

Text: John 7:1-36

Title: Believe because the world hated Him

Time: 10/20/2024

Place: NBBC

Introduction: Last week may have been our best week of peak-fall-color here in New Hampshire. Evidently, many from out-of-state agreed. One news headline read, "Hordes of leaf-peepers, unprepared hikers, pack New Hampshire trails: 'It was chaos.'" Our state expects to have 3.7MM visitors this fall.

With all those visitors, we residents of New Hampshire gain special insight into the conditions that prevailed during the Jewish Feast of Tabernacles mentioned in our passage (v. 2). The Feast was held in the fall, during the Jewish month Tishri, our late September and early October. The leaves were beginning to change color when Jesus's brothers suggested He accompany them to Jerusalem for this annual celebration.

And it was quite a celebration. It was called the *Feast of Tabernacles*, because throughout Jerusalem's streets and parks and rooftops, leafy branches formed tents to house pilgrims celebrating the feast. Celebrants commemorated how the Lord brought their nation through the wilderness to the promised land. The feast was a time of thanksgiving for the bounty of this land as the olive and grape harvests had been brought in.

Many of the pilgrims were from foreign lands, and this was the time of year they brought their temple-contributions to Jerusalem, where they were gladly received by the temple authorities. Seventy sacrificial bullocks lost their lives throughout the week, representing the seventy nations of heathendom. A ceremony of water symbolized the eschatological promise of the Book of Joel about the outpouring of the Holy Spirit; torches lit in the court of the women illuminated the temple through the night to shine out to the nations; and the trumpet blasts of the morning hours called out to awaken the sleepers, as though they were being resurrected to the beginning of a grand future.

Sadly, however, this celebration that God had designed for His people's spiritual well-being had become the practice of many who would not recognize His Son as their Messiah. Continuing the theme of the rejection of Christ from chapter 6, which took place six months prior to this Feast of chapter 7, John emphasizes for us in his Gospel that we must believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and believing have life in His name, because He was hated.

Jesus labels those who hated Him as *the world* (v. 7). The world rejected Jesus because the world hated Jesus. It still does so today. John mentions three parties of the world who rejected the Messiahship of Jesus at this Feast: His own brothers; the Jewish people at the Feast; and the leadership in Jerusalem.

I. Jesus' brothers hated Him (vv. 1-10).

Illustration: There was a period in my life as a young man, having trusted Christ as my Savior, but also feeling the attraction of the world, when I wished that I could take a neutral position when it came to following the Lord. My thought was that I would not hate the Lord and His church, nor would I hate Satan and his world, but I would ask both to leave me alone so that I could occupy this middle ground I though existed between them.

I found out, of course, that any hope of neutrality in spiritual warfare is a mere illusion. The reality is that we are either for the Lord or against Him. We either follow Him or oppose Him. Jesus said, "He that is not with Me is against Me" (Matt. 12:30). I also came to realize the hard way that Satan never leaves us alone when we open ourselves up to his destruction.

Application: Jesus tries to tell His brothers that neutrality is not an option (note that Jesus had brothers against the false doctrine of the perpetual virginity of Mary). They use the Feast of Tabernacles to try to get Jesus to leave them alone (v. 3). When they say *depart thence*, they use a word that normally means

leave and do not come back. I am sure that they were convinced that their brother had miraculous powers (v. 3), and yet these miracles were not enough to create true saving faith in them (v. 5). What seemed to irritate them especially about their brother's claim to be the Messiah was what they saw as the pathetic obscurity of His work in Galilee (v. 4). How could He really be the Messiah when so very few follow Him, and why stay here at such a great distance from all that is significant in religion?

Jesus's answer exposes the hidden hatred of His brothers' unbelief. He draws a contrast between His brothers and Himself, which highlighted the fact that either He or they were wrong. As for the brothers, they could go to the Feast at any time without fear of danger (v. 6), they could not be hated by the world because they never spoke out against it (v. 7), and so they should go to the Feast in a normal way (v. 8). Not so for Jesus. He had to pick the right time fearing danger (vv. 1, 6), the world hated Him because He testified that its works are evil (v. 7), and He had to wait until He could attend this Feast in secret, because his time had not yet fully come (vv. 8-10).

As we read the rest of the Gospel of John, we will find out that the time Jesus referred as not *fulfilled* here would be fulfilled six months later at the Feast of the Passover in the spring. That would be the time for His Triumphal Entry into Jerusalem. Then would begin the final battle against evil by this great Savior. The Feast of Tabernacles looked ahead to the future victory over heathen nations of a great King. The Feast of the Passover looked back to the sacrificed Lamb for a people redeemed from slavery. The brothers wanted the King in their Messiah; disappointing them, Jesus offered the Lamb's sacrifice for their sins.

And so they hated Him by siding with the world of unbelief. What shall we do? Shall we side with the unbelief of the world that crucified Jesus as a blasphemer and a deceiver, or shall we bow before Him in faith as our Lord and Savior and so have life in His name? If we chose the latter, we too will be called to endure the world's hatred as we testify that its deeds are evil.

But some day, it will be time at last for Jesus to bring about the future anticipated by the Feast of Tabernacles, and then His true believers shall rule and reign with Him over the nations of the world. Every true disciple is willing to forsake the present evil world in exchange for the glory of the world to come.

II. Fellow Jews hated Him (vv. 11-24).

Illustration: In this politically charged election season, many pundits are concerned about the optics of political campaigns. One news story I saw said, "From bad optics to word salads, Harris' Univision town hall likely did little to sway Hispanic voters." Another headline said, "'Optics' and 'Vibes': Trump confident says he's 'obsessed' with MSG rally." Political candidates are told to be concerned about their optics.

Application: Jesus tells this Jewish crowd to stop being concerned about optics (v. 24). He tells them to judge righteous judgment – judgment that measures things with an accurate standard, not according to appearance or optics. He specifically has in mind the healing He performed at the Pool of Bethesda in chapter 5, where He told a man who had been lame for 38 years to take up his bed on a sabbath day and walk home (v. 21). To Jewish eyes, that was very bad optics. It was a violation of what they believed the sabbath law of Moses taught.

Jesus redirects them to the true righteous standard for measuring the miracle in question. He explains that one of the reasons Moses gave a law of circumcision, which is traceable back to Abraham, was so that they could better understand what sabbath law is all about (v. 22, *therefore*). The law of Moses required that circumcision of a newborn Jewish boy happen on the eighth day after birth (Lev. 12:3). Boys born on a sabbath day would need to be circumcised on the following sabbath day in obedience to that command. So Jesus's point is that it is right for some of God's commands to supersede the 4th commandment's prohibition against working on the sabbath, and if circumcising a baby is more important than not working on the

sabbath, surely making a man entirely whole is in that more important category too (v. 23). Love thy neighbor as thyself is the second greatest commandment after all (Matt. 22:39).

Jesus brings up their desire to kill Him over the bad sabbath-optics because He wants them to see that His teaching is not merely His; it is God's teaching, the One who had sent Him (vv. 14-18). The Jews marveled at the bad optics of His sabbath healing (v. 21), and they also marveled at His teaching here (v. 15). There truly is something inescapably marvelous about the teachings of Jesus Christ. But we must do more than marvel.

We must know that Jesus's marvelous teachings are true and that they come from God. How shall we know for sure? Jesus tells us how we may know for sure in v. 17 – we must want to know for sure first. Many are content not to know for sure, because they want other things more than the answer to this question, which once they know will require their obedience.

In his book *How to Think Straight: An Introduction to Critical Reasoning*, logician Antony Flew defined a prime cause for our being deceived: “A prime cause of our being deceived is, for all of us, always our own desire to be so deceived. . . all of us constantly need to be asking ourselves what it is which we want to believe to be true, and whether our desires so to believe are stronger than our desires to know the truth, however uncongenial to us that truth may be. It is a truly existential challenge” (10). I want to believe that God is ok with my golfing on Sunday morning instead of going to church, but is it true?

Jesus says thinking straight about His teaching begins with the real desire not only to know the truth, but to obey it. We must be willing to do God's will, what His truth tells us to do. Without that willingness, we will not know for sure whether Jesus spoke from God or from Himself, whether He sought His own glory or the glory of the One who sent Him, whether He is true and righteous or false and unrighteous. Are you willing to do His will? Do you want to know the truth that much?

III. Religious leaders hated Him (vv. 25-36).

Illustration: Before Jesus ascended He commissioned His 120 disciples to be witnesses to Him, in the power of the Holy Spirit, to the uttermost part of the earth (Acts 1:8). Acts shows that when they did so, they brought the gospel, as the power of God to save all who believe, to the Greek and non-Greek Jews first and then afterwards also to the Greek Gentiles (Rom. 1:16).

Application: For this reason, and because it is the special purpose of the Gospel of John to evangelize Greek Jews scattered abroad, that commentators find happy irony in the questionings of the Jewish leaders and others at the end of our passage (vv. 35-36). The word *Gentiles* (KJV) is actually the word *Greeks*, and it refers to the Jews that had been dispersed throughout the Roman Empire's Greek culture. As he looks back and writes of the criticism of these Jerusalem leaders, John the Apostle now sees the gracious plan of God to bring the gospel to the ends of the earth – to the Jews first, Greek and non-Greek, and then to the Greek Gentiles.

The hatred of the leadership in Jerusalem was well known (vv. 25-26). They had sought no middle ground. They had infected the people with teachings about the Messiah that confused them and that failed to point them to Jesus (v. 27).

Illustration: On my walk last Thursday, I saw three deer cross Bradford Road ahead of me on the top of Hooper Hill. When Dixie and I made it to the place where they crossed, I could not see any of them at first, but then I glimpsed a buck gallop across the field and then disappear into the woods.

The Rabbis had taught the people that their Messiah would be like a deer. Like Moses of old, Messiah would appear, then disappear, and then appear again. As we look at the life of Christ, we can see a pattern somewhat similar to that. However, those who hated Christ were content with a shallow conclusion – we know Jesus came from Nazareth, so He is not the Messiah.

Had they looked further, they would have found that Jesus was born in Bethlehem, the city of David. He had made an appearance in Jerusalem at the age of 12, for the first time causing the leaders of Jerusalem to marvel at His teaching. And then He disappeared until John the Baptist had pointed Him out as the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world in fulfillment of Isaiah 40:3. How tragically shallow was the basis for their denial of Christ's claims, taught them by their Rabbis.

Illustration: Dave Schmechel's atheist neighbor told me that believing in Jesus Christ was like believing in the tooth fairy. I tried to help him see how his analogy was too shallow a thing in which to place his trust. He needed to investigate further.

In the face of this unbelief, Jesus cries out the truth of verses 28-29. In the face of that cry, the leaders of Jerusalem hate Jesus, as though He were a menace to be removed (vv. 30-36). Some believed because of the miracles, but we will find in chapter 8 that for many of these this faith in miracles was less than saving faith, as elsewhere in the Gospel of John.

Jesus warned that those with the hatred of their unbelief could not come to where Jesus was going (vv. 33-36), and here we hear an echo of the truth of chapter 6. No one can come there unless the Father drags them out of the horrible pit of their sin and unless Jesus raises them on the last day (John 6:44).

Conclusion: We began this morning with the hatred of the world represented by Jesus's brothers. Thankfully, we can end our study with some good news on that point. In 1 Cor. 15:7, Paul tells us that the risen Christ appeared to His brother James, who then believed with saving faith. James would serve the Lord as the head pastor of the first Christian local church in Jerusalem, and he would write the first inspired epistle of the New Testament, which bears his name.

In fact, Acts 1:14 tells us that the 120 people, who were the charter members of that first church, "all continued with one

accord in prayer and supplication, with the women, and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with his brethren” (Acts 1:14).

Through the power of God’s gospel to save and to the glory of His matchless grace, Jesus’s brothers became burdened of heart to do God’s will, and once willing they knew for sure that Jesus’s claim was true. They believed that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and believing they found life in His name. They did so knowing that they were once part of the world that hated Him.

Are you willing to do God’s will? Do you know for sure He sent Jesus? Do you believe and have life in His name? Will you continue in the hatred of unbelief, with which the world has always hated the Savior? We must believe on Him because the world hated Him.

“A man came—I think it was actually in Philadelphia—on one occasion to the great George Whitefield and asked if he might print his sermons. Whitefield gave this reply; he said, ‘Well, I have no inherent objection, if you like, but you will never be able to put on the printed page the lightning and the thunder.’ That is the distinction—the sermon, and the ‘lightning and the thunder.’ To Whitefield this was of very great importance, and it should be of very great importance to all preachers, as I hope to show. You can put the sermon into print, but not the lightning and the thunder. That comes into the act of preaching and cannot be conveyed by cold print. Indeed it almost baffles the descriptive powers of the best reporters.”

—David Martin Lloyd-Jones,

Preachers and Preaching