

Lesson Nine

(John 6:60-7:24)

No one greeted Jesus at the door of the synagogue with, "My, what a lovely sermon that was!" Instead, they were fussing and fuming about his unorthodox remarks. Jesus knew how to comfort the afflicted, but he also knew how to afflict the comfortable. As William Jennings Bryan once said, "When God tells a man to speak he cannot stop to count those who stand with him. He must speak even though he cries in the wilderness; he must stand up even if he has to stand alone."

The Words of Eternal Life

(John 6:60-71)

⁶⁰Many of his followers heard this and said, "This teaching is too hard. Who can listen to it?"

⁶¹Without being told, Jesus knew that they were grumbling about this, so he said to them, "Does this make you want to give up? ⁶²Suppose, then, that you should see the Son of Man go back up to the place where he was before? ⁶³What gives life is God's

Spirit; man's power is of no use at all. The words I have spoken to you bring God's life-giving Spirit. ⁶⁴Yet some of you do not believe." (Jesus knew from the very beginning who were the ones that would not believe and which one would betray him.) ⁶⁵And he added, "This is the very reason I told you that no one can come to me unless the Father makes it possible for him to do so."

⁶⁶Because of this, many of Jesus' followers turned back and would not go with him any more. ⁶⁷So he asked the twelve disciples, "And you — would you also like to leave?"

⁶⁸Simon Peter answered him, "Lord, to whom would we go? You have the words that give eternal life. ⁶⁹And now we believe and know that you are the Holy One who has come from God."

⁷⁰Jesus replied, "I chose the twelve of you, didn't I? Yet one of you is a devil!" ⁷¹He was talking about Judas, the son of Simon Iscariot. For Judas, even though he was one of the twelve disciples, was going to betray him.

The crowd is convinced that Jesus' teaching about eating his flesh and drinking his blood is "too hard" (6:60). The Greek word for hard, *skleros*, means hard to accept, not necessarily hard to understand. They had to decide whether to accept or to reject his way of life. And their decision (6:66) indicates their lack of interest in spiritual matters.

A certain preacher sat down at the dinner table one Sunday and asked his wife how she liked his sermon. She said, "Honey, your sermon reminded me of the days when you were courting me. You were slow getting to the point then, too." That could not be said of Jesus, for he never hides what people need to know. Like the prophets before him, Jesus knows that the preacher who sets out to please his audience may make a hit but the one who tells the truth may get hit!

The trend in many congregations is toward a desire for twenty minute lectures which won't offend anyone. One rather timid preacher was told by one part of his congregation to preach the old-fashioned gospel. Another group let him know in no uncertain terms that he better be broadminded in his preaching. So he ended his next sermon by saying, "Unless you repent, in a measure, and are saved, so to speak, you are, I am sorry to say, in danger of hell-fire and damnation, to a certain extent."

So we should appreciate the preacher or teacher who challenges us to think for ourselves. As Phillips Brooks once said, "The timid minister is as bad as the timid surgeon. Courage is good everywhere, but it is necessary here. If you are afraid of men and a slave to their opinion, go and do something else. Go and

make shoes to fit them. Go even and paint pictures which you know are bad but which suit their bad taste. But do not keep on all your life preaching sermons which shall not say what God sent you to declare but what they hire you to say. Be courageous. Be independent."

That's the kind of boldness that characterizes Jesus. He doesn't soften his words or offer to retract them. After all, there is no need to apologize for telling the truth. But Jesus knows that these grumblers have already made up their minds, and they don't appreciate his frankness. Paul encountered the same treatment from his own brethren, so he finally asked them, "Have I now become your enemy by telling you the truth?" (Gal. 4:16). That is the situation Jesus finds himself in now, so he just reaffirms that "the words I have spoken to you bring God's life-giving Spirit" (6:63).

Rather than accept Jesus and his disciplined way of life, many of these people "turned back and would not go with him any more" (6:66). It is a dangerous and tragic mistake to turn away from Jesus (Hebrews 6:4-8). That's why Jesus warns, "Anyone who starts to plow and then keeps looking back is of no use for the Kingdom of God" (Luke 9:62).

Jesus pointedly asks his hand-picked men whether they intend to leave (6:67). They are no doubt disappointed at Jesus' sudden decline in popularity, but their loyalty is still in tact. So Peter confesses that even if they felt like leaving him, there was no one else to whom they could go. For it is Jesus alone who speaks "the words that have eternal life" (6:68). They are still convinced that he is the Messiah (6:69).

Then Jesus acknowledges that he personally recruited each of them, "Yet one of you is a devil" (6:70). The Greek word *diabolos*, translated as "devil," literally means an accuser or a slanderer and is one of the names of Satan. There is only one Devil, but Judas is working so closely with him to ensnare Jesus that the Lord identifies Judas with him. It is Satan (or the Devil) who tempts us to sin (Gen. 3; Eph. 4:17; 6:11; 1 Peter 5:8), but we can overcome him if we resist his efforts (James 4:7). Jesus no doubt chose Judas because of his potential for doing good. But as with each of us, that potential may be wasted by our own evil desires.

Jesus and His Brothers

(John 7:1-9)

¹After this, Jesus traveled in Galilee; he did not want to travel in

Judea, because the Jewish authorities there were wanting to kill him. ²The time for the Festival of Shelters was near, ³so Jesus' brothers said to him, "Leave this place and go to Judea, so that your followers will see the things that you are doing. ⁴No one hides what he is doing if he wants to be well known. Since you are doing these things, let the whole world know about you!" (⁵Not even his brothers believed in him.)

⁶Jesus said to them, "The right time for me has not yet come. Any time is right for you. ⁷The world cannot hate you, but it hates me, because I keep telling it that its ways are bad. ⁸You go on to the festival. I am not going to this festival, because the right time has not come for me." ⁹He said this and then stayed on in Galilee.

Beginning in 7:1 and continuing through chapter 10, John records the traumatic events of the last six months of Jesus' ministry upon the earth. The Jewish authorities have been plotting to murder Jesus for about a year and a half at this point (5:18; 7:1). They are hopeful that they will be able to capture Jesus when he comes to worship at Jerusalem.

The Festival of Shelters (or "Feast of Tabernacles") was celebrated in Jerusalem on the 15th day of the 7th Jewish month (our September or October, depending upon the cycle of the moon). It lasted eight days, during which the people lived in temporary structures ("booths" or "tabernacles") made of the branches of palm trees. The festival commemorated the fact that their ancestors had lived in such structures after God delivered them from Egyptian bondage, and it was also a time of thanksgiving for the harvest (Exodus 23:16; Leviticus 23:33-44; Numbers 29). Every able-bodied male Jew was required to come before the Lord at the temple during this festival. And more burnt offerings were made at this festival than at any of the others.

Jesus' half-brothers are named James, Joseph, Simon, and Judas (Matt. 13:55). Frank Pack says, "The brothers were not among the disciples of Jesus, and their unbelief came about because, focusing upon his works, they had an imperfect understanding of his mission to the world. After his resurrection they became believers (Acts 1:14), and James became prominent in the church at Jerusalem (Acts 15:13)" (*The Gospel According to John*, I, 119).

These half-brothers apparently want Jesus to force a showdown with the Jewish authorities to get the air cleared once and for all (7:3-5). But Jesus reminds them that while they were not fugitives, he is very much a hunted and hated man. Besides,

Jesus explains, "I am not going to this festival, because the right time has not come for me" (7:8).

How are we to harmonize Jesus' statement in 7:8 with the fact that he does go to Jerusalem during this very festival (7:10)? First, Jesus uses the Greek word *kairos*, here translated "time," which means the appropriate, decisive, or right time (there is another Greek word, *chronos*, which he would have used if a simple chronological sequence was meant). This is not the appropriate time for a triumphal entry into Jerusalem (that day will come at the Passover Festival, six months from now). This is the moment for a more prudent approach than that suggested by the brothers.

Second, several ancient manuscripts — including the Bodmer Papyrus (P66) — read, "I am not *yet* going." So this variant reading may be, in fact, the most accurate text. It certainly offers the simplest answer.

A third explanation is rooted in the ancient customs of the Jewish community. To the orthodox Jew, anyone who failed to attend *every* day of the feast had, in effect, not attended it at all. Thus, if taken in this context, the words and the actions of Jesus would not contradict each other at all.

Jesus at the Festival of Shelters

(John 7:10-24)

¹⁰After his brothers had gone to the festival, Jesus also went; however, he did not go openly, but secretly. ¹¹The Jewish authorities were looking for him at the festival. "Where is he?" they asked.

¹²There was much whispering about him in the crowd. "He is a good man," some people said. "No," others said, "he fools the people." ¹³But no one talked about him openly, because they were afraid of the Jewish authorities.

¹⁴The festival was nearly half over when Jesus went to the Temple and began teaching. ¹⁵The Jewish authorities were greatly surprised and said, "How does this man know so much when he has never been to school?"

¹⁶Jesus answered, "What I teach is not my own teaching, but it comes from God, who sent me. ¹⁷Whoever is willing to do what God wants will know whether what I teach comes from God or whether I speak on my own authority. ¹⁸A person who speaks on his own authority is trying to gain glory for himself. But he who wants glory for the one who sent him is honest, and there is nothing false in him. ¹⁹Moses gave you the Law, didn't he? But not one of you obeys the Law. Why are you trying to kill me?"

²⁰"You have a demon in you!" the crowd answered. "Who is trying to kill you?"

²¹Jesus answered, "I performed one miracle, and you were all surprised. ²²Moses ordered you to circumcise your sons (although it was not Moses but your ancestors who started it), and so you circumcise a boy on the Sabbath. ²³If a boy is circumcised on the Sabbath so that Moses' Law is not broken, why are you angry with me because I made a man completely well on the Sabbath? ²⁴Stop judging by external standards, and judge by true standards.

Frank Pack notes that 7:10 "marked Jesus' departure from Galilee, and according to John he never returned. He remained in the environs of Jerusalem until after the winter Feast of Dedication (10:22,23), then retired beyond the Jordan for a time (10:40). Then after coming back to Bethany to raise Lazarus from the dead he went to a town called Ephraim at the edge of the desert until the last week of his life (11:54)" (*Gospel According to John*, I, 121).

So Jesus returns to Jerusalem, the city which becomes the focal point of the rest of his ministry. It is a city which is bursting at the seams with thousands of visitors. Tension hangs over the city like the thick fog that often engulfs London. The Jewish authorities are eager to capture Jesus (7:11). And the crowds, knowing of that intense manhunt (7:13), are excited and on edge.

But the first day of the festival passes without incident. Then the second, and the third. It was not until the fourth or fifth day, when the festival "was nearly half over" (7:14), that Jesus appears at Jerusalem and begins teaching somewhere within the huge Temple complex. And even the Jewish authorities are astounded at the depth of his teachings, for they know he had never received any theological training in their rabbinical schools. The explanation given by Jesus is that his words are actually God's words and that God sent him for that purpose (7:16).

In 7:17 Jesus puts the knowledgeable Jewish leaders on the spot: "Whoever is willing to do what God wants will know whether what I teach comes from God or whether I speak on my own authority." The implications of this principle are explained by Paul Butler: "A lifetime of studying the Bible is of no avail if a man's will and desire is out of harmony with God's will. Paul said the same thing in 1 Corinthians 2:6 through 3:9. The rebellious, carnal-minded man cannot discern the things of the Spirit, because the worldly-minded man has no desire to *do* God's will. These Jewish rulers, to whom Jesus spoke, had studied the Old

Testament from their youth up — hour upon hour, year after year — but they did not comprehend that Jesus spoke God's word for they had no desire to *do* God's word" (*Gospel of John*, II, 22).

Jesus gives them a painful reminder that not even they themselves could perfectly obey the Law of Moses (7:19), and that is a theme which Paul takes up in Romans 2:17-3:20. Where do they get off, then, in trying to kill the Son of God for supposedly disobeying the Law?

Their heated response is, "You have a demon in you" (7:20). A demon (Greek, *daimon*) is an evil spiritual being who gets his power from Satan and who supports Satan in his opposition to God's plan for mankind. There is only one Satan (or Devil), but there are many demons. In the New Testament they plagued people with mental, physical, and moral problems (Mark 1:21; 1 Cor. 10:20); they claimed complete control over certain individuals (Mark 5:1-21); and they spread false doctrines through the efforts of false teachers (1 Timothy 4:1; 1 John 4:1-2).

Their accusation that Jesus has a demon is just an emotional outburst (7:23). So Jesus ignores it and goes on to remind them that his *single* act of healing a sick man on a Sabbath (almost 18 months before; 5:1-18) contrasts greatly with their *weekly* violation of the rule against working. Their practice was to circumcise a male child on the eighth day, regardless of whether that fell on a Sabbath day. The Jewish leaders taught that acts of compassion should be delayed until after the Sabbath, except in an emergency situation where life is threatened or there is acute pain. But Jesus teaches that no act of compassion needs to be delayed just because of the Sabbath.

Jesus wraps up his remarks with, "Stop judging by external standards, and judge by true standards" (7:24). In Matthew 7:1 Jesus warns against judging people unfairly, out of a hypocritical desire to destroy them. But the New Testament clearly teaches that we must humbly and honestly evaluate what people do and what they teach (Matt. 7:15-20; Rom. 16:17-18; 1 John 4:1-3; 2 John 7-11). And the standard by which we judge ourselves and others can be none other than the word of God.

Thought Stimulators on John 6:60-7:24

1. What gives life?
2. What is it that "brings God's life-giving Spirit"?
3. Who makes it possible for people to follow Jesus?

4. To what extent should a preacher "soften" his message to make it more attractive to his audience?
5. Relate a personal experience where you told the truth and got into undeserved trouble because you did.
6. What causes some Christians to stop following Jesus?
7. Who has the words of eternal life?
8. Which disciple did Jesus call "a devil"? Why?
9. Describe the Festival of Shelters (or "Feast of Tabernacles").
10. Name the half-brothers of Jesus.
11. What was the source of Jesus' teachings?
12. Why does it do little good to study the Bible if you really don't want to obey what you read?
13. What is a demon?
14. When is it appropriate or scriptural to perform an act of compassion?
15. In what way are Christians expected to be judges?
16. List at least two instances (from your personal experience) in which a person was wronged because someone judged him "by external standards."