

John 7:37-8:20 More Wrong Thinking About Jesus

Introduction: The Great Exchange college campus evangelism ministry randomly asks students, “Who, in your opinion, is Jesus Christ?” Most really don’t know. The answers they hear vary widely: a good person, Savior, prophet, moral teacher, historical figure, social revolutionary, son of God. If you don’t know who Jesus is, you can’t trust Him for who He really is. This is important, because Jesus said:

NIV **John 8:24** . . . if you do not believe that I am the one I claim to be, you will indeed die in your sins.

Today we’ll continue on with our survey—examining various conclusions people reached as to Jesus’ identity.

Review:

What advice about forming opinions did Jesus give in 7:24?

ESV **John 7:24** Do not judge by appearances, but judge with right judgment.

What reason was given in 7:27 for not believing in Jesus? Scripture clearly predicted that the Christ would be born in Bethlehem, and people were aware of this (7:42). However, they apparently held to the notion that the Christ, though born in Bethlehem, would remain in hiding before suddenly appearing as Messiah. Jesus appeared to be disqualified because they had known about Jesus for years.

False Reasoning: The real Messiah will suddenly and unexpectedly appear, almost as if from out of nowhere. Jesus has been around a while, and it is well known where He is from. Thus, Jesus cannot be the real Messiah.¹

ESV **John 7:24** Do not judge by appearances, but judge with right judgment.

Despite the unbelief of those who doubted Jesus’ ancestry, why did many others believe in Jesus (7:31)? They believed in Him because of the signs He did.

How did the chief priests and Pharisees respond to the crowd’s growing interest in Jesus (7:32)? They sent the temple police to arrest him.

Living Water

******On the last day of the feast, what did Jesus offer anyone who believes in Him (7:37-39)?** In fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy, He promised that rivers of living water would flow out of anyone who believes in Him. The quotation (7:38) is not of a specific Old Testament verse, but a summary of several passages, such as:

¹ Hendriksen, *John*, 17.

ESV **Isaiah 58:11** . . . the LORD will guide you continually and satisfy your desire in scorched places . . . and you shall be like a watered garden, like a spring of water, whose waters do not fail.

Perspective: This is an audacious claim; no mere human could rightly offer this to others. Jesus was claiming to be a man from God.

Timing: Why did Jesus wait until the last day of the feast to make this water statement (7:37)? The Feast of Booths was a fall harvest celebration that concluded on its last day with an elaborate, formal, water-pouring ceremony. This water-pouring anticipated the future harvests that only abundant rain could bring. The water also came to symbolize Messianic blessings.² Jesus took advantage of this ceremony to make this offer. Earlier He had said:

ESV **John 4:14** . . . whoever drinks of the water that I will give him will never be thirsty forever. The water that I will give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life.

ESV **John 6:35** . . . whoever believes in me shall never thirst.

•“**anyone**” (7:37): Jesus’ offer is extended to “anyone” who thirsts. The problem is that most people aren’t thirsty.

•“**come to me and drink**” (7:37): Jesus’ invitation to come and drink suggests not mere intellectual assent, but a whole-hearted participation in believing that Jesus is the Christ.³

ESV **Revelation 22:17** . . . let the one who is thirsty come; let the one who desires take the water of life without price.

In 7:39, John interpreted what Jesus meant for us. What did the living water symbolize? Jesus said this about the future coming of the Holy Spirit to indwell God’s people. This happened 50 days after Jesus’ crucifixion, at the Feast of Pentecost. The Holy Spirit fell on the believers and they began supernaturally speaking in foreign languages. Peter explained it this way:

ESV **Acts 2:16-18** . . . this is what was uttered through the prophet Joel: "And in the last days it shall be, God declares, that I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh, and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams; even on my male servants¹ and female servants in those days I will pour out my Spirit, and they shall prophesy.

Literary Purpose: John wrote this to unbelieving Jews scattered throughout the Roman Empire. They knew the Old Testament imagery about water well enough. They also knew such prophecies as given by Joel about God pouring out the Holy Spirit in the days of the Messiah. Reading this about rivers of living water flowing from one’s innermost being certainly must have piqued their interest and curiosity. Here it was, being offered to them.

² Carson, *John*, 322.

³ Dennis & Grudem, *ESV Study*, 2038.

Application: Everyone who believes in Jesus receives the gift of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit regenerates us and dwells inside of us and gives us both the desire and the power to obey Jesus' teachings. Receiving the Holy Spirit sometimes results in a sudden and dramatic change of attitude or action. For others, the change is slow but sure, like a small spring that suddenly bubbles up in the bottom of a cesspool and eventually pushes out all the sewage.

******If we gave these people the Great Exchange survey, what four reactions would we have recorded (7:40-44)?**

1. Some believed Jesus was "the Prophet", 7:40.
2. Some believed Jesus was the Christ, 7:41a.
3. Some rejected Jesus because He was Galilean, 7:41b-42.
4. Some wanted to arrest him to stop the spread of error, 7:44.

Who was "the Prophet" (7:40)? See 6:14. This was a Messianic reference to a prediction found in the writings of Moses (Dt 18:18-19) that one like Moses would one day come. That prophet was indeed Jesus! This is a great conclusion so far as it goes.

What is the difference between the Prophet and the Christ (7:40-41)? At this point in history, many understandably but wrongly saw "the Prophet" and "the Christ" as two different people.⁴

What is the answer to the question stated in 7:42? Yes, the Scripture predicted that the Messiah would be born in Bethlehem. The problem is that they were unaware that Jesus actually had been born in Bethlehem.

Wrong Thinking: The Messiah would be born in Bethlehem (true). Jesus was born in Galilee, not Bethlehem (wrong). Therefore, Jesus cannot be the Christ.⁵

ESV John 7:24 Do not judge by appearances, but judge with right judgment.

•**"division" (7:43):** Jesus causes division among people. Truth divides. Jesus is *the way*, *the truth* and *the life*. All other religious ways and systems are false.

ESV Matthew 10:34 Do not think that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I have not come to bring peace, but a sword.

Why did no one arrest Jesus (7:44)? Clearly, it was not yet Jesus' hour! Exactly how these people would have had the authority to arrest Him is unclear; a citizen's arrest maybe? Perhaps "arrest" is the wrong word; the NIV has "seize".

⁴ Carson, *John*, 329.

⁵ Hendriksen, *John*, 27.

******What wrong thinking about Jesus was thrown into the face of Nicodemus (7:45-52)?** The reason given was because Jesus was from Galilee, rather than Bethlehem. They, too, were ignorant of Jesus' birth in Bethlehem.

ESV **John 7:24** Do not judge by appearances, but judge with right judgment.

The Jews sent the temple police to arrest Jesus. Why did the policemen not bring Jesus in (7:45-46)? They got there and became enthralled by His teachings! In a sense, policemen are hired guns. They don't make the law. Their job is to enforce the law, good or bad, no matter what. For these professional lawmen to not carry out their assignment is quite remarkable.

Example: When doing side-walk counseling at abortion clinics, the police are often called by the abortionists. Too often, the police seem to be sympathetic with the clinic, waving and smiling at the clinic escorts. At the very least they are typically annoyed at having to respond to the call. Pro-Lifers are an irritant to them, potential disturbers of the peace. Can you image the police coming out with a bad attitude, hearing our pro-life arguments, and then siding with the Pro-Lifers against the clinic, outraged that babies were being legally murdered? This is type of thing that happened when they were sent to arrest Jesus.

•**“No one ever spoke like this man!”** The policemen spoke far more than they knew. Jesus was no ordinary man. He was God in human form.

What was the nature of the argument the Pharisees made to the policemen for not believing (7:47-49)? Theirs was an *ad hominem* attack.⁶ Rather than give genuine reasons, they attacked the character, education or spirituality of those who believed in Jesus:

- 1) They intimidated the officers with accusations of being deceived, then
- 2) They appealed to a claim that none of the leaders had believed (the old “scholars are agreed” bit).
- 3) They denigrated the crowd's faith as that of ignorant, unlearned people who were accursed.

Worthless Shepherds: The Pharisees, religious leaders, should have been kind, merciful and compassionate toward the crowd. Instead, they held them in contempt. Through Zechariah, God warned of:

ESV **Zechariah 11:16-17** . . . a shepherd who does not care for those being destroyed, or seek the young or heal the maimed or nourish the healthy . . . Woe to my worthless shepherd . . .

What objection did Nicodemus raise in 7:51? Nicodemus felt they were not giving Jesus a fair hearing, but rather were rushing to condemnation. Nicodemus was one who truly did embody Jesus advice:

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What *ad hominem* attack did the Pharisees make on Nicodemus? They showed contempt toward Nicodemus by asking, “Are you from Galilee, too?”

⁶ Brown, *John*, 330.

Application: Expect to be ridiculed when you express your faith in Jesus. A group of evangelists visited Washington, D.C. In a Capital building hallway when one of them offered a young intern a Gospel tract. Right there, in a huge crowd of people, she shrieked, “Oh my God; a Jesus freak!”

The Woman Caught in Adultery (7:53-8:11)—This story is not found in any of the oldest manuscripts, regardless of manuscript family, so there is considerable doubt about it being an original part of John’s Gospel. Furthermore, all the early church Fathers omit it in their comments about John’s Gospel. It finally does appear in later manuscripts, it moves around within John’s Gospel. Further, the wording style is found nowhere else in John.⁷ All that said, it may really have happened, but it probably was not inspired by God to be in Scripture (John 21:25):

ESV **John 21:25** Now there are also many other **things** that Jesus did. Were every one of them to be written, I suppose that the world itself could **not** contain the books that would be written.

Perspective on Textual Criticism—The doctrine of divine inspiration means that the original documents that left the hands of the apostles were ultimately produced by God; they were of divine origin. As such, they were without error (inerrant). Technically, inspiration applies only to the original manuscripts. However, *copies* of the originals demonstrably do contain copying errors, or in the case of John 7:53-8:11, insertions. At present, there are nearly 6,000 whole or fragmented hand-written Greek copies of the New Testament. God promised to preserve His Word, so it is all there somewhere. It is important to note that the text of the copies is in 90% agreement. Of the 10% variance, only 1% touches on the area of the doctrine, and even then no doctrine is altered. For instance, even if a particular variance weakens the truth of Jesus’ deity, there are many others places in the 90% that do not, and even others of the 1% that strengthen the deity of Christ.

I place this story in the same category as the *Apocrypha*—probably true, useful reading, but not inspired by God.

The Light of the World

******How did the Pharisees prove that they did not know God the Father (8:12-20)?** Jesus basically said that if they didn’t know who He was then they didn’t know the Father either, 8:19.

•**“Again Jesus spoke to them” (8:12):** Jesus was back again publically teaching the crowds gathered in the area of the temple treasury, 8:20a. The last time He spoke in public, He offered people living water. This time he declared that He is the Light of the world.

Timing: Jesus spoke these words at the Feast of Tabernacles. As part of the ceremony of this feast, four huge lamps were lit in the temple’s court of women. The Levitical orchestra played and people danced in celebration. It was evidently in this context that Jesus declared Himself to be the light of the world.⁸

⁷ Carson, *John*, 333-334.

⁸ Carson, *John*, 337.

What did Jesus mean when He announced that He is the light of the world (8:12)? See 1:4-5. Jesus was referring to spiritual light versus spiritual darkness. He was the light of eternal life. Jesus opens our eyes so that we may see.

ESV John 1:4-9 In him was life, and the life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it . . . The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world.

Song: “The whole world was lost in the darkness of sin; the light of the world is Jesus.”

Based on 8:12, if you truly believe that Jesus is the light, what should you do? The ancient Israelites followed the pillar of fire by night; so too you should follow Jesus as the light of life.

According to 8:13, why did the Pharisees reject Jesus’ claim to be the light of the world? They insisted that Jesus have other witnesses to his identity (His own personal testimony was not enough, they claimed).

Blah, blah, blah: This is not the first time the Pharisees rejected Jesus’ own testimony about Himself. Jesus previously answered them this way:

ESV John 5:31-47 If I alone bear witness about myself, my testimony is not deemed true. There is another who bears witness about me . . . For the works that the Father has given me to accomplish, the very works that I am doing, bear witness about me that the Father has sent me. And the Father who sent me has himself borne witness about me. . . . You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that bear witness about me . . .

How did Jesus answer in 8:14-18 to show that His testimony was valid? First, Jesus suggested that the Pharisees were disqualified to be His judges because they had no idea where Jesus really came from (God the Father, not really Bethlehem and certainly not Galilee at all), nor where Jesus was going (ascending back to the Father). Related to this disqualification, Jesus said they judged only according to the flesh (human standards). Jesus was flesh, but He was the Word made flesh (John 1). Second, Jesus restated His earlier claim that the Father bore witness about Jesus (through His works and through the Scriptures given to Moses, 5:31-47).

Review: What in 8:19 reveals that the Pharisees did not know God? That they asked where Jesus father was shows they did not know either Jesus or the Father. They knew about God, but they did not know God. It is quite possible they asked Him mockingly, “Where is this ‘father’ of yours?”⁹

Jesus taught this publically, in the temple treasury, yet no arrested Him; why not (8:20)? As before, it was because His time had not yet come. When Jesus finally was arrested and crucified, it was not unfortunate turn of events. It was all according the Father’s plan and time.

⁹ Brown, *John*, 342.

So What?

How does the information in John 7-8 help persuade an unbelieving, first-century dispersion Jew to believe in Jesus as the Christ? It shows the bias and unreasonableness of the leadership of Judea, and it shows the ignorance of the general populace concerning Jesus. It teaches the readers the importance of following Jesus' advice:

ESV **John 7:24** Do not judge by appearances, but judge with right judgment.

According to John 7-8, who is Jesus? Jesus was someone whose teaching was that of the Father, and who was from the Father. He is the source of living water and the light of the world.

Based on John 7-8, what does Jesus want from us? He wants us to judge not by appearances, but with right judgment. In so doing recognize Him for who He really is and believe in Him as the Light of the world.

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What did Jesus offer in John 7-8 to anyone who believes? He offers the Holy Spirit, who He likened to rivers of living water flowing from one's heart. This offer is a fulfillment of several Old Testament passages.

**** = Ask this question before reading the text to focus people's attention.

•You can hear this lesson being taught at SermonAudio.com/NTRF.

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