

“Unbelief”
John 7:1-5
(Preached at Trinity, August 21, 2019)

I'm supplying these notes for the benefit of busy pastors who may be engaged in bi-vocational work, feeling the pressure of preparing to preach twice on the Lord's Day while trying to balance full-time secular work as well as caring for their families. While the notes of another man are no substitute for personal study, I pray that these may aid in the process of preparing to preach.

Disclaimer: These are the actual notes I bring with me to the pulpit, which I follow loosely. They are not designed for publication. While I try to make every effort to give proper credit to my sources from the pulpit, adequate citations will sometimes be absent from my notes. If anyone feels their intellectual material has been used without adequate citation, please contact me and I'll make immediate correction giving credit.

1. **Chapter 7** opens “After these things.” **Chapter 6** falls during the season of the Passover and now it is the Feast of Booths. This tells us that it's been about six months since the events of **Chapter 6**. Jesus was nearing the end of His Galilean ministry.
 - A. As this chapter begins it is at the end of September and the celebration of the Festival of Tabernacles or Feast of Booths was at hand. It was one of the three obligatory festivals and every adult male within 20 miles of Jerusalem was required to attend. The Jews considered it the greatest of the Feasts and it was the most popular. Many outside the 20 mile radius attended. Jesus' brothers were pressing Him to attend. It took place at the end of the harvest and it was a commemoration of God's provision for Israel during the Exodus wanderings.
 - B. The other two obligatory festivals were the Feast of Unleavened Bread or Passover, and the Feast of Weeks or Pentecost.
2. As **Chapter 7** opens, it was as if His brothers had appointed themselves as the PR men for Jesus ministry. He had done many miracles in Galilee but almost none in Jerusalem. It was at Jerusalem that Jesus healed the man at the Pool of Bethesda on the Sabbath which resulted in the conflict with the Jewish leaders. **Chapter 7** opens in the context of the events of **Chapter 5**.

John 5:18 NAU - "For this reason therefore the Jews were seeking all the more to kill Him, because He not only was breaking the Sabbath, but also was calling God His own Father, making Himself equal with God."

John 7:1 NAU - "He was unwilling to walk in Judea because the Jews were seeking to kill Him."
3. For Jesus' brothers, they could not comprehend why Jesus wasn't using this Feast to boldly announce that He was the Messiah. This was an excellent opportunity for Jesus to promote Himself.
 - A. They took it upon themselves to give Jesus some brotherly counsel.

John 7:3-4 NAU - "Leave here and go into Judea, so that Your disciples also may see Your works which You are doing. ⁴ "For no one does anything in secret when he himself seeks to be *known* publicly. If You do these things, show Yourself to the world."
 - B. The problem was it was carnal, worldly wisdom. They failed to understand the person and work of Christ as the Redeemer of God's elect. John gives us an important piece of information in **Verse 5** – “For not even His brothers were believing in Him.”

- C. This should be an encouragement to parents who have adult children who are still unbelieving. Even our Lord's brothers who grew up in His presence were still at this point unbelieving.
J. C. Ryle: "The mere possession of spiritual privileges never yet made anyone a Christian."¹
4. Once again, John draws attention to the fact that many of the followers of Jesus did not actually believe in Him. This has been a troubling pattern in John's Gospel.
John 2:23-25 NAU - "Now when He was in Jerusalem at the Passover, during the feast, many believed in His name, observing His signs which He was doing.²⁴ But Jesus, on His part, was not entrusting Himself to them, for He knew all men,²⁵ and because He did not need anyone to testify concerning man, for He Himself knew what was in man."
These are most likely the ones His brothers are referring to in **Verse 3** implying their faith would be strengthened if they could see more of His miracles.
- A. In reality, their false belief was built upon the miracles of Jesus. More miracles would not serve to create faith.
Hebrews 11:1 NAU - "Now faith is the assurance of *things* hoped for, the conviction of things not seen."
- B. Jesus knew it wasn't miracles that would draw men to Him as Savior but the cross.
John 3:14-15 NAU - "As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up;¹⁵ so that whoever believes will in Him have eternal life."
John 12:32 NAU - "And I, if I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to Myself."
- C. And miracles would not be the means of creating faith within them but the Word of God.
Romans 10:17 NAU - "So faith *comes* from hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ."
The word here is ῥῆμα which refers to a particular word, a message. It is referring to the message about Christ, the Gospel which must be believed and received. It was the same word Peter used in **Verse 68** of the previous chapter.
John 6:68 - "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have words of eternal life."
5. Jesus attracted large crowds. He fed a crowd of over 5000 who had come to hear Him and to witness His miracles. But they did not believe in Him.
John 6:35-36 NAU - "Jesus said to them, "I am the bread of life; he who comes to Me will not hunger, and he who believes in Me will never thirst.³⁶ "But I said to you that you have seen Me, and yet do not believe."
John 6:65-66 NAU - "And He was saying, "For this reason I have said to you, that no one can come to Me unless it has been granted him from the Father."⁶⁶ As a result of this many of His disciples withdrew and were not walking with Him anymore."
6. John tells us here that at this point the brothers of Jesus were among those persisting in unbelief.
John 7:5 NAU - "For not even His brothers were believing in Him."

¹ J. C. Ryle, *Expository Thoughts on the Gospels, John Vol.2* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 2007), Page 2.

- a. The brothers of Jesus were interested in His ministry. They were supporters. They were advocates. It seemed incredible to them that if Jesus was the Messiah that He wouldn't proclaim it openly and boldly.
They were interested in Jesus. They had a brotherly love for Jesus. But they didn't believe. They didn't trust Him as Savior.
The verb tense tells us their unbelief was a continuing attitude.
 - b. They were interested in the power of Jesus and His reputation. They knew He could perform miracles. They could see the increasing interest of the crowds.
 - c. Perhaps they were in league with those in the previous chapter.
John 6:14-15 NAU - "Therefore when the people saw the sign which He had performed, they said, "This is truly the Prophet who is to come into the world." ¹⁵ So Jesus, perceiving that they were intending to come and take Him by force to make Him king, withdrew again to the mountain by Himself alone."
 - d. Or it could have been the vain glory of being the brothers of one who had become famous.
7. Despite their closeness to Jesus. Despite His clear teaching to them, they were unbelievers. There is a great contrast between the brothers of our Lord and the Jews in Jerusalem who wanted to kill Him. But both groups were unbelievers, and both stood condemned.
John 7:5 NAU - "For not even His brothers were believing in Him."
8. You might not think yourself as bad as the murderer or robber. You may consider yourself a good person, even a religious person. But if you are an unbeliever you stand condemned alongside the murderer and thief.
9. Tonight, I want us to consider this once again. John holds it before us often. It is infinitely important. It deals with Gospel truths.
The NT exhorts is to be sure of our faith. The reason it is so important is that many who profess to know Christ don't actually know Him at all.
- A. This must be dealt with cautiously and graciously. There are many Christians who are frail. Their faith is weak and they often tremble at the feet of Christ. They love Him and trust Him but they are as a frail flower that needs to be protected from being trampled under the feet of men.
We must gently help their weak faith to grow and mature.
We must always be careful not to deal harshly with them or cause them to stumble.
 - B. On the other hand, there are also too many who would boldly proclaim their place among believers. They claim to be Christians when they do not actually know Christ. As I look back over my 30 years of ministry, I grieve over those who made a good profession of faith, who boldly proclaimed their trust in Christ. I baptized them and we received them into the membership of the church, and they continued faithfully among the brethren for a season, but then fell away.

I. Faith demands believing upon the person and work of Christ

A. His brothers knew Him well

1. Jesus was their older brother. They shared the same family experiences. They grew up with Him. They felt comfortable around Him.
2. But they didn't truly know Him. In Mark's Gospel we are told they actually thought He had lost his mind.

Mark 3:20-21 NAU - "And He came home, and the crowd gathered again, to such an extent that they could not even eat a meal. ²¹ When His own people heard *of this*, they went out to take custody of Him; for they were saying, "He has lost His senses."

3. They failed to understand the nature of His person *and* His work. It wasn't until after His resurrection that they were found among His followers.
4. In order to be a Christian, you must believe in Jesus as He is presented in His Word.

R.C. Sproul comments on their unbelief: "If we could have asked Jesus' brothers, 'Do you believe in your brother?' they would have said, 'Of course we believe in Him. Why else would we want Him to go to Jerusalem and make Himself known? We want the people to know about Him. We want to see His ministry grow and expand. Just like John the Baptist, we want Him to increase.' Nevertheless, the Word of God says Jesus' brothers were unbelievers. That is why we have to ask ourselves, 'Is this the Jesus we believe in the real Jesus.'"²

B. John is very careful in his Gospel to present the true Jesus, the living Word

John 1:1-2 NAU - "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. ² He was in the beginning with God."

John 1:14 NAU - "And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us, and we saw His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth."

1. John declares that belief in Him is essential for salvation
John 20:31 NAU - "these have been written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing you may have life in His name."
John 3:36 NAU - "He who believes in the Son has eternal life; but he who does not obey the Son will not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him."
2. You have to understand the problem of sin and the great redeeming work of God through Christ.
3. The brothers of Jesus had no doubt that there was something extraordinary about Jesus. They had no doubt in His ability to perform miracles. If faith was simply believing that Jesus was extraordinary his brothers would have been included.
 - a. But saving faith is of a particular sort, it demands looking upon Jesus in a particular way.

² R. C. Sproul, *St. Andrews Expository Commentary, John*, (Orlando: Reformation Trust Publishing, 2009), 131.

b. Saving faith is not simply confidence in the ability of Jesus to do great things. Was the demand of his brothers any different from the demand of Satan
Matthew 4:3 NAU - "And the tempter came and said to Him, "If You are the Son of God, command that these stones become bread."

4. You don't have to be a theologian to be saved, but there are certain doctrines that are essential to the faith; certain things that must be believed.
5. Jesus was sent forth from the Father to save His people from their sins. Saving faith cannot be divorced from a knowledge of sin and of our need for a Savior.
 Saving faith rests upon the fact that the death of Christ upon the cross was sufficient to satisfy God's justice for sin.
6. Saving faith demands believing that Jesus was raised the third day just as He said, thus validating His work as Savior.
Acts 17:30-31 NAU - "God is now declaring to men that all *people* everywhere should repent, ³¹ because He has fixed a day in which He will judge the world in righteousness through a Man whom He has appointed, having furnished proof to all men by raising Him from the dead."
7. His brothers did not see this. They thought they were doing the right thing by encouraging Jesus to advance His mission. But they didn't understand the nature of His mission. They failed to trust in the only thing that truly mattered.

II. Saving faith demands claiming Christ as Lord and King

A. "Jesus is Lord" is a basic Christian creed. Its been called the earliest Christian Creed

Romans 10:9 NAU - "that if you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved;"

1. The followers of Christ trust His wisdom. They trust His rule and dominion and fall before His throne in submission.
2. Notice our Lord's brothers had an unholy familiarity with Christ. They thought nothing of instructing Him, of pressing their will upon Him. The words of **Verses 3-4** are in the imperative. They are commanding Jesus.
John 7:3 NAU - "Leave here and go into Judea, so that Your disciples also may see Your works which You are doing."

B. Perhaps the greatest evidence of their unbelief was their inability to comprehend the spiritual realities of Christ

1. They were blind to the Divine glory of Christ. John records in **Chapter 1 John 1:14 NAU** - "And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us, and we saw His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth."
2. All they could do was behold Christ with their fleshly minds. They didn't trust Christ to guide their lives. They didn't even trust Christ to guide His own life.

3. The unbeliever will have no concept of the worship of Christ. While others gather to worship, the unbeliever is unable to join them. He may attend worship for years and never actually worship.
4. Again, you don't have to be a theologian to be a Christian, but you do have to embrace Christ as He is—the eternal Son of God who has come to save His people from their sins. He is worthy of worship and praise.

Conclusion:

1. What we need is a simple child-like faith. Faith that simply rests upon our Savior. Faith that sees Him as altogether lovely.
2. Such faith is void of pretense. It is just an expression of total trust and undivided love. The best picture is of the woman that anointed Jesus with the costly perfume as a simple expression of love and holy extravagance.
Matthew 26:7-10 NAU - "a woman came to Him with an alabaster vial of very costly perfume, and she poured it on His head as He reclined *at the table*.⁸ But the disciples were indignant when they saw *this*, and said, "Why this waste?⁹ "For this *perfume* might have been sold for a high price and *the money* given to the poor."¹⁰ But Jesus, aware of this, said to them, "Why do you bother the woman? For she has done a good deed to Me."
3. We can close with a final thought of encouragement. John clearly tells us in **Verse 5** that the brothers of our Lord were unbelievers. They were not His enemies in earthly, familial terms, but they were His enemies along with all who will not bow before Him as Lord and King.
 But, the Gospel remains powerful, and all who turn from their sins and turn to Christ as Savior will be saved. This is precisely the conclusion with Jesus' brothers because we read that they were included with the believers who had gathered in prayer waiting for the outpouring of the Holy Spirit.
Acts 1:14 NAU - "These all with one mind were continually devoting themselves to prayer, along with *the women*, and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with His brothers."
4. No one is beyond the reach of the Gospel. Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved.