

John 7:1-10

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Date: 04 May 2021

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[0 : 00] Thank you, Heather, for reading. Let me add my welcome to Robbie's. My name's Jack. I'm a ministry trainee here. I'm just going to pray for us as we start.

Father God, thank you that you sent your son Jesus, Jesus who was completely God into the world, to reveal God to us. Thank you that as we look at your word now, we are coming face to face with you.

Thank you. Please help us to understand what you are saying to us and to obey it. Our first things in Jesus' name. Amen. This evening we're starting off, as we said, our series in John chapter 7 and John chapter 8.

It'll actually be a great help to me. If you found reading on the back of the note sheet you were given when you came in, it'd be good if you were to keep that in front of you throughout. And we start off chapter 7 with a really quite ominous verse.

Verse 1. After this, Jesus went around in Galilee. He did not want to go about in Judea because the Jewish leaders there were looking for a way to kill him. As a heads up on where we are in John's Gospel, we're about a third of the way through John's eyewitness account of Jesus' life.

[1 : 11] And we're catching up with Jesus right in the middle of his three very active years of preaching and teaching before his death and resurrection. And the thing that we discover about him at the start of chapter 7 is that he is a wanted man.

And like most wanted men, he is in hiding and avoiding the places where he would be in danger. Jesus is not going to Jerusalem, the capital, or Judea, the region around Jerusalem, because there is a real conspiracy on.

The Jewish authorities are looking for a way to get rid of Jesus and to kill him. And if you'd followed the events in John's Gospel up to chapter 7, you'd think this was just kind of one other thing in a long line of things that hasn't been going well for him.

Just before this, in chapter 6, Jesus starts off with 5,000 disciples. So you think he's doing pretty well. He's got 5,000 followers who he then miraculously feeds with five breads and two fish.

And they like this so much that they want to make him king. But having tried the three samples, the following conversation with Jesus about who he is and what he's come to do, well, this manages to get most of that crowd of 5,000 people to walk away and to abandon Jesus.

[2 : 29] Hero to zero in just two days. And I think it's natural to ask the question, why? Why? Why do people react so badly to Jesus?

Why do the religious leaders want to kill him? I mean, maybe that comes as a surprise to you, that people responded to Jesus like this, that he was deeply, deeply unpopular with lots of the people who knew him at the time.

And that doesn't fit our kind of, you know, kind of Sunday school picture of Jesus, meek and mild. But for those of us who have thought about this before, this should probably worry us a lot more than it normally does.

I think we kind of take it as a given that the Jewish leaders want to kill Jesus. It's just kind of what they do. It's their part in the events. Jesus needs to die, so he needs some people to kill him.

But what should worry us is that these are the people who should know best. They are the religious experts. They know their Old Testament scripture, the Old Testament that should point forward to God himself coming to save his people.

[3 : 40] They were waiting for this person. They were waiting for this saviour to come and bring about God's kingdom. But when God shows up, they say he's a fake and they try to kill him.

So I think the question hanging over these chapters of John's Gospel is this. If Jesus was the Christ, if he is God come in person, then why did the people who know best, should have known

best, who should have been able to recognise him, why did they reject him and kill him? And today also I think we can feel the force of a really similar question. Jesus is not still here on earth, that people could murder him. But why do people reject him now? People might not be experts in the Old Testament, but we live in a world that seems to us like it is full of intelligent and reasonable people, and lots of these people don't believe in Jesus. Some people seem to reject Jesus without knowing too much about him. Maybe they know or heard a little bit about God, a bit about Jesus' death for sin, but they don't think those things are at all important, so they never give it any thought.

[4 : 53] And we think that maybe if we were to give more opportunities, more chances, that they would change their minds. If they were to know a bit more, they might change. But some people, they take a good look at the evidence.

People who've read the Bible, who've thought about it, thought about the claims of Jesus' resurrection, academics and scholars, what do we make of their rejection of Jesus? Are they stupid? Or are we stupid? Have they spotted something that we've missed? So why is Jesus sidelined or ridiculed?

If he was the Christ, God himself come in person, then why doesn't everyone around us today recognize that? The first thing I want us to see in tonight's passage is there is a way of responding to that.

One way of responding is to say what Jesus' brothers say in verses 3 and 4. Look down with me. But when the Jewish feast of Tabernacles was near, Jesus' brothers said to him, Leave Galilee and go to Judea so that your disciples may see the works you do.

[6 : 01] No one who wants to become a public figure acts in secret. Since you are doing these things, show yourself to the world. Their response to Jesus' unpopularity is to blame Jesus and to offer some public relations advice.

Jesus says, Your campaign has gone off the rails. All of your disciples have left you. But we know how to fix that. We know how to get the crowds back. The festival of the Tabernacles is coming up. You know, a huge religious festival. It's about to take place in Jerusalem and thousands and thousands of people are going to be there. What better chance would there be to regain some popularity than just to do something really spectacular at the festival?

And notice that they mention the disciples, not Jesus' closest 12 followers, but the large crowd of disciples that he lost at the end of chapter 6. And what specifically do they think he should do at the festival?

And they say they want him to show you the works he is doing. Show us the works you are doing. And works is the word that Jesus uses and John uses as he writes his gospel to talk about Jesus' miracles.

[7 : 15] Miracles like the feeding of the 5,000 or turning water into wine or the healing of the paralyzed man back in chapter 5. All miracles that he has done so far in John's gospel.

And they want Jesus to go public to do a big miracle, maybe lots of miracles, in Jerusalem. And that will surely turn the tide. Give them some evidence that they can't deny.

And it's so understandable what they say, isn't it? And I wonder if we were in their position, would we give similar advice? Verse 4, you know, no one works in secret if he seeks to be known openly. If you do these things, show yourself to the world. Jesus, stop hiding in the shadows. Stop hiding in the backwaters and come out and prove yourself. If you want everyone to know and follow you, then do something about it.

I don't know if you've ever heard someone say something like that. You know, I'd believe in Jesus if he was to do something really spectacular, like a huge, large-scale miracle. I don't know, maybe like writing kind of God is real in the clouds above Kelvin Grove Park on a really sunny day.

[8 : 21] Or something like that. Or maybe we can think of the Bertrand Russell quote, and he was an atheist philosopher who was asked what he would say to God if he was to meet God on judgment day.

And he said he would reply, not enough evidence, God. Not enough evidence. But perhaps, and I think this is one of the surprises in this passage, we think what the brothers say sounds quite reasonable.

But John tells us that this is rooted in unbelief. His brothers are only telling him to do this because they don't believe in him. Verse 5, for even his own brothers did not believe in him.

What is it that they don't understand? And how is their request an expression of unbelief? Well, they know because they should know from what they've seen about Jesus so far that every single time that Jesus does a miracle or a sign, it comes with a kind of accompanying explanation that Jesus gives.

An explanation which explains what the miracle means. And it tells the people who see it a truth about Jesus or a truth about them and it's that truth they're supposed to believe in rather than just a miracle itself.

[9 : 38] So if Jesus miraculously provides loads and loads of bread, you're not supposed to fixate on the bread, which is what the people in John 6 did. Presumably they wanted pre-packed lunch forever.

But it's his explanation that he has come as God in person to do something to stop you from dying, much like physical bread does for us day to day.

But people often like the miracle, but don't like the explanation that comes with the miracle. They don't like when they find out what it really means for Jesus to be the Christ.

Christ. They hate it. They don't like, in John 6, they don't like the idea that Jesus came down from heaven to give eternal life because they're more interested in Jesus giving them food now so that they can live and flourish now in this life.

They don't like the idea that because Jesus is God they have to listen to what he says. And it's not a case of them deciding what they think for themselves. They have to listen to him. They don't like that he claims to be more important.

[10 : 43] than their current religious system. So they turn around and walk away from Jesus. So Jesus' brothers show that they don't get him.

They don't believe yet because they are still fixated on the surface things, the superficial things.

They haven't understood what it means for Jesus to be the Christ. And there's another explanation for his unpopularity, which is what Jesus goes on to explain and that's the second thing that I'd like us to see.

The reason Jesus is facing rejection by the world isn't because he hasn't shown enough evidence. It's not because he has lost a plot or the whole thing is out of control.

But it's because he says and proves that the world is evil and that is what the Christ, the Messiah, does. If his brothers understood that he was a Christ then they would understand that it's not the miracles that are the problem, but the explanation about people that comes along with them.

And in verses 6 and 9 we see Jesus draws a contrast between himself and his brothers who have shown this wrong way of thinking. So what are the contrasts? Look down at me. So he says, my time is not yet here but for you any time will do.

[12 : 00] The world cannot hate you but it hates me. You go to the festival, I am not going to the festival. My time is not yet here, he says, for you any time will do.

Why is that? Well the time he is talking about is his time to go to the festival in Jerusalem. Time here does not mean his death. John uses the word hour to refer to that.

But time just simply means God's appointed time, the time God has set for something to happen.

So God's time for Jesus to go to the feast has not yet happened. So when Jesus says in verse 8 I am not going up to the festival, he's not lying because in verse 10 he then goes up to the festival.

It's not a contradiction. What he means is it's not my time yet to go up to the festival. Or my time, my time has not yet arrived, he means. But any time is okay for the brothers to go anywhere they please, to go to Jerusalem because as Jesus says, the world cannot hate them but it hates Jesus because he testifies, verse 7, that its works are evil.

But what does Jesus mean by the world? Well the world is simply humanity as it rejects God. And what the Bible and indeed Jesus says about humanity, all people, everywhere at all times, is that they are in rebellion against God.

[13 : 29] They don't want him as their king. God is our creator and therefore our boss. He owns us. And he's a good and generous and kind boss. But we choose to reject him and to turn from his ways.

And the reason that Jesus has had no success so far, the reason the crowds have abandoned him, the reason the Jewish leaders want to kill him, isn't because he has made huge claims and given no evidence.

It isn't because Jesus doesn't know what he's doing. He has a schedule that he is working to. He has his timing and God is in control. It is because in almost everything that he says and he does, he exposes the unbelief and the wickedness of the world and what it does.

And the world hates him for it. He tells people as he explains his miracles that they are living in a way that is wrong. They are living without really acknowledging God at all.

And that is evil. The world thinks that what it does, living without God, is okay. And Jesus challenges this thinking. But the world just doesn't want to hear it.

[14:43] I think we often display the same sort of thinking ourselves. We often refuse to listen to someone, really listen, when they challenge us and tell us something that we are doing is wrong. But there's a mistake here that we shouldn't make.

Perhaps a mistake that the brothers are making. Because we think that the world is neutral. We think that people are reasonable. And if we show them evidence that they're going to come around to a reasonable point of view.

But when it comes to Jesus, I think we are perhaps shown to be the kind of irrational, reacting from the gut people that we are. When I was at uni, I had an ethics lecturer, a guy called Dr. Epstein. He's very interesting and his own expertise was the ethics of organ selling, organ donation and kind of organ, kind of commercial organ selling. Yeah.

Yeah. Yeah, quite weird stuff. But he always used to throw this quotation at us from a guy called Thomas Hobbes who was a philosopher in the 17th century. And I'll paraphrase what Hobbes says.

[15:50] As Hobbes says, he says he does not doubt that if it went against people's interests, to say that the three angles of a triangle should be equal to 180 degrees, which as a side note they always do, if that truth didn't suit people, then the truth would be pushed down by the burning of all the geometry books in the world.

And Hobbes is right, and I think Jesus is right here, it does not suit people to admit the things that they do are evil. So they want to suppress or ignore the truth.

And that means in Jesus' day they wanted to kill him. But at this point I'd just like us to pause and think about the question, who is the world here?

Who is the world? Who is Jesus talking about when he says the world? Well, we've already talked about this once, we've said it's kind of all of humanity as they reject God. But shockingly, who is the world here in John chapter 7?

Well, it's not the Romans or some other people as they want to kill Jesus, it's the Jewish leaders. It's the most religious, the most knowledgeable, the people who talk the most about God, the people who know their Old Testament the best.

[17:05] I think when I kind of thought I thought the world was just people out there as well. I wonder if that's what the brothers thought. But it turns out that the brothers belong to the world as well. They don't understand or believe in Jesus.

So what we see in these verses is that it's not as if everyone else is okay. Rejection of God is still rejection of God, whether it's wearing robes in a temple or joining the atheist society at uni.

The experts, they look like the ones they should be right, who should have the religious authority, the ones who should be able to spot the Messiah when he comes. But they don't because he tells them something they don't want to hear.

The most religious people there, they aren't really God's people at all. They belong to the world. And this is what Jesus needs to prove. And this is what somebody is going to show in the coming chapters.

And that's important for us because if it's definitely true of them, then it's definitely true of you and me as well. And it's his brothers as well, his closest relationships.

[18:11] But even they belong to the world. So this includes everyone. It doesn't matter how religious you are or how good you look. What Jesus says in verse 7 applies to us all.

So to sum up, Jesus is saying that the reason that people reject him is because he shows that their works are evil. Not because there isn't enough evidence. And that rejection and hatred of him isn't just from people on the outside.

But it even comes from where we didn't expect it. From the most religious and even his own family. So how should we respond to Jesus as we hear this?

I think this says two things for us. Firstly, it gives us confidence. And secondly, it gives us a choice. So firstly, it gives us confidence. Jesus is the Christ.

Just because the Jewish experts and religious leaders rejected him and killed him, it shouldn't make us doubt who Jesus is. And it's the same today.

[19 : 13] The reason people don't like Jesus and want to undermine his claims isn't because there is inadequate evidence, but it's because he deeply challenges them. The very idea that there is a God, one to whom we will have to give an account of our lives to, and who has the right to tell us what is right and what is wrong, well, that is deeply, deeply unpopular in today's world.

So it should hardly be a surprise that people don't want to hear it. Or when they do hear it and start to understand it and to hear about Jesus and sin and forgiveness, they like it even less.

And what I'm not saying here is that we should give up trying to tell people about Jesus, because we know that God can work by his spirit to change people's hearts. He can take people, people like us who naturally hate God, and turn us into people who love him.

But perhaps at some point you have felt discouraged by people's reactions as you have tried to tell them about Jesus. But don't think that is because there is something wrong with Jesus.

He is still in control. He is still worth trusting and still worth following. And then secondly, it gives us a choice. how will we respond to Jesus?

[20 : 33] Or will we let Jesus challenge us? And how will we respond when he does that to us? In his prologue, John chapter 1, verse 11, John says this about Jesus.

He says, He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him. Yet to all who did receive him, to those who believe in his name, he gave the right to become children of God.

His own, his own brothers, his own people, the Jewish people of his day. Jesus challenged them and initially most of them just said no. So us, even with our own religious familiarity or religious upbringing or religious family, that doesn't mean that we are okay with Jesus.

Not responding rightly to Jesus puts us outside of Jesus' God's family. But that's not the only response possible. There is another response and that is to receive Jesus.

We see that in chapter 1. To all who did receive him. Jesus allows those who receive him to become part of God's true family, to become God's children, to be forgiven by Jesus for our natural rebellion against him and to become brothers and sisters with Jesus, God's children.

[21 : 52] and Jesus, though, doesn't give out different challenges to different people. Jesus challenges everyone and he gives everyone the same challenge and he tells us that naturally we are rebels against God, that naturally without him we do things that are wrong and are evil and he tells us that without him we're going to face God's anger and judgment.

And so that means we must turn to him and believe in his words, that he has died in our place to take our sin so that we can be forgiven and become God's children.

And these are difficult things to hear, to be told that about yourself. Because I think we think becoming a Christian means you kind of accept that at the start. Maybe you realized that some time ago that you were a sinner and that you needed God's forgiveness.

But I think the dynamic is with this, I think this is true for all of us, is that that continues, that challenge doesn't stop. It doesn't stop when we become a Christian. Jesus still challenges us to live his way, to accept him as the Christ and to listen to him.

And perhaps as you keep on living as a Christian, you keep on seeing ways that you aren't living in line with what Jesus says. And the challenge for us in that moment to acknowledge Jesus as the Christ is to say to him that what he says is true, that yes, we do still need his forgiveness and we do still need his help to change.

[23 : 27] And that's what it looks like for us to continue to acknowledge that Jesus is the Christ. Let's pray. Father God, thank you that we can know that Jesus is the Christ, that he is your son, and that by believing in him we can become your children and have eternal life.

Please help us to remain confident in Jesus, even that when we see that he is rejected, please give us his confidence that we may continue to listen to him and to continue to hold out eternal life to others.

Amen.