

Is it just a matter of timing

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Date: 01 December 2018

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[0 : 00] So we're looking at John chapter 7 this morning, first 36 verses. If you're a visitor here, you can see the outline of what I'm saying on the back of the sheet you get handed when you come in the door this morning.

Now, according to critics, timing is everything in politics and public life. And we see that, don't we, all the time. So we've had a charm offensive by Mr. Morrison, our new Prime Minister, immediately following his political assassination of our previous Prime Minister, Mr. Turnbull.

And we all know what that's about. It's designed to quieten or avoid the hard questions that everybody wants to ask. But of course it never works, does it?

Or rarely works. And that's where it takes us into chapter 7 of John this morning, because it's the hard questions around Jesus that John wants us to wrestle with as he takes us into Jesus' public ministry, which is what he's doing.

And they are hard questions. There were lots of things happening, lots of people watching and debating with Jesus, and lots of conclusions about Jesus being formed by different individuals and groups within the crowd.

[1 : 22] And John wants us to be, as it were, part of that. The hard questions about Jesus won't go away. The hard questions of Jesus today, we find, are actually the same hard questions that we need to face today about Jesus.

So, who is he? Who is this Jesus that presents and makes these outlandish claims? What's he about? When you drill down into his message, what really is he about?

Is what he says to be trusted? If we follow him, he says we'll have life, salvation, forgiveness. Is he to be trusted?

And then on the other hand, all the negative things creep in. Well, if as he said he was, he was God, then how come so many people reject him?

How come there's so much unbelief? How come he allowed himself to be treated like he was treated? How come he was rejected? How come he was killed?

[2 : 28] And then the ultimate question that John wants us to wrestle with is a personal question. So, what conclusion will I form about Jesus? 2,000 years after this biography was written.

And they're hard questions, aren't they? Hard because they're hard to understand. But hard because of the implications of the conclusions we form.

And even if you're already a Christian this morning, you still need to drill down into that idea of you being a Christian. You need to drill down into your own conclusions about Jesus.

You say, well, I'm a Christian, therefore I've already concluded that what Jesus says is true. And I've committed myself to him. But then the question arises, well, have you? Have you really? In other words, is your faith real?

Is your faith in line with what Jesus says it should be if you're going to be a believer in him? Or is it possible even as you claim to be a believer, you're actually living under a form of self-deception?

[3 : 34] So, for example, do you actually believe and trust on Jesus on his terms? As he says, as he talks about himself and talks about salvation.

Or is it possible that you just believe in a form of Jesus? That is, you've taken various bits and pieces of Jesus that you sit comfortably with.

And have actually rejected various bits and pieces of Jesus that are altogether too challenging. Or that require you to give up too much or change too much. See, as Christians we do that all the time, don't we?

And the problem with that is that Jesus said that too amounts to unbelief.

We'll see that coming out of these verses this morning. As we move into chapter 7. Context, as always, is critical to understanding. So, the context is this.

[4 : 41] People loved the miracles that Jesus was doing. No doubt about that. They flocked to him to see the miracles. This was really special stuff. Loved every moment of it. But, increasingly rejected the conclusions Jesus pushed on them as a result of the miracles.

They were taking the miracles and saying, Oh, this is what we'll believe about Jesus and the like of the miracles. Jesus said, No. If you look at the miracles, this is what you need to believe and respond to about me.

And that gap was opening up. Into opposition. Into opposition. And hatred. And outright rejection. Chapter 4 and 5.

We've seen it a few weeks ago. Jesus had actually left Jerusalem and Judea. Now, Judea was the southern part of Israel. Why he had left there? Because the Jewish religious authorities, none less than them, the Jewish religious authorities had decided that Jesus was a blasphemous imposter.

And that they would kill him. That was their conclusion. Then chapter 6. In time, it was a few months later. Jesus had moved north to the northern part of Israel called Galilee.

[6 : 00] And we find that only a few months later, history had repeated itself. The crowds that flocked him in Galilee now, in chapter 6, have almost all abandoned him.

Why? Why? Well, they too, once they started to hear Jesus' teaching after the feeding of 5,000, they too said, well, actually, this Jesus is talking about a spiritual salvation.

He wants to be a spiritual Messiah. And quite frankly, when our biggest enemy is the Romans, we don't really have any need for a spiritual Messiah. We don't even have any interest in a spiritual Messiah.

We don't like this nonsense of bread from heaven and internal changes and stuff like that. And so they walked away from Jesus. That was their conclusion.

He was irrelevant to their needs. And chapter 7, we step into chapter 7, and there's another gap of a few months. So from the start of chapter 7, it's about six months since the miracle of the feeding of the 5,000.

[7 : 07] And we're told in verse 1, Jesus had been going about in Galilee. I think that word just means Jesus has been on the move. He was flying under the radar, trying to keep a low profile, because of the hostility that was rising against him.

In verse 2, we come up against a significant moment. Decisions are going to have to be made. It was the Feast of the Booth, or Feast of the Tabernacles. And that was the most important and the most popular, sorry, the most popular, not the most important, the most popular of all the Jewish religious festivals.

And it was a time of happiness and excitement, because it incorporated something that we would call a Thanksgiving, a harvest Thanksgiving. It happened after the intake of the annual harvest.

The food was all stored for winter, so it was a time to celebrate. But predominantly, it remembered God's provision for his people in the wilderness after the exodus from Egypt and on their journey to the Promised Land.

And so, as I said, it was an exciting, happy time. It was a week-long celebration. And huge crowds went to Jerusalem for ten days or so of celebrating God's provision.

[8 : 21] Ten days of enjoying the sense of being God's people together. Ten days of looking to the future that the exodus had promised them, which they'd never quite materialized for them.

And Jesus' disciples see an opportunity and think that they should go too, because this is Jesus' moment.

This is his moment to showcase himself to the crowds. And suddenly, in chapter 7, verse 2 again, the question, the hard question, surfaces, resurfaces.

Is it only a matter of time? It's now six months or more since Jesus was last in Jerusalem, and left because the crowds were going to kill him. So, is it a case now, well, having had six months to think about Jesus and get used to what he was saying and stuff like that, will the crowds and will the Jewish religious authorities now warn to Jesus?

Will things be different? Will they understand him better when he goes back to Jerusalem? On the other side of that coin, will Jesus do things differently, getting a second bite at the cherry, as it were?

[9 : 32] Well, the answer as we move into chapter 7, the answer John gives is a very loud no.

Nothing is going to be different. Because the problem, as John has emphasized repeatedly, is not a lack of time to consider what Jesus has been saying.

It's not a lack of time to ponder and troll over the evidence. It's not in how Jesus has presented himself. The real problem, John wants to see over and over and over again, the real problem is in hearts that refuse to accept Jesus on his terms.

That's what it comes down to. Hearts that refuse to accept Jesus on his terms as God's Messiah, God's King and Savior. And we'll see that playing out again in these verses as we move into, first of all, the family response, which is pragmatic enthusiasm covering general unbelief.

Now, we've got a sort of feel for Jesus at this point. John has zoomed through chapter 6. Massive crowds, incredible interest in Jesus. Then at the end of chapter 6, we're left with not much more than just the 12 disciples.

[10 : 53] Crowds are gone. And now, we zoom in even further, and the word here in chapter 3 is his brothers. Now, it's a little bit ambiguous, but I'm taking it to mean his actual literal biological brothers.

They have a turn now to express their conclusions about Jesus. And they're no different from the crowd. Not really. They had no doubt.

It was just a matter of timing and packaging. And so, they're saying the festival in Jerusalem, that's the opportunity. All right, Jesus, you need to go there. You need to go there as soon as possible.

This is your moment. If you farm this right, Jesus, you can turn things around. You win the crowd back. You can be popular. You can be successful. You need to get out there and sell your message.

Just like enthusiastic political campaign managers, they think that success for Jesus lies in more exposure to the public. Show yourself to be a patriot.

[12 : 02] This is the time to go there and do a charm offensive, being a patriot in Jerusalem. Display your miracles. Mount a popular grassroots campaign.

Give people things that will help them and benefit them, and people will fall in line with you. Make sure it's your face and your message that appears every evening on the 6 o'clock Jerusalem news for that 10 days of the festival.

But buried in that enthusiasm, verse 5, was unbelief. They weren't convinced by what they saw and heard from Jesus.

So part of urging Jesus to go back to Jerusalem was to kind of convince themselves. They had really no idea what Jesus was on about. Even worse, from our vantage point as readers, we can see that these brothers, these biological brothers, were pushing Jesus to his death, and they just didn't even realize they were doing it.

How sad that must have been for Jesus to hear his brothers speaking, saying, go to Jerusalem. We'll get you up there as quickly as we can. And Jesus knew what the outcome of being in Jerusalem was going to be. So we get Jesus' response then to his brothers.

[13 : 26] And again, we see this stark contrast, which John wants us to see, as we engage with Jesus. Because primarily, that's what we need to do through these verses, is engage with Jesus.

And Jesus' response shows him to be purposeful, faithful in his commitment to saving God's people. Jesus pushes back at his brothers, and he said, well, actually, guys, you're telling me it's a question of timing, and you're right and you're wrong.

It is a question of timing, but it's a question of God's timing, not your timing. See, the brothers had no idea about God's agenda, and how the next few months would play out for Jesus.

And it's only six or seven or eight months from this point to Jesus actually killed on the cross. But ironically, given the nature of the feast and the festival and what it was celebrating, ironically, if they had actually understood what Jesus was teaching, they would have realized that the festival they were keen to be part of actually described Jesus' mission.

He was the greater than Moses, the prophet who was to come. He had come to mount another exodus, to lead another exodus event, to rescue his people from the world.

[14 : 52] Everything that is opposed to God and holds his people in bondage. So in a sense, what Jesus is in here, in this festival, is a real live drama of working in parallel with what he's going to endure, what he's there for.

But of course, nobody sees that except Jesus. Jesus had come into the world to expose evil and sin and death and deliver his people into light and life.

Jesus is saying here in these verses, all this will become clear in due course. But in the meanwhile, no amount of charm offensive or populist politicking will change anything.

Jesus will inevitably offend. Look at verse 6. My time has not yet come, but your time is always here. The world cannot hate you, but it hates me.

Why? Because I testify about it that its works are evil. There's an inevitable clash of agendas, a clash of worldviews, a clash of wills, a clash of thinking, a clash of desires.

[16 : 16] Jesus will inevitably offend people, causing them to hate him because he will expose and deliver them from the very things that people want to keep hidden. Rebellion and unbelieving hearts and attitudes.

But Jesus is God's man, driven by God's concern for God's glory. And that's what we need to see. In spite of what he knows he's ahead of, Jesus doesn't turn to the left or right.

He plows ahead because he's God's man, driven by concern for God's glory. Look at verse 10. We're just going to skim over some verses very quickly now. Jesus does go to Jerusalem in the end.

But the point here, I think, is that he goes to Jerusalem on his terms. And again, immediately starts teaching, pushing the crowd to believe his claim to be God's king and savior.

verses 16, 17, and 18. They recognize his authority as he teaches. They admire his teaching and his authority.

[17 : 25] And Jesus tells them his purpose, his mission, is not in any way to showcase himself, but his life and his mission and his very being is driven by the Father's purpose in salvation.

He's here to implement his Father's purpose in salvation. He speaks truth from his Father. And the fact that they do not respond to Jesus in belief shows they have lost touch with God.

And lost touch with God's purpose in salvation as written in their Jewish scriptures. The divide opens again. Verses 27, 28, and 29.

Same sort of thought. Jesus says, well look, your response tells me one thing. You've only got a very superficial understanding of who I am. You think you know everything about me, but you don't.

And so, says Jesus, no surprise. You do not see me as God's Savior because you're so focused on running your own agenda. Same problem.

[18 : 37] We've seen chapter after chapter after chapter. Verses 32 through 36. Jesus will accomplish his mission.

verse 33. Jesus then said, I will be with you a little longer and then I'm going to him who sent me. I'm here for a job. I'll do the job.

And then I'm going back home to my father. That's the plan. And the plan will be perfected. And hidden in there is Jesus saying to the Jewish religious authorities who remember at that very moment were planning to kill him.

He's really saying to them, now look, you guys, you think you know all about me. You think you control my destiny, but I'm telling you that you evil people will never control my life and my destiny.

Regardless of what it appears like, regardless of what they think, Jesus, he's on God's mission, on God's timing and will complete it. And so, the irony again is, and there's lots of irony in this passage, the irony is that the brothers unknowingly said to Jesus, go up to Jerusalem and show yourself to the world.

[19 : 58] Jesus is saying here, yes, he says, I will be showing myself to the world. But when that moment comes, I'll be showing myself in shame of death by execution as a criminal.

It will be a sacrificial death. It will be a death of apparent defeat. It will be a special death in the sense that nobody else can follow me into this particular death because it is a sacrificial death for the forgiveness of sins.

But then, says Jesus, I'll return to heaven with my Father. And again, something that sinful people will be excluded from. I will show myself to the world, says Jesus.

But even then, you're not going to be able to understand what it's about. And then we have the popular response, commitment to faithless unbelief towards Jesus.

Now once again, John gives us a very wide range of unbelieving responses to Jesus. And that's been his pattern right through. And so, in a sense, there's a lot of repetition, but it's nuanced.

[21 : 06] Verse 11. There's nothing very nuanced about this. The religious leaders were planning to kill Jesus.

Worse than that, they were actually openly promising to kill Jesus. And worse than that, even, verse 13, they had implemented a fear campaign, I think, because it was not just going to kill Jesus, but it was anybody associated with Jesus.

Look at verse 13. Yet for fear of the Jews, and when John uses that term, he's usually talking about the Jewish religious leader, yet for fear of the Jews, no one spoke openly of him. Everybody had an opinion about Jesus.

Everybody was talking, but they were scared. Scared of what? Scared to associate with Jesus, because they knew that Jewish religious leaders were going to kill Jesus, and most likely, if you're closely associated with Jesus, you might actually get dragged into the mess.

That's a pretty strong response of unbelief. Not just a decision for themselves, but a decision they were imposing on people around them, the nation around them. The people who were supposed to instruct and lead into truth.

[22 : 28] Verse 12. Everybody had an opinion about Jesus, and it seems very modern, doesn't it? So some people, on the one hand, were saying, well actually, he's a good man.

It's hard to find fault with a guy. After all, look at all the good things he's doing. He's bringing benefit into the community, and he's not harming anybody, so let's just leave well enough alone. Yep. He's a good bloke.

The other extreme, again, very familiar, he's a deceiver. He's leading people astray. He's not a good man. He's a bad man. He's leading people to believe something that's not true.

He's giving people a hope of life and salvation that's not right according to how we understand the law. Very familiar responses, aren't they?

Verses 19 to 24, Jesus takes up the big issue that the Jews had with him. The issue of claiming that Jesus was a lawbreaker and a blasphemer.

[23 : 41] Well, Jesus really takes the case to them and rubbishes their claim. He's really saying to them here, I think, in these verses. Look, you're challenging about me being a lawbreaker because that's just really petty.

Worse than that, it's illogical. Worse than that, you're just using it as an excuse, another reason not to believe. Here's how it worked. So, they say that Jesus should be condemned and put to death because he breaks the law.

Remember, he healed a guy, the last time he was in Jerusalem, some six or seven or eight months earlier, he healed a guy on the Sunday, on the Sabbath. Right? And for that, they say, they were furious. He needs to die. He's got total disregard for the law of Moses.

He breaks the law. But Jesus, I think, is picking up here. Well, actually, you guys forgot that you're deliberately plotting my murder right at this very moment.

You blame me for breaking the law, but you also fail to keep the law. But then, more immediately, he's saying, well, look, this whole thing about breaking the law in regard to the Sabbath because I healed this guy, he uses an argument against him.

[24 : 51] He says, well, actually, you guys allow the circumcision of a child on the Sabbath if that circumcision falls on the eighth day to fulfill the law.

The law said you have to circumcise the child on the eighth day. So, Jesus was saying, well, okay, you guys allow circumcision in that event even though technically circumcision is a breach of the law because it's working.

So, he said, how can you logically then say to me because I healed a guy on a Sabbath which again is technically a breach but doing something really good. How can you hold that against me?

What he's saying is you guys are just illogical. You're just finding reasons to not believe. And then buried in there, others thought he had a mental health issue, wasn't thinking straight.

But Jesus pushes back again suggesting they're the ones who are not thinking straight. Do not judge by appearances but judge with right judgment.

[26 : 03] He's pleading for fairness and generosity. Again, he's saying, look, if only you would actually give me a go, you would see and understand and be drawn into truth and ultimately drawn into life.

But instead, all they were given Jesus was prejudice and pettiness. But among all those responses, verse 31, John's always keen to remind us, yet many of the people believed in him.

They said, when the Christ appears, will he do more signs than this man has done? In the midst of massive belief and confusion, some are actually moving towards belief.

This doesn't necessarily suggest that people are actually Christians at that point, but they're moving towards belief because they're actually being generous and logical and fair in the way they're viewing their evidence.

They're saying, well, look, okay, can we imagine anybody else doing greater and more miraculous and wonderful things than what Jesus has been doing? No, we can't. The scriptures told us that when Messiah comes, he would do great and miraculous and wonderful things.

[27 : 20] Therefore, this has to be the Messiah. We don't understand everything there is to understand about him, but this has to be the Messiah. So they're moving towards Jesus and they're moving into deeper and deeper belief.

So what do we need to learn from this part of the story? There's lots more details, I just don't have time to get into there. But what do we need to learn from this part of the story? Well, I just want to touch down a couple of things and they're fairly arbitrary in lots of ways.

So you're free to interact with them and even reject them if you don't think they're right. But the first one is this. Unbelief does not always mean rejecting Jesus outright.

Unbelief does not always mean rejecting Jesus outright. But it is always resisting the terms and agenda for salvation offered by Jesus.

And it is always about implementing our own values and judgments as to what will please God and make us acceptable to him. So, we sometimes don't help ourselves by thinking well, unbelief equals walking away from Jesus completely.

[28 : 36] It's not always like that. It's much more nuanced. It's possible to stay in the Christ and to believe but reject the terms that Jesus offers.

believers. And it's not only possible but it's actually likely almost inevitably because we're hardwired to do that very thing. We're hardwired to reject truth.

That's what it is to be sinful people. We're hardwired to reject anything that challenges our view of life and our understanding of life and our practice of life.

And we're hardwired to do this even in the face of logic and truth and compelling evidence. Sometimes we I think when we read these texts we just read from a reader's perspective and think if these people only could see the big perspective over 2,000 years that we're seeing then they would have believed.

Well not so says Jesus. And in fact the degree to which we oppose or modify or reject Jesus will be determined by how much we feel threatened by Jesus.

[30 : 02] How much we feel Jesus challenges our existing values and understanding of truth. So jumping from the text into our application here where did the most deep seated hatred and rejection of Jesus come from?

It came from those who were most religious. religious. It came from people who knew the Old Testament scriptures inside out back to front.

It could quote slabs of it whose very life work was teaching these things. Why did that hatred come from?

Because they had nowhere to hide. Jesus was totally dismantling everything that they defined themselves by. Everything that they had lived their lives by.

They thought well if only I do religious actions A, B, C and D then God will be pleased with me and God will actually be indebted with me. God will accept me because he has to accept me because I have honoured him.

[31 : 09] And Jesus comes at them and says no you're all wrong. Yes you believe that sincerely but you've been sincerely wrong. That's not how it works. they assumed that they had the ability and the desire to come to God and did so quite openly and again that God ought to be beholden to them.

Jesus says well no you're hard wired to reject God and you'll only come to God if God actually does a work in your heart and brings you to himself. Jesus was taking control of their salvation away from them and making them see that salvation could only be by grace and not by the works of the flesh or by their own efforts.

And they didn't like that. That was undoing them. That was showing them to be wrong. Their choices? Well Jesus has got to go.

Jesus teaches that salvation is inside out. These guys were saying it's outside in.

They had no place for God's spirit because they didn't need God's spirit to renew their hearts and their attitudes. And then other responses were much more moderate, much more subtle.

[32 : 33] But they reinterpret Jesus to the point where those who hold those views believe in Jesus because he's become comfortable to them.

And he fits in comfortably with their own terms. So it comes like this in a modern take on it. It goes something like this and you've heard people say this. There's people in our church I think who say this. Well I want to believe in Jesus.

I really like it that he points me back to serious spirituality and he points me to really connect to God and pursue the good life that God wants me to have. I really like that about Jesus.

But I find it really, really difficult to accept that he would judge me as a sinner. Or indeed that he would threaten me with hell. What right has he to do that?

Or that he would say to me there's actually only a very, very narrow pathway to life and it involves relationship with Jesus and involves a complete change of life, a complete orientation. I'm sure that God has many different pathways to heaven and life.

[33 : 44] So I really like this about Jesus but I'm not going to go down that pathway. Or we say that Jesus died for our sin.

This is very, very real for us here. Sin's a big thing, isn't it? It's a big word for us in our church. We say that Jesus died for our sin. Why did he die for our sin? Because sin's really serious. Why is sin really serious?

Because it keeps us from God. It keeps us from enjoying relationship with God. So here's the question. Which of your sins are you protecting and determined to keep because you actually like it?

Yes, you'll give up a sin over here or over here but this one here, no, I actually rather like it and I'm not going to allow Jesus to expose it.

You say, well, I believe God's end point in salvation is the creation of the church. And the church is his saved people in a community that reflects heaven. And that's what Jesus teaches.

[34 : 55] But then we go on and say, well, actually, I'm not going to engage seriously or thoroughly with any church family, let alone this church family. The theory's okay, I like the concept of church, but the practice is just too hard to be bold with.

It's too hard to engage with other people who let me down all the time. It's too hard to reorganize my lifestyle to prioritize fellowship with believers.

I don't need them. I can exist very well by myself. In fact, I prefer to be on my own. You see the problem? it's great to realize that Jesus has always been purposefully and faithfully committed to save you and me.

In response, we need to be sure that the Jesus we say we believe in is actually the Jesus of Scripture. that we believe in Jesus on his terms, not ours, and all his terms, not just some.

Friends, it's just too easy to deceive ourselves into a cheap substitute that looks like true belief, but is actually unbelief.

[36 : 18] too easy to just know about the mission to believe in Jesus God we knew he He to the