

Pride and Prejudice

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[0 : 01] Let's turn together now to John chapter 7. John chapter 7, we'll read at verse 45. The officers then came to the chief priests and Pharisees who said to them, Why did you not bring him?

The officers answered, No one ever spoke like this man. Looks like a strange answer to this question.

It's not a direct answer, but nevertheless it's very true. When they came to arrest Jesus, they didn't apprehend him.

And John uses this as a method of presenting to us some of those things that are true about this Jesus, this person. And indeed, all the way through the Gospel of John, you find things like questions, misunderstandings, disputes, discussions among people to present to us the truth about Jesus.

One of the features of John's Gospel. For example, in chapter 8 there, if you turn to it, verse 53, you'll find the same sort of thing happening there. Are you greater than our father Abraham who died when Jesus was disputing with the Jews about his identity?

[1 : 27] Are you greater than our father Abraham who died and the prophets who died? Who do you make yourself out to be? Now, of course, by the time you've read to that point, supposing you'd never read John's Gospel before, and you start at the beginning, and by the time you reach that, you know who this is.

You know what he's saying about himself. You know what testimony others are bearing to him. You know what God is saying about him. So by the time you come to that sort of question, you realize as a reader of John's Gospel, that you are in the know, and these Jews who say these phallacies and authorities of the time, who think they are in the know, they're the ones who are actually blind.

And that's the way that John uses these details, historical, to present to us things to do with Christ. And one of the classic instances of John's Gospel of that is when Jesus was being examined by Pontius Pilate, and then went out and was crucified.

The Jews came to Pontius Pilate, who had made up the sign, had the sign made up to be set over the cross. This is Jesus, the King of the Jews.

And they came to Pilate and said to him, don't write that. Just put, he said that he was King of the Jews. And Pilate, pagan governor though he was, without really knowing the full implications of it, said, what I have written, I have written.

[2 : 58] The stubbornness of a pagan, a pagan officer of Rome. And yet, it's used by John and by God to present the truth about Jesus.

This is Jesus, the King of the Jews. And you find something similar in this passage. Because they had sent out these officers, they were really the temple guards, and the Pharisees and the religious leaders had sent him, as you read earlier in the chapter, had sent the officers out to apprehend Jesus, to take him into custody.

And they came back without him. And when they came back without him, of course, the Pharisees, the officers, the chief priests and Pharisees, were very annoyed with the officers and asked, why did you not bring him?

And then you have this remarkable answer to that question. They said, no one ever spoke like this man. Now, let's look at a few things that lead up to that answer to this question.

First of all, there's a division over Jesus in verses 40 to 45. And then secondly, there is in verses 46 to 49, a prejudice against Jesus.

[4 : 12] I mean, if you wanted a title to this particular study, you could easily choose Pride and Prejudice, because that's what it's about. The pride and the prejudice of those religious leaders of the time against Jesus blind them to the reality of who he is.

They're not prepared to leave their own thinking and adjusted to think seriously of what Jesus is claiming for himself.

And thirdly, you'll find in Nicodemus here a supporter for Jesus in verses 50 to 52. It's briefly these three points. A division over him, a prejudice against him, and a supporter for him.

Now, this division is clearly there in verses 40 to 45. And it's when they heard these words. See, it's always to do with the teaching of Christ, the claims of Christ, who he says he is, what he has done, what he continues to do as his ministry develops.

That's what you find. When they heard these things, some said, this really is the prophet. But others said, is the Christ to come from Galilee, and so on. So, in verse 43, there was a division among the people over him.

[5 : 28] And so it goes on. You can examine the town of Stornoway today, and you will come to the same conclusion. There is a division over Jesus.

Some people will virtually ignore him and think him as no longer relevant or not relevant at all. But really, it's very difficult to ignore altogether, isn't it? There's hardly anyone, there's nobody that I know of, who would actually ignore Jesus altogether.

Because you have to come to confront the fact that Jesus, when he speaks to us through the gospel, through the Bible, through his people, the claims of Jesus come across to us.

Jesus claims our attention. He claims our lives. Jesus actually calls us to himself and calls us to accept what he says about himself. Jesus actually insists on things that we, at ourselves, are not necessarily prepared to accept to begin with.

And Jesus, probably more than all of that, Jesus questions us. And all the way through John's gospel and the other gospels as well, you'll find deliberately remembered by these writers, these questions that Jesus posed.

[6 : 44] Who do people say that I am, he said to the disciples at one time? And they answered, some say Jeremiah, some say one of the prophets, some say Elijah.

And then he turned and said, but who do you say that I am? You see, that's really, that's really what confronts us when you read your Bible. It's always about this, isn't it? Who is he?

And what do I make of him? And what's my relationship with him? There's a division over him. Some people say this is the Christ. Others say, well, no, the Christ can't come from Galilee.

Surely he's going to come from Bethlehem. So this division exists over him. Some wanted to arrest him, but no one yet laid hands on him. Why do people consider Christ and then dismiss him?

Why is it still the case that there's a division over him? Well, by and large, it's just the same as it was in those days. The Christ, as he presents himself and his claims and his call on our lives, and his insistence on who he is and the questions that he drives into our minds, he does not fit with our perception of what a Savior should be, of what our need really is, and where that need is met.

[7 : 59] That's the problem. That's the root of the problem. Our own minds tell us one thing, and it conflicts with what Christ says about himself.

And so there's a division over him. That's why it's important for you and for me today to ask ourselves, which side of the division am I on?

Am I on the side of those who have come to acknowledge, to accept, to give my own mind over to him, to be ruled by him, and by his claims, and by his authority, and by his will, and by his greatness?

Is that what rules my life? Or am I still on the side of those who have said, no, that's not really for me. That's not how I see things. That's not how I would prefer things.

Well, that's what it's like for these people. They're disputing. They're rejecting. He doesn't fit with their own way of thinking and concluding about God, and about Christ, and about salvation.

[9 : 11] So instead of thinking, well, perhaps I need to adjust my thinking and bring it into line with what he's saying, what they do is say, no, that doesn't fit with my understanding, so I can't accept that.

There's a division over him. Think today of this, friends. Which side of that dividing line are you and I on?

Secondly, there's a prejudice against Jesus. Because when these officers came back, they were immediately asked, why did you not bring him?

That's an understandable question. They had sent these temple guards out to bring this Jesus into custody. They wanted to examine him. They wanted to arrest him. They wanted to really close him off, if you like, from the people so that he would no longer teach them.

They regarded him as a great threat to themselves and to their authority. So this is the question. Why did you not bring him? And this is their answer. No one ever spoke like this man.

[10 : 14] Now, why would you say such a thing in answer to this question? They didn't say, well, we couldn't, or here's the reason we were incapable, or we didn't get the opportunity, or were there too many people around.

No, what they said was, no one ever spoke like this man. And that is really telling you something about this Jesus and about his authority and about his claim and about his identity.

Because what it's really saying is that, yes, these people were impressed when they heard Jesus speaking these things. They were indeed impressed, but it's more than just being impressed.

There's a sense of the divine about Christ. And there's that almost untouchableness evident in his life as people interact with him and as these officers went to arrest him.

As soon as they heard him, they knew there was something different about this person. And this something different about it made it impossible for them to lay hands on him and to bring him into custody.

[11 : 21] So the answer to the question really is more or less saying, how could we possibly bring into custody somebody who speaks like that? Somebody who has that obvious divinity and deity and godness about him?

How can we possibly find our power to be greater than his so as to bring him into custody and arrest him and bring you here?

No one ever spoke like this man. And John actually tells us elsewhere about this as well, further on in the gospel, in chapter 18, and at verses 8 to 11, you'll find something that fits in with that.

Jesus again saying to them, whom do you seek? They said, Jesus of Nazareth. Jesus answered, I told you that I am he. If you seek me, let these men go. This was to fulfill the word that he had spoken of those whom you gave me.

I have lost not one. Then Simon Peter, having a sword, drew it and struck the high priest's seven and cut off his ear. The seven's name was Malchus. So Jesus said to Peter, Put your sword into its sheath.

[12 : 38] Shall I not drink the cup that the Father has given me? In other words, he's saying to them, I'm not going to be arrested in the sense in which people have the power and the ability and the capacity to bring me into their custody.

I, when I come to be taken into custody, I will put myself there. I'll be in charge of the situation. I'll be the one who gives myself over to be examined and even over to death.

That's not going to be done to me. It's going to be done by me. So put away your sword. I don't need that sort of defense. I'm in charge of the situation.

And if you go back to verse 6 in that same chapter, in chapter 8, when he first of all spoke there, whom do you seek?

They said, Jesus of Nazareth. When Jesus said to them, I am he, they drew back and fell to the ground. Or they fell backwards to the ground is literally what it says.

[13 : 42] Now these words, I am he, of course, remind you of something way back in the Old Testament in the book of Exodus where God revealed himself to the people through Moses and to Moses first of all.

And when Moses asked him, when I go back, Lord, to the people and they say, who has sent you? What shall I say to them? And God said, tell them this, tell them that I am has sent you.

The great I am, the great Jehovah, Yahweh, the God of the Old Testament, this great covenant God who has been the God of his people down through the ages. Now Jesus is saying, I am.

And they fall backward to the ground under the sheer power and authority of these words. He's really letting them see, if you're going to come to arrest me, you're better know who you're dealing with.

And he exercises his power and they fall to the ground. You see, that's John telling us again something that comes across in this passage we have before us here as well.

[14 : 49] No one ever spoke like this man. And don't you feel that in the gospel as well? Maybe you're here today and you're not yet committed to Christ.

And you know the gospel and the Bible story and the account it gives of this Christ and who he is and what he claims for himself and how he claims our lives and where he now is and what he did in his death and resurrection.

Maybe you're not yet fully committed to him or have given your life over to be ruled by him. And yet you know that under the gospel, even when you actually still have not fully accepted him or brought him into your life or opened your heart to him, you still cannot master him.

You see, even in our rejection of Jesus, as we hear the gospel, as we read our Bibles, we're still left with the impression, well, even in rejecting him, I'm not in charge of this.

He is. He's the master of the situation. Even if I have chosen not to accept him and to refuse him, I cannot get him out of my life and I cannot get out of his authority and I cannot dismiss myself from the greatness of this person.

[16 : 11] which is why we have to come to the point and say, Lord, what else can I do? You have demonstrated who you are, what you are like.

Your greatness is before me. I know it through the gospel. So, Lord, you have won my heart. I yield to you.

I accept that authority. I don't want to live under any other authority. So, please take me as your own. No one ever spoke like this man.

And that's how it is today through the gospel. My words are just mere human words. I'm just an instrument.

I'm only a mere human being. I'm a minister of the gospel. But the word that you're really hearing, although it's human language that's used to convey it, the word that's addressing you is the word of Christ.

[17 : 20] Christ. The authority that comes to you in the gospel is the authority of Christ. And that's why today he's claiming your life and mine.

I have no business claiming your life or insisting that you do this or you do that. I'm just conveying the message of Jesus. And the message of Jesus is the one that says, no one ever speaks like me.

And that's why the only proper thing to do is what Nicodemus, as we'll see here, is doing. He's coming to accept him for who he is, for what he is.

And then the reaction, of course, of the Pharisees is furious. The Pharisees answered, 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. And that's really a very up-to-date reaction. Because so many people, when they really feel pressed by the claims of Christ in the gospel, will instantly flare up and close up their minds and close up their hearts and really sometimes get very angry like these people in authority because their authority was being questioned and their authority was being addressed and challenged by what these officers were saying, conveying back to them the status of this Christ, the way in which he spoke like no other ever spoke.

[18 : 58] And so they say, are you also deceived? Strange, isn't it, that those who are making this statement are actually the ones deceived.

And that's how it is right up to this day. There are many people in the world today who say Christians are just deceived.

They don't really know the reality. They're not prepared to open their minds. Their intellect has never really been unlocked. And so they keep themselves confined to this very narrow perspective that the gospel or the word of God or the Bible actually brings to them.

Well, what this is telling us is you don't actually seek to satisfy your intellect first before you then come to believe in Jesus and to accept him.

It's actually the other way around. You actually come to believe which means to trust in Jesus which means to bring your life to God for him to rule your life and then you'll have your intellect straightened out.

[20 : 12] You don't come and say unless I actually understand all of these things and unless they've been proved adequately in ways that meet with the way that people can prove things through experimentation or scientific analysis whatever it is unless that is done to my satisfaction how can you expect me to believe this Bible well that's not how the Bible itself speaks is it Hebrews chapter 11 and verse 3 really puts it in a nutshell for us by faith we understand it's not by understanding we come to faith you don't begin with your own reason and then work towards faith you begin with God and with his claims with Jesus you accept them you believe in him you trust in him you give your life to him and then you come to have your mind enlightened and a mind that actually then operates as it should as God intended it should not one that's closed out to the light of God and the light of Jesus the light of salvation and the other thing of course they say here is have any of the authorities or the Pharisees believed in him this crowd that does not know the laws are cursed in other words they're really playing the racial card if you like they're saying well we know what's best and we know the truth about this man and we know the things of

God and the things of religion so you can't expect these people and the word they're using there is a very strong one it's just a rabble a word that means vermin virtually you would say is an equivalent word in English for us that's how these Pharisees and religious authorities thought of the ordinary people some of whom were coming of course to accept Jesus and to accept and they were saying you don't expect these people to know things properly do you they're lower class now that's how some people sadly see Christians that's how some prominent atheists see Christians they find that even when their view is challenged and when they begin to capitulate even in their intellect regarding the things of the gospel and the claims of Christ they'll turn to play some other game they'll turn to actually show prejudice in this way that well they're the intellectual ones they're really the professors they're the ones who actually have the intellectual capacity and the news to really know things properly you can't expect ordinary people to know things scientifically it's attributed to John

Lennox well known Christian Oxford professor in disputing with people like Stephen Hawking came across this quotation just the other day and first of all had Stephen Hawking saying heaven is a fairy tale for those who are afraid of the dark and Lennox his view was atheism is a fairy tale for those afraid of the light that's it that's what John says in chapter three of this gospel where in that great incident where Jesus met with Nicodemus and the discussion goes on and the teaching of it goes on and he talks about this light that's come into the world and the famous verse 16 God so loved the world and if you read down from there whoever believes in him is not condemned whoever does not believe is condemned already because he has not believed in the name of the only son of

God and this is the judgment that light has come into the world and people love darkness rather than light because their deeds were evil and this is what he says then for everyone who does wicked things hates the light and does not come to the light lest his deeds should be exposed but whoever does what is true comes to the light so that it may be clearly seen that their deeds have been carried out in God that's the real test are you afraid of the light are you afraid of having your life exposed and shown up that's what the atheistic mind does not want it retains its own narrow perspective and is afraid to open up to the light of the gospel and to the light of Christ claims and yet no one ever spoke like this man and his claims they were blind not the officer they were right when they said no one ever spoke like this man they were wrong in the reaction to that have you also been deceived they were deceived even in saying that and then you come to the third point having seen the division over

Jesus the prejudice against Jesus then you come to this supporter for Jesus now here's another fascinating study in John's gospel we maybe look at it some other time in itself it's worth looking at and that is the progress of Nicodemus as an individual from where you find him first of all in chapter three to where you find him here in chapter seven and then where you find him finally at the cross of Jesus after Jesus has died along with Joseph of Arimathea taking the body of Jesus and giving it a decent burial in chapter 19 that's a fascinating progress let me just mention it at the moment and you can follow it through for yourselves or we maybe look at it in more detail some other time but he begins in the darkness he comes to Jesus by night he has questions about Jesus he thinks there's something significant in him from what he's heard and he wants to find out a bit more but he's still in darkness and that's why the condition and when you come to chapter 7 he's beginning to see the light he's speaking up for

[26 : 46] Jesus it's not an open confession by any means but he's standing up for him he's coming over to his defense he's saying to his own fellow Pharisees remember he was a member of the ruling Sanhedrin as well which is why Jesus said to him in chapter 3 are you a teacher in Israel and you don't know these things still in darkness spiritually but he's beginning to see the light and then in chapter 19 of course he's seen the light and it's the death of Jesus and all that's associated with the death of Jesus that really brings him out openly as a disciple of Christ that's how it often is for ourselves we begin in the darkness then we have questions and we come to Jesus and we begin to examine his claim and it becomes more real to us and we take it more seriously and then we begin to see the light and it doesn't necessarily happen all of a sudden and it doesn't necessarily mean that all our problems go away when we see the light or after we've seen the light but it makes all the difference now that we're seeing it that we know what life's about that we know what

Christ is about that we know why he speaks as he does through the gospel and so we come to stand up for him does our Lord judge a man without first giving him a hearing and learning what he does that's not really you might say a great categorical defense of Jesus but it's enough to draw the opposition of his fellow rulers to him they replied are you also from Galilee you see they're saying from Galilee you don't expect much from Galilee by way of things which will be pleasing to God do you belong to them as well are you on their side as well that's what he they're saying to this man Nicodemus and although it's not a very open confession you can see that in Nicodemus' mind and heart Christ is really now beginning to feature very prominently and very significantly in his life and maybe that's where you are today maybe you're not quite yet at chapter 19 of

John but maybe you're hopefully you're at least at chapter 7 where you're beginning to see that this Jesus really has to be taken seriously and that if life means anything at all and if Christ's claims mean anything at all then you've got to take them so seriously that you just cannot live life without him and without being in Christ without having him without knowing him without walking with him without that union with him that brings you into eternal life and you know that's a question that's very significant for ourselves today are you from Galilee too Jesus coming from Galilee born in Bethlehem associated with Galilee and associated with these people that the

Pharisees see as just a rabble just not worth thinking about and certainly not worth listening to today we should be proud to come from Galilee what I mean by that is we should be proud to be associated with this Christ and proud to be associated with him openly yes it's going to draw attention to ourselves of course it is support for Christ will always do that just as it was for Nicodemus here as soon as he said this they immediately associated him with Jesus and with those who were supporting him and following him and believing in him a prophet arises from Galilee you know Jesus says something quite terrifying in chapter 10 of Matthew's gospel whosoever will confess me before men I will confess him before my father who is in heaven whoever will deny me before men him will

I also deny before my father who is in heaven but you're not here to deny him you're here to confess him to accept him to be proud of belonging to him and being associated with him because no one ever spoke like this man and no one ever will speak like this man and that's why there's no one like him and never will be let's pray lord our god we give thanks for the uniqueness of our savior and we give thanks for the way in which your claim today upon us comes to us through the gospel we pray forgiveness lord for any mishandling of your word in any way whether in speaking or in hearing we ask that you would enable us lord today to receive you into our hearts into our lives and even if we have already done so lord enable us today to do so anew and to refresh our commitment and our confession of you go with us now we pray through this day and as we gather this evening we pray that you would bless us in our gathering and be with us through the gospel and all for

[32 : 52] Jesus sake amen now let's sing in conclusion to God's praise from psalm 106 that's on page 378 psalm 106 singing verses 1 to 5 to the tune done firmly give praise and thanks unto the Lord for bountiful is he his tender mercy doth endure unto eternity and so on to the end of verse 5 and I thy chosen good may see and in their joy rejoice and may with thine inheritance triumph with cheerful voice these verses to God's praise praise and thanks unto the Lord for wonderful is he his tender mercy doth endure unto eternity almighty work to

God express or show forth all his praise blessed are they that judgment keep and just be due always remember me Lord with the love which are to thine just bear with thy salvation O my Lord God to visit me draw near that thy chosen goodness see and in their glory rejoice and may with thine inheritance triumph triumph with cheerful voice now may the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ the love of God the Father and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you now and evermore amen amen