

Armagh Baptist Church – Sunday 18th October 2009

Jesus at the Feast of Tabernacles

Two Readings: John ch.7:1-36 & 37-53

Introduction

The events of John ch.7 take place in the context of the Feast of Tabernacles in Jerusalem. This Feast is described for us in Lev. 23:33-44 and Numbers 29. It was celebrated from the fifteenth day of the seventh month, and lasted for 8 days in total. The seventh month is equivalent to the month of October for us. It was really a feast of thanksgiving for the vine harvest. Besides being a harvest-festival it was also a joyful commemoration following the Day of Atonement, which was celebrated just 5 days earlier. So the idea of joy after redemption was very evident. During the 8 days of the Feast of Tabernacles a total of seventy bullocks were sacrificed, along with many sheep and goats. The temple-trumpets were blown each day. On the last day of the Feast there was also the special ceremony of the outpouring of water, which was drawn from the Pool of Siloam. This had dual significance in that it *commemorated* God's miraculous provision of water which had come forth out of the rock at Meribah (Ex. 17:1-7), and it also *anticipated* the blessings both for Israel and for the world of the out-pouring of the Spirit. There was the illumination of the inner court of the temple, where the light of the grand candelabra reminded the people of the pillar of fire by night which had guided their ancestors through the desert (Num. 14:14). There was a torch-parade. And most importantly, everywhere in and around Jerusalem, in the streets, the squares, and even on the roofs of the houses little *booths* or tabernacles were erected. These temporary shelters were made from palm branches and provided accommodation in the crowded city for the pilgrims who came from every direction to attend this feast. But most of all they were reminders of the wilderness-wanderings of their ancestors (Lev. 23:43). So that was the Feast of Tabernacles, but the question was...

1. Would Jesus go to the Feast of Tabernacles or not? (vs.1-9)

John ch.7 opens with Jesus carrying on his ministry in and around Galilee. We're told that he was staying away from Jerusalem and Judea on purpose, because the Jews there were waiting to take his life! (Ever since John 5:18). He seems to have been in Galilee, avoiding Jerusalem, for about 6 months: (from John 6:4 Passover = our Easter to John 7:2 Tabernacles = our Harvest). The problem is that it is approaching the time for one of the three great pilgrim feasts, when most respectable Jews would make their journey to the Temple in Jerusalem to celebrate. It was near the time for the Feast of Tabernacles. This was the Jewish Harvest Festival! As I said earlier, it is usually held in the month of October. So we had our Harvest Services last Sunday, and we are looking at the Jewish Harvest Festival here in John ch.7 tonight. So this is very appropriate. We are on schedule!

But the question is, was Jesus on schedule? Because Jesus was doing the Father's Will, Jesus was living to a different timetable than his brothers. They actually laid down a challenge to him in v.3:

'You ought to leave here and go to Judea, so that your disciples (there) may see the miracles you do. No-one who wants to become a public figure acts in secret. Since you are doing these things, show yourself to the world.'

Why did they say such a thing? They were laying down the gauntlet to him. They were basically saying to him: 'Put up, or shut up!' Are you the Messiah or not? You claim to be, and you're able to do all these miracles, but why are you still here in back-water Galilee? Get up there to Jerusalem and prove yourself! Why did they have such an attitude? Well we're told in v.5:

'For even his own brothers did not believe in him.'

It wasn't until after Jesus' death and resurrection that Jesus' brothers believed in him and became part of that first early church prayer meeting in Acts ch.1. Right now, they were a bit fed up with him, so they challenge him to go to the Feast and make himself known – do something convincing – once and for all!

But Jesus simply replied (v.6):

*'The right time for me has not yet come; for you any time is right. The world cannot hate you, but it hates me because I testify that what it does is evil. You go to the Feast. I am **not yet** going up to this Feast, because for me the right time has not yet come.'*

So having said this, he stayed in Galilee.

The time wasn't right for Jesus to arrive publicly into Jerusalem. That would be another 6 months away, when he would ride into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday on the back of a donkey, and the crowds would be waving palm branches, and crying out, '*Hosanna, Hosanna, Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord!*' It wasn't time for that yet. Jesus was working to his Father's timetable, so he waited.

However, after his brothers had left for the Feast, he **did** go up to Jerusalem, but not publicly – instead he went in secret. This allowed him to slip in quietly to Jerusalem unnoticed, so that he could make himself known when He was ready. He was totally in control of the situation. He didn't move a moment too soon. He moved in accordance with His Father's timetable.

(This idea of working to the Father's timetable is evident throughout John's Gospel: See 2:4, 7:30, 8:20 and 13:1).

Nothing could happen to Jesus, until God the Father said so!

And sure enough, Jesus was right. Throughout the seven days that the Feast lasted, the Jews were looking out for him all the time (v.11). They were asking themselves, '*Where is that man?*' They were ready for him, or so they thought - waiting to seize him.

But as Jesus melted in among the crowd on his arrival, I'm sure he found it very interesting to listen in to conversations about Himself! The people were talking about Him! Look at what they were saying (v.12-13):

There was wide-spread whispering going on about him:

Some said, '*Jesus – Oh, he's a good man!*'

Others said, '*No, he's not, he's deceiving the people! He's trouble!*'

But all this whispering was going on behind the scenes and under their breath, because no-one had the guts to come out and talk about him openly. They were all too afraid to say anything about him publicly in case the Jewish leaders took them as followers or supporters of Jesus and arrested them!

This discussion reveals the confusion and unbelief of the people.

- Some were for Him because of His miracles.
- Others opposed Him because He broke the Sabbath laws.
- Some waited to see what their leaders would say or do (v.26),
- And in the end their leaders wanted to kill Him.
- But because they were judging only by appearances (v.24) sadly, they were going astray. This crowd truly was 'harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd.' What they needed was leadership to see that Jesus really was the Messiah, so they could accept him as such, but the Leaders of the Jewish Religion at that time, left a lot to be desired. So Jesus eventually decides to come out into the open:

2. Jesus Begins to Teach Publicly at the Feast (vs.14-36)

We're told in v.14 that it was half way through the Feast of Tabernacles when Jesus decides to go up to the Temple Courts, and there he begins to teach publicly. Half-way through – around Day 4 – would be the time when the largest crowds were present to hear what he was saying to them.

Everybody was amazed at his teaching: '*Where did this man get such learning without having studied?*' (v.15). They just knew there was something special about him. Galilee was the back-water of Israel. No-one learned came out of Galilee. But here was Jesus of Nazareth, the carpenter's son from Galilee confounding them all with his knowledge and insight in the Temple Courts, just as he had done many years earlier as a boy of 12, when he sat asking questions of the Religious leaders away back then. This is now 20 years later, and he's still at it!

I think it is significant that here in John ch.7 no miracle is performed by Jesus, like we have seen in previous chapters. No lives are transformed by Jesus in John ch.7 like we have seen in previous chapters. Those miracles spoke volumes about who Jesus was. The people whose lives were transformed by Jesus, spoke volumes about who he was as well. But here in this chapter, it is

purely the courageous teaching of Jesus which comes to the fore – and the authority by which he spoke. This was yet more evidence that Jesus was who he claimed to be – 'The Christ, the Messiah, the Son of the Living God.'

C.S. Lewis once said that '*Jesus is either a Liar, a Lunatic, or He is Lord.*

In his book *Mere Christianity*, he makes this statement,

"A man who was merely a man and said the sort of things Jesus said would not be a great moral teacher. He would either be a lunatic - on the level with a man who says he is a poached egg - or he would be the devil of hell. You must take your choice.

Either this was, and is, the Son of God, or else a madman or something worse.

You can shut Him up for a fool or you can fall at His feet and call Him Lord and God.

But let us not come with any patronizing nonsense about His being a great human teacher. He has not left that open to us."

The same three conclusions were drawn by people in the crowd that day in Jerusalem:

- Some thought he was a Liar: they said he was deceiving people (v.12)
- Others thought he was a Lunatic: that he was demon-possessed, because he claimed someone was trying to kill him. (v.20)
- But some chose to believe in him that day, because of the power of his preaching, the authority by which he taught. Even the Temple guards who had been sent to arrest him, came back saying: 'No-one ever spoke the way this man does!' (v.46)
- Many in the crowds who had travelled as pilgrims from great distance: put their faith in him, because they came to the conclusion: '*When the Christ comes, will he do more miraculous signs than this man?*' (v.31)
- So many of them began to believe in him, to trust him as Saviour and Lord of their lives.
- So which is it for you: Liar, Lunatic or Lord? What is Jesus to you? What you can't do, is simply ignore him. You must make a response.

So Jesus wasn't afraid to go up to the Feast and to Teach publicly about who he was, and why he had come. He spoke with such authority that everyone had to sit up and take notice, and everyone was faced with the decision that they had to make: Was Jesus a Liar, a Lunatic, or was He going to be their Lord? But tonight I want us to take a closer look at...

3. Jesus Message on the Last and Greatest Day of the Feast (vs.37-53)

In vs.14-27 confusion reigns about Jesus' credentials to be the Messiah.

But in v.28 Jesus cries out publicly at the Feast, '*Yes, you know me, and you know where I am from. I am not here on my own, but he who sent me is true.*

You do not know him, but I know him because I am from him and he sent me.

So Jesus was once again claiming to be God come in the flesh. This gets a reaction in v.30. But notice that it's the people of Jerusalem (v.25) who tried to seize Jesus here, on behalf of the religious authorities. They were trying to make a citizen's arrest of Jesus at this point. They couldn't understand why the religious authorities were letting him preach and teach so publicly. Why didn't they arrest him? Had they come to the conclusion that he was the Messiah? Was that why they were letting him teach freely in public? The stumbling block for these people was that they knew where Jesus had come from. They knew he was Jesus of Nazareth – from Galilee. But they seemed to think that when the Messiah would come, that no-one would know where he had come from! (v.27). Yet further down this chapter, others seemed to know that the Messiah would come from the house and line of David, and come from Bethlehem! (v.42). So the people were totally confused. They were divided because of Jesus. They just needed clear leadership to check it out, and state the case for Jesus' Messiah-ship, but no-one was prepared to make that call. On each occasion they tried to seize him (v.30, v.44), but on each occasion, no-one was able to lay a hand on him. His time had not yet come. When the Pharisees sent Temple Guards to arrest him (v.32) they even came back dumb-struck – they had been taken in by his teaching too! (v.45-49).

So what was it that Jesus was saying, that had such a powerful effect?

In v.37-39 Jesus cries out again on the last and Greatest Day of the Feast. Notice the reaction of the people in vs.40-44. Notice the reaction of the Jewish Leaders in vs.45-53.

One ritual during the Feast of Tabernacles was the pouring out of water in the Temple. This water was drawn from the Pool of Siloam and then publicly poured out in this ceremony. But it was a reminder of how God gave Israel water in the wilderness – miraculously out of the rock. In John ch.6 Jesus claimed to be the Living Bread (See Jn 6:51). In John ch.7 Jesus is claiming to be Living Water (See Jn 7:37-38). For a link between living bread in John 6 and living water in John 7 I'd like you to turn to 1 Corinthians 10:1-4 – 'spiritual food & drink' & 'that rock was Christ!'

I made the case when we looked at John ch.6, where Jesus talks about eating his flesh and drinking his blood that he was talking about spiritual food, not physical. Well here again, Jesus is talking about life-giving spiritual water. Not physical water coming out of a rock in a desert, or out of the Pool of Siloam – but spiritual water coming out of Him: *'That Rock was Christ!'* The life-giving water coming out of Christ, we are told here in Jn 7:39, is a picture of the Holy Spirit!

*'If anyone is thirsty, let him come to me and drink. **Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, streams of living water will flow from within him.'** By this he meant the Spirit, **whom those who believed in Him were later to receive. Up to that time the Spirit had not been given, since Jesus had not yet been glorified.'** (vs.37-39)*

So as we come to Christ, and simply believe in Him as our Saviour and Lord He comes to live within us by His Spirit. It is the Holy Spirit living within us who changes us from the inside out, who makes us a new creature in Christ, who assures us that we have come into the family of God, and that we are truly a child of God. He equips us with spiritual gifts, and he begins to produce the fruit of the Spirit in our lives. That's what it means to be born again from above. That's what it means to be a Christian. It is a total life-changing transforming experience.

The Holy Spirit would not be poured out fully until the Day of Pentecost, which would be after Jesus himself had been glorified through his death, burial, resurrection and ascension to heaven. Only when he was back at the Father's right hand, could the Holy Spirit be given. But we are now in that era: Jesus is back at the Father's right hand; He is interceding for us there; from there He is pouring his grace into our lives day by day to help us live for him. He has given His Holy Spirit to live in the hearts of every believer; to help us to live lives that continue to glorify Him.

Conclusion

John 7 finishes with another reference to Nicodemus – the man who came to meet Jesus by night back in John ch.3. The man Jesus had first talked to about being born again, about being born from above, about being born of the Spirit (John 3:3-8). I wonder is the penny beginning to drop for Nicodemus? Is he beginning to see how all that Jesus has been saying fits together and makes sense? Well, back at the Sanhedrin, whenever the Temple Guards return, without having arrested Jesus, they give their reason for not arresting him: *(John 7:46) 'No-one ever spoke the way this man does.'* The Pharisees sarcastically replied: *'You mean he has deceived you also?' 'Has any of the rulers or of the Pharisees believed in him?'* (Peer pressure) *'No! But this mob that knows nothing of the law – there is a curse on them!'* So Nicodemus at last speaks up for Jesus: *'Nicodemus, who had gone to Jesus earlier and who was one of their own number, asked, 'Does our law condemn a man without first hearing him to find out what he is doing?' They replied, 'Are you from Galilee, too? Look into it, and you will find that a prophet does not come out of Galilee!' – They were wrong, Jonah etc had! They were wrong on many counts. Don't you be wrong as far as Jesus is concerned! Put your trust in Him now. He's not a liar, nor a lunatic: He **is** Lord*

