

(2) The scandal of Jesus' identity

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[0 : 00] The reading this morning is from John's Gospel, chapter 7, reading from verse 25 to 52, and that could be found on page 1077 of the Bibles on chairs.

John chapter 7, verse 25. Some of the people of Jerusalem therefore said, Is not this the man whom they seek to kill? And here he is speaking openly, and they say nothing to him. Can it be that the authorities really know that this is the Christ? But we know where this man comes from, and when the Christ appears, no one will know where he comes from. So Jesus proclaimed as he taught in the temple, You know me, and you know where I come from? But I have not come of my own accord. He who sent me is true, and him you do not know. I know him, for I came from him, and he sent me. So they were seeking to arrest him, but no one laid a hand on him, because his hour had not yet come.

[1 : 08] Yet many of the people believed in him. They said, When the Christ appears, will he do more signs than this man has done? The Pharisees heard the crowd muttering these things about him, and the chief priests and the Pharisees sent officers to arrest him.

Jesus then said, And where I am, you cannot come.

On the last day of the feast, the great day, 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.

Now this he said about the Spirit, whom those who believed in him were to receive.

As yet the Spirit had not been given, because Jesus was not yet glorified. When they heard these words, some of the people said, This really is the prophet.

[2 : 35] Others said, This is the Christ. But some said, Is the Christ to come from Galilee? Has not the scripture said that the Christ will come from the offspring of David, and comes from Bethlehem, the village where David was?

So there was a division among the people over him. Some of them wanted to arrest him, but no one laid hands on him. The officers then came to the chief priests and the 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. Nicodemus, who had gone to him before, and who was one of them, said to them, Does our Lord 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. Thank you very much, Lois, for reading the passage to us.

[3 : 45] It's a passage, isn't it, full of confusion, of hostility, of hatred towards Jesus. So the passage starts, doesn't it, with the confusion of the crowds.

Verse 25, Is this not the man whom they seek to kill? Can it be that the authorities really know this is the Christ? So we start with confusion. The passage continues with the outright hostility of the Pharisees.

In verse 30, they're seeking to arrest him. Again, verse 32, the chief priests and Pharisees sent officers to arrest him. So they want him dead. And then the passage finishes in verses 40 to 52 with more confusion.

We read of division, verse 43, among the people. And right at the end, we just heard the Pharisees start to mock one of their own for standing up for Jesus.

Are you from Galilee too? Search and see that no prophet arises from Galilee. So we've got confusion, division, hostility and hatred towards Jesus.

[4 : 50] And yet in the midst of all this confusion, Jesus' voice rings loud and clear and true. Did you hear it? Because in spite of the death threats and utter hostility towards him, we see Jesus continue graciously to hold out the offer of eternal life.

If anyone thirsts, come to me and drink. Pharisees might hate him, but Jesus loves them to the end. It's a marvelous scene, isn't it? Not sure about you, but if I were under such pressure, such hostility, facing these death threats, I'd be out of there as soon as possible.

But not Jesus. He stands firm. He continues to teach the truth about himself. He continues to hold out the offer of life.

Amidst the hostile world. And this is an important lesson for us this morning. Because we live in the same world that Jesus lived in back then.

[5 : 54] A world that hates Jesus. We saw that last week. And you could have been left thinking, well, what do we say in a world that's so hostile to Christ? What can we do?

What can we say when their hearts are already opposed to him? When they don't want anything to do with him? What do we say to a world that's hostile to Christ? Well, Jesus shows us in our passage what to do as he himself continues to teach the truth about his identity and his mission. As he continues to hold out this offer of eternal life. And that's what Jesus wants us to do. To hold out his message. His message of life in a hostile world.

Now, there are four things that Jesus wants us to keep in mind as we hold out this offer of life. As we speak to people about him. Four things which you can see just on the reverse side of the service sheet.

Things to keep in mind as we speak to people about this offer of eternal life. First, get your facts straight. Because in verses 25 to 31, people are rejecting Jesus based on faulty facts.

[7 : 11] They haven't got their facts straight. So in verse 26, some of the people wonder whether Jesus really is the Christ. He's teaching openly. The leaders don't seem to be doing anything with him now.

Perhaps he is the Christ after all. But their questions soon turn to doubts. Verse 27. No, no, no. He can't be the Christ. Because we know where this man comes from.

He's Joseph from Mary's kid. He's a boy from Galilee. He can't be the Christ. Because when the Christ appears, no one will know where he's from. Problem is, this is simply not true.

That people wouldn't know where he came from. So if you glance across to verse 42, you will see that the scripture clearly said that the Christ comes from the offspring of David.

Comes from Bethlehem, the village where David was. This is Micah 5, this is Psalm 89. And the people here, they just haven't got their facts straight to say they don't know, you wouldn't know where the Christ comes from.

[8 : 21] Ironically, actually, in verse 42, the crowd are using this fact that the Christ comes from Bethlehem as another reason not to believe in him. Because they're thinking he is from Galilee. Not realising, of course, that Jesus was born in a manger in Bethlehem.

And so what we're seeing here is people rejecting Jesus simply because they didn't have their facts straight about him. And it's no different to today, is it?

Oh, the Bible, it's full of contradictions. I'm not going to read that. Isn't Jesus anti-woman? I'm not going to listen to him. Didn't Paul change the message of Jesus to suit his own purposes? No, Jesus never claimed to be God.

It's just a fabrication of the church. It's amazing the so-called facts that people think are true which prevent them from believing in the Jesus of the Bible.

So often people don't know the basic facts about him. I know this is true of me before I became a Christian. Probably true of most of us here. I remember being shocked in the final year of university when someone from the Christian Union told me that Christianity was not about being good, but about being forgiven.

[9 : 31] Actually, Judy just said it was a similar thing for her testimony. I thought for 22 years, I thought Christianity was about earning my salvation, imitating Christ, being good enough for God and heaven.

But I simply didn't have my facts straight. It wasn't until I was shown Jesus teaching on sin. Jesus teaching on his rescue from sin, his death.

Jesus teaching on calling me to follow him and put my faith in him. But I came to know the true fact about him. That he's good, I was not good, and only by trusting him and his death could I be good

enough for God.

Now, I didn't have my facts straight, but maybe what's a shock here is that the ignorance is coming from God's own people. And in verse 28, Jesus explains why.

Have a look at verse 28. You know me, and you know where I come from, but I've not come of my own accord. He who sent me is true, and him you do not know.

[10:38] I know him, for I come from him, and he sent me. You think you know me, says Jesus. You know where I'm from? You don't. You're just thinking in human terms.

All you see is Joseph's son. All you see is a boy from Galilee. But I'm God's son. I'm the son of God come down from heaven. That's my true origin. You're clueless.

Doesn't Jesus put it starkly at the end of verse 28? Wait. You do not know God. You do not know him. Jesus is continuing to show what we saw last week, that God's people also belong to the world, a world that hates Jesus, or the world that does not know God.

And in this world of confusion and ignorance, Jesus wants us to continue to teach the truth about him, just as Jesus himself does here. I've come from God.

God in human form. I've come to reveal God. He sent me. We need to make sure that people have their facts straight about Jesus. So don't be surprised when you're chatting to people, and they say stuff, and you think, no, no, no, that's not what Jesus said.

[11:55] Don't be surprised by how little people may know about the message of Jesus. Don't be surprised by some of their reasons for not believing. Continue to hold out the truth, the truth about Jesus.

In the Bible. So people need to have their facts straight. Secondly, people need to know their limitations. Because in verses 32 to 36, the Pharisees think that they're in control of Jesus, that they can do with him what they like.

But as we shall see, Jesus is the one who's in complete control of the situation. So, verse 32. The Pharisees heard the crowd muttering these things about him, and the chief priests and Pharisees sent officers to arrest him.

So they think they're in total control of Jesus. They can arrest him whenever they want. But Jesus responds, I'll be with you a little longer, and then, I'm going to him who sent me.

You will seek me, and you will not find me. Where I am, you cannot come. Jesus is saying, you're not in control, I'm in control.

[13:09] I'm going to be on earth a little longer, and then I'm going back to my Father in heaven. I'm going back to him who sent me. You've just seen Jesus teach where he's from, the Father in heaven.

Now he's seeing where he's going to, back to his Father in heaven. It's a good summary of John's Gospel. Jesus comes down from heaven to reveal God. Jesus returns to heaven, opening up the way to God.

This is his mission, his divine mission. And no one can stop him. The Pharisees are powerless. If they do arrest Jesus, it's only because the Father wills it. If they do kill Jesus, it's only because it's part of God's plan, and Jesus chooses to go obediently to his death for mankind.

See, it's all part of God's plan. Jesus' death, it's the first step of his path back to the Father. Dying for the sins of the world, rising to new life, ascending to be with his Father again in heaven.

Conquering sin, conquering death, ruling over the world. This is Jesus' divine mission. The Pharisees can do nothing to stop it. Now, if this is God's plan for the world, it would make sense to be a part of it and to get on board, which makes Jesus' words in 34 to the Pharisees so disturbing.

[14:34] You will seek me, and you will not find me. Where I am, you cannot come. So the clock is ticking for the Pharisees.

Time is coming, says Jesus, when you will look for me, but not find me. In your current state, you cannot come with me. You cannot come back with me to my Father's presence.

You cannot come to heaven. You cannot save yourselves. As long as you think you're in control of your life, you cannot come. As long as you think you're in control of me, you cannot come to heaven.

As long as you reject me, trying to arrest me and kill me, you cannot come with me to heaven.

Heaven's doors are locked to all those who reject Jesus.

So the second thing that we need to make people aware of is their limitations. People need to know they cannot enter heaven by themselves.

[15 : 35] People are not good enough for God. They are not good enough for heaven. I needed to be told that back at university. People need to be told it today.

We cannot save ourselves. We cannot enter God's kingdom without Jesus Christ. We need to believe in him. Now, unfortunately, the Pharisees remain clueless.

They say to him, where's this man intend to go that we will not find him? Verse 35. Does he intend to go to the dispersion among the Greeks? What does he mean by saying you'll seek me and you will not find me and where I am, you cannot come?

Pharisees, they remain clueless to the limitations. They don't have their facts straight about Jesus. And yet, Jesus still, graciously, holds out this offer of eternal life in verses 37 to 39.

What a marvellous offer it is too. Have a look at verse 37. This is the heart of the passage. On the last day of the feast, the great day, Jesus stood up and cried out, if anyone thirsts, let him come to me and drink.

[16 : 49] Whoever believes in me, as the scripture said, out of his heart will flow rivers of living water. Don't these words just sound wonderful?

Just have to read them and immediately we're thinking, well, I want some of that. Something thirst-quenching, refreshing, satisfying. There's lots of it. Flowing, living, alive, active in our hearts. Sounds great. But what does it mean exactly? Why this imagery of thirsting and of living water? What is Jesus actually offering here? Well, we need to notice the timing.

Jesus is speaking on the last day of the feast. That's the feast of booths. It's the great day when priests would fill a golden vessel with water from the pool of Siloam and sort of bring it into the temple with a great fanfare of trumpets and then pour out this water to God on the altar, giving thanks to God for his provision of water back in the Exodus when he provided water from the rock in the wilderness.

But also looking forward. Looking forward to a time when all of God's promises would be fulfilled. When all God's promises would flow like rivers of living water throughout the land.

[18 : 11] And I've put some of the Old Testament references on the sheet if you want to look them up later. The problem is they're in the land and they've given thanks for the water but where's the fulfillment?

Where are the living waters of today? From what we've seen of the Jewish leaders in the last couple of chapters the religion of the day was hypocritical, lifeless, dead.

God's laws being misunderstood we saw last week. God's law is not being kept. We've just seen today Jesus saying well you don't even know God. People have been left arid, dry, parched by the failure of their leaders and their own sinful hearts.

weighed down by legalism they're tired they're thirsty they're yearning for the spiritual water of a true relationship with God they yearn for the living waters the prophet spoke about and then Jesus stands up and cries out if anyone thirsts come to me and drink.

Can you picture it? Rabbis normally sat to teach here's Jesus standing up and proclaiming crying shouting come to me and drink the living waters are here I'm the fulfillment feast of booths is about me let me give you the water you yearn for let me quench your thirst come to me and drink that's an extraordinary claim isn't it from Jesus if anyone said that today we'd probably just laugh at them Jesus being deadly serious all of God's promises find their fulfillment in me all of God's blessings you're longing for are found in me everything you need spiritually I can provide doesn't matter how spiritually thirsty you are there is no need to great I can quench it come to me drink and Jesus offer is for anyone man woman young old rich poor

[20 : 16] Jesus is speaking to you doesn't matter how bad you think you are you could be the most spiritually destitute person here and Jesus is speaking to you if anyone thirsts come to me and drink the only condition is that we thirst do you do you thirst for God for the life of God do you thirst to know Jesus Christ not just know about him but know him personally do you thirst for the truth do you thirst for a new life tired way down by failing to live up to God's standards failing to live up to your own standards do you thirst for change aware of your own limitations knowing you can't save yourself do you thirst for the spiritual reality if you do come to Jesus and drink he will satisfy your thirst to drink means to believe in

Jesus to believe he's from God as we've seen to believe he's gone back to God via his death and opened up the way for us to know God for ourselves believe in him and as the scripture has said out of his heart will flow rivers of living water now this he said about the spirit whom those who

believed in him were to receive for as yet the spirit had not been given because Jesus was not yet glorified John leaves us in no doubt then when Jesus speaks of these living waters flowing out of the heart what he's referring to he's referring to the spirit of God living inside the believer it's an amazing promise amazing promise believe in Jesus and God himself takes residence in your heart believe in Jesus and your thirst will be quenched alright God himself will live inside you by his spirit the life of God flowing through your spiritual veins this is what makes the Christian life so refreshing and thirst quenching and alive God himself is with you every minute of every day you hear Christians talking about a relationship with God this is what they mean if you believe in Jesus you are intimately connected with God he lives with us in us at work inside us changing us from the inside out assuring us of his love helping us to pray strengthening us making us more like Christ guiding us away from old sinful habits and into new godly ways this is what it means to be a Christian it's not about rules or regulations it's a relationship with God it's dynamic experiential alive and no matter how painful it can be at times having our sinful ways pointed out and changed it is deeply satisfying and even this is just a foretaste of what's to come when we'll see God face to face in heaven let me also just say a word to those of you seated here today who do believe in Jesus but are still feeling dry you read these words they sound great but don't really seem a reality in your life read the bible feels irrelevant outdated maybe just boring you pray but it's like reading through a list you come to church but you're just going through the motions feel stayed spiritually speaking your mouth is dry lips cracked you're thirsty

Jesus still says come to me and drink come to me when you read the bible when you read it remember you're not reading any old book you are listening to me I am talking to you come to me when you pray put aside your list for the moment talk to me as you talk to your friend or spouse tell me what's wrong pour out your heart to me cast your anxieties on me confess your sins to me come to me when you're at church sing to me pray to me listen to me as the sermon is preached I am the one who offers the water you seek I am the heart of Christianity I am the heart of being a Christian and I am with you right now in your heart come to me and drink finally and very briefly two dangers to watch out for pride and prejudice because in spite of Jesus' marvellous and gracious offer the chief priests and Pharisees were just having nothing to do with it they are blinded by their pride and prejudice pride in verse 48 sorry I'll start from 45 the officers then came to the chief priests these are the officers that were sent to arrest him and why did you not bring Jesus and the officers answer no one ever spoke like this man they've been humbled by Jesus blown away by his teaching but the chief priests proudly respond have the authorities believed have we believed we know best we're better than you better than Jesus you see we see they're not facing up to their limitations they still think they're fine spiritually and as long as you think you're fine spiritually you'll never be thirsty for Jesus a prize one problem second is prejudice because in verse 50

Nicodemus seems to be getting his back straight about Jesus doesn't the law require a hearing before we judge him but the Pharisees they just mock him you from Galilee too search and see that no prophet comes from Galilee they've already made up their mind about Jesus their prejudice has blinded them to the facts if they had checked their facts they would have known that Jesus has come from Bethlehem but anyway there were prophets that came from Galilee Jonah and Nahum being two of them but their prejudice has got them they're like people that say I've made up my mind don't confuse me with the facts so don't let pride or prejudice stop you and we need to be encouraging people to see it and to come to Jesus before it's too late well there's the second half of John 7 there's a lot in there I suppose you could have a sermon on each of those four parts but together they help us to see what we should be doing and saying as we live in a world of hatred confusion ignorance pride prejudice towards Jesus keep holding out

[27 : 02] Jesus' offer of life help people to know the facts about him help people to know their limitations they can't save themselves they need to come to Jesus and drink the world is thirsty and here is the one drink that satisfies Jesus Christ let's pray to him now Father God we thank you afresh this morning for the Lord Jesus and this wonderful offer of life and we praise you for your grace in our life moving us to believe in you sending your spirit to live inside of us assuring us of your love making us more like Christ guaranteeing our future presence with you in heaven Father when we think of the world's natural hostility of you a world that we once belonged to realise just how gracious this promise is please help us to appreciate it more and more this would motivate us to go out and hold out this offer of life

Jesus' marvellous offer of life amidst a world hostile to you and we ask it in Jesus' name Amen
Amen .

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