

“How Do You Know?”

John 7:25-52

May 22, 2022

Read John 7:25-52

This is the Word of the LORD.

Our passage this morning is the second part of Jesus' Festival of Booths appearance within the Gospel of John. We are focusing our attention here because John observes and reports the struggle believers have – then and now – how do you know?

John 7 is all about “how do you know?” There are multiple scenes. Last week, we began with the Jesus and his brothers, talking about going from Galilee to Jerusalem. Galilee was safer for Jesus because the plot against his life in Jerusalem was well known. Despite that threat and because they did not believe, Jesus' brothers urged him to go so that he would do his works of power in the big city.

The Festival of the Booths was (and is) an annual celebration in Jerusalem. It was the largest of the three major festivals in Jerusalem and had a dual purpose. First, it was a celebration of the harvest. Second, the booths were temporary shelters designed to connect people with their nomadic ancestors who wandered in the desert – ancestors who always lived in temporary housing. These were holy remembrances because they focused attention on how God provided. The people were invited to examine their own lives to see God's blessing and provision.

So, Jerusalem was crowded. And, as John wrote, the leaders in Jerusalem were lying in wait for Jesus. They were disappointed when they could not find him for the first few days. Even so, Jesus was a topic of conversation – a very divisive topic of conversation – with some people saying he was a good man and others saying he was a deceiver. The more things change, the more they stay the same.

In the middle of the festival – probably three or four days in – suddenly Jesus showed up. He began teaching in the temple. The buzz was instant – “look, he's here.” “What's he doing here?” The crowd quickly gathered and there was a feel like watching a car chase on television. What were the authorities going to do – they were all here, they were looking, they were watching, and there was a lot of tension. What was going to happen?

Jesus addressed the elephant in the living room right away, “Why are you looking for an opportunity to kill me?” Those who had been plotting threw up their hands, looked innocent and said, “What? Who? Us? What are you talking about?” Jesus went on to ask, “If a man receives circumcision on the sabbath..., are you angry with me because I healed a man's whole body on the sabbath?”

Here is where we pick up the text. Verse 25, “Some of the people in Jerusalem were saying, “Is not this the man whom they are trying to kill? And here he is speaking openly, but they say nothing to him! Can it be that the authorities really know that this man is the Messiah?”

That's the issue, right there. Jesus' very presence, his very being, requires a decision. Who is he?

1. Jesus forces us to answer.

Jesus was uncompromising. Despite the danger and different than his brothers had urged, he went to the Festival. He went. He showed up unexpectedly. He taught. He demanded a response and answer.

The Jews responded by complaining about his lack of credentials. The people of Jerusalem struggled to answer who he was. Look at our text: verses 25-27 the people were debating whether he could be the Messiah. In verse 31 they ask, "When the Messiah comes, will he do more signs than this man has done?"

In the midst of the danger, Jesus continued teaching. He was pressing the question, demanding an answer. In verse 40, "when the people heard these words, some in the crowd said, "This is really the prophet." Others said, "This is the Messiah." Others argued back against him.

In verse 45, the temple police were questioned by the chief priests and the Pharisees, "Why did you not arrest him?" The response was, "Never has anyone spoken like this." Who is this? When Nicodemus urged them to give Jesus a hearing, the chief priests and Pharisees argued back – erroneously – from what they thought they knew: Jesus could not be the Messiah because no prophet is to arise from Galilee.

All along, Jesus was pressing people to answer the question, "Who is he?"

Today, many people imagine that Jesus was fairly passive. They have in mind a picture that we have all seen: Jesus in the pasture with the lamb, long flowing hair, and long flowing white robe. He is the Jesus you can approach at your leisure while he is ready and waiting. Scripture gives us that picture, but it also shows us a God who is very much in our face. God will not let us rest undecided. He confronts us and demands a response. Jesus demands a decision. Jesus asks each one of us – every day – "who do you say I am?"

There is no avoiding the question. You cannot hide from it and pretend you have never been asked. **Have you ever tried to hide from God?** It does not work.

Ask Jonah. Jonah got on a boat to Tarshish after God told him to go the other way to Ninevah. Suddenly, he found himself thrown overboard and sitting in the belly of the fish.

Psalms 139 asks the question, "Where can I go from your spirit? Or where can I flee from your presence? If I ascend to heaven, you are there; if I make my bed in Sheol, you are there. If I take the wings of the morning and settle at the farthest limits of the sea, even there your hand shall lead me, and your right hand shall hold me fast." Normally, those are words of comfort; however, they also speak the truth that God does not leave us alone.

There is no hiding. There is no possibility of passing the buck. When Jesus confronts you – and he does – he is not going to accept, "Well, some say..." or "I am not sure." Professing with your lips that he is Savior and Lord, believing in your heart that God raised him from the dead; that's where salvation begins. It restores the relationship between creator and creation, between the holy God and the redeemed sinner. Without it, we remain dead in our sins. That's why it is such an important question.

Job

Our Old Testament passage today also looks at how there is no hiding: that wisdom is found only in God.

Job was a man in misery. Having enjoyed prosperity and a great relationship with the Lord – he was “blameless and upright, one who feared God and turned away from evil” – Job suddenly suffered massive losses. He lost children, property, and then his health. It got so bad Job’s wife said, “Do you still persist in your integrity? Curse God and die.” But Job replied, “Shall we receive the good at the hand of God, and not receive the bad?” In other words, is God required to please us – or – do we exist for God’s purposes? Who do you say God is?

In chapter 28 that Sandy read, the question was posed, “But where shall wisdom be found? And where is the place of understanding? Mortals do not know the way to it, and it is not found in the land of the living.” Job went on to answer his own question, “God understands the way to it (wisdom), and he knows its place...’Truly the fear of the Lord, that is wisdom, and to depart from evil is understanding.’”

When we talk about the “fear of the Lord, that is wisdom;” it is the modern phrase for a “come to Jesus moment.” It is that moment when all pretense is stripped away and we are faced with the clear answer to the question, “Who do you say I am?” Jesus demands an answer.

This is why I have been talking to you about the perversion of faith we see so widely adopted in our culture: moralistic therapeutic deism. Many people in our culture have received this as their understanding of what it means to be Christian:

1. A God exists who created and ordered the world and watches over human life on earth.
2. God wants people to be good, nice, and fair to each other, as taught in the Bible and by most world religions.
3. The central goal of life is to be happy and to feel good about oneself.
4. God does not need to be particularly involved in one's life except when God is needed to resolve a problem.
5. Good people go to heaven when they die.¹

That is specifically *not* what scripture teaches about Christ. You cannot read scripture and come to this view of God. The only way you get to this view is by ignorance of scripture, by explaining it away, by choosing to obey only which portions you like, or by not trusting it to be God’s word.

Making Jesus a theory, a state of mind, or a metaphor for God’s love are the popular **erroneous** choices these days. Why? Because those approaches do not require a decision about Jesus, you just have to let Jesus be whoever he wants to be. “You gotta have faith” is the conventional wisdom axiom – however it often does not matter in whom you place your faith as long as you are sincere.

Friends, Jesus did not allow that option. Jesus does not allow us this option. If Scripture is to be believed at all, Jesus was very deliberately and intentionally flesh and blood. He was very deliberately

¹ Christian Smith and Melinda Lundquist Denton, [*Soul Searching: The Religious and Spiritual Lives of American Teenagers*](#) (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 163.

and intentionally confrontational, asking the question, “Who do you say I am?” Either he is God’s only son or he is not. Either he is the way, the truth, and the life, or he is not. Sitting back and not making a decision is not an option.

Further, to drive the point home: you cannot rely on anyone else to answer for you. My faith, what the majority of people believe, what your parents taught you – none of those stand as an answer for you. Jesus looks each one of us squarely in the eye and asks, “Who do YOU say I am?”

There will be no sneaking into heaven. There is no salvation without facing Jesus directly. I have heard a number of people in my life who have described the desire to slip in the door right before heaven fills up. It does not work that way. The only way into heaven starts here and starts now: your relationship with the king – the living, reigning, sovereign Lord Jesus Christ.

Do not get caught up in the trap of “what about the person who has never heard the name Jesus?” Why? Two reasons: One, what you know about God reveals that God is taking care of things in ways you will never understand; and, two, *you* have heard the name of Jesus and are called to account for how you respond. Arguing that some other hypothetical person should not be held accountable does not release you from your own personal accountability.

Jesus confronts each one of us – you and me – and demands a decision, personally.

2. So, how do we know?

If I have to decide and you have to decide, how are we to know?

The crowds were asking the right questions, “When the Messiah comes, will he do more signs than this man has done?” They were looking at what he was doing – the healings, the symbolic gestures, the teaching – and asked the right questions: do we believe what we see? Do we believe what we hear? Is God real and does God actually show up?

What does God have to do in order for us to believe? Well, what *has* God done?

Consider the condition of your own heart. As you look in your own life, do you look for evidence that God *has been* faithful or are you trying to find reasons to *not* believe. Please hear me correctly: I am not suggesting that God is not real if you decide God is not real; rather, I am saying that you can only see what God is doing when you are willing to believe.

Look.

Can you see where Jesus has been true to his word? **Look with eyes of belief**, not unbelief.

I have related some of this before, but it bears repeating in this context. In October, 2003, wildfires struck San Diego County. I was serving Westminster Presbyterian Church in Escondido. A family in our congregation experienced a horrific tragedy: Ashleigh Roach 16, was killed. Her older sister, Allyson Roach, was severely burned -- so severely that a doctor pulled me aside to tell me she would not survive. 85% of her body had been burned. She was wrapped up so that only her eyes and nose were visible.

We put our hands on Allyson's wrapped head that day. I remember praying out loud, asking God to heal her body, to show us His glory by making her a tangible witness of His sovereign power. I prayed for a miracle. "We know you are able," I prayed. I also remember thinking -- and here is a confession -- "I sure hope these are not empty words." I walked out of the hospital that day wondering how God would answer all of our prayers.

God healed Allyson.

God is so much stronger than my faith. God is not bound by the limitations I see. God's glory is bigger than my imagination. But this is not a story about me or my faith; it is about Allyson and seeing God's continuing love for her.

Allyson's spirit and courage has been incredible. She endured literally dozens of surgeries. She has persisted and persevered through trial after trial, step after step. It has not been an easy road, but this much is true: the fire left its mark, but it has not defined Allyson. She has more than survived. She is living.

Allyson has been an inspiration in the community. She continues a blessing to me. Her "can-do" character, her genuinely encouraging personality, and her easy laughter have lifted up many around her. She went back to college. She is working as a photographer. She was a bridesmaid at her brother's wedding. She is active in the community. She and her family are working together with the medical community to minister to others who have incurred burn injuries. She got married. She has two children. She has had a full life since being dismissed as dead.

On that October Sunday almost 20 years ago, who would have imagined? Yet, God is able to do what is impossible in human eyes. How great is our God! That part of the story, I have already told you.

Now, let me take this a little farther. What about Ashleigh? She was 16 years old and had just come home from a prom. She was an adorable, joyful, marvelous light within her family – and then she was gone. If God is real, how could Ashleigh have died in such a terrible fashion?

This is where faith meets real life. How do we understand? How do we know? Terrible things happen and Ashleigh died. But here's the point: death does not have the last word. Jim Rauch officiated at Ashleigh's memorial service, and here's what he had to say:

She was raised in the Christian faith from her first breath. She always treated me with so much respect as her pastor, but also with so much warmth and affection. She loved our youth director, Rob, and his singing. She loved her church and thought everybody should go to Westminster. She kept her Bible on her bedside stand, and all on her own started reading it, starting in Genesis and working her way through the Bible a chapter or two at a time. When I asked Lori about Ashleigh's faith, she said "there was never a day that she did not know God, and Jesus Christ as her Savior and Lord. She fully believed that the angels in Heaven and the Lord Jesus are watching over us all." Ashleigh's faith in God was a pure faith – it was unwavering – she never doubted, never questioned that there was a God and that Jesus was his only begotten son. It was just part of her life, and plain as the nose on your face.

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When I talked with John and Lori about Ashleigh's faith, they told me that when loved ones died, the family would cry and grieve, but that Ashleigh would always say – "its ok – they're home now."

Jesus said to his disciples – "In my father's house there are many rooms – I have to leave you now – but I will go and prepare a place for you – and I will come again to take you there myself that where I am, you may be also."

Where's Ashleigh? She's home now. The Good Shepherd has walked with her through the valley of the shadow of death, and he has brought her safely home.

So, how do we know? Ashleigh's faith gave peace to her family. She looked, saw what God was doing in her life and all around her, and she believed. Allyson has endured such pain and such trials; yet she will tell you that her life is a testimony to God's goodness and steadfast love for her.

What are the miracles that are happening around you? Who are the people you know whose faith brings them peace, whose faith brings encouragement to you? Where are you looking to see God's hand at work? That's how you can know.

If you still are struggling to know, then let me point you to one more section of our text today: verses 37-39. Jesus cried out – shouted with a loud voice – "Let anyone who is thirsty come to me, and let the one who believes in me drink." John went on to explain that Jesus said this about the Spirit, which believers in him were to receive. What Jesus did – his obedience unto death, resurrection, and ascension – ushered in and validated the kingdom of heaven he was proclaiming. The Spirit would be (and is) given to believers so that they may know and grow in the answer to who do we say Jesus is.

In short, Jesus promised: if you want to know, ask him. Ask with ears to hear the answer; that is, ears of faith.

Conclusion

When we leave this sanctuary, when we leave this campus, we go out into "the real world." Or so we think. But Jesus Christ confronts us in our not-so-real world with real grace. He confronts us each day with the question, "Who do you say I am?" Is Jesus Lord of your entire life? Not just your Sunday mornings, but your Tuesday afternoons and Friday nights? Is he who he says or not?

He is.

The invitation Jesus gives is to real, eternal life in him. Trust him. It requires faith, yes – but God grants faith to those who ask. If you look with eyes to see, can you not already see the way that God has been faithful to you? In faith, there is relief – redemption from our sins. In faith, there is joy – communion with the holy God, having been made righteous through faith in Jesus Christ. In faith, there is hope – the hope assured that tragedies do not define us, that death does not have the last word.

When the Messiah comes, will he do more signs than this man has done?

Amen.

Prayer

Closing Song: His Name Is Wonderful

Questions:

1. Who is Jesus?
2. How do you know?
3. How can you share Jesus with someone who does not yet know? What difference has Jesus made in your life? What examples would you give – from your entire life or the last few days?