

Notes for the Ones Called-Out to Meet

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Jesus' Teaching at the Feast of Booths

by Dan Trygg

The first verse of chapter seven sets the stage for the next significant event in John's record. This verse actually grammatically should be attached to the end of chapter 6. That chapter ended with Jesus in Capernaum, in the springtime. **This verse indicates that He was traversing Galilee, because it was not safe for Him to spend time traveling throughout Judea. The Jewish leaders had it in for Him, and He was aware of this. Now, however, it was the fall of the year, and "the Feast of Booths was at hand"** (vs. 2). This was one of three great annual feasts instituted at Mt. Sinai. They were to be observed as reminders of the spiritual history of the Jews, a celebration and renewal of their relationship with God. Every adult male Jew was to attend these feasts in Jerusalem (Ex. 23:14-17; Lev. 23:1-44). **Despite the danger, Jesus was not about to disregard His obligation to observe the Feast of Booths.** This particular feast, also called Ingathering, occurred in the seventh month of the Jewish lunar calendar, reckoned beginning from Passover in March-April. This would fall in October after the fall harvest, five days after Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement. In the midst of the great abundance produced by this end-of-the-year gathering in of their crops, **Jewish families were to construct "booths", shelters made of sticks and leafy branches, and to live in them for this week long celebration.** In this way, they were to remember that their ancestors had lived in such temporary shelters when God brought them out of the land of Egypt. **They were to remember God's provision for them in the wilderness, and that He has provided them with all the blessings that they now enjoy.** It is interesting that the Feast of Booths is the only OT feast that is mentioned as being observed in the Messianic kingdom to come (Zech. 14:9-21). In that time, *all* nations, not just Israel, will be required to come up to Jerusalem to observe this yearly celebration.

Jesus' brothers enter into the story line (vss. 3-5). These were other sons of Mary by Joseph. There is no record that Joseph had any older children before marrying Mary, nor is there any other explanation offered in Scripture than to think that they are natural half-brothers of Jesus. There was a specific word for "cousin" (e.g., Col. 4:10) and for "kinsman" or "relative" (Lk. 1:36,58) available, if John and the other gospel writers been intending to write about other close blood relatives of Jesus. The NT descriptions consistently represent them as brothers of Jesus (cf. Matt. 12:46,47; 13:55; Mk. 6:3; Jn. 2:12; Acts 1:14; I Cor. 9:5; 15:7; Gal. 1:19). They are even recorded by name: Jacob (James), Joseph, Simon and Judas. Jesus also had sisters. We do not know their names, nor even how many sisters He had (Matt. 13:55,56). They were advising Him to "Go into Judea, in order that Your disciples may behold Your works." They were challenging His approach. **They thought Jesus should be more aggressive and open, if He wanted public attention. They did not understand Him, nor recognize who He really was.** John comments, "For *not even His brothers were believing in Him.*" This brings up the question, "What must it have been like to be the younger brother of Jesus?" They could never measure up to His performance. Apparently, He was not terribly close to any of them, at least none of them respected and admired Him enough to become a follower. Mark 3:20-35 suggests that they may have thought He had gone mad.

Jesus responded, "My time is not yet at hand" (vs. 6). It is not the appropriate time for Me to go up to Jerusalem, or to more aggressively put Myself forward. "...your time is always opportune." This seems to mean, "You can always do what you want, without considering an issue of timing." **They were looking at things only from a natural, human point of view. Jesus, on the other hand, was waiting for direction from His Father.** "The world cannot hate you; but it hates Me because I testify of it, that its deeds are evil" (vs. 7). **Jesus was quite aware that it was His confrontation of the world's motivations and activities that were the basis of its hate toward Him.** "Go up to the feast yourselves..." (vs. 8). Jesus tells them to go ahead. "I do not go up to this feast because My time has not yet fully come." Jesus is not deceiving them. He is not saying that He does not intend to come *at all*, but that He is not going *just yet*. The Greek allows for it to mean, "I am not going up" in the present tense. It is not an absolute statement, as indicated by the qualifying statement, "...because My time has not yet fully come." Jesus, being a devout Jew, never missed attending the feasts. His brothers would have known that He was not intending to stay behind in Galilee. **They were ready to go right then, and He was not, so they went ahead without Him. See, there can even be family differences and conflicts even when you are doing nothing wrong! Jesus remained true to Himself, and waited on God's leading, even under family pressure.** Then, after they had gone, "then He Himself also went up... *in secret*" (vs. 10). For the moment, *this* was the prudent way of dealing with the dangers.

As expected, the Jewish leaders were watching for Him, and people were talking about Him. Note the controversy that surrounded Him, and the intimidating influence of the religious leaders on the people (vss. 11-13).

Jesus remained in obscurity until the fourth day, “the midst of the feast”. **Then, “He went up into the temple and began to teach”** (vs. 14). He unabashedly went to the most public place of all and openly made His presence known. The religious leaders could obviously see the skill and accuracy with which He taught. **They marveled, “How has this man become learned, having never been educated?”** (vs. 15). **Jesus responded to their questioning among themselves, “My teaching is not Mine, but His who sent Me”**. On the one hand, He humbly ascribes the glory to God, ...not to *His efforts or innate ability*..., on the other hand, He reasserts His claim that He has been uniquely sent by God. **Here again Jesus gives us a glimpse into His *modus operandi***. Just as *the works* He had done were not from Himself, so also *the teachings* He delivered originated from His Father (cf. Jn. 5:19,20,30). In fact, **Jesus delineates two kind of teachers in the next couple of verses: (1.) One who speaks “from himself”, whose motivation is to seek “his own glory”; and (2.) One whose teaching is “from God”, whose motive is to seek “the glory of God who sent him”**. This one is a true, genuine, dependable messenger of God, one not affected by unrighteous or unjust motives. **The difference will be discernable to those who genuinely wish to do God’s will.**

Jesus begins to confront their reasons for wanting Him dead. Vs 19 completes the thought of 17,18. The religious leaders were evidently not “willing to do His will”, because they did not carry out the law of Moses. It should not be surprising that *they* would not recognize Jesus’ teaching! **In a direct, public confrontation, Jesus challenges them, “Why do you seek to kill Me?”** The multitudes, comprised mostly of pilgrims from out of town, dismiss this as crazy talk, “You have a demon! Who seeks to kill You?” Jesus goes right on, as if they had said nothing. He is addressing those who knew very well what He was talking about. **“I did one deed, and you all marvel...” What was Jesus referring to?** (Vs. 21-23; cf. 5:1-18). The argument in vss. 22, 23 points out **the ridiculous shortsightedness and inconsistency of their anger at Him for healing the feeble man at the pool of Bethesda on the Sabbath** on a previous visit to Jerusalem. If they break the Sabbath to circumcise a baby, could it possibly be wrong for Him to make a man entirely well on the Sabbath? **“Do not judge according to appearance, but judge with righteous judgment,” Jesus declared.** The word translated as “appearance” means “a sight, face”. Therefore Jesus is saying not to make judgments based on first-glance impressions, or “on the face of things”. **Snap decisions and surface evaluations are often wrong. Judging with righteous judgment requires a little more thought and investigation.** This is an obvious allusion to a famous Messianic prophecy, “He will not judge by what His eyes see, nor make a decision by what His ears hear; but with righteousness He will judge...” (Isa. 11:3,4; cf. Jn. 5:30). Jesus’ argument has not only the strength of *good sense*, but a *solid basis in OT precedent*.

Most of the rest of the chapter recounts the confusion and varying opinions about Jesus (vss. 25-53).

In the midst of all this confusion and debate about who He was, Jesus once again stirred them up by making a very bold proclamation (vss. 37-39). “...on the last day, the great day of the feast...” -- The feast lasted eight days, beginning and ending with a solemn assembly (Lev. 23:34; Neh. 8:18). **This last day would have been when the pilgrims gathered in the temple to observe the final ceremonies and receive the benediction before returning to their homes. It would have been one of the most crowded times of the year.** “Jesus stood and cried out...” -- **He would have had to shout to be heard, but He would have been heard by many more people than at virtually any other time.**

Each morning during the feast a golden pitcher of water was drawn from the pool of Siloam, and brought in procession through the streets of Jerusalem to the temple. This was to remember the provision of water from the rock that God had given Israel in the desert. Each day the priest marched once around the altar, and poured out the pitcher of water on the right side of the altar, while a pitcher of wine was poured out on the left. While he was pouring out this libation, the people sang Isaiah 12:1-3, which says that God has turned away His anger, and He is their salvation. Verse 3 says, “Therefore you will joyously draw water from the springs of salvation.” **On this eighth day, they were commemorating the entrance into the promised land, where there were an abundance of springs.** Historically, there was no more need for water from the rock, or the daily manna that they ate, so it ceased to be provided. Therefore, in their celebration of that event, when the priest came back with the water, he marched around the altar seven times, instead of once. This time, the people sang Psalm 118:25, a plea, “O Yahweh, do save (‘Yahweh hashua’), we beseech You; O Yahweh, send us prosperity!” **At this point, Jesus (‘Yah shua’) stood and made His proclamation, “If anyone is thirsty, let him come to Me and drink. The one believing in Me, as the scripture said, ‘out of his belly will flow rivers of living water’”**. Clearly He is directing their attention to *Himself*. Jesus does not quote any particular verse *verbatim*, so we cannot be certain what passage He may have had in mind. Jer. 2:13, Isa. 44:3 and 58:11 are good possibilities. **From his innermost being shall flow rivers of living water -- An abundant, limitless source of water from within.** Water represented life, for wherever it went, the ground would quickly become lush and fruitful. (Cf. Ps. 1:1-6; Jer. 17:5-8). **John explains for us the meaning of Jesus’ utterance. “But this He spoke of the Spirit; ...for the Spirit was not yet given, because Jesus was not yet glorified.”** (Cf. Jn. 14:16-26; 15:26; 16:7-15; Acts 2:33,37-39.)