

# Jesus Teaches at the Feast of Tabernacles

## Part 2 - John 7:37-53

On the last day of the Feast of Tabernacles, the people celebrated God's miraculous provision of water during the wilderness wanderings and later in the Promised Land. Jesus will stand and cry out an invitation to come to Him for eternal, life-giving water. J. Dwight Pentecost wrote, "But what God had done for Israel physically, Christ had come to do for that people spiritually." p. 281

### The Significance of Jesus at the Feast of Tabernacles: (Part 1)

1. Jesus came to Jerusalem and taught in the temple after being gone for 18 months. In John 5, we read of the healing of the man who had been paralyzed for 38 years. Because Jesus performed this on the Sabbath and later plainly told the Religious Leaders that He was the Son of God sent from God, they sought to kill Him. Jesus left Jerusalem and Judea for Galilee, where He ministered to the masses and taught the disciples. This is the first time Jesus has made a public appearance in Judea for about a year and a half.
2. Jesus causes much confusion, debate, and hostility. It must have been rumored that Jesus was coming to the Feast of Tabernacles. The Religious Leaders were looking for Him, and the people were privately talking about Him. Opinions varied; some thought He could be the Messiah, others felt He was a deceiver or false teacher, and some wanted to kill him.
3. Jesus repeated that He was the Son of God. When the Religious Leaders and the people raised questions about His origin, Jesus reiterated that God had sent Him.
4. Jesus repeated that He had come with God's message. When the Religious Leaders and the people raised questions about His lack of educational background, Jesus reiterated that God had given Him the words to teach.
5. Jesus challenged them concerning Sabbath work. The incident that started much of the controversy with the Religious Leaders was the healing of the paralyzed man found in John 5. During His teaching in the temple, Jesus took this on with the Religious Leaders in front of the people. He used the fact that circumcision was performed on an eight-day-old baby boy if that day fell on a Sabbath. He challenged all who listened to "judge righteous judgment."
6. Jesus revealed that He would soon leave, and the Religious Leaders could not follow. This statement really confused the Religionist. They immediately started to surmise where He would go, what He would do, and how He could think they would not find Him. Of course, Jesus was speaking of His return to His Father after completing His work on the cross and the 40 days following His resurrection.

## I. Jesus' Great Invitation

**“In the last day, that great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried (Lit. - loudly and earnestly declared so all would hear), saying, If any man thirst, let him come unto me, and drink. <sup>38</sup>He that believeth on me, as the scripture hath said, out of his belly (Lit. - him, innermost being, deep within, deep inside, heart, inmost heart) shall flow rivers of living water. <sup>39</sup>(But this spake he of the Spirit, which they that believe on him should receive: for the Holy Ghost was not yet given; because that Jesus was not yet glorified.)” John 7:37-39**

“the last day, that great day of the feast” – Let’s talk about the significance of the “Great Day” of the Feast of Tabernacles. This commemoration and celebration were instructed in Leviticus 23. But by the time of Christ, much of what was done was tradition and not dictated in the law. These practices had grown over the centuries, much like our traditions! 1) It was observed as a special Sabbath. 2) There were special sacrifices. 3) Joyfully dismantled their booths/huts. 4) Water brought from the pool of Siloam and poured on the altar, accompanied by loud music and the singing of Psalm 113-118; Isaiah 12:3. This was the climax of the day and would mark the closing of the Feast of Tabernacles. This last act was a dramatic reminder of **God’s provision** in the wilderness and the giving of rain for crops in the Promised Land. They left the temple at the end of the feast remembering God’s miraculous and amazing provision of water for their fathers!

One of my study books said this, “But what God had done for Israel physically, Christ had come to do for that people spiritually.” Pentecost p. 281

“If any man thirst, let him come unto me, and drink” – We can only imagine as the last drop of water poured from the pitcher onto the altar, Jesus cried, “If any man thirst, let him come to me, and drink.” The tradition they were celebrating was something that could never satisfy the heart. Yet, God promised to always satisfy the thirsty. The world always leaves man wanting more, and God has provided through Jesus satisfaction for the soul and eternal life! He is the source of living water! Here we find the Messiah’s life-giving invitation... come and drink! This is a Bible principle found throughout the Scripture: Isaiah 12:2-3; 44:3-4; 55:1; 58:11; Matthew 5:6; John 4:10, 13-14; 6:35

Within this statement, we have the Gospel from Jesus’ lips! Let’s examine each aspect:

“If any man” – please recognize the universal invitation to all and any man to come to Christ! Jesus said it to all those within the sound of His voice, and He still calls out the same. God desired all men to come, and it is still a truth of God. “God so loved the world” - John 3:16; God promises to “draw all men unto” Christ John 12:32; He would “have all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth.” 1 Tim. 2:4; and Rom. 10:13 tells us again that “whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved.” Just as Jesus gave this invitation to all, it’s the same today, but first, the need of the soul must be recognized!

“thirst” - Here we can see that there must be a recognition of a need – thirst, a dry, parched soul! And this recognition is a gift of God. He reveals the need, the dissatisfaction with the world, a lack of fulfillment, a desire for God, a need, a thirst for more! It is then that there will be a desire to go to Jesus!

“let him come unto me” – Just as water satisfies thirst and produces fruitfulness, so the Son of God satisfies the inner person and enables us to bear fruit.” Warren Weisbe p. 254 There in the temple, Jesus called the

Religionists, the Judeans, the pilgrims, all people, to come to Him. Not to merely come to the law, or the grand temple, or endless traditions, but to Him! And He still calls all people to come to Him. Even today, He does not call people to come to rules or regulations, churches, denominations, traditions, or a set of acts or works, but to Him and enjoy living water.

“and drink” – Jesus had said to the Woman at the Well, probably some eighteen months before, “But whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst; but the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into **everlasting life.**” John 4:14 The living water from Jesus not only satisfies the thirsty soul but gives everlasting life. But notice a new aspect Jesus reveals concerning one who believes in Him.

“Out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water” – This phrase started with, “He that believeth on me.” This Greek phrase is repeated over 40 times in the Gospels! Why? Because it is a central part of the Gospel. It begins with believing in the person and work of Jesus! Not only will the thirsty take in living water, but it will flow from them. John’s commentary found in verse 39 makes this clear: Jesus was speaking of the coming Holy Spirit who would dwell within each believer! This was prophesied in the Old Testament (Ezekiel 11:19-20; 36:26-27; Isaiah 33:3; 59:21) and fulfilled in Acts at Pentecost (Acts 2:1-13).

This was a strong invitation and claim. Again, Jesus was revealing who He was; not just a good man, or a prophet, but the Son of God, who came to give man access to God.

## II. Divisions of the People

**“Many of the people therefore, when they heard this saying, said, Of a truth this is the Prophet.<sup>41</sup> Others said, This is the Christ. But some said, Shall Christ come out of Galilee? <sup>42</sup>Hath not the scripture said, That Christ cometh of the seed of David, and out of the town of Bethlehem, where David was? <sup>43</sup>So there was a division among the people because of him. <sup>44</sup>And some of them would have taken him; but no man laid hands on him.” John 7:40-44**

“this is the Prophet” – Moses prophesied of a coming Prophet. Like Moses, he would also be a leader, a liberator, a provider, and one who spoke to God face to face like. (Deut. 18:15-18) They did not see this prophet as the Messiah, but another. John the Baptist was asked if he was “that prophet” in John 1:19-25. Their confused traditions confused their understanding. At the Feeding of the 5000, the people immediately associated Jesus with this prophecy and said, “This is of a truth that prophet that should come into the world.” (John 6:14) It seems that Jesus' proclamation at the Feast of Tabernacles promoted this same reaction. So, who was the Prophet Moses was speaking of? Was it Jesus their Messiah? Well, actually, in Peter’s message to the Jews in Acts 3, Peter makes it very clear that this Prophet was Jesus the Messiah. (v. 19-23-24) Stephen, in his message to the Jews, referenced Moses’ prophecy, as well as pointing out that the Jews had rejected Moses’ words concerning Christ.

“This is the Christ” – It is wonderful to realize that some people actually saw the reality of who Jesus was. They came to the right conclusion. This was the statement that kept the Jewish Leadership up at night! When the

people thought Jesus might be their Messiah, it was the Religious Leaders who denied it and put extreme pressure on anyone who might consider it!

We can see that the people believed Jesus was from God. They associated Him with prophecies. Yet they had **faulty thinking!**

“Shall Christ come out of Galilee?” – But their ignorance and lack of investigation come out again! They assumed Jesus was from Galilee. No one asked, no one checked the facts! Faulty thinking shut down the truth and ended the conversation!

“would have taken him” – Some thought Jesus might be the Messiah, others the Prophet Moses spoke of, and the last reaction was hostility! Again, they wanted to take Him but could not. Remember, it was not God’s timing!

**III. Return of the Temple Guards** Here we see the scene has changed, and we are privy to a meeting of Jewish bigwigs – a combination of Pharisees and Sanhedrin. The temple police had been sent to arrest Jesus in verse 32, and now they return – empty-handed!

**“Then came the officers to the chief priests (Lit. - Sadducees) and Pharisees; and they said unto them, Why have ye not brought him? <sup>46</sup>The officers answered, Never man (Lit. – human being, mortal – idea of supernatural, more than a man) spake like this man. <sup>47</sup>Then answered them the Pharisees, Are ye also deceived ? <sup>48</sup>Have any of the rulers or of the Pharisees believed on him? <sup>49</sup>But this people (Lit. - ”people of the land” - mob, crowd, pilgrims) who knoweth not the law are cursed.” John 7:45-49**

“Why have ye not brought him?” → “Never man spake like this man.” –

Their excuse was – “Never man spake like this man.” The temple guards had the power to arrest anyone causing a disturbance or breaking any of the ceremonial laws. There were hundreds of trivial laws; it was almost impossible not to break, neglect, or ignore a few of them occasionally. But these officers, who were all studied Levites, heard nothing in Jesus’ words to arrest Him about; instead, they were amazed at His words! Matthew Henry, a preacher of the 1700’s said this, “The officers that were sent to take Him were taken with Him and acknowledged this.” MH p, 1698

I want to examine the phrase, “Never man spake like this man.” The word “man” is interesting. It means a mortal or a human being. The officers were saying, “Never has a mortal man ever spoken like this man. Jesus of Nazareth seems supernatural, not a mere human!” Let’s give these men credit. They were not for-hire thugs blindly doing the bidding of the Religious Elite. Instead, they were men of character, conscience, and judged righteous judgment! They saw in Jesus’ words truth, which cause them to disobey the Religious Rulers.

**Insults Fly:** The rulers were exasperated at the officers when they came back without Jesus and gave this very irritating report! They saw themselves as the theological elite, who could never be theologically deceived! They first **insulted the officers** as easily swayed by Jesus, pointing out that none of them have considered Jesus anything more than a blasphemer. Then the Religious Rulers **insulted the people**. The term “people” in verse 49 is really a derogator word meaning “common, low-class, ignorant people.” According to the rulers, they were accursed people. That comment may have meant to intimidate the officers to go again and arrest Jesus.

Remember, another group of temple officers will successfully take Jesus in the garden of Gethsemane in a few short months! “Judas then, having received a band of men and officers from the chief priests and Pharisees, cometh thither with lanterns and torches and weapons.” John 18:3

**IV. Nicodemus – a Voice of Reason** In John 2, Jesus drove out the temple money changers and animal markets, and gave strong, bold words to the Jewish Leaders, “Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.” Then in John 3, we find Nicodemus coming to speak to Jesus at night because he recognized, “we know that thou art a teacher come from God: for no man can do these miracles that thou doest, except God be with him”. Nicodemus was not only one of approximately 6,000 Pharisees in Israel, but we are told in John 3:1, that he was also part of the 70-member Sanhedrin, a Jewish ruling body authorized by the Roman Government. Nicodemus was a prominent VIP within all of Israel. During their time together in John 3, Jesus was very straightforward with Nicodemus about His mission from God and, of course, it is within this conversation we read the wonderful passage, “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.” John 3:16 It is wonderful to realize that within the book of John, we are watching the faith-journey of Nicodemus toward a open commitment to Jesus. I want to point out the last statement of Jesus to Nicodemus as found in John 3:21, “But he that doeth truth cometh to the light, that his deeds may be made manifest, that they are wrought in God.” These words are significant. Ultimately, we find Nicodemus’ deeds demonstrate his movement to a full belief in Jesus the Messiah.

**“Nicodemus saith unto them, (he that came to Jesus by night, being one of them,) <sup>51</sup>Doth our law judge any man, before it hear him, and know what he doeth? <sup>52</sup>They answered and said unto him, Art thou also of Galilee ? Search, and look: for out of Galilee ariseth no prophet. <sup>53</sup>And every man went unto his own house.” John 7:50-53**

“Doth our law judge any man, before it hear him, and know what he doeth?” – Several of my study materials said that Nicodemus was standing up and protecting Jesus. Yes, I think so too, but he was doing so in a very political way. Nicodemus was a wise politician; he knew theology – the truths of God, he knew the law – the religious procedures given by Moses, he knew the traditions of the elders – those 600+ man-made laws given to Israel over the centuries, and like a good politician, he knew how to handle his haughty and intitled peers. So instead of saying something very direct like, “Jesus of Nazareth may actually be our long-awaited Messiah and we better be investigating this.” He reminded the rest of the rulers of the law concerning hearing and investigating before judgments were made. I love that Nicodemus desired them to study both Jesus’ words and work! Something all of us need to do! And this was something the Religious Leaders had not done! He was slowing them down and challenged them to hear Jesus out and, with a sincere good heart, like his, judge Jesus righteously! Again, something we must all do! And what was he meet with – insults and sarcasm!

**Insults Fly:** They questioned his intelligence. They asked if he was from lowly, wrong-side-of-the-tracks Galilee. Was he as ignorant and unlearned as the common men of the land who came from the north! Then the next statement they made is laughable, “Search, and look: for out of Galilee ariseth no prophet.” Why is that funny? Because of their ignorance! The Old Testament clearly teaches that yes, there were several prophets from Galilee, and several others that very likely were as well. Jonah, Nahma, Hosea, Elijah, Elisha, and Amos

“And every man went unto his own house.” – Meeting adjourned – over, done. The Religious Leaders would not comment on or move on Nicodemus’ motion. Some Bible teachers believe that Nicodemus speaking up as

he did, at least stopped the leadership from sending the temple officers out again. It seems that several months later, at the Passover, Nicodemus was not around to bring up rules and laws, and they were able to grab Jesus, get Him tried, and on the cross before Nicodemus showed up! Wow! Nicodemus was a man of integrity who loved the God, and the truth of the Scripture, and these Religionist would have seen him as a barrier to their agenda.

Let's do another **Rest of the Story episode**, this time on Nicodemus. Looking both at Scripture and tradition we find further information about him. In John 19:38-42, we find Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea anointed and buried the body of Jesus. Compared to Nicodemus pointing out procedural discrepancies in this private meeting, the act of openly burying Jesus is clear evidence of his continued growth in faith. Also, tradition tells us, Nicodemus was later baptized by Peter, then forced to step down from all his Jewish leadership positions, and suffered great persecution. Of course, we can only imagine how the religious establishment reacted when one of their own became a follower of Jesus. We only have to look at Paul, the former Pharisee, to understand the suffering Nicodemus probably endured. Lastly, we can be assured that Nicodemus is in eternity with his Savior, the one he met by night, protected in this meeting, and later laid in a tomb. But not because of his deeds, but because he understood the truth that Jesus was the Messiah, and the work of Christ's death was the sacrifice needed for his sin!

### **Believers' Application:**

1. Jesus cried to the crowd that the believer in Him would have rivers of living water flow from their innermost being. John the Apostle makes sure the readers understand that this living water was the Holy Spirit!

Let's answer some questions concerning the Holy Spirit.

- A. Who is the Holy Spirit? He is the third person of the Trinity: Father, Son, & Holy Spirit. We see the whole trinity mentioned in Matthew 3:16-17; 28:19; 2 Cor. 13:14;
- B. When did the Holy Spirit come to Jesus' disciples? Jesus spent much time explaining the coming Holy Spirit to the disciples the night before He died, while in the Upper Room! John 14:16-18; 26; 16:7-15 He told them that the Holy Spirit would come after He returned to His Father, and this happened in Acts 2:1-4
- C. When does the Holy Spirit come to believers today? When one believes in Jesus, the Holy Spirit comes immediately and lives within them. Eph. 1:13-14; Rom. 8:9; 2 Cor. 1:22
- D. What are some of the benefits and characteristics of this Holy Spirit flow that comes from the depths of the believer's heart and soul?
  1. The Holy Spirit leads us to believe truth. He leads us to see the wrong of our thinking and what is true. John 16:13
  2. The Holy Spirit leads us to believe in Jesus. He is the One who brings us to acknowledge our need of Jesus as our Savior. John 15:26

3. The Holy Spirit leads us to repentance . As He reveals the truth of our sin, conviction comes, which should drive one to turn to God! John 16:8-9
4. The Holy Spirit leads us in our relationship with God. As we live our lives on earth, He will comfort us in difficulty, direct us to God's will, strengthen us in our weakness, and helps us in our communication with God. Romans 8:13-16; 26-27
5. The Holy Spirit leads us in our relationship with man. As we live our lives on earth, He will give us the characteristics of Himself. In Galatians 5:22-23, they are called the "fruit of the Spirit," but actually this whole passage deals with our life in the world with the river of living water flowing through us! Galatians 5:16-26.

2. Nicodemus is an amazing New Testament character. We are allowed to watch his progress of faith from a nighttime seeker of Jesus to a public follower of Jesus. Let's consider some applications we can gain from this man's spiritual journey. (adapted from Lessons from the Life of Nicodemus – ccf.org)

- A. Nicodemus sought out the truth of Jesus with a sincere heart. In John 3, we find Nicodemus coming to Jesus at night. He began with an honest observation of Jesus and His ministry, "Rabbi, we know that thou art a teacher come from God: for no man can do these miracles that thou doest, except God be with him." Positively, he saw Jesus as a teacher from God based on the miracles. On the downside, Nicodemus wasn't ready to verbalize that Jesus might be the Messiah. But it seems Jesus interrupts whatever the conversational agenda or desire of Nicodemus for this interview, and challenged him with the need for a spiritual rebirth (v. 5-12), the need to realize the real truth of Jesus' person and His work; Him being the Son of Man from heaven come to be the sacrifice for sin (v. 13-20) The recording of the nighttime interview ends with an interesting statement from Jesus. "But he that doeth truth cometh to the light (John 7:17), that his deeds may be made manifest, that they are wrought in God." v. 21 We see in this statement that **the deeds** of a follower of Jesus will show if he is really in the light of truth or still in the darkness of his old thinking. John 15:4; James 2:18
- B. Nicodemus realized that being religious was not enough – One must be born again . Nicodemus was a Pharisee and an elite ruler in Israel. The people would have highly respected his position and knowledge. Yet, Jesus told Him he needed a spiritual rebirth! His high religious standing wasn't enough! In this passage, we find the familiar verse from the lips of Jesus, "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life." v. 16 From these words of Jesus, we see that the work and involvement in religion cannot save; only faith in Jesus' work can! Paul will put it this way, "Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Ghost." Titus 3:5
- C. Nicodemus stood for Christ, even when it wasn't popular. Probably about 18 months after that nighttime interview, we find Nicodemus challenging his peers to evaluate Jesus' teachings and works honestly. (John 7:50-51) This statement was evidence of the spiritual change in Nicodemus' heart. His

fellow Religious Leaders were full of emotional hate and murderous plans against Jesus. But as Nicodemus had earlier sought out truth from Jesus, he now wanted those men to honestly do the same. We find Nicodemus' desire to slow down and hear Jesus out was met with ridicule. What he courageously said in this private meeting was unpopular, and he would have known it might bring a suspension on him, but he stood for truth and the person of Jesus.

- D. Nicodemus' faith led to bold actions. In John 19:39, we read, "And there came also Nicodemus, which at the first came to Jesus by night, and brought a mixture of myrrh and aloes, about a hundred pound weight." Here we find another deed of faith done by Nicodemus. Please realize, it was only Nicodemus who anointed the body of our precious blood-stained Jesus. Not the faithful women, it was Nicodemus. He had moved from a secret seeker to a bold disciple! His open and public generous contribution of about 75 pounds of burial spices showed a deep love and commitment to Jesus.

Genuine faith always leads to loving action! This was displayed, just as Jesus told Nicodemus that first night, "But he that doeth truth cometh to the light, that his deeds may be made manifest, that they are wrought in God."

Where are you in your faith journey? Are you seeking truth? Have you been born again? If you are a believer, are you willing to boldly stand for truth? Let's answer these questions honestly and move forward as faithful, loving followers of Jesus!