

John 7:25-53. Jesus enters Jerusalem for the Feast of Booths and starts to teach. He went in secret and didn't perform any miracles, but His words drew a large crowd. He caught the attention of the leaders, temple guards, visitors, and residents of the city alike.

This is the last time Jesus went to Jerusalem before His crucifixion. The environment was already hostile, but He came one final time with an appeal to save the few who would listen.

He is admired and studied throughout the world today, but such wasn't the case 150 years ago. The 1860 election of Abraham Lincoln set the nation on a course for war. Slavery was the economic engine of the South, and the President viewed it as nothing less than a "monstrous injustice."

Lincoln was not a radical abolitionist. He understood change would require time and compromises. The secessionists, however, refused to negotiate or budge on the issue—it was their right to own slaves, and the Federal Government had no right to interfere. Even before Lincoln's first inaugural speech, most of the South had left to form a new nation.

The President didn't believe slavery was a question of state rights but moral law: "All men are created equal." What Jefferson so famously penned, Lincoln courageously applied. He was a man with principles who drew the highest admiration as well as the deepest hatred from his countrymen.

When we come to John's Gospel we find that Jesus experienced much the same from His people. At the Feast of Booths, six months before His execution, He addressed a crowd who divided over His words. Some reacted with hatred and wanted Jesus eliminated, while others marveled at His teachings, wanted to hear more, believe, and follow.

The apostle John tells us in this chapter how people reacted to Jesus. In general, the Lord was a divider. The division He created at this feast was a microcosm of the last 2,000 years. His principles are unswerving, His teachings are controversial, and His claims have massive implications for all of us. Though Lincoln divided an entire country, Jesus has divided the entirety of mankind. He was then and remains today a most polarizing figure.

WHAT DID JESUS SAY?

During the middle of this weeklong feast, the Lord made three statements about Himself...

I WAS TAUGHT BY GOD (JOHN 7:16)

After Jesus preached, the crowd "marveled" He lacked a formal education (John 7:15). The same word is used when Jesus told the wind and the waves to be still, told a demon to depart, or made the sick well. God's Word was as astonishing as His miracles (Matt 8:27, 9:33, 15:31).

The people questioned the Lord, and rather than appeal to a rabbi greater than Himself, He appealed directly to God the Father. They marveled, and this defense of His authority left them stunned. No one had ever spoke like this.

I CAME FROM GOD (JOHN 7:29)

Jesus was born in Bethlehem and raised in Nazareth as the son of Joseph, a carpenter. Jesus' background was well-known, which was a problem for some in the crowd. They believed the true messiah's background would be a mystery (John 7:27).

Was it just a misunderstanding? It seems not. Some in the crowd that day didn't like Jesus and were hungry for a reason to dismiss Him. They had already accused Him of being possessed and wouldn't stubbornly wouldn't believe anything He said (John 7:20, 26).

Sometimes the Gospel authors show us the rage of God against hard hearts and willful ignorance. We see it here in a sarcastic, biting line from Jesus. He raised His voice above the crowd (John 7:29), and He confronted many for being foolish. What did He say? That He came from God, and those who humbly seek to know God with all their heart will know His testimony is true (John 7:17). Few cared.

I'M GOING BACK TO GOD (JOHN 7:33)

So, they debated and divided. Jesus, however, was grieved. He says He would soon leave everyone alone. Most in Judea wouldn't listen or consider what He said. Jesus told His enemies with a heavy heart that they would be without Him soon enough. He would return to Heaven in a few months, and they would never see Him again. Many would get their wish... and it would come at the cost of eternal life (John 7:34).

Dialogue and Division

“Seek the Lord while He may be found” (Isa 55:6). The door of mercy is open. The throne of grace remains for a time. The sad truth is many fritter away this opportunity or harden their heart from one year to the next. Pining away for a position, more money, power, fame, or respect, some get all their heart desires only to find in the end that where Christ is they cannot come (John 7:34).

WORDS THAT PIERCE

“What shall I do with Jesus?” (Matt 27:22). The question tormented Pilate, the Roman Governor, and it divided a great crowd of people at an annual feast. Jesus performed no miracles in John 7, but His words dropped like a bomb upon the people. Few had seen Him though all knew of Him. Never had anyone heard words with such striking authority, and this caught their attention.

It’s been said that when Demosthenes spoke the hearts of men were moved to go to war and die. Seneca and Cicero made a mark in history for their oratory as have many others since, but even their words hadn’t the power of Jesus’. Those who heard Him, heard the voice that called the universe into being.

At the Feast of Booths, some accused the Lord of being possessed’ others dismissed Him for being a Galilean or mocked Him. No one had the nerve to debate Him (John 7:20, 27, 35, 42). Many hardened their hearts and hoped the religious leaders would have this man arrested (John 7:26).

The leaders already judged Jesus to be a heretic. When they had the courage, they ordered His arrest. Even then, no one could actually do it. Why? They were afraid of Him. They had seen the fury of Jesus when He cleared the temple (John 2:15), had seen Him perform miracles (Lk 5:17-26) and had been shamed repeatedly by His arguments (Lk 20:22-26). When the Lord was betrayed and arrested, His enemies even sent a “great crowd” of soldiers to take Him (Matt 26:47). Those who hated Jesus still feared Him.

When the temple guards approached, they returned to the Pharisees and Sadducees without Him. Ironically, His words pierced their hearts and they said: “No one ever spoke like this man!” (John 7:46). They were not commenting on a moving speech, but on the nature of Jesus Himself—no mere man could say these things.

THE INVITATION

The Feast of Booths, like all Jewish feasts, was laden in symbols. In this one, a great procession of worshippers and priests would go down from the temple mount to the pool of Siloam each day. The high priest would fill a water pitcher, lead the procession back to the temple, and pour the pitcher out on the altar. It was a plea during the annual dry season for God to provide the harvest rains; famine may come otherwise.

Drawing from the water imagery, Jesus cried out on the last day of the feast, “If anyone thirsts, let him come to Me and drink” (John 7:37). As God sent rain to bring life to a barren land, so He sent His Son to bring life to the human heart. Is anyone thirsty? There is a dryness in the heart, an emptiness created by sin that only the Lord can remedy (John 4:1-42). Come to Him. Drink deeply. Find relief.

THE SAME SUN THAT MELTS WAX HARDENS CLAY.

To any who would listen, this was Jesus’ final invitation in Jerusalem unto salvation. Some in the crowd grew in their understanding of Him and believed (John 7:31, 40-41). The religious leaders, however, grew all the more enraged, mocked the guards, cursed the crowd, and turned upon one of their own (John 7:47-52). They couldn’t stop the Son of God, because “His hour had not yet come” (John 7:30). The Lord knew that despite the threats, nothing would happen to Him against the Father’s will. His ministry would end, and He would be executed not when His enemies planned it, but when the Father determined these things would happen.

A DIVISIVE SAVIOR

What made Jesus such a polarizing figure? (John 7:43, 9:16, 10:19). When you consider the staggering nature of the claims Jesus made and the force with which He made them, it’s impossible to remain neutral. One must either follow Him or reject Him. Anything that seems to be in the middle is a rejection.

So, who is Jesus? This still remain one of the most divisive questions in our world some 2,000 years later.