

## John on Jesus - Jesus Divides

Sign Title: Jesus Divides

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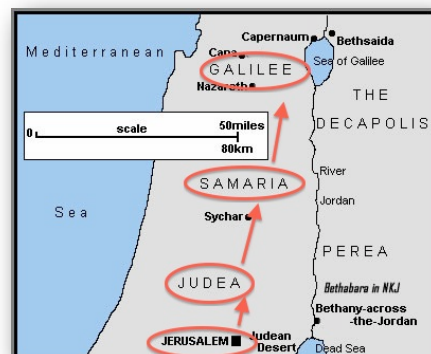
Good morning Faith Church. For those of you who are new, my name is Kurt. I am one of the pastors. We are working our way through the Gospel of John. Today, we hit John 7. This is a big chapter. It is long and it is complicated, but because it is God's Word, it will be a blessing.

Take out your Bibles and turn to John 7. If you didn't bring a Bible, John 7 is on page 892 of the pew Bible. Take out your notes. Here we go!

### Background

After this Jesus went about in Galilee. He would not go about in Judea, because the Jews were seeking to kill him. Now the Jews' Feast of Booths was at hand. John 7:1-2 (ESV)

Let me refresh you on our geography lesson from the beginning of this series. Galilee is in the north, Judea in the south and Samaria in the middle. There were different rulers in each area so if you were in trouble in one region, you went to another region to stay out of their reach. This is what Jesus did. He wasn't acting as a coward. Jesus stayed in the north to intentionally avoid a confrontation with the Jews around Jerusalem in the south. A full-blown confrontation was just around the corner.



The other thing we should notice is that the Feast of Booths was at hand. Chapter 6 took place during Jesus' second Passover. When chapter 7 opens

with the Feast of Booths, that is six months later. There is a six-month gap between the closing of chapter 6 and the opening of chapter 7.

The Feast of Booths is one of three major Jewish holidays. It was a week-long party that took place at the end of September or the beginning of October, right about now. It was a harvest festival where God's people celebrated the good harvest God provided. It was also a time to remember when they didn't have a land and a harvest because they wandered in the wilderness for 40 years. To remember the 40 years in the wilderness, they erected flimsy tent-like shelters of willow and palms branches all around Jerusalem. Jerusalem was filled with tents made of tent leaves and twigs. There were also a number of festivals during the Feast of Booths. We are going to look at one of them this morning called the water festival and another in the weeks to come.

### **Recognizing Jesus is a gift from God.**

So his brothers said to him, "Leave here and go to Judea, that your disciples also may see the works you are doing. For no one works in secret if he seeks to be known openly. If you do these things, show yourself to the world." For not even his brothers believed in him. John 7:3–5 (ESV)

As I mentioned, the Feast of Tabernacles (also known as the Feast of Booths) was big. It is like the Clay County fair is in our community. Everybody who was somebody would have been there. If you were a Jewish male and you lived within 20 miles of Jerusalem, you were required to be there. Jesus' brothers tell him, "If you want to make it big, we want to give you some business advice. Get out of the dumpy region of Galilee that is nothing but hicks and farmers. Go to the city for the big holiday. Pull another miracle like the feeding of the 5,000 in Jerusalem and you will get name recognition." This sounds like

reasonable business advice, but the text takes a strange twist at the end. John said, “not even his brothers believed in him.” Think about this. They grew up with him. They threw their dirty laundry in the same hamper as Jesus. They knew the name of his favorite breakfast cereal. They watched Jesus perform countless miracles, but they still didn’t believe he was who he claimed to be, even after seeing the miracles and knowing him better than anyone else.

Many of us think that if we were alive when Jesus was on the Earth, and we saw him perform a miracle, we would believe. Think again. Jesus’ own brothers, who knew him better than anyone else, did not believe in him. Why not?

We learned the answer two weeks ago. No one can come to the Son unless the Father draws him. Nobody can recognize Jesus for who he is unless God supernaturally opens their eyes. Even if they see countless miracles by Jesus, they will not be able to connect the dots to understand the true identity of Jesus, just like Jesus’ brothers, unless God the Father opens their eyes and draws them to the son. Recognizing Jesus as the son of God is a supernatural gift from God.

To finish the story on his brothers, after the resurrection, we find they did believe. Church history tells us the book of Jude was written by one of Jesus’ biological half brothers. James, who wrote the book of James, was probably also Jesus’ biological half brother. At this time, not even Jesus’ family was connecting the dots. It was not because of a lack of information. It was because God the Father hadn’t yet drawn them to God the Son.

## **Don't substitute your friend's advice for the guidance of the Holy Spirit.**

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

Jesus explained why his brothers' advice was not the right advice to follow. The world hates Jesus. His brothers thought the world loved Jesus. In reality, it was just the opposite. This is the beginning of the main point of this text. Christ brings division. People either hate him or love him. It is similar to traveling in an airport. Airports have carts employees that drive right through the crowd. What sound do they make? Beep. Beep. Beep. When one of them is coming your way, you have to make a choice. You have to hop either to the right or to the left. You can't stay in the middle. You need to make a choice. Jesus is like one of those carts. He forces you to make a choice about his identity. He told his brothers, "In Jerusalem, there are not just people who love me, but there are people who hate me." Jesus will create a huge divide between people.

The reason he did not join his brothers in the family caravan to the Jerusalem is because he said his time had not yet come. What Jesus was waiting for was a prompting from God the Father to know when God the Father was calling him to travel to Jerusalem, not when his brothers told him to travel to Jerusalem.

There is some good advice. Jesus was a man who lived his life in full dependence upon God the Father. He is our model of what a life fully submitted to God the Father looks like. When looking for direction in life, we can be led by

the prompting of God the Father in our hearts through the Holy Spirit or we can be led by the wisdom of our family and friends. This is not to say that all the wisdom of our family and friends is wrong. Many times our family and friends give good advice. Do not let the advice of family and friends become a substitute for the hard work of sensing and following God the Father's promptings in our lives. God's will for your life is not determined by a vote from your friends.

When I was in college, like any red-blooded, testosterone-laden young man, I looked forward to meeting and marrying the right girl. God and I talked at great length about this topic. I begged him to bring her quickly. I didn't enjoy waiting; nobody does. Like most young men, I had friends offering to set me up. They told me they had the perfect woman for me. Help even came from my own mother. When I came home from college, I went to my room to find a girl's picture on my bedroom dresser. I was stunned. This was mom's way of trying to set me up for a date. I wasn't amused.

Now this is not to say that we shouldn't receive help from friends, but the bottom line is that we need to follow God's leading in our life, not our friends guidance for our life. Praying and seeking God's direction is hard work. Sometimes, it will mean we stand alone. Sometimes it will mean others don't understand us. It may even mean we disagree with our family, like it did for Jesus. Be a man or woman led by the Spirit of God and the Word of God before being led by friends and family.

### **Jesus divides**

The Jews were looking for him at the feast, and saying, "Where is he?" 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.” Yet for fear of the Jews no one spoke openly of him. John 7:11–13 (ESV)

So what you have is the Jewish leaders hated Jesus, but for the most part, they kept it to themselves. Nobody wanted to be labeled as either for or against Jesus. Everybody realized this festival would bring Jesus and the Jewish leaders, together for a confrontation. Notice what was happening. Jesus divided the people. Some were for him; others were against him. He is just like that beeping cart in the airport. You need to make a decision either for him or against him.

### **The Word of God is filled with power.**

About the middle of the feast Jesus went up into the temple and began teaching. The Jews therefore marveled, saying, “How is it that this man has learning, when he has never studied?” John 7:14–15 (ESV)

This was not what people expected. They expected Jesus would march into town just popping off miracles to amaze the crowds. He did not perform miracles. What did he do? Teach. He opened the Bible and taught the Bible. Why did he teach the Word of God? Doesn't that sound powerless and weak? It is not weak. There is power in the Word of God. Hebrews 4:12 says the Word of God is living and active, sharper than a double-edged sword. There is power when God's Word is taught and explained. Miracles will draw a crowd but the teaching of the Word is the way God changes hearts. In the book of Acts, the spread of the church was always attributed to the Word of God.

Another thing we need to notice is the Jews marveled because he never studied. They were amazed when Jesus spoke with authority. Let me explain how this works.

### **Jesus kept his finger in the text.**

In that day, to be a Bible teacher, you needed to go to school. You sat under a rabbi. When the rabbi said you were done, you graduated and could have your own pupils. Your education was not primarily about what that Bible taught. You studied what the older, usually dead, rabbis taught. What you had was all these rabbis teaching what dead rabbis taught. The dead rabbis taught what older dead rabbis taught. So a rabbi would state something and then take the next two minutes to give verbal footnotes so everybody knew the idea he taught was something the other respected dead rabbis of history taught.

Think about how this works. What you have is rabbis quoting rabbis. Eventually, if you were lucky, they got to what the Bible actually taught. Their teaching was like an onion. It was layers upon layers of peeling to get to the core. This is NOT the way Jesus taught. He was much simpler. He ditched quoting the other rabbis and he said, “God says...” then he quoted the Bible. Jesus just preached from the text. I always say, “Put your finger in the text.” Who started preaching that way? Jesus.

### **Jesus taught with authority.**

The other thing Jesus did was preach with authority. The rabbis were accustomed to keeping everybody happy. They loved to preach with options. They preached and gave three different perspectives on an issue, and you could choose the one that fit you best. That isn't how Jesus preached. He said, “God says do not murder.” It doesn't matter if you are pregnant because of an accidental one night stand. It doesn't matter if you can't afford the baby. God

says do not murder and that is the end of the discussion, no wiggle room. It doesn't matter if the guy is a jerk and you want to put a bullet in his head. "Do not murder." It doesn't matter if someone is old and dying, you don't bump them off early. "Do not murder." That is good preaching. The Jews were not used to that kind of preaching, because what does it do? It divides people.

Jesus was preaching with authority. Jesus was not quoting the scholars, he was quoting the Bible. That completely threw the Jews for a loop. Since Jesus preached like this, they began asking where he went to school. Does he have a degree from an accredited institution? What rabbi did he sit under, because he forgot his footnotes? Unless he did well in his graduate work, they didn't think they should listen to him. In reality, all these questions about the school he graduated from were just smoke and mirrors to avoid obeying the Bible.

### **Jesus studied to know his Bible.**

Some of you wonder how Jesus got so smart without going to school and studying under a rabbi. That is a good question. Most of us think Jesus came out of the womb completely packed with all the knowledge of the universe and as a 6-month-old he was explaining to Mary, his mother, the higher levels of calculus. That is not the case. The Bible says that Jesus *grew in wisdom*, stature and in favor with God and man. In other words, Jesus had to study. He had to memorize the Bible. He had to pray. He had to work hard at it just like we do. I am just speculating on this, but in that day, there weren't copies of the Old Testament sitting in the family living room. The copy was kept in the synagogue



by the priest. Jesus worked for his father as a carpenter. He was a blue-collar laborer. This meant Jesus probably got up early to walk to the synagogue and get the copy of God's Word so he could read it and study it. When everybody else finally got up to go to work, he put the scroll back and worked a full day. He probably did the hard work of getting up before everyone else so he could spend time with the Bible and his heavenly father. God the Father taught him through the Bible when he read, studied and prayed over his Bible. For those of us who struggle to get up early for our Bible reading, be encouraged by Jesus. He went through it too.

What we have are the rabbis of the day engaging in theological speculations and conversations. Jesus quoted from the Bible and engaged in proclamation and calls for obedience. Those are two very different approaches to the Bible and preaching.

We are in a day that is similar to Jesus'. When you go to most of the mainline churches, you find is they engage in theological speculation and conversation. They tend to quote dead theologians rather than Scripture. I recently was involved in a funeral in a mainline church where I was asked to read a passage of the Bible. The pastor who set the service up wanted me to read little snippets of Bible verses. I remember opening my Bible and looking at the verses. I realized the verses were cut so short they never talked about Jesus. I asked the pastor in charge of the funeral if I could read three or four extra verses in each reading. It wouldn't take long. Maybe add one or two minutes to the service tops. I didn't think it would be a problem. It was a funeral. The guy was

dead. He wasn't on a schedule. You know what this pastor said to me? "No, you will not read those extra verses." You know why this pastor wouldn't let me read about Jesus? Jesus divides people. That pastor doesn't like him. I suspect that pastor also doesn't know him.

**Christianity can't be examined from the outside, it can only be experienced from the inside.**

So Jesus answered them, "My teaching is not mine, but his who sent me. 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. 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." John 7:16–18 (ESV)

Jesus said, "If anyone's will is to do God's will, he will know whether my teaching is from God or I am speaking on my own authority." What does it mean to do God's will? That is easy. God's will is that we repent of our sins and trust in Christ. Essentially, it simply means being a Christian.

Now it gets fun. "If your will is to do God's will, you will know that Jesus' teaching is true." Jesus said you cannot look at his teaching from the outside to determine if it is true. You cannot hold the Christian faith and examine it under a microscope or in a laboratory to objectively determine the truth of Christianity. If you are out there and you are telling yourself that if you can just prove the Christian faith by some kind of scientific experiment, then you are willing to become a Christian, I just want you to know, it will never work. The only way you can know the Christian faith is true is to begin on the inside. That means repent of your sins, run to the grace offered to you through Jesus, experience forgiveness of sins plus the joy and the empowerment of the Holy Spirit in your life, which are all unmeasurable in a laboratory. When you have experienced the

forgiveness of sin and the peace of the Holy Spirit, you know the Christian faith is true.

Teenagers and young adults, you need to understand how this works. Forgiveness, and the presence of the Holy Spirit working in our hearts, is a supernatural component of the Christian faith. You can't quantify it or measure it. There is tons of historical evidence that makes the Christian faith rational beyond a reasonable doubt, but the only way to prove it to yourself is to experience it for yourself by becoming a Christian. That is what Jesus said.

Jesus also said that somebody who is speaking by his or her own authority will always look for his or her own glory. In other words, if Jesus was just making his authority up, he would be out to make himself look good. You don't make stuff up to make yourself look bad. You make stuff up to make yourself look good. Jesus says that if he is seeking God's glory not his own glory, then you know he is true. In other words, Jesus kept his finger in the text, and it got him in trouble with the authorities. He didn't do it to become popular with the authorities. He was not after the applause of the crowd, he was after the applause of God the Father, even if it hurt.

Listen to me on this. We are in the same situation. We are under a lot of pressure to fit in. Nobody likes to ruffle feathers. You try this at lunch this week with somebody who doesn't know Jesus. Just tell them the honest to goodness truth from the Bible. Just put your finger in the text. Tell them that according to the Bible, God loves them. According the Bible they are helplessly addicted to sin and that, without question, according to the Bible, they will spend an eternity

in never-ending punishment in the lake of fire. Tell them God is calling them to repent of their sins and turn to Jesus to be forgiven and made new. What do you think will happen? When you speak like Jesus and about Jesus, it will create a great divide. Remember the beeping car. Some people will respond to Jesus; other people will be in rebellion against Jesus.

One of the problems we labor under is we never get around to preaching the Gospel because we don't want to offend anybody. In doing that we are getting the applause of our friends but we are missing the applause of God.

**Don't judge by appearances, make a right judgment.**

Has not Moses given you the law? Yet none of you keeps the law. Why do you seek to kill me?" The crowd answered, "You have a demon! Who is seeking to kill you?" Jesus answered them, "I did one work, and you all marvel at it. Moses gave you circumcision (not that it is from Moses, but from the fathers), and you circumcise a man on the Sabbath. 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? Do not judge by appearances, but judge with right judgment." John 7:19–24 (ESV)

This next passage sounds perplexing. It seems out of place in the flow of the text. One of the things we need to know to understand it is the audience. In verses 11 and 15 we see Jesus was talking to the Jews. Some translations call the Jews "the crowds." Jesus was talking to the massive crowds of Jewish people from all over the Holy Land that arrived in Jerusalem for the holiday. For the most part, they were ignorant of the tension that existed between Jesus and the local religious leadership. This is why when Jesus brought up the topic of people wanting to kill him they thought he was nuts. They said he had a demon. They thought he was nuts because they loved his teaching. Why would anyone have wanted to kill him? Earlier in this passage, we learned those who were

aware of the Jewish leaders plans were not talking about it publicly so the general public from out of town did not know of the leaders' plans to kill him.

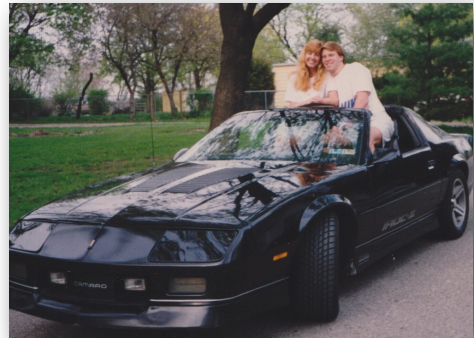
Jesus took the pink elephant in the room, which was the religious leaders' desire to murder him, and put it on the table. He engaged the Jewish leaders in a legal logic argument called qal-wah-homer argumentation. That means from the light to the heavy. It is a big word but it is not that complicated of an idea. It means if something is true in a lesser case, it is also true in a greater case.

Jesus said, the Jewish leaders all claimed to be followers of the law of Moses, but they were not keeping the law of Moses. They were missing a big piece called, "Do not murder." Why did they want to murder Jesus? This goes all the way back to John 5 when Jesus healed the man at the pool of Bethesda, which was during his last trip to Jerusalem. Remember the religious leaders went ballistic because he did this healing on the Sabbath. Heaven forbid! Jesus healed a guy and told him to carry his bed home on the Sabbath! That gave the Jewish leaders the right to kill him.

Here is the way Jesus reasoned. If, according to the law, a newborn baby must be circumcised eight days after his birth, and that eighth day is a Sabbath, the Jews set aside the Sabbath regulation so a small part of a baby's body can be ceremonially made right before God. If they set aside the Sabbath for such a small thing, why did they have a problem with Jesus healing an entire man's body on the Sabbath? Jesus told them to stop judging by mere appearances, and make a right judgment.

Many times the obvious answer is not the right answer. The way our brains process information is we create categories and pigeon hole people into those categories. We don't like it when people don't fit into our categories. You know how this happens. We think good Christians only listen to certain music. We think good Christians all have a fish on their cars. Good Christians have read the Left Behind series. There is a list of things we think Christians should and shouldn't do. That is how we judge people.

Personally, these pigeon holes have landed me in a lot of hot water. It began when I first went to seminary. I drove an old Chevrolet Camaro. It had nitrous tanks, straight exhaust, blacked out windows and, on a cold day, it



burned rubber on the highway when you pushed the gas pedal to the floor. I remember seminary friends telling me that since I was studying to be a pastor, I needed to get rid of the car and buy something small and foreign because that is what seminary students were supposed to drive. One guy even tried to make a case that I was a bad steward of God's resources since my tires were so wide. What is that? Pigeon holing!

I had the same problem when I started in ministry. I was encouraged to wear a suit and tie. That is what good pastors wore to the office every day. The problem is that, as a former wrestler, at one time my neck was more than 18 inches around, and my body was as skinny as a rail. As you can see, I don't have that problem any more. When I wore a shirt that fit my neck, I looked like I

was a boat sail. When I wore a shirt that fit my body, I couldn't button it and wear a tie. I decided the only option was student ministry where I could wear a T-shirt. What is all that? Pigeon holing. It is judging by mere appearances. Don't judge by mere appearances, but judge with right judgment. We all struggle with this.

### **You can know about God but not know God.**

Some of the people of Jerusalem therefore said, "Is not this the man whom they seek to kill? And here he is, speaking openly, and they say nothing to him! Can it be that the authorities really know that this is the Christ? But we know where this man comes from, and when the Christ appears, no one will know where he comes from." So Jesus proclaimed, as he taught in the temple, "You know me, and you know where I come from. But I have not come of my own accord. He who sent me is true, and him you do not know. I know him, for I come from him, and he sent me." So they were seeking to arrest him, but no one laid a hand on him, because his hour had not yet come. Yet many of the people believed in him. They said, "When the Christ appears, will he do more signs than this man has done?" John 7:25–31 (ESV)

Notice who is speaking here. It is the people of Jerusalem. It is no longer the crowd. These folks knew about the religious leaders and their plans to kill Jesus. They couldn't figure out why the religious leaders were letting him teach in public. These city folks thought they were smart. They had God figured out. They figured Jesus couldn't be the Christ because when the Christ came, nobody would know where he came from. Is that true? Absolutely not. Where did they get this crazy idea? From their commentators. The idea came from teachers who taught what other teachers said, not from looking at the Bible.

Jesus did a total in-your-face move. Jesus divides people. He said, "You think you know me and you know where I come from. You city Jews think you know God and you think you have God figured out. I will tell you what you don't know. You don't know God. I know God, and I come from God." If those words

weren't a total irritant to these arrogant city Jews, I don't know what would be. Tell the highly-sophisticated and highly-theologically educated church people, who think they have God all figured out because they have him reduced to charts and time table and bar graphs that they don't know God and you know they will be mad. Is there any question why they went ballistic and wanted to arrest him?

What you have is Jesus dividing people. Earlier it was a soft divide, a friendly debate. Then it was serious. Some people thought he was the Christ; others thought he needed time behind bars to cool his mouth.

The Pharisees heard the crowd muttering these things about him, and the chief priests and Pharisees sent officers to arrest him. Jesus then said, "I will be with you a little longer, and then I am going to him who sent me. You will seek me and you will not find me. Where I am you cannot come." The Jews said to one another, "Where does this man intend to go that we will not find him? Does he intend to go to the Dispersion among the Greeks and teach the Greeks? What does he mean by saying, 'You will seek me and you will not find me,' and, 'Where I am you cannot come'?" John 7:32–36 (ESV)

The only thing I want to point out here is that things were heating up. The chief priests and the Pharisees sent officers to arrest Jesus. Of course, the chief priests were cowards and sent somebody else to do the dirty work they were too afraid to deal with themselves.

Some of the research I did leads me to believe the officers they sent were not simply rent-a-cops in a polyester uniform carrying a flashlight. These would be the temple guards, which are a division of the Levites. These guys were theologically-educated. They were studs, but they were not high school drop-outs. Tuck that away because it will make the finish of this chapter much sweeter.



## The hope of the holiday was Jesus.

On the last day of the feast, the great day, Jesus stood up and cried out, “If anyone thirsts, let him come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, ‘Out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.’” Now this he said about the Spirit, whom those who believed in him were to receive, for as yet the Spirit had not been given, because Jesus was not yet glorified. John 7:37–39 (ESV)

Part of the Feast of Tabernacles involved the pilgrims gathering to watch the priest each morning. He would take a pitcher and go to the Pool of Siloam. He would take a pitcher of water from the pool and return to the altar in the temple. Slowly he poured it out with the crowd cheering around him. This reminded the people of two things. First, it reminded them of God’s miraculous provision of water in the desert when they lived in booths. It also reminded them of the time God’s spirit would be poured out upon the whole earth.

The seventh day was a day when, like Israel marching around the walls of Jericho in the Old Testament, they did the water pouring ceremony, not just once but seven times. This was the day nobody overslept. This was the height of the water-pouring ceremony when the pitcher was raised in the air and people held their breath waiting for the water to pour. It was precisely at that moment when Jesus called out to the crowd, “Whoever believes in me, out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.” Jesus announced that he was everything the water-pouring ceremony in the Feast of Booths pointed to. The only way God’s spirit would be poured out upon the Earth was through Jesus. That was what the ceremony looked forward to. Jesus was the means to the ceremony’s fulfillment. Remember the water-pouring ceremony didn’t just look forward to when God would pour his spirit out upon the Earth, it also looked backward to when God

miraculously provided physical water for his people when they wandered in the wilderness. Who provided that water in the desert?

...and all drank the same spiritual drink. For they drank from the spiritual rock that followed them, and the rock was Christ... 1 Corinthians 10:4–5 (ESV)

Jesus was the rock that gave their ancestors physical water in the desert, and he was the one through whom the Holy Spirit would be poured out upon the Earth. The entire water-pouring ceremony in the Feast of Booths was about Jesus, and the people didn't even know it.

What do you think happened after Jesus spoke these words? More division.

### **Jesus divides**

When they heard these words, some of the people said, "This really is the Prophet." Others said, "This is the Christ." But some said, "Is the Christ to come from Galilee? Has not the Scripture said that the Christ comes from the offspring of David, and comes from Bethlehem, the village where David was?" So there was a division among the people over him. Some of them wanted to arrest him, but no one laid hands on him. 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!" The Pharisees answered them, "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." Nicodemus, who had gone to him before, and who was one of them, said to them, "Does our law judge a man without first giving him a hearing and learning what he does?" They replied, "Are you from Galilee too? Search and see that no prophet arises from Galilee." John 7:40–52 (ESV)

I love this ending. The religious leaders yelled at the officers for not arresting Jesus. They were essentially calling the officers a bunch of idiots. Were they drop-outs? Were they uneducated? No, they were Levites. Maybe not as high-ranking as the religious leaders, but they were not dumb. They heard

Jesus teach, and he was sound. The Levite officers said they needed to give Jesus a hearing before they condemned him.

While the Levitical guards were getting beat on by the religious leaders, Nicodemus stepped to the plate and pointed out that they were not as smart as they think. They were forgetting that the law of Moses required them to hear someone before condemning them. Remember who Nicodemus was from John 3. He was *the* teacher of Israel. He was one of the highest, if not *the* highest, ranking teacher at that time. What did they do to the intellectual genius who pointed out the error of their ways? They blew him off. They told him to check and see that no prophet came from Galilee. They tried to pull rank and tell Nicodemus he didn't know his Bible.

This is funny. In the Old Testament, two prophets *did come* from Galilee, Hosea and Jonah. They were so worked up they were irrational and just plain wrong.

## Conclusion

One thing is crystal clear in this passage. Jesus divides. He divides every room. He divides families. He divides hearts. The more you know about Jesus, the less neutral you will become about him. He will either be the one who saves you and you love him or you will rebel against him and try to eliminate him.

Jesus divides history into B.C. and A.D., and he divides humanity either into those who love him or those who rebel against him and hate him. Which side of the great divide are you?

This morning, if you are neutral about Jesus, that is only because you don't know him. If you think there is something called middle ground where Jesus is a good person, that is because you don't know him.

For those of us who do know him, the big misunderstanding we have is our fear of offense. We are afraid what people will think of us if we bring up Jesus. We want to be well thought of so we don't bring Jesus into conversations. We keep our faith private. We don't talk in public about sin, God's love and new life because we know it will divide people. This chapter is teaching us to not be afraid of offending people with Jesus; just expect it. It is only when we talk about Jesus that people will hear about him and be drawn to him. While some people will be drawn to him, others will be offended by him. Just expect it. Don't be afraid of it. Jesus divides people. It is when Jesus is dividing people that he grows the church.

## Prayer

Jesus, thank you for dying on the cross for our sins and giving us your righteousness. This text teaches us that we should expect that whenever the truth about Jesus is inserted into a conversation, it will divide. Forgive us of our fear of offending so we don't talk about you. We want to gain the applause of our heavenly father more than our earthly friends. Amen.



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