



For the Week of April 29, 2012

Good Questions, Straight Answers:
who is Jesus?

Life Notes for Missional Communities

Introduction

This week's passage discusses the various attitudes and beliefs people had about Jesus. "Who is he?" is a theme throughout John 7, and it's a discussion that is central to each person's decision to follow Jesus...or not.

The Word: John 7:1-31

After this, Jesus went around in Galilee, purposely staying away from Judea because the Jews there were waiting to take his life. But when the Jewish Feast of Tabernacles was near, Jesus' brothers talked to him.

Jesus' brothers: "You ought to leave here and go to Judea, so that your disciples 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."

For even his own brothers did not believe in him.

Jesus: "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."

Having said this, he stayed in Galilee. However, after his brothers had left for the Feast, he went also, not publicly, but in secret. Now at the Feast the Jews were watching for him and asking this question.

Jews: "Where is that man?"

Among the crowds there was widespread whispering about him.

Some people: "He is a good man."

Other people: "No, he deceives the people."

No one would say anything publicly about him for fear of the Jews.

Not until halfway through the Feast did Jesus go up to the temple courts and begin to teach. The Jews were amazed.

Jews: "How did this man get such learning without having studied?"

Jesus: *"My teaching is not my own. It comes from him who sent me. If anyone chooses to do God's will, he will find out whether my teaching comes from God or whether I speak on my own. He who speaks on his own does so to gain honor for himself, but he who works for the honor of the one who sent him is a man of truth; there is nothing false about him. Has not Moses given you the law? Yet not one of you keeps the law. Why are you trying to kill me?"*

Crowd: *"You are demon-possessed. Who is trying to kill you?"*

Jesus: *"I did one miracle, and you are all astonished. Yet, because Moses gave you circumcision (though actually it did not come from Moses, but from the patriarchs), you circumcise a child on the Sabbath. Now if a child can be circumcised on the Sabbath so that the law of Moses may not be broken, why are you angry with me for healing the whole man on the Sabbath? Stop judging by mere appearances, and make a right judgment."*

Some of the people of Jerusalem: *"Isn't this the man they are trying to kill? Here he is, speaking publicly, and they are not saying a word to him. Have the authorities really concluded that he is the Christ? But we know where this man is from; when the Christ comes, no one will know where he is from."*

Jesus (still teaching in the temple courts): *"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."*

At this they tried to seize him, but no one laid a hand on him, because his time had not yet come. Still, many in the crowd put their faith in him.

Many in the crowd: *"When the Christ comes, will he do more miraculous signs than this man?"*

who is Jesus: a look at the past

To begin our time this week, let's reflect on several Old Testament writings about Jesus that are addressed in the New Testament as well (prophecies). These help us focus on the true identity of Jesus. Journal what was spoken, what was fulfilled and include any questions or thoughts that come to mind.

Genesis 22:17,18

Jeremiah 22:5

Isaiah 7:14

Micah 5:2

Isaiah 11:2

Isaiah 53:1

Zechariah 9:9

Psalms 78:2

Psalms 22:18

Psalms 22:16,17

Galatians 3:16

Luke 3:23,31

Matthew 1:20-23

Matthew 2:1

Matthew 3:16-4:1

John 12:37,38

Matthew 21:6-8

Matthew 13:34,35

Matthew 27:35

John 20:25; John 19:36,37

What do these prophecies tell you about Jesus?

Is the existence of prophecy instrumental in your journey of faith? If so, how or why?

Are some prophecies more significant for you than others? If so, which and why?

who is Jesus: a variety of opinions

This week, Pastor Mark talked with us about the identity of Jesus. As Jesus walked through the various experiences on this earth, people had differing responses to him, and five responses are found in the first half of John 7. (Circle one if it represents how you once felt or believed.)

Jesus was...

an average person...(7:2-10)

a good man...(7:12)

a bad man/deceiver...(7:13-18)

a crazy man/demon possessed...(7:19,20)

the actual Son of God, Savior of the world...(7:21-31)

Read through the verses/passages beside each description and talk about why each was appropriate.

Now think through the grid of the various cultures you come in contact with everyday - work, school, family, athletic club, outdoor clubs, etc.

What do you hear people saying about Jesus now and why?

Think through the grid of other cultures you've read about or come in contact with outside of this country's experience - mission trips, your own travels, books or articles, etc.

What have you read about people's attitudes or heard people discussing about Jesus?

Do you find that you engage conversation or avoid conversation in situations where you don't personally know the individuals involved? Why?

How do you think we can step into other people's cultures/realities with a message that draws conversation rather than ends conversation?

who is Jesus - his words about himself

Jesus: "My teaching is not my own. It comes from him who sent me. If anyone chooses to do God's will, he will find out whether my teaching comes from God or whether I speak on my own. He who speaks on his own does so to gain honor for himself, but he who works for the honor of the one who sent him is a man of truth; there is nothing false about him. Has not Moses given you the law? Yet not one of you keeps the law. Why are you trying to kill me?" (John 7:16-19)

Jesus (still teaching in the temple courts): "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." (John 7:28,29)

Jesus pointed to the Father continually. He told those listening in John 7 to test him and find out if he was speaking the truth - and he gave one important criteria. Was he speaking on behalf of himself or to bring glory to the Father? Time and again throughout John, he gives glory to the Father and to the interworking of Father, Son and Spirit (we'll see this later in John 7:37-39 and John 14-17).

Jesus was all about giving God the glory - pointing to the Father. He was all about NOT taking credit himself or drawing the attention to himself.

In your own words, talk about this distinction - this reference point, this way that Jesus pointed to God the Father rather than himself.

How does this orientation help you in your understanding of who Jesus is?

How does this orientation help you in your understanding of the relationship between God the Father and God the Son?

What/who does your life point to? What or who do you give credit to for your own actions or accomplishments? (Think through your daily language or the testimony you regularly give about yourself.)

How would your life be different if you checked with God before you acted or made decisions?

How would your life be different if you regularly gave the credit to God for your accomplishments?

Is there anything that this discussion can do to strengthen or guide you in some way spiritually right now? If so, please describe.

The real answer about who Jesus is must become personal to us in order to change the trajectory of our lives. We can't just be the observers in the John 7 story and be truly transformed at the same time. So let's discuss who he is and how we've relied upon him and experienced his direct intervention beyond that moment we initially placed our faith in him.

How have you historically, specifically experienced the work of God in your life?

How are you currently, specifically experiencing the work of God in your life?

In what way(s) do you see yourself as God's "sent one?" Was the testimony of Jesus the only one needed for all time or is your story significant to the telling of God's story today?

Try completing this sentence for yourself.

I truly believe that Jesus is who he says he is...and this is how my life reflects my belief.

for missional communities not doing life notes

Spend a few moments at the beginning or ending of your time responding to the following Examen:

What is the easiest thing about engaging people in conversation about Jesus?

What is the most difficult thing about engaging people in conversation about Jesus?

OR

Complete the following sentence: *I truly believe that Jesus is who he says he is...and this is how my life reflects my belief.*

Next Week

To prepare for more discussion in John in the coming weeks, read the last half of John 7 and pages 107-114 in Metzger's *The Gospel of John: When Love Comes to Town*.

Don't forget to email questions you might have on these passages in John to Pastor Mark at markc@mission68.org.

see next page for facilitator suggestions

Facilitator Suggestions

Pastor Mark introduced this weekend's message with a discussion of the Feast of the Booths (also called Feast of the Tabernacles) - one of three festivals all Jewish men are required to attend annually. The family erects a Booth and lives in that structure for 7 days as a reminder of what the Israelites experienced during their wilderness sojourn. The Festival of Booths is a celebration of God's faithfulness during a time of complete dependency.

Let's create such a festival together today - a time of joyful remembering. Think carefully about a time in your life (could be in the past, could be right now) when you were truly aware of your need for God - when you had to fully rely on him.

Journal and/or discuss such a time - how you arrived there and how you experienced God's faithfulness during that time?

As we move ahead, try not to treat this lightly or gloss over this conversation. When we share openly with each other about all that God is doing, we leave encouraged and everyone else leaves encouraged. This was the point of the feasts in the first place - to remember..and in remembering, to gain courage and strength to continue a life of dependency on God. Spend time worshiping God in this way today - reflect on his provision and complete love for you.

Think about this time God truly provided for you. What kind of booth would you erect to celebrate this feast - this complete dependence upon God? What would you build to reenact a period in your life where you daily had to rely on the Lord for provision and guidance? How would the booth look? Where would it be located? What would be inside the booth? What spiritual family members would be inside with you? What would specifically help you "remember" God's faithfulness and your total dependence on him?

Some questions to help with your conversation:

How have you historically, specifically experienced the provision of God in your life?

How do you currently, specifically experience the provision of God in your life?

Where are you asking God to "show up" right now? And how can the group pray for you?

Notes on the building of the Sukkah in the Festival of the Booths

The following notes were put together from various current Jewish sources, for those of you who are interested in this aspect of our faith history.

In honor of the holiday's historical significance, the Israelites are commanded to dwell in temporary shelters to commemorate what their ancestors did in the wilderness. The temporary shelter is referred to as a sukkah (the singular form of the plural word "sukkot," pronounced like Sue-kah). This festival is meant to be a joyful time as the Israelites remember God's provision for 40 years.

"The LORD said to Moses, 'Say to the Israelites: "On the fifteenth day of the seventh month the LORD's Feast of Tabernacles begins, and it lasts for seven days. The first day is a sacred assembly; do no regular work. For seven days present offerings made to the LORD by fire, and on the eighth day hold a sacred assembly and present an offering made to the LORD by fire. It is the closing assembly; do no regular work. (Leviticus 23:33-36)

"So beginning with the fifteenth day of the seventh month, after you have gathered the crops of the land, celebrate the festival to the Lord for seven days; the first day is a day of sabbath rest, and the eighth day also is a day of sabbath rest. On the first day you are to take branches from luxuriant trees—from palms, willows and other leafy trees—and rejoice before the Lord your God for seven days. Celebrate this as a festival to the Lord for seven days each year. This is to be a lasting ordinance for the generations to come; celebrate it in the seventh month. Live in temporary shelters for seven days: All native-born Israelites are to live in such shelters so your descendants will know that I had the Israelites live in temporary shelters when I brought them out of Egypt. I am the Lord your God." (Leviticus 23:39-43)

When we look at current Jewish tradition, we find that the commandment to "dwell" or "live" in a sukkah can officially be fulfilled by eating all meals there; however, the Jewish people are encouraged to spend as much time in the sukkah as possible, even sleeping in it. Why? To reenact the experience...to remember all that God has done...to focus your attention on fully trusting God in a world where we daily deal from our self-sufficiencies.

A sukkah has at least two and a half walls and should be covered with a material that will not blow away in the wind. The "walls" of the sukkah do not have to be solid; canvas covering tied or nailed down is acceptable and quite common in the United States. A sukkah may be any size, as long as it is large enough to dwell in. The roof of the sukkah must be made of something that grew from the ground and was cut off, such as tree branches, corn stalks, bamboo reeds, sticks, or two-by-fours and must be left loose, not tied together or tied down. The roof must be sparse enough that rain can get in and stars can be seen, but not so sparse that more than ten inches is open at any point or that there is more light than shade. The roof is to be put on last. Note: If you don't feel confident in your construction abilities, there are literally online sources for purchasing your ready-to-build sukkah.

It is common practice to decorate the sukkah. Many families hang artwork drawn by the children on the walls and see this festival as truly a family project.