

# Pride and Prejudice

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[ 0 : 00 ] Let's turn together now to John chapter 7 and this evening we're looking at the passage from verse 40 through to the end of the chapter there at verse 52.

When they heard these words, some of the people said this really is the prophet. Others said this is the Christ. But some said, is the Christ to come from Galilee? Has not a scripture said that the Christ comes from the offspring of David and comes from Bethlehem, the village where David was? So there was a division among the people over him. And so on to the end of the chapter. One of the fascinating things about John's gospel is the way he presents in the theology of this gospel, the way he presents the truth to us, and especially the truth about Jesus, through mistakes and misunderstandings that certain people make right through the gospel.

All the way through you've got that feature as something through which the truth about Jesus is communicated. In other words, as you read the gospel, you know what the truth about Jesus is. And that's reinforced to you from the misunderstandings that the gospel itself brings before us. For example, go back to chapter 3 and that famous incident of Jesus meeting with Nicodemus.

[ 1 : 27 ] Nicodemus is totally unable at that stage to comprehend or to understand what Jesus is saying to him about being born again. He comes to Jesus confident as a teacher, as a member of the Sanhedrin.

We'll speak about him a little in a minute, but he's confident that he's all right with God, that he knows God, that he knows the way to God's acceptance, and that whatever else happens, he's in the kingdom.

And he comes to ask a question of Jesus about Jesus himself. No one can do these signs, the miracles that you're doing, unless God be with him.

And instead of answering him in accordance with the question, Jesus throws at him this dynamic statement, unless a person is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.

And then you have Nicodemus saying, how can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born? And you're reading this gospel, and you see that these misunderstandings, and that sort of passage, and you find the same here in chapter 7 as well, the differences of opinion amongst the people, the way in which the Pharisees themselves are so insistent that this man has to be rejected with his teaching.

[ 2 : 45 ] And all of that just conveys to us, as you read this great gospel, who Christ is, what he's about, why he's important, what he says about himself, and how true it is.

And so the gospel proceeds on through to the end, where John summarizes the whole thing in the grand way that he does.

Now there are also many other things that Jesus did, where every one of them to be written, I suppose, that the world itself could not contain the books that would be written.

And in that sort of exaggerative language, which the Bible uses in many places, again John is confirming to us that this, in fact, is the Savior, the Messiah, the anticipated prophet and deliverer and Savior of his people.

Now tonight we're looking at this passage under the title of Pride and Prejudice. Nothing to do with Jane Austen's great novel, which I'm sure you're all familiar with, but simply the way that these two words capture for us together, the way that this passage shows the hostility to Jesus that he confronted at a stage in his ministry, and how also, out of all of that, very unexpectedly and undoubtedly to the frustration and amazement of the Pharisees from amongst themselves and from amongst the very ruling party, the very ruling members of the council, comes one of their own number and comes gently at this stage to side with Jesus as Nicodemus speaks up and says, is what we're doing right concerning this man?

[ 4 : 41 ] Let's look first of all at the division that you read about over Jesus, a division over Jesus in verses 40 to 45. Then you have a prejudice against Jesus in verses 46 to 49, and then you have a supporter for Jesus in verses 50 to 52.

Here is a division, first of all, as mentioned specifically in verse 43. But in verse 40, you see, what has set that in motion is the teaching of Jesus as it's recorded for us in the previous verses. When they heard these words, some of the people said, others of the people said, but some others said. So it's the teaching of Jesus around which this division and these differences of opinion actually circle and come to light.

And John is telling us from that itself that there is, in fact, always that about Jesus. Jesus divides human opinion in the days of his own ministry, and Jesus still divides human opinion when you find Jesus presented in the gospel, in the claims of the gospel.

That is always going to be the case. And in fact, when you think about it, the very crucifixion of Jesus and the circumstance and the surroundings, as you find it described in the Bible, there were three crosses.

[ 6 : 13 ] And it's significant that the cross of Jesus was the middle one. And on one side of him was a man who accepted him as his savior and died safe in Christ.

On the other side is one who rejected him to the last and spat against him, this venom that found fault with him.

That's how it always is. Human beings are always divided in their opinions about Christ, the claims of Christ, the call of Christ to us to come to repent of our sin, the way in which he emphasizes throughout the whole of the Bible.

Remember, this is his word as much as the gospels are his word. And in all of that, when he comes to insist on his own authority and insist that he's the Lord of life, the Lord of individual lives, the Lord of corporate lives, the Lord of society in the way that arranges its own matters, the Lord of questions that are addressed to us and to our conscience.

We don't like these things naturally. People are going to resist that. People are going to actually fight against that. Every single person here, no doubt, or most of you at least, myself included, will look back on days when the claims of Christ presented through the gospel, whether it was the witness of his people or through a sermon, always at that stage of life brought up a resistance, our pride and our prejudice, our very incorrect view of ourselves and our own superiority.

[ 7 : 54 ] That's where the difference of opinion still exists. Some accept him and say, this is the Christ. But some said, is the Christ to come from Galilee?

Has not the scripture said Christ comes from the offspring of David? So there was a division amongst the people. And today, these claims of Jesus are still causing that division amongst human beings.

Some accept them. Some yield to his authority. Some give their lives to him. Others resist him to different degrees. And some go out of their way to ridicule his claims altogether.

And to not just resist them, but to call upon people everywhere to get rid of this sort of stuff from their lives. He doesn't fit into their understanding of what a human life should be about.

What the values of a human life should be. What the outlook of a human life should be for the future. What the understanding of human beings should be about the world in which they live, about their own behavior in it.

[ 9 : 05 ] What is or isn't acceptable, morally speaking. None of these things, as far as a resistance and rejection of Christ, is any different today to the way it was in Christ's own time.

And if you made a survey in the district of Point right now, you'd find exactly the same reactions as you find recorded in this passage where there is a division of opinion about Jesus.

But it really raises the question, doesn't it? Have you and I made up our own minds about him? Is there a division of opinion still going on in your own head about this, in your own heart about this? Have you come for yourself as an individual, whatever age you're at, whatever experiences you've had? Have you really sorted out in your mind about this Jesus and who he is and what he must be to you and where he must fit into your life and not just fit into your life but be in terms of ruling your life and be over your life?

Have we sorted out these things tonight in our minds, in our hearts, in our understanding, in our thinking, in our way of life? Because that's really why the gospel is given to us, isn't it?

[10:21] As we said at the very beginning, through the misunderstandings, through the mistakes that people make as recorded in this gospel, the wonder of Christ, the greatness of Christ, the claims of Christ are actually confronting us right on this page.

And tonight, that's what he's, that's what he's really as the living Christ through this gospel. That's what he's really saying to you and he's saying it to me. Have you sorted this out in your life? Have you got this right? Have you come to have a right opinion and a right relationship with me, with this Jesus, with this Savior?

Secondly, there's a prejudice against Jesus, verses 46 to 49. You see, the officers, and now these would be when they were sent, as you find earlier in the chapter, the Pharisees and the rulers, along with the Pharisees, wanted to arrest Jesus.

So they sent what's called here officers, and these would be what were then called the temple guards. Those were guards who were specially set to guard the temple and would actually carry out the duty of the rulers as they sent them on various tasks.

[11:40] And here they are, they're sent to apprehend Jesus. They're sent to bring him into their custody. And they've come back without him. And the Pharisees, of course, are annoyed when they see that he's come back without him.

They've come back without him. So the officers, when they came, the Pharisees said to them, why did you not bring him? What's this? We sent you away. You're the temple guards.

You're the people who have got the authority and we've given you that authority and permission to bring the likes of this man who's teaching these things to bring him here so that we can examine. Why have you not brought him?

And what's really remarkable is not that they asked the question, but what's really remarkable is the response, the reply of the officers. No one ever spoke like this man.

And see, that's going back to the words that Jesus spoke as verse 40 when they heard these words. These officers had obviously heard these words. This teaching of Jesus, this amazing teaching, this teaching with such authority, with such certainty, and what they're now saying is no one ever spoke like this man.

[12:56] Now, there's more to this than just thinking about these people being impressed somewhat by Jesus' speech. You can be greatly impressed by people in their speaking and in their oratory, and they might use words very powerfully, but it doesn't mean you're impressed to the point that you really have what was here, a sense of the divine speaking to you.

And John actually captures this for us later on in chapter 19, verses, chapters 18 and 19. If you flick forward to chapter 18 for a minute, just look at verse 6 there, where you find there that Jesus, as the party that went out to arrest him, came into the area where he was, the garden in which he was at that time.

And then you find that when Jesus, what Jesus said to him in verse 4, Jesus, knowing all that would happen to him, you see that, takes us instantly into the mind of someone who is not just an ordinary human being.

he came forward and said to them, whom do you seek? They answered him, Jesus of Nazareth. Jesus said to them, I am he.

Now the words, literally, in the Greek text of the Bible there, just say literally, I am. And John, just as you find in chapter 8 as well, in regards to what he says before, Abraham was, I am.

[14:33] You see, he is presenting in the theology of his message about Jesus, he is presenting the greatness of this Christ, the divinity of this Christ, the divine Christ is what comes across to us in that when he said this to them, they drew back and fell to the ground.

And literally what it is saying is not so much that they drew back as that translation is, they fell backwards onto the ground. It is just as if they had been hit by something really powerful, like a massive blast of wind that knocked them off their feet backwards.

They were not bowing to him, they were not coming to acknowledge him as their master or as their Lord, they were just simply, if you like, bowled over by the authority of his words.

There was such a divine element and emphasis to them that it just blew them over. You know, we use that phrase very often nowadays, don't you?

Something that really fills you with a sense of wonder or something surprising or something amazing, you say about it, well, you know, I'm just bowled over.

[ 15 : 52 ] I'm just blown away. Now, not everybody who heard Jesus felt that because not every time Jesus spoke did he actually exert such deliberate authority.

But it seems that something like that had affected these officers when they came back and said this in response to why did you not bring him? No one ever spoke like this man.

In other words, you could see that they meant by that, how could we possibly bring such a person as this into custody? How do you expect us to actually lay hands on someone who speaks like this, who has such authority, who has such a divine personage about him?

How do you expect us to bring that person into our custody? There's something here that we're really acknowledging far, far greater than the authority they had as temple guards.

far greater than the authority that these Pharisees and rulers themselves had. No one ever spoke like this man.

[ 17 : 06 ] And you find that also later in John's Gospel, chapter 18, verses 8 to 11, and chapter 19 where he's speaking there to Pontius Pilate, and Pilate says, do you not realize that I have power to condemn you, and I have power to release you?

And Jesus says to him, you would have no power at all against me, except it were given to you from above. You see, he knows who he is.

And he knows, as the Son of God, how to speak, how to exercise divine authority. And it means that when you read later in this Gospel, and the other Gospels of Jesus coming to be arrested, it's not that they have a power over him that simply take him and with their own power take him into their custody.

It's the other way about. It would never have happened unless Jesus had voluntarily given himself authoritatively to them.

He, in fact, is in charge of what they are doing by giving himself to them to be arrested. And you know, short of that, he would not be a savior to us.

[ 18 : 37 ] How could this savior, how could a person who would claim to be your savior and my savior to save us from our sin and from all that is attached to our sin and from the death that our sin has brought upon ourselves?

How could you possibly say that this is our savior if he doesn't have the capacity and the power himself to actually order his own affairs and to take control of human beings in what they're doing to him?

And you know, it's still the case, even through the gospel itself, however much we may reject the gospel, and again you can look back as a Christian, if you're here tonight as someone who knows the Lord and is saved, you can look back and say, well, this is undoubtedly to a measure how I did feel then.

I was rejecting Christ in the gospel. I was rejecting when I heard about him, preached to me, I was still refusing to accept him, refusing to acknowledge him, but deep down, I knew that even though I was deciding that, even though I was actually coming to that conclusion, he was still in charge, and you can reject him tonight, and still know in your heart, however often you reject him, however much you may reject him, however determined you are that he will not be your master, he will still be your master, he will still be in charge of your life, you cannot get rid of his superiority, you cannot get rid of his lordship, you cannot get rid of his deity, you can't get rid of his authority over your life, that's still going to remain in place, as it did with these people, and that's still deep down in your own heart tonight, if you haven't yet accepted him, and you're hearing his claim in the gospel once again to you, lovingly reaching out and authoritatively reaching out to you, and seeking in his claim to bring you to himself, no one ever spoke like this man, you see, even as

I reject him, I realize that he has a mastery over me, that he is still lord, and I cannot get rid of that fact from my thoughts, and then they turn around and say, have you also been deceived?

[ 21 : 16 ] That brings up another feature of the passage which is also very important. They have this furious reaction, obviously, to the officers and say, have you also been deceived?

That's the response, you see, when they say, how could we possibly bring him? No one ever spoke like this man, and their instant response is, have you also been deceived? In other words, they're really saying, if that is your opinion of Christ, of this man, the only reason that can possibly be accepted for that is that you are deceived.

And you see the irony, in the way John is presenting this to us in his gospel, as you read this passage, you know in your heart that it's the Pharisees who are deceived, and yet here they are

saying to these officers, are you also deceived because we're not?

That's what prejudice does to you. Prejudice closes out the possibilities that someone else may actually be right and you may be wrong. And isn't that the verdict of so many people that are anti-gospel today?

I know there's a lot of apathy about, a lot of people who couldn't care less, one thing one way or the other, but when you look at those that are especially and publicly against the gospel, what you'll find again and again is the very same response and the words of the Pharisees as you find them here.

[ 22 : 49 ] You know, you Christians are just deceived. Why don't you let yourselves come out of that stream of teaching that you're now standing in, that has come down all of these centuries and has deceived so many thousands of people down in the course of time because there's no evidence they'll tell you on which to base such a thing as faith.

There's no evidence that God exists. There's no evidence that all that's said there about Christ being a savior having risen from the dead, there's no evidence that he ever rose from the dead because such a thing is impossible.

There's no such thing as miracles and the supernatural. You're deceived. It's time you allowed yourself not to be deceived.

That's what you find thrown at you. That's what you find people so largely coming to accept as if the likes of these great minds that are godless people actually know any better than you do and I do.

How can you be deceived? If you accept the truth of scripture, if you accept this as the word of god, and you know that's what we have to actually be aware of.

[ 24 : 14 ] That deception is something that can apply to us even when we think that it's the other opinions that are deceived. It doesn't matter how clever a person is, how much they're able to enter into things scientifically or in terms of astronomy, in terms of physics, or whatever else they might be, and there's nothing wrong with these abilities.

They're God-given abilities, but they're no indicator to wisdom spiritually, or to whether a person is or is not deceived about the truth of the Bible.

are you also deceived? If you come across that when you seek to live for Christ, remember that what this is saying to us is this, that the Pharisees who thought everyone else was deceived were the very ones who were most deceived themselves.

As Jesus said in Matthew's gospel about them, leave them alone, they be blind, leaders of the blind, and if the blind lead the blind, both shall fall into the ditch.

In other words, he's saying to them, if you accept my claims, the truth of what I'm saying about myself, if you accept where I've come from and who sent me and why I'm here, if you accept all of that, you cannot be deceived.

[ 25 : 53 ] If you reject me, on whatever basis, you are being deceived. You're deceiving yourself. You're siding with those whom John says here were themselves deceived and accusing others.

And that's why they say, then they move on from that, have you also been deceived? Have any of the authorities or the Pharisees believed in him? And you see, they're playing the discrimination card, if you like, at that point.

What they're really saying is, you know, not only are you deceived, but just think about this. Have any of us Pharisees, we're the people who really know, we're the experts in the law, we're the experts in these things of what God has given us in the Old Testament scriptures, have any of us believed in him?

And if none of us have believed in him, why should you accept what this rabble, and you know, they used a very strong word of the crowd there, of the people, this crowd that does not know the law is accursed.

And the word that's used for accursed there is very strong, it really means something like, we just regard them as vermin, riffraff, we despise them, because you see, we're the experts, we know what's what, and our opinion is right about this man.

[ 27 : 24 ] Don't listen to ordinary people, people who've never studied such things as we've studied. You're familiar with that argument, you're familiar with that from the popular books of Dawkins and others who've written from an atheistic point of view, who will constantly throw this at you, that not only are Christians deceived, but actually deep down they're really still at the level of very simple thinkers, they've never really entered into a proper philosophical examination of these things, if they did, or scientifically, they'd come to the conclusion that Dawkins has come to, there is no God, and God is throwing at him all the time in this word of truth, you fool.

It's the fool in his heart that says, there is no God. I'd much rather be a simple fool in the opinion of Dawkins and others, than a wise atheist who has no time for Christ.

And that's how prejudice always is, friends. Not just in terms of how they look at God and look at Jesus, but prejudice as prejudice. Not only does it actually see themselves or the person that is prejudiced as superior in thought, but it regards others of different opinions as below themselves. Maybe they'd never actually say it in so many words, but that's how the mind works. It's a two-sided thing. We're fine, but others are mistaken, and we're really superior in our thinking, and others just haven't reached that level yet.

But here is John in presenting this to us. Through this misunderstanding, through those things that he records were happening at that time, what he's really saying is, you know, as you read this, my readers, I'm saying to you, that from this you come to the conviction as to this Jesus and his greatness and your need of him and what he must be to you and your simple acceptance of God's truth about him and of God's truth about everything else.

[ 29 : 41 ] As revealed in his word. Isn't that how it is? Isn't that how it is with yourself tonight? Don't be bamboozled by clever thinking.

Don't be bamboozled by people who say to you, you know, you've never really been able to enter into things with the complexity that we're able to enter into. Don't be taken apart or taken aside or even apart in your arguments and even if you are by people who are able, very cleverly to put words together and to have thoughts that seem so superior as they present them.

Don't you actually be taken aside by that. Don't be fooled by that. All God needs of you and of me is to give our lives, to trust our lives to Christ, to accept him and to accept everything he's done in the pure simplicity of faith and say for me to live to live is Christ and to die will be gain.

And then you see thirdly a supporter of Jesus. Here's the Pharisees saying, have any of the authorities or the Pharisees believed in him?

And then all of a sudden and unexpectedly and to their consternation in a measure no doubt, one of themselves speaks up and says, does our law judge a man without first giving him a hearing and learning what he's doing?

[ 31 : 13 ] Just imagine the reaction. Here's one of themselves and he's siding with Jesus, at least in a measure. Now, let me just say this in passing, that in John's gospel, the progress of Nicodemus is a fascinating thing itself.

He's only mentioned three places. First of all, in chapter three, he comes to Jesus by night, which is symbolic of the darkness of his mind, still at that stage.

Second place is here, where he's coming more to side with Jesus, but not yet fully. And then you find him in the later part of the gospel when Christ has died and along with Joseph of Arimathea, he takes the body of Jesus and looks after it and gives it a decent burial in Joseph's tomb.

And at that stage he's in the open. He's come out fully on the side of Jesus. And many of us can follow what John is telling us and it seems a very deliberate thing on his part just to mention these three points at these three stages in the gospel Nicodemus and his progress.

It's very much in line with what many of us have actually experienced and may be experiencing right now. You begin with an inquiry and that's all it is, but there's still a lot of darkness.

[ 32 : 49 ] And then you come to side with this Jesus at least in a measure. You have a sympathy with him and with his people and with what they believe and with what the Bible itself says about the important issues of life.

And then by God's grace and especially in relation to the sufferings and the death of Christ, you're constrained to come out into the open and say, this is where I stand.

I want to be with this man. I want to be sure that I'm actually speaking up for him.

and fully aligned with him in all that he represents. And he's not confessing that allegiance here, not quite fully yet, he's still at that sort of in-between stage, you might say, but what he's simply saying is, is it fair to judge a man before we've heard him speak for himself?

That's all he said. But it was enough of a support for Jesus to draw out this final reaction from the Pharisees. They replied, are you of Galilee also?

[ 34 : 01 ] Search and see that no prophet arises from Galilee. See, if we side with Jesus as we must, if we respond to his call and come to him and give ourselves to him and to following him, it's going to attract reaction.

not saying everybody will then just hate you, everybody will be against you, but you will come across this reaction. Are you also of these people?

Do you really belong to those people as well, who are supporters and followers of this Christ? Are you from Galilee too?

it's an honor to say, yes, I am. It's a privilege to be able to say, of course I am.

I wouldn't want to be anywhere else except on the side of Jesus and in support of Jesus and witnessing to Jesus.

[ 35 : 08 ] As you read this and come to this concluding statement, what it's really saying to us is, this is all the more reason to actually be fully a follower of Christ.

After all, it's Jesus who says in Matthew 10 and verses 32 to 33, whosoever will confess me before men, him will I confess before my Father who is in heaven.

And whosoever will deny me before men, him will I deny before my Father who is in heaven. That's a scary thing.

To be denied by Jesus in the presence of his Father. To have Jesus come about us to God the Father and say, this person has nothing to do with me.

I am not a savior or her savior. They've never been in a right relationship with me. I deny that they're mine.

[ 36 : 21 ] We don't want to be there. We don't want to go there. We want to be on the other side. Where Jesus is saying, I'm confessing this one as one of my own.

they belong to me. They are approved of by me. And to the Father he says, they are yours also.

May it be so for every single person here tonight that that's what will be through of us at the end of all things. Let's pray.

Lord, our gracious God, we thank you for the gospel and we thank you for the way in which you present yourself to us through it and for the way in which we know your authority coming to touch our lives and our mind and conscience even through your word.

Bless your word again to us we pray, Lord. We so often ask you these same things, that you would bless your word to us, but we do pray that you would bless it because we know that even in reading it for ourselves and without your blessing we will not come to profit eternally from it.

[ 37 : 39 ] And we pray that you would even this night come to bring us fully under submission to you and in respect to your authority over us. Receive our thanks now, we pray, and cleanse us from all sin.

For Jesus' sake. Amen.