



INTERPRETING THE SIGNS

READING JOHN'S GOSPEL

SESSION 15:
OPPOSITION: THE USUAL SUSPECTS
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Interpreting the Signs Study Guide: Reading John's Gospel, Session 15
© Twin Cities Church, 2010

Published by:
Twin Cities Church
Minneapolis, Minnesota
www.tccmn.org
612-866-5848

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All Bible references and quotations are from the English Standard Version (ESV).

OPPOSITION: THE USUAL SUSPECTS SESSION 15

SERMON DISCUSSION GUIDE

1. What is your greatest source of opposition in regards to faith?
2. How do you deal with this opposition?
3. Have you had any family opposition? Has that been resolved or is it still ongoing? How have you dealt with that?
4. What opposition did you face when you were considering becoming a Christian? If you are not a Christian, what opposition do you face as you consider Jesus?

PERSONAL STUDY GUIDE

Sources of opposition against Christians and those considering Christianity have been the same since Jesus' time. Many of us have to deal with *family members* that mock us as we consider something different from what the family believes. Additionally, there are always those *ultra-conservative fringe influences* that push a Christianity that is more concerned about obeying weird rules than on following Jesus in Spirit and truth. These people distort Jesus' teachings and provide such a narrow and bleak picture of who Christ is that they prevent many from seeing a thoughtful, wise, and beautiful Christianity. *Elite scholars* have always been opposed to Jesus because he confounds their sensibilities and personal agendas. On top of all this, *confusion* sets in because of all the different perspectives and opinions. We think, "If there are so many opinions, which can be right? Are any of them right?"

Jesus encountered the same opposing forces when he was on the earth. These types of opposition are not new. In this passage, we will see how Jesus and those considering him dealt with these opposing forces. Hopefully, we will realize that even in the midst of all this confusion, we can have confidence and peace about who Jesus is.

STUDY THE SCRIPTURES

Read the Passage:

John 7:1-52

Think Through the Questions:

1. Identify the various obstacles to Jesus and to faith in this passage.
2. Why did Jesus go to the feast after telling his brothers he wouldn't?
3. What do you think was so impressive about Jesus' teaching?
4. Why did the Jewish leaders want to arrest Jesus?
5. Try to imagine what this week looked like from the eyes of Jesus, the Pharisees, and John. Make an effort to simply summarize in 3-4 sentences the events of this chapter.

COMMENTARY

Chapter 7 marks a point in the Gospel of John where the opposition against Jesus increases and becomes more hostile. We already know that the Jews were already seeking to kill Jesus (5:18), but now we're going to begin to see more bold actions by the Jews to act on this desire.

vv. 1-13

The passage begins with Jesus in Galilee because of the threat against his life in Jerusalem. Again, the story takes place during one of the Jewish feasts, the Feast of Booths. The word “booth” literally means “tent.” The Feast of Booths was an eight-day celebration commemorating the time Israel lived in tents while it wandered in the wilderness under the protection and provision of God (Leviticus 23:33-36). The week of the Feast of Booths was one of those times where many Jews traveled from all over the Roman Empire to Israel to celebrate. It is valuable to note that Israel wandered in the wilderness for forty years living in tents because the first generation of Israel out of Egypt grumbled continuously in disbelief of God's protection and provision. (Deuteronomy 1:1-2:8) The Feast of Booths should have served as a reminder of the nation's previous unbelief in God's word promising to provide for and protect Israel. It is within the context of this feast and Israel's history that Jesus speaks of being from God and being the provider for and the protector of Israel.

The first opposition Jesus faces is from his own family. Even in the midst of Jesus' miracles and his mother Mary, Jesus' brothers did not believe in him. These signs were not enough to overcome the unbelief and family jealousy. It even seems that they wanted Jesus to expose himself to potential danger by encouraging him to go to the feast. Jesus, knowing that his hour had not yet come, explained to his brothers why he wasn't going to the feast. It was always their time for feasting and partying, but just as in the wedding celebration, it was not yet time for Jesus to be celebrating. The world hated him and wanted to kill him. It was not yet time to be joined to his bride, the church. By implication, Jesus was including them in “the world.” Did they hate Jesus? Were they tired of his preaching? Were they tired of him being mom's favorite? Were the reasons for their unbelief the same as those of the world—because he told the world that its deeds were evil?

Jesus remained at home while his brothers went to the feast. After they left, he secretly went to the feast. Why didn't he go with his brothers? Why does he go in secret? Perhaps it was because the purpose of going to the feast for Jesus was not one of partying or feasting. His brothers would participate in the feast as usual, but Jesus would not have been able to enjoy the feast with them in this way. He went alone. His role at the feast would be different. When he arrived at the feast, he kept to himself, secretly observing what was being said about him. The people were inquiring of him. He was the talk of the feast. Jesus heard what people were saying about him, and their words betrayed the confusion present within Israel about the identity of Jesus. But in all this talk, the specter of the Jewish leaders hung over the crowd, instilling fear in everyone and causing them to only whisper about Jesus. No one would speak openly or boldly about Jesus.

vv.14-31

After three or four days of this, Jesus emerges from hiding and begins to teach in the temple in front of all of Israel. The crowds are amazed at his teaching, considering that he was only a poor carpenter from Nazareth that didn't have the proper schooling for a religious teacher. Jesus uses this dynamic to demonstrate the selfish ambition of the Jewish leaders. Jesus clearly states that anyone whose motives are true in their desire to follow the will of God will know whether his teachings are the words of God or not. A person's teaching will reflect one of two things. It will reflect the desire to glorify God or it will reflect the desire to glorify one's self. Those who truly seek to know and follow God will recognize that Jesus does not teach to glorify himself, but to glorify God. He then uses an example from his own life to demonstrate his point and to draw attention to the self-serving Jewish leaders—the healing of the man who was lame for 38 years.

The Law of Moses clearly states that no work is to be done on the Sabbath. Prior to the Law to Moses, God commanded all Jews to circumcise their sons eight days after birth (Genesis 17:9-14). According to the custom, if a son's day to be circumcised fell on the Sabbath, he was to be circumcised without threat of punishment for violating the Sabbath. The point of the Sabbath was to avoid performing ordinary work, as ceasing work was a sign in the trust of God's provision. Circumcising a newborn son was not work. Yet, when Jesus healed the lame man, he was accused of breaking the Sabbath by the same people

that circumcise on the Sabbath. Why would these people be angry with Jesus and accuse him of breaking the Sabbath? Jesus states that it is because they seek their own glory and not the glory of God. If they had been seeking the glory of God, they would have praised God for healing the man who had been lame for 38 years, and not have been angry for the violation of their customs, which were not supported by the Law of Moses anyway. They were more concerned about people following their man-made traditions than in honoring God. In their hatred, they then sought to kill Jesus. We see these types today. People that create all sorts of rules in order to prevent not only sin, but to avoid “any appearance of evil,” a catch-all phrase used to make sure no one ever has any freedom or fun in the gospel. The biblical admonition to “abstain from all appearance of evil” (King James Version) is misused to say that if something even looks like someone could consider it evil, then it must be avoided. If that were the case, we would all be living our lives according to other peoples’ opinions, and not biblical teaching. More accurate translations read, “abstain from every form of evil,” which means that we are to avoid all types of evil, not what could appear as evil to someone. Any prohibition or mandate that is not a teaching of Jesus as revealed in the Bible is a man-made tradition whose intent is to draw glory from Jesus and glorify those who made the prohibition or mandate. These people forbid many things and usually suppress joy and ruin opportunities to connect with non-believers. Additionally, their rules also have the initial impression of being nonsense. As Jesus stated, we must evaluate these rules using sound judgment, not just on the basis of the appearance of being religious. Ultimately, these ultra-conservative types are seen as angry, controlling, and judgmental—just like the Pharisees—the opposite of what makes true Christianity so appealing, which is the presence of joy, peace, hope, and love.

The crowd responds excitedly when Jesus states that people were trying to kill him. The crowd then wonders why the Jewish leaders, who are trying to kill Jesus, fail to take Jesus captive when he’s right in the open. Then the crowd starts to think that maybe Jesus really is the Messiah. But then they consider that they know Jesus and where he is from, which causes them to doubt who Jesus says he is. Jesus states that he is from God and that he is doing the will of God, which reflects his earlier statements, “He who believes in his words truly seeks the will and the glory of God.” The leaders then seek to arrest him, but in spite of the efforts of the leaders, they are unable to arrest Jesus and many in the crowd believe in Jesus.

vv. 32-52

With the crowd increasingly believing in Jesus, which infuriates the Jewish leaders because of their jealousy, the Jewish leaders send officers to arrest Jesus. Jesus then begins making statements that his time is drawing to a close—he is approaching “his hour.” Once he is gone, it will be impossible to go with him or find him. Is he saying this to heighten peoples’ sense of urgency? Does he want Israel to realize that the decision is before them and they simply cannot continue to wait around for Jesus to perform more miracles and provide more teaching? Finally, on the last day, Jesus makes a final call, urging the crowds to believe in him. Using again the metaphor of water, Jesus states that those who believe in him will have springs of living water flowing from their hearts. After eight days of crowds and Middle East heat, I’m sure that many in the crowd were thirsty, tired, and worn out. An appeal to be refreshed would have caught the ears of many tired feast-goers and partiers. John points out that it was the Holy Spirit Jesus was referring to. Jesus has already made mention of the need to be born of the Spirit (3:6, 34), that God is spirit (4:24), and that it is the Spirit that gives life (6:63). As Jesus stated earlier, belief in Jesus means a rebirth in the Spirit and with that rebirth comes the refreshing and life-giving indwelling of the Holy Spirit within those who believe.

On the eighth day, the crowd continues in the same confusion present in the middle days of the feast. Questions about Jesus’ origins continue to be asked. They wonder if he’s the Christ or the Prophet. The officers sent to arrest Jesus come back empty-handed because they too don’t know what to think or who to believe. The Pharisees mock and denounce the officers for listening to Jesus and for siding with the crowd, which the Pharisees accuse of ignorance of the Law of Moses. Nicodemus now openly questions the Pharisees after they prematurely accuse Jesus without a hearing. Nicodemus points to the requirement in the Law of Moses to first give a man a hearing to examine him before condemning him (Deuteronomy 17:6, 19:15). Confronted with their own hypocrisy and the mishandling of the Law of Moses, the Jewish leaders mock Nicodemus. They challenge him to find any prophet in the Scriptures from Galilee. As we have already seen in this episode and in Jesus’ earlier admonishment of Nicodemus, the Pharisees were not as knowledgeable of the Law of Moses as they pretended to be. A well known prophet, Jonah, was from Galilee. There were probably others. Here we clearly see that the elite scholars, who pride themselves in their knowledge, let their pride get the best of them. In their pride and

status, they failed to do the necessary work to truly know the Law of Moses, and came up short in the substance of their knowledge. Using their status as teachers and leaders with special knowledge, they abused their position and knowledge to squash anyone who questioned them, which is also a common practice today among elite scholars who malign the teachings of the Bible while at the same time knowing very little about the Bible. Some elite scholars intentionally deceive casual inquirers by taking passages out of context and using them to supposedly demonstrate the contradictions of Scripture. For more information on how scholars distort the Scriptures, download the audio and published files for Sessions 2 and 3 of this series from www.tccmn.org or see Craig Evans book, *Fabricating Jesus: How Modern Scholars Distort the Gospels*.

Jesus has successfully brought to head the decision confronting the Jewish people. They must choose to believe Jesus or the Jewish leaders. Jesus has proven his testimony through signs that affirmed he was indeed from God. Jesus has shown the inconsistencies and short-sightedness of the Pharisees in their strict rules that only glorified themselves. Jesus has exposed the hypocrisy of the Pharisees and their ignorance of the Law of Moses. From every perspective, Jesus demonstrated his superiority over the Jewish leaders. Compared to Jesus, the Jewish leaders were not worth following. For Israel, it was time to believe in Jesus, the Son of God.

THINK THROUGH THE ISSUES

There has always been opposition to the will of God and those who are striving to find and follow the will of God. From the beginning in the Garden of Eden, the devil opposed God by lying about God and deceiving Adam and Eve. Throughout the history of Israel, foreign nations opposed God by opposing Israel. As we see in this passage, Jesus and those who followed him faced great opposition as well.

As we consider following Jesus for the first time or as we continue to follow Jesus many years after first believing, we must recognize that opposition always exists, and that it will come from people quite close to us and from the culture around us. We will find opposition from ultra-conservative religious types and from liberal religious types. We will find opposition from scholarly elites who resist the notion of the supernatural. As Jesus experienced, the question is when opposition arises, not if. We need to know how to respond to it.

Issue: The Reality of Opposition

1. If you are considering Jesus, what opposition do you currently face?
2. If you are a Christian, what opposition do you currently face?
3. How do you respond to opposition? What does it usually do to you?
4. How did Jesus respond to the various types of opposition? Can we learn anything from his example?
5. What is the role of the Word of God in facing opposition?

Respond to the Questions Below:

DINNER TABLE DISCUSSION GUIDE

MEAL #1: FAMILY OPPOSITION

Read John 7:1-9

Take the opportunity to do one of two things:

Discuss with your family any opposition you as parent(s) have faced from your family.

-or-

Discuss the following questions:

1. Why do you think Jesus' brothers did not believe in Jesus?
2. How would you respond to a person that was your relative but was also the Son of God?

MEAL #2: JESUS, THE BLUE-COLLAR SCHOLAR

Read John 7:14-18.

1. Who is or was your favorite teacher?
2. Describe what you believe is the ideal teacher.
3. Why did Jesus' teaching surprise the people?
4. What are good qualities Bible teachers should have?

MEAL #3: THE HOLY SPIRIT

Read John 3:5-8, 7:37-39.

1. Who is the Holy Spirit?
2. How does the Holy Spirit come to live in people?
3. What does the Holy Spirit do in those people that he lives in?

MEAL #4: STANDING UP FOR JESUS

Read John 7:40-52 and review John 3:1-21

1. How has Nicodemus changed since the last time we saw him?
2. How does Nicodemus stand up for Jesus?
3. What did the Pharisees think of Nicodemus when he stood up for Jesus?
4. What do you think is going to happen to Nicodemus?

FAMILY PRAYERS



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