

Festival, Faith, and Family

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[0 : 00] and open it up to the Gospel of John, chapter 7. We're going back to our series through the Gospel of John, and it's been a few weeks since we were there, so we're going to take a few minutes just to recap all that we've heard and seen in John's Gospel.

John's Gospel is the account of John of the story of Jesus. As we said at the beginning of the series, if the Apostle John could be here with us this morning and tell you the story of Jesus, this is what he would say.

This is what he saw, what he heard, what he experienced. John began his account in a different place than the other Gospel writers did.

He tells us that Jesus' story goes back to the very beginning. In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.

John tells us that back then, before all things were made, this one, the Word, or the Son, he was with God, and he was God.

[1 : 13] John tells us that all things that have been created were created by and through him. And then he tells us that the Word, the Son, became flesh and lived among us.

And we celebrated that just a few weeks ago at Christmas. And John said this, he said, We have seen his glory, glory as of the only begotten Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.

And so as we've been working our way through John, we've been looking to see, What did you see, John? What did you see of Jesus' glory? How did you see that he was full of grace and full of truth? From there, John took us to the shore of the Jordan River. We heard about John the Baptizer and his little run-in with the Jewish leaders that were sent from Jerusalem to see what was going on. We heard a little of what John had been saying. There's somebody great coming after me. He stands among you, even now.

[2 : 22] And we saw through John's eyes that moment when the Baptizer pointed to Jesus for the first time and said, Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.

This is the one I've been talking about. We heard about how some of Jesus' first disciples, as a result of that, began to follow Jesus.

Andrew and Peter, Philip and Nathaniel. We heard a little of their expectation as they began to share the news with one another that we found the Messiah.

We heard Jesus tell them, You guys haven't seen anything yet. Just wait. From there, John took us to Jesus' first public sign, the wedding at Cana, where he, in the back room, did an amazing miracle and turned a whole bunch of water into wine.

Then we followed Jesus up to Jerusalem, where he marked the Passover with his disciples. And we saw how Jesus began to cause a stir as he flipped the tables in the temple courts of the sellers and drove the money changers out of the temple courts, which brought him into conflict with the religious leaders.

[3 : 41] We read about how Jesus did several signs during that visit to Jerusalem, and how many people believed, and yet the faith of these people was also suspect.

Jesus wouldn't entrust himself to these people because he seemed to know things about them, even what they were thinking. John gave us the example of Jesus' conversation with Nicodemus, a member of the Jewish ruling council.

And we listened as Jesus told this teacher of Israel about how he needed to be born again by the Spirit of God in order to enter the kingdom of God.

From there we saw how there was this noticeable shift. Many of the baptizers' disciples were now going to Jesus.

And the crowds were dwindling for John and increasing for Jesus. John the baptizer was kind of fading into the background, and Jesus was taking the spotlight and the attention of the whole nation.

[4 : 53] We saw how Jesus made this quick stopover in Samaria on his way back to Galilee, where he encountered the woman at the well and revealed himself to her as the Messiah and to the townspeople, and many believed.

Then we saw him again in Cana of Galilee, and it was there that some tensions began to rise as Jesus started to come face to face with the unbelief of the people in his own region. It was there that he healed the royal official's son from a distance. After that, John skips ahead to another time that Jesus went up to Jerusalem for a festival.

And we saw how Jesus healed the man who hadn't been able to walk for 38 years at the Pool of Siloam. And he did that on the Sabbath. And we watched as this brought Jesus into a very sharp dispute with the religious leaders.

In fact, John told us then that even before this run-in, they had already been plotting to kill him. But now this was intensified even more. Jesus began to say some things to them in the hearing of others that really bothered them.

[6 : 08] He began to tell them about his unique, special relationship with God. A father-son relationship unlike anything we've ever heard or seen. Jesus said that the works that he's been doing are small beans compared to the kinds of works that the Father is going to give him to do in the future.

Things like raising people from the dead to life and calling people out of their graves to judgment at the end. He said he will be the one who will judge on that day on behalf of his Father.

He said those who believe in him will receive eternal life. And he began to expose and challenge the unbelief and the pride and the self-centeredness of the religious leaders.

From there, Jesus went back to Galilee. He crossed over to the other side of the sea. And John tells us that there was a massive crowd following him around, numbering over 5,000 people.

And we saw how Jesus amazed them all by making bread and fish enough to feed the whole lot of them out in the middle of nowhere with nothing but a boy's lunch.

[7 : 30] We watched as Jesus sent his disciples back across the lake only to join them later on in the middle of the night walking out to them on the water in the middle of a storm.

Then when they were back on the other side, we listened as many of the crowd from the previous day caught up with Jesus. And Jesus talked with them in the synagogue.

And he challenged them to really read and understand the signs that he was doing correctly and to believe in him. He told them that he was the bread of life that had been sent down from God, from heaven to give life to the world.

And we saw as that conversation went from tense to an all-out argument. How can this man give us his flesh to eat? Some said.

After that, we watched as many of Jesus' followers left him and decided they were done following Jesus. But even though many left him, the twelve and probably a few more stayed with him, the faithful few.

[8 : 44] So this is the story that we've heard from John up until this point. Let's turn our attention now to what happens next in John chapter 7, starting in verse 1.

After this, Jesus went around in Galilee. Galilee is that northern region right up there.

He kind of has the towns of Cana and Capernaum and Nazareth up there. He was moving around there. He was conducting his ministry there.

He was doing his signs. All that he has been doing. But up in this region in Galilee, he did not want to go about in Judea because the Jewish leaders there were looking for a way to kill him.

So Jesus stayed up in this northern region of Galilee. Judea is down here, of course, where Jerusalem, the capital city, is. That's the place where the temple is.

[9 : 52] That's the place where all the religious leaders and the ruling council are headquartered. And that's the place where he is wanted the most. So he's staying up here in Galilee, conducting his ministry there.

And it might be a little bit tempting to jump to conclusions here or to make assumptions. We might wonder, is Jesus afraid of their religious leaders? But of course, we can only guess at what's going on in Jesus' heart and mind.

John only tells us that he didn't want to go there because they were looking for a way to kill him. Now, if it was me that they were looking for, you'd bet I'd be anxious.

You bet I'd be afraid. I'd be thinking of how to get out of the country real quick. But we can't assume that Jesus feels or even thinks just like we do because as we've seen many times, he often doesn't. Verse two. But when the Jewish festival of tabernacles was near, John tells us that the festival of tabernacles was near.

[11 : 03] Throughout the year, there were several festivals, like this one, that they would have. And people from all over the land would go up to Jerusalem and mark these festivals just as God commanded the Israelites to do back in the days of Moses.

And you can just imagine with all these people going up to celebrate and to worship, to mark the festival, this is going to be interesting. The tensions have never been as high as they are now between Jesus and the religious leaders.

Jesus is a wanted man. They want him dead. And so will Jesus head back down to Jerusalem yet again for the festival even while they're trying to kill him?

Verse three. Jesus' brothers said to him, leave Galilee and go to Judea so that your disciples there may see the works you do.

No one who wants to become a public figure acts in secret. Since you're doing these things, show yourself to the world. So as the day of the festival is drawing near, Jesus' brothers tell him to go down to Judea, the very region that he's been avoiding.

[12 : 25] Why? They say so that your disciples there may see the works that you are doing. Now I'm not really sure just what Jesus' brothers are thinking here.

At first it might seem like they're just simply giving him some good brotherly career advice. Jesus, you should go back to Judea.

The festival will be starting soon and you should try and reconnect with some of your followers there. They need to see the things that you've been doing here in Galilee. They say, for no one who wants to become a public figure acts in secret.

Since you're doing these things, show yourself to the world. On the surface, it kind of seems like reasonable advice, doesn't it? And truly, it's not unlike the advice that we might hear in our world today.

If you want to make a name for yourself, you need to put yourself out there. You need to connect with your followers. But then John, the one telling the story here, says this, for even his own brothers did not believe in him.

[13 : 38] So there's something else going on here. The advice that they are probably, that they are giving probably contains a hint of cynicism.

Perhaps they're saying these things with a little bit of mockery in them. To be honest, I'm not really sure what the tone of their voices is or what they are truly meaning here.

But we kind of get a sense that it's probably negative. Like, come on, Jesus. If you are the Messiah, and you're doing all these amazing signs and miracles which confirm it, go down to Jerusalem and prove it.

Make it official. Make it all happen. Get onto the world stage here. That's what the Messiah is supposed to do. Whatever they're thinking, John tells us that even though they were his brothers, they did not believe in him.

That's maybe a surprising thing, isn't it? We kind of expect that if anyone would believe in Jesus, it would be his own brothers. The people who know him best. The people that he grew up with.

[14 : 50] And yet, just because they were close to him all those years, didn't mean that they believed in him. And it kind of leaves us to wonder, well, what did they believe about him?

If they didn't believe that he was the Messiah sent from God, what did they believe about him? what are the alternatives? Did they believe that he was a con artist?

Did he believe he had somehow perfected the art of fooling people with elaborate tricks? Did they believe that he was making claims that were not true? A deceiver?

Or did they just think that he was out of his mind? We can't be sure here. But one thing stands out to me in all this, and it's that Jesus was truly human.

So much so that his own brothers couldn't see past his flesh and bones to know that he was more than just a man. I don't know how they explained away the miracles that he did or maybe in their own warped thinking they kind of convinced themselves that he was just some kind of self-righteous

older brother who was always looking down on them and exposing the things that they didn't want people to know about or see.

[16:14] I got thinking about this in terms of what's going on in our world today. With COVID and political upheaval, we know all too well how easily people can come to polar opposite viewpoints on things and just get real dug in about those things.

Well, somebody's got to be right. There is truth and fact in all that's going on. But somehow, as it often happens with people, Jesus' brothers are just not seeing straight.

Maybe they're just kind of, you know, putting up with him and his grand delusions. Or at best, maybe they just don't really know how he can do these miracles.

Maybe they are hoping that he'll be successful, but they just kind of have their doubts and their reservations. They don't believe in him. How is it that Jesus' own brothers do not see the glory of the one and only Son who came from the Father?

I think it harkens back to what Jesus said earlier to his followers just before this in chapter 6. John 6, verse 64.

[17:30] Jesus said, Yet there are some of you who do not believe. Verse 65. This is why I told you that no one can come to me unless the Father has enabled them.

unless it has been granted to them by the Father. There's more going on here. For some reason, at least for now, Jesus' brothers remain in the dark.

Blind to the reality of just who their own brother is. So they give their advice to Jesus.

The brothers do. And then Jesus gives his response to them. He replies in verse 6 to 8. Therefore Jesus told them, My time is not yet here.

For you, any time will do. The world cannot hate you, but it hates me because I testify that its works are evil.

[18:35] You go up to the festival. I'm not going up to this festival because my time has not yet fully come. So Jesus says a lot here. And to be honest, I'm not entirely sure just what Jesus means by all of it.

It's interesting. What is clear is that he tells his brothers that he's not going to this festival, at least not yet. Not now, as they've been encouraging him to do.

And then he urges them to go on ahead of him. You guys go. I'm not going yet. And his reason for not going yet, it seems, has to do with timing.

He says, My time is not yet here. For you, any time will do. What is Jesus referring to by my time? There are a couple different ideas here.

One is that it's like what he says in other places when he says, My hour has not yet come. But probably the view that makes the most sense to me is that he's simply talking about the time to leave and go to the festival.

[19:44] And there's a couple good reasons for that. First, he doesn't use the word for hour like he does in the other places. Here he uses the word for time or it's a more general word, appointed time or season.

And in addition to that, in the original language, you can see the clear emphasis on his pronouns. It kind of pops out to you in the way that it was phrased. My time is not yet here.

For you, any time will do. In other words, what I think Jesus is saying is something like, you guys can go up to the festival anytime. Whether you go today or tomorrow, doesn't matter.

But for me, there is an appointed time. And that time is not yet here. And this is maybe more similar to his statement about, in those other places, about his hour not yet having come.

I think what Jesus is saying is that he is under a special constraint that his brothers are not. just as Jesus can't act or speak apart from what he sees his father doing and hears his father saying in some mysterious way that we don't understand.

[20:57] He is also bound or constrained to this certain time, this timeline by his father. Father and son acting in harmony and synchronization.

And Jesus, the son, for his part, is in the role of submission to his father. So Jesus says, you guys go on ahead. My time to go up is not yet here.

For you guys, it doesn't matter is what I think Jesus is saying. But then in the middle of all this, Jesus makes this statement about the world hating him.

Somehow this factors into Jesus' timing as well. Jesus says, the world cannot hate you, but it hates me because I testify that its works are evil.

Another statement of comparison and again, the emphasis is kind of on the pronouns, you versus me. The world cannot hate you. Why not?

[22 : 03] We're kind of left to wonder. Perhaps Jesus is implying that the world cannot hate them because they're a part of the world. I'm not really sure. But what is clear is why the world hates Jesus.

He gives us the reason. He says, because I testify that its works are evil. In other words, there is a strong current of opposition to Jesus that factors into Jesus going into Judea and when he will go up to the festival.

There are some who hate him and we know as we've heard in the story that this hatred has been building over the past while both from the religious leaders and now it's building amongst the people in the crowds that he's been talking to.

Why? Why do they hate him? Jesus says they hate him because he has been testifying that their works are evil.

What does Jesus mean by that? Well, it's maybe a little more difficult to see but this has been happening all along through the story right from the beginning.

[23 : 20] Jesus has been exposing the sinful thoughts and attitude and behaviors of the people. He's been, in a sense, shining the light on them and telling them that what they're thinking, what they're doing here and there is wrong, is sinful.

In fact, in the Gospel of Mark, Mark just tells us quite plainly, right from the get-go, Jesus' message was this, repent and believe the good news. Repent, turn from your sinful ways, your wicked ways, and seek God's forgiveness.

righteousness. We saw Jesus testifying that people's works were evil at the temple courts as Jesus flipped the tables and drove the sellers and exchangers out.

Stop turning my father's house into a marketplace, he said. In other words, what you're doing here in the temple courts is evil. We saw it with Nicodemus in a much subtler way as Jesus essentially told him that despite how good he thinks he's been or what his position is, it's not good enough to enter the kingdom of God.

He told Nicodemus about the unbelief in Nicodemus' own heart. We saw it with the Samaritan woman and how Jesus said that he knew about her past five relationships and about how she was with a man right now that she wasn't married to.

[24 : 57] He didn't even have to say that's wrong. She knew it. But Jesus did bring it up and he exposed it. I testify that its works are evil.

We saw it with the crowd back in chapter five. Jesus said there, unless you people see signs and wonders, you will never believe. Again, exposing the evil, the stubbornness in their hearts as they refused to listen to him.

We saw it with the man from the pool of Siloam that he healed on the Sabbath day. After Jesus had healed him, Jesus bumped into him again later that day at the temple and he said, see, you are well again.

Stop sinning or something worse may happen to you. I testify that its works are evil. We saw it with the religious leaders that same day as Jesus told them about how they're not seeking God's glory, but instead they're seeking glory from one another.

I testify that this world's works are evil. We saw it with the people from the feeding of the 5,000. When they came back across the lake, Jesus said to them, do not work for food that spoils, but for food that endures to eternal life.

[26 : 17] What you're seeking is all wrong. You're looking for me not because of the signs I did, but because you ate the loaves and had your fill. Again, Jesus testifying that their works are evil.

It's not always explicitly talked about in John, but you can see hints of it all throughout. And it's going to happen even more as we go on. This was part of Jesus' ministry from start to finish. He proclaimed that people should repent and turn from their sinful ways, their wicked thoughts, attitudes, and as it says here, their works. He testified that people's works were evil in general ways, as he taught the people about how they should live righteously in the Sermon on the Mount. And he talked to people about how their works were evil in very personal ways, as he spoke with individuals about their very specific sinful behaviors.

Jesus' message was not just God loves you and I love you. His message was those things, but it was also repent, turn from your sin, believe in me so that you will not perish and receive what you

deserve for your sins.

[27 : 40] There are many in our world today who are trying to hide this little phrase, I testify that its works are evil. They're trying to say that Jesus only spoke about how he loved people, or that he was always affirming of people no matter how they lived.

It's simply not true. Jesus talked about sin all the time, and he was not afraid to call people out for their sins.

That's why they hate him. That's why they wanted to kill him. That's why they did go all the way. to taking his life when they executed him on the cross.

They wanted to get rid of this man whom God had sent to shine the spotlight on their sin, on their evil thoughts and attitudes and works.

God John has brought this dynamic to our attention back in chapter 3 verse 19. This is the verdict.

[28 : 45] Light has come into the world, but people loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil. Everyone who does evil hates the light and will not come into the light for fear that their deeds will be exposed.

That's what's going on here. Jesus not only exposing the sin of a couple people, he's exposing the sins of everyone in all kinds of ways and people don't like it because they love their evil ways.

And this is not just something that happened back in Jesus' day. This is a dynamic that describes what's going on even today. The world still hates Jesus when they hear him expose and testify that their works are evil.

Now, Jesus is not here in the flesh, but whenever we, as Christians, teach or preach or tell others of what he said about sin, they don't like it.

They recoil. And if the light comes to shine too brightly on something in particular that they've been doing, they can get mad and angry. Don't you dare tell me that how I'm living is wrong, is evil.

[30 : 08] Don't you dare tell me that someday I'm going to face judgment or go to hell. But the truth is that Jesus talked a lot about hell.

Why? Because it's a real danger for sinners like you and me. Unless we repent. and believe in Jesus. Back to Jesus' answer to his brothers.

He says, I'm not going up yet to the festival because my time is not yet here. You go on ahead.

Verse 9. After he had said this, he stayed in Galilee.

However, verse 10, after his brothers had left for the festival, it says, he went also, not publicly, but in secret.

And this is how things started to go. Now, at the festival, this is verse 11, the Jewish leaders were watching for Jesus and asking, where is he? Among the crowds, there was widespread whispering about him.

[31 : 22] Some said, he's a good man. Others replied, no, he deceives people. But no one would say anything publicly about him for fear of the leaders.

Can you feel the tension here in Jerusalem as thousands are gathered for this festival? Tension between the people who came up to attend the festival?

Tension between the people and the leaders? Fearing that they might be caught on the wrong side of things? There's whispering going on?

And we'll find out what happens next Sunday. But for this morning, let's take a few minutes to just reflect on what we've heard so far. How does this all apply to us?

How can we respond to it? How can we relate to it? There are a number of points in which this applies to us. First, there's a big focus here on the simple question of who is Jesus.

[32 : 29] Everybody in Jerusalem is talking about him, whispering about him, and different people have their ideas about him. He's a good man. No, he's a deceiver.

Who is Jesus? Even Jesus' brothers don't believe that Jesus is who he has been claiming to be. All of this really should bring us to consider for ourselves, who is Jesus?

Who do you think he is? Second, much of this section is focused on Jesus' relationship with his brothers. John shows us that it is truly possible to have known, to have known Jesus all your life, and yet not truly know him.

That's kind of a scary thought. That was Jesus' brothers. I wonder if you have any kind of feeling that maybe you can relate to that. Perhaps you've known and heard lots about Jesus from the time you were young.

You've been in the church lots. You're pretty sure that you've got Jesus figured out. But do you see him as a mere man, like his brothers did?

[33 : 44] Or do you see him as the one who was sent from God, the son of God, the Messiah, the king who will someday come back to judge and to rule our world?

This is really the key issue here. Do you believe Jesus? And I don't mean just believe that Jesus will save you. Many people believe that.

But do you really believe Jesus and what he said and taught? His brothers, at least so far, it says, do not believe in him.

Many of the people in Jerusalem think that he's a fraud and a deceiver. What about you? Do you believe? Jesus.

Fourth, do you believe what Jesus has been saying to everyone, to the world? Do you believe him when he says that your works are evil?

[34 : 50] Do you believe what Jesus says, that you are a sinner who needs to repent, to turn from your sinful ways, to seek God's forgiveness, or else you will perish?

Do you believe that you are guilty for your sins against God? Do you believe that you're in real danger of perishing in hell because of your sins?

Does this message of Jesus stir up hatred for you in your heart? Or are you ashamed of this message of Jesus? Or do you believe that Jesus is right and that you really are in need of his forgiveness and saving?

Are you deeply thankful in your heart for what Jesus did at the cross to deal with your evil works? I know I am.

finally, I believe there's a simple word of encouragement here for those of us who have family members who do not believe in Jesus. Do you know that Jesus knows what it's like to have family members who do not believe?

[36 : 04] He has lived with that reality. And for him, it was even more personal because he was the one that they did not believe in. The Lord Jesus hears your prayers for those in your family who do not believe.

His heart knows deeply what you are feeling for them. By God's grace, there did come a day when Jesus' brothers came to believe in him.

Acts 1, verse 14, talks about how the church was all gathered together after Jesus had ascended. And it says, they all joined together constantly in prayer, along with the women and Mary, the mother of Jesus, and with Jesus' brothers.

Talks about there, in those days, Peter stood up among the believers. Jesus' brothers were among the believers. By God's grace, there came a day when Jesus' brothers had a change of heart and a change of mind towards him.

A day when they knew that he was so much more than just their brother. father. So do not lose heart for those family members that you have who do not know the Lord.

[37 : 20] They may not believe in Jesus today. They may seem blind or hard to what you say about him. They may even disapprove, mock, or look down on you for believing in Jesus, but don't give up on them yet.

Keep asking the Lord Jesus for their salvation. The power of God's grace and mercy can soften even the hardest of hearts.

Let's pray. Father in heaven, thank you for your words to us. Please cause them to sink deep down into our hearts and help us to know what we can do with them, who we can share them with.

We do ask that you would put in our hearts those in our families and in our community who don't believe in you. Show us how we can reach out to them and continue to love them and to speak the truth with gentleness and respect to them.

We ask this in Jesus' name. Amen.