

The Last Day of the Feast - Chapter 7:1-53

1After this, Jesus went around in Galilee, purposely staying away from Judea because the Jews there were waiting to take his life. 2But when the Jewish Feast of Tabernacles was near, 3Jesus' brothers said to him, "You ought to leave here and go to Judea, so that your disciples may see the miracles you do. 4No one who wants to become a public figure acts in secret. Since you are doing these things, show yourself to the world." 5For even his own brothers did not believe in him.

6Therefore Jesus told them, "The right time for me has not yet come; for you any time is right. 7The world cannot hate you, but it hates me because I testify that what it does is evil. 8You go to the Feast. I am not yet going up to this Feast, because for me the right time has not yet come." 9Having said this, he stayed in Galilee.

10However, after his brothers had left for the Feast, he went also, not publicly, but in secret. 11Now at the Feast the Jews were watching for him and asking, "Where is that man?"

12Among the crowds there was widespread whispering about him. Some said, "He is a good man." Others replied, "No, he deceives the people." 13But no one would say anything publicly about him for fear of the Jews.

Jesus Teaches at the Feast

14Not until halfway through the Feast did Jesus go up to the temple courts and begin to teach. 15The Jews were amazed and asked, "How did this man get such learning without having studied?"

16Jesus answered, "My teaching is not my own. It comes from him who sent me. 17If anyone chooses to do God's will, he will find out whether my teaching comes from God or whether I speak on my own. 18He 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. 19Has not Moses given you the law? Yet not one of you keeps the law. Why are you trying to kill me?"

20"You are demon-possessed," the crowd answered. "Who is trying to kill you?"

21Jesus said to them, "I did one miracle, and you are all astonished. 22Yet, because Moses gave you circumcision (though actually it did not come from Moses, but from the patriarchs), you circumcise a child on the Sabbath. 23Now 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? 24Stop judging by mere appearances, and make a right judgment."

Is Jesus the Christ?

25At that point some of the people of Jerusalem began to ask, "Isn't this the man they are trying to kill?"

26Here he is, speaking publicly, and they are not saying a word to him. Have the authorities really concluded that he is the Christ? 27But we know where this man is from; when the Christ comes, no one will know where he is from."

28Then Jesus, still teaching in the temple courts, cried out, "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, 29but I know him because I am from him and he sent me."

30At this they tried to seize him, but no one laid a hand on him, because his time had not yet come. 31Still, many in the crowd put their faith in him. They said, "When the Christ comes, will he do more miraculous signs than this man?"

32The Pharisees heard the crowd whispering such things about him. Then the chief priests and the Pharisees sent temple guards to arrest him.

33Jesus said, "I am with you for only a short time, and then I go to the one who sent me. 34You will look for me, but you will not find me; and where I am, you cannot come."

35The Jews said to one another, "Where does this man intend to go that we cannot find him? Will he go where our people live scattered among the Greeks, and teach the Greeks? 36What did he mean when he said, 'You will look for me, but you will not find me,' and 'Where I am, you cannot come'?"

37On the last and greatest day of the Feast, Jesus stood and said in a loud voice, "If anyone is thirsty, let him come to me and drink. 38Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, streams of living water will flow from within him." 39By 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.

40On hearing his words, some of the people said, "Surely this man is the Prophet."

41Others said, "He is the Christ."

Still others asked, "How can the Christ come from Galilee? 42Does not the Scripture say that the Christ will come from David's family and from Bethlehem, the town where David lived?" 43Thus the people were divided because of Jesus. 44Some wanted to seize him, but no one laid a hand on him.

Unbelief of the Jewish Leaders

45Finally the temple guards went back to the chief priests and Pharisees, who asked them, "Why didn't you bring him in?"

46"No one ever spoke the way this man does," the guards declared.

47"You mean he has deceived you also?" the Pharisees retorted. 48"Has any of the rulers or of the Pharisees believed in him? 49No! But this mob that knows nothing of the law—there is a curse on them."

50Nicodemus, who had gone to Jesus earlier and who was one of their own number, asked, 51"Does our law condemn anyone without first hearing him to find out what he is doing?"

52They replied, "Are you from Galilee, too? Look into it, and you will find that a prophet^e does not come out of Galilee."

((The earliest and most reliable manuscripts and other ancient witnesses do not have John 7:53-8:11.))

53Then each went to his own home.

After this Jesus went about in Galilee; he would not go about in Judea, because the Jews sought to kill him. Now the Jews' feast of Tabernacles was at hand. So his brothers said to him, "Leave here and go to Judea, that your disciples may see the works you are doing. For no man works in secret if he seeks to be known openly. If you do these things, show yourself to the world." For even his brothers did not believe in him. {John 7:1-5 RSV}

This event in John's Gospel occurred in the fall of the year, six months after the feeding of the five thousand, and the great discourse on the "bread of life" that our Lord gave in the synagogue at Capernaum.

John does not cover any of the events that occurred during that time, but they are detailed in the gospels of Matthew, Mark and Luke.

The closing words of chapter six clearly show that a turning point has occurred in the ministry of Jesus.

Many of the great multitudes -- even many of his own disciples who followed him everywhere he went -- have now drawn back and ceased to follow him. In the opening words of chapter seven, John declares that there is a hint of murder in the air. Our Lord is aware of growing hostility against him and that the Jews in Judea are seeking a way to kill him.

The Feast of Tabernacles was now at hand. This great feast of Israel occurred in early October. Originally it was seven days in length, but later one more day was added (called in this chapter "the great day of the feast"). During this time the inhabitants of Jerusalem built booths out of tree limbs and boughs which they thatched over, and families actually moved out of their houses and lived in them. This was to remind them that for forty years they wandered as pilgrims in the wilderness and lived in tents.

When this feast drew near the four brothers of Jesus came to him. One of the gospels tells us their names: James and Jude (who, after they came to faith, were to write two of the letters of the New Testament), and Joses and Simon. (Jesus also had sisters, but their names are not given in the New Testament.) These four brothers came as a kind of self-appointed Political Action Committee, giving advice to Jesus.

First, they told him, in effect, "You need a larger arena. Galilee is too small for you. Why stay here in the sticks? You need to get down to Judea, to Jerusalem. That's the capital, the heart of the country."

"Furthermore," they advised Jesus, "Your Judean disciples need to see you again. Their faith needs to be supported and reinforced by witnessing miracles like the ones you have been doing up here."

Remember that John's gospel opens with Jesus' ministry in Judea. There he won a great multitude of disciples. Some of them, of course, followed him to Galilee, but it is likely that a great many did not have any contact with him for months. Thus Jesus' brothers suggest that he needs to reinforce those ties and show them his powers.

Thirdly, they suggested that his game plan was quite unrealistic. They said, "No man works in secret if he seeks to be known openly." By that they meant, "If you want to be recognized as the Messiah, you have got to move out into the open where people can see what you are doing. It's a mistake to work in an obscure corner of the nation like Galilee. You need to change your plan if you want to reach the nation."

Finally, they suggested that his gifts were being wasted: "If you do these things, show yourself to the world." Obviously they could not deny the miraculous powers he possessed. Thus they told him, "Since you can do these things you can't hide them here in Galilee. You've got to show this to the whole world."

But there is one missing element, which John records in Verse 5: "For even his brothers did not believe in him." If you had asked these men, "Is Jesus a great brother to you?" they would have said, "Yes, he is. We love him, although we never can quite understand him. But he is always compassionate, merciful, kind and trustworthy. He is a great brother." And if you had asked them, "Did Jesus have unusual powers?" they would have said, "We can't deny his mysterious abilities to do remarkable things. He does have great powers." But if you had asked them, "Do you believe he is the promised Messiah?" they would have had to say, "No, we don't. We can't accept that. It's impossible to believe that this man whom we grew up with -- we slept in the same bedroom with him, we went to school with him, we did all the things boys do together -- that this is the one the Scriptures are talking about. We can't believe that."

That is why his brothers argued the way they did. If they had accepted that he was the Messiah, it would have changed everything. They believed that he was but one of them -- a Jewish believer -- but they did not see him as anything more.

His brothers did not see Jesus as any different than themselves. While his miraculous powers must have amazed and astonished them, and they could not figure him out, yet they did not accept his claims to be the Messiah. That is the meaning of these words, "his brothers did not believe in him."

Had they accepted that, they would have realized that God had already outlined a complete program of how the Messiah was going to achieve his objectives. They could have read it in Isaiah and in other prophets. All through the Old Testament there was predicted a carefully outlined program, including suffering and death that the Messiah had to follow. If they had read that they would never have come up with the advice which they offered Jesus.

Like Jesus' brothers, we sometimes think that we have to utilize all the busy approaches of the world. We have difficulty understanding that God has already told the church how to work and has outlined those directions plainly in the Scriptures: To discover, each one, the spiritual gifts God has given us, to utilize the spiritual resources that are provided to us in the presence of Jesus himself in our hearts by the Spirit, and then to do what is right before us in our neighborhoods, in our homes, in our families, wherever we are. That is the way the church is to accomplish its work. We sometimes think that we must organize great programs, with tremendous publicity campaigns, etc. Thus we fall into the same trap as these brothers of Jesus.

In response, Jesus describes the difference between them and him. This is really the difference between God's way and man's ways:

"My time has not yet come, but your time is always here. The world cannot hate you, but it hates me because I testify of it that its works are evil. Go to the feast yourselves; I am not going up to this feast, for my time has not yet fully come." So saying, he remained in Galilee. {John 7:6-9 RSV}

In the words, "My time is not yet here, but your time is always here," Jesus means that it was not yet the appointed hour for him to give himself as the Messiah for the sins of the nation.

The Feast of Tabernacles was the wrong feast. He is saying, in effect, to his brothers, "You're asking me to go up to the Feast of Tabernacles and make it known to everybody that I am the Messiah by the appointed path that God has chosen, but if I did that it would be at the wrong time."

Jesus understood the Scriptures. He knew that God had appointed, not only a pathway for the Messiah to follow, but the very program and time in which the events would occur. He knew that he would not be offered at the Feast of Tabernacles, but at the Feast of Passover.

The feast of Tabernacles is in October, while Passover is in March or April, thus there were six months left before his time was to come. He knew the ceremony in the book of Exodus of the offering of a lamb and sprinkling its blood over the doorposts so that the Angel of Death would pass over the houses of Israelites and spare them from the judgment of God, was picturing that event in which he would be the central character.

This is why John the Baptist's first words when he saw Jesus coming toward him were, "Behold, the Lamb of God that takes away the sin of the world," {John 1:29}. John and Jesus both understood the program but the brothers of Jesus did not. It must have been a heartache to Jesus that his own brothers did not understand and did not believe in him. There is nothing more hurtful than to be misunderstood by those closest to you, and yet this is what our Lord had to live with all the time.

When he said, "But your time is always here," he meant that if his brothers went up to the feast they would only be fulfilling what everybody expected of them. They would be acting as normal religious Jews, fulfilling a religious duty which would not irritate anybody, raise any questions, or challenge any beliefs. Therefore, they could act without fear of arousing antagonism or opposition. That is why he says, "'The world cannot hate you' -- because you are living according to the way it thinks; you are not raising any questions; you are not challenging anything; 'but it hates me,' because when I speak I expose the hearts of men; I call evil by the right names; I speak the truth that causes people to wince and they don't like that. They hate me because I tell them the truth."

Thus he says to his brothers, "You go. I'm staying awhile."

Then we read in verse 10:

But after his brothers had gone up to the feast, then he also went up, not publicly but in private. {John 7:10 RSV}

Now we learn why Jesus did not want to go: He did not want to take his disciples or his brothers to the feast because that would have attracted attention to him, so he sent his brothers on ahead (and probably with them his disciples, because they seem to show up later on in Jerusalem). But he himself went up alone, incognito, as it were, so as not to draw attention to himself.

He found Jerusalem awash with rumors about him. In the intervening months he had become the sensation of the nation. Reports of his great miracles had filtered down to Jerusalem and everybody was talking about him, as John describes:

The Jews were looking for him at the feast, and saying, "Where is he?" And there was much muttering about him among the people. While some said, "He is a good man," others said, "No, he is leading the people astray." Yet for fear of the Jews no one spoke openly of him. {John 7:11-13 RSV}

Those words capture the atmosphere of the feast. The crowd is polarized.

There were those who said of him, "He is a good man.' Why, he healed my Aunt. He opened the eyes of a blind man that I knew. He goes about doing these wonderful things, restoring the deaf, making the lame to walk, saying marvelous words and explaining life to us. Look at all the great things he has done. He is a good man."

But others said, "That is not the whole story. Have you heard what the leaders are saying about him? He teaches men to break the Law of Moses by violating the Sabbath. Do you think that is a good man? We are warned in the Scriptures that if a man doesn't follow what the Law says, don't believe him." Thus they spread the word that he was a deceiver. Yet no one talked openly. The Jewish leaders and their spies were everywhere, everyone was afraid of being hauled up before the leaders, so they did not speak openly but merely whispered about him.

The next verses explain why Jesus eventually went up to the feast. It was not to appear publicly as the Messiah (because he knew this was the wrong time), but it was an opportunity again to teach the crowds the truth and invite men and women to himself.

So John writes,

About the middle of the feast Jesus went up into the temple and taught. The Jews marveled at it, saying, "How is it that this man has learning, when he has never studied?" So Jesus answered them, "My teaching is not mine, but his who sent me; if any man's will is to do his will, he shall know whether the teaching is from God or whether I am speaking on my own authority. He who speaks on his own authority seeks his own glory; but he who seeks the glory of him who sent him is true, and in him there is no falsehood." {John 7:14-18 RSV}

Here is revealed the authority of Jesus: He did not speak like the other teachers of Israel. The text reads, "How is it this man has learning?" but actually it literally says, "How does this man know his letters so well?" The "letters" refer to the Scriptures. What Jesus was doing was teaching from the Scriptures. He was taking these ancient prophecies and other passages and expounding them and explaining them. But he did not do it like the rabbis did. In that day (and this is true still today), every Jewish rabbi began his teaching with words such as, "the sages say," or, "the Talmud teaches," or, "the Mishnah explains so and so." But Jesus never quoted an authority other than the Scriptures. He would say, as it is repeatedly recorded in John's gospel, "Truly, truly, I say unto you..." When he talked like that, people listened. They were captured by what he said.

It is said that the most common response of people listening to Jesus as he was teaching was probably something like, "Yes, that's right, isn't it? Yes, that's what I've always felt," because what he said was confirmed by life and by experience. It had about it what J. B. Phillips calls "the ring of truth," that deep, almost intuitive conviction that what he said was reality, the way things really are.

When people wondered among themselves where he learned this (because he was not a graduate of any rabbinical college and had not sat under the great teachers), they fell into the trap that many people fall into today; that one has to go to school in order to learn, and the only way one can ever be qualified to preach or to teach is to graduate from a seminary.

But when people asked Jesus to reveal the origin of his teaching he told them: "My teaching is not mine, but his who sent me."

There is a beautiful passage in the fiftieth chapter of Isaiah, where the prophet predicts the very words of the Messiah:

The Lord has given me the tongue of those who are taught, that I may know how to sustain with a word him that is weary. Morning by morning he wakens, he wakens my ear to hear as a disciple. {Isaiah 50:4}

Then in Verse 17, one of the most remarkable verses in his teaching, Jesus gives the key to understanding his words: "If any man's will is to do his will (God's will), he shall know whether the teaching is from God or whether I am speaking on my own authority."

Verse 18 reveals the mark of an authentic learner: "He who speaks on his own authority seeks his own glory; but he who seeks the glory of him who sent him is true, and in him there is no falsehood." That was true, of course, of Jesus. He did not seek his own glory. He did not care whether he spoke to one person or a great crowd in the courts of the temple. What he said was always true and always compassionate, and he did not care whether anybody praised him or not.

Verse 19 is a wonderful example of our Lord's skill in public debate.

"Did not Moses give you the law? Yet none of you keeps the law. Why do you seek to kill me?" The people answered, "You have a demon! Who is seeking to kill you?" {John 7:19-20 RSV}

This interaction, of course, is based on Jesus' healing of the impotent man at the pool of Bethesda on the Sabbath. The leaders of the Jews were accusing Jesus of being a lawbreaker because he did that. Jesus' argument is, "Why are you so hostile to me? Why are you seeking to murder me? You break the Law as much as you accuse me of doing." The crowd interrupts, "Wait a minute. What are you talking about?" They are obviously ignorant of the intrigue of their leaders and the plots to destroy Jesus. So, in ignorance and innocence, they cry out and say, "You're a madman. What are you talking about? Nobody is seeking to kill you." But knowing the intent of the leaders, Jesus goes on to say,

"I did one deed, and you all marvel at it. Moses gave you circumcision (not that it is from Moses, but from the fathers), and you circumcise a man upon the sabbath. 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?" {John 7:21-23 RSV}

Here is Jesus' powerful argument: "I made a man well on the Sabbath and the crowd rejoiced in that. But in obedience to the Law of Moses your leaders circumcise boys on the Sabbath day." The Law required that circumcision must take place on the eighth day after birth. On many occasions that day would, of course, fall on a Sabbath, but the Law said that the boy was to be circumcised anyway because circumcision was a more important rite. But circumcision is a form of mutilation of the body. Granted it has a moral significance, but it is a mutilation of the flesh, a cutting off of part of the foreskin as a sign of putting away the evil of the flesh. "Yet," Jesus argues, "you do that on the Sabbath day, thereby violating the Sabbath rest. If you mutilate a little boy on the Sabbath day, is it not better for me to heal a man and make him whole on the Sabbath day?" You can see the power and the force of that argument. There is apparently no response to that reasoning so our Lord closes the dialogue with this warning:

"Do not judge by appearance, but judge with right judgment." {John 7:24 RSV}

That is, do not judge merely by a superficial look at things. Get your values straight. Look at matters from God's point of view. Only then can you make a righteous judgment.

Some of the people of Jerusalem therefore said, "Is not this the man whom they seek to kill? And here he is, speaking openly, and they say nothing to him! Can it be that the authorities really know that this is the Christ?" {John 7:25-26 RSV}

I am sorry, in a sense, that the word "Christ" is ever translated that way in our Bibles. This is a Greek word that means "the Anointed," and that, of course, was the Messiah. Christ is not Jesus' last name, as many people think, rather it is a title for him as is the title "the Messiah". These people were saying,

"Can it be that the authorities really know that this is the Messiah? Yet we know where this man comes from; and when the Messiah appears, no one will know where he comes from." {John 7:26 RCS Version}

What is impressive about this scene is the boldness and courage of Jesus. John has already described the rising tide of hostility and opposition toward Jesus; the threats of murder and rumors that the authorities were seeking to kill him. Yet in the midst of all this Jesus openly preaches in the courts of the temple and seemingly challenges the authorities to do anything about it.

So impressive is his boldness and courage that many of the people wonder if the authorities have not secretly believed in Jesus and recognized that he was the Messiah. But others remind them of the legend that the Messiah would suddenly appear, and no one would know where he came from. There is a verse in the last book of the Old Testament that says that God's Messenger (and by that is meant the Messiah), would suddenly appear in his temple {cf, Mal 3:1}. The rabbis took that to mean that no one would know his background. So these people are saying, "How could this be the Messiah? We know that he comes from Nazareth, in Galilee. He cannot be the Messiah." Thus there was a confusion in the minds of people as to how much to believe about Jesus.

Jesus ignores these mistaken concepts and this superficial argument about him and goes right to the heart of the problem -- as he always does -- in these words:

So Jesus proclaimed, as he taught in the temple, "You know me, and you know where I come from?" {John 7:28a RSV}

Notice that there is a question mark there. What Jesus really is saying is, "Do you know me, and do you know where I come from?"

"But I have not come of my own accord; he who sent me is true, and him you do not know. I know him, for I come from him, and he sent me." {John 7:28-29 RSV}

Here our Lord cuts right through all the argument and the debate to the real issue. "Do you really know me?" he asks. "No, you do not, for my true origin is not Nazareth." (They did not even know about Bethlehem.) He has been saying all along, "I am the true bread sent down from heaven. I came from God, I know him, but you do not, because if you did know him you would know that I came from him," {cf, John 6:32-34}. This is our Lord's argument all the way through.

One thing you do not do when talking to a Rabbi is to accuse them of not knowing God! There was an uproar last year when a Southern Baptist pastor once declared openly that God does not hear the prayers of Jews. What a tremendous controversy that caused, and rightly so, because that is a misunderstanding of the teaching of the Scriptures. God does hear the prayers of Jews, as he hears the prayers of anyone who prays sincerely from the heart.

But notice the reaction of the leaders who were listening to Jesus. It is like pouring gasoline on a fire to say to these acknowledged religious leaders of the nation, "You do not know God." Yet Jesus says this deliberately, fully understanding what their reaction would be.

Why would he do this? Is Jesus a troublemaker who delights in taunting these Jewish leaders? Does he take pleasure in overturning the apple cart, so to speak, and forcing them to hear things they do not want to hear? The answer, of course, has to be, "No, he is not that kind of a person." Our Lord is not a troublemaker, a revolutionary out to overthrow the system, though many today try to make him out to be that. No, rather, Jesus is a truth-teller in a world of self-delusion where men follow after lies and fantasies. Our Lord is the very epitome of truth.

There is an intriguing phrase that is used several times in the epistles: "As the truth is in Jesus," {Eph 4:21}. Here is someone who deals with life exactly the way it is. He does not dress it up or overbalance one aspect of it against another. He tells it just the way it is. He sees absolutely clearly and truly what is there, and what he sees he says. That is what distresses men. We are not even remotely aware of how much of our lives are spent in believing lies, fantasies and false philosophies that are without foundation in fact. But our Lord understands. When he speaks the truth, he upsets people because they would rather believe a pleasant and enjoyable lie.

The reaction to his words, therefore, is predictable:

So they sought to arrest him; but no one laid hands on him, because his hour had not yet come. Yet many of the people believed in him; they said, "When the Messiah appears, will he do more signs than this man has done?" {John 7:30-31 RSV}

That is an accurate description of what always happens when the good news about Jesus is preached. If the gospel is truly preached, a two-fold reaction will always result:

First, some people are going to be very upset and angry. This is what the Apostle Paul also found to be true. In Second Corinthians he wrote that, as he went about preaching, he found two reactions. To some he was an "aroma of death unto death," {cf, 2 Cor 2:16a}. They were already dying, perishing people. What he said to them only upset them even more because it challenged their concepts about themselves and about life and forced them either to change or go on the way they were. They chose to continue as they were and were led further into darkness and destruction. That is going on all around us yet today as people reject the truth and follow after false ideas.

But then there is the other reaction, as John records: "many believed." Many saw this good news as "an aroma of life unto life" {2 Cor 2:16b}, as Paul described it. Here was Someone who was at last stripping away the illusions, taking down the facades, removing the mists and making people see and understand who they really were, how much God loved them and wanted to change and heal and restore them.

This gospel will cause division at times. This is surely what Jesus meant in those amazing words in the twelfth chapter of Luke: "Do you think that I came to send peace on earth? No, I came to send fire. I came to send a sword. I came to set people at enmity one with another, so that your enemies will be those of your own household, fathers against children, family member against family member," {cf, Luke 12:51-54}. That is the nature of truth. When you believe it, and obey it, it will create division at times.

The only reaction we need to note here is that our Lord kept right on with his preaching.

The Pharisees heard the crowd thus muttering about him, and the chief priests and Pharisees sent officers to arrest him. Jesus then said, "I shall be with you a little longer, and then I go to him who sent me; you will seek me and you will not find me; where I am you cannot come." The Jews said to one another, "Where does this man intend to go that we shall not find him? Does he intend to go to the Dispersion among the Greeks and teach the Greeks? What does he mean by saying, 'You will seek me and you will not find me,' and, 'where I am you cannot come?'" {John 7:32-34 RSV}

It is encouraging to see how clearly our Lord perceived that his time had not yet come, therefore no one could touch him or stop him until the Father allowed it to happen. That is the only explanation we can give for these bold words of Jesus. He is aware of the unseen protecting hand of God.

All through the Scriptures, and through much of the life of the church, you can see evidence after evidence and example after example of this kind of thing. In the book of Acts we read that when the Apostle Paul first preached in Corinth he was afraid because an angry opposition developed toward him. But Jesus appeared to him and told him not to fear because nobody would hurt him, {cf, Acts 18:9-10}. God was invisibly protecting his messenger. Our Lord senses this protection. He is confident that no one can touch him, and so he continues his ministry with the awareness that all the opposition against him could go no further than God's mighty hand would permit.

This is greatly encouraging to Christian witness today. If we are walking in the will of God, and the strength of God, we can be confident that nothing can happen to us except what God allows; and when he allows it, it is the right time for it to happen. That is one of the great lessons of the Christian life. This explains why Daniel was so comfortable in the lion's den. Can't you imagine him ordering a lion to lie down so he could make a pillow of him? Daniel knew that God had shut the mouths of the lions and they would not hurt him. Granted, one can take advantage of this, and become presumptuous.

Years ago someone said to Dr. J. Vernon McGee, "I have been studying the Bible, and I believe I am absolutely safe in God's hand. No matter what I do, or how dangerous it may be, he is going to protect me. If I stepped out into a busy street against a red light I would be perfectly safe if my time had not yet come." Dr. McGee replied, "If you are foolish enough to step out into traffic against a red light at the rush hour, brother, your time has come!" We must remember that even the Lord teaches us, through his temptation in the wilderness, that we are not to tempt God. If we are fulfilling his will, and doing what he sends us to do, we can be confident that we are kept by angelic presence, safe until God's moment strikes.

So observe our Lord's boldness here. He even announces what he is going to do. He gives his itinerary, "I am going to be with you just a little while longer and then I will go away to him who sent me. You will seek for me but you will not find me." This throws his hearers into confusion. "What is he talking about?" they say. "Is he going to leave the country and go away to the Jews in foreign lands (the Dispersion)? Is he going to preach to the Gentiles?"

Jesus here indicates for the first time, in these strange words, the process by which all that he has promised will be fulfilled. This next paragraph is often taken to be a kind of parenthesis, but it is not. Rather it is really the answer to these questions of the Jews, "How is he going to do this? What does he mean 'I am going away and you can't find me?'" Here is his answer:

On the last day of the feast, the great day, Jesus stood up and proclaimed, "If any one thirst, let him come to me and drink. He who believes in me, as the scripture has said, 'Out of his heart shall flow rivers of living water.'" Now this he said about the Spirit, which those who believed in him were to receive; for as yet the Spirit had not been given, because Jesus was not yet glorified. {John 7:37-39 RSV}

John is writing this gospel on our side of the day of Pentecost, after that wonderful day when the Spirit was given in great power and came into the hearts of believers to do his office work of making Jesus Christ visible to the inner eye of the soul. It is not a joke when people say they have talked with him, that they follow him, and he comforts them, and strengthens them. It is a genuine experience in which Jesus himself is really present by means of the coming of the Spirit.

But when Jesus was yet on earth the Spirit had not yet been given in that way. The Spirit of God is always present everywhere in the world. He was present before the day of Pentecost as well as afterward. But not in this sense. He was not performing this ministry of making Jesus real -- at least not as fully as he has been doing it since the day of Pentecost. So for the first time we have our Lord's hint of how this is all going to be accomplished. "I must leave, I am going back to him who sent me, but when I do so I will send the Spirit." Later on in this gospel our Lord enlarges upon this, in the great Upper Room Discourse found in Chapters 13-17. But now he teaches it by means of a beautiful symbol.

Each day during the seven days of the Feast of Tabernacles, one of the chief priests would lead a procession down through the Kidron Valley to the pool of Siloam (which, by the way, means "sent", "the one sent"). Out of the waters of the pool he would fill a golden pitcher and carry it back to the temple and pour it over the altar to remind the people of the days in the barren wilderness when God gave them water out of a rock. Then the people would shout and wave palm branches, rejoicing and praising God. But on "the great day," the last day, there was not such ceremony because this day had been added to the feast. It was on this day that Jesus seized the opportunity to cry aloud, "If anyone thirsts, let him come to me and drink." By that, he means, of course, "I am the Rock. I am the very Rock that those in the wilderness drank from." These words are confirmed by Paul in First Corinthians 10:4: "They all drank of the Spiritual Rock which followed them, and that Rock was Christ," {cf, 1 Cor 10:4 KJV}. So there in the wilderness God was teaching the same truth that he is teaching us today: Jesus is the Rock from which men can drink and satisfy the thirst of their hearts.

Notice Jesus does not limit the word, *thirst*. He says simply, "If any one thirst." People thirst for many things. Some are thirsting for significance. They want to feel like they are important, that they belong, they are somebody. People whom society overlooks, those who are not wealthy, or handsome, or have strong personalities, thirst to be regarded as important. To those Jesus says, "If you thirst, come to me. You will find the very significance you seek." Some are looking for power, the ability to accomplish things. Jesus says to such, "If that is what you want, come to me. Drink of me. Listen to my words. Come into a personal relationship. Let me walk with you. Draw from my wisdom, from my strength, from my presence with you. Your thirst for power will be satisfied."

Physical thirst is the most powerful drive known to man. Thirst becomes a driving demon that takes over the whole of your life and makes you think of nothing else but satisfying it. That is what Jesus means. If you feel yourself driven, wanting something, restless and thirsty and longing for satisfaction, then his invitation is, "Come unto me and drink, and by means of the Spirit, which I will give to those who believe in me, I will satisfy that thirst."

But notice how he will satisfy it. This is the most beautiful part about this. He does not say, "If anyone come unto me and drink, I will meet his needs." That is what many people today think Christianity is all about. There is a false form of Christian faith that says, "If you come to Jesus he will meet all your needs. He will satisfy you apart from anyone else." That is in line with the desires of the "me generation" of our day, the generation that thinks only in purely selfish terms of how they can have their needs met. But Jesus does not say that -- although that is true. Notice how he will meet that need: "If any one thirst, let him come to me and drink. He who believes in me ... 'Out of his heart [he actually uses the word "belly," not "heart," out of his bowels, out of his innermost being] shall flow [not just a river, but] rivers of living water.'"

What does he mean by that? The true sign of the Spirit is that you become a blessing to somebody else; someone else is helped through you. Your concern is to reach out to someone else in need and help him. When that happens you will find that your own thirst has been slaked; you will find a deep satisfaction of heart. When people say that what they have found is only satisfying them, there should be doubts as to whether it is real or not. But when what they have found leads them to reach out to needy people around them and to minister to them, then they show the Spirit of grace doing what Jesus said would happen --

rivers of living water are flowing through them to others to satisfy their need. Only when we truly drink of him do these rivers begin to flow.

John traces three results that followed these gracious words of Jesus.

First, we see again the same two-fold division among his hearers:

When they heard these words, some of the people said, "This is really the prophet" [i.e., the one Moses predicted would come who would be like him]. Others said, "This is the Messiah." But some said, "Is the Messiah to come from Galilee? Has not the scripture said that the Messiah is descended from David, and comes from Bethlehem, the village where David was?" So there was a division among the people over him. {John 7:40-43 RSV}

But there is also a kind of strange, awed impotence among his enemies:

Some of them wanted to arrest him, but no one laid hands on him. The officers then went back to the chief priests and Pharisees, who said to them, "Why did you not bring him?" The officers answered, "No man ever spoke like this man!" {John 7:44-46 RSV}

This is one of the humorous incidents of the gospels. Imagine how these chief priests felt when the very officers whom they sent out to arrest Jesus returned, having been arrested by him! "Where is he?" the priests demanded. "You knew where he was. Why didn't you bring him?" You can almost hear the response of the men, "Well, it is hard to tell exactly what happened, but as we were listening to him he somehow got through to us. We became so wrapped up in what he was saying we forgot what we set out to do. We have to say that we have never heard anybody speak like this man."

The third thing that resulted from Jesus' word was the bitter hatred of his enemies.

The Pharisees answered them, "Are you led astray, you also?" {John 7:47 RSV}

Listen to the anger and the contempt in those words.

"Have any of the authorities or of the Pharisees believed in him?" {John 7:48 RSV}

Listen to the pride and the pompous superiority in those words.

"But this crowd, who do not know the law, are accursed." {John 7:49 RSV}

"Why do you listen to these common people?" Listen to the snobbishness and the contempt in those words.

But then Nicodemus (one of their own) speaks. In the third chapter of John's Gospel John records that Jesus had met with him and changed him:

Nicodemus, who had gone to him before, and who was one of them, said to them, "Does our law judge a man without first giving him a hearing and learning what he does?" {John 7:50-51 RSV}

Nicodemus raises a word of caution. "Be careful, you are about to take an impetuous action that is going to end up in violating the very Law that you claim to maintain."

Nicodemus receives their sarcastic response:

They replied, "Are you from Galilee too? Search and you will see that no prophet is to rise from Galilee." {John 7:52 RSV}

Read that way, of course, they were absolutely wrong. Three prophets had already arisen from Galilee. Jonah clearly was one. Nahum and Hosea very likely came from Galilee also.

In light of this, they may not have actually said this. One of the oldest manuscripts of the Gospel of John says, "Search and you will see that the prophet does not rise from Galilee." That was a reference to the prophet predicted by Moses, and that is probably what they meant. Even in their mistaken concepts of Jesus they would hardly be as wrong about their history as the usual translation suggests.

But the point, of course, is, they were sarcastic, pompous, cynical, and calloused in their attitude. This is often the reaction of those who are disturbed by the words of Jesus.