

# The Fence

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[ 0 : 00 ] For those of you who maybe haven't met Matt, he is our district minister.! He gets to sometimes just pop into different churches in Saskatchewan and share what's going on with our wider church family.

But also offers often to share the word with us as a congregation, which is nice for me to get a break from doing that week after week and focus on other church responsibilities.

So I want to welcome you here, Matt, and thank you for coming. And we look forward to hearing what the Lord's laid on your heart. Thank you, Pastor Josh. It's always good to be here with you. And, yeah, I can appreciate what Pastor Josh experiences when it comes to ministry and a young family.

That's what it was kind of like for my wife and I in 1996 when we started at a church called Lake Park Baptist Church near Birch Hills. And it was a smaller church as well.

Being a solo pastor, trying to do youth ministry and run different kinds of other ministries to chair different groups so that they were organized and so on.

[ 1 : 10 ] And it's a big, big role. So I appreciate what Pastor Josh and his family go through. And that's why I, every once in a while, I call them up and say, how can I help?

And if I can preach, that's one of the best things for me. I have a hard time running a youth group these days. But anyway, we've done that for many years as well. So, okay, let's, I just would like to pray with you before I share.

Father, I thank you so much for this time together here this morning. I thank you for the spirit of worship, the unity of this family of believers right here in this community. And, Lord, as we've had time to share together about requests that we have on our hearts, whether personally and then also for others, Lord, we also want to remember the event that just took place here in Regina and this crusade.

And just hearing of those that came forward for prayer. We don't know, really, every individual and why it was they came for prayer. But for some, they came to respond to the call that came through the word, which was by your spirit.

And then also for those who maybe weren't living right and needed to rededicate their life. And that you shone by your spirit a light in their life. And you pinpointed things in their journey that they needed to organize, to deal with, and whatever it may be.

[ 2 : 33 ] And so I pray for each of those and those who were encouraged in that crusade. And that you would use them for the furtherance of your gospel here in our province or wherever they came from.

So I pray now that you would guide us as we open the scriptures. I pray your protection over your word. That I would not say something, Lord, that would cause an issue with it.

That you would guard my heart, my mind, and my lips. And that you, Holy Spirit, would have full freedom to work. I pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.

Amen. Okay. We are going to be looking at John chapter 7 together this morning. And it's really interesting that as you're going to find out in just a moment, as I'm sharing this, some of the requests that we heard from one another that we asked for prayer for, and how it will apply to what I'm going to be sharing with you.

And I'll try to draw that in as we go through this passage together. Now, we're not going to look at the entire chapter of John 7. We're going to look at the first part of the chapter, and then mainly at the last part, and then a little bit of the verses in between to lead us and connect it all together.

[ 3 : 46 ] But I just want you to know, that's how I used to read books. I would read the first chapter and the last chapter. And then I would put my English assignment together an hour before it was

supposed to be handed in.

And so what we're going to be doing is reliving my past, okay? So, no, not going to happen that way. Now, before we read this, I need to set the theme for you as to what is this chapter getting at. In our day-to-day life, we experience what I would refer to as fences or lines. And what I don't mean according to agricultural fences and that kind of thing.

What I mean is there are lines or fences that people will either, they'll walk up to it, and they'll say, I cannot cross. There's other people on the other side of the fence that are saying, come on over. And then there's those that are on the fence, and they're saying, I don't know what to do. And so you see that, for example, in, let's pick on politics, right?

[ 4 : 51 ] You have people that are saying, we are all for this party. And somebody else will say, absolutely not. I am not for that party. And then there's others that will say, well, I'm kind of on the fence.

I don't know. I like some of what they're saying. I don't like this part. I don't know which way to go, but I'll just entertain both. Okay, so that just gives you an example of everyday life. But this is also very practical when it comes to life with Jesus Christ or faith in Christ, which we talked about and we've heard a little bit in this prayer time that we had prior to me coming up here and sharing with you.

There's these moments in life, in our world, where people have definitely chosen which side of the fence they are on when it comes to Jesus. There are those who say, absolutely not.

I will not go there. There's others of, for example, you who are gathered here this morning. I don't know where everybody's at in your spiritual journey. But for many of you, this is definitely, we are on the side of Jesus.

And then there are those who are saying, well, I kind of like Jesus. I know what he's like. I just don't know which way to go. I don't know if I should totally commit to him or not. So we're going to begin by reading the first five verses of John chapter 7.

[ 6 : 08 ] And we're going to see how this comes together. So verse 1, starting there. After this, Jesus went around in Galilee, purposely staying away from Judea because the Jews there were waiting to take his life.

But when the Jewish feast of tabernacles was near, Jesus' brothers said to him, you ought to leave here and go to Judea so that your disciples may see the miracles you do.

No one who wants to become a public figure acts in secret. Since you are doing these things, show yourself to the world. For even his own brothers did not believe in him.

Now the first thing we need to know when we're looking at these first five verses because it comes up, who are Jesus' brothers? We don't often think about Jesus' biological family.

We know he grew up like he grew up in a family. We know that he was born of Mary, which we celebrate at Christmas, his father being Joseph as far as his earthly father, not his father who brought him into this world.

[ 7 : 15 ] But we know there is a family, but we don't think about, well, did he have brothers? Did he have sisters? Who were these people? Well, in Matthew chapter 13, verse 55, it says, Isn't this the carpenter's son?

Isn't his mother's name Mary? And aren't his brothers James, Joseph, Simon, and Judas? Now that's not the Judas that would betray Jesus, by the way.

So these are Jesus' half-brothers. Do you recognize any of those names? You do, right? There's some that are quite familiar.

One being James. James was the one who wrote the epistle of James that you have in your scriptures right after Hebrews. He's one of the brothers that is spoken of in John chapter 7, who at this point in his life did not believe in Jesus.

Oh, yeah, he knew Jesus was a real person. Jesus talked and ate and, you know, he worked with the family. He worked possibly with his father in the carpentry business and so on.

[ 8 : 26 ] But here is this James who would later write an epistle that you have in your scriptures. At this point, he did not believe. Now just a side note here.

No one is born a follower of Jesus Christ. Right? No one's born as a follower of Christ.

So you hear testimonies from time to time. And, I mean, I heard so many of them pastoring in a church. People giving their testimony maybe before they were baptized or sharing their testimony before they became a member of a church, of our church.

And they would say, I was born into a Christian family. And when I heard their testimony, just one-on-one, I'd say, can you please clarify what you mean by this? Because no one is born a Christian.

Just because you were born into a Christian family does not mean your faith comes out of your parents or your grandparents. And there are so many people that live in this, in our world or in our province, maybe even in your community, that if you were to ask them, tell me a little bit about your spiritual heritage.

[ 9 : 42 ] Oh, you know, they would say, well, we attended this church. And they would explain, you know, what church it was, what denomination it was. And I grew up going to this church. You know, my family was very Christian.

And I just did it that way. So, in other words, they're implying, I'm okay. Because I grew up with that kind of heritage. Every single person on this planet is born without a personal relationship with Christ.

And at some point must decide what are they going to do with Jesus. Even men like the Apostle James, who is actually a brother to Jesus, needed to make this decision for himself.

No one is exempt. But there's something about James and his other brothers, the other brothers of Jesus, that doesn't quite make sense. They told Jesus in verse 3 and 4, you ought to leave here and go to Judea so that your disciples, okay, your disciples, James isn't saying, you know, me being one of them.

He's saying, your disciples may see the miracles you do. No one who wants to become a public figure acts in secret. Since you are doing these things, show yourself to the world.

[ 10 : 58 ] Now, if verses 3 and 4 would have Jesus' brothers saying something like this, we don't think you can do these miracles. We hear that you're doing these kinds of things in the community or the communities around.

We don't think that you can actually do these things. We don't want to be associated with you. Do you realize, Jesus, you're embarrassing our family? Like, cut it out.

No one, in their situation, no one really wants to be a part of someone who's going out there and doing these wild and maybe even what they would think are strange things.

Now, if Jesus' brothers would have said something like that, then it would kind of make sense what we're reading in verses 3 and 4.

But this is not the case. Jesus' brothers believed that Jesus could do miracles. They believed he could do these things. They were amazed. They loved what he could do.

[ 12 : 03 ] And they even wanted him to make an appearance in Jerusalem to become more popular. That, Jesus, you actually could become a celebrity by doing these kinds of things.

You need to take your show on the road. Do you realize how much cash you could make? We'll stand at the door and say, if you want to see Jesus do this, pay up.

We'll do this. We could make a boatload of cash. Verse 10 tells us that Jesus' brothers even went to the same feast or celebration at the church in Jerusalem that Jesus did.

But to this, John says in verse 5, For even his own brothers did not believe in him. More plainly put, spiritually, they were on the wrong side of the fence.

After I read this and I pondered this, a terrible feeling came over me. How many people do you know? They like the idea of the person of Jesus.

[ 13 : 17 ] They like his character of compassion for the sick and the hurting. They like his sympathy and empathy for those who are grieving. They like to hear of him being a forgiving person.

They like that he can look after our needs. They like the person of Jesus. And they love what the person of Jesus can do. They even pray that maybe Jesus would do it for somebody in their own life.

But they do not believe in him for salvation. They are on the wrong side of the fence. To like or even love the character and the things that Jesus can do.

Does not mean that Jesus likes or loves you or them to the point that just because they like what he can do, they're good to go for eternity.

You won't find that in the Bible. What you will find in Scripture are words like this. John 1 verse 12. Yet to all who received him, to those who believe him, Why is this so important?

[ 14 : 36 ] John 3 verse 36 tells us, Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life. But whoever rejects the Son will not see life.

For God's wrath remains on him. People on the wrong side of the fence are more interested in committing to religious activity than committing to Jesus.

Jesus' brothers were all for Jesus, doing his miracles and going more public with his miracles. They were interested in going to Jerusalem and going to the special church meetings, but they were not interested in making the commitment that Jesus was actually whom God sent, that that is to be the Savior, the Messiah for all of mankind.

They were not interested in believing in him, which means that they would not put their faith in him or entrust themselves to him or make a commitment to him.

[15:43] So the question is, do you know anyone like that? Do you know anyone who says, Oh, I'm okay with going to church. I'm okay with going to a special meeting maybe, but don't ask me to cross the fence.

I'm okay. I'm okay with just attending or accepting some things about Jesus, but not committing to him. In this previous chapter of John, in chapter 6, verse 2, it says, There are a great crowd of people followed him because they saw the miraculous signs he had performed on the sick. Why were they following Jesus? Because they liked what he was doing. We like that Jesus is going to heal people and do those kinds of things, so we really like that he can do those things.

And we will follow him as long as he keeps doing that. Or in Luke, when Jesus was brought before Herod, a Roman official to be questioned to see if he deserved the death penalty, it says in Luke 23, verse 8, When Herod saw Jesus, he was greatly pleased because for a long time he had been waiting to see him.

Why was he waiting to see Jesus? From what he had heard about him, he hoped to see him perform some miracles.

[17:17] That's why he wanted to see. If I could just see Jesus do this stuff, I hear he does such a great job of wowing people with doing all these great miracles.

I would love to see some of that. There's absolutely no desire for the truth of Jesus and to live for Jesus. The only desire was we only want to see Jesus do these great things that he does.

Like they're watching a magician. You know, they've gone to the show, they've watched the magician do what he does, and then in the end, all they can say is, what a fantastic show.

You need to go watch him sometime. So for proof that they were only interested in the activity of Jesus and not in committing to Jesus, John says in John 12 verse 37, even after Jesus had done all these miraculous signs in their presence, they still would not believe in him.

They still wouldn't believe. They saw all these great things that Jesus was doing, but they would not believe in him by faith. So this does not mean that there haven't been people who have committed their life to Jesus because of a miracle.

[18:34] There have been. But there's more about liking the activity of Jesus rather than simply, or than the person of Jesus. So I ask again, do you know anyone on that side of the fence?

They like the activity of Jesus, the social justice, the caring for and befriending the marginalized in society. He was a great man and a great example is what they're thinking, but they aren't interested in submitting to him as their savior.

So that was the first point. People on the wrong side of the fence are more interested in committing to a religious activity than committing to Jesus as their savior. So Jesus eventually goes to the feast in Jerusalem, but instead of going to keep a religious ritual, he goes to teach.

Verse 14 tells us this. Not until halfway through the feast did Jesus go up to the temple courts and begin to teach. And while he was teaching, people started to ask questions.

Questions like this one found in verse 15. How did this man get such learning without having studied? Or this question in verse 26.

[19:59] Here he is speaking publicly and they are not saying a word to him. Have the authorities really concluded that he is the Christ? Or verse 31. Still many in the crowd put their faith in him.

They said, When the Christ comes, will he do more miraculous signs than this man? In other words, what they are saying is he must be the Christ.

Questions like these didn't sit well with the Pharisees. Verse 32. The Pharisees heard the crowd whispering such things about him. Then the chief priests and the Pharisees sent temple guards to arrest him.

In the meantime, right to the very last day of the feast, people are still listening to Jesus' teaching. What was Jesus teaching about? verses 37 to 39 tell us that on the last and the greatest day of the

feast, Jesus stood and said in a loud voice, If anyone is thirsty, let him come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as the scripture has said, streams of living water will flow from him. By this he meant the Spirit, whom those who believed in him were later to receive.

[ 21 : 13 ] Up to that time, the Spirit had not been given, since Jesus had not been glorified. Jesus' teaching gets the people talking. Verses 40 to 42.

On hearing his words, some of the people said, Surely this man is the prophet. Others said, He is the Christ. So others asked, How can the Christ come from Galilee?

Does not the scriptures say that the Christ will come from David's family and from Bethlehem, the town where David lived? David's family said, Their talking tells us where they are in relation to the fence.

They are not on the wrong side of the fence, nor are they on the right side of the fence. They're on the fence. They're living a way and trying to live in such a way that they don't really have to make a commitment, but they like the side of the people that are on the right side.

They're also agreeing with some of the things that people are on the wrong side, but they don't know which way to go. Do we go with Jesus or do we not? And they're actually telling us what it's like if you are on the fence.

[ 22 : 22 ] People on the fence are more interested in talking about Jesus than committing to Jesus. There are many people across the nation, province, local communities who are on the fence in respect to Jesus, and you may have experienced that right here in this town or the region of Davidson from wherever you are from.

You've talked to people and they've said, well, okay, I understand what Jesus is like and I can agree with you, but again, I'm not interested in going all the way.

There may even be someone here this morning that you're in exactly that situation. You're on the fence. You don't know what to do with Jesus. And so if you're on the fence concerning Jesus, I ask you, won't you come down off the fence?

Living on fences is not a great place to live. So come down and commit your life to Jesus. Don't just talk about Him. Come down and talk to Him. Talk to Him about your unbelief.

Talk to Him about your sin. Talk to Him about whatever is troubling you or causing this guilt or frustration that you're dealing with. The same thing Jesus taught on the last day at the feast in Jerusalem in John 7 verses 37 to 38, He teaches you today.

[ 23 : 45 ] If anyone is thirsty, let him come to Me. Let him or her come from either the wrong side of the fence or off the fence and drink.

Whoever believes in Me, which means put your faith in Him, trust in Him, commit to Him, as the Scriptures has said, streams of living water will flow from within Him.

So come down off the fence. So there were those who heard Jesus teaching and they said, no, not interested. There are those who were on the fence and saying, we're thinking about it.

But then there are those who actually did cross over. Remember how the Pharisees sent the temple guards to go and arrest Jesus? They were so fed up with people entertaining the thought that Jesus was actually the Messiah that they said, go and arrest Him and bring Him here.

Well, look what happens, verse 45. Finally, the temple guards went back to the chief priests and Pharisees who asked them, why didn't you bring Him in? And look at their answer. No one ever spoke the way this man does.

[ 24 : 56 ] The guards declared, you mean, He has received you also? He has deceived you also? The Pharisees restored. Has any of the rulers or the Pharisees believed in Him?

They forgot about Nicodemus, which is coming up. No. Pretty clear which side of the fence they're on, correct? We're not going over that fence, so neither should you. Now Nicodemus, who had gone to Jesus earlier and who was one of their own number, asked, does our law condemn anyone without first hearing Him and finding out what He is doing?

They replied, are you from Galilee too? Look into it and you will find that a prophet does not come out of Galilee. Okay, side note.

When the wise men came to try and find Jesus at His birth, or He had actually been born already, they found Him somewhere else, but when they came at the time of Jesus' birth, remember they went to the Roman official of that time and they asked, where would we find Jesus, born King of the Jews?

And He said, I have no clue, but I'm going to ask for you. Who did He ask to find out where Jesus would be born? Do you remember?

[ 26 : 23 ] Pardon? Well, the Magi came, the Magi asked, where would we find Him? Where did the governor official of that time say, well, I know where you can get the answer.

Who did He ask for the answer? The Pharisees. The Pharisees said, we know, according to the prophets, where He would be born when He comes.

He'll be born in Bethlehem. But they didn't go. And now they're saying in this verse to Nicodemus, are you from Galilee too?

Look into it and you will find that a prophet does not come out of Galilee. And it was just prior to this in the same passage that the people knew He's coming from Bethlehem. Now consider this very carefully with me.

The temple guards came back to the chief priests and the Pharisees and when questioned why didn't you bring Him with you, they didn't say, well, we were thinking about it but we thought that's just going to cause a lot of trouble.

[ 27 : 35 ] They didn't say something like that. What they did say is, no one ever spoke the way this man does.

And then one of their own, a Pharisee by the name of Nicodemus from John chapter 3 who came to Jesus in the night and Jesus explained to him this doctrine of being born again.

This man perks up and he starts defending Jesus. Verse 51, does our law condemn anyone without first hearing him to find out what he is doing?

So what's going on with these people? I'm referring to the guards and Nicodemus. What's going on with these people? The key is that the guards came back.

They didn't have to. Another key action is that Nicodemus spoke up in defense of Jesus knowing that this group of Pharisees disliked Jesus so much that they actually wanted to kill him.

[ 28 : 44 ] So in regard to the fence, where are the temple guards and Nicodemus? They have crossed over. And how do we know? What is the telltale sign of somebody that's going over the fence and they're actually on the right side of the fence regarding Jesus Christ?

People who are on the right side of the fence are more interested in publicly identifying with Jesus than remaining private. Now here's where the prayer request came in about how people that you're experiencing there's a hostility toward the gospel.

That's happening in our communities. It's happening in Canada. There's a hostility toward the gospel. Why? Because it speaks about the very fact that there are specific values, specific guidelines, specific truths that people should be living by.

And it's not our idea, by the way. It's God's idea. And people get opposed to that because who are you to tell me how I should live? Now even if it means there could be tension, people that are on the right side of the fence are okay with publicly identifying with Christ rather than remaining private. Even if it means they could be questioned, they will willingly take their relationship with God to another level. They put their commitment right out there for all to see.

[ 30 : 15 ] They don't do this for pride's sake. Look at me, I'm a Christian. They do this because they know that in Christ and Christ alone their eternity is secure and that's the only way anyone will come to eternity with Christ forever.

It is through Christ and Him alone. So their conviction, if you're on the right side of the fence, your conviction, you don't have to be concerned about verses like Matthew 10 verses 32 to 33 where it says, whoever acknowledges me before men, I will also acknowledge him before my Father in heaven.

But whoever disowns me before men, I will disown him before my Father in heaven. See, the people on the right side of the fence, this isn't a concern for them. People on the right side of the fence publicly identify with Jesus.

So when is the last time you saw someone go public with their relationship with Jesus? When is the last time that you have gone public with your relationship with Jesus?

You might ask, well, what exactly would that look like? Well, one of the examples would be baptism. Baptism is a very real public example of going out front of people and saying, I am a follower of Jesus Christ.

[ 31 : 33 ] I believe that He died for me. I believe that He went to the grave and took care of my sin but rose again victorious, conquering death. I know it's only through Him.

Now, if you haven't been baptized, talk to your pastor or some of the leadership here at the church and they'd love to talk to you about that. But what about when a conversation goes toward the spiritual discussion?

You know, you're going and you're doing business here in Davidson or in your region, wherever it is, you meet up with people and the conversation goes to the spiritual part of it. Do you engage in sharing about Jesus and that you are a follower of Him?

Or are you not even on that side of the fence? You say, well, it's been a while. I'm just not that vocal or I don't want to come across as a fanatic.

I don't want to cause a scene. Look at what Jesus says in Luke 9 verse 25. Oh, I'm way behind, sorry. Maybe I'm not. Hmm?

[ 32 : 34 ] Hmm? Hmm? No, that's the one. If anyone is ashamed of me and my words, the Son of Man will be ashamed of him when he comes to his glory and in the glory of the Father and of the holy angels.

Is this the reason that some people don't want to go public with their relationship with Jesus? Are they ashamed of him? And if so, it might be an opportunity to consider what side of the fence am I really on?

For some of you may say, well, no, Matt, that's not it. I just don't want to cause a division between myself and people. I prefer to keep the relationship going, so I don't want to go there because I don't want to disrupt that.

You know what? There is no way around that. Division is very possible if you are on the right side of the fence. People who are not on the same side of the fence as you concerning Jesus, they will not accept the values and things that you're sharing about your relationship with him.

No matter how tactful and courteous you are, if you go public, division is very likely going to happen. It's not that you are going to cause it intentionally, it's just going to happen.

[ 33 : 57 ] Verse 43 said, thus the people were divided because of Jesus. You won't cause a division, it will be Jesus who will cause it. Jesus admitted this in Matthew 10, 34-36.

Do not suppose that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I did not come to bring peace but a sword. For I have come to turn a man against his father, a daughter against her mother, a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law, a man's enemy will be the members of his own household.

Jesus doesn't mean this to happen intentionally. It's not like he's saying, okay, if you accept me as your savior, really try hard to get your son to not like you.

That's not what he's saying. It's just a byproduct of the relationship. It's not always going to be unifying in a family. It's not always going to be unifying in your community.

I know of people who have left a religious background to live in a personal relationship with Jesus. And then their family found out and they told this dear loved one of theirs, they told their son, this just happened about a month and a half ago, I heard about this.

[ 35 : 15 ] If you don't quit this relationship with Jesus stuff, you are not welcome here. I know of families where children have grown up in the teaching of Jesus and have accepted Jesus, but today their children don't see Jesus like their parents do and it has caused them to become estranged.

that happens in my family, my own son.

Going public with your faith will cause division and it's painful. But that's what life is like on the right side of the fence.

When it comes to the fence, which side are you on? Or would you say, I'm not on any fence, I'm on the fence on this one, really. Just truthfully, I'm on the fence.

I don't know which side I want to go on and that's fair. And if you want, don't hesitate to talk to your pastor about where you're at.

[ 36 : 38 ] Or if you know of somebody that's on the fence and they want to talk about it and you don't really know if you feel comfortable, then say, I know someone who can help you with this and introduce them to your pastor or to a leader of the church or somebody who else they may respect within the dynamic of who Jesus is.

And if you've chosen the side of the fence that does not include Jesus, I pray that God by his spirit will continue to call you as you're searching. I'm going to pray and then I'll hand it over to Pastor Josh.

Lord, thank you so much for our time together this morning and Lord, we are grateful that you have shown us very clearly through scriptures, like even the one we looked at today, that there's just times in life where people are just not willing to cross over.

And Lord, it's painful when people on the fence just aren't willing to commit. It's painful.

And Lord, we know how painful it is for us and we can't imagine how painful it is for you. But you've called us to simply live life according to the values, the ethics, the doctrine, the theology of scripture and let you take care of the rest.

[ 38 : 07 ] And that when we have opportunity to share, we'll share. And we won't let any of the division stuff get in the way because we know how important you are to everybody in this world and in our lives.

In Jesus' name I pray, amen. Amen.