

John 7:45-52

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[0 : 00] Amen. Please take your copy of God's Word and join me in John chapter 7.! And in the development of that purpose, John over and over again juxtaposes people who receive Jesus and people who reject Jesus.

The last time we studied John together, we saw the record of Jesus standing up at the Feast of Booths and declaring, If anyone thirsts, let him come to me and drink.

That's verse 37. With some following comments concerning the coming of the Spirit. And these words caused quite a stir.

We find some people in chapter 7 contemplating who Jesus is. Others seem to believe that he is the Christ and some want him arrested.

Verse 43 says, So there was a division among the people over him. More than 2,000 years later, the world is still divided over who Jesus is.

[1 : 43] Now I have a very short quotation from John MacArthur's commentary on this, which is in my notes. But I brought a copy up here because some weeks ago I had a very dilapidated, falling apart copy that I read from.

And just as a little note, I said, I need a new one of these. If anyone wants to get me a gift. And I didn't really mean it seriously. But I have since received two of them. One came anonymously. One was handed to me. And I just wanted to hold it up and note before I read this brief, brief quotation. Not just in this case, but I just wanted you all to know how very heard and loved I feel by you as a church.

Story after story I hear of pastors who preach to folded arms and sneering faces, feel extraordinarily alone in the task that they have.

And I just feel the opposite of that. In fact, I sometimes feel bad hanging out with pastors because I can't commiserate with them. And I don't tell them how great you guys are because I don't want them to be discontent in the place that they are.

[2 : 57] But thank you for loving me so very much. I really, really appreciate it. So, again, this issue is still at hand. And John MacArthur says this. The ultimate question that everyone must eventually face.

The most crucial issue determining one's eternal destiny is, what shall I do with Jesus Christ? His claims about himself are far too audacious to just ignore.

You must do something with him. You must either reject him or I hope you will receive him. How do you respond to the declaration of Jesus?

If anyone thirsts, let him come to me and drink. Do you recognize that your soul is thirsty and it will never find the satisfaction it seeks in anything this world may have to offer you?

If you do, come to Jesus. He is the source of living water. Before I read our text beginning in verse 45, join me in a prayer.

[4 : 08] Father, we are grateful for your word for these verses before us and this time we have to consider them. And we ask humbly that you would bless our time together.

We want to behold Christ in this text. We want to see him rightly. If we've already placed saving faith in him, I pray that you'd give us a fresh picture of Jesus.

And if we have yet to do so, I pray that you would work that miracle in hearts this morning. We pray this in his name. Amen. John 7, beginning in verse 45.

The officers then came to the chief priests and Pharisees who said to them, Why did you not bring him? The officers answered, No one ever spoke like this man.

The Pharisees answered them, Have you also been deceived? Have any of the authorities or the Pharisees believed in him? But this crowd that does not know the law is accursed.

[5 : 09] 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?

They replied, Are you from Galilee too? Search and see that no prophet arises from Galilee. Now this portion of John's gospel has, surprise, a literary structure, which you ought to be familiar with by now.

It's called a chiasm. If that's a new word to you, please talk to me about it afterwards. I'd love to tell you about chiasms. This structure is a bit harder to discern.

It has been, in other portions of the book, much easier to see. But it is there, and it places at the center of this literary structure the question, Have any of the authorities or the Pharisees believed in him?

It's the helpful interpretive lens we can pick up from that structure. The Pharisees asked the question, What have any of us done with Jesus Christ?

[6 : 22] You're considering the words of this man? Well, none of us have believed in him. They use it as a rhetorical tool to convince the officers that they should have arrested Jesus Christ.

Now my friends, little friends mostly in our church who are learning their logical fallacies, will know that an appeal to authority, especially your own authority, when making an argument is shaky ground at best.

And that's what they're doing here. It's this question, Have any of the authorities or the Pharisees believed in him, that's at the center of this text, that frames for us the opening and the ending of it. Note it with me in the following simple outline. Number one, powerful words. Number two, prideful unbelief.

And number three, really, really tried to alliterate number three, so if you'll hear my emphasis, appropriate consideration. Powerful words, prideful unbelief, appropriate consideration.

[7 : 37] Number one, powerful words, verses 45 and 46. So the officers come to the chief priests. They're returning to the chief priests and the Pharisees, and they say, Why did you not bring him?

Back in verse 32 of chapter 7, we can see the Pharisees heard the crowd muttering these things about him, and the chief priests and Pharisees sent officers.

So in verse 45, we're seeing the return of those officers sent, recorded in verse 32, for a purpose, to arrest him.

That's what they were sent to do. Now, these officers would have been Levites. They would have been religiously trained and selected to serve as a sort of temple police.

So these are Levite men going to arrest Jesus, and yet they return without arresting him. And you can get this rejection narrative if we back up even further into John chapter 5 and verse 18.

[8 : 47] Why have they sent the officers to arrest him? He's back in town at a previous visit. He said some massive things about himself.

He did some healing on the Sabbath. And chapter 5 verse 18 says, This was why the Jews were seeking all the more to kill him, because not only was he breaking the Sabbath, but he was even calling God his own Father, making himself equal with God.

So that's what's going on here. This is the intent of this arrest. To seize him, to bring him, and to have him put to death. From our text last time we were in John chapter 7 verse 44, some of them wanted to arrest him, but no one laid hands on him.

We've talked extensively about God's timeline here and it being obeyed really by everybody in Providence. And so it's not yet been time for him to be arrested.

And so these officers return and the question is asked, Why did you not bring him? And their answer, verse 46, is, No one ever spoke like this man.

[10 : 09] Powerful words. What has he said in between their being sent in verse 32 and their return in verse 45?

You can see in verse 33 and 34, he says, I will be with you a little longer, and then I am going to him who sent me. Remember previously he's made claims about God being his Father.

Father, you will seek me and you will not find me where I am. You cannot come. And then in verse 37 we see, On the last day of the feast, the great day, the feast of booths, Jesus stood up and cried out, If anyone thirsts, let him come to me and drink.

Whoever believes in me, as the scripture has said, out of his heart will flow rivers of living water. So these are the things that Jesus has said, these officers have heard, and they report back, No one ever spoke like this man.

I'm not entirely sure what is happening in the minds of these officers, what's perhaps stirring in their hearts. But it would seem that they, religiously trained men, are just unsure at this point what they are to do with him.

[11:33] The question hangs for them. His words to them are strange. He is declaring to be God. He is offering to eternally satisfy souls.

These officers, as far as we can tell, do not accept him as the Christ, but they also do not arrest him. Once again, MacArthur, he says, caught between the power and grace of his message and the hatred of their leaders, they were paralyzed into inactivity.

Just didn't do the task they were sent to do. Oh, I hope these men, as we find them considering the words of Jesus, eventually placed their faith in him.

We don't know. But neutrality concerning the claims of Christ, will not stand forever. His words are too emphatic to ignore.

One day, every knee will bow before Christ. So there's powerful words in the text. Secondly, there is prideful unbelief.

[12:47] Verse 47, 48, and 49, and then picked back up again at the end of the text, in verse 52. The Pharisees answered them.

No one ever spoke like this man. They say, Have you also been deceived? Notice that the officers are not in trouble because they failed to complete the task they were sent for.

They're not being derided because they didn't do the thing they were commanded to do, but because of a concern that they were being led astray. The religious elite in Jesus' day thrived by leveraging spiritual power.

They claimed exclusive understanding of the demands of God's law. They added all kinds of tradition to it, interpretive tradition.

Grossly misled by the law, and they wielded it to their advantage. People starting to think that maybe Jesus was the Christ caused a genuine fear in them that their power was going to go away.

[13:58] This is their concern all along. This is why Jesus must be put to death. Lest he raise up a rebellion and Rome comes in and squashes and takes the power away.

A tiny aside for a moment at this point. Sadly and all too often, this type of spiritual abuse still happens in our day.

Christian teaching that appeals to some measure of elite knowledge or interpretation has no place in churches established by and in the word of God.

Beloved, be really cautious when teachers teach outside of the Bible. When they act as if they go up onto the mountain and meet with God in a cloud and bring a new word down.

Faithful Christian leadership equips the saints for the work of ministry. Ephesians chapter 4. And it does not claim to have a corner on the truth.

[15:08] Yesterday morning, this is still part of my side, we had one of our men's morning meetings and we talked about biblical finances. And I was trying to come up with a way to spend two hours talking about this and not just be me droning on and on and on, which I'm sure would not have been enjoyable.

And so I just thought, you know, I've got, I had eight principles, eight biblical principles, and I thought, I'm just going to float the principle and then set our guys to the task of proving it or disproving it, if I was wrong, from the Bible.

And I was so encouraged by these 22-ish men who were there who all had something. I mean, just, I mean, right to the Bible every single time.

And I don't mean this as a boast on myself, but I'm just glad to be part of a church of people who hold the Scripture as the Scripture and aren't looking for some mountaintop experience for somebody who gives leadership to it.

Okay, so, they're abusing their power, they're claiming to have a corner on the truth, that's the concern here. Have you also been deceived?

[16:16] And then they ask this central question, have any of the authorities or the Pharisees believed in him? This is not a genuine question.

They're not actually asking, do you know this has happened in any case? What they're doing is they're saying, what's wrong with you guys? None of us have believed in him.

I hope that you can feel the dripping pride here on their part. How dare you entertain the idea that he's unique in the way that he speaks?

None of us have received him as the Christ. If we, the experts, aren't buying what Jesus is selling, why should you? Now, these men knew their Bibles.

It is at this point that I tremble most. It is altogether possible to be familiar with the truth and not believe it.

[17:22] To have all the right answers, to be able to recite them, spit them back at the ready, and yet not have saving faith in those answers.

You can know the truth and not hold the truth savingly. Jesus said to the religious elites in John chapter 5, verse 39 and 40, you search the scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life.

Aren't there so many in our day that would commend that? Searching the scriptures, what a task. Yes, search the scriptures. We ought to be biblically literate people because you think that in them you have eternal life.

That they themselves are the source of eternal life. And it is they, he goes on, that bear witness about me.

Yet you refuse to come to me that you may have life. Jesus is not here devaluing the Bible and neither am I.

[18:31] It is God's word. It is powerful. It is taken up by the spirit and used in our lives to bring about regeneration, sanctification, our one day, glorification.

It is a powerful tool but it's powerful because it speaks the message to us. It takes us to Jesus, to him, himself.

They failed to see him in their knowledge. They had become so puffed up with their understanding and their positions that they could not, they were not even willing to entertain the thought that Jesus might be the Christ.

They didn't skip a beat. They didn't stop for a moment to consider if he was in fact who he claimed to be. Well, at least most of them, most of them, as we'll see in a moment.

But before we do, note their disdain for the ordinary people's prideful, prideful unbelief. They say verse 48, my summary, none of us have believed in him, but this crowd, verse 49, that does not know the law is accursed.

[19:52] So spiritually superior. We know the law and haven't believed in him, so they must not know the law and therefore are accursed.

thirst. You see, they had no recognition of their spiritual thirst. To be sure, their souls are not satisfied.

They think they're finding it in this knowledge, this position, this power that they held, but they are in fact spiritually thirsty. You know, most of us are likely dehydrated all the time.

Very few of us probably drink as much water as we possibly could drink in a day. Maybe, some of you ladies, because you've always got your water with you, are getting your water in.

We're often at varying degrees of understanding of how really thirsty we are physically. Our spiritual thirst will never be met apart from Christ.

[20:56] And you may or may not be entirely aware of the longing that you have in your life for something more. It's not about things in this world. It's not about relationships. It's about the Lord Jesus Christ.

The dryness of your soul will find a satisfaction in him. And they have no concern at all. This crowd that does not know the law, prideful, prideful unbelief.

May we not be counted amongst these men. men. But notice thirdly, the appropriate consideration. Appropriate consideration. Jesus has spoken words of power. They ought to be considered. We see a man do this considering.

Verse 50 and 51. Nicodemus. Nicodemus, who had gone to him before and who was one of them, one of this council, said to them, yes, this is the Nicodemus of John chapter 3.

[22:09] John wants us to be sure that we don't miss that fact with this phrase, Nicodemus, who had gone to him before. He means for us to note this.

Oh, oh, the one who had gone to him before, that Nicodemus? Yes, that one, who had gone to Jesus in secret at night because he was curious.

You may remember, he says to him, nobody does these kinds of things or speaks this way if they're not from God. Jesus says some interesting things to him about being born again that Nicodemus doesn't seem to understand.

And then he goes on. It's to Nicodemus that Jesus says, John 3. 16. For God so loved the world, that he gave his only son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. A lot of other wonderful, clear gospel expressions in that chapter. However, chapter 3 doesn't record what Nicodemus does after this encounter with Jesus.

[23 : 18] John's narrative just kind of rushes off to what's going on with John the Baptist at the time. And Nicodemus passes from the page until chapter 7.

The very same Nicodemus, a leader amongst the Jews. I'm led to believe, because of what happens here, that he has been, from chapter 3 until now, however much time has gone by, quietly considering what Jesus said to him.

He's mulling it over. He's giving it appropriate consideration. He seems, as we see him here in chapter 7, to still be doing so.

He's in that process even now. He brings up this question. He says to them, verse 51, does our law judge a man without first giving him a hearing and learning what he does?

We don't see Nicodemus openly defending Jesus' deity at this point. He does not make the case, oh, but he is the Christ. What might be stirring in his heart, exactly, we don't know.

[24 : 30] But he does raise a telling procedural point. His companions stated that the crowd doesn't know the law and they are breaking it themselves.

Notice that? The accusation they make of the crowd, right? They're ignorant of the law, they're accursed, and then he brings the law to bear. You're breaking the law, is what he says to them. Doesn't our law say, is what he says to them. He's indicting them as men who do not practice the law, and he is expressing that he is open to Jesus' claims.

Isn't it proper that we should give him a hearing before we judge him? We should think about what it is that he's saying. Why not hear him out?

Nicodemus asks. So what becomes of him? This is all we see here in chapter seven. The man who first comes in secret at night, then procedurally defends Jesus amongst the religious leaders.

[25 : 39] I am so grateful that we know. Do you know what happens in Nicodemus? John records for us in chapter 19 and verse 39.

After Jesus' crucifixion and before his resurrection, verse 39 says, Nicodemus also, who earlier had come to Jesus by night.

John's doing there. That same one is what he's saying. Remember that one that came in secret? Who earlier had come to Jesus by night, came bringing a mixture of myrrh and aloes about 75 pounds in weight.

So he brings the embalming spices when Jesus is taken down off the cross. And there's this little detail.

why the detail, John? Why are we talking about 75 pounds of spices? It's because John means to tell us that he would not have done this by himself.

[26 : 52] This is no longer being done in secret. This is Jesus being taken down off the cross. This is Nicodemus, a man of stature, coming with servants in the daytime.

a whole parade of people coming to carry this, that Jesus may be laid to rest in the tomb. It's phenomenal.

Nicodemus grew in grace. We get to see that. John chapter 3 through John chapter 19. One of the ones in the text that receives Jesus.

Now, certainly there was a point of his conversion. John doesn't record that for us. A point that he was spiritually dead and then became spiritually alive.

In your bulletin, the historic quote today says, from Thomas Watson, to every believer, the debt book is crossed out. The black lines of sin are crossed out in the red lines of Christ's blood.

[27 : 57] There's a point at which that happens. You are unforgiven and now you are forgiven. But I think more often than not, people are drawn to Christ in a process.

I think that Nicodemus' story ought to encourage many of us who didn't find ourselves in some squalor of sin, some sin that the world might measure as great, and then we suddenly snapped and all of a sudden our life was dramatically different after the fact, but bit by bit, degree by degree, here we have a man who was trained in the Bible, who from everybody's perspective was upright, who was doing everything that should be done to please God, and he's made curious about these claims of Jesus, and he approaches him first shamefully, and then he's willing to stand up for him a bit amongst his companions, and then finally a bold proclamation that he's a follower of Jesus at his

death.

Now the response to Nicodemus takes us back to the second point. If you were listening carefully, you may have noted there I said verse 52, and I didn't say anything about it. Well, here we are now in the text.

prideful unbelief. They are brutal in their response to Nicodemus. Don't miss what's going on here. I try to read it with some measure of tone, but I don't want to be an actor, so I have to dial down the way they probably sounded. They replied, are you from Galilee too?

[29 : 50] Search and see that no prophet arises from Galilee. This is mockery. They're saying, are you defending him because you are also from the sticks?

You're from the country? You're a bumpkin out there? For some reason you see the need to take up for him? They know that Nicodemus isn't from Galilee.

They're very aware of this. And then notice they say, search and see. No prophet arises from Galilee.

Again, these are the religious elite. These are the men who knew their Bibles. What's really interesting at this point is that there is a prophet that arises from Galilee.

Jonah undoubtedly arises from Galilee. If they're appealing to their authority in this text, at this point everybody ought to go, ah, you don't have a clue what you're talking about.

[30 : 53] Yeah. If we search and see the scriptures, there is a prophet who arises from Galilee.

And some scholars, there's a pretty good case to be made that also Nahum and Hosea and there's some other possibilities as well.

but we know factually Jonah. Jonah was from Galilee. They have no idea what they're talking about. They have used the Bible to build platforms for themselves.

They are not seeking to please the Lord. They accuse Nicodemus of being ignorant of his Bible. Instead, their ignorance is exposed.

This is a tactic of the deconstructionists of our day. Those who would have people who once professed to be Christians no longer be Christians.

With great confidence, they make outlandish claims about the Bible and people just eat it up.

You've probably heard people make these kinds of claims. Say things that are just false about the Scripture, but they say it with such confidence, no one wants to do the work to actually go and see.

[32 : 04] Is that something that the Bible actually says? It's happening all the time. Beloved, we need to confirm and defend the Scriptures.

We need the people who say, no, that's not at all what's happening in this grand narrative of God's redemptive work for his people.

Yes, our God is full of wrath, but he's also full of mercy. There's a popular pastor who has suggested in our gospel presentations that we unhitch the gospel from the Old Testament.

Unwilling to do the work of helping his people understand the Old Testament, he says, let's just do away with it so that people can't object any longer in this way.

Confirm and defend the Scriptures for they express to us our God. We want to know him by the book that he wrote and share him with others.

[33 : 16] So confirm and defend the Scriptures for the glory of our God and for the good of people. Powerful words, prideful unbelief, appropriate consideration.

I'm going to pray for us, but before I do, I just want to make a note. I don't know how many of you are paying attention to our preaching schedule. We're off of it on the dates. We'll have to republish that document.

But if you look at your text, you may notice some notes, some double bracketing around chapter 7, verse 53 through chapter 8 and verse 11.

And the preaching schedule says that I'm going to preach that text, but guess what? I'm not. What we are going to do is we're going to talk about textual criticism.

Why it is that there's double brackets around this text and why I don't believe it belongs in the text at all. Why? Because we want to confirm and defend the scriptures for the glory of our God and for the good of people.

[34 : 30] So that's what we're going to spend our time doing next week. So we'll kind of be in John chapter 7 verse 53 through chapter 8 and verse 11. How did we get our Bible? Why can we be confident it is in fact God's word when we have little issues like this found here?

Let's pray.