

Is He Good?

John 7:1-24

Call: Adaptation from Ps 147 and 2 Peter

Scripture: John 1:1-5, 14, 18 (ESV)

I. Intro

It is good to be back with you today as we return to our studies in the Gospel of John. In this Gospel, we are invited to come and see who Jesus is. As Jesus invited his first disciples to *come* and *see* who he really was, he offers the same invitation to us. He invites us to *come*, hang out with him a little bit and discover who he really is. Are his words and deeds truly good and no? Does he really make the living God known, as we just read in our scripture reading? For the next five weeks, I invite you to come and see who Jesus is.

Review

We're entering back into John in chapter 7. Over the next five weeks, we will explore chapters 7 and 8. These chapters are the very heart of the Gospel. They lie at the center of the book which is Chapters 5-12. In these chapters, Jesus sets himself apart from every other person that has ever lived. What Jesus says and does during these middle chapters of John puts him in a class all by himself. But John is also very careful to tell us that what Jesus says and does in these chapters, he says and does in the midst of the Jewish feasts.

As I said last fall, these feasts were a time to *remember* the grand narrative of God's story of redemption, but also to *renew* hope for his future guidance. Of the many feasts, there were three main ones: Passover, Pentecost and Tabernacles. Passover happens in the springtime when the Jews remember God's great deliverance from slavery in Egypt. Pentecost happens 50 days after Passover when the Jews remember the giving of the Law on Mt. Sinai. Tabernacles happens 6 months after Passover in the fall, around October for us. Tabernacles remembers the 40 years of the Israelites wandering in the wilderness. During this time, the Israelites lived in tents or booths. So the feast of Tabernacles is sometimes called the Feast of Booths.

Last fall, we studied chapters 5-6. These chapters happened during the feast of Passover. Chapters 7-8, then, occur six months later during the Feast of Tabernacles. We will talk the details of Tabernacles next Sunday, but for now, this prepares us for this morning.

II. The Brother's Pressure (1-5)

1 After this Jesus went about in Galilee. He would not go about in Judea, because the Jews were seeking to kill him. 2 Now the Jews' Feast of Booths ["tabernacles"] was at hand. 3 So his brothers said to him, "Leave here and go to Judea, that your disciples also may see the works you are doing. 4 For no one works in secret if he seeks to be known openly. If you do these things, show yourself to the world." 5 For not even his brothers believed in him.

A. The Conflict Begins

The mood of chapters 7 and 8 is captured in verse 1. The Jews are seeking to kill Jesus. Hostility and conflict surrounding the identity of Jesus will characterize almost every scene in these two chapters. Is he good or not? That's the question. As the discord continues to grow, the instant pot builds pressure.

Once again we get this term, "the Jews." And, once again, this does not refer to all Jews. This refers to the Religious Authorities, and those who follow them who are hostile to Jesus.

B. The Brother's Urging

Jesus' brothers provide the first confrontation, a private confrontation. They encourage Jesus to go to the feast and into the public eye. At first, it seems like his brothers are being genuine. If you remember, the great defection had just happened at the end of chapter 6. Jesus had fed the 5000, then the crowd stuck around for his "bread of life" discourse. But, at the end of that sermon, all but the twelve find his words too offensive and leave Jesus.

So, now, his brothers encourage him to go to the feast to win more followers, but John's comment in verse 5 that his brothers "didn't believe in him" makes plain that his brothers are not genuine. They are taunting him. "If you're such a great miracle-worker, go show yourself openly. Become a star Jesus!" They're tempting him to show off, to gain the praise of people, to impress the movers and shakers of the world. As Dale Bruner says, "Their call is more of a call to Hollywood ... than to Golgotha" (464).

It's a bit like the temptation stories in the Synoptics, especially the temptation where Satan takes Jesus to Jerusalem to the top of the temple, and he tells Jesus to jump off – you'll be a star Jesus – maybe do a couple back flips on the way down - because your angels will catch you Jesus. Come on Jesus, show off! And, everyone will love you Jesus! You'll gain the whole world Jesus!

But, Jesus won't do it. Why? Because showing off is the world's way. It's the way of show business. It is not God's way and neither should it be the church's way. Showing off – even for evangelical ends – is not the way of Jesus. Means and methods matter, how we do things matters, not just the ends.

Jesus' brothers do not believe him here. Now after the resurrection, we know that his brothers came to believe. Two of them, James and Jude, would later write New Testament books.

III. Jesus' Response (6-10)

6 Jesus said to them, "My time has not yet come, but your time is always here. 7 The world cannot hate you, but it hates me because I testify about it that its works are evil. 8 You go up to the feast. I am not going up to this feast, for my time has not yet fully come." 9 After saying this, he remained in Galilee. 10 But after his brothers had gone up to the feast, then he also went up, not publicly but in private. (ESV)

A. Jesus' Response

Jesus responds that he will not go to the feast. His time has not yet come. For his brothers, they can always come and go because their presence will not affect anyone. But, Jesus, on the other hand, isn't able to be that free. His mission is not only to speak the good news, but also to share the bad news about the darkness and evil that he knows is in every person. In chapter 3, John already told us that the world loves the darkness instead of the light (John 3:19). The world doesn't want to hear about their darkness.

B. Euphemisms

This is probably why the world loves euphemisms, to minimize the truth of the darkness. A euphemism is using polite words to describe ugly things. It's to put a spin on a difficult topic so it doesn't really sound that ugly. In other words, it's nicer to say we "terminated a pregnancy" than saying we committed murder. It feels better to say "collateral damage" instead of "accidental deaths." It sounds much more acceptable to say "alternative lifestyle" than to say "immoral behavior." The truth can hurt, but Jesus was always about the truth, the truth in love. He is the truth, as he will later say, so he won't spin difficult topics. And, neither should we as his followers, especially on matters of eternal significance. But, the truth ... in love. How we live and say the truth matters.

C. Jesus' Timing

So Jesus sends his brothers on their way to the feast while he remains in Galilee. But, some time later, he does go to Jerusalem, but in secret. This decision on his part has caused much controversy over the years. He said he wasn't going to the feast, then decided to go. Did he lie? Many people think so. I don't think so.

D. Chronos vs. Kairos

I think the key here is to understand the Greek words for time. There are two words in the Greek language for time: "chronos" and "kairos." "Chronos" is the normal word for time. It is from this word that we get the words chronology and chronological. "Chronos" time is time that can be measured on clocks and calendars. "Chronos" time is tick-tock time. However, "Kairos" time is opportunity time. "Kairos" is the word used here. Kairos time is that special moment determined by God for the fulfillment of divine promises and purposes. It's the same word used in Jesus' first sermon recorded in Mark. He says, "The time is fulfilled. The Kingdom of God is at hand." That's "kairos." The time determined by God to fulfill his purposes. "The time is fulfilled. The Kingdom of God is at hand. Repent and believe the Good News." (Mark 1:15).

Jesus doesn't go up to the feast initially because it's not the right opportunity time. It's not the appropriate time according to the Father. And, Jesus lives only according to his Father's time, not according to his brothers, or his mother, or anyone else. As the old spiritual used to say, "He may not come when you want him, but he'll always be right on time."

IV. The Crowd's Division (11-13)

11 The Jews were looking for him at the feast, and saying, "Where is he?" 12 And there was much muttering about him among the people. While some said, "He is a good man," others

said, “No, he is leading the people astray.” 13 Yet for fear of the Jews no one spoke openly of him.

A. The Grumbling

So the feast has started, and Jesus is there in private. Of course, everyone is looking for him. They’re all “muttering” about him. This is the same word for grumbling which we saw back in chapter 6. Grumbling reminds us of the wilderness wanderings when the Israelites grumbled against Moses and God.

B. The Division

And, there is division. the crowd is divided over who Jesus is. As we said, this is the theme of these two chapters. Even though Jesus hadn’t been in Jerusalem for months, many people remember his goodness. “This guy is a good man,” they say. “Remember how he miraculously healed the lame man (5:1-17), then taught insightfully about eternal life (5:19-31)? His words and his deeds are good.” Of course, they are recalling the events of chapter 5.

But others were siding with the religious authorities. “No way,” they say. “Our leaders say he’s breaking the Sabbath and making himself equal with God! He can’t do that and be good. He must be an imposter” (5:18). Yet, all the grumbling was done quietly for fear of the authorities. (Isn’t that how we grumble? We grumble quietly under our breath.)

It's important to understand the word “good” here. Although being a “good man” may be an inadequate title for Jesus by the end of the story, here it sits opposite imposter or liar meaning it’s more than a casual compliment. It carries the connotation of truth. In fact, in the next few verses, Jesus will claim that there is no falsehood in him. Furthermore, goodness in the Bible always has its source in a relationship with God, because God is good... all the time. All the time... God is good. Beginning in Genesis, God, the good creator, makes a very good creation. Then, throughout the Old Testament we’re invited to taste and see that the Lord is good. He’s a good God and his steadfast love endures forever. Goodness is rooted in the living God because he is altogether good. Calling Jesus a good man here implies that he reflects the character of God, that these people believe that he is indeed making God known.

The crowd is divided. And, of course, this division continues to our day. Jesus is in fact a good man who makes God known, or he is an imposter.

In the middle of the week, Jesus makes his public appearance, verse 14.

V. Jesus’ Authority Questioned (14-18)

14 About the middle of the feast Jesus went up into the temple and began teaching. 15 The Jews therefore marveled, saying, “How is it that this man has learning, when he has never studied?” 16 So Jesus answered them, “My teaching is not mine, but his who sent me. 17 If anyone’s will is to do God’s will, he will know whether the teaching is from God or whether I am speaking on my own authority. 18 The one who speaks on his own authority seeks his own glory; but the one who seeks the glory of him who sent him is true, and in him there is no falsehood.

A. The Question of Education

Jesus begins teaching publicly and, as we'll see throughout this debate, continues to be interrupted and questioned. His antagonists are astonished by his teaching. "How can he be this intelligent? He doesn't have an MDIV! He hasn't gone to all the right schools. He hasn't studied under any legitimate Rabbi. He doesn't have any authority to be teaching us."

B. Jesus' Authority

Jesus responds that they should recognize his words, for they are not from himself, but from his father. Jesus is speaking with the authority of God.

Of course, we see this over and over in the Gospels where Jesus speaks with the authority of God.

- Authority over creation. When the disciples are on the boat and getting drowned by the storm, Jesus stands up and simply tells the storm to stop (Mk 4:35-41). And it does. No appeal to a higher power. No incantation. Just stop.
- Authority over the demonic. He simply says come out to the demons and they do (Lk 8:26-37).
- Authority over sin. When some friends bring a paralyzed man to Jesus, Jesus looks at the paralyzed man and says, "Son, your sins are forgiven" (Mk 2:1-12).
- Authority over death. Shortly after the Feast of Tabernacles, he will raise Lazarus from the dead, with just a word (John 11).

To all the forces which threaten to undo us, he speaks as God and those forces obey him.

Even at the end of his Sermon on the Mount in Matthew, the crowds *there* recognize Jesus' authority. Matthew says, "*the crowds were astonished at his teaching, for he was teaching them as one who had authority, and not as their leaders*" (Matt 7:28-29). The crowd that day sensed he had the right to say the things he said, and that what he said fit with reality. His words matched their reality.

C. Matching Reality

And, reality is where Jesus goes in verse 17. He challenges his hearers that if they really are serious about doing God's will, then test his teaching. Test his teaching to see if it matches reality, see if it matches real life.

This experiment has been tested by disciples throughout the centuries and has been confirmed. Jesus' life and teachings match reality. He really is the only path to satisfaction. Believing in him and seeking to live by the law of self-giving love, although completely foreign to our natural senses, does bring true life and true contentment.

Attaching oneself to Jesus matches reality. In other words, it matches the grain of the universe. There is a grain to this universe. There is an ultimate reality, and it is life with Christ. To live with him is to go with the grain of the universe. An old Irish blessing once said, "As you slide down the banister of life, may the splinters never point the wrong way." If you slide down the

banister of life without Christ, the splinters will be pointed the wrong way! And, that will hurt! It will not work, because it cannot work. At the center of the universe is a relationship of love and pure goodness: God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit. And this has set the grain of the universe. You can't live against the grain and get away with it.

If you're watching today and you want to know if Jesus is real, here's how you can check him out: start doing what he tells you to do. Come and see him. Repent and believe in him, and begin walking in his ways. Then, you'll know that what he says is true. You'll be living with the grain of the universe. You'll be living in line with true reality.

Jesus knows what he's talking about because he has actually had the best teaching ever. He's been taught by the master teacher, his heavenly Father, which is the best possible rabbinical school.

After the challenge to his authority, the topic now turns to his deeds, verse 19.

VI. Jesus' Actions Questioned (19-24)

19 Has not Moses given you the law? Yet none of you keeps the law. Why do you seek to kill me?" 20 The crowd answered, "You have a demon! Who is seeking to kill you?" 21 Jesus answered them, "I did one work, and you all marvel at it. 22 Moses gave you circumcision (not that it is from Moses, but from the fathers), and you circumcise a man on the Sabbath. 23 If on the Sabbath a man receives circumcision, so that the law of Moses may not be broken, are you angry with me because on the Sabbath I made a man's whole body well? 24 Do not judge by appearances, but judge with right judgment."

A. The Plot

The discussion refers to chapter 5, and Jesus' action of healing the lame man. The crowd doesn't know of the authorities' plot to kill Jesus probably because the crowd is made up of pilgrims in Jerusalem for the feast.

B. The Sabbath and Circumcision Discussion

Now, if you remember, when Jesus healed the lame man, the authorities called him a lawbreaker because the healing was done on the Sabbath. And because he broke the Sabbath law, the healing doesn't count. He must not be good. He must be an imposter, or as the crowd says, he must have a demon.

But Jesus presents a brilliant argument, exposing their contradictions and their hard hearts. This group follows Moses' teachings whole-heartedly. Moses wrote Genesis, which means he wrote the law of circumcision in Genesis 17. This law stipulated circumcision on the 8th day after birth for *all* boys. Moses also wrote the Sabbath commandment in Exodus and Deuteronomy (Ex 20:8-11, Deut 5:12-15). Presumably Moses knew full well there would be conflicts between these two laws, and yet, there are no exceptions given for either. When a boy is born 8 days before a Sabbath, that boy *is* circumcised on the Sabbath, no questions asked. The Sabbath law is superseded, and superseded repeatedly, because children are born

all the time. Therefore, Moses himself had given instructions for repeatedly breaking the Sabbath.

C. Wholeness?

Now Jesus drives home his point. If the law of Moses can be broken – even repeatedly – due to circumcision, what about making a man’s whole body well? Isn’t the healing of the entire body of the man justified? Shouldn’t healings supersede the Sabbath as well as circumcision? Jesus has made his point.

D. Judgment

And, he finishes with a command. Don’t judge superficially, but judge righteously. In other words, wake up to your contradictions and assess the situation rightly, assess me correctly.

The irony is thick in so many ways. For one, the law was always intended to bring life, because it reflected God’s good character, the life-giver himself. Yet, the authorities are using it as motivation to kill. Their legalism has blinded them to the true intent of the law and to the goodness of Jesus. And, Jesus is trying to show them the true intent of the law. But, maybe the greatest irony of all is that they are trying to kill, while Jesus is trying to make well. In the end, he will be the one who dies. But, his death will be the supreme example of self-giving love.

VII. Implication

That’s our text for today. Next week, we’ll continue the debate from this point.

So, is Jesus good? Or is he an imposter? You and I must make a right judgement about him. We must assess him correctly. A lot hangs in the balance. For Jesus has already stated that his Father has given him authority over life and death, which we saw that he demonstrates over and over in the Gospels. What we decide about him will determine our destiny. If you’re not sure where you stand on him, I invite you today to come and see, judge for yourself, pronounce your verdict on whether he is good or not, whether he is from God or not, whether he really does make the living God known. If you want to talk to a pastor about this, one of our pastors would be glad to talk with you.

If you have decided follow Jesus and have attached yourself to him, then the invitation to you and me is to reflect his goodness. The invitation to us, as Bernard taught last week, is to never tire of doing good (2 Thess 3:13). This, to use again the analogy of wood, is to work with the grain and not against it. I’m not a woodworker but I’m told that when you work with wood, you need to follow the grain so it doesn’t splinter. Working with the grain gives the best results. In the same way, we reflect Jesus’ goodness by working in the direction of God’s good purposes in this world, for we have been created for good works, as Paul says in Ephesians (Eph 2:10).

Have you ever heard of the “Join Me” movement? Back in the 1990’s, a man named Danny Wallace decided to begin a goodness movement, and thousands of people, called “joinees,” joined him. What was his movement? Every joinee would do a random act of kindness to strangers every Friday, now to be known as “Good Fridays.” Little acts of kindness every Friday

that bring joy to strangers: carrying groceries for a stranger, buying a cup of coffee, waving thanks to a person who lets you into traffic, smiling and saying hello to a jogger, making a card for someone, posting words of encouragement on social media (well they didn't do that in the 90s). Life-affirming acts for no reason whatsoever.

I read this story and thought – isn't that what the church is supposed to be doing? And, not just on Fridays, but everyday? Our invitation is to reflect the goodness of Jesus everyday, after all, we love because he first loved us (1 John 4:19). Everyday is good, not just Fridays, and everyday holds the potential for good deeds.

Following Jesus is a movement out of self-focus and into God and others focus. We all know how difficult the last 12 months have been. But, we can't let our muttering and grumbling blind us. That's to be self-focused. We can't let our frustrations or our zoom fatigue or our pursuit of comfort or even our political views blind us from reflecting Jesus' goodness.

And, I know many of you are already doing lots and lots of good things: making cards, buying groceries, checking in on people, helping with food distribution. But this is God's great program for transforming this world: to inhabit a people with his love, mercy and justice – his goodness – then have those people demonstrate this goodness in concrete actions everyday, not just Fridays. Surely the question for us who follow Jesus as we lay down our heads every night, every night, is this, what good did I do today?

Amen.

Benediction

God is good ... all the time. All the time ... God is good. We give thanks to the Lord for he is good and his steadfast love endures forever. And [now] let us not grow weary of doing good, for in due season we will reap, if we do not give up [and are not blinded by ourselves]. So then, as we have opportunity, let us do good to everyone (Gal 6:9-10).

Resources

Bruner, Dale, *The Gospel of John: A Commentary*

Fitch, David, *Faithful Presence*

Johnson, Darrell, *Preaching the Gospel According to John* (Regent College Course)

Jones, E. Stanley, *In Christ*

Klink, Edward, *John (Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the NT)*