



The Gospel of John

Session 14: The Feast of Tabernacles and Jesus's Teaching

THE LESSON AT A GLANCE

In today's lesson, we'll explore Jesus's arrival and teaching at the Festival of Shelters, an Old Testament pilgrimage to remember God's faithfulness to the Israelite people during their time in the Sinai wilderness.

Jesus's brothers wanted Him to arrive to fanfare and parade, but their motives came not from a desire to see Jesus magnified, but rather as a function of their own disbelief.

Jesus's delay in attending reminds us of an important truth—God's timing is always best. As you examine the text this week, look for ways to acknowledge our own desires for God to act when and how we want. Today's text is an encouraging reminder that God is sovereign and often, what we see as delay is actually God's provision right on time.

TODAY'S SCRIPTURES

Leviticus 23:33-44; John 7:1-24

THE MAIN IDEA

Jesus taught during the Feast of Tabernacles and addressed controversy surrounding His identity.

QUESTION TO EXPLORE

How do you respond when it seems God delays? How might faith increase as we learn to trust His perfect timing?

SCRIPTURE IN CONTEXT

Leviticus 23:33-44 The Old Testament Feast of Shelters (or Feast of Tabernacles) was an eight-day pilgrimage to Jerusalem. The Israelites built crude, temporary shelters to live in as a reminder of how God provided for them in the wilderness.

John 7:1-9 In New Testament times, the Feast of Shelters was a required time set aside for celebration and sacrifice. Jesus's brothers prodded Him to arrive in fanfare to prove His authority and divinity. But Jesus was clear that He received His marching orders from God—not man.

John 7:10-24 When Jesus did appear in the temple courts, He taught with authority and wisdom. Many in the crowd were impressed with His teaching, but the Jewish leaders were already plotting murder in their hearts. Jesus taught that true wisdom originates from and points to God.



START HERE

All of us face moments where it is hard to wait on and trust God's timing. Whether it's a new job, a new baby, a new opportunity, or even a desire for an unbeliever to experience salvation and new life, waiting on God's timing can be one of the hardest acts of trust we ever have to face. In today's text, Jesus's own brothers sought to hurry Him along for their own purposes. As we reflect on today's text, think about ways God might be asking you to rest in His sovereignty and authority as you wait on Him.

DISCUSS

Have you ever tried to "hurry" God along? Though this is often fruitless and can do more harm than good in our lives, why does it remain tempting?

REVIEW AND DISCUSS THE TEXT

1. Remembering the Rescue: The Feast That Looked Back and Ahead

Leviticus 23:33-44: The LORD spoke to Moses: "Tell the Israelites: The Festival of Shelters to the LORD begins on the fifteenth day of this seventh month and continues for seven days. There is to be a sacred assembly on the first day; you are not to do any daily work. You are to present a food offering to the LORD for seven days. On the eighth day you are to hold a sacred assembly and present a food offering to the LORD. It is a solemn assembly; you are not to do any daily work.

"These are the LORD's appointed times that you are to proclaim as sacred assemblies for presenting food offerings to the LORD, burnt offerings and grain offerings, sacrifices and drink offerings, each on its designated day. These are in addition to the offerings for the LORD's Sabbaths, your gifts, all your vow offerings, and all your freewill offerings that you give to the Lord.

"You are to celebrate the LORD's festival on the fifteenth day of the seventh month for seven days after you have gathered the produce of the land. There will be complete rest on the first day and complete rest on the eighth day. On the first day you are to take the product of majestic trees—palm fronds, boughs of leafy trees, and willows of the brook—and rejoice before the LORD your God for seven days. You are to celebrate it as a festival to the LORD seven days each year. This is a permanent statute for you throughout your generations; celebrate it in the seventh month. You are to live in shelters for seven days. All the native-born of Israel must live in shelters, so that your generations may know that I made the Israelites live in shelters when I brought them out of the land of Egypt; I am the LORD your God." So Moses declared the LORD's appointed times to the Israelites.



Unpacking Leviticus 23:33-44

Think back on a parade you've attended. Often, these celebrations mark national holidays, like the Fourth of July, when people gather to celebrate American independence. Though the conflict that secured our national freedom was brutal, today we remember our independence with joy and celebration. The Jewish people also observed annual festivals to remember important moments in their history. The Festival of Shelters (also known as the Festival of Booths or Tabernacles) marked the end of the harvest season. However, instead of celebrating with inflatable floats or confetti, the people marked the festival by camping out for eight days in crudely constructed shelters made of sticks and branches. There was no permanence or polish, just remembrance.

Following the Exodus, as God's people moved into forty years of wandering, God gave Moses additional laws to establish the religious system that would sustain their relationship with Him throughout the exile and beyond.

In Leviticus 23, God outlined for Moses the holy days of remembrance He established for the people. First, God emphasized the importance of the weekly observance of the Sabbath (Leviticus 23:3). A weekly day of rest was not God's suggestion—it was His command—a symbol of faithful trust in God's ability to provide for a people who had known only the endless labor and suffering of slavery. Sabbath was not a punishment—it was a gift.

Next, God set up the spring festivals: The Passover, the Feast of Unleavened Bread, the Feast of First Fruits, and the Feast of Weeks (which would later become Pentecost). These festivals marked a celebration of God's deliverance and provision, and each family was to take part.

In the autumn, God commanded the Israelites to celebrate the Feast of Trumpets (later known as Rosh Hashana), a day of total rest to mark the beginning of the Jewish New Year. Ten days later was the Day of Atonement (Yom Kippur)—the most holy day on the Jewish calendar—a day of sacrifice for the sins of the people.

The final required celebration in the Jewish year was the Feast of Shelters (also known as the Feast of Booths or the Feast of Tabernacles), and the last of the three required annual pilgrimages to Jerusalem (Leviticus 23:33-38). Note the length of the festival, as well as the requirement to rest on the first and last day. While participation in traveling to Jerusalem was required by the law, God built in days of respite after a long harvest season and the pilgrimage to worship. It's not hard to imagine that leaving one's home for eight days (plus travel) right at the end of a difficult harvest season was in and of itself a sacrifice. Undoubtedly, there were tasks left undone at home, and preparations that needed to be made for the coming winter. However, even within God's requirement there was grace.

Not only did the people travel to Jerusalem for the Festival of Shelters, but they built their own micro-hotels when they arrived. Each family constructed a shelter of sticks and branches as a reminder of the shelters in which the Israelites lived for forty years in the desert. Living in these temporary shelters served as a powerful reminder to the people of God's presence and



provision, both for their ancestors, and for them. According to Deuteronomy 16:14-15, the Festival of Shelters wasn't just a day for Israelites, but for all people living in Israel—a shared celebration marked by joy and generosity.

By Jesus's day, the Festival of Shelters was an ongoing tradition of the Jewish people. In it, God trained His people to remember His deliverance of them while living in dependence on Him. In today's text from John, we'll see how others, including His brothers, lost focus on the days of remembrance and instead attempted to pressure Jesus into using that time to take a political stance.

DISCUSS

- *Why is it important that we remember God's work in the past? How does that impact the present and future?*
- *How did the presence of temporary dwellings point to the ultimate dwelling of God's people? How is this still true for us?*
- *What practices might we take up to regularly remember God's work in our lives and throughout time?*

2. "Show Yourself": When Human Urgency Tries to Force Divine

Timing

John 7:1-9: After this, Jesus traveled in Galilee since he did not want to travel in Judea because the Jews were trying to kill him. The Jewish Festival of Shelters was near. So his brothers said to him, "Leave here and go to Judea so that your disciples can see your works that you are doing. For no one does anything in secret while he's seeking public recognition. If you do these things, show yourself to the world." (For not even his brothers believed in him.)

Jesus told them, "My time has not yet arrived, but your time is always at hand. The world cannot hate you, but it does hate me because I testify about it—that its works are evil. Go up to the festival yourselves. I'm not going up to this festival, because my time has not yet fully come." After he had said these things, he stayed in Galilee.

Unpacking John 7:1-9

In Disney's *Aladdin*, the street-rat-turned-prince wanted to make a grand entrance into the city to impress the sultan and win the hand of his beautiful daughter, Jasmine. His magical sidekick, Genie, created a parade for Aladdin's arrival unlike anything else—complete with elephants, camels, and gold. The irony, of course, is that Aladdin's flamboyant spectacle didn't impress Jasmine at all—she wanted authenticity.¹

¹ *Aladdin*, directed by Ron Clements and John Musker (Burbank, CA: Walt Disney Pictures, 1992), DVD.



Jesus's brothers wanted Him to make a grand entrance to the Feast of Shelters. They believed that Jesus was not yet known in the right religious circles. Jesus, however, wouldn't kowtow to their suggestion. His ultimate arrival into Jerusalem wouldn't come during a festival dedicated to shelter, but later as the Passover Lamb. His brothers wanted pomp and circumstance; Jesus would arrive humbly on the back of a donkey.

"After this, Jesus traveled in Galilee, since he did not want to travel in Judea because the Jews were trying to kill him" (v. 1). Before diving into the text, it's important to look back at the context of verse 1, *"After this."* You might recall that John's Gospel is not always recorded sequentially. Here, John passed over a sizable portion of time more fully covered in the Synoptic Gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke). John fast-forwarded to the autumn festivals approximately six months before Jesus's triumphant entry into Jerusalem, His arrest, and crucifixion. John picks up where chapter six left off, six months to a year after His declaration, *"I am the Bread of Life"* (John 6:35). Jesus had declared *"Truly I tell you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you do not have life in yourselves"* (John 6:53). His words offended many, who chose to walk away from Him, and put Him in the crosshairs of the Jewish leaders.

In John 7:3-4, Jesus's brothers approached Him with a suggestion. They argued He should go up to Jerusalem for the Feast of Shelters, rather than remain in Galilee, *"so that your disciples can see your works that you are doing"* (v. 3). Jesus's brothers would have known God's command in Deuteronomy 16:16, that *"All your males are to appear three times a year before the LORD your God in the place he chooses: at the Festival of Unleavened Bread, the Festival of Weeks, and the Festival of Shelters. No one is to appear before the LORD empty-handed."* Jesus, who followed the letter of the law (Matthew 5:18), was required to attend the Feast, as were they. The brothers' request was more about *how* they thought Jesus should arrive—in pageantry, with His works on display.

The brothers suggested: *"If you do these things, show yourself to the world"* (v. 4b). Jesus's own brothers did not petition Him to enter Jerusalem with fanfare because they wanted to see God's kingdom realized on earth. Rather, their petition had something to do with their own lack of faith, as John confirmed in the next verse: *(For not even his brothers believed in him.)*

The other three Gospels also give a glimpse into the relationship between Jesus and His siblings. In Mark 3:20-21, a large crowd gathered to hear Jesus teach. *"When his family heard this, they set out to restrain him, because they said, 'He's out of his mind.'" Luke 8:19-21 recounts, "Then his mother and brothers came to him, but they could not meet with him because of the crowd. He was told, 'Your mother and your brothers are standing outside, wanting to see you.' But he replied to them, 'My mother and my brothers are those who hear and do the word of God.'"*

It may be hard for us to imagine the unbelief of Jesus's own family. They had seen His life in intimate detail, had seen His miracles, and had a front row to His teachings. However, as Jesus



said in Luke 4:24, *"No prophet is welcome in his hometown."* Perhaps their familiarity bred contempt. Perhaps they struggled with their own internal envy over the attention Jesus received, or perhaps they even struggled with the recognition of their own sin in contrast to Christ's perfection. Whatever the reason, by John 7, a mere six months before Jesus was crucified, his siblings had not yet accepted Him as Messiah.

While this passage points to a season of unbelief, Scripture records that Jesus's siblings did, in fact, come to faith. In Acts 1:14, we read *"They all were continually united in prayer, along with the women, including Mary the mother of Jesus, and his brothers."* In the shadow of the cross, following Christ's death and resurrection, His family put their trust in Him. What they tried to rush for their own agenda in John 7, was accomplished after Jesus was raised from the dead. This can encourage us as we contemplate family members or loved ones who do not yet know Christ and perhaps are even skeptical of the gospel. God's timeline doesn't look like ours. His purposes can't be rushed. As Timothy Keller said, *"God is never late, but He is rarely early by our definition."*

Not only did Jesus's brothers eventually put their faith in Christ, but Jesus personally appeared to His brother, James, which became a catalyst for James's tireless work for the kingdom later in life (1 Corinthians 15:7). In Galatians 1:19, Paul called James *"an apostle"*, and when he escaped prison in Acts 12, he instructed the church to *"tell James"* (Acts 12:17). In fact, church tradition tells us that James the apostle went on to lead the church in Jerusalem and authored the book by his name. What a difference encountering the living Lord, Jesus, can make in a person's life and eternity!

In John 7:6-7, Jesus answered His brothers' request, saying, *"My time has not yet arrived, but your time is always at hand. The world cannot hate you, but it does hate me because I testify about it—that its works are evil."* Jesus had a kingdom perspective and was willing to wait for God's perfect timing. Jesus understood that He could not allow human urgency to try to force divine timing. His words echo those to His mother at the wedding feast in Cana. *"What has this concern of yours to do with me, woman?" Jesus asked. "My hour has not yet come"* (John 2:4). An eternal perspective enables us to wait patiently for God to work in His way and in His timing.

After denying His brothers' suggestion, Jesus replied, *"Go up to the festival yourselves. I'm not going up to this festival, because my time has not yet fully come."* After he had said these things, he stayed in Galilee" (John 7:8-9). Many early manuscripts add the word *"yet"* after *"I'm not going to the festival."* He was not going up at that moment, and He would not go up with the fanfare and pageantry they wanted. He would not go up yet, but would wait for the right moment to attend.

"Yet" is a powerful word implied throughout this passage. Jesus's brothers did not believe . . . yet. His hour had not come . . . yet. Jesus would not arrive in Jerusalem as a king, *"righteous and victorious, humble and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey"* (Zechariah 9:9) . . . yet. As we evaluate this text in light of areas in our lives where we are waiting on our own *"yet,"* we are encouraged to wait on God's perfect timing. As the apostle Peter wrote, *"The Lord does*



not delay his promise, as some understand delay, but is patient with you, not wanting any to perish but all to come to repentance” (2 Peter 3:9).

DISCUSS

- *Why are we often drawn to spectacle as proof of legitimacy? How might we miss what God is doing if we're only expecting something grand?*
- *What did Jesus's response to His brothers reveal about His mission?*
- *What is a “not yet” in your life? How can the testimony of Jesus's own brothers encourage you in your waiting?*

3. Authority Without Applause: Teaching and Healing from the Father

John 7:10-24: After his brothers had gone up to the festival, then he also went up, not openly but secretly. The Jews were looking for him at the festival and saying, “Where is he?” And there was a lot of murmuring about him among the crowds. Some were saying, “He's a good man.” Others were saying, “No, on the contrary, he's deceiving the people.” Still, nobody was talking publicly about him for fear of the Jews.

When the festival was already half over, Jesus went up into the temple and began to teach. Then the Jews were amazed and said, “How is this man so learned, since he hasn't been trained?”

Jesus answered them, “My teaching isn't mine but is from the one who sent me. If anyone wants to do his will, he will know whether the teaching is from God or whether I am speaking on my own. The one who speaks on his own seeks his own glory; but he who seeks the glory of the one who sent him is true, and there is no unrighteousness in him. Didn't Moses give you the law? Yet none of you keeps the law. Why are you trying to kill me?”

“You have a demon!” the crowd responded. “Who is trying to kill you?”

“I performed one work, and you are all amazed,” Jesus answered. “This is why Moses has given you circumcision—not that it comes from Moses but from the fathers—and you circumcise a man on the Sabbath. If a man receives circumcision on the Sabbath so that the law of Moses won't be broken, are you angry at me because I made a man entirely well on the Sabbath? Stop judging according to outward appearances; rather judge according to righteous judgment.”

Unpacking John 7:10-24

Consider the job of those who must clean up after a parade—candy wrappers and trash, piles of paper confetti, and even the evidence of animals all must be cleared away to reopen the street



and get back to business as usual. It's an unseen yet important job, and one that must be done swiftly. No one sticks around to celebrate the street sweepers, yet their job may matter more than even the parade marshal. Sometimes, it's quiet work behind the scenes that matters most of all.

Jesus eventually went to the Festival, yet not in the way His brothers suggested. He arrived secretly, and Scripture does not tell us how He and His disciples went about presenting the necessary sacrifices. Many were looking for Jesus among the crowd, assuming He would make a public appearance. However, as verses 12-13 point out, public opinion about Jesus was mixed. Some believed He was a good man, while others thought He was a con artist. It's important to note that in the previous chapter, many disciples deserted Jesus, deciding His teaching on His body and blood was too hard to accept (John 6:60,66). While the Jewish leaders were mostly unified in their disapproval of Jesus, the masses were undecided.

Halfway through the festival, Jesus appeared in the temple courts and began teaching. *"Then the Jews were amazed and said, 'How is this man so learned, since he hasn't been trained?'"* (v. 15). The power of Jesus's words pointed to the validity of His claims—His wisdom comes directly from God. (v. 16) Even today, people have lots of thoughts about Jesus without ever having studied His Word. However, Jesus's words come with power, and when people are exposed to them, they cannot help but be impacted by their wisdom and truth. Similarly, at the Sermon on the Mount, the crowd was impacted by His teaching and recognized His wisdom was not of man: *"When Jesus had finished saying these things, the crowds were astonished at his teaching, because he was teaching them like one who had authority, and not like their scribes"* (Matthew 7:28-29).

"If anyone wants to do his will, he will know whether the teaching is from God or whether I am speaking on my own" (v. 17). Obedience opens the door to understanding. When we spend time with the Lord, reading His Word, studying His commands, and applying them to our lives, we will grow in wisdom and understanding. The religious leaders in the crowd had knowledge of God's Word without application. Knowledge isn't enough for transformation—walking in obedience to God's commands is how we grow in Christ-likeness.

In verse 18, Jesus reasserted that His authority came from God, and that He spoke only the truth God revealed. Then, He turned the conversation back to the religious leaders who were no doubt in the crowd listening to Jesus. *"Didn't Moses give you the law? Yet none of you keeps the law. Why are you trying to kill me?"* (v. 19). Jesus was aware of the Jewish leaders plot to kill Him, but the crowd was, at this point, unaware of what the Jewish leaders were planning: *"You have a demon!" the crowd responded. "Who is trying to kill you?"*

At this point, Jesus turned the conversation to an earlier miracle that caused great commotion among the religious leaders. *"I performed one work, and you are all amazed," Jesus answered* (v. 21). By the time of the feast, Jesus had performed many miracles. However, His words in verse 23 give us a clue as to which miracle He was referencing. *"If a man receives circumcision*



on the Sabbath so that the law of Moses won't be broken, are you angry at me because I made a man entirely well on the Sabbath?"

Back in John 5, Jesus healed a paralytic man at the Pool of Bethesda who had suffered for thirty-eight years. The day on which He performed the healing was the Sabbath, and the religious leaders saw healing as a labor which was forbidden. John 5:16 says that from that moment, the Jewish leaders began to persecute Jesus, who declared *"My Father is still working, and I am working also"* (John 5:17). The man's healing, which should have been a celebration of God's mercy, became the impetus through which the opposition against Jesus arose in force. *"This is why the Jews began trying all the more to kill him: Not only was he breaking the Sabbath, but he was even calling God his own Father, making himself equal to God"* (John 5:18).

In John 7:22-24, Jesus reminded the religious leaders that Moses allowed circumcision on the Sabbath to keep the law (Leviticus 12:3). If the temple leaders were allowed to circumcise on the eighth day, essentially performing "work" for the sake of righteousness before God, why would Jesus not be allowed to also perform healing work on the Sabbath? Jesus argued that their judgment was unjustified and admonished the people to stop judging according to mankind's standards, but instead by God's.

Jesus grounded His authority in His obedience to the Father. As John Piper explains, *"Jesus did not come to get glory for himself, but to give glory to the one who sent him."* Jesus would not be swayed by His brothers' desire that He arrive in Jerusalem in spectacle to prove His authority. Neither would He downplay His authority and minimize the calling of God on His life. In Jesus, we see a perfect example of meekness—power under control. Though we cannot live perfectly this way, this is also to be our goal.

DISCUSS

- *Why did Jesus's quiet authority often unsettle people? How have you seen that truth?*
- *How can we learn to judge according to "righteous judgment"?*
- *How can you learn to discern God's voice when it lacks spectacle? In other words, how do you encounter Him in the quiet, everyday moments of life?*

DEEPER FOCUS

The Feast of Shelters remembered God's rescue from Egypt. Jesus's delayed arrival and God-given teaching pointed toward the greater rescue God prepared for His people. His quiet arrival and delayed visibility were not disconnected indifference, but grace. Think of a time when God's delay was a grace in your life. Looking back, what did you learn about His character you might not have discovered any other way?



REFLECT ON THE TEXT

DISCUSS

*Looking back, what “seeds” of faith did God plant prior to you coming to Christ?
Who did God use to prepare your heart, even quietly or imperfectly?
Where might God’s delay in your life today be an act of grace, not neglect?*

RESPOND TO THE TEXT

How might you resist the urge to tell Jesus how and when you want Him to act, and instead respond to His authority with quiet trust and obedience?

APPLY

Jesus did not arrive with trumpets in today’s text, but one day He *will* return in glory. Until that day, His patience is an act of mercy and grace, and an invitation to draw near. What does it look like for you to faithfully wait on Him?

REFERENCES

Timothy Keller, *Walking with God through Pain and Suffering*, New York: Dutton, 2013.

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