

## **The Gospel of John**

### **Session Fifteen: Divided Opinions on Jesus**

#### **Commentary**

#### **John 7:25-44**

7:25–27. The religious authorities were trying to kill Jesus, but he spoke boldly and publicly without challenge. Is it possible, wondered the people, that the religious authorities have concluded he is the Messiah? Obviously not. Such thinking led many people into false conclusions about the origins of Messiah—a topic which left most in confusion. A twofold trap emerged from their misunderstanding. First, they determined they knew where Jesus came from (Nazareth), thereby denying the virgin birth. Second, they argued that no man would know the origin of Messiah, but the prophets spoke much of this with specific references to Bethlehem. As with many people today, ignorance of the facts about Jesus led them into further theological error.

Notice how John designated a specific group again—this time some of the people of Jerusalem instead of “the Jews” of verse 15 and “the crowd” of verse 20. The spotlight narrows from the broad pilgrims present at the feast to the locals who had made a regular practice of second-guessing their religious leaders. We should not infer that the Bethlehem reference of the Old Testament had been completely missed. The Herod-appointed scribes of Matthew 2 had no problem coming up with that name. But the spiritual blindness, especially in Jerusalem, had reached such levels that theological confusion about Jesus had clouded public thinking.

7:28–29. Once again Jesus answered rumors with direct proclamation. The origin of Messiah left most people in confusion, but that origin also linked him with God. In effect, Jesus’ response to their confusion was three simple statements: (1) You know me in terms of my physical presence on earth; (2) but I really came from the Father and you do not know that because you do not know him; and (3) nevertheless, I know him because he sent me to earth. So all this knowledge was no knowledge at all. John may have intended a deliberate irony in the way he recorded this passage. Since the Jews did not accept Jesus’ divine mission, they did not accept the one who sent him.

7:30–32. Suddenly the bright side surfaces in our story because the origin of Messiah, properly understood, lifted some people to faith. Notice the sovereignty of God in John’s careful description. They had every intent to seize him and presumably kill him, but his time had not yet come. Meanwhile, many in this crowd of so-called disciples actually did place their faith in him, concluding that they had seen enough. Surely even Messiah would not do more miraculous signs than they had seen Jesus do. He fulfilled Scripture; he gave eternal life to those who wished it; he healed the sick; and he mended broken hearts. Nevertheless, seeing still precedes believing, a violation of the faith principles of John’s Gospel.

7:33–36. Only six months remained in Jesus’ earthly pilgrimage—the period from the Feast of Tabernacles to the Feast of Passover. So he told the crowd that his invitation would be activated by the ascension. How interesting that in verse 34 he said, You will look for me, but

you will not find me; and where I am, you cannot come. This is precisely the reverse message of John 14 where he told the disciples they knew where he was going and how to get there.

Again the Jews interpreted these words in earthly terms. Where would he go? To the Diaspora, Jews living outside of Palestine around the Mediterranean world? Or would he go and teach pagan Greeks?

All this seemed preposterous to Jews gathered for the Feast of Tabernacles, but that is precisely what happened in the early chapters of Acts. Paul sought out synagogue after synagogue across Asia Minor and Greece, proclaiming the gospel to Jews, Jewish proselytes, and pagan Gentiles.

7:37–38. The invitation of Messiah is received by believing. We have come to the eighth day of the feast, the last and greatest day. Finally, as his brothers had urged more than a week earlier, Jesus “went public” with his message. This great water ceremony reminds us again of the link between water and the Holy Spirit in John 4, and quite possibly also John 3. Any thirsty people out there within the sound of Jesus’ voice? Let them come and drink. And those who drink would have within themselves streams of living water falling from the inside out.

The surrounding context offered a dramatic backdrop for these brief but powerful words. The corporate mind had been focused on water for days. Hughes describes the scene:

On the seventh day, the priest would circle the altar seven times in succession—as the people of Israel had encircled the walls of Jericho. When he came around for the sixth time, he’d be joined by another priest carrying the wine. They would ascend the ramp to the altar of holocaust where they were together to pour out the water and wine on the altar. When they were in place, there would come a pause as the priest raised up his pitcher. Always the crowd shouted for him to hold it higher and he would do so. It was considered to be the height of joy in a person’s life if he could see the water being poured out onto the altar (Hughes. *Behold the Man* (2 vols.). Wheaton, Ill.: Victor Books, 1984, p. 139).

One cannot argue for certain whether Jesus’ words were delivered on the seventh or the eighth day. Either could be called the last and greatest day of the Feast. Nor do we know what Scripture he had in mind in the citation of verse 38.

7:39. Thank God for John the interpreter for surely we would have theology of all sorts flowing from the “streams of living water” in this passage. But John left no question about meaning because the doctrine of the Holy Spirit is one of his great themes. We find more detailed teaching on this theme in chapters 14–16, but the glorification of Jesus is another important message in this book. We see it repeated in 8:54; 11:4; 12:28; 13:31–32; and 14:13.

So the Spirit is the living water from within. This interpretation may help us with John 3:5 and 4:13–14. Note John’s careful time delineations as well. The Spirit’s coming at Pentecost was still future at this event, though John was writing decades later. Throughout the Old Testament, the Holy Spirit’s descent upon servants of God was temporary, but soon believers would receive

him. All this awaited until after the glorification; John uses the verb form for the first time here. As Tenney points out, “It has varied meanings in this Gospel. It may refer to establishing status or to enhancing a reputation (8:54; 12:28; 13:32; 14:13; 15:8; 16:14; 17:1, 4, 5, 10; 21:19). In this particular context it refers to Jesus’ death, which, despite all appearances, would be the entrance to glory for him (7:39; 11:4; 12:16, 23; 13:31). The death and resurrection of Jesus would demonstrate the perfection of God’s love and power through humiliation” (Tenney, Merrill C. *The Gospel of John*. Expositor’s Bible Commentary. Vol. 9. Ed. by Frank E. Gaebelein. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1981, p. 87).

7:40–44. Finally, we see the invitation of Messiah is divisive to unbelievers. How typical of the gospel. Invariably in Acts when the gospel is preached, some people believe, some hesitate, some scoff, and some want to kill the messenger. On this occasion, some believed a portion of what Jesus said; some believed but did nothing; some got lost in religious arguments; and some reacted in hostile indignation. How foolish to recognize that Messiah was prophesied to come from Bethlehem and yet not check the facts of Jesus’ birth. Rejecting hearts are blinded still to the fact that Christ’s origin was not Galilee but Bethlehem; indeed, it was not earth, but heaven.

John kept dropping in references to the Prophet, a device in line with his messianic emphasis. Yet there was still no clear connection in the people’s minds between Moses’ promise of a future prophet and the coming of this Messiah. One thing was clear—the people were divided because of Jesus.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Gangel, Kenneth O. *Holman New Testament Commentary: John*. Edited by Max E. Anders. (Nashville: B&H Publishing Group, 2000).