

“Could This Be the Christ?”

John 7:25-36

Pastor Jason Van Bommel

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³² The Pharisees heard the crowd muttering these things about him, and the chief priests and Pharisees sent officers to arrest him. ³³ Jesus then said, “I will be with you a little longer, and then I am going to him who sent me. ³⁴ You will seek me and you will not find me. Where I am you cannot come.” ³⁵ The Jews said to one another, “Where does this man intend to go that we will not find him? Does he intend to go to the Dispersion among the Greeks and teach the Greeks?” ³⁶ What does he mean by saying, ‘You will seek me and you will not find me,’ and, ‘Where I am you cannot come?’”

– John 7:25-36, ESV

Do We Know What We Think We Know?

In my life, I have held all sorts of opinions very strongly and confidently only to later realize that I had no idea what I was talking about. When I was a child, I wasn’t totally sure but I was reasonably certain that chocolate milk came from chocolate cows. And, because of a song that played on PBS during Sesame Street and Mr. Rogers’ Neighborhood, I was pretty sure that the most important person in the world was me, and I thought it was strange that I apparently hardly even knew me. Last month, when the Orioles had won seven in a row and got within one game of a wild card spot for the playoffs, I thought they were finally playing up to their potential, that they were a pretty good team after all, and that they would surely make the playoffs.

The problem with all of these erroneous opinions I held was that I didn’t know what I knew and what I didn’t know. So often in life we think we know but we don’t really know as much as we think. Some people were convinced that the world was going to end yesterday as the planet Nibiru crashed into the earth. They didn’t even know that there is no such planet as the planet Nibiru, the Rogue Planet X.

The educated, sophisticated Jerusalemites in Jesus’ day thought they knew a lot, too. They thought they knew that a man could not have skilled and insightful understanding of the Scriptures without studying in one of the important rabbinical schools or under a famous rabbi. Today, some people take the same

view of having or not having an Ivy League education. They also thought they knew that the Messiah when he came would have unknown origins, that no one would know where he came from. They were also fairly certain they knew where Jesus came from: He was the carpenter's son from Nazareth who had His base of operations in Capernaum, on the north shore of the Sea of Galilee.

The sad reality for them is that they were wrong about all three things they thought they knew. And the underlying reason for their errors in all three cases was the same: They had their eyes fixed on popular opinion and not on God, His word and His will.

A. Tradition vs. the Word of God, vv. 25-27

The first mistake the people of Jerusalem make comes in verses 25-27 –

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It is interesting that the citizens of Jerusalem do get one thing right, which the rest of the crowd doesn't know: They know that the authorities in Jerusalem want to kill Jesus. The crowd from outside of Jerusalem thought Jesus was crazy to even suggest such a thing, but the people of Jerusalem were the people “in the know.” They knew the deadly design the leadership was seeking to carry out.

Sometimes it's dangerous to be a person who is “in the know,” because a little knowledge can be a dangerous thing, as Alexander Pope famously said. Such was the case for the people of Jerusalem. They were stunned to see Jesus speaking openly in the Temple, and they wondered if perhaps the authorities had figured out that He really was the Christ, the long-awaited Messiah. It didn't occur to them that a Higher Authority was protecting Jesus and ensuring that He was able to teach in the Temple, despite being opposed by the Sanhedrin and the priests.

They immediately reject the idea that Jesus could be the Messiah on the basis of two things:

1. They know where Jesus comes from.
2. When the Christ appears, no one will know where he is from.

On the surface of it, the logic of their reasoning is sound:

Premise 1: When Messiah comes, no one will know where he is from.

Premise 2: Jesus is from Nazareth.

Conclusion: Jesus is not the Messiah.

But it turns out that both of the premisses were deeply flawed.

Why did the people of Jerusalem think that no one would know where the Messiah was from? Did they get that premise from Scripture? No. The Scriptures said that the Messiah would be born in Bethlehem, according to Micah 5:2 –

*But you, O Bethlehem Ephrathah,
 who are too little to be among the clans of Judah,
 from you shall come forth for me
 one who is to be ruler in Israel,
 whose coming forth is from of old,
 from ancient days.*

The Scriptures also connected the ministry of Messiah to the Land of Galilee, Galilee of the Gentiles, according to Isaiah 9:1-2 –

But there will be no gloom for her who was in anguish. In the former time he brought into contempt the land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, but in the latter time he has made glorious the way of the sea, the land beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the nations.

*The people who walked in darkness
 have seen a great light;
 those who dwelt in a land of deep darkness,
 on them has light shone.*

The people of Jerusalem made two errors: First, they accepted human tradition as an equally valid source of revelation about Messiah, and it was human tradition of the rabbis that said that no one would know where the Messiah was from. Tradition is not equally valid to Scripture.

The second error they made was based on prejudice: They knew about Messiah's connection to Bethlehem, which was just 5 miles away from Jerusalem and had been the birthplace of King David. They didn't know about Isaiah's prophecy connecting Messiah to Galilee. Why not? Because Galilee was far away, infested with Gentiles and lacking in culture and sophistication.

So they were wrong when they thought that the Messiah would come from nowhere, appearing suddenly with no one knowing where He was from. He would come forth from Bethlehem and His light would shine in Galilee.

B. What We Think vs. What We Know, v. 28-29

Jesus did not directly address their ignorance of these Scriptures here, but He did address their flawed reasoning in another way, in verses 28-29:

So Jesus proclaimed, as he taught in the temple, "You know me, and you know where I come from. But I have not come of my own accord. He who sent me is true, and him you do not know. ²⁹I know him, for I come from him, and he sent me."

We can read Jesus' comment here two ways:

First, we could read His response to them as dripping with irony: “So, you know Me and you know where I come from, do you? Really? Well, despite what you think you know, I have not come of my own accord . . . ”

Or we could read it more as the ESV translates it, as a simple statement of concession that sets up the contrast of the next thing He says. In other words, “True enough, you know that I am the son of a carpenter from Nazareth. I grant you that much, but I have not come of my own accord. He who sent me is true, and you do not know Him.”

In the end, it doesn’t really matter much which way we read this, the end conclusion is the same: They shouldn’t be so quick to boast of what they know, because they don’t actually know nearly as much as they think they know. Most importantly, whether or not they know Jesus’ hometown, they don’t know His Heavenly Father. They don’t know God.

Think of what a shocking statement this is and how offensive it would be to those who live in the shadow of the Temple. How could this upstart, untrained so-called rabbi and would-be Messiah from Nazareth dare to come into the Temple and tell those who live in constant view of its magnificent glory that they did not know God!

Their reaction to this insult was swift: *So they were seeking to arrest him, but no one laid a hand on him, because his hour had not yet come.*

C. Our Plans vs. God’s Plans, vv. 30-36

They were seeking to arrest Him, but they could not. This verse begins a section which exposes the vast difference between our plans and God’s plans. We think we know more than we know, but we also think we control much more than we control. And so we make plans and then find our plans frustrated and we wonder why. The same thing is happening to these powerful, well connected Jerusalem Jews. They cannot control what Jesus is doing; in fact, they can’t even understand it –

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³² *The Pharisees heard the crowd muttering these things about him, and the chief priests and Pharisees sent officers to arrest him.* ³³ *Jesus then said, “I will be with you a little longer, and then I am going to him who sent me.* ³⁴ *You will seek me and you will not find me. Where I am you cannot come.”* ³⁵ *The Jews said to one another, “Where does this man intend to go that we will not find him? Does he intend to go to the Dispersion among the Greeks and teach the Greeks?”* ³⁶ *What does he mean by saying, ‘You will seek me and you will not find me,’ and, ‘Where I am you cannot come?’”*

Here again we see the difference between the educated elites who think they know, and who are confused and helpless before Jesus, and the common people, who are more open to considering what they are seeing Jesus do, and who more often respond with a measure of faith. Sometimes what we think we know is not only wrong but it often prejudices us against the truth we need to know. The common people knew enough to look at what Jesus had done and to consider it and so they ask the most insightful question in this passage: *“When the Christ appears, will he do more signs than this man has done?”*

While many of the common people are rightly considering the evidence of Christ’s miracles and coming to faith in Him, the people in power, the Pharisees and the chief priests, responded to the wonder and the growing faith of the crowds by sending officers to arrest Him. They think they’re finally going to put an end to this trouble-maker, but Jesus has other plans.

Jesus knows they are sending officers to arrest Him and that they will not succeed, yet. But soon, they will. In six months’ time, the same group of leaders will send soldiers to the Garden of Gethsemane to arrest Him and take Him to the cross. But for now, Jesus says, *“I will be with you a little longer.”* When that time is up, and not before, Jesus says, *“ . . . then I am going to him who sent me. You will seek me and you will not find me. Where I am you cannot come.”*

The Jewish religious leaders will fail in this attempt to arrest and kill Jesus. In six months, when they do succeed, their actions will only fulfill Jesus’ plans and lead to His exaltation to the Father’s right hand as Lord of All. When we make plans based on partial knowledge, driven by self-interest, ignoring the will of God, seeking to please or protect ourselves and our agenda, contradicting the word of God, we are being foolish, or worse, we are working against our own good and for our own ultimate destruction. Jesus tells these religious leaders that when He departs, they will look for Him and be unable to find Him. Even though He told them that He will be returning to Him who sent Him, they don’t get it. They accuse Him of planning on going to the Jews of the dispersion or even to the Greeks, meaning the Greek-speaking Gentiles of the Roman Empire.

What is fascinating to me about this exchange is how precisely both Jesus’ words and their words are fulfilled in the providence and purposes of God. After the death and resurrection of Jesus, the religious leaders do seek for Him. They think they’re trying to find His body, convinced that He is still dead. They search everywhere but they cannot find Him. The fact that neither the Jewish religious leaders who conspired to have Jesus killed nor the Romans who crucified Him could ever find Jesus’ body is one of the most compelling pieces of evidence for the resurrection. They looked, but they could not find Him.

Then, their reaction to Jesus’ words was to speculate that He might go to the Jews of the dispersion and that, if He was rejected by them, too, He might then turn to teaching the Greeks. This is, in fact,

exactly what Jesus would do. After Jesus rose again and ascended back to the Father, He did not cease to exist or cease to be actively engaged in teaching and redeeming people.

Luke begins the book of Acts with these words: *“In the first book, O Theophilus, I have dealt with all that Jesus began to do and teach, until the day when he was taken up . . .”* His first book, of course, was the Gospel of Luke. By saying that his Gospel covers “all that Jesus began to do and teach, until the day He was taken up,” Luke is introducing the Book of Acts as a continuing record of all that Jesus continued to do and teach after He was taken up. And what does the Book of Acts record? The Gospel of Jesus Christ moves from Jerusalem out to the Jews of the dispersion, starting with Pentecost but continuing through the ministry of the Apostles, until the focus then shifts from Jews to Gentiles after the Jews of the dispersion largely reject Jesus as Messiah, just as the leadership in Jerusalem had done.

So the Jewish leaders were more right than they knew. Jesus was going to go to the Jews of the dispersion and He was going to turn to teach the Greeks. The salvation which they despised and rejected, because it did not confirm and establish their power and their positions of prestige, would be embraced by Gentiles instead.

I wonder how many people reject Jesus and turn away from the kingdom of God because Jesus will not give them what they want but insists on offering them what they need instead. Of course, some so-called Christian teachers have made lots of money promising people that Jesus will give them exactly what they want if they only have enough faith to ask for it. It seems to me that these people need to re-read the Gospel of John, because Jesus continually rejects the world’s agenda and earthly visions of wealth and power. He insists that His kingdom is radically different, and that His agenda will not serve the desires of those who long for wealth or power or prestige in this life.

When the Christ Comes, Will He Do More Signs?

So, how do we respond to this Jesus? He challenges the religious experts, is rejected by those in positions of authority, says confusing things, challenges us to reconsider what we know vs. what we think we know. He does great things, but not in way He we expect. He will not follow our plans and priorities but insists on following His Father’s will, even if it leads Him to a cross.

Perhaps the best approach would be to follow those who were not looking at Jesus in terms of what they expected from Him but rather in terms of what He actually did. They had the insight to ask, *“When the Christ appears, will he do more signs than this man has done?”*

Jesus didn’t come into the world and bring an end to poverty and suffering. He didn’t overthrow the Roman tyranny. He didn’t give everyone free bread for life. But what did He do? He turned water into wine. He healed a man who had been an invalid for 38 years. He fed 5,000 men, besides women and children. He raised the dead, gave sight to the blind, walked on water, calmed a violent storm. Then,

He went to the cross and took all of the sins of all of His people on Himself, willingly, lovingly. He died as an offering for sin, was buried, remained under the power of death for a time, and then broke the bonds of death for all time. He rose again, victorious and alive forevermore. He returned to His Father and sat down in victory to reign in glory at the Father's right hand. He has made perfect and everlasting purification for sin and He has overthrown death and hell forever! What more could we really need?

One day, He is coming again. When He comes, will He find us trusting Him and waiting for Him, or will He find us making excuses and whining about how He won't bless our agenda? Will He come and find us disbelieving and trying to live according to our own wisdom, or will He find us worshiping and saying, "Come quickly, Lord Jesus!!"?