

Divisions and More Divisions! John 7:40-52

We have seen that this chapter revolves around the feast of tabernacles and Jesus' interactions with various groups of people. But when we come to verses 37-39 on the last day of the great feast, Jesus does not interact with anyone but stands and shouts out an impassioned plea that any that will come to him will never thirst again. This is a short gospel invitation and built on everything that he had been teaching the people and crowds that were gathered in Jerusalem at that time. Salvation is found in Jesus Christ, and in him alone.

Now as we come to verses 40 to the end of the chapter we come to various responses to this message of Jesus among the people and also among the soldiers. And one of the things that we realize about the ministry of Jesus is something that we have experienced in life, and that is Jesus divides. He divides people. He even said in Luke 12: 51-53, **“Do you think that I have come to give peace on earth? No, I tell you, but rather division. For from now on in one house there will be five divided, three against two and two against three. They will be divided, father against son and son against father, mother against daughter and daughter against mother, mother-in-law against her daughter-in-law and daughter-in-law against mother-in-law.”** There is division. When the true Jesus is preached individuals cannot stay neutral.

And now you can even see this at this feast. This was a happy feast, but all that joy and happiness about enjoying the celebration of the harvest has now become contentious as they discuss who Jesus is. And if Christianity is kept as something like a self-help philosophy or how you can become a better you, then it is all right. No one cares. If you can just say that it is an ethic of life that we are suppose to love one another, then there is no problem. Charles Spurgeon wrote, **“I have heard of a whole parish in which there were no religious bickerings because there was no religion; there were no religious strifes because nobody had anything worth striving for. And that is not a state of things over which I can rejoice.”** When you really do not have anything worthy to say you can realize that there is not going to be strife.

But the moment you bring up the holiness of Jesus he confronts our unholiness. The moment you bring up the gospel then it confronts our need and people cannot and will not remain silent. Families have been divided over Jesus, and the closest friendships have been impacted by the gospel of Jesus Christ. People cannot and will not remain neutral. And in that way we should expect opposition. Strong and clear truths especially about eternal matters will always bring a strong response. The gospel is concerned not with trivial matters but eternal destinies — how one will come before God, and the ultimate judgment of God. How can you not but have a strong response to this message? So in one sense we should expect it, and see it as normal. But in another sense, it is anything but normal. The reason divisions exist among men, and especially concerning the gospel is because of sin. The reason you see the strong response from the ministry of Jesus right in this passage is because of sin. It is man's love of darkness rather than light that ultimately creates that division and that hostility to the message.

But as we come to this passage we have to realize even as the people of God we do not feel indifferent with the truths of Jesus Christ. We know the truth of the gospel and it creates strong feelings in us and deep conviction. These convictions are so strong that we are willing to give the gospel even though we know that people are going to have a strong response to it, but we realize what is at stake is none other than their eternal destiny. They need to hear this message. In fact, if we are indifferent to the truths of the gospel and people's need then there is something desperately wrong in our hearts. If we are not challenged to give that gospel there is something in the deepest recesses of our soul that is not making a connection.

For us as believers, I think it is so helpful to see the different responses to Jesus, the different kinds of unbelief so that we can know what we face in giving the gospel and living for Christ. But it is also helpful for those outside of Christ and have heard the gospel, because maybe one of these responses are your response to the gospel. We see four different responses here among the crowd.

1. We see the response that Jesus is a good man sent from God. V.40.

I can remember talking to someone who went through the Sermon on the Mount, and they were impressed with the morality of that sermon of Jesus. And they said they thought that Jesus was the greatest teacher that ever lived, the most wisest and the highest of those in the human race. And that is high praise, but may I say that it does not go far enough.

And you can see that with the crowds here as they talk openly among themselves, no longer fearing what the religious leaders might do. And the crowds would be the pilgrims from Galilee who came for the festival. And look at verse 40 again, **“When they heard these words, some of the people said, ‘This really is the Prophet.’”** They are emphatic that this who Jesus is. They have been impressed by his teaching, and his boldness, and now they have come to the determination that he is “the Prophet.” Now what do they mean by that? And in Deut. 18:15, **“The LORD your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among you, from your brothers— it is to him you shall listen.”** There would be a prophet that arises that will be after the pattern of Moses - he will speak for God. And they also combined the idea of the coming prophet with Malachi 4:5-6 that he would be the forerunner of the Messiah. And this was high praise. He was someone who should be listen to, but he was not God come down from heaven. He was not one that we bow down to and worship.

And it is the same with so many. They might get convicted of their sin through the preaching of the gospel. They do not want to just reject Christ but certainly do not want to bow the knee either, so they decide that he was a great teacher. But any that said the things that Jesus said is either a liar or God in human flesh. but it is safe to say this. We should go to church once and while and be reminded of how we should live. We should send our children to learn some good moral lessons, but it is not for me. Individuals will not acknowledge him to be Lord. By just saying that he was a great man and a good teacher it makes him safe.

2. The second response is that he is the Christ. 41a.

There were some that admitted that he was who he claimed to be. The word “Christ” does not appear in the Old Testament but was a phrase that meant “anointed one.” And it was a title that took in all the prophecies of the coming of the Great Deliverer. Now they were basically looking for one that would come to be basically a military leader; one that would throw off the Roman occupation and then rule over the people. They were not looking for one to be Lord and Saviour of their own souls; one that would come and take away their sins. They looked at their earthly problems as so much greater than their spiritual plight. This is why so many stumbled over Jesus so meek and mild.

And I do commend this group because they admit that Jesus is the Christ after what he has just taught that life is found in him. But even though they come to this determination it seems to be something of an intellectual realization rather than a trust in Jesus as the Christ, because they do not follow Him, but it is more something to talk about, but not to believe and follow as the Lord of glory. And I really think our churches are filled with individuals like this. That have heard the gospel, and they believe the mere facts about the gospel. They believe he was and is God in human flesh, that he died for the sins of mankind, but it is a far cry from trusting him. They might come out to church often but there is no trusting Jesus. He is not Lord of their lives but more of an insurance policy for the moment of death. They have never trust in him. In fact, in many ways they are often surprised when they encounter believers that are passionate about following and learning of Jesus because they find him quite boring.

And I believe the church is full of individuals that have made some sort of half-hearted intellectual assent that these things are true, but Jesus is not their Christ - the Lord of their lives. And let me ask: would that describe you - something of a professor or these truths but not a possessor? He is Lord. He owns our lives. Our call is to not only believe in Him but come follow Him. It is now time to bow the knee and follow Him as Lord and Saviour.

3. There are those who reject him outright. Vv. 41-42.

I am always amazed at how smart people think they are. They will come up with some reason to reject the Bible and reject Jesus, and once they have thought of that reason the case is closed and the books are shut. I talk to the gentleman one day that said that he rejected Christianity because it is impossible for anyone to rise from the dead, and he just revived in the tomb, and came out. People in that day thought he was dead but he really was not. But he could not explain how Jesus rolled away the huge stone or how he overpowered the guards protecting the tomb, or how he appeared physically different before his followers. But that one thought unchallenged allowed him quite confidently close the book on Jesus no matter how much sense the gospel made — no matter how clear his sin.

And you see this with the crowds. Again, look at verse 41-42, **“Others said, ‘This is the Christ.’ But some said, ‘Is the Christ to come from Galilee? Has not the Scripture said that the Christ comes from the offspring of David, and comes from Bethlehem, the village where David was?’”** They were quick to reject Jesus and on biblical grounds. They were quick to point out how deceived others were by asking the question of whether the Christ was to come from Galilee? And this question was expecting a negative answer. This was not a question trying to find out information

or trying to understand Jesus. And then they ask, isn't he suppose to be the offspring in the line of King David and be born in Bethlehem? And it is amazing because this what Scripture teaches. God promised that the line of David would endure forever and One would sit on the throne forever. One of the Scriptures we read at Christmas is Isaiah 9:6-7, **"For to us a child is born, to us a son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulder, and his name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of the increase of his government and of peace there will be no end, on the throne of David and over his kingdom, to establish it and to uphold it with justice and with righteousness from this time forth and forevermore. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will do this."**

He comes from the line of David, and then in Micah 5:2 we read, **"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."** So they have chapter and verse.

But here is the thing: it is also so obvious that Jesus is the Christ. No one can do the things that he does unless he is the Messiah! Remember the response in verse 31, **"Yet many of the people believed in him. They said, 'When the Christ appears, will he do more signs than this man has done?'"** It was easy to see that he was the Christ. So they come up with the theological reason for rejecting him, but they do not go and ask him the question about how his personhood fits in with the Old Testament prophecies of David and Bethlehem. They just reject him outright.

And people do that all the time. They will come up with something that anytime the gospel is preached that comes to mind and there is an immediate rejection of it. You need a Saviour and your sins forgiven. Do you know those Christians don't believe in evolution?! Or do you know they believe in a literal devil. Or I once heard someone preach that message and they lived such an immoral life. Or I heard a minister once say that the Bible teaches there are other ways to heaven. So I am going to believe what he says, and they never investigate. They never try to understand what the Bible teaches. And maybe that describes you. Maybe you think you are so much wiser and brighter and you laugh and scorn those who follow Christ and you have come up with some sort of reason for rejecting Christ but you truly have never investigated his claims or what believers understand about origins or the devil or if it the Bible really teaches many ways to heaven. Can you think of anything more important than your eternal destiny? And you want to bank where you will spend all of eternity on an assumption? Look into the Bible. Ask someone about your questions. There are answers.

4. Finally, there were those who wanted to harm him. Vv. 43-44.

I find find it extraordinary that you can talk about almost any controversial subject today with others, and you can do it with a least some respect with others - whether politics or taxes or marriage and divorce, or whatever. For many people nothing is off limits as long as you treat one another with respect. But why is it when it comes to Jesus and the eternal destiny of others is he off limits? No, you can't talk about him. The moment he is mentioned you are shoving religion down someone's throat. And there are so many that look and want nothing to do with Jesus but even go

further - they hate the name of Jesus and they would like nothing better than his name to be eliminated and Christianity to be decimated.

Look at verse 43, **“So there was a division among the people over him.”** And we would expect that individuals would be divided over Jesus and what to do with him, and how to think and respond to him. With darkness and a love of sin there is confusion. And this created division and confusion among those who unbelievers. It is so important to understand the division here is not between those who believe and those who do not believe, but among the rejectors of Jesus Christ.

But there is a contrast with those who are believers because there is no division or disharmony with Jesus. We know who he is. He is the Lord and the Saviour. He is king and we are the children of his fold. We as his people have come to trust in him for full and free salvation. And we do not thirst for another fountain. We have found Christ and there is satisfaction in him. True believers are united in who he is and what he came to do and that he is coming back. There is no division as far as the essentials of Jesus. There is no other name under heaven that can save sinners like us. There is a profound unity among those who are believers about Christ. But those who do not believe, it must be seen that there are many ways to reject him and they run the gamut, to saying he was good man, acknowledged who he is but not trusting, to coming up with some reason no matter how flimsy to reject him.

Then there is this last group which might be a hodgepodge of all those who reject Jesus in verse 44, **“Some of them wanted to arrest him, but no one laid hands on him.”** Some wanted the religious leaders and the Temple authorities to act and incarcerate him, take him away so that we do not have to listen to him. Listen to what Jesus says in John 15:18-20, **“If the world hates you, know that it has hated me before it hated you. If you were of the world, the world would love you as its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you. Remember the word that I said to you: ‘A servant is not greater than his master.’ If they persecuted me, they will also persecute you. If they kept my word, they will also keep yours.”** The message of God’s love and grace is met with hostility and hatred. If they persecuted Christ we as his witnesses and people can expect the same.

But here we read those words again in at the end of verse “but no one laid hands on him.” This is the third time and not the last time people have wanted to seize Jesus in this gospel but were prevented by the hand of God because his time had not yet come. God again is sovereign and no one can do anything to us as believers that has not been ordained by God. It is a wonderful message of comfort for us as believers.

But let me end tonight by asking: are you tolerating being here or listening to this message? Have you or are you rejecting Jesus? There are many ways to reject him but only one way to trust in him and that is through seeing our sin and our need of Jesus and trusting him. If you will do that Christ will welcome you in. Come to him, believe on him, follow him.