

“My Teaching Is Not Mine, But His Who Sent Me.”

The Twenty-Fifth in a Series of Sermons on the Gospel of John

Texts: John 7:1-24; Deuteronomy 16:13-17

Jesus has returned to Jerusalem. The on-going conflict between Jesus and the religious leaders of Israel will now escalate. Speaking with the Father’s authority, Jesus proclaims that the people of Israel do not keep the law of Moses, and are sinners in need of a Savior. Already plotting to kill Jesus—because, ironically, the Jews consider Jesus to be a law-breaker—some of those opposing Jesus accuse him of being demon possessed. As the tension increases, the people of Israel are now forced to choose whether they will follow Jesus or reject him. From this point on in John’s Gospel, the messianic mission of Jesus will center in and around the city of Jerusalem, and the leaders of the Jews will keep plotting to kill him. All roads now lead to the cross and the empty tomb because this is the will of YHWH, and Jesus’ mission requires him to fulfill his Father’s will.

We are continuing our series on the Gospel of John, and we move into a new section of the Gospel, recounting those events which took place in Jerusalem during the Feast of Booths (Tabernacles). These events take place about six months after Jesus gave the “bread of life” discourse in the synagogue in Capernaum (in the Galilee region). Chapters 7-10 of John, which record this so-called “conflict” phase of Jesus’ ministry, are characterized by an increasing tension between Jesus and the Jewish religious authorities in Jerusalem (the Sanhedrin). This tension stems from Jesus’ previous trip to Jerusalem (a year earlier), when Jesus healed an invalid on the Sabbath as recounted in John 5:18, where we read, *“this was why the Jews were seeking all the more to kill [Jesus], because not only was he breaking the Sabbath, but he was even calling God his own Father, making himself equal with God.”*

Although the increasing tension between Jesus and the Jewish leaders occurs during Feast of Booths, the nature of the Feast itself does not enter into the dispute. But the celebration of the Feast does serve as the setting for the various disputes between Jesus and the Jews which are recounted in the next few chapters. This is not the final conflict between Jesus and the members of the Sanhedrin (that will come during the Passover a few months later), but the vast divide between Jesus and the Jewish leaders is now fully out in the open. Once this happens, the people are now forced to take sides. The differences over the meaning of the Sabbath, and Jesus’ claims to deity became clear in chapter five. New issues arise in chapters 7-10, specifically questions about Jesus’ relationship to Abraham, Jesus’ authority and his interpretation of the Old Testament (particularly the way Jesus places himself at the center of Israel’s history), and Jesus’ assertion that the religious leaders of Israel are actually in league with the devil.

Since we have much ground to cover today, let us turn to our text, verse 1 of chapter 7. *“After this Jesus went about in Galilee. He would not go about in Judea, because the Jews were seeking to kill him.”* John does not specify how much time has elapsed since Jesus gave the “bread of life” discourse in Capernaum but since the Passover occurs in the spring and the Feast of Booths late in the Fall, it is safe to say that about six months have elapsed since the events of John 6. The synoptic Gospels devote much attention to this period in our Lord’s ministry in the Galilee, but John says nothing about it. According to John’s account, Jesus stayed in the Galilee region because the Jews in Jerusalem (the capitol of Judea) were threatening to kill him. When John speaks of the Jews in his Gospel, he is referring to the Jewish religious leadership and those allied with them (the Sanhedrin or the Jewish senate, and its two principle factions—the Pharisees and the Sadducees), not to the Jewish people in general. We should also be clear that Jesus was not afraid of dying—his life was his to give, it could not

be taken from him. Jesus also knew his messianic mission would eventually take him to the cross and according to the synoptics Gospels Jesus was already beginning to speak openly about his coming death and resurrection. As Jesus will state in our text in John 7, it was not yet time for Jesus to suffer and die for his people. There was still much for Jesus to accomplish until the next Passover.

We learn in verse 2 that “*the Jews' Feast of Booths was at hand.*” This was an important feast among the Jews and was celebrated when the fall harvest of grapes and olives came in. The Feast was instituted before Israel entered the promised land of Canaan (as we saw in our Old Testament from Deuteronomy 16:13-17). Following shortly after the Day of Atonement, the Feast lasted for one week with a special festival on the eighth day. It included “water-drawing” and “lamp-lighting” rituals—Jesus will refer to both rituals in these chapters. The famed Jewish historian Josephus describes this feast as the most popular of the three main Jewish feasts, with people flocking into Jerusalem in great numbers for the celebration—something like a national Fall harvest celebration. Those who could not find lodging in the city, built small shelters from wood and branches (hence the name, “Feast of Booths”).¹

The timing of Jesus’ return to Jerusalem—despite the danger to his life—is tied to Jesus’ brothers, the younger biological sons of Mary and Joseph. As we read in verses 3-5, “*so his brothers said to him, ‘Leave here and go to Judea, that your disciples also may see the works you are doing. For no one works in secret if he seeks to be known openly. If you do these things, show yourself to the world.’ For not even his brothers believed in him.*” Since Jesus’ own brothers are still unbelievers at this point, we should not be surprised that they think like unbelievers. Their interest in Jesus’ return to Jerusalem is motivated by self-interest, like many of those so-called disciples still following Jesus because of his miracles. Jesus’ brothers think of Jesus’ trip to Jerusalem as an opportunity for their brother to “grow his ministry.” He should move from the backwater of the Galilee to the big stage in Jerusalem.

John (who was an eyewitness to many of these things) likely makes mention of this because after the hard sayings recorded in John 6 when many of Jesus’ disciples walked away and no longer followed him, Jesus’ own family felt that if Jesus were to go to Jerusalem and do the same miracles he was doing in Galilee, he might regain lost followers, or add new ones. The Feast of Booths would be the ideal time for Jesus to do this since the city was packed with pilgrims and the occasion was more festive than the more solemn celebration of the Passover. Since the city was filled with pilgrims from outlying areas throughout Judea and the Galilee, no doubt, they would all go back home and tell everyone about Jesus. Perfect time for Jesus to go Jerusalem—never mind the fact that the Jews were trying to kill him.

Jesus responds to his brothers’ suggestion in such a way as to indicate that he is not interested in their marketing plan (nor in being successful as the world counts success). Jesus has a mission to fulfill given him by his heavenly Father. In verse 6, he tells his brothers, “*my time has not yet come, but your time is always here.*” Back in John 2, when Mary approached Jesus about the lack of wine at the wedding in Cana, he told her the same thing, “my time has not yet come.” He says the same thing to his brothers. It is not time for Jesus to go to the Feast of Booths as they suggest. His brothers could go to Jerusalem at any time to celebrate the harvest feast. But Jesus has a larger mission to fulfill. His brothers do not believe. They do not understand the greater purpose driving Jesus’ decision when to go to Jerusalem: Jesus must obey his Father’s will.

Jesus goes on to tell them, “*the world cannot hate you, but it hates me because I testify about it that its*

¹ Carson, The Gospel According to John, 305.

works are evil.” In effect, Jesus is calling his own brothers unbelievers by identifying them with the world. The world cannot hate them because they are of “the world” (the mass of unbelieving humanity). But the world does hate Jesus, because he bears witness from the Father to the world: testimony which exposes sinners for who and what they are—guilty before God, and in need of a savior. When Jesus heals the sick, casts out demons, and feeds the multitudes, people zealously follow him wherever he goes.

But when Jesus tells the people they cannot come to him unless the Father draws them, when he tells them that he will give his own flesh (as the living bread who came down from heaven) for the life of the world, and that all people must believe in him (that he is the Son of God, that he gives life, and that his word is true), people quit following him and walk away. His own brothers want Jesus to go to Jerusalem and perform more miracles, and to do so out in the open. Jesus, on the other hand, knows what will happen if he listens to them. He must testify that the people’s deeds are sinful. That message will get him crucified, but this can only happen when the Father wills it.

Jesus tells them in verse 8, “*you go up to the feast. I am not going up to this feast, for my time has not yet fully come.*” Jesus’ brothers can go to Jerusalem whenever they want. They have nothing to worry about. No one is plotting to kill them. They have no messianic mission to fulfill. But Jesus does have to fulfill his Father’s will, and because he does, he tells his brothers that it is not yet time for him to go to the Feast—although he does not tell them that the time for him to go will come very soon, just a couple of days later. And so in verse 9, John informs us bluntly that “*after saying this, [Jesus] remained in Galilee.*” But Jesus does intend to go to Jerusalem, only not in the way in which his brothers wanted or expected. In verse 10, we read, “*but after his brothers had gone up to the feast, then he also went up, not publicly but in private.*” Jesus leaves the Galilee area for the last time. He will go to Jerusalem in his own way (privately), and so as to fulfill his Father’s will. He will not accede to his brother’s short-sighted wishes and go on tour performing miracles and attracting followers.

Meanwhile, the Jews were expecting Jesus to come to the feast and create more trouble for them—a contingency they expected, and for which they actually hoped. According to verse 11, “*the Jews were looking for him at the feast, and saying, ‘Where is he?’*” In this verse we are given a hint (although we may not see it at first glance) that the Jews’ plan to kill Jesus is probably the reason why they were searching for him. If Jesus stayed in the Galilee, he was under the legal protection of Herod Antipas, and the Jewish leaders in Jerusalem could do nothing to stop Jesus from preaching and teaching elsewhere, no matter how much this impacted the Jewish leadership in Jerusalem. Should Jesus come back to Jerusalem, the Sanhedrin could easily find grounds to arrest him, and then have him executed for any number of trumped-up charges.

Since Jerusalem was filled with pilgrims during the feast, the Sanhedrin also had to worry about public opinion regarding Jesus, which was largely divided. John tells us in verse 12 that “*there was much muttering about [Jesus] among the people. While some said, ‘He is a good man,’ others said, ‘No, he is leading the people astray.’*” Everyone in Jerusalem had heard of Jesus, no doubt, many had actually seen him perform a miracle or heard him preach. People were talking about him, and as is common with a controversial figure, public opinion was greatly divided—some thought Jesus to be a good man, others thought him to be a false teacher.

What John does not report here is that a large number of people thought he was Israel’s Messiah—quite the opposite, many felt sure that he was a false teacher. The messianic fervor surrounding Jesus was probably much stronger in the Galilee area where Jesus’ messianic mission was headquartered and where Jesus had done the bulk of his teaching for the last year. We also learn that “*yet for fear of the Jews no*

one spoke openly of him.” If you were a pilgrim to Jerusalem and wanted to upset the local authorities, or risk jail time, just mention Jesus to the members of the Sanhedrin.

Like most politicians, the members of the Sanhedrin were far more concerned with pleasing their constituents than with doing the right thing. Because they knew that Jesus had a large following among the people, the Sanhedrin had to be careful with how they dealt with Jesus in public, should they put their plans into effect. If they arrested Jesus, they might start a riot, and that would bring down the wrath of Rome. No one wanted that. If Jesus arrived for the feast and the Sanhedrin did nothing, then Jesus might attract an even larger following. And who knew what miracle Jesus could perform to gain his freedom. The Sanhedrin had to be very careful, watch, and then wait for the right moment and circumstances to arrest Jesus and put him to death. The plot to kill Jesus will simmer until Thursday night of Easter week, when Jesus is betrayed by Judas and arrested by the Sanhedrin.

In the meantime, apparently, the Sanhedrin discouraged any public discussion about Jesus and his teaching, although John indicates that the people were talking among themselves privately—the word translated “muttering” can also mean “whispering” or speaking in hushed tones, which is probably the sense it has here.² What the members of the Sanhedrin could not have understood is that the timetable for Jesus’ arrest and execution was set by YHWH before time itself began, and will be fulfilled by Jesus at just the right time, when his hour finally has come. Jesus will die when it is the Father’s will to pour out his wrath upon his own son, and not when the Sanhedrin can successfully pull it off its plot—although the Sanhedrin’s anger against Jesus will ultimately fulfill the Father’s will.

The feast was in its third or fourth day when Jesus arrived. In verse 14, John tells us that “*about the middle of the feast Jesus went up into the temple and began teaching.*” This raises a question: “if Jesus did not want to be seen and remain in private, why did he pick the most popular feast and then go to the temple?” One good answer to this is that offered by D. A. Carson. Jesus was obeying his Father’s will, not his brother’s wishes. If Jesus had gone with them and joined the other pilgrims at the beginning of the feast and they all entered Jerusalem together, then Jesus risked a “triumphal entry” being forced upon him by zealous pilgrims, just like the Galileans who saw Jesus feed over five thousand people and then tried to make him king. It was not yet time for Jesus to enter Jerusalem in triumph.

This was also shortly after the time described in Luke 13:1-3 when Pilate crushed an uprising of zealots in the temple area. According to Luke’s account, “*there were some present at that very time who told [Jesus] about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices. And he answered them, ‘Do you think that these Galileans were worse sinners than all the other Galileans, because they suffered in this way? No, I tell you; but unless you repent, you will all likewise perish.’*” There are few details given and outside the Gospels there are no other accounts of this. It may well be that Jesus entering the temple quietly was his way of preventing civil unrest and Roman retribution in response.

However we deal with the way and the reason why Jesus entered the temple quietly, his appearance there set in motion the conflict which follows in chapters 7-10. According to verse 15, “*the Jews therefore marveled, saying, ‘How is it that this man has learning, when he has never studied?’*” The Galileans earlier had said of Jesus that “*he was teaching them as one who had authority, and not as their scribes*” (Matt. 7:28-29). When we take compare that account with this one, it is clear that there was something utterly remarkable about the way Jesus taught, as well as the content of his teaching which indicated to

² Morris, The Gospel According to John, 402.

everyone who heard him that God was with him.

One of the characteristics of rabbinical training during this time was the practice of supporting one's teaching by appealing to well-known authorities. "Rabbi, so and so said." "Our tradition says." "In this place it is written." Jesus, apparently, did not do this.³ When questioned about his teaching credentials, Jesus tells the people in verse 16, "*my teaching is not mine, but his who sent me.*" Jesus is not making this stuff up as he goes along. He is not some crazed religious zealot spouting nonsense or teaching esoterica to impress people. Jesus' teaching comes directly from the Father. This is but another way of saying that he is revealing things from God himself, just like the prophets who spoke God's word to Israel. "The Word of the Lord came to me, saying." Only Jesus seems to be saying something more—that unlike the prophet who is the agent who speaks God's word, Jesus is speaking the Father's word because he is one with the Father, and therefore Jesus speaks with the authority of the author of Scripture, not merely as the agent who brings the words of the author.

Debate about his credentials to teach misses the point. In light of what Jesus said in the "bread of life" discourse, since Jesus speaks only what the Father tells him to speak, only those given to Jesus by the Father and who are granted faith and then drawn to him, will respond accordingly. Says Jesus in verse 17, "*if anyone's will is to do God's will, he will know whether the teaching is from God or whether I am speaking on my own authority.*" The proper question is not where did Jesus get his Ph.D. in Old Testament, but whether or not people are willing to hear Jesus' teaching, accept it as coming from YHWH himself, and then strive to obey it. The one who desires to do God's will is that one granted faith and drawn to Jesus by the Father. To question Jesus about his credentials is to evade the real issue.

Jesus establishes the importance of the truth of his testimony in verse 18. "*The one who speaks on his own authority seeks his own glory; but the one who seeks the glory of him who sent him is true, and in him there is no falsehood.*" Since Jesus is not speaking on his own, and is only seeking the glory of the Father, then he can only tell the truth. The Psalmist reminds us that we all are liars (Psalm 116:11), and Scripture is clear that YHWH always tells the truth. Jesus grounds everything therefore in the fact that he speaks the truth, because he speaks with God's authority. In a sense, he is also daring anyone to find anything in his teaching which is not biblically or factually true. People should stop thinking about motives ("I think Jesus is a good man") and begin to weigh whether or not what he says is true.

In verse 19, Jesus now preaches the law to the crowds, showing them in no uncertain terms that they are all sinners in need of a Savior from sin. "*Has not Moses given you the law? Yet none of you keeps the law. Why do you seek to kill me?*" The law comes through Moses, grace and truth come through Jesus, John says in the prologue of the Gospel (v. 17), pointing his reader ahead and preparing us for statements like this one from Jesus. The question, *has not Moses given you the law?* is obviously rhetorical. Of course, Moses gave the law. It is the next assertion which cuts to the heart of things. *Yet none of you keeps the law.* The Pharisees taught that outward conformity to the law was fulfilling the law's requirements. If you have not stolen from your neighbor then you can say, "I am not guilty of theft." But Jesus teaches that if you have so much as desired your neighbor's property in your heart, then you are as guilty before God as if you had stolen it with your hands.

We know this from Jesus' sermon on the mount as recounted in Matthew 5. A couple of examples should suffice. In Matthew 5:21-22, Jesus says, "*you have heard that it was said to those of old, 'You*

³ Carson, The Gospel According to John, 312.

shall not murder; and whoever murders will be liable to judgment.” In Matthew 5:27-28, Jesus says, “*you have heard that it was said, ‘You shall not commit adultery.’ But I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lustful intent has already committed adultery with her in his heart.*”

With these words, Jesus exposes the sinfulness of the human heart which is the source from which all actual sins spring. His hearers know the law, but they do not keep it. This renders them guilty before God. Jesus even goes so far as to expose the plot of the Sanhedrin (which may or may not have been widely known), when he asks those present “*why do you seek to kill me?*” By making this assertion, Jesus is offering proof of his charge that the Jews do not keep the law in which they boast.

The crowd’s response is utterly tragic. “*The crowd answered, ‘You have a demon! Who is seeking to kill you?’*” We know from Mark 3:28-30, that to accuse Jesus of being demon possessed is to commit the unpardonable sin. “*Truly, I say to you, all sins will be forgiven the children of man, and whatever blasphemies they utter, but whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit never has forgiveness, but is guilty of an eternal sin*”—for they were saying, ‘*He has an unclean spirit.*’” This may be the case here, but John’s point is that the people responded to Jesus’ charge that they were law-breakers and were plotting to kill him (which they were) by accusing Jesus of being demon-possessed, which is their explanation as to why Jesus’ teaching is contrary to that of the Pharisees.

Jesus responds to the charge in verses 21, by reminding the people of what happened when he had been in Jerusalem earlier. “*Jesus answered them, ‘I did one work, and you all marvel at it,’*” referring to his healing of a man who had been an invalid for thirty-eight years. The Jews could not accept the fact that the man who was miraculously healed dared to move his mat (bedroll) on the Sabbath. Jesus continues to demonstrate their hypocrisy and mishandling of the law. “*Moses gave you circumcision (not that it is from Moses, but from the fathers), and you circumcise a man on the Sabbath. If on the Sabbath a man receives circumcision, so that the law of Moses may not be broken, are you angry with me because on the Sabbath I made a man’s whole body well?*” The Jews condemn the one thing (a man moving his bedroll, which was *not* a violation of the law) yet insisted upon performing circumcision on the eighth day, even if that day was a Sabbath. In other words, the Jews are condemning Jesus for doing something which they themselves are doing—making allowances for certain things on the Sabbath. On what basis then, can the Jews call Jesus a law-breaker and therefore seek to kill him, when they do something on the Sabbath (which is actually lawful) using the exact same reason Jesus uses? The lesson in this is that it is hard to argue how to interpret the law with the one who wrote it.

Jesus rebukes them. “*Do not judge by appearances, but judge with right judgment.*” The implication is that the Jews are making judgments using the wrong criteria. Those who have taught them the law may appear to understand it, but Jesus is proving that they do not. Apart from faith, the Jews cannot and will not handle the law correctly. They judge everyone by their oral tradition, and because they can keep their own traditions they appear to be righteous—yet in reality they are law-breakers who tell the people to do one thing, all the while they plot to kill Jesus for demonstrating that he is both the author and the fulfilment of the law of Moses. Their hypocrisy is beyond belief.

What, then, do we take with us from this passage? Throughout this chapter and those following we find an escalating tension between Jesus and the religious leaders of the Jews. The Jews are plotting to kill Jesus, while Jesus speaks of the necessity of fulfilling the Father’s will. Therefore, Jesus will not listen to unbelievers (like his own brothers) who put into words the plot of Satan recounted in Matthew 4, where Satan offers Jesus all things kingdoms of the world if only Jesus not go the cross. Despite the temptation to do what his brothers want (to attract great number of followers, seek fame and power, and

re-establish Israel's kingdom), Jesus knows his hour is not yet.

When the time is right for Jesus to return to Jerusalem, he enters the city without fanfare, but goes immediately to the temple and begins teaching. The Jews have been waiting for him. But speaking as one with the authority of YHWH himself—Jesus says “my teaching is not mine”—Jesus exposes the self-righteousness of the Jews and the plot to kill him as proof of their sin, and as evidence of the hypocrisy of the Sanhedrin.

Jesus must endure all of this to save us from our sins. He must fulfill all righteous in obedience to his Father—and he will. And everything from here on out in the messianic mission of Jesus points us to a cross and to an empty tomb.