

John, Part 31: The “Damaging” Effect of Encountering Christ

John 7:40 ESV When they heard these words, some of the people said, “This really is the Prophet.” **41** Others said, “This is the Christ.” But some said, “Is the Christ to come from Galilee? **42** Has not the Scripture said that the Christ comes from the offspring of David, and comes from Bethlehem, the village where David was?” **43** So there was a division among the people over him. **44** Some of them wanted to arrest him, but no one laid hands on him.

45 The officers then came to the chief priests and Pharisees, who said to them, “Why did you not bring him?” **46** The officers answered, “No one ever spoke like this man!” **47** The Pharisees answered them, “Have you also been deceived? **48** Have any of the authorities or the Pharisees believed in him? **49** But this crowd that does not know the law is accursed.” **50** Nicodemus, who had gone to him before, and who was one of them, said to them, **51** “Does our law judge a man without first giving him a hearing and learning what he does?” **52** They replied, “Are you from Galilee too? Search and see that no prophet arises from Galilee.”

- I. We are completing our look at John chapter 7 today. We see that the Feast of Tabernacles is concluding, and yet some of the same controversies that we saw earlier in the chapter are still swirling around Christ, his teachings and his claims.
 - A. Our passage today begins by describing a crowd mixed with those who are becoming convinced, and those who are finding reasons to remain skeptics.
 1. This accurately describes the make-up of every Church gathering that you will ever participate in. Some of you here today have heard the sound of Jesus’ voice and have embraced him as the truth. Others remain in doubt.
 - a) The range of issues on which one bases their doubt varies widely, but what all hold in common with other doubters is the ***sin of unbelief***.
 - b) In America we feel ***entitled*** to disbelieve, and rarely view it as a ***grievous sin***, but Charles Spurgeon, the great 19th century pastor said, “**Unbelief is the mother of vice; it is the parent of sin; and, therefore, I say it is a pestilent evil, a master sin.**” Charles Haddon Spurgeon
 2. Unbelief is not a very uniform thing. It looks different in each person.
 - a) Some doubt that God could love or forgive someone who has done what they have done, though the gospel clearly teaches otherwise.
 - b) Others freely question anything in scripture that is beyond what is culturally acceptable to believe (things like a God who created all things, a virgin birth, or the miracles and resurrection of Christ).
 - c) Others of you simply doubt God’s existence at all.
 3. But those gathered in the Temple complex in our text today disputed about 2 things: 1.) The identity of this remarkable man named Jesus in the context of their scriptures; and 2.) if he truly was someone of significance, wouldn’t his birthplace confirm that, as was prophesied?
 - B. First, there was the controversy over who exactly he was. Some speculated, because of Jesus’ teachings and signs, that he was “the Ultimate ***Prophet***” Moses predicted would come to the Israelites in Deuteronomy 18; who would

rise among them, and teach them the ways of Yahweh, the LORD. Others thought he was the **Christ** (or Messiah) that would lead the nation, like King David had; defeating their enemies and ushering in a period of national peace.

1. Many of the Rabbis had been teaching that the Prophet and the Christ were two separate figures, both to appear for Israel's benefit and deliverance.
 2. But they could not imagine that God was sending to them **one man** who would be **both** the quintessential Prophet of Israel, as well as her mightiest King, not to mention her most faithful intermediary priest. Furthermore, they could not imagine that this single figure would actually be God himself.
- C. Secondly, they were hung up on whether or not Christ's city of origin matched any prophecy concerning the Christ or the Prophet. According to the Old Testament Prophet Micah, the Christ would be born in Bethlehem, near Jerusalem in the south. But this man was essentially from "Hicksville"; a little village called Nazareth in the northern district of Galilee.
1. Now you and I have the benefit of the New Testament, knowing by its holy words where Christ was actually born (Bethlehem), and the circumstances surrounding his birth.
 2. But what you must understand that the culture of Jesus time and region was far less mobile than ours. I, for example, as a child lived in Philippi, West Virginia. When I was three, my family moved to Odessa. After I was married we moved to Midland. For the last 21 years, Lubbock has been my home.
 3. But in Jesus day, your hometown was assumed to be a lifetime assignment. Knowing that he was reared in Nazareth, the crowds foregone conclusion was that he was a native-born Nazarene.
- D. Before you dismiss this as a minor point, may I caution you that it is almost always to your own detriment when you make assumptions about Jesus? Assumptions will usually lead to some level of **familiarity**, which naturally opens the door for **contempt**, from which the foundation is laid for **unbelief**, which is exactly what we see here, as I mentioned earlier.
- II. **John 7:43 ESV** So there was a division among the people over him. The Greek word for "division" used here is Shisma (Skees-mah), from which we derive the word, "Schism". It literally means a tearing or a ripping away. It was not a minor disagreement; Jesus opened the Grand Canyon between the two camps!
- A. The very thought of this creates discomfort for some of you. It flies directly in the face of your deeply held assumptions about who Jesus is, and what the results are of following him. As I said earlier, when it comes to Jesus, the only safe assumption is that none of your assumptions are safe!
- B. **Matthew 10:34 ESV** "Do not think that I have come to bring peace to the earth. **I have not come to bring peace, but a sword.** **35** For I have come to set a man **against** his father, and a daughter **against** her mother, and a daughter-in-law **against** her mother-in-law. **36** And a person's enemies will be **those of his own household.**
1. Jesus is not saying here that he delights in destroying homes, as though that were the purpose of his mission; or that he laughs coldly at the resulting pain when families are torn apart because of the Gospel, but that he is a realist.

- a) Jesus Christ knows that human depravity is so deep, and our resistance to him and his ways are so entrenched in us, that oftentimes a tearing results when someone is awakened to the gospel by the Holy Spirit.
 - b) But one thing I can tell you with total certainty: Christ is worth the pain! Some of you are experiencing a separation from parents, children, or other family members right now because of your devotion to Christ. It hurts. As your pastor, I wish I could end the pain for you. But what I can tell you without blinking is that whether the lost members of your family eventually come around, or whether they don't, **Jesus Christ is worth it.**
 - 2. But don't let fear cause you to give in to the temptation to pester, to nag, and to preach from some "holier-than-thou" arm-twisting soap box.
 - a) Just continue, in full view of your lost family members, to treasure Christ sincerely above all else in this life. You will deeply impact them!
 - b) There is no more effective evangelistic strategy than to simply adore and follow Christ in all of his beauty, worth and majesty in the eyes of the lost.
 - C. This "tearing" described in John 7 is about to be made vividly clear for us in our text. It will reach to the very heart of the 1st Century Jewish establishment, as well as the customs, and presuppositions they had held from their earliest days.
- III. **John 7:44 ESV** Some of them wanted to arrest him, but no one laid hands on him. Who are the "some of them" mentioned here in this verse?
- A. **John 7:32 ESV** The Pharisees heard the crowd muttering these things about him, and the chief priests and Pharisees sent officers to arrest him.
 - 1. Previously, before Jesus' declaration that whoever was thirsty could come to him and drink, and that they would in turn one day have rivers of living water flowing from their hearts, the leaders had sent officers to wait in the temple for an opportunity to arrest Jesus, thereby avoiding exactly the kind of division (or schism) that they were witnessing.
 - 2. They were determined to keep the "unwashed masses" in line by any means possible. They would think what they were **told** to think! They would follow Moses, or suffer the consequences; not some carpenter from the sticks!
 - B. Verse 44 told us, however, that **no one** put hands on Jesus. Why? The most fundamental reason is because God simply wouldn't let them! Three times in chapter 7 already, either Jesus or John in his narrative comments, says that Jesus' "hour had not yet come" to be arrested, tried and crucified. No one could touch Jesus until **God was ready** for the prophesied about him to be fulfilled.
 - 1. The Pharisees could plot, fuss, fume and threaten all they wanted! Jesus had hidden his life away in the love of his Father. And there, he was totally safe!
 - 2. Some of us give other people way too much credit for having power over us! The Bible says that the Father is aware of every little sparrow heart that stops beating! "Are you not much more valuable than many sparrows?" he asks rhetorically. Trust that you are in his care and subject to God's timing.
 - C. But, oh! What happens next is **priceless!** The officers return to the Jewish leaders, but they have no ragamuffin Nazarene Rabbi chained between them! Christ's voice has not been silenced from the Temple, nor has he been extracted from the hearts of all the people! The Pharisees naturally want answers.

1. **John 7:45 ESV** The officers then came to the chief priests and Pharisees, who said to them, “Why did you not bring him?” “What happened?!? You guys had one job to do!”
 2. Their answer is astounding. No excuses. They did not say, “We just never found the right time.” In fact, they said nothing to appease the religious jealousy of the leaders. When interrogated as to why they failed in their clearly stated mission, they reply simply, “**No one ever spoke like this man!**”
- D. They been sent to avoid a division among the commoners, yet while standing there, lying in wait for the chance to cuff and stuff Jesus, they experienced the full force of the damaging effect of encountering him! The result was not the **avoidance** of a division among the people; but literally, a **schism within a schism!** The people sent to fix the problem, had been wrecked by the Nazarene!
1. We learn from this that you simply cannot remain the same after encountering Christ! I submit to you that it is an absolute impossibility!
 - a) Some will protest and say, “Not true! I once knew a person who went to church every Sunday, but died a wretched old sinner. They encountered Christ, and heard his words many times and yet remained unchanged.”
 - b) And I would reply that they did **not** encounter Christ, they encountered a **church** (perhaps a fine church!). They did not hear the words of Christ, but rather the words of a preacher (perhaps a fine preacher!). Why do some hear and are saved, while others hear his words and perish?
 2. In Matthew 13, Jesus speaks of those to whom it has been **given** to know the secrets of the kingdom, and those to whom it **has not** been given. Jesus speaks in the Bible of those who “have ears to hear”. Those who respond to the gospel of Christ Jesus have ears to hear. These officers in the Temple had ears to hear, yet their leaders, the heralded “teachers of Israel” did not.
- E. Therefore as we pray for our lost friends and relatives, we should pray not only that God would give **us** the right words, but that he would give them the right ears, that they would hear what **he** is saying, and not merely our frail words!
- IV. John 7:47 ESV** The Pharisees answered them, “Have you also been deceived? **48** Have any of the authorities or the Pharisees believed in him?”
- A. The leaders absolutely pop a cork! They accuse the officers of being deceived because they dare to respond to the burning in their hearts caused by the words of Jesus. They were expected instead to adhere only to the teachings of these wise guys - excuse me - wise MEN.
1. Notice that they accuse them of being deceived, yet, astoundingly, not one of them asked them what Christ had said to deceive them! Anything he said counter to their deeply held traditions was automatically considered invalid.
 2. I recently heard the testimony of a man who had been raised in a nominally Roman Catholic home. His family went to mass on Christmas and Easter, and said grace, but that was about the extent of his spiritual experience.
 - a) When he went to college, he was exposed to the gospel by friends, was given “ears to hear” by the Holy Spirit, and soon after was radically saved by Jesus, filled with the Holy Spirit, and devoted his life to glorifying God.

- b) The result was that his family, concerned that he had wandered so far from the accepted norms, had a “cult watch” organization intervene!
3. When you hear with spiritual ears, people who can’t hear the sound will rarely care what you are hearing, they will just think you’re crazy, confused, or deceived. This was absolutely the case with these Jewish leaders.
- B. But they’re not done! They point to the fact that none of them have believed in him as a way to nullify Christ’s ministry. Religious people will often try to authenticate things based on the authoritarian control of the leader, instead of on Biblical revelation and the Holy Spirit’s enlightenment.
1. The measuring stick for truth should never be what some big shot has said, but rather what God has said! No one asked what Christ had said to test it.
 2. At least that pagan Pontius Pilate had the sensitivity to say to Jesus, “What is truth?” The Jewish authorities here are saying, “Who cares? Immaterial!”
- C. **John 7:49 ESV But this crowd that does not know the law is accursed.** They are declaring themselves the “enlightened elite”; everyone else is under a curse.
1. The rabbis of Jesus day had a name for themselves; a Hebrew term meaning the “holy people”. You know how they referred to commoners like you and I?
 2. The “people of the earth”! And by the way, that doesn’t mean “inhabitants of this planet”, but rather “dirt people” (earth). The essence of religion is to segregate people into categories of “us” and “them”; insiders and outsiders.
- D. The story is told of a man who was standing on a bridge, contemplating his own suicide. Another man rushed up on him and attempted to talk him out of it. He says, “Why are you doing this?” The man replies “I have nothing to live for”.
1. The other man asks, “May I ask a question? Do you believe in God?” He replies, “Yes I do”. “Great!” the man says. He then asks, “Are you a Christian or a Jew?” “I’m a Christian.” “Wonderful! So am I!” the man responds.
 2. “Are you Catholic or protestant?” “Protestant.” “Me too!” he says enthusiastically. “Are you Methodist or Baptist?” “Baptist” “Me too!” “Calvinist or Arminian?” “Calvinist.” “What a coincidence! Me too!”
 3. “Charismatic or Cessationist?” “Charismatic.” “Well, Glory! Me too!” “Premillennialist or Amillennialist?” “Premillennialist.” “Praise God! Me too!”
 4. “Are you full rapture, or partial rapture?” “Partial Rapture.” At this point the man pushes the other man off of the bridge, and as he’s falling, shouts, “Die, you foul heretic! Die!”
- E. Jesus never wanted his body sliced and diced. I think his intention was that the only lines on his body would be the stripes on his back given for the redemption and healing of men and women from every tribe, tongue, and nation on earth!
- V. The story however, is not over. In fact, the plot thickens! In this story, we see the return of someone we met way back in chapter 3. **John 7:50 ESV Nicodemus, who had gone to him before, and who was one of them, said to them, 51 “Does our law judge a man without first giving him a hearing and learning what he does?”**
- A. You’ll remember that Nicodemus had come to speak with Jesus secretly, under cover of darkness.
1. In that meeting, Christ had told him, “You must be born again”. He marveled at this thought, and Jesus told he was speaking, not of returning to his mother’s womb, but of being born of the Spirit to a new life.

2. Apparently, that late night meeting must have made a bigger impact that we can discern from only reading chapter 3! I can imagine him kind of squirming in the background when the leaders deride the officers by saying, “Have **any** of the authorities or the Pharisees believed in him?” Nicodemus nervously must have thought, with a pit in his stomach, “One of them has.”
- B. So here he is, still holding a position on the San Hedrin, and he tries to use his expertise in the Law as the context for a meager attempt to defend Christ. He points out that Christ has not had a fair hearing, something he is entitled to under their law. But he is rebuked and shut down mockingly by his colleagues.
1. **John 7:52 ESV** They replied, “Are you from Galilee too? Search and see that no prophet arises from Galilee.” “Are you from Galilee too” was meant as a classist insult! They had total contempt for the Galileans! They were the epitome of the “dirt people”!
 2. To this statement, John doesn’t record for us that Nicodemus makes any reply. Perhaps he was intimidated. Perhaps like Peter, during his denials, he feared repercussions from this group of authorities determined to make an example of Christ and those who would pledge allegiance to him.
- C. But before you take a shot at poor Nicodemus, calling him a coward or weakling, consider what has happened in his life. He has gone from being curious about Christ, yet unwilling to publicly associate himself with him; to being willing to publicly defend him to his peers. Isn’t that evidence of change?
1. But that is not the end of Nicodemus story! We see him one more time in the Bible, In John 19, the crucifixion has been carried out and Jesus is dead. Most of you know that a rich man named Joseph from Arimathea asked Pilate for permission to bury Christ. But look who shows up with him...
 2. **John 19:39 ESV** *Nicodemus also, who earlier had come to Jesus by night, came bringing a mixture of myrrh and aloes, about seventy-five pounds in weight.* Note...
 - a) First he came to Jesus **secretly**. Next he defended him somewhat **stealthily**. But now he is **publicly** paying homage to Jesus. He is now willingly associating himself with Christ’s suffering. The Jews know it (including the San Hedrin)! The Romans know it. The disciples of Christ know it. Even the common people know it. He’s out in the open!
 - b) Also note that he brought a huge gift of 75 pounds of expensive spices to prepare Jesus’ body for burial.
 - (1) It was a little hard to find the exact value of this gift in today’s dollars, but I found estimates on the internet ranging from \$100,000 to \$1.5 million.
 - (2) Now that may seem like a wide range, but the point is that it was clearly way more than any of us have given to God in our entire lives. He certainly wasn’t carelessly casting \$20 into the plate!
 - c) Why is that important? Because Nicodemus was finally demonstrating with both his **reputation** and **treasure** that Jesus was of supreme importance to him. What made such a dramatic difference in his life?

- D. Earlier when we were discussing the officers that came to arrest Jesus, I said, “you simply cannot remain the same after encountering Christ”. Doesn’t Nicodemus’ life prove this beyond doubt? When Jesus confronted his cowardly heart with the truth, a process began that wrecked him for this world. The yeast of the kingdom worked its way throughout the entire lump of clay.
- E. But what about you? Are you more passionate about Jesus today than you were yesterday? Are you more passionate about him? Are you more willing to publicly associate with him?
1. If the answer is “no”, and you were to ask me how a person is to change, I would hold firmly to my position; “you simply cannot remain the same after encountering Christ”.
 2. Your answer is to strive to change through religious effort, but to encounter him more in his Word, in worship, in heartfelt meditation of his cross, his resurrection, and his love for you while you were completely unloveable. Do this and I dare you not to be transformed!
- F. Like the officers, you may be somewhat stunned by your reaction to him at first. Like Nicodemus, you may find your path at times feels slow.
1. I remember taking a long hike in Palo Duro Canyon one day. All I could think about was how far I had to go. But as I continued I would look back and stand amazed at how far I had come just by ***steady forward progress***.
 2. Are you ready to encounter Jesus? He’s ready for you.