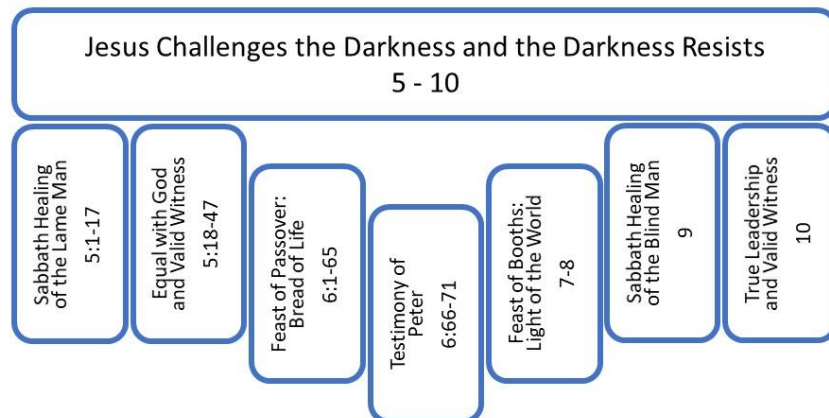


Lesson 14: John 7 The Feast of Booths and Living Water

Introduction



Six months have passed since the large-scale defection of Galilean disciples. We know this because the desertion happened at the time of Passover, and it is now time for the Feast of Booths, which occurs six months later.

Understanding the festival calendar is not essential for understanding the message of John, but it does help. The festivals provide a symbolic context for a number of passages. We experienced this in chapter 6. The feeding of the 5000, the declaration “I am the Bread of Life!”, the sacrificial language “eat my body, drink my blood” that all occurred in the context of Passover. The manna provision from heaven, the lack of faith in that grumbling generation, the blood and flesh of the Passover lamb, that was all background to the dialogue between Jesus and the people. Similarly, we are going to be able to expect connection between the Feast of Booths and the teaching of Jesus in chapters 7 and 8. Let’s talk about the feasts a little bit. I count seven feasts in the Gospel of John by including the wedding feast from chapter 2. I grant that the wedding is not an Old Testament religious feast, but it does provide religious symbolism particular to the New Covenant. So, I think John is quite creative in his ordering of the feasts in his Gospel.

- (1) There are seven with the Wedding Feast. That Feast occurs in chapter 2.
- (2) The First Passover mentioned is also in chapter 2.
- (3) An Undesignated Feast occurs in chapter 5.
- (4) The Second Passover is mentioned in chapter 6.
- (5) The Feast of Booths is the setting for chapters 7 and 8.
- (6) And the Feast of Dedication occurs in chapter 10.
- (7) Finally, we have the Third Passover. It is mentioned at the end of chapter 11. But it provides the background for the whole of the second half of the Gospel, chapters 12-20.

Three references to Sabbath also occur in John (that’s in chapters 5, 9 and 19) and that would give us a total of 10 feasts, which is another symbolically satisfying number.

In organizing the feasts in your head in the calendar, it is helpful to remember the number seven. That is obvious just thinking about the typical Sabbath, which is the seventh day of every week. It is also helpful for remembering the three primary feasts of presence. Presence means that all of the able-bodied Jewish males were required to be present in Jerusalem for the feast. Those are Passover, Weeks and Booths. Passover occurs in the middle of the first month of the year. The Feast of Weeks occurs seven sabbaths and a day after the last sabbath of Passover. That is seven sevens, forty-nine, plus one which is why it is later called Pentecost, Pente being 50 in Greek. And then the Feast of Booths occurs in the seventh month, which is easy to remember if we keep in mind the number of 7.

We have Passover in the first month. Feast of Booths in the seventh month. Pentecost came seven sevens after Passover. The separation of time between Passover and Booths also creates a nice calendar year for Israel because it occurs exactly half a year after Passover. It is also helpful to note that the seventh month is really emphasized in the feast calendar. On the first day of that seventh month is the Feast of Trumpets, on the tenth day is the Day of Atonement, and then we have the Feast of Booth starting on the fifteenth day.

The three main feasts all had connections both to Jewish salvation history and also to God's provision of harvest. On the last day of the Passover Feast, also called the Feast of Unleavened Bread, a first-fruit grain offering from the early barley harvest was offered in the temple. That Jewish first month coincides with our ending of March and beginning of April. Fifty days later at the Feast of Weeks, which is our May or June, a wheat offering was made for the early summer harvest. And then in the seventh month at the Feast of Booths, our September or October, an offering was made to celebrate the late grain harvest and the harvest of grapes and olives.

These festivals reminded the people where provision comes from. And, yes, they worked hard to till the land and to plant the seed and to cultivate grain and fruit, but they also recognized that sun and rain and protection ultimately comes from God. I've been told that there is something about working the land that makes it easier for a person to appreciate that we live in a created world governed by a Creator God, and so in our day, we find that far more atheists live in the city than in the country. Someone might try to argue that city dwellers are better educated academically and so, they are more likely to be right. But that kind of false elitism is going to be rejected by the end of this chapter, by the end of John 7.

Connecting the harvest to celebrations of thanksgiving provided a regular reminder for the Israelites of their dependence on God for life and abundance.

The festivals gave this same reminder of dependence by pointing the people back to essential moments in their salvation history. At Passover they remembered the sacrificial lamb and the Exodus from Egypt. At the Feast of Weeks, they celebrated the coming to Mount Sinai and the receiving of the law that bound them together as a nation. At the Feast of Booths they remembered the wandering in the wilderness, and God's provision of water and bread throughout.

John does use the feasts in his Gospel to give us a sense of time. That is part of what he is doing. We are journeying with Jesus from Passover to Passover to Passover. The years are moving by. And the mention of Booths or the Feast of Dedication reminds us that there is a chronology here, that John is telling us things according to fixed times. This is a real story. It's in real time. But John is doing more with the festivals than just fixing the chronology. His references to various feasts make a point.

In John's lifetime, before he writes this Gospel, the Roman fist had finally come crashing down on the Jews. In 70 AD, Titus destroyed the temple. Hundreds of thousands of Jews died and were enslaved. No one could any longer travel to Jerusalem to celebrate Passover or Weeks or Booths. Even if they could get to Jerusalem, there is no temple, no altar for sacrifice, no holy place. This is a time of dismay and disorientation for Jewish people and for Jewish proselytes, Greeks who had connected themselves to Judaism. Where do we go from here? The temple, so central to Jewish worship and identity is gone. How do we know God? How do we live for God? Without the temple, for the Jews there is no easy answer, not spiritually, not intellectually, not emotionally.

Into this vacuum, John has written his Gospel. He is proclaiming fulfillment. You do not need to go back to the Old Testament. You go forward in Jesus. You want to celebrate the Passover Lamb? Jesus! You want the provision of bread through the wilderness? Jesus! You want flowing water in the desert? Jesus! You want Sabbath rest? Jesus! When you look back, stop longer look back to the Exodus. That's looking too far back. Something new has happened. You look back to the cross on Golgotha. You look back to an empty tomb. The promise to Abraham is fulfilled in something new. "Believe in me and from you will flow rivers of living water!"

This is the message of John 7. There is no need any longer to celebrate the Feast of Booths. Its message is fulfilled in Jesus. We are going to look at three sections to the chapter. A family argument and two debates. The family argument teaches us something about the timing of God. This is John 7:1-13.

The Timing of God (7:1-13)

¹ 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.

There is a disagreement between Jesus and his brothers concerning strategy. The brothers give Jesus unsolicited advice for a next move. They tell him in verse 3-4, "Leave here and go into Judea, so that Your disciples also may see Your works which You are doing. 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."

If we did not know that Jesus was going to rebuke them, we might conclude that this is pretty sound counsel. It is a possible strategy. Jesus' rebuke is maybe a rebuke to us as well to be careful about giving strategic advice too quickly without prayer, without submission to the will of God.

Before telling us about Jesus' response, John first lets us know the brothers do not believe. That helps us consider their advice. It also helps us understand Jesus' response. We also know by this point in the gospel not to take lack of belief as necessarily indicating strong opposition from the brothers against him. There is quite a range of those who do not believe all the way from those who want to kill Jesus to those who claim to believe without believing. The strategy offered by the brothers suggests that they believe in his power to do miracles, and they believe in his potential to become someone of note in the religious world of Israel. We do not know if any of them would call him the Prophet or the Christ. That does not seem likely, yet. But they know he is gifted, and he is able to become a public figure, if only he will make the most of the right opportunities.

So, the advice makes strategic sense. The brothers are aware of the desertion of many Galilean disciples. That is a blow to Jesus' position. But it is not necessarily a critical blow. Galilee is not the place to build a movement anyway. If you want real influence, real power, you are going to have to make a name for yourself in Jerusalem. The Feast of Booths is a prime opportunity. The seventh month is the most important on the calendar. Pilgrims were already in Jerusalem for the Feast of Trumpets and the Day of Atonement. Booths, as one of the three main feasts, requiring the presence of all males, is just going to swell the population of Jerusalem. It is going to swell it to the bursting point. It is the most religious, most joyfully festival time in the calendar year. Jesus needs to make a strong showing. He needs to give confidence to the disciples who remain in Galilee and to the ones who have believed in Judea. At this feast, Jesus can strengthen his base and grow his movement. It is time to seize the moment.

But in giving this advice, the brothers have missed the heart and mind of Jesus. If Jesus wanted numbers, back in chapter 6, he would not have let all those Galilean disciples go without explaining to them the symbolic meaning of eating his flesh and drinking his blood. That episode taught us that the strategy of Jesus is not about gathering numbers and building influence within society's acceptable religious structures. Jesus determines strategy according to goals and timing in harmony with the will of God. He is not pressured into his moves by others. Jesus is depending on God and that determines the underlying values that drive his decision making.

Jesus lets them know they are way off the mark when he responds, "My time is not yet here, but your time is always opportune. The world cannot hate you, but it hates Me because I testify of it, that its deeds are evil. Go up to the feast yourselves; I do not go up to this feast because My time has not yet fully come."

Why is Jesus' time "not yet here"? Because he is waiting for God's timing.

Why is their time "always opportune"? Because they are making strategic decisions according to the values of the world. "The world cannot hate" the brothers because the brothers create strategy in line with what the world finds valuable. The brothers see the spiritual from the lens of worldly religious structures. The world defines for them how to act spiritually.

But the world hates Jesus because Jesus opposes its system of values and its structures. Jesus sees the world through a spiritual lens. Because of that, he sees it rightly.

I was teaching a course for Cru staff in Macedonia just a couple of weeks ago. One of the staff Ilija previously worked as a host for Good Morning Macedonia. Ilija shared with me that when he informed the human resource representative that he was leaving television to work for Leader Impact, a Christian ministry of Cru, she could not believe it. She became hostile. She tried to shame him. She expressed shock that he would leave a respectable, progressive career not to move on, but as she put it "to go back to the Middle Ages, the dark ages". Ilija just left. But when he shared this with me, I immediately thought of Jesus' words here. The world sees through the lens of the world with the values of the world. The brothers cannot give Jesus strategy because they do not understand the values that Jesus is operating on.

Jesus is not so much avoiding a clash with the world as he is managing that clash. We might ask whether Jesus lied to his brothers here. He said he was not going up. But after they left, he did go up. I think it is perfectly valid to read an implied condition into the words of Jesus. "I am not going up to announce myself in the public way you are advising for me." Or, "I am not going up based on a strategy of the world but am waiting on the Lord and will go up if and when he so directs me." That is the implication behind his not going up.

And it appears that God did not want Jesus to avoid public confrontation at the Feast of Booths. He does go up. He does speak publicly. We cannot know for certain why the Father led Jesus to wait and go after the brothers. But we can look forward to chapter 12 and imagine another way of going up. At that future Passover feast, Jesus will go up very publicly. He will ride in on a donkey, crowds are going to gather. And they are going to follow him in, and they are going to shout dangerous political things, like, "Hosanna! Save us! Son of David." That very public stirring up of the crowds precedes Jesus' arrest and his crucifixion.

We can imagine that to be exactly the kind of public entrance the Father wants Jesus to avoid at this time. Jesus will enter Jerusalem privately. Confrontation with the world must be managed according to the timing of the Father, because the Father has more for the Son to accomplish before the time of the cross.

And Jesus does this. He manages the timing according to the will of the Father, but it does not mean avoiding being public or avoiding confronting the crowds. We are going to see at the feast Jesus standing up to teach twice. The teaching is going to be followed by two debates. And the debates are

going to be followed by responses from Jewish leadership. These are two similar cycles, Jesus teaches, people debate, leaders respond, then Jesus teaches, people debate, leaders respond.

The Source of Truth (7:14-36)

We start with the teaching section of the first cycle. This is John 7:14-24.

a. Jesus teaches (7:14-24)

¹⁴ But when it was now the midst of the feast Jesus went up into the temple, and *began to* teach. ¹⁵ The Jews then were astonished, saying, “How has this man become learned, having never been educated?”

¹⁶ So Jesus answered them and said, “My teaching is not Mine, but His who sent Me. ¹⁷ If anyone is willing to do His will, he will know of the teaching, whether it is of God or *whether* I speak from Myself. ¹⁸ He who speaks from himself seeks his own glory; but He who is seeking the glory of the One who sent Him, He is true, and there is no unrighteousness in Him. ¹⁹ Did not Moses give you the Law, and *yet* none of you carries out the Law? Why do you seek to kill Me?”

²⁰ The crowd answered, “You have a demon! Who seeks to kill You?”

²¹ Jesus answered them, “I did one deed, and you all marvel. ²² For this reason Moses has given you circumcision (not because it is from Moses, but from the fathers), and on *the* Sabbath you circumcise a man. ²³ If a man receives circumcision on *the* Sabbath so that the Law of Moses will not be broken, are you angry with Me because I made an entire man well on *the* Sabbath?”

²⁴ Do not judge according to appearance, but judge with righteous judgment.”

John tells us Jesus was teaching, but he does not tell us what Jesus was teaching. He just tells us the crowd marveled at it. They were amazed at the knowledge of Jesus though he had not been trained as a scribe or a priest. Where does he get this knowledge? Jesus takes the opportunity to teach about his teaching. Though the crowd gives him a chance to boast about how he knows so much, Jesus ignores that. He does not tell us how he has attained his knowledge. He does not seek his own glory. Instead Jesus focuses on the source of his knowledge, the source of truth. And this turns into a challenge for his listeners.

If indeed they are educated in the Word of God and know God’s will, then Jesus tells them, “You should be equipped to discern whether I am speaking in accordance with the truth of God or whether I am speaking for myself.” Jesus is seeking the glory of God. He is not seeking to establish a movement just about himself or for glory for himself or influence for himself. But Jesus does not expect the crowd to respond positively to him. He doesn’t expect them to discern that he is in harmony with the Father. He has already judged them that they are not really seeking to follow the Word of God written in the law of Moses. That might be surprising since they are all there to celebrate a feast from the law of Moses. They have a version of the law, a set of regulations, a way of following it, and ceremonies that work in their culture. So, they have this religious setup. But Jesus rejects the idea that their traditional following of Moses is an actual understanding or submission to the Word of God delivered by Moses.

It seems to me that Jesus’ approach here is similar to his approach in Galilee. This is not a conversation of invitation like the one he had with the woman at the well. This is a conversation of confrontation. Jesus does not want to be mistaken as one who fits into their culturally defined Jewish understanding of religion. He does not want to allow those who here to absorb him into their own definitions and values. That is a standard danger with cultural religion. It is either going to reject him or worse mold him to fit the system. Jesus would rather be rejected. He must be if he is to remain true to the Father, true to his own nature. He cannot be taken as merely a good man, a religious teacher, a prophet. He is Lord and Savior.

So, Jesus cuts through any potential compromise, declaring that his teaching is from God and their commitment to Moses only lip service. They have strayed in their hearts and their behavior condemns them.

The crowd does not take that accusation well, so they lob one back at Jesus. It is a bit less sophisticated. They just say, "You have a demon!" And then they deny the possibility that anyone would want to kill Jesus even though it is a common suspicion that killing Jesus is exactly what the religious leaders have in mind.

And Jesus knows what argument has been set up against him. It has been stewing for a while, since chapter 5. He knows the Jewish leaders have not forgotten when he healed the lame man on the Sabbath. And Jesus challenges that accusation, which also provides an opportunity to prove what he has just said, that they do not truly follow Moses. Here is a paraphrase of his teaching here, "Yes. I know what you are saying. I know you want to kill me. And I know you justify your position based on the fact that I healed a man on the Sabbath. But you know the law makes exceptions. The law allows for circumcision on the Sabbath. You allow for that. And yet, you are so sure that healing a man on the Sabbath breaks the law of Moses. You are judge based on your agenda to convict me. This is your hatred to convict me. You are not judging the case with righteous judgment."

Jesus' words on this matter just stir up the debate about him even more. And we move on to John 7:25-31.

b. People debate (7:25-31)

²⁵ So some of the people of Jerusalem were saying, "Is this not the man whom they are seeking to kill?" ²⁶ Look, He is speaking publicly, and they are saying nothing to Him. The rulers do not really know that this is the Christ, do they? ²⁷ However, we know where this man is from; but whenever the Christ may come, no one knows where He is from."

²⁸ Then Jesus cried out in the temple, teaching and saying, "You both know Me and know where I am from; and I have not come of Myself, but He who sent Me is true, whom you do not know. ²⁹ I know Him, because I am from Him, and He sent Me."

³⁰ So they were seeking to seize Him; and no man laid his hand on Him, because His hour had not yet come. ³¹ But many of the crowd believed in Him; and they were saying, "When the Christ comes, He will not perform more signs than those which this man has, will He?"

We might have asked the same question these people begin with. Aren't the leaders wanting to kill this man? How is he getting away with teaching publicly? Why don't they arrest him? That makes them wonder whether there is something to Jesus after all. Is there something hidden the leaders aren't letting on to.

But he can't be the Christ. They know he cannot be. Because they claim to know where he is from. And no one knows where the Christ is from. Their own knowledge is there basis for rejecting Jesus.

And Jesus' responds by affirming what they know and what they don't know. "Yes. You know something. You know I am from Nazareth in Galilee born of a woman named Mary. There is a historical, physical side to me. And you are okay claiming that knowledge. But there is more. And this you do not know. You do not know who sent me. You do not understand where I am really from. You do not know me. They are satisfied with the little they know about Jesus and it is enough for them not to seek more.

Aware of this debate among the crowd, Jewish leaders respond. This is John 7:32-36.

c. Leaders respond (7:32-36)

³² The Pharisees heard the crowd muttering these things about Him, and the chief priests and the Pharisees sent officers to seize Him.

³³ Therefore Jesus said, "For a little while longer I am with you, then I go to Him who sent Me.

³⁴ You will seek Me, and will not find Me; and where I am, you cannot come."

³⁵ The Jews then said to one another, "Where does this man intend to go that we will not find Him? He is not intending to go to the Dispersion among the Greeks, and teach the Greeks, is He? ³⁶ What is this statement that He said, 'You will seek Me, and will not find Me; and where I am, you cannot come?'"

Officials are sent to arrest Jesus. The chief priests are the establishment. They are of the party of the Sadducees. They hold the traditional ways of authority. They hold to religious structures that give them power. And Jesus is a threat to that position. They are stewards. And they do not want to give that stewardship up to some kind of king like Jesus. The Pharisees are a more grass roots movement made up of all levels of society. They do not control the council of the Sanhedrin, but Pharisees do sit on the council and they have considerable moral influence. They keep the law. They are zealous for God and for morality. But Jesus challenges their legalism. Jesus sees through to their heart. And so, he is a threat to them as well. Normally, the Sadducees and Pharisees would be political opponents. But here they unite together against Jesus. So, the Pharisees and the chief priests together sent officers to seize him. Because he is a threat.

Jesus declares, "For a little while longer I am with you, then I go to Him who sent Me. ³⁴ You will seek Me, and will not find Me; and where I am, you cannot come." The crowd cannot understand what he is saying. And as has constantly happened, Jesus speaks about heavenly or spiritual truth, but the people can only interpret it according to the physical. Where is he going? It is not in their mind at all that he is talking about heaven. Is he going to the dispersed Jews who live among the peoples of the Roman and Persian empires? Is that where he is going? Is he leaving Israel, going on a missionary journey?

The wondering of the crowd indicates they do not really know what they claimed to know. They claim to know where Jesus is from. But they only know half the story. Their knowledge is limited. They do not know that he is going back to the Father and that if they believe in him, he will prepare a place for them. They don't get it. They know without knowing.

So, Jesus, says, "You will seek me..." Remember when he says that in the Gospel of Matthew? "If you seek", what comes next? If you seek... "You will find." But not so here. The opposite here. If you seek you will not find, and you cannot come. Because the seeking here is not going to be done with a heart for God, a heart humbled and submitted to the teaching of Jesus. They will seek blindly. They will seek only with the eyes of the world and so they can't ever find him. And they can't ever join him where he is going.

Jesus words are truth because they come from the Father just as the Word given by Moses comes from the Father. The Father is the source, the source of truth. And both the revealed word of Old Testament Scripture and the revealed word of the teaching of Jesus come from the Father. So, the person who truly understands one or the other, they will recognize the two as harmonious. Jesus does not come to overturn Moses. Jesus comes to fulfill Moses.

That is the first cycle of Jesus teaching, the people debating, leaders responding. Now, we come at the end of chapter 7 to a second cycle. Again, Jesus teaches, the people debate, the leaders respond. In that first cycle we focused on the source of truth. In this second cycle we are going to focus on the source of life.

The Source of Life (7:37-52)

But before we start on the second cycle, let's take a moment to investigate a little more what happens at the Feast of Booths in the time of Jesus. We take our basic understanding of the Feast of Booths from Leviticus 23 and Deuteronomy 16. But there are two other prominent mentions in the Old Testament that influenced how Jews of Jesus' day understood the Feast. It influences the symbolism. These are Nehemiah 8 and Zechariah 14.

Nehemiah 8 tells about the priest Ezra preaching to the Jewish remnant returned from Babylon at the time of the Feast of Booths. The Law is read, and the people experience conviction, probably both for their own sins and the sins of their ancestors. And they begin to weep. But Ezra tells them to enjoy the Feast, "Go, eat of the fat, drink of the sweet, and send portions to him who has nothing prepared; for this day is holy to our Lord. Do not be grieved, for the joy of the LORD is your strength...They celebrated the feast seven days, and on the eighth day there was a solemn assembly according to the ordinance (8:10, 18)."

The whole of Nehemiah chapter 9, the following chapter, is a Psalm of confession and praise. And it confesses the sins of Israel from Abraham to the Exile and praises God according to his name, “gracious and compassionate, slow to anger, abounding in lovingkindness.” This Psalm in Nehemiah 9 was likely read at future celebrations of the Feast of Booths to bring to mind this revival with Ezra. The Psalm expresses the heart of the people after that much earlier Feast of Booths. And it was a heart of conviction. And it was a heart of listening to the word God. It was the heart response Jesus desired but it is not the heart response he saw of these people at this Feast of Booths.

The second prominent reference to the Feast of Booths in the Old Covenant is found in Zechariah 14. It was also typical to read this passage at the celebration. The latter half of Zechariah’s prophecy is very much looking forward to the future day of the Lord and emphasizes the Messiah, the Shepherd King. And we get all these Messianic prophecies in this part of Zechariah.

In 9:9, “Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion! Shout *in triumph*, O daughter of Jerusalem! Behold, your king is coming to you; He is just and endowed with salvation, Humble, and mounted on a donkey, Even on a colt, the foal of a donkey.”

Then in Zechariah 11:13, “The Lord said to me, ‘Throw it to the potter, *that* magnificent price at which I was valued by them.’ So I took the thirty *shekels* of silver and threw them to the potter in the house of the Lord.”

In 12:10 “I will pour out on the house of David and on the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the Spirit of grace and of supplication, so that they will look on Me whom they have pierced;”

And in 13:7 “Strike the Shepherd that the sheep may be scattered; and I will turn my hand against the little ones.”

Then in the final chapter we get this reference in 14:7–9 about water and light on the last day,

“⁷For it will be a unique day which is known to the Lord, neither day nor night, but it will come about that at evening time there will be light. ⁸ And in that day living waters will flow out of Jerusalem, half of them toward the eastern sea and the other half toward the western sea; it will be in summer as well as in winter. ⁹ And the Lord will be king over all the earth; in that day the Lord will be *the only* one, and His name *the only* one.”

Finally, we get a surprising vision of the Feast of Booths on the last day, which identifies the King with Yahweh and states an expectation that all peoples attend this Feast, both Jew and Gentiles.

This is Zechariah 14:16-17,

“¹⁶ Then it will come about that any who are left of all the nations that went against Jerusalem will go up from year to year to worship the King, the LORD of hosts, and to celebrate the Feast of Booths. ¹⁷ And it will be that whichever of the families of the earth does not go up to Jerusalem to worship the King, the Lord of hosts, there will be no rain on them.”

So, we get this emphasis on Messiah and this emphasis on the time when there is no darkness, only light. And there is water streaming out of Jerusalem. These Old Testament passages, this from Nehemiah and Zechariah together with the original ones from Deuteronomy and Levitics, led the Jews in their development of the celebration. These four elements are reported in the Mishna, the official Rabbinic commentary on the Torah.

1) Booths

As we have already noted, the Israelites built booths in which they ate and slept for seven days. It was a lot of fun. It was like camping out in the backyard. Booths were built in the temple courts as well as in public and private areas. And the booths encouraged Israelites to imagine the experience of Israel in the wilderness.

2) Celebration

The celebrations included psalms and flute-playing and trumpet sounds and sacrifices, dancing and processions. In morning procession, worshippers carried a citrus fruit in the left hand and a bunch of twigs tied around a palm branch in the right hand to celebrate symbolically God’s provision.

3) Water

Each day water was drawn from the pool of Siloam and taken in procession to the temple and poured out there in a bowl near the altar as an offering to God.

4) Light

Four enormous candelabra were set up in the court of women in the evening of the first day of the feast. And when these were illuminated, the rabbis say, "there was not a court in Jerusalem that did not reflect the light." A torch dance and music performed by Levites accompanied the illumination in the evening.

So, with this background, we are now ready to consider the impact of Jesus' words when he stands up as second time to teach in the temple court. This is John 7:37-39.

a. Jesus teaches (7:37-39)

³⁷ Now on the last day, the great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried out, saying, "If anyone is thirsty, let him come to Me and drink. ³⁸ He who believes in Me, as the Scripture said, 'From his innermost being will flow rivers of living water.' "

³⁹ But this He spoke of the Spirit, whom those who believed in Him were to receive; for the Spirit was not yet given, because Jesus was not yet glorified.

We can't be certain whether Jesus stood up on the seventh day of the Feast or on the special Sabbath that occurred on the eighth day right after the Feast. Either way, we can imagine the power of his words at the end of this Feast. For seven days the high priest had gone to the pool of Siloam and filled a golden pitcher with water. He then led a procession back to the temple. Trumpets were sounded as he entered the courts. The priests marched around the altar as the choir sang the Hallel, that's Psalms 113-118. At the close of the last Psalm, the pilgrims shook the twigs they had in one hand and raised the citrus fruit they had in the other hand as an expression of thanksgiving to Yahweh. And the water was poured from the golden pitcher and it was an offering to God, symbolizing God's provision in the desert and Lord's pouring out of the Spirit in the last days.

This ceremony took place every morning for seven days. Every morning the Priest returned to the pool for water and carried the water to the temple. And now, Jesus stands up in the temple on the last day, and he cries out, "If anyone is thirsty, let him come to Me and drink. He who believes in Me, as the Scripture said, 'From his innermost being will flow rivers of living water.'"

It is an amazing proclamation. Just as Jesus had said in his one-on-one with the Samaritan woman, now, he proclaims to the gathered masses in the temple. There is no more going back to the pool for water time after time, year after year. "Believe in me and from you will flow rivers of living water. I am the source of living water."

Jesus is promising a kind of life that has never been experienced by human beings. Old Testament saints knew something of the Spirit and the joy of the Lord. But this, this is something new. None of the disciples had yet experienced it. As John says, the pouring out of the Holy Spirit will not happen until after the glorification of Jesus, after the cross, the resurrection and the ascension.

Jesus is speaking ahead about a New Covenant reality. And he is connecting it to temple language. The flowing river in Zechariah does not come out of a person. The river flows from Jerusalem. And in Ezekiel he says it is a river flowing out of the temple. In the New Covenant, each individual believer will be a temple indwelt by the Holy Spirit.

Jesus just foreshadows this truth here. He is going to come back to it in a private conversation with his disciples in chapters 14-16. The people recognize that he has spoken with authority. But they do not understand who he is. And they do not understand what he is really saying. And the debate begins again. Let's read 7:40-44.

b. People debate (7:40-44)

⁴⁰ Some of the people therefore, when they heard these words, were saying, "This certainly is the Prophet." ⁴¹ Others were saying, "This is the Christ." Still others were saying, "Surely the Christ is not going to come from Galilee, is He?" ⁴² Has not the Scripture said that the Christ comes from the descendants of David, and from Bethlehem, the village where David was?" ⁴³ So a division occurred in the crowd because of Him. ⁴⁴ Some of them wanted to seize Him, but no one laid hands on Him.

The people continue the debate begun earlier in the Feast. Who is this Jesus? Instead of saying they do not know where the Christ will come from, this time someone remembers he ought to come from Bethlehem. And they are divided. They can't agree. And even though some want to lay hands on him they do not because God is in control of that. And again, the leaders respond. This is 7:45-52.

c. Leaders respond (7:45-52)

⁴⁵ The officers then came to the chief priests and Pharisees, and they said to them, "Why did you not bring Him?" ⁴⁶ The officers answered, "Never has a man spoken the way this man speaks." ⁴⁷ The Pharisees then answered them, "You have not also been led astray, have you?" ⁴⁸ No one of the rulers or Pharisees has believed in Him, has he? ⁴⁹ But this crowd which does not know the Law is accursed." ⁵⁰ Nicodemus (he who came to Him before, being one of them) said to them, ⁵¹ "Our Law does not judge a man unless it first hears from him and knows what he is doing, does it?" ⁵² They answered him, "You are not also from Galilee, are you? Search, and see that no prophet arises out of Galilee."

Here we finally get a human reason for why Jesus was not arrested. From the human perspective of the officers, it is because Jesus spoke in a way that no one speaks. They became unsure of themselves. There was something about the authority in his voice, something about his presence.

But we see the elitism of the Pharisees in their response. "Who is this crowd to understand any of these things? This crowd, they are accursed. They are stupid. They don't know. Who are men like this Peter or John or Matthew, fishermen, tax collectors, who are they to make any proclamation about the Christ? What is a Samaritan woman or Martha or a blind man? They are uneducated. What does it matter what they say? We are educated. We are the religious class. We are the ones who know."

But we keep being reminded that education is not the key to spiritual sight. Knowing the Word of God is certainly important. But to understand the Word, something must also happen in the heart. God must do a work there in the human soul. And when he does, the common man or woman may see much more clearly with greater perception than the most highly educated or the most privileged or the most powerful.

And we see from John's report a problem with the heart of the Pharisees. Nicodemus, who by the way it is finally nice hear from again, makes a rational suggestion about procedure which is fully in line with the law. "Our Law does not judge a man unless it first hears from him and knows what he is doing, does it?" And instead of saying, "Good point." Or giving an opposing reason of law, the other members of the council, they just simply attack Nicodemus personally because the problem is not in their mind. The problem is in their heart.

They answered Nicodemus, "You are not also from Galilee, are you? Search, and see that no prophet arises out of Galilee." This problem in their heart, this antagonism against Jesus, the desire for the darkness to shut him down, blinds their ability or even desire to think. I mean really, "does not prophet arise out of Galilee"? Well, what about Jonah or Nahum? They are both from Galilee. And they made it into the Bible, so I guess they count. But maybe they mean the Prophet, the one who will be like Moses. He does not arrive out of Galilee. But that is overstating, because nowhere are we told where that Prophet is going to come from. But, of course, they would presume that he must come from Jerusalem, from Judea. They can't imagine anybody of worth or influence coming from Galilee.

And they don't even want to talk about Jesus being the Christ. They reject that he is the Prophet - no prophet from Galilee. But they don't even want to think about Isaiah's words in Isaiah 9 when he talks about Galilee and he says, "The people who walk in darkness are going to see a great light...a child will be born, a son given, and his name will be Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Eternal Father, Prince of Peace (Isaiah 9:2, 6)." If they would investigate a minimal amount, they could resolve the problem of the Messiah growing up in Galilee. It is pretty simple. He wasn't born in Galilee. He was born in Bethlehem, the city of David. And then he moved to Galilee and grew up there. But why search further? Why? They have already made up their minds about Jesus. They already know. And because they claim to already know, they cannot come to know. The knowledge that is available to simpler, less educated, more humble people, they can't access.

Jesus stood up in the temple speaking words of truth and exhorting the people to bring their hearts in line with the teaching of Moses. He also stood up promising the Holy Spirit to everybody who believes in him. The crowd and their leaders, they claim to know who Jesus is. But they deny the word. They deny the Spirit. They know without truly knowing. The way to know Jesus is to humbly receive the Word of God and trust him to work in our hearts by his Spirit to open our eyes so that we can see. Those who seek in that way, find. And the result is life. Life flowing in us, life flowing through us.

If anyone is thirsty, let him come to Jesus and drink. He who believes in him, as the Scripture said, "From his innermost being will flow rivers of living water."

Reflection questions

1. Read John 7:1-13. What stands out to you as interesting, important, strange or confusing? What are some questions that come to mind?
2. How do you understand in your own life the experience of coming up with your own strategy as the brothers did versus acting in trust on God's leading, according to God's values? What stands out in the text concerning the brothers and concerning Jesus that might help you make the distinction in your own life?
3. Read John 7:14-36. What stands out to you as interesting, important, strange or confusing? What are some questions that come to mind?
4. How do the Jews and the leaders of the Jews reflect this same principle of trusting in their own understanding on in the values of the world as the brothers had? What assumptions do they make?
5. How does Jesus continue to model guidance and action based on the guidance and values of God?
6. Read John 7:37-52. What stands out to you as interesting, important, strange or confusing? What are some questions that come to mind?
7. Imagine the difference between those who just heard Jesus' words and those who really heard and believed Jesus' words when he made the proclamation of 7:37-38? What might the thoughts or feelings been like for different people in the crowd?