

## IS THERE ANY WAY TO KNOW DIVINE TRUTH WITH CERTAINTY?

**John 7:14-24** - "About the middle of the feast Jesus went up into the temple and began teaching. [15] The Jews therefore marveled, saying, "How is it that this man has learning, when he has never studied?" [16] So Jesus answered them, "My teaching is not mine, but his who sent me. [17] If anyone's will is to do God's will, he will know whether the teaching is from God or whether I am speaking on my own authority. [18] The one who speaks on his own authority seeks his own glory; but the one who seeks the glory of him who sent him is true, and in him there is no falsehood. [19] Has not Moses given you the law? Yet none of you keeps the law. Why do you seek to kill me?" [20] The crowd answered, "You have a demon! Who is seeking to kill you?" [21] Jesus answered them, "I did one work, and you all marvel at it. [22] Moses gave you circumcision (not that it is from Moses, but from the fathers), and you circumcise a man on the Sabbath. [23] If on the Sabbath a man receives circumcision, so that the law of Moses may not be broken, are you angry with me because on the Sabbath I made a man's whole body well? [24] Do not judge by appearances, but judge with right judgment."

There is a wonderful strangeness in this text. Immediately after telling His own brothers to go on ahead without Him to the feast of Booths in Jerusalem Jesus arrives *mid-point through the celebrations* and not only *shows His face in Jerusalem*, but boldly stands and takes the place of *teacher in the Temple itself* - **John 7:14** - "About the middle of the feast Jesus went up into the temple and began teaching."

What is the meaning of this apparent reversal in Jesus' plans? And the answer to that question lies in Jesus' intention *not* to go up, as His brothers requested, to perform miracles that would "wow" the crowd. No. When He comes to Jerusalem - and this only *six months before His death at the Passover celebrations* - He comes to the Temple. He comes in fulfillment of the *prophet Malachi's description* - "...And the Lord whom you seek will suddenly come to his temple...."(Malachi 3:1).

All of this is in keeping with the *timing of the Father* we studied last week - **John 7:3-8** - "So his brothers said to him, "Leave here and go to Judea, that your disciples also may see the works you are doing. [4] For no one works in secret if he seeks to be known openly. If you do these things, show yourself to the world." [5] For not even his brothers believed in him. [6] Jesus said to them, "*My time has not yet come*, but your time is always here. [7] The world cannot hate you, but it hates me because I testify about it that its works are evil. [8] You go up to the feast. I am not going up to this feast, *for my time has not yet fully come.*"

So *no*, Jesus wasn't coming up with His brothers at the beginning of the feast to perform wonders for the applause of the crowd. But *yes*, He would come at the *right time* to declare Father God's truth in the *Temple*. Jesus came right to the temple itself as the *fulfillment* of all that had been going on in that temple. He came to the very place where the sacrifices for sin were offered. He came to the place where the priests did their work of cleansing and preparation to engage with God. *This* is the kind of faith and understanding Jesus required of the people. They had to see Him as the *fulfillment* of the old covenant, God's final Passover Lamb. He was not just another prophet or divine wonder worker.

It is Jesus' place on center stage in the Temple that shapes everything else in today's text. Jesus' teaching in the Temple is the trigger event for our text. What gives Jesus the right to do what He's doing in the Temple? The people, and especially the religious leaders, want to know. He has none of the *rabbinical training and instruction* (7:15). That's issue number one. And He doesn't seem to take the *law of Moses* seriously enough (7:19-24). That's issue number two.

That sets the stage for the dialogue. Why should *these religious people* - why should *you and I* - give exclusive endorsement to Jesus as the final redemptive revelation and authority from Father God? Or, in the words of our teaching title today, *is Jesus really the only way to know divine redemptive truth with certainty?*

There are some great teaching points in this passage:

1) **NO ONE HAS HEARD JESUS' WORDS RIGHTLY UNTIL GOD IS HEARD TO BE SPEAKING**

**John 7:14-16** - "About the middle of the feast Jesus went up into the temple and began teaching. [15] The Jews therefore marveled, saying, 'How is it that this man has learning, when *he has never studied?*' [16] So Jesus answered them, '*My teaching is not mine, but his who sent me.*'"

Don't rush over these words. Two religious systems are colliding. The Jewish leaders are working from within the system that expects Jesus to fall into the same long line with all the other rabbis and scholars. To them Jesus *continues* that tradition rather than *fulfills* and *completes* it.

This is their whole argument. To *continue* the tradition one gains credentials by learning and then picking up the traditions of *previous* scholars and rabbis. In other words - and this is *very* important - these critics of Jesus bring a pre-determined understanding of what they expect from Him. He is *another* in this valued *chain* of religious leaders. Perhaps the best one of all, but part of the same group nonetheless.

And the offensive teaching of Jesus, *then* and *now*, is He *separates Himself* from any other equals. Jesus stresses His absolute *difference* compared to any other teacher or rabbi. He tells them plainly He *isn't a part of that same chain*. In fact, that whole chain of previous prophets and leaders, *properly understood*, testified to the *uniqueness* of Jesus and His *separation* from the rest of their teachers. He

was the unique One to whom they all pointed.

Now we're in a position to see where this text is taking us. Jesus begins to *define* the nature of genuine belief. He's defining genuine faith. And the first thing we learn is Jesus doesn't accept **admiration of His moral teaching** as equivalent to **genuine belief**.

We know that because these people "*marveled*" at His teaching - "*....The Jews therefore marveled, saying, 'How is it that this man has learning, when he has never studied?'"* There was no denying the "*wow*" factor in Jesus' teaching. He could really hold a crowd. They were all stunned at His wisdom. They found the whole thing beyond explanation.

But Jesus presses for more. He could have amazed the crowd just by listening to His brothers and coming to Jerusalem with a bag full of miracles. But that wasn't what He was after. He was going to die as God's Lamb for their sins in six months and knew it. Did the people sense He was the final and redemptive revelation from Father God?

That was the issue. Jesus wants to know. Did they hear God speaking when Jesus spoke - **John 7:16**- "**So Jesus answered them, 'My teaching is not mine, but his who sent me.'**" No one believes in Jesus in the New Testament sense until he or she separates Him from all other options.

In 1657 **George Hutcheson**, the pastor of a small church in Edinburgh wrote a wonderful, though difficult to read, commentary on John's gospel. Here is his summary statement on **verses 15-16**. Let me read those verses again and then read right on into Hutcheson's comments on them:

**John 7:15-16** - "**The Jews therefore marveled, saying, 'How is it that this man has learning, when he has never studied?'** [16] **So Jesus answered them, 'My teaching is not mine, but his who sent me.'** Hutcheson writes, "*Whatever be the seeming great effects of Christ's doctrine among a people, yet so long as they want genuine faith it will be all to no purpose; for even though they marveled, yet since they believed not, it was, in the best of them, nothing else but stupidity. The least degree of saving faith is beyond all admiration without it.*"

Listen to the talk shows today. Listen to leaders and entertainers and commentators. They think they're posting a Christian endorsement when they talk of Jesus' **teaching** on love or tolerance. They think they advance the **Christian cause** when they talk of Jesus' love for the poor and distressed.

And these **are** vitally important teaching points in the New Testament. But they aren't unique teaching ideals from Jesus Christ. They can be gleaned from any number of moral leaders, philosophers and prophets. You can **include** Jesus' teachings among them. But you don't **need** Jesus to be encouraged to live like this. As our text says, it is never enough, in the mind of Jesus, to "*marvel*" at His words. **Admiration** without **saving faith** has no redemptive power.

## 2) **RECEIVING DIVINE LIGHT FROM THE WORDS OF JESUS CHRIST DOESN'T HAPPEN AUTOMATICALLY JUST BECAUSE HIS TEACHING IS HEARD**

**John 7:17-18** - "**'If anyone's will is to do God's will, he will know** whether the teaching is from God or whether I am speaking on my own authority. [18] **The one who speaks on his own authority seeks his own glory; but the one who seeks the glory of him who sent him is true, and in him there is no falsehood.**"

It takes more than a sharp mind to know spiritual truth. The pursuit of Christ can never be merely an intellectual pursuit. Note carefully the sequence of words in **verse 17** - "**'If anyone's will is to do God's will, he will know....'**" Of course, the mind is **involved**, but the order of our Lord's words is first **willing** and then **knowing**. Not just **thinking** and then **knowing**.

If Jesus is telling the truth - if His words aren't His alone but the words of Father God who sent Him (16) - then His words properly require a **submitted will** that befits the authority of God. They can't be received in a will settled on its own way. To listen to the words of Christ without **treating them** as God's words will result in powerless religion and increased spiritual darkness. All of this while listening to, and perhaps even admiring, Christ!

Remember this as you listen to the world speak of Christ. The world at large is not a **fit discerner** of our life-giving Lord. He never promised to reveal Himself to anyone and everyone. Never measure the validity of **your** trust in Christ by **their** grasp of His true worth.

The heart of Jesus in **proclaiming** God's redemptive truth is the same heart required for **receiving** God's redemptive truth - **John 7:18** - "**The one who speaks on his own authority seeks his own glory; but the one who seeks the glory of him who sent him is true, and in him there is no falsehood.**"

Jesus models the submissive heart. There is no pursuit of His own will. He seeks to nourish His whole being around the Father's glory rather than His own. He only has room for the Father's glory in His pure heart. This is the **kind** of heart (though not in the same **degree**) that hearers must have in order to know the depth of Christ's words.

## 3) **WHY PEOPLE REJECT THE WAY, THE TRUTH, AND THE LIFE**

**John 7:19-24** - "Has not Moses given you the law? Yet none of you keeps the law. Why do you seek to kill me?" [20] The crowd answered, "You have a demon! Who is seeking to kill you?" [21] Jesus answered them, "I did one work, and you all marvel at it. [22] Moses gave you circumcision (not that it is from Moses, but from the fathers), and you circumcise a man on the Sabbath. [23] If on the Sabbath a man receives circumcision, so that the law of Moses may not be broken, are you angry with me because on the Sabbath I made a man's whole body well? [24] Do not judge by appearances, but judge with right judgment."

We know from Jesus' remarks that the people were still upset that He healed the lame man on the Sabbath - **John 7:23** - "If on the Sabbath a man receives circumcision, so that the law of Moses may not be broken, are you angry with me because on the Sabbath I made a man's whole body well?" This miracle took place quite a while ago (**John 5:1-16**) and they're still carrying their anger against Jesus for healing on the Sabbath.

Jesus has two points to make in these verses. I want to look at the *second* point first and then come back to close with the *first*. The second point Jesus makes is they are angry at Him without cause. He no more broke the Sabbath law in healing the lame man than His critics did when they obeyed Moses and circumcised a child if the eighth day fell on the Sabbath - **John 7:22** - "Moses gave you circumcision (not that it is from Moses, but from the fathers), and you circumcise a man on the Sabbath." Jesus hadn't broken the intent of the Sabbath law.

Now back to the *first* of the two points Jesus made. He presses deeper. He exposes their dishonesty in their response to Him. They would like to pretend they are seeking to kill Him (**7:19**) because of their pious religious devotion to the law. But Jesus not too subtly points out they don't even *keep* the law of Moses themselves - **John 7:19** - "Has not Moses given you the law? Yet none of you keeps the law. Why do you seek to kill me?"

Their devotion to the law extends more to Jesus than to themselves. And that's the way Jesus exposes there is something else going on under the surface of their hearts. This is what leads Jesus to caution that they "**Do not judge by appearances, but judge with right judgment**" (**7:24**).

Rejection of Jesus has *another source* than the one these Jewish leaders wear on the surface. Things aren't as they might "*appear*" (**24**) at first glance.

We've seen Jesus expose this root before in this chapter - **John 7:6-7** - "Jesus said to them, "My time has not yet come, but your time is always here. [7] **The world cannot hate you, but it hates me because I testify about it that its works are evil.**" To deal honestly and fruitfully with Jesus always requires levels of *repentance* and *humility*.

So is there a way to know divine truth with certainty? Is there a way to receive more from Christ than good teaching and good ideas? Then and now the answer is yes. But not everyone will receive. Then and now our Lord always deals *only with the core of our beings*. Belief in Jesus that bears fruit must be a *humble* belief that deals honestly with conscience. It must lay aside self-deceit and pride.

That means we constantly have to *review our own motives*. It means we must constantly examine how much of our decision making is influenced by the desire to look good to others rather than to bring glory to God. It means we must quit justifying ourselves in the presence of Jesus' words.

David's prayer, "*Create in me a clean heart, O God!*", never goes away. Keep it the constant cry of your heart.