

## *Valley Bible Church – Sermon Transcript*

### **The Feast of Booths John 7:14-17 Part 2**

A number of years ago a person called the church and asked to speak to a pastor. The reason why they wanted to speak to a pastor was because they wanted someone with so-called credentials, such as myself, to tell them whether or not they could on the basis of Scripture get a divorce.

Clearly they were suffering in their marriage, and they wanted to know if they could put that suffering to an end and do so righteously, based on the teachings of the Bible. They were, in other words, at least from their perspective, seeking spiritual truth.

So I opened up the Bible and shared with them what the Scriptures plainly taught. In other words, I shared with them the truth. They rejected it, concluding our conversation with the expression, "I guess I will have to call another pastor."

This person would represent themselves, I am sure, as wanting to hear the truth; but when the truth was shared with them, they were unable to receive it. Why? The passage that we will be studying this weekend will answer this particular question.

Before we begin our examination of this passage and seek to answer this question let me, for a moment, review what we have already considered. We have just completed our study of the "Bread of Life" discourse in **John 6** and the section of the Gospel entitled "The Period of Controversy." We have now entered a new section that we have entitled, "The Period of Conflict."

"The Period of controversy" (5:1-6:71) narrates mostly arguments arising from unsettled attitudes about Jesus, while the "Period of Conflict" (7:1-11:53) narrates clashes that do not flow from unsettled attitudes but rather fixed attitudes.

This particular section, "The Period of Conflict," begins with Christ in **John 7** attending the "Feast of Booths," or in other words, the "Feast of Tabernacles." His attendance at this feast will take up the entire chapter.

Therefore, we are in the process of dividing Christ's attendance at the "Feast of Booths" or the "Feast of Tabernacles" into three different parts. Last week we considered the first part.

The first part of the "Feast of Booths" is the beginning of the feast (John 7:1-13). Let me read this passage for you. **"And 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 at hand."**

The "Feast of Booths" or the "Feast of Tabernacles" took place in autumn and celebrated the tree and vine harvest.

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Beyond the celebration of the autumn harvest, another purpose was also served. Theologically, the "Feast of Booths" was to remind the Jewish people of the temporary shelters they lived in during their wilderness wanderings (Leviticus 23; Deuteronomy 16.) The celebration of this feast was typically the yearly highlight of each Jewish family, very much like our Christmas. Unfortunately, what was typical for the average Jewish family was not the experience of Christ's family during this particular feast that we are now studying.

Let us continue to read the passage, picking it up at verse 3. **"His brothers therefore said to Him, 'Depart from here, and go into Judea, that Your disciples also may behold 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) Jesus therefore said to them, 'My time is not yet at hand, 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) **And having said these thing to them, He stayed in Galilee."**

The encouragement of Christ's brothers for Him to go up to the feast was not being extended in order that Jesus might be proven to be the Messiah. Rather, it was being extended in order that Christ would be exposed as a fraud. How do we know this? We know this because His brothers did not believe in Christ. So what happened next?

Let us now read **John 7:10-13. "But when His brothers had gone up to the feast, then He Himself also went up, not publicly, but as it were, in secret. (11) The Jews therefore were seeking Him at the feast, and were saying, 'Where is He?' (12) And there was much grumbling among the multitudes concerning Him; some were saying, 'He is a good man;' others were saying, 'No, on the contrary, He leads the multitude astray.'** (13) **Yet no one was speaking openly of Him for fear of the Jews."**

These verses tell us that a debate broke out in Jerusalem during the Feast about whether Jesus was a good man or a bad man. Based on what we have already learned, what side of this debate would the brothers of Jesus aligned themselves with?

Because of their unbelieving heart the brothers of Jesus would have aligned themselves with the group of people saying that Jesus was leading the multitude astray, rather than with the group of people who were saying that Jesus was a good man.

Typically, the "Feast of Booths" was the yearly highlight of each Jewish family. But clearly from the verses that we have reviewed this morning from last week's study, what should have been the highlight of the year for the family of Jesus was rapidly turning into their lowlight.

All of verses that we have just reviewed, in other words, the first thirteen verses of chapter 7 take place at the beginning of the Feast of booths; but now we are ready to move on to the second part of the feast. What is the second part of the feast?

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The second part of the "Feast of Booths" could be entitled, "The *Middle* of the Feast" (John 7:14-36). Look at the very first words of **John 7:14. "But when it was now the midst of the feast Jesus went up into the temple."** The word "**midst**" helps us to chronologically divide the "Feast of Booths" into another part. Everything that we will be examining from **verse 14** through **verse 36** will be taking place in the midst or in the middle of the feast. It is obvious that this segment is quite lengthy and will need to be broken down into a number of even smaller parts for the purpose of our study. How can this section of Scripture that deals with the middle of the "Feast of Booths" be broken down even further?

John 7:14-36 answers *three* different questions. What is the first question?

The first question addressed in John 7:14-36 is "Where did Jesus go to *school*?" This question on the surface might appear to be rather mundane, but it actually is anything but mundane, as we shall see.

Though **John 7:14-24** addresses the question of where Jesus went to school, we unfortunately will not be able to examine all these verses this weekend. This will not however prevent us from discovering a very important truth. What is that important truth?

My hope for our study this weekend is that we will discover how we can discern when a particular teaching is from God or when a particular teaching is not from God. This is my hope for this message this weekend. Considering all the false teaching that we can be exposed to at any given point in time, our understanding of the truth is very important.

So let us return to **verse 14** and read the entire verse. "**But when it was now the midst of the feast Jesus went up into the temple, and began to teach.**" Why did Jesus enter the temple in the midst of the feast? The answer is to teach.

What was He teaching? The passage does not tell us, but clearly His teaching caught the attention of the Jews. Let me read for you the beginning of **verse 15. "The Jews therefore were marveling."**

Why were they marveling? Let us continue to read the verse. "**The Jews therefore were marveling, saying 'How has this man become learned, having never been educated?'"**

How should we understand this surprised expression on the part of the Jews? Were they surprised because Jesus, though untaught, was teaching at a level of competency that far exceeded His training? Or, were they surprised because Jesus, who had no proper education, was inappropriately palming Himself off as one who was in fact well versed in the Scriptures? I believe that the latter of these explanations is the best way to understand their surprised expression.

The surprised expression on the part of the Jews in verse 15 was based on the fact that they did not believe that Christ had the proper *credentials* to teach in the manner that He was teaching.

This is why they were aghast at what He was doing; and their strong feelings of censure, I am sure, was very evident to the people that heard them.

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Let me ask you a question. Would this surprised expression of displeasure have any possibility of resonating with the people that heard it? Of course it could.

The Jewish people at the time of this particular incident very much respected the demanding protocol required of those who aspired to be teachers amongst them and certainly Jesus had not in any way followed that protocol. Therefore, the surprised expression of displeasure by the Jewish leaders concerning Christ's teaching ministry especially in the temple area could very easily have resonated with the Jewish multitude.

How will Jesus respond to this charge on the part of the Jewish authorities? Let us continue reading **John 7:16. "Jesus therefore answered them, and said, 'My teaching is not Mine, but His who sent Me.'" Jesus responded to the accusation of the Jews by telling them that His teachings came from God who sent Him (John 7:16).** By repudiating their charge in this way Jesus, in effect, is telling them, "if you reject me and what I am teaching you, you are in essence not rejecting My teaching but rather you are rejecting the teaching of God Himself."

The Jewish leaders represented Jesus by their surprised response as never having gone to school. In John 7:16, Jesus in essence tells the Jews He went to school in *heaven*.

What an amazing exchange for the Jewish multitude to hear. The Jewish leaders had rejected Jesus credentials as a teacher because He had not received His teachings through a rabbinical school or from some famous Jewish Rabbi. Jesus response was, "though I may not have received my teaching from a rabbinical school or a famous Jewish rabbi, I did receive my teachings from God who sent Me."

This was pretty powerful stuff, but who was right? Was Jesus teaching the very words of God and was fully qualified to do so because He had been sent from God and teaching the words of God; or was He, as the Jewish leaders intimated, totally unqualified to represent Himself as a teacher?

If the Jewish multitude applied the criteria that their leaders seemed to value they would have looked at Christ's lack of academic credentials and quickly rejected the teachings of Christ. Hopefully you can quickly see how this approach is not only misguided but also dangerous, which would have been fully demonstrated in the case at hand.

If this approach of using credentials to discern whether or not a particular persons' teaching is from God or not from God is misguided and dangerous, then what is a better approach in respect to discerning whether or not a teaching has originated from God or not from God?

For many of you here this weekend, who are familiar with the Scriptures, you might quickly answer, "well, the way we can know that if what you are teaching us is true is simply by us checking out what you have said with the rest of the Scriptures and see if it lines up."

If this is your answer, it is an excellent answer. If you are one of those who in fact are committed to doing this, you certainly can be commended, just like the Bereans who were commended in **Acts 17:10-11**.

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Let me read this passage for you. "**And the brethren immediately sent Paul and Silas away by night to Berea; and when they arrived, they went into the synagogue of the Jews. (11) Now these were more noble-minded than those in Thessalonica, for they received the word with great eagerness, examining the Scriptures daily, to see whether these things were so.**"

How were the Bereans protecting themselves from receiving a false teaching or, in other words, a teaching that had not originated with God? They examined the Scriptures to see if it lined up with other Scriptures.

Does this describe you? If it does then you are doing a wonderful thing and certainly this practice will not only help you to embrace teachings that are true but also to protect you from embracing teachings that are not true.

Even though this may be so, if we fail to embrace the teaching of Christ in **John 7:17**, all the Scriptural examination in the world can easily be for naught.

Let me read this verse for you. "**If any man is willing to do His will, he shall know of the teaching, whether it is of God, or whether I speak from Myself.**" Those who want to know whether or not a particular teaching has originated from God must first of all make sure that they are wholly committed and eager to *doing* His will (John 7:17).

Why must this be in place even before we begin to compare Scripture with Scripture? It is because those who are not fully committed to doing the will of God will invariably reject His will as it is revealed in the Scriptures either by totally rejecting it or by twisting it, even if they go through the motions of a so-called examination, which was true of the person who called me about whether or not they could, on the basis of what the Bible taught, get a divorce. They were in the process of going through an examination of what the Bible taught, but their effort was for naught because they failed to appreciate the teaching of Jesus in **John 7:17**.

This is true for each of us here this weekend. So I would challenge you in light of the words of Christ to examine your own heart, knowing if you fail to fully commit yourself to doing the will of God with your whole heart, you will by this choice make it possible for your life to be built on spiritual error and falsehoods rather than on those teachings that originate from God even in spite of whatever effort you expend to examine the Scriptures to see whether a particular teaching is so or not so.

This morning I am taking the role of a teacher, but how will you know whether or not what I am sharing with you has originated from God or has originated from me? In other words, how will you know whether or not what I am teaching you is true or whether what I am teaching to you is false? Certainly you can compare what I am saying with other Scriptures and see if it lines up. This is a wonderful thing to do, but first and foremost we must personally appropriate the teaching of Christ in **John 7:17**.

If people do this, what will happen? If they do, this they will find themselves being drawn by the *grace* of God to the teachings that originate from God and away from those teachings that do not originate from God.

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How is the grace of God actually able to accomplish this? It is through the ministry of the Holy Spirit. When we are wholly and eagerly committed to doing the will of God, it unleashes the Spirit of God within our lives to teach us and to lead us into all truth and therefore away from all error. Of course, those professing believers who are not committed wholly and eagerly to doing the will of God will grieve the Spirit and expose themselves to doctrinal confusion and even doubts about the accuracy of the gospel message.

This exhortation that I have just given you, based on the words of Christ in **John 7:17**, is an exhortation that these Jewish leaders needed to embrace and take to heart. Obviously they had not done this. If they had, they would not have found themselves rejecting the teachings of Christ. In fact, this is the very point that I believe Christ was trying to make for these Jewish leaders when He said what He said in **John 7:17**.

The Jewish leaders had raised the question of His competence as a teacher in John 7:15. He now raises the question of their competence as *listeners* in John 7:17.

The Jewish leaders were communicating, by their surprised response to Christ's teachings in **John 5:15**, that Jesus was incompetent and by inference that His teachings were false. Jesus in **John 5:17** infers that the Jewish leaders were not in any position to evaluate the truthfulness of what He was teaching. They themselves were not committed to doing the will of God, for if they were wholly and eagerly committed to doing the will of God, they would have received His teachings as true.

### CONCLUSION

The person who called the church many years ago and asked to speak to a pastor seemed as if He wanted to know the truth, but there was no way that He could ever discern what the truth really was until He was willing to wholly and eagerly commit Himself to doing the will of God. Because He was more concerned with getting a divorce than He was with doing the will of God, He was unable to see the truth.

I would imagine that in time he found a pastor with the so-called credentials that he was searching for in order to bless his divorce. Did it actually happen? I don't know, but I would guess that it did. If this divorce did in fact take place under the circumstances that he had described for me, I am very confident that this was evil and robbed him and his family of all the blessings that could have been there if He had simply had a heart to embrace the truth when it was revealed to him.

Are *you* wholly and eagerly committed to doing the will of God and therefore in a position to discern whether a particular teaching is from God or not from God?