

Sound Judgment

John 7:1-52

Key Verse: 24

“Stop judging by mere appearances, and make a right judgment.”

Depending upon who you ask, you can get very different answers to the question of who is Jesus. If you ask 20 people, you will get 25 different answers. Even Jesus' own disciples had different opinions of who he was. So that's why I titled today's message, "Sound Judgment." When we were young, we didn't have sound judgment, which means good judgment, and that's why we made mistakes. It's okay to make mistakes because that's how we learn. Mistakes are often our best teachers because we remember those lessons the longest. However as we get older, it become more important that we make better decisions, because decisions have consequences. And today's passage deals with an important question, maybe the most important, one that has eternal consequences, that's why we need sound judgment all the more. Throughout this passage all kinds of people make judgment about who is Jesus but we can't rely on what other people say about Jesus, we have to come to our own conclusions and make our own judgment.

As we resume our study of John's gospel in chapter 7 take a look at verse 1. “After this, Jesus went around in Galilee, purposely staying away from Judea because the Jews there were waiting to take his life.” Galilee was in the north and Judea was in the south with Samaria in the middle. The Jews in this verse refer to the religious leaders whose home base was in Jerusalem, in Judea, which is why Jesus was staying in the northern region of Galilee. It's not that Jesus was afraid of them, it's just that he had work to do and he didn't want to cause commotion before he completed it. Back in Jesus' day he had a polarizing effect upon people. It was a love/hate relationship. People usually either hated him or loved him. And we will really see that in this chapter. In fact a large number of people, particularly the Jewish leaders, wanted Jesus dead. And so they were going to use one of their three main holidays to carry out their desires. Here was the first group that we see in this passage to make a judgment about Jesus. The religious leaders judged that Jesus was a trouble maker and so they wanted to get him out of the way.

According to verse 2, the Jewish feast of Tabernacles was near. Of the three main holidays the Passover, the Feast of Tabernacles, and the Feast of Pentecost, the Feast of Tabernacles was the greatest. It was a seven day celebration held around the Sept-Oct time frame in which all the Israelites would gather together and remember how God freed them when they were slaves in Egypt. To commemorate their journey they would live in these booths or tents for seven days to remind themselves of their people's 40 year journey in the wilderness.

And as the big feast was approaching, Jesus' brothers tell him, “You ought to leave here and go to Judea, so that your disciples may see the miracles you do.”⁴ No one who wants to become a public figure acts in secret. Since you are doing these things, show yourself to the world.” (v3-4) Basically Jesus' brothers were telling him, “You can't become famous if you're in hiding. If you can do such great things, why don't you show yourself to the world at the big festival.” Jesus' brothers didn't understand who he was, or what his purpose was, they didn't know what Jesus' motive was. They assumed Jesus performed the miracles so that he could become popular so they encouraged him to do it when there was a big crowd. That way he will get more bang for his buck. This was like Satan's temptation to him in the desert, to take the easy way. (Mt 4) Even though what Jesus' brothers said made sense, their advice came from the wrong motive because they didn't believe that Jesus was God. Verse 5 says, “For even his own brothers did not believe in him.” And here we see the second group of people who make a judgment about who Jesus is. But what we learn from Jesus' brothers is that even though we have a wrong judgment, we can change because we know from the Bible that James and possibly Jude, both authors of books of the Bible were brothers of Jesus.

So when Jesus' brothers tempt him to make a big show at the feast he points out, "The right time for me has not yet come; for you any time is right." ⁷ The world cannot hate you, but it hates me because I testify that what it does is evil. ⁸ You go to the Feast. I am not yet going up to this Feast, because for me the right time has not yet come." (v6-8) Jesus says that the world cannot hate them, why? It's because they think like the world, they act like the world. The world doesn't hate people that agree with it. But the world hates Jesus because he testifies that what it does is evil. Here's the third group that responds. Jesus says that the world hates him. It's not just this passive indifference but an actual hate because Jesus speaks truth into lies, light into darkness, and he confronts that which is evil, and addresses it and the world doesn't like it. This is still happening even in our time. You have heard me mention numerous times how I like to read the comment section of articles and without fail, every article that has to do with Jesus gets mixed reactions. But the overwhelming comments are negative.

Jesus tells his brothers to go to the feast without him however he goes up later secretly so that he won't be killed before his appointed time. Meanwhile at the feast, the religious leaders were looking out for Jesus. They were ready to throw their plan into action the moment they see Jesus so that they could kill him. (v11) Now among the crowd at the feast we see more people who are making judgments about Jesus. It was the talk of the festival, who is Jesus. "Among the crowds there was widespread whispering about him. Some said, 'He is a good man.'" Others replied, "No, he deceives the people." ¹³ But no one would say anything publicly about him for fear of the Jews." (v12-13) The Jewish leaders hadn't publicly said if they were for or against Jesus. But in their own heart and mind they had come together and they hated him and wanted him dead. But because they hadn't said anything publicly yet, all the people have their opinions and they're speculating about who is Jesus. However they're not ready to come out and make any strong declarations because they're afraid of the religious leaders.

Then about halfway through the Feast, maybe the fourth day, Jesus went up to the temple courts and began to teach. (v14) And when Jesus begins to teach what do the religious leaders do, do they arrest him? No, they watch in amazement. And all they could do is ask each other, "How did this man get such learning without having studied?" (v15) For four days they people listened to the dry religious leader drone on and on. The people were bored out of their minds. Their teaching didn't have any life or spirit, it was dead. We've all been there and experienced that right? Heck sometimes I even bore myself. But not Jesus. When he got up to teach, the scriptures came alive. It was exciting and new because Jesus taught as one who had authority. (Mt 7:29) When Jesus taught, it was as if as if he was there. Even Jesus' enemies were amazed at his teaching. The religious leaders sent their police to arrest Jesus but they came back empty handed because even they were inspired by Jesus' teaching. (v46) The religious leaders tried to look down on Jesus because he didn't have the degrees they did, but they couldn't help but admire him. So in spite of their hatred, they praised Jesus.

Jesus took this opportunity to show them how he could teach the way he does. Firstly it was because Jesus taught God's word, not his own opinions. Look at verse 16. "Jesus answered, 'My teaching is not my own. It comes from him who sent me.'" Jesus shows that he taught God's word. God's word gives life. Hebrews 4:12 says, "For the word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart." The word of God convicts us of sin and leads us to repentance. The word of God reveals God's love and saving grace and leads us to salvation. The word of God is universal truth for all men. Jesus' teaching was powerful because it was nothing but the word of God. The problem the religious leaders had was that they didn't teach God's word instead they loved to speculate and share their opinions. They didn't want to submit to the full authority of the Scriptures. It's more fun to live in a world of theory and opinion than it is to live under authority. Because God speaks with authority and he demands obedience from his people they didn't like that.

Secondly, Jesus taught for the glory of God. Look at verse 18. "He who speaks on his own does so to gain

honor for himself, but he who works for the honor of the one who sent him is a man of truth; there is nothing false about him.” Jesus contrasts those who want to gain honor for themselves with those who work for the glory of God. Jesus’ single desire was to glorify God, that is, to reveal God through his message. On the other hand the religious leaders sought the praise of men and their own glory. We must be watchful of those who only seek glory for themselves. From the contrast in verse 18, we learn further that living for the glory of God alone is not only a matter of speech, it’s a matter of work. Their inner motive and lifestyle, and especially what they do when no one else is watching, is very important. Our speech can glorify God only when our lifestyle matches it, if not we’re just hypocrites.

The religious leaders knew the law of Moses. Maybe one of them had even delivered a message on it at the Feast of Tabernacles. Although they knew the law, they didn’t obey it, instead their hearts were filled with hatred and murder toward Jesus. They broke the law of God and Jesus called them on it as he pointed out their evil intentions. (v19) And when the crowd heard this, they made yet another judgment about Jesus as they called him demon-possessed. They thought Jesus was crazy because the crowd didn’t know the religious leaders true intentions.

Jesus gets to his main point in verse 24, “Stop judging by mere appearances, and make a right judgment.” Here Jesus was pointing out the hypocrisy of the religious leaders. They loved to look at people and immediately judge where they stood. They thought, that if you didn’t look a certain way that you weren’t a since godly person. And we like to pile on the religious leaders and point out their mistakes but in reality it’s so easy to fall into that trap. However Jesus says you can’t judge by outward appearances. You can’t merely look at what you see and determine the motive and the intent and the affections of someone’s soul. It’s impossible, you can’t. You have to be a little more involved than that and do a little more homework and investigation than just looking at someone. For example, when I first grew a beard a couple years back, someone came up to me and asked, “What’s wrong?” And I responded, “What do you mean?” They replied, “You’re growing a beard, there must be something wrong.” I had never heard that before. They assumed that because I had hair on my chin there was a problem, but in reality there could’ve been a problem whether I had hair on my chin or not. But I have to give credit to the guy who asked me because he actually came up to me and we talked about it. He didn’t pass judgment in his mind and go and talk to someone else behind my back. I remember people’s reactions and it was quite hurtful because I sensed their judgment by how I looked and so many never did their homework or investigated further. I only grew it to see how it would look because there was a guy in my office that could grow a nice thick beard in like a week, so I wanted to try it, and I had time off of work and I didn’t feel like shaving. I say this from the point of view the one being judged, however I am guilty of the same thing. Because a couple years before that at one of our ministries staff conferences, a guy that I know came in with this foot long thick beard. He looked like someone out of the Bible. And I remember that I went up to Julia and said, “Hey did you see so and so, I wonder what’s going on with him.” But I never approached him about it, I fell into the same trap. But Jesus said to stop judging by mere appearances and make a right judgment. We have to stop this when we see it happening in our hearts, for it’s not right. The same thing happened with Christ. They looked at him and said, “He doesn’t look like he’s a real good rabbi.” Well, he was a good rabbi. In fact, he was God. But God just didn’t have the right wardrobe. They thought that someone should educate him.

After Jesus challenged the religious leaders about their false judgment we see all kinds of people speculating about Jesus. In verse 25 people are wondering if Jesus was the Christ, but others reject that because they knew where Jesus lived. Some tried to seize Jesus while others put their faith in him. Some of them called him the prophet while others said, “How can the Christ come from Galilee?” And it culminates in verse 43 where it shows that the people were completely divided because of Jesus. It was chaos.

In this passage we see so many differing opinions about Jesus. The religious leaders hate him, his brothers don't believe him, some think he's good, others think he deceives people. Some think he's demon possessed. Others think he is the Christ some object and say he's not. Maybe he's the Prophet maybe not. People are all over the spectrum. So what we find is that once again Jesus' insight was right on. We really need to get our judgments right. More than ever we need to make right judgments in all kinds of areas. What if we don't make the correct judgment in our choice of major, then we can end up in a career we hate or maybe the job disappears. What about our choice of spouse? If we make the wrong judgment we could end up divorced. Or what about our investments, we could end up broke. What if we make the wrong judgment of friends we hang out with, we could end up in a bad place. These are all temporal, what about something that is eternal. Our judgment about Jesus will determine if we go to heaven or end up in hell. We really need to get our judgments right. In order to make right judgments, we need to have correct information. So where we get our information is important. We have to be able trust the source of that information.

However we can't simply trust what people say. We need to match what they say to their actions. People trusted Bernie Madoff for his financial investing advice but he was deceiving them and ended up in jail after taking all their money. The religious leaders taught the people the Ten Commandments, which included do not murder, all the while they planned to murder Jesus. However Jesus was different his actions backed up his words. "On the last and greatest day of the Feast, Jesus stood and said in a loud voice, 'If anyone is thirsty, let him come to me and drink.'³⁸ Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, streams of living water will flow from within him.'³⁹ By this he meant the Spirit, whom those who believed in him were later to receive. Up to that time the Spirit had not been given, since Jesus had not yet been glorified.' (v37-39) It seems completely random that Jesus would suddenly stand up and say this. But here is how it fits. On the last day of the feast, the priest would take a bowl filled with water and he would walk forward quoting Isaiah 12:3 "With joy you will draw water from the wells of salvation." Then he would pour it out and this would remind them of when they were wandering in the desert for 40 years and how God provided water from a rock when they needed it. Moses struck a rock and living water came out of that rock and their thirst was quenched. Jesus declared that He is that living water and to believe in him is how we drink it. Jesus was the fulfillment of the Feast of Tabernacles and he was declaring it to the world. Now it's one thing to state that, but Jesus fulfilled it when he hung on the cross. Not only did he talk the talk, but he walked the walk. He fulfilled all his claims and through his death and resurrection we can have eternal life. We can trust Jesus.

So when we come to the right conclusion about Jesus that's not the end. We can't simply just read the Bible, we have to live it. After we make a sound judgment, we need to put it into practice otherwise we miss the point. The word of God is not meant to be accumulated in our heads only; it is meant to be obeyed and practiced. The religious leaders knew God's word, they taught it, but they didn't follow their teaching as verse 19 shows. We have to follow our decisions with our actions.