



# The Gospel of John

## Session 15: The People's Divided Opinions on Jesus

### THE LESSON AT A GLANCE

On the last day of the Feast of Shelters, a day when the temple leaders would pour fresh water on the altar as a drink offering, Jesus addressed the crowd: *“If anyone is thirsty, let him come to me and drink. The one who believes in me, as the Scripture has said, will have streams of living water flow from deep within him”* (John 7:37-38).

Jesus's call is the same today—come to Him. Jesus promises that the Holy Spirit, whom God would send after Christ's resurrection, would be a source of ongoing connection to the Father. Through Christ, we have access to a never-ending source of life and connection.

In today's text, we'll examine how the crowd misunderstood Jesus. In the last section of the lesson, we'll examine reasons why the Old Testament is still important for us to study today.

### TODAY'S SCRIPTURES

*John 7:25-44*

### THE MAIN IDEA

The crowd continued in confusion about Jesus. He calls us, not primarily to increased knowledge, but to increased intimacy with God. Jesus promised to send Living Waters—the Holy Spirit—to flow within and from the hearts of His followers when we come to Him in faith.

### QUESTION TO EXPLORE

*What does it mean to “come to Jesus,” not as a one-time salvation event, but as an ongoing posture for life?*

### SCRIPTURE IN CONTEXT

**John 7:25-36** The crowd was divided about Jesus. Some saw Him as the promised Messiah, but others were suspicious. The Pharisees wanted to kill Jesus, but others were convinced by His miracles. Jesus declared that God is His Father and predicted His death.

**John 7:37-39** On the last day of the Feast, Jesus addressed the crowd. The spiritually thirsty would be fulfilled by coming to Him. The promised Holy Spirit is an ongoing source of connection with God. Coming to Christ is not only a one-time event, rather it is the ongoing relationship believers have with God through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit.

**John 7:40-44** The people remained confused about Jesus. Part of their confusion came from an incomplete understanding of the Scriptures. As New Testament believers, we should carefully study the Old Testament as well. In it, we come to understand the Father more fully, clearly see Jesus as the promised Messiah, and learn to recognize the work of the Holy Spirit.



## START HERE

In the first century, Greek plays filled amphitheaters around the Roman empire. While actors portrayed various characters and emotions using crudely constructed masks, Jesus addressed large crowds with no pretense. He clearly declared who He is and pointed toward His relationship with the Father and the words of the Old Testament prophets as proof of His divinity. Jesus didn't invite people to come to Him to see a good show and return home entertained. Rather, He invited people to come to Him as an ongoing source of life and connection with the Father.

## DISCUSS

*What does it mean to “come to Jesus” on an ongoing basis? What gets in the way from connecting with Him throughout our days?*

## REVIEW AND DISCUSS THE TEXT

### 1. Knowing Jesus Through His Words and Works

*John 7:25-36: Some of the people of Jerusalem were saying, “Isn't this the man they are trying to kill? Yet look, he's speaking publicly, and they're saying nothing to him. Can it be true that the authorities know he is the Messiah? But we know where this man is from. When the Messiah comes, nobody will know where he is from.”*

*As he was teaching in the temple, Jesus cried out, “You know me and you know where I am from. Yet I have not come on my own, but the One who sent me is true. You don't know him; I know him because I am from him, and he sent me.”*

*Then they tried to seize him. Yet no one laid a hand on him because his hour had not yet come. However, many from the crowd believed in him and said, “When the Messiah comes, he won't perform more signs than this man has done, will he?” The Pharisees heard the crowd murmuring these things about him, and so the chief priests and the Pharisees sent servants to arrest him.*

*Then Jesus said, “I am only with you for a short time. Then I'm going to the One who sent me. You will look for me, but you will not find me; and where I am, you cannot come.”*

*Then the Jews said to one another, “Where does he intend to go that we won't find him? He doesn't intend to go to the Jewish people dispersed among the Greeks and teach the Greeks, does he? What is this remark he made: ‘You will look for me, and you will not find me; and where I am, you cannot come’?”*

*Unpacking John 7:25-36*



Between 25-15 BC, Herod the Great, attempting to bring Greek thinking into his district, created a magnificent stone theatre in Caesarea, and a smaller, ornate wooden theatre in Jerusalem. In these arenas, Greek plays and music were commonplace, along with sporting events, chariot races, and gladiator combats. While the exact location of the Jerusalem structure is unknown, the theatre in Caesarea, with its 4,000 seats and panoramic view of the Mediterranean Sea, is still in use as a musical venue today.

First-century Jews largely avoided Greek plays, with their Hellenistic views and masked actors. They wore masks, not to deceive the audience, but to amplify emotion, and make the character visible from a distance. The mask didn't hide the actor; it revealed the role.

Yet, in John 7, we encounter a striking reversal of this tradition: Jesus wore no mask at all. He spoke openly and taught publicly. He made bold claims. Ironically, the confusion surrounding Him did not come from concealment, but from misinterpretation.

At the Feast of Shelters, the people were not divided because Jesus was unclear, but because they viewed Him through the lens of their own partial knowledge of the Old Testament, combined with their disbelief. John shows us that recognition of Jesus is not merely about seeing or hearing, but also about how we interpret what is right in front of us. Jesus isn't trying to mask who He is—He invites us to come close, get a good look, and believe.

As Jesus taught the crowd during the Feast of Shelters (also known as the Feast of Booths or Tabernacles), some in the audience made an interesting observation—they heard that the religious leaders sought to kill Jesus, yet there He was teaching publicly. They hypothesized that maybe the temple leaders had concluded He was the Messiah. There was one troubling fact, however. The Jews believed they would not know where the Messiah came from, but they knew Jesus's earthly family.

In these few sentences, we see immediately that the people's passion exceeded their knowledge. The Old Testament made clear that the Messiah would be born in Bethlehem (Micah 5:2). We can also fall into philosophical debate about theology or apologetics without first taking time to examine the Scriptures for ourselves. Before getting into lengthy debates or a social media vortex, it's important to first examine who Jesus is and what He did based on the only truly reliable source we have—the Word of God. Scholars debate the exact number but generally agree there are between 300-500 Old Testament references that point to Christ as the Savior of the World. When we become careful students of God's Word, we are less likely to fall for false teaching and are more prepared to give the reason for the hope we have (1 Peter 3:15).

In verses 28-29, Jesus addressed the crowd's doubt. He acknowledged they knew where He grew up but pointed out that He is *from* somewhere else entirely. He asserted, again, that His origin is heaven and His commission came from the Father.



Jesus's declaration that He is the Messiah in verses 30-32 brought about two different responses—some believed, and others did not. The Pharisees in the crowd tried to seize Jesus, yet the text says, *“his hour had not yet come”* (v. 30). However, many in the crowd put their trust in Him. They responded in faith not only to His words, but to His actions, saying, *“When the Messiah comes, he won't perform more signs than this man has done, will he?”* (v. 31). The Pharisees sensed this shift in the crowd and renewed their commitment to have Jesus arrested.

Regarding Jesus's proclamation and miracles, some believed and responded to Him in faith, while others heard and saw the same things but turned away. When we share our faith, we are only responsible for bearing witness to what Christ has done in our lives. We are not responsible for other people's response. Jesus was not discouraged by those who rejected His message—He remained faithful to God and allowed people to respond. In the words of Timothy Keller, “The gospel is not something we invent by speculation; it is something we receive by revelation.” We can be encouraged as we share Jesus with our family, friends, and neighbors. We share and invite; God's Spirit draws and saves.

In verses 35-36, the crowd began to question where Jesus would go. Not understanding the seriousness of the plot against Him by the Pharisees, and that Jesus meant they would not proceed Him in death, they presumed Jesus meant physically removing Himself to another area. One thought was that He would go and teach among the Diaspora. This term referred to Jews who lived among the Greeks but maintained a Jewish identity. They worshiped in local synagogues and made occasional pilgrimages to Jerusalem to worship at the temple. Paul would have been among the Diaspora Jews who was from Tarsus but educated in Jerusalem. It was through this network of synagogues that the gospel would advance in the early days after Christ's resurrection, spreading the seed of the good news of the kingdom outward from Jerusalem and ultimately throughout the world.

## DISCUSS

- *What assumptions did the Jerusalem crowd make about Jesus's origins, and why were those assumptions flawed?*
- *How can familiarity with Jesus, or even church culture, make it harder to hear Him clearly? What makes it challenging to examine teachings about Jesus carefully?*
- *Where might God be inviting you to move beyond your assumptions about God's will and do the harder work of pressing in deeply to understand Him better?*

## 2. Knowing Jesus Through Faith and the Indwelling of the Holy Spirit

John 7:37-39: *On the last and most important day of the festival, Jesus stood up and cried out, “If anyone is thirsty, let him come to me and drink. The one who believes in me, as the Scripture has said, will have streams of living water flow from deep within him.” He said this about the Spirit. Those who believed in Jesus were going to receive the Spirit, for the Spirit had not yet been given because Jesus had not yet been glorified.*



### *Unpacking John 7:37-39*

When you visit ancient amphitheaters like the one in Caesarea, you'll notice the unique way in which they are constructed—the “stage” area is on the floor, and the seats rise above it—giving the performer the best setting to amplify their voice, making it so even those in the back can understand their words. Today, with our advanced technologies and speakers, natural amplification isn't necessary, but the structure and design remain.

On the last day of the Feast of Shelters, Jesus stood up and lifted His voice to the crowd, *“If anyone is thirsty, let him come to me and drink. The one who believes in me, as the Scripture has said, will have streams of living water flow from deep within him”* (vv. 37-38). Jesus spoke with absolute assurance. His voice was amplified by His authority, and people took notice.

Each day during the festival, priests would draw water from the pool at Siloam (a “living water” or spring fed pool used for purification), and bring it back to the temple, pouring it upon the altar as a drink offering. This ritual served as a reminder of the miraculous ways God provided water for His people during their desert wanderings. Jesus, drawing the attention of the crowd, proclaimed that streams of living water would flow from within believers, not carried in buckets or pails, but carried in human hearts by faith. This picture stood in stark contrast to the ritual of the priests and pointed to Jesus as the source of life.

You might recall that this is not the first time Jesus pointed to Himself as the source of living water. In John 4:14, Jesus spoke to the Samaritan woman at the well, saying, *“But whoever drinks from the water that I will give him will never get thirsty again. In fact, the water I will give him will become a well of water springing up in him for eternal life.”* The Jews placed high regard on water as a living and spiritual substance. They routinely practiced ceremonial cleansing, and many practiced water baptism as a sign of repentance. Throughout the Old Testament, God used water as a symbol of His power and deliverance. Here, Jesus identified Himself as the ongoing source of living water that would flow within His followers by faith.

Jesus said all those who want to experience the Spirit's ongoing, regenerative, life-giving presence, will experience it through Him. *“Those who believed in Jesus were going to receive the Spirit, for the Spirit had not yet been given because Jesus had not yet been glorified”* (v. 39). After Christ's death and resurrection, God would pour out His Holy Spirit on believers like water, refreshing and bringing new life, just as He promised through the prophet, Isaiah. *“For I will pour water on the thirsty land and streams on the dry ground; I will pour out my Spirit on your descendants and my blessing on your offspring.”* (Isaiah 44:3)

Jesus does not call the self-sufficient to drink; He calls the thirsty. Faith built on traditions or keeping a set of rules will never satisfy—legalism only leaves us spiritually parched. Jesus's invitation remains: The thirsty are invited to come and drink. As the prophet Isaiah wrote:



*“Come, everyone who is thirsty,  
come to the water;  
and you without silver,  
come, buy, and eat!  
Come, buy wine and milk  
without silver and without cost! (Isaiah 55:1)*

## DISCUSS

- *What does Jesus promise to those who come to Him? How did John explain that promise?*
- *What does spiritual thirst look like in a culture that often denies its need for God?*
- *What might it look like for you to actively “come to Jesus” in this season, not just believe facts about Him?*

### 3. Knowing Jesus Through the Witness of the Old Testament

*John 7:40-44: When some from the crowd heard these words, they said, “This truly is the Prophet.” Others said, “This is the Messiah.” But some said, “Surely the Messiah doesn’t come from Galilee, does he? Doesn’t the Scripture say that the Messiah comes from David’s offspring and from the town of Bethlehem, where David lived?” So the crowd was divided because of him. Some of them wanted to seize him, but no one laid hands on him.*

#### *Unpacking John 7:40-44*

The amphitheater in Caesarea Maritima was one of the crowning architectural achievements of Herod the Great. While his smaller, wooden amphitheater in Jerusalem was ultimately destroyed, the remains of the original stone theatre in Caesarea, and the rebuilt modern structure, are still in use today. In Acts 25, it is likely that Paul stood trial before Festus and King Agrippa in that very location. Throughout the Old Testament and church history, people have used public platforms to boldly profess faith in Christ, sometimes at their own peril. Even today, there are Christians who boldly proclaim Jesus in the face of grave danger. The people in Jerusalem at the Festival of Shelters were perplexed by Jesus’s bold teaching. As He claimed to be the source of living water, the crowd looked for reasons to dismiss what He had to say, and some even wanted to see Him apprehended.

The crowd, like the rest of the Judean area, was divided about Jesus. *“When some from the crowd heard these words, they said, ‘This truly is the Prophet.’ Others said, ‘This is the Messiah.’ But some said, ‘Surely the Messiah doesn’t come from Galilee, does he?’ (vv. 40-41).* Notice the language used to express strong belief, even certainty: “truly”, “this is”, and “surely”. The people had different thoughts about who Jesus is, but they held to their positions firmly. The problem, as verse 42 points out, is that their understanding was incomplete. They argued, *“Doesn’t the Scripture say that the Messiah comes from David’s offspring and from the town of*



*Bethlehem, where David lived?”* However, back in verse 27 they said, *“But we know where this man is from. When the Messiah comes, nobody will know where he is from.”* The crowd's incomplete knowledge of the Old Testament, and their reliance on their own opinions rather than Scripture made it difficult for them to see Jesus accurately.

The Old Testament indeed says the Messiah will come from Bethlehem (Micah 5:2). It also predicted Joseph's flight with Mary and Jesus to Egypt after Jesus's birth (Hosea 11:1) and claims that Jesus would come from David's seed (Isaiah 11:1). Matthew 2:23 says, according to the prophets, the Messiah would be called a Nazarene. All of these are true of Jesus. He is the ultimate fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy and the promised Messiah. However, the people argued their positions more than they examined the text. When we respond similarly, we miss the fullness of God's Word. As faithful students of the Scriptures, it is important that we use the Bible as the basis for forming our opinions and not the other way around. Scripture leads and our conclusions should follow.

The crowd was confused about who Jesus is because they lacked a sufficient understanding of the Old Testament. Today, many Christians avoid studying the Old Testament, feeling intimidated by its length or the difficulty in understanding parts of it. Others feel as though the New Testament has replaced these Scriptures and therefore the Old Testament is less important to the life of the believer today. However, like the crowd, we misunderstand Jesus if we do not understand what the Old Testament has to say about Him. We can be tempted, as they were, to form our opinions about the Scriptures, rather than letting the Bible speak for itself. As we wrap up today's study, let's consider why Christians should study the Old Testament.

First, we should study the Old Testament because the Bible would be incomplete without it. From Genesis 1:1 to Revelation 22:21, God speaks to us through His Word and calls each letter of it “God-breathed” (2 Timothy 3:16-17).

Second, we should study the Old Testament because Jesus said He did not come to abolish the law, but to fulfill it. He said not one stroke of the law will pass away until all things are accomplished (Matthew 5:17-20). We are to study God's Word and follow His commands faithfully.

Third, the Bible teaches us important truths about God and humanity. From the creation story to the fall, to the Law and Prophets, we understand who God is and who we are as we examine the fullness of history.

Fourth, we should read the Old Testament because it is the Bible that Jesus read. Throughout the Gospels, Jesus quoted the Old Testament hundreds of times. In getting to know the Old Testament, we get to know the worldview of Jesus.

Fifth, the Old Testament provides wisdom and instruction for believers today. The moral law of the Old Testament, like the Ten Commandments, which instruct us in loving God and loving our neighbors is still valid today. In the Old Testament, we learn how we are to live—honoring God,



speaking with honesty, caring for our neighbors, and living with contentment. In the Psalms, we learn what authentic worship looks like, and in the Proverbs, we learn wisdom for daily living. The prophets point to the hope of Christ and stir our hearts with gratitude that we live in the reality of Jesus's life, death, and resurrection. To miss the Old Testament would be to miss the full expression of God to His people.

Finally, we should read the Old Testament because in it we are pointed toward Jesus, the Messiah. As we spend time in the Old Testament, we see how all of Scripture points toward Jesus—the author and perfecter of our faith (Hebrews 12:2). We can study Scripture for the rest of our lives and never unearth all of God's treasures. We will never arrive completely, but we'll be transformed as we study God's Word throughout our lives. As D.A. Carson wrote, "We do not master the text; the text masters us."

The crowd at the Festival of Shelters had mixed responses to Jesus. The crowd was divided, partly because of their varying levels of faith, but also because of their misunderstanding or incomplete knowledge of the Old Testament. Jesus stood in the temple and proclaimed the truth, but not everyone present had eyes to see and ears to hear. Today, we have the fullness of Scripture at our fingertips. The Bible has never been more accessible and available in more languages and translations than it is today. Believers should be faithful students of the fullness of God's Word so that we, unlike some in the crowd that day, may hear Jesus clearly and respond to Him in faith.

## DISCUSS

- *What specific Old Testament misunderstandings led some people to reject Jesus?*
- *How can Scripture be used defensively and selfishly rather than faithfully?*
- *What posture should God's people take in carefully studying the full measure of God's Word? What needs to change in your personal discipleship, as you seek to grow in your knowledge and understanding of Scripture?*

## DEEPER FOCUS

### REFLECT ON THE TEXT

## DISCUSS

*Which group in this passage do you most identify with, and why?*

*What tends to cloud people's vision of Jesus today: lack of understanding, wrong expectations, or resistance to surrender?*

*How does this passage challenge the way you listen to Jesus's words now?*



## RESPOND TO THE TEXT

Reflect on how Jesus fulfills Israel's history as both **bread in the wilderness** and **water from the rock** (Exodus 16–17)—not merely as symbols of provision, but as the very means of salvation.

As you reflect this week, consider:

- *Where do you most need Jesus as **bread**—sustenance and strength?*
- *Where do you most need Him as **living water**—renewal and life?*

## APPLY

- What needs to shift in your life this week (how you start or end your day, what you watch or listen to, those you spend intentional time with) to stay connected with Christ who quenches our spiritual thirst?

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