

Seeing is Not Necessarily Believing
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John 7:1-13
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What a wonderful blessing that was this morning. Thank you. Turn with me in your Bibles to the Gospel of John. Actually, we're going to be going to John 7, but I've got a preliminary matter I need to deal with so we're going to have a pre-sermon before the sermon. We might be out of here by 2:30 or 3:00, I don't know.

Last week I said some things in my sermon, at the end from James. We were talking about the enemies of unity, and we were talking about the need to not speak against one another. We were looking at that problem from James 4:11-12, and as the application of the sermon I said that one of the things that we need to do is cultivate humility as it says in James 4:10. Humble yourselves under the hand of God, in the presence of the Lord, in the sight of God, that He may exalt you. How do we do that?

So we had three points: Place yourself under the Word of God. The Word of God will humble us. So place yourself under it. Place yourself under the people of God, and people speaking into our lives, telling us what they see. When we receive criticism, put ourselves under it. Then I said, place yourself under the hand of God, and that is the hand of God in suffering, in circumstances, that the Lord uses circumstances and our suffering to humble us. Now I said some things that weren't exactly inaccurate, but they were incomplete, and in that sense, I apologize. I said some things that were liable to be misunderstood. So let me explain what I said last week.

I mentioned that God uses suffering to discipline us, and when He disciplines us that we ought not be as appalled at the circumstance He brings to discipline us as at the need for the discipline. What we ought to be is more appalled at our sinfulness than we are at God's hand. I stand by that comment, but I need to explain it a little bit, because really the problem is we tend to be appalled as Newton. Even that hymn we just sang, when God makes our woe grow greater, we're appalled that He does that. Rather than interpreting it in light of the Word of God, knowing that His grace and His mercy is doing only that which is necessary to make us like Jesus, and if this is necessary to make me like Jesus, look at my heart. That's the point.

But let me explain a little bit because what was liable to be misunderstood and one part of the problem is the way we understand discipline. Normally we think of discipline as, and it's part of discipline, as God actually disciplining us for a particular sin, but the word discipline has a bigger meaning in scripture than just that. God does discipline us for particular sins, and we may find ourselves disciplined because He's disciplining us for a particular sin or sin problem. You see this in scripture in 1 Corinthians 11, where they were disciplined for the way they took the Lord's Supper, the disunity they were fostering in the body. And a glaring example of it is Acts 5, where Ananias and Sapphira were disciplined by being put to death for their sin. And the Lord does say in Hebrews 12 He disciplines those Whom He loves, but there's a bigger understanding of discipline, not for sins, individual sins per say, but for sin itself, the problem of sin in us, the problem of self. In that sense, all suffering is intended by God to discipline us from that.

Now what happens is, and this is what was liable to be misunderstood, is if you're having a bad trial right now, you're apt to think, "We can assume it must be because I've got some bad sin that God is dealing with," or "I'm a greater sinner because my trials are worse. I'm a greater sinner than others." Or if you think your trials aren't that bad, you think, "Well, I'm not as bad a sinner as that other person." That's completely inaccurate. The first thing is you never compare your situation to anybody else's. Scriptures never exhorts us to do that, never encourages us to do that. In fact, exactly the opposite. An example of it we're going to find in John's Gospel, in John 21, when Jesus is talking to Peter and preparing him for his own death by crucifixion. Remember that? He says, "You're going to stretch out your hands. They're going to lead you where you don't want to go. "You stretch out your hands, you follow me." Peter says, "What about John? I compare myself with him. What are you going to do with him?" Jesus says, "What is it to you if I leave him here until I come? You follow Me." The idea is it's none of my business what God is doing with somebody else, my business is what He's doing with me, and I'm to follow Him.

The reality is He deals with all of us differently. The fact that you might find yourself in the next six months in a very deep trial is actually very likely a token of His great love. It's always a token of His great love for you, but it may be that He's doing a deeper work in you than He's doing in me. If we saw suffering biblically, we would have an aptitude to want to say, "Lord, why not me? Why is my brother or sister suffering more than me?" If we saw it right, we would think that way. So what I was getting at was more of the bigger picture of sin, the sin in us, because if God really loves us as He does, He only wants to give good things to us. Jesus

says, “If your children ask you for a fish, which one of you gives them a serpent? If He asks you for bread, which one of you gives him a stone?” If you being evil know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more does your Heavenly Father give good gifts to His? If He gave Jesus on the cross, how will He not together, Romans 8:32, only give us good things? So that everything that comes from His hand is good?

Now, I want us to do a little Bible study on suffering here to help flesh this out a little bit. Turn with me to James 1. We were in James last week in Chapter 4. In Chapter 1, look at God’s purpose for suffering, Verse 2.

James 1:2-4 ~ Consider it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials, 3 knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance. 4 And let endurance have its perfect result, so that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.

The idea here is if you want to be perfect and complete, if you want to grow in grace, you must have various trials. That’s James 1. Now turn to Romans 5:3. Paul has just shared in Verses 1 and 2 the glory of what it means to be a Christian is that we are at peace with God. We who were aliens, enemies, are now at peace with God, and we stand in grace. We have a position of standing in grace. What that means is, to stand in grace, grace is God’s favor. Grace is related to the word of joy, it’s that which gives joy, and it’s that which expresses joy. It’s God’s joy in giving us things that make us joyful. So if you stand in grace it means that God is only giving you things for your joy and out of His joy, and only good things. You can’t get any condemnation for God, and this is where we get mixed up. For us, when we discipline our children, I know for me I often have to go back more than I wish, and confess a bad attitude. “I sinned in my attitude when I was talking to you about this issue, son or daughter.” So discipline to us has more of a negative feel to it, doesn’t it? But with God, His discipline is all love. It’s perfect and it’s exactly what we need. Look at Romans 5:3.

Romans 5:3-4 ~ And not only this, but we also exult in our tribulations, knowing that tribulation brings about perseverance; 4 and perseverance, proven character; and proven character, hope;

If you want hope, you’ve got to have proven character. If you want proven character, you have to have perseverance. If you want to have perseverance, you have to have tribulation. You cannot get it without that in a fallen world. Turn over to Chapter 8 of Romans, Verse 28-29, Dr. Mack preached on this last month.

Romans 8:28 ~ And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose.

All things for the believer called to His purpose are for our good, and what is that good essentially? Verse 29 defines it.

Romans 8:29 ~ For those whom He foreknew, He also predestined to become conformed to the image of His Son,...

To make us like Jesus. The best thing that can happen to me or to you on any given day is to be made more like Jesus. How did Jesus become even the perfect Savior? Hebrews 5:8 says He learned obedience through the things He suffered. So it's a necessary part of the Christian life to suffer. One more place I want us to turn, 1 Peter Chapter 6.

1 Peter 6:6-7 ~ In this you greatly rejoice, (This is your hope of salvation, the hope that our inheritance is in Heaven. At what's lying ahead, but now...) even though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been distressed by various trials, 7 these have come so that the proof of your faith, being more precious than gold which is perishing, even though tested by fire, may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ;

What he's saying is, "Suffering is like a refiner's fire. If you want gold, if you want to take raw gold ore, a stone out of the ground that's got gold in it, and you want it to come out 24-karat, it's got to go through the fire again and again." So therefore, if our faith which is like gold, more precious than gold, is going to become more pure, how is it going to happen? It's going to happen through the refiner's fire. In fact, while we're in 1 Peter, turn over to Chapter 4 Verse 1.

1 Peter 4:1 ~ Therefore, since Christ has suffered in the flesh, arm yourselves also with the same purpose, because he who has suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin,

How do you stop sinning, Christian? You have to suffer. The Word of God? Yes. The people of God? Yes, but God also uses affliction. Now, what that means is, and what we need to see from that is, how do you place yourself under the hand of God? It means when you suffer you don't accuse God, you don't say, "Lord,

You're being too harsh with me. Why are You doing this? Don't You know how bad I'm hurting?" Of course He knows. He's a perfect Father. He's measured out the dose of suffering exactly right, no more than is necessary. How do you know that? Because He gave Jesus, He only gives good things. It's the perfect amount, and we have a High Priest Who even sympathizes with us. Jesus Christ, Who knows what it is to suffer worse than we can ever imagine. He suffered every kind of suffering we've suffered, but greater. So when we want to say God is being too harsh, what I was getting at is we need to turn that accusation around and say, "My heart is so messed up that a God Who only wants to bless me had to bring this into my life." Don't compare, one person has this affliction. No, it's not about that. It's really more about, sometimes I have the biggest problems when somebody else is suffering. Do you find yourself having that problem? "Lord, why are You doing that to them? Is there not enough already?" Have you not had that thought go through your mind? I mean, "Why this on top of that, on top of that, in that person's life?" We can accuse God that way. What we ought to do is step back from it and say, "Wait a minute." The reality is that a born again Christian in this world, in a fallen world with indwelling sins still in us, for me to know more of Christ, for you to know more of Christ, the only way is to suffer. What that ought to make us do is be more brokenhearted over the power of sin to obscure, to eclipse the glory of God. We can see the glory of Christ in the Word, but that's not enough. We have to suffer so that we can really see the glory of Christ, so that we really let go of sin. And there's something that's powerful, when you suffer it's amazing, just the little things. Like having a bad illness where you're just sick for a few days, nausea.

I was talking with somebody the other day and they were saying, "I hate being nauseated. That's the one thing I hate." I agree with that. Of all the things, just your normal afflictions, sore throat, other things. Okay, high fever, yes it's miserable, but when you're nauseous. I've had times when I've been so nauseated that I thought to myself, "I want to in Heaven now." That is good. It's good to know that this world is not my home. It's good to see that in the lives of my brothers and sisters whom I love. This world is not our home, and so when we see suffering come, realize that what we ought to be appalled at that sin has so wrecked us that a God Who loves us with perfect love, must still allow these things, bring these things, ordain these things so that He might have more of us and we might have more of Him. That's the point.

The blinding power of sin is so great that even this is necessary. "God save us from our sin." Praise God, He's going to do that, and He Who began a good work in you, He's faithful and He will complete it until the day of Christ Jesus. When we

stand before Him, all the times that we've wondered, all the times that we've accused Him, all the times we questioned His methods, when we stand before Him we will be brokenhearted. I think that's one of the reasons that He has to wipe away tears, we're wondering, "How could I ever, ever, ever have doubted Your goodness?" Suffering helps us see that, the blinding power of sin.

Now, in God's providence, that relates in kind of an amazing way to John Chapter 7, our text this morning. Now to the sermon. We haven't been in the Gospel of John since April 1, over five months in our series on unity. We're deciding to come back to this glorious presentation of Jesus Christ. Let's read Verses 1-13 of John 7.

John 7:1-13:

*After these things Jesus was walking in Galilee, for He was unwilling to walk in Judea because the Jews were seeking to kill Him. 2 Now the feast of the Jews, the Feast of Booths, was near. 3 Therefore His brothers said to Him, "Leave here and go into Judea, so that Your disciples also may see Your works which You are doing. 4 For no one does anything in secret when he himself seeks to be known publicly. If You do these things, show Yourself to the world." 5 For not even His brothers were believing in Him. 6 So Jesus *said to them, "My time is not yet here, but your time is always opportune. 7 The world cannot hate you, but it hates Me because I testify of it, that its deeds are evil. 8 Go up to the feast yourselves; I do not go up to this feast because My time has not yet fully come." 9 Having said these things to them, He stayed in Galilee.*

10 But when His brothers had gone up to the feast, then He Himself also went up, not publicly, but as if, in secret. 11 So the Jews were seeking Him at the feast and were saying, "Where is He?" 12 There was much grumbling among the crowds concerning Him; some were saying, "He is a good man"; others were saying, "No, on the contrary, He leads the people astray." 13 Yet no one was speaking openly of Him for fear of the Jews.

Let's pray together.

Father, as we come here again to the Gospel of John, we are reminded of our great need of grace. That You might open the eyes of our hearts, that we might see. Open the ears of hearts, that we might hear, that we might understand, that we might obey, and that we might love our Savior more. We pray in Jesus' Name, Amen.

Now if you think about it, what we talking about earlier, the pre-sermon basically was saying that for the Christian, for a child of God who has been born again, for us to see God more, we have to suffer. Suffering is necessary, even for the child of God who has a new heart. That's an astounding picture of the power of sin that remains in us. We've been begotten of God, we've been translated from the kingdom of darkness to the Kingdom of God's beloved Son, and yet still, for us to see God and love Him more we have to go through things like that.

Well this passage is talking about if that's true the Christian, how much more is it true of the unbeliever that is in the dark. This is really about the blinding power of sin. The title of the message is: 'Seeing is Not Necessarily Believing', John 7:1:13. If for the child of God seeing is not enough, that is if for the child of God seeing in the Word is not enough to do all that we need to do to grow in Christ's likeness, if seeing Jesus manifest in the preaching of the Word, and the teaching of the Word, and the study of the Word is not enough but we need to add suffering to it, how much more is it true that seeing is not enough for unbelievers. That's really the point of this passage.

The blinding power of sin is a very important doctrine for us to wrestle with because our present day church is so, in general, evangelicalism is so confused about this. One of the leading lights of evangelicalism, the most leading pastor that many would say in America, has said this: "If I had the opportunity to talk to any person alone for 15 minutes, I will get them saved because I will address, I will find out what their felt needs are, and I'll work through their felt needs to get them to Christ." That's a man who doesn't understand the biblical doctrine of sin. He does not understand what it means to be lost. He thinks that salvation is apparently a small step. "You just need to show somebody, take this step and you're a Christian." As I read this passage, and I read the Bible, I see that salvation isn't a small step, it's not even a giant leap. Salvation is an unbridgeable chasm. I mean, the distance between us and God is an unbridgeable chasm that can only be bridged from God's side to us. God must act for an unbeliever to be saved. This is the point we see in this passage. How far is it from the kingdom of darkness to the Kingdom of God? How much must be done?

Now there's a temptation for us to believe this in theory but not in practice. Those of you that have been taught and studied, you know that to the doctrine of sin we are blind, we don't see. We have to have God give us a new heart. We can't understand. The natural man does not understand the things the God, and yet isn't it true that we still struggle on a daily basis to really act consistently with that

belief? How many times have I found myself talking to somebody about the Gospel and explaining things and thinking, “That surely...”

I had a conversation with some Jehovah’s Witnesses a couple of weeks ago, and we had made an appointment. We had had a conversation and they gave me some stuff to read. I said, “I’ll be happy to read this. I can’t talk to you right now really, I’m getting ready to leave, but will you come back next Thursday morning at 11:00?” So they came back next Thursday morning at 11:00 and I was ready for them. They were a little late though, I also thought they weren’t going to come because it was 11:45 when they came. But anyway, they came, sat down, and I’m one to point the finger at people that are late. But anyway, they came and sat down at 11:45 and I laid out for them why Jesus is Jehovah. I took them through John’s Gospel. I had asked the guy the read John’s Gospel already. He read it and I showed Him the ‘I AM’ sayings of Jesus. That started in Exodus 3:14 where the Lord says, “I am that I am.” That’s the real meaning of the name Yahweh. That’s the real meaning of the name Jehovah. Then I took them to John and showed them all the ‘I AM’ sayings of Jesus. ‘I AM’ which is saying Yahweh. He’s saying, “I am Yahweh.” I showed them how the Jews understood it. They picked up rocks to kill him when he said it in John 8:58. How when they said that Judas was coming after Him with the people and the torches. They said, “We’re looking for Jesus of Nazareth.” He said, ‘I AM’. In the English it says, “I am He.” It says literally ‘ego ami’, I am. That group of men coming with swords and torches took a step back, fell on their faces, when He said, “I am.” Then they got up, somehow, amazingly, they got up from that and arrested Him because it was the Lord’s appointment. There was a visible declaration in action right before then that they were coming into the presence of Yahweh.

Now I laid all of that out, and showed them all of that,” and I said, “All right, I’m ready for your decision.” In my heart I was thinking, I was praying, but I remember thinking after we were done, “How could they not see it? You guys are still Jehovah’s Witnesses. It’s so clear.” Here I am being dumb, I’m not believing what I believe. I know that they can’t see unless God opens their eyes. You can’t ask a blind man to understand if he can’t see. What has to happen? Well we are supposed to do what we did. We’re supposed to persuade, we’re supposed to do what Paul says, knowing the fear of God we persuade me. We argue with it from the scriptures. That’s what Paul’s method was, you read that in Acts. God says in Isaiah, “Come let us reason together.” It’s right to reason together but we must trust in the power of God to do something because this person has an unbridgeable distance. It’s not me just convincing them. It’s me letting out the truth and hoping

that the Spirit of God will bridge that unbridgeable distance and give them a new heart.

It happens through the Word. It happens through that kind of encounter, but when it happens it's not because you or I are a good persuader, or we made a good argument. It is because God chose to call that sinner to Himself. This is what being laid out for us in this chapter. Let me show you, and what we're going to do to observe the passage in the time that we left, we'll begin to look at it by using the W's and an H. It's something we often do when we get to a new chapter is observe it carefully. We're going to look at three W's and an H. 'When?', 'Where?', 'Who?', and 'How?'

1) When?:

The first thing we see that John calls attention to is 'When?' *After these things...* the familiar, introductory phrase that John shows that some time has passed. Now sometimes a lot of time has passed, sometimes not much time has passed, but there has been some time that's passed between the events of Chapter 6 and Chapter 7. *After these things...* Verse 2 gives us a clue, a much more explicit time reference. *Now the feast of the Jews, the Feast of Booths, was near.* Remember that in Chapter 6, the feeding of the 5,000, and then Jesus walking on the water the next night, and then His teaching in the synagogue in Capernaum was a two-day discussion. All of Chapter 6 covers a two-day period in the life and ministry of Jesus. We were told in John 6:4 that the Passover was near. So Jesus had that encounter in feeding the 5,000, walking on the water, teaching in Capernaum in March/April because Passover is in March/April of the year. The Jewish month bridges our two months, March and April. So those events happened in March or April.

Now the next thing that John wants us to look at is what happens at the time of the Feast of Booths. The Feast of Booths, the Fest of Tabernacles more commonly, I'm going to call it that from now on, the Feast of Tabernacles. It's easier for me to say than booths. Anyway, the Feast of Tabernacles is September/October, so what you have is a six-month time lapse between the events of Chapter 6 and the events of Chapter 7. It's always important when reading the Scripture to observe things like that. Why is that? Was there nothing interesting that happened over the last six months? Of course not! In fact, we've got a lot of the events of what happened over the last six months in the other gospels: Matthew, Mark, and Luke. What he tells us is He was teaching in Galilee most of the time during that six months, but six months have passed. Why is it that John has not told us more?

Well in John 20:31, he tells us that His purpose in giving this book, and writing his gospel, remember Matthew, Mark, and Luke, the other three gospel-writers wrote earlier than John. Matthew and Mark probably in the 40's AD. Jesus was crucified and rose again somewhere between 30 and 33 AD from what we can tell. Well, the first gospels were written in the 40's. Mark and Matthew wrote in the 40's. Luke probably wrote in the 60's as a companion of Paul. John was the longest surviving apostle. He lived well into the 90's AD. Most scholars believe he wrote around 85 AD, more than 20 years after Luke, and about 40 years after Matthew and Mark. He's the last writer of a gospel. He has a specific purpose. He knows by this time the other gospels had made their way around and are a part of the life of the church. They'd been copied and taken from church to church, and so he's writing a gospel that is kind of filling in the gaps and he has a particular purpose. In fact he says that in John 20. He said, "Jesus did many more things than these. Many more signs did Jesus in the presence of His disciples. If they were written down there would not be books enough to hold them."

John 20:31 ~ but these have been written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing you may have life in His name.

"I selectively recorded the events and the discourses of Jesus. I've gone through His life and I've told them." I think it's in chronological order but he skips over things to give a particular portrait of the Son of God that's unique from the others. Now all four gospels are unique and have different angles, and John's, as we look at it, has some wonderful uniqueness about it. He mentions the 'I AM' sayings and highlights those. He gives seven great signs, some of which are not in the other gospels. Here he shows this idea of when it happened, he's trying to put these things together so that we'll see it. Essentially, John wants the events of Chapter 6 right beside the events of Chapter 7. It's obvious but it's something to note. He wants us to see it as we read it, reading out of 6 right into 7. Remember the chapter divisions weren't originally inspired anyway, so that you're reading without a chapter division. There it goes, right into the next events, with only the marker that some time has passed. Now let me skip on to the next question, 'Where?'

2) Where?:

Where? Look with me at Verse 1.

John 7:1 ~ After these things Jesus was walking in Galilee, for He was unwilling to walk in Judea...

He's walking in Galilee, that is the northern province where Israelites and Jews lived in the first century. It was formerly Northern Israel. Now that Rome is ruling there is a province called Galilee. Jesus is from Galilee, raised in Nazareth and Galilee. The disciples are from Galilee. But Judea, the southern part of Israel, where Jerusalem is, that's the center of Jewish life. What he's saying is that Jesus is walking in Galilee, not in Judea. He's not walking in Jerusalem. He's not walking in the environment of Jerusalem. Why? Because the Jews were seeking to kill Him. That's the reason that He's spending his time in Galilee and not Judea. The reason is that there is intense opposition, growing hatred for Christ at the very center of Jewish life. This is really an astounding reality. It's saying, "Why is it in Judea?" Well, the chief priests are there, the priests that are ministering in the temple are there. The scribes that copy the law, there are so many more of them in Jerusalem. When he goes down there, the priests who minister before His Father, the priests who minister in His temple, which all are a picture of Him, the scribes who copy His Word, and who teach His Word, the lawyers who study it and pore over it, when they see Him, the people who should know Him the best, hate Him the most. That's astonishing. The people who know Him the best should hate Him the most, and John has prepared us for this. This is part of his major message. This is one of the themes that weaves this book together. Remember what he said in John 1?

John 1:9-13 ~ There was the true Light which, coming into the world, enlightens every man. 10 He was in the world, and the world was made through Him, and the world did not know Him. 11 He came to His own, and those who were His own did not receive Him. 12 But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in His name, 13 who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God.

He's saying, "Look, from the very beginning, He came to those who should have received Him and they received Him not." This is an astonishing reality. It runs against all of our natural intuition. Wouldn't it be obvious that the Jews would have recognized it? Especially when you think about the fact that the whole Bible points to Him.

I talked on Wednesday night, we're reintroducing the study of the Old Testament. We're going through the books of the Old Testament a couple of weeks at a time, rapid pace on Wednesday night. I think we all kind of leave here sort of winded. I know I do. My hair is blowing back because we have such a fast pace on Sunday mornings, as you know if you've been here long. How many years have we been in

John, and you know, whatever. The point is, we're going through the Bible book by book, and so what I did last Wednesday night was I caught us up again. I went back from Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy. We looked at how all of those books, the way God unfolded it, points to Christ. I mean it's so amazing! It's incredible! It all points to Jesus. We see this in Jesus' ministry. Remember the road to Emmaus? When the disciples, after He's been resurrected, they don't realize it, the two guys on the road to Emmaus don't know it. They are walking with Him, and He supernaturally hides His identity from them, and He begins talking to them. They say, "You don't know about the events that have happened, how Jesus was crucified." Then it says, "He began to teach them." He said, "Oh you foolish and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have written." All that Moses and the prophets wrote. "Was it not necessary for the Christ to suffer these things?" If you read your Old Testament, it all pointed to this, he's saying. How could you miss it? When you look at the beauty of the Bible and how it fits together, it's unbelievable. I mean, this book is so perfectly woven together. It's written by 40 different men, radically different life settings, on three different continents. Now compare any other holy book to this! It's ridiculous, any other book that people want to look to. The Bible—40 different authors, 3 different continents, over 1,500 years! It's got one message and that message is Jesus Christ. All of it points to Him.

Now these guys have been poring over it, they're in Jerusalem. They've been poring over these scriptures, and He comes and they reject Him. That's why He's not walking there. In fact, they're seeking to kill Him. It's an emphasis that's repeated in the text, 'seeking to kill Him', over and over we see this.

John 7:11 ~ So the Jews were seeking Him at the feast and were saying, "Where is He?"

Were they seeking Him to hear Him teach? No, they were seeking because they wanted to kill Him. You see this later in Verse 19, when Jesus says to them:

John 7:19 ~ "Did not Moses give you the Law, and yet none of you carries out the Law? Why do you seek to kill Me?"

John 7:20 ~ The crowd answered, "You have a demon! Who seeks to kill You?"

"Who is seeking to kill You?" the crowd says. Look just down 5 verses later. "Nobody is seeking to kill You," they say this. Look at Verse 25, after He teaches some more, they say:

John 7:25 ~ So some of the people of Jerusalem were saying, “Is this not the man whom they are seeking to kill?”

Who’s seeking to kill Him? Everybody is seeking to kill Him. In fact, when you read through, 7 and 8 are all about this particular feast, the Feast of Tabernacles. In Chapter 8, you have Jesus asking again, “Why are you seeking to kill Me? A man Who has only taught you the truth.” They say, “We’re not seeking to kill You.” He then tells them about Himself and about the fact that why they want to do that is because they are children of the devil. He says, “Before Abraham was, I am.” That’s the verse I mentioned to my Jehovah’s Witness friend. “Before Abraham was, I am.” They picked up rocks to stone Him to death.

In Chapter 10, I think it’s Verse 31, He says, “I and the Father are one.” They picked up rocks to stone Him to death. You see the refrain, they’re seeking to kill Him, they’re seeking to kill Him. There is this growing hatred and opposition by those that are the closest and what we see in that is proximity to Christ does not mean possession of Christ. John is calling our attention to this. He puts these events side by side in the text without any intervening narrative. He could have told us so many things but he wants us to see this side-by-side, Chapter 6, Chapter 7. That leads us to the third question:

3) Who?:

We looked at ‘When?’ and ‘Where?’, now ‘Who?’

John 7:3 ~ Therefore His brothers said to Him, “Leave here and go into Judea, so that Your disciples also may see Your works which You are doing.

His brothers. Three times in this passage the phrase ‘his brothers’ is used. There in Verse 3, his brothers. Look at Verse 5:

John 7:5 ~ For not even His brothers were believing in Him.

Verse 10:

John 7:10 ~ But when His brothers had gone up to the feast,...

These are Jesus’ half-brothers. He had four half-brothers. The Gospels don’t mention it much although John 2:12 had told us. John, in Chapter 2, after Jesus did the miracle at Cana, He turned the water into wine, it said that He went down with

His mother, and His disciples, and His brothers to Capernaum. He was in Galilee and His mother and His brothers apparently were now living in Capernaum, and He went there and stayed with them with His disciples. He had four half-brothers according to Matthew 13:55. We have this on the lips of the crowd at the synagogue in Nazareth. Jesus is teaching. The people are amazed at His teaching and they say, “Is not this the carpenter’s son? Whose mother Mary we know, and whose brothers we know, James, Joseph, Simon, and Judas? We know His four brothers, we know His dad, we know His mother. So this can’t be a prophet. We know this guy.” The four half-brothers, four younger brothers, because Mary was a virgin when she gave birth to Him. These are His four younger brothers, and what did they say, Verse 3 and 4, basically what they’re doing is they’re, it’s hard to know, we don’t know their motive, but we can guess at it.

John 7:3-4 ~ Therefore His brothers said to Him, “Leave here and go into Judea, so that Your disciples also may see Your works which You are doing. 4 For no one does anything in secret when he himself seeks to be known publicly. If You do these things, show Yourself to the world.”

They’re at least frustrated with Him. After the events of Chapter 6, they’re from Galilee, they know, Chapter 6 told us. Remember what Chapter 6 told us? Turn back over just a moment to Verse 59, after Jesus has said, “You must eat My flesh and drink My blood,” and we talked about what that meant. He’s basically saying the most offensive thing He could to get their attention to the fact that the cross is the most offensive thing possible, and that’s what’s necessary to save us. That God’s Son would have to die that kind of death.

John 6:59-60 ~ These things He said in the synagogue as He taught in Capernaum. 60 Therefore many of His disciples, when they heard this said, “This is a difficult statement; who can listen to it?”

His disciples are muttering among themselves, and Jesus says, “Does this cause you to stumble? Well what then?” and He turns up the heat on them a little bit.

John 6:62 ~ What then if you see the Son of Man ascending to where He was before?

Verse 66 says:

John 6:66 ~ As a result of this many of His disciples withdrew and were not walking with Him anymore.

The 5,000 that He fed was probably more like 20,000 people and 5,000 men. The numbering, the Jewish numbering, 5,000 men, 20,000 people He fed. They were thrilled with Him, they wanted to make Him king. By the end of the chapter, the crowds have departed, the teaching was too hard so that even many of those who were actually following Him, His disciples, departed from Him. And Jesus says, the stirring words, Verse 67:

John 6:67-68 ~ So Jesus said to the twelve, “You do not want to go away also, do you?” 68 Simon Peter answered Him, “Lord, to whom shall we go? You have words of eternal life.

But people were seeing this last year of Jesus’ ministry at that Passover, which basically marks the one year mark, the feeding of the 5,000, is one year before the Passover when He will die at Calvary. This year is a year of declining interest and growing opposition. Less and less followers, more and more haters, and the hatred is ratcheting up. Well, his brothers saw this, what was happening, and the best motivation, they were being like Judas and wanting to force His hand. “Show Yourself so that You’ll get this thing turned around!” Totally misunderstanding His mission, and possibly it was a statement of scorn. “If You’re really Who You say You are, why are You doing it in secret?” How those words must have hurt the heart of our Savior in His humanity. Even His own brothers rejecting Him. They’ve seen signs, they have seen miracles, but more than that, they lived with Him, they saw sinlessness lived out before them. Think about that. Can you imagine living in a home with a child, as a parent, that never sinned, never uttered anything disrespectful under their breath, never said, “Okay, Dad,” never disobeyed? To live with a sibling that always served you and loved you, and exemplified kindness, and tenderness, and strength, humility? They lived with that. What’s wrong? Proximity doesn’t mean you possess Christ. Such is the hardness of the heart in sin, that you can stand right beside the glory, shining brightly, and reject it. That’s the message. Even His own brothers.

So John in putting this together wants us to see His closest disciples questioning Him in John 6 at the end of the chapter, and those who had walked with Him turning away from Him. Then, as he wants us to see, right beside that the scornful questioning of His brothers, His own flesh and blood who reject Him. This leads us to the fourth question:

4) How?:

‘When?’, ‘Where?’, ‘Who?’, and ‘How?’ How can this be? How can His brothers? How can the scribes and the priests who should know these things? It’s because you must have a new heart. I mentioned earlier 1 Corinthians 2:14, “The natural man does not understand the things of God.” The man who has not been given a spiritual nature does not understand the things of God, but instead they are foolishness to him.

Or think about in the context of John’s Gospel. Turn back over to John 3, and we have in the wisdom of God, one of those portraits that we don’t see anywhere in the other gospels, Jesus’ conversation with a Pharisee of Pharisees named Nicodemus, who was so well-known he was called ‘A Teacher of Israel.’ He was one of the great teachers/preachers of his day. Jesus had been talking to him about the need for the spiritual birth.

John 3:9 ~ Nicodemus said to Him, “How can these things be?”

He’s perplexed, he can’t understand. “What are you talking about,” he’s basically saying, and Jesus says this in 10, 11, and 12. He basically says three things about Nicodemus which are three things that are true about the unregenerate heart. No matter how much Bible you know, if your heart is not regenerated, because Nicodemus is a man who knows his Bible. Looks what He says in Verse 10.

John 3:10-12 ~ Jesus answered and said to him, “Are you the teacher of Israel and do not understand these things? 11 Truly, truly, I say to you, we speak of what we know and testify of what we have seen, and you do not accept our testimony. 12 If I told you earthly things and you do not believe, how will you believe if I tell you heavenly things?”

He essentially says, “You’ve been in the Bible. You’re in the Bible, you’re in the Bible, you’re in the Bible, and you do not understand, you do not receive, and you do not believe!” As He said earlier, “You must be born again.” That’s the point. Proximity to the things of God does not equal possession of the things of God. You can be around it, you can be beside it, you can see it right before your face, but if God does not open the eyes of your heart to see it, open the ears of your heart to hear it, you will not. You’ll be like He says, “Seeing you will not see. Hearing you will not understand.” This is the point that John is trying to get across here. How can it be? Because many of the Jews of his day, he’s writing in 85 AD to a group of Jewish people, Jews and Jewish proselytes who were increasingly rejecting Christ, and one of the reasons they’re rejecting Christ is because all of the other Jews have rejected Christ. I mean, the apostles were all Jews, and there were many

Jews in the churches, but relatively speaking, more and more Gentiles are getting saved, non-Jews, less and less Jews. He's writing as one last olive branch, one last revelation to the Jewish people, "Don't judge by appearances. Just because the Jews around you have rejected Christ, don't let that keep you from looking at Christ yourself. It's always been this way," he said. "Listen, the people who were closest to Him could not see, but the good news is, if you will look at Jesus and you will look to Jesus, He will grant new birth. We don't have to arrest it from His fingers, we just go to Him saying, 'Lord, give me life!'" ***Come unto Me you who are weary and heavy-laden, I'll give you rest.*** 'Come' is always the word. In fact, He's going to say it here in John 7:37:

John 7:37 ~ ..."If anyone is thirsty, let him come to Me and drink.

His words are always inviting us, but we have to come knowing it's not a small step to become a Christian. It's not even a giant leap. It is an infinite distance that must be bridged by the grace and power of the living God. When we understand that, we come on our faces before God, knowing that we do not see, we do not understand, we do not believe, except He grants us eyes to see, and ears to hear, and how that changes our lives in so many ways, in so many practical ways.

Our evangelism, when we're talking to someone about Christ. It makes us more prayerful, doesn't it? We have to pray as we're talking. "Lord, help me know what to say. Help me know how to say this, but Lord I know whatever I say and however I say it is not as important as Your Spirit touching them. Give them life. Do like You did to Lazarus. Say that this soul that is locked away in the tomb spiritually, 'Come forth.' Do it even now Lord and I'll give you all the praise because I know only You can open the eyes of the blind." It makes us more humble. When we're talking to someone and we articulate what we think is a good argument, we're prone in our own pride to think, "How can you not see it? I see it!" But why do I see it? Why do you see it? Grace. God's unmerited, freely offered, freely given grace, and no other reason. How can we boast in what we have when we have knowledge? What do you have that you have not received? Then why do you boast as if you had not received it when you have received it? It makes us humble in our evangelism, it makes us prayerful.

Think about how it helps us be focused on the souls of those around us, especially our children. Raising up children in the church. It's not proximity, it has to be a real possession of spiritual life, and it's only going to come as God changes the heart. We're supposed to teach them the things of God, we're supposed to discipline them, to help drive foolishness out of their heart, but always, always

point them to Christ. He alone can save. And it makes us pray, and pray, and pray for their souls, and our own souls.

To be around the things of God and to come up short of the grace of God, that is something that the New Testament warns us about.

Hebrews 3:12-13 ~ Take care, brethren, that there not be in any one of you an evil, unbelieving heart that falls away from the living God. 13 But encourage one another day after day, as long as it is still called "Today," so that none of you will be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin.

What he's saying is, "Look, beware that it's possible to almost be in the Kingdom and then fall away." What are you to do with that? Keep looking at Jesus and keep helping each other look at Jesus. Don't tout your resume, look at Christ, and plead with Christ, and trust in Christ, and realize that He doesn't have to be convinced to save. That's not it, that's not the message of all these verses of warning. It's not that you have to convince Him to save you. You know you can't. I can't convince Him. None of us can do that. I mean there's nothing about us that commends ourselves. Not our desire, not our earnestness, all that we can look to is grace. "Lord, You are One Who abounds in loving kindness and mercy. You are One Who has shown Yourself to be a friend of sinners, and I am a sinner. I'm the chief of sinners. You're one Who has shown Yourself to delight in bringing trophies of grace out of dunghills like me. So I put all of my hope in Your grace, all of my hope in Your mercy. None in myself, all in You. And I'm going to keep looking at You, and I'm going to keep helping my brothers and sisters to keep looking at You, so that none of us will take our eyes off of Christ." If you're really saved you can't ultimately do that, but the scripture is exhorting us because we can't tell among one another. None of us knows who else is saved and who isn't. You can only know about yourself. The Bible says that the Spirit bears witness with our spirit, that we're children of God, in Romans 8. It tells us the Lord knows those who are His. What we're to do is to look for fruit in each other's lives, and help encourage one another, and humbly serve one another, and mainly keep reminding each other, "It's all about Jesus." It's all about Him.

When we remember where we came from, it keeps us where we need to be. We came from darkness. If it weren't for the grace of God, say you got saved as a young person because you were raised in a house of Christians who taught you the Word and God used that. Well, praise the Lord for that, but if not that God has sovereignly chosen to give you that background, you could have very easily been

born in the darkest jungles of New Guinea. Praise God! It's nothing in us, is there? It's all Him. We remember that He's made us able to open our eyes.

I want to share with you the words of another hymn. We were so blessed by the words of that hymn that our brothers sang earlier.

**How sweet and awful is the place with Christ within the doors,
While everlasting love displays the choicest of her stores.
Hear every bowel of our God with soft compassion rolls,
Here peace and pardon bought with blood is food for dying souls.
While all our hearts and all our songs join to admire the feast,
Each of us cry with thankful tongues, Lord, why was I a guest?
Why was I made to hear Thy voice, and enter while there's room?
When thousands make a retched choice, and rather starve than come.
It was the same love that spread the feast, that sweetly forced us in,
Else we had still refused to taste, and perished in our sins.
Pity the nations, O our God, constrain the Earth to come,
Send Thy victorious Word abroad, and bring the strangers home.
For we long to see Thy churches full, that all the chosen race,
May with one voice, one heart, one soul, sing Thy redeeming grace.**

That's the glory of our great God and Savior, Who saves not because of our works which we've done, but because of His great mercy. Let's pray together.

Our Father, we stand in awe of You, that You would save sinners like us. That You would open the eyes of those who apart from You, would be still in rebellion, still in hatred, still at war with You. We thank You for saving. Those of us in this room who've been redeemed, we give You praise and all the glory for what You've done. And Lord we're mindful that there some here that have not yet truly entered into Your grace. We ask, Father, that You might even now, having heard Your Word, that they might even now look to Christ and cast themselves upon Him. They might let go of everything else and want only Him. Give them that grace to call out to Him, and to find that there is nothing sweeter in all the world than beholding His face, and knowing His love. Lord, let us so be consumed and constrained by that love, that we live for Your glory every moment. We pray this in Jesus' Name, Amen.

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