

Lesson Ten

(John 7:25-8:11)

Not long after his arrival at the Festival of Shelters, Jesus sees the Jewish authorities turn from astonishment at his teachings to suspicions concerning his identity. And soon there is a verbal war raging among his listeners.

Is He the Messiah?

(John 7:25-31)

²⁵Some of the people of Jerusalem said, "Isn't this the man the authorities are trying to kill? ²⁶Look! He is talking in public, and they say nothing against him! Can it be that they really know that he is the Messiah? ²⁷But when the Messiah comes, no one will know where he is from. And we all know where this man comes from."

²⁸As Jesus taught in the Temple, he said in a loud voice, "Do you really know me and know where I am from? I have not come on my own authority. He who sent me, however, is truthful. You do not

know him, ²⁹but I know him, because I come from him and he sent me."

³⁰Then they tried to seize him, but no one laid a hand on him, because his hour had not yet come. ³¹But many in the crowd believed in him and said, "When the Messiah comes, will he perform more miracles than this man has?"

Once again, the self-made barrier of prejudice prevents people from accepting Jesus as the Son of God. They think they know where he is from, since they are aware of his Galilean background (7:27). But Jesus challenges their smug certainty (7:28), and then boldly claims that God sent him and empowered him with heavenly authority. But they won't accept him because, in the final analysis, they themselves don't know God (7:29).

Reacting negatively to Jesus' profoundly truthful statements, they attempt to capture him but fail. John does not explain exactly how Jesus is able to escape their fury. He simply says, "no one laid a hand on him, because his hour had not yet come" (7:30).

Slowly but surely the number of believers increases, as people are unable to explain away the mighty wonders which Jesus performs (7:31). But their expressions of belief cause still another reaction.

Guards are Sent to Arrest Jesus

(John 7:32-36)

³²The Pharisees heard the crowd whispering these things about Jesus, so they and the chief priests sent some guards to arrest him.

³³Jesus said, "I shall be with you a little while longer, and then I shall go away to him who sent me. ³⁴You will look for me, but you will not find me, because you cannot go where I will be."

³⁵The Jewish authorities said among themselves, "Where is he about to go so that we shall not find him? Will he go to the Greek cities where our people live, and teach the Greeks? ³⁶He says that we will look for him but will not find him, and that we cannot go where he will be. What does he mean?"

The self-righteous Pharisees and the powerful high priests (most of whom were Saducees) together send the Temple police out to arrest Jesus (7:32). Since the Saducees at this time were in a comfortable period of collaboration with the Romans, the last thing they want is a Messiah who might upset their political balance of power. It is a tragic moment when religious leaders are determined to protect their pocketbooks rather than to proclaim the truth.

In 7:33-34 Jesus expresses his awareness that the end of his human existence is quickly drawing near. And, significantly, he is spending his last days doing God's will. The fact that Jesus dies at the age of just 33 should remind us that it is the quality, not the length, of one's life that is really important. Methusaleh lived 969 years, yet the Bible sums up his life in only two sentences (Genesis 5:26-27). It's how we live, not how long, that counts.

The Jewish authorities are confused about Jesus' statement that he is going where they cannot find him (7:35-36). Frank Pack says that the Greeks who are spoken of here "were not the Hellenistic Jews but the pagan Greeks. Was Jesus saying that, faced with the rejection by the Jewish religious authorities, he was going out to the Dispersion and use the Jewish synagogues scattered throughout the Diaspora as the means for reaching the Greeks? Of course, this is later what actually occurred in the history of the church. The Jews' misunderstanding ironically does convey the truth, for Jesus was not only going back to the Father who had sent him, but he was also going (through the preaching of the gospel) to the Jews in the Dispersion, and through them he would reach the pagan Greeks with the word of the gospel of Christ" (*The Gospel According to John*, I, 129).

Streams of Life-Giving Water

(John 7:37-44)

³⁷On the last and most important day of the festival Jesus stood up and said in a loud voice, "Whoever is thirsty should come to me and drink. ³⁸As the scripture says, 'Whoever believes in me, streams of life-giving water will pour out from his heart.' ³⁹Jesus said this about the Spirit, which those who believed in him were going to receive. At that time the Spirit had not yet been given, because Jesus had not been raised to glory.

⁴⁰Some of the people in the crowd heard him say this and said, "This man is really the Prophet!"

⁴¹Others said, "He is the Messiah!"

But others said, "The Messiah will not come from Galilee! ⁴²The scripture says that the Messiah will be a descendant of King David and will be born in Bethlehem, the town where David lived." ⁴³So there was a division in the crowd because of Jesus. ⁴⁴Some wanted to seize him, but no one laid a hand on him.

On the last day of the Festival of Shelters an elaborate ceremony took place. At the pool of Siloam a golden pitcher was filled with water by a priest as the people chanted, "As fresh water brings joy to the thirsty, so God's people rejoice when he

saves them" (Isaiah 12:3). Then the entire group went up to the Temple, with each person carrying a "lulab" (a bundle of willow and myrtle twigs bound to a palm branch) in their right hand and a lemon in their left. As they encircled the altar of burnt offering, they waved their lulabs and sang their special songs of praise (Psalm 113-118). During this time the priest poured the water from the pitcher into a container on the altar. This act symbolized their prayer for rain and, more related to our context here, it also symbolized the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. The Jews believed that, just as Moses had brought forth water from a rock, the Messiah would cause a stream to flow "from the Temple of the Lord" (Joel 3:18).

It is no accident, then, that Jesus chooses this day on which to proclaim himself as the source of life-giving water (7:37). Since there is no single passage in the Old Testament which exactly fits this quotation in 7:38, it may be that Jesus is saying that it is a general principle which one could reasonably draw from the scriptures.

Paul Butler says, "The Christian will naturally become a source of life to others. Jesus is the Water of Life and believers become streams of life-giving water pouring forth to those thirsting for Life, the believers being ever supplied from the Source themselves. Jesus is the Light of the world and believers are also lights (Matthew 5:14). One only need review the book of Acts and especially the life of Paul to see examples of those who have drunk deeply of the Water of Life and become rivers of living water themselves" (*The Gospel of John*, II, 34).

In 7:39 John explains that in the past God had seen fit to bestow the presence of the Holy Spirit only upon a handful of individuals (such as Sampson, Samuel, and the writers of the Old Testament). And it was not until Jesus left the earth (Acts 1) that it became possible for God to give the Holy Spirit as a gift to every immersed believer (Acts 2:38; 5:32).

In 7:40-43 the crowd resumes the debate over who Jesus really is. Their actions remind us of certain Greek philosophers who spent days theorizing about how many teeth a horse has, rather than opening a horse's mouth and counting the teeth. These Jews had seen the miracles of Jesus and he tells them plainly who he is, but they are hung up on their pet theories.

The plain facts are that Jesus was born of the virgin Mary, so she must have been of the lineage of David (2 Samuel 7:12; Acts 2:30; Rom. 1:3; 2 Tim. 2:8; Rev. 5:5). And, of course, the scriptures

also teach that the Messiah would be born at Bethlehem (1 Samuel 16:1-4; Isaiah 11:1; Micah 5:2). But this crowd is like the hard-headed, old judge who told the lawyers standing before him, "Let's get this case over with. And don't bother me with the facts. I've got my mind made up."

The Unbelief of the Jewish Authorities

(John 7:45-52)

⁴⁵When the guards went back, the chief priests and Pharisees asked them, "Why did you not bring him?"

⁴⁶The guards answered, "Nobody has ever talked the way this man does!"

⁴⁷"Did he fool you, too?" The Pharisees asked them. ⁴⁸"Have you ever known one of the authorities or one Pharisee to believe in him? ⁴⁹This crowd does not know the Law of Moses, so they are under God's curse!"

⁵⁰One of the Pharisees there was Nicodemus, the man who had gone to see Jesus before. He said to the others, ⁵¹"According to our Law we cannot condemn a man before hearing him and finding out what he has done."

⁵²"Well," they answered, "are you also from Galilee? Study the Scriptures and you will learn that no prophet ever comes from Galilee."

Just imagine how embarrassed the Jewish leaders must have felt as they saw the Temple police return without Jesus and, in their biased opinion, without even a good excuse (7:45). While the police were out on their evil errand, these men had tossed around ideas about how to dispose of Jesus when he was brought before them. They had no doubt made crude jokes about the fate of this troublemaker. But their plans explode at the sight of the empty-handed police.

"Why did you not bring him back?" they demanded to know. They probably expected the police to say that they encountered violent resistance from the followers of Jesus or that Jesus had seen them approaching and ran for his life. But to their dismay, the police soberly announce, "Nobody has ever talked the way this man does!" (7:46).

What was it about Jesus that so impressed the Temple police? Was it his physical presence, his calm assurance and total lack of fear in the face of persecution? Was it the fact that Jesus "wasn't like the teachers of the Law; instead, he taught with authority" (Matt. 7:29)? Or was it a combination of both elements? John does not spell it out for us. But the result of that encounter is clear: the

police were so deeply moved by Jesus that they voluntarily disobeyed the orders which had been given to them. They just couldn't bring themselves to arrest a man like this.

Like some religious leaders today, these men mistakenly equate intellectualism with godliness (7:49). Even with their theological training, these men are blind to the evidence which proves that Jesus is the Messiah. So they reprimand the policemen by reminding them that none of the chief priests, nor even a single Pharisee, has yet accepted the claims of Jesus.

But they are wrong, dead wrong. For up steps one of their own leaders, a respected Pharisee named Nicodemus, to ask that Jesus be given the normal rights under Jewish law. This believer reminds them that the Law of Moses (which they had just accused others of not knowing) requires that every person be given a fair trial and that any charge must be verified by at least two witnesses (Exodus 23:1-2; Leviticus 19:15-18; Deut. 1:16; 19:15-18). This mild rebuke is similar to Paul's condemnation of hypocritical dual standards (Romans 2:1-3, 17-24).

In 7:52 the Jews direct their verbal venom toward Nicodemus, and he apparently stops his testimony at this point. If he is afraid or ashamed of acknowledging Jesus as his Lord, then he is in much more trouble than he realizes (Matt. 10:32-33). But since John only tells us what happened, not why, we must be careful about judging his motives.

Notes on John 7:53-8:11

These verses are not found in the oldest manuscripts. Many of the newer translations, in a valid attempt to make the text as accurate as possible, either delete these verses or place them in brackets. The earliest manuscripts which do contain these passages were written in the 9th century! The best and oldest manuscript that we have of the Gospel of John, the Bodmer II Papyrus (P66), does not contain these verses.

Thought Stimulators on John 7:25-8:11

1. Discuss the meaning of "prejudice", and how it can hurt us.
2. Who sent Jesus here and gave him authority?
3. Why did Jesus perform miracles?
4. What did Jesus mean by saying, "You cannot go where I shall be"?
5. In what specific ways are Christians today tempted to hide their beliefs in order to protect their own interests?

6. Give some examples of how the quality of one's life is more important than its length.
7. Describe the ceremony which took place on the last day of the Festival of Shelters.
8. Who may receive the Holy Spirit and when does that take place?
9. What was it about Jesus that impressed the police so much that they refused to arrest him?
10. The Pharisees were guilty of: (a) intellectual snobbery; (b) prejudice; (c) blind hatred; (d) all of the above.
11. Put yourself in the place of Nicodemus as a member of the Jewish high court, the Sanhedrin. You ask for fair treatment of Jesus, but the other 70 members of the court begin to ridicule you. How would *you* have reacted? (choose one)
 - (a) Let Jesus fight his own battle.
 - (b) Work behind the scenes to help him.
 - (c) Continue to debate the issue openly.
 - (d) Wait and see what happens.