealt with the division among the people, it should have been the priests. But as we will see, they are more deceived than anyone else. Ironically, all of their accusations made against Jesus and the crowds are true also of themselves. They are self-righteous with little concern for the truth, therefore, they are unable to judge with right judgement.

As with the people, there is a three-way division among the priests:

1. In verses 45 and 46 we see the officers that the Pharisees and the chief priest sent out back in verse 32 officers to arrest Jesus return empty-handed. Since then, these officers have been listening to Jesus' teaching, specifically about Him going back to the Father, and His invitation to come to Him and drink. They have probably also heard some of the responses of the people. When questioned they say that it is because they have never heard anyone speak like Him. This too is ironic, especially when we realise who these men are. We need to realise that these officers are not Roman guards, nor soldiers in the Israeli army, but are officers within the temple courts. These were men chosen from the tribe of Levi, specifically from the family of Korah. In other words, they were Levites (cp. The "gatekeepers" in Neh. 12). These men are trained in crowd control, combat techniques, and other necessary skills to fulfil their duties. They are also equipped with weapons such as swords, spears, and shields.

In the time of Christ, the selection of these officials was primarily done by the temple authorities, including the high priest and the Sanhedrin, who would evaluate candidates based on four criteria. Firstly they needed to be physically fit and capable of carrying out their duties. Secondly they had to demonstrate high moral character and standards, and have a good reputation. Thirdly they had to be fully devoted to God. This was an essential requirement since their duties were to primarily enforce God's law. Fourthly, they had to be loyal to the priesthood. As officers of the temple they worked closely with the priests, and so loyalty to the priestly authority and hierarchy was crucial. It is this last criteria that is especially pertinent here. Because these officers, being from the tribe of Levi, were taught the same things as the Pharisees and Priests, they even heard their colleagues teach the law. Yet when they hear-first hand the message of Jesus, despite their orders, they cannot arrest Him because they realise that they have never heard anyone say the things Jesus is saying, and with the authority that He is saying them, not even by fel-

low Levites or their superiors in the temple. They were sent out to arrest someone they were told is a deceiver and they come back thinking He's a truth-bearer.

2. This leads the Pharisees to ask in verse 47, "*Have you also been deceived?*". This question reveals exactly what they think about Jesus and the crowd, that Jesus is a deceiver who is teaching lies and deceiving the ignorant people. And now the officers have also been bewitched. However, notice how quickly they start to turn on one another in the very next verses, "*Have any of the authorities or Pharisees believed in him? But this crowd that does not know the law is accursed*" (vv48-49). Here they're saying to the officers, "None of us here believe in Jesus. Therefore, you shouldn't either". What is more, those who do believe Jesus are accursed because they do not know the law. But we, the Pharisees and Priests, we have the Law, so we know better. Their evidence that Jesus is not the Christ is themselves. Their justification for Jesus not being the Messiah has nothing to do with Jesus' teachings or works and everything to do with their assessment of Him. This is a very subjective judgement that is not based on objective fact, but humanistic, cultural, or traditional beliefs. These religious leaders are trying to prevent the officers from deciding for themselves and use their role as the ones who study the law as evidence that they know better.

They are also degrading those in the crowd who do believe in Jesus, claiming they do not know the law and have brought condemnation upon themselves. But, as is typical in John, their statement is ironic, because they are the ones who are supposed to know the law, yet they do not recognise the giver of the law and the one that the law points to. They boast of their wisdom and knowledge, claiming that others are deceived, when, in fact, they have deceived themselves. And even more ironic, it is not the crowd that is accursed, but these religious leaders who claim they are.

3. To state that none of the authorities and Pharisees have believed in Him is a false presumption and this is why I say they are starting to turn on one another, because in verse 50 we read that Nicodemus is among them. There are a couple of details that John wants us to notice here. First, he reminds us that Nicodemus previously went to Jesus with questions. That was in chapter 3 when He went to Jesus at night and learned that unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God. So, John is telling us here that some fruit of that conversation is starting to show, proving that Nicodemus heard and understood Jesus' words, that even if he has not fully come to faith yet, he's wrestling with Jesus' teachings, and unlike his fellow Pharisees, he seeks to judge with right judgement.

But, not only that, John is reminding us that Nicodemus is himself a Pharisee. He is not part of the crowd in the city, but is part of the religious order that is zealous for the law. However, his thinking is not the same as theirs as he challenges their logic by asking, "*Does our law judge a man without first giving him a hearing and learning what he does?*".

Notice how Nicodemus refers to the law here, he says “*our law*”, unlike the Pharisees who refer to it as “*the law*”. What’s the difference? Well by saying “*the law*”, the Pharisees are saying that the standard they’re using to judge Jesus by is the law as it was given to them by Moses – the law of God. However, Nicodemus is saying that the law they’re actually using is not God’s law, although there may be elements of it, it is instead their interpretation of the law. In fact, it’s more their law than it is God’s.

For example, Nicodemus alludes to the various passages in Deuteronomy that state that a person must be heard, evidence given, and witnesses considered before he can be declared guilty. But this has not happened with Jesus. So Nicodemus exposes that the Pharisees do not keep the law, but rather obey their own law, “*our law*”. He’s basically confirmed what Jesus accused them of earlier in verse 19 – hypocrisy. And so, instead of condemning Jesus, they condemn themselves.

The Pharisees then respond to Nicodemus in a way that proves his point. They ask, “*Are you from Galilee too? Search and see that no prophet arises from Galilee*”. Here they are accusing Nicodemus of being on Jesus’ side – that he too has been deceived. But they take it a step further and challenge him to search the Scriptures for himself to see that no prophet has ever come from Galilee. However, their response highlights both their pride and lack of knowledge even more, for two prophets did indeed come from Galilee, Jonah and Nahum.

These religious leaders do not judge with right judgement. Instead, they judge on appearances. They claim to know the Word, but in fact, they do not. Although they appear zealous for the law, they are instead zealous for their own version of the law and prove that they do not know God, as Jesus charged them of back in verse 17.



### QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION OR STUDY

1. Look back at the whole of chapter 7 and list the various ways that people reacted to Jesus?
2. What are some of the different reactions to Jesus today? Are they any different?

And so ends chapter 7 in a way that is rather similar to chapter 6. There the chapter opened with Jesus feeding five thousand plus people, but after He challenged them, all but His twelve disciples remain. Here in chapter 7, it opens with tens of thousands of people in Jerusalem attending the Feast of Booths, yet by the end all return to their homes divided as to who Jesus is. This leaves only one man, Nicodemus, who seeks to judge Him rightly.

### DIVISION REMAINS

But why is all this important? What is John teaching us today, thousands of years later? He is teaching us that nothing has changed. Man continues to judge Jesus and others based on appearances only and do not judge rightly. We jump to conclusions about who He is, how He works, or how He wants us to respond to Him and worship Him. Much of those judgements, like with the Pharisees, are based on ourselves and not on what He has revealed to us. It is about our personal preferences or desires. It is

based on what we have heard other people say about Jesus, whether they are Christian or not, and allowing ourselves to be influenced by those things.

Note that Nicodemus here advocates the proper approach. Not only in a court of law, but in all matters of life, and especially personal faith, issues must be decided on the basis of evidence and facts. That means that we must be willing to hear both sides and must give an honest consideration to the evidence. But as Christians, it is also a call to study God's Word. If we are to truly know who God is and how to respond to Him, we need to surround ourselves with Scripture. We should read and study it daily, and often more than once each day. If we are to judge God rightly we need to go to the best source of information about Him, we have to go to the book that He has written for us.

But it also causes us to consider where we stand before Jesus. And there are only two possible decisions that you can make. You are either for Jesus or against Him. You either take Him at His word and believe and trust in Him, or you choose to ignore His Word, follow the wisdom of man, and reject Him. But as sinful human beings our natural inclination is to resist Him? We must admit, that we do not always like what Jesus said or stands for, and it is hard to admit that we are dependent on Him. Instead, we want to be independent, to choose our own way, to choose what we want to believe about Him.

But we can not see Him only as the Prophet and ignore that He is Christ, or vice versa. For if we choose to ignore just one thing, or add something of our own, we make Him out to be someone He is not. That is idolatry. We either accept and believe everything Jesus tells us about Himself as revealed in Scripture and nothing more, or we do not. We cannot casually brush any of His claims for the simple truth is this, either Jesus is who He says He is, or He is a deceiver, worthy of death.



#### QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION OR STUDY

1. Based on what you have learned from Scripture, what conclusion have you come to about Jesus?
2. What should be your response to all that you have learned, and how are you doing?

