



REDEMPTION
CHURCH AT NEW HOPE

Is This the Christ?

John 7:25–36 - Sunday, April 7, 2024

Some of life's biggest questions can lead to massive internal struggles. The search for truth can be an inner wrestling match of competing ideas squaring off in our hearts. We all tend to go through a season of life where that wrestling match becomes the most intense. For many of us, it's that time of young adulthood when we grapple with the ideas around us, examine our childhood foundations, and try to discern our place in this world. In our search for truth, you shouldn't want to parrot the party line or replicate the popular answers from a straw poll. You don't want to presume upon the tradition of the past. Nor should you want to give up and turn the truth into an amorphous, subjective feeling. The inner wrestling of the soul longs for the truth to those big questions—no matter the answer. The gospel of John confronts us with the all-important big question in life, "What will you do with Jesus?"

As we resume our study of John 7, we find that internal wrestling becomes an external debate. The inner conflict about Jesus becomes an open battle. Tensions will rise. Questions will be raised. Lines will be drawn. The authorities will be called. But the thrust of the text challenges us. Is this Jesus the messiah? Can this be the Christ?

So, we will enter the chaotic fray of the crowd at the temple during the Feast of Tabernacles. And amidst the confusion, Jesus will help us to make the right judgment about him by answering two questions. First, where does Jesus come from? And second, where will Jesus go? I pray that as we hear Jesus' answers to these questions, the Lord might help you find the truth and come to the right judgment about Jesus today that he is the Christ, the Son of the living God.

1. Where does Jesus Come From? (vv. 25–31)

Let me remind us of the context of John 7. We are around six months from Jesus' arrest and

crucifixion. Jesus just concluded his lengthy ministry in Galilee. Jesus' fame is turning increasingly into infamy. The religious establishment sees Jesus as an increasing threat, so much so that they are now seeking to kill him (Jn 7:1). Though the hour of Jesus' death had not yet come, the time had come for him to return to the center of Israel's religious life around Jerusalem. And so, while he refuses to go with his brothers to the Feast of Tabernacles, he does go privately to the feast. Jerusalem is filled with Jewish pilgrims who are celebrating this week-long feast. The streets are crowded, and the people are murmuring about Jesus. Everyone's debating Jesus' ministry. Is he a good man, a nice teacher, and a faithful preacher? Or is he leading everyone astray? No one spoke openly about Jesus because they knew the religious leaders didn't like Jesus. So they whispered in secret, debating on what to think about Jesus. For the first few days of the feast, Jesus isn't there. The Jewish leaders are looking for him, and the crowd murmurs about him. But no sign of Jesus.

But then, in the middle of the feast, Jesus appears to the crowd. He shows up at the temple and starts teaching. The crowd marvels at his learning, even though he wasn't formally trained by any rabbi. And he challenges all there to judge him with right judgment, to recognize that he is the one sent from God, who teaches with the authority of God, and who seeks the glory of God. The religious leaders who make false accusations about him are hypocritical and illogical. And even though Jesus was at the top of the religious leaders' most wanted list, Jesus teaches with boldness and wisdom but surprisingly without interruption. Where are the religious leaders? Why haven't they shut down Jesus' preaching?

And that's the questions that lead the crowd to express their confusion about Jesus in verses 25 and 26:

"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?'" (John 7:25–26, ESV)

The religious authorities had yet to show up and shut down Jesus' teaching. So the crowd wonders, "Why are the religious leaders letting this happen? Weren't they seeking to kill him? Why is he speaking so openly in such a public place, and yet they do nothing? Does this mean that they know that Jesus is the Christ?" In other words, the crowd is confused. Are the religious leaders endorsing Jesus as the messiah now? What's going on here?

The crowd, like perhaps you are today, is trying to figure out what to do with Jesus. What should you think of him? If you are not a Christian, I suspect you are here today because you are trying to answer that same question. Maybe you've heard about Jesus. Christianity has played a massive role in human history these last two thousand years. Perhaps you like some Christian teaching you've picked up over the years. Maybe the friend who brought you Jesus has told you about Jesus, and it piqued your interest in him. But you still aren't sure what to make of him. And perhaps, like some of the folks in this crowd, you are confused. And you wonder, could Jesus be the Christ? Is he the messiah? The fact that you are here today, humbly seeking the truth to that big question, is a great starting point. By the grace of God, even through the preaching of the

Word today, may the Lord help you find the answer to that question.

But the crowd is confused about Jesus because even though he talks like a messiah and acts like a messiah, he has not appeared like a messiah—at least from their vantage point. There was a common consensus in the first century that the messiah of Israel would suddenly spontaneously appear. Some thought the messiah would appear in an apocalyptic way, with a sudden ravishing appearance to deliver Israel. Most Jews expected the Messiah to be born of flesh and blood in fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy. Still, they expected his identity to be hidden until he suddenly arrived on the scene and redeemed Israel.¹

And in terms of a sudden, immediate deliverance for the people, Jesus didn't seem to meet that expectation. And so the people express their confusion in verse 27: "But we know where this man comes from, and when the Christ appears, no one will know where he comes from." The crowd raised a prominent criticism of Jesus, which plagued him throughout his ministry and prevented many from believing in him. Jesus, "If we know your parents, and we know your brothers, and if we know your hometown and watched you grow up, how can you be the Messiah?" The obstacle to their belief was how ordinary Jesus appeared to be. Though he taught with Messianic wisdom and worked miracles with Messianic power, his appearance left something to be desired. Jesus looked like an ordinary man from Nazareth. If the Messiah was to appear to redeem Israel suddenly, how could it be Jesus? In John 7, we can hear again the critique of the Galilean crowd back in John 6:42, "Is not this Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know?"

Jesus, hearing this common criticism about his messianic claims, responds to the crowd by affirming they are right in knowing his family history, but they fail to recognize the one who sent him. While they know Jesus is the son of Mary, they do not realize that he is the eternal Son of God. Look at how Jesus responds in verses 28 and 29,

"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.'" (John 7:28–29, ESV)

Jesus' history is public knowledge. He is a man from Nazareth. In this sense, Jesus says, "You know me, and you know where I come from." Yet, they do not know Jesus as the Son of God. They knew Jesus in his humanity, but they did not know his deity. The humanity of Christ was so genuine and authentic in their perception of Jesus that they did not consider it plausible that he was divine. To them, Jesus came from Nazareth. But as we know, remembering the prologue of John's gospel, Jesus came from heaven. "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God" (Jn 1:1–2). And so the crowd fails to recognize the one who fundamentally sent Jesus. And so Jesus tells them, "I have not come of my own accord." The Father has sent his Son into the world. The Son descended from heaven, became enfleshed, and now dwells among them.

If you have been with us throughout our study of John's gospel, none of this should sound surprising or new. We've seen Jesus talk this way repeatedly. The last time Jesus was in

Jerusalem, in John 5, He spoke this way: “Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life” (Jn 5:24). Jesus has made shocking claims throughout this gospel about how the Father has given him authority for judgment (Jn 5:22). Jesus has also described the unity of action between the Father and Son (Jn 5:19). But Jesus’ claims of divinity are becoming increasingly more explicit, and his challenge of the religious establishment more confrontational. And so Jesus tells them, “He who sent me is true, and him you do not know. I know him, for I come from him, and he sent me.”

When Jesus says, “He who sent me is true,” he is not asserting God’s existence (though he does exist!), but he means true in the sense of “genuine.” The real God sent his Son—it really happened! But Jesus speaks this to a crowded assembly of Jews at the temple, and sadly, he says, “He who sent me is true, and him you *do not know*.” They all professed to know God, what he was like, what he has commanded, and what he might do. And yet, by their failure to recognize the one God sent, they reveal they do not know him.

There are many wonderful blessings the Lord has brought to Redemption Church at New Hope, but one thing I cherish is how multi-generational we are as a church. One of the benefits of being a multi-generational church is to see the family tree—grandfathers who look like fathers who look like sons. It can be uncanny how similar the appearance can be between a father and a son or a mother and a daughter. Even if you are still learning the names of others, you can tell which child belongs to whom simply by looking at the faces of similar appearances.

My father and I look eerily similar. Our facial and body structure is nearly identical. We have the same prominent Deeter nose and squinty eyes, and we even lost our hair in the same pattern. However, my father is a pastor in Georgetown, SC, so visiting us on a Sunday morning is a rare occurrence. So most of you have never met my father, so you do not recognize his appearance in me. But whenever I go to Georgetown, anyone who knows my father immediately recognizes that I have come from him. And they love to bring that fact to my attention.

This is the point Jesus recurrently makes in his gospel, a point he now returns to in John 7. Recognizing the face of the son reveals that you know the face of the father. And if you fail to recognize the image of the father in a son, then you probably don’t know the father. And so Jesus tells the crowd that their failure to recognize him as the one sent from God exposes them to the fact that they do not know God. By their failure to recognize Jesus as the Christ, religious and zealous Israel exposed their utter ignorance of God.

And if you’ve ever wondered why the religious leaders wanted to kill Jesus, passages like this remind us of his offensive teaching. Because while he says, “Him you do not know. I know him, for I come from him, and he sent me.” If we heard any other man or teacher talk this way, we would be scandalized by such a ridiculous claim. We can imagine the ire of the crowd: “Really, Jesus, no one else knows God but you? You are the only one who knows him? And you think you’ve come from him and that God has sent you into the world?”

C. S. Lewis recorded a series of talks on the radio during WW2 that became one of his most famous books, *Mere Christianity*. Lewis laid out a famous argument in this book about how we

must respond to Jesus' claims of divinity. It's often called Lewis' trilemma. Here's what he said,

I am trying here to prevent anyone saying the really foolish thing that people often say about Him: I'm ready to accept Jesus as a great moral teacher, but I don't accept his claim to be God. That is the one thing we must not say. A man who was merely a man and said the sort of things Jesus said would not be a great moral teacher. He would either be a lunatic — on the level with the man who says he is a poached egg — or else he would be the Devil of Hell. You must make your choice. Either this man was, and is, the Son of God, or else a madman or something worse. You can shut him up for a fool, you can spit at him and kill him as a demon or you can fall at his feet and call him Lord and God, but let us not come with any patronizing nonsense about his being a great human teacher. He has not left that open to us. He did not intend to. ... Now it seems to me obvious that He was neither a lunatic nor a fiend: and consequently, however strange or terrifying or unlikely it may seem, I have to accept the view that He was and is God.

Is Jesus a liar, a lunatic, or the Lord? Those are the options before us. Which one do you consider Jesus to be? As we see the response to Jesus' message, we can see conflicting responses to Jesus. On the one hand, we see those so agitated in the crowd by Jesus' teaching—reckoning him a liar or a lunatic—that they seek to seize him. On the other hand, we see many believe in him.

Let's look at the agitated group in verse 30: "So they were seeking to arrest him, but no one laid a hand on him, because his hour had not yet come." Now, the authorities have not yet arrived on the scene. They won't show up until verse 32. So what happens in verse 30 is that those arguing with Jesus at the temple get so frustrated, appalled, and offended by Jesus that they are ready to engage in a citizen's arrest! Those who can't win the argument usually resort to physical intimidation and aggression. But even though some seemed to seize him, Jesus avoided the conflict. No one lays a hand on him. We aren't told how only God's sovereignty prevented it "because his hour had not yet come."

The hour of his arrest *will* come. In six months, Jesus will be arrested and crucified. The grave hour of his suffering will soon be here. But today was not that day, and so it didn't happen. We may wish that John would share more details about how Jesus avoided such a situation, but it really doesn't matter to John. The Lord is sovereign. His timing will come to pass. If it wasn't the hour of Jesus' death, then it wouldn't happen. Jesus' arrest and crucifixion will occur at the appointed time the Father has determined.

When you fully trust in God's sovereignty, you will obey God without fear of the consequences. Jesus' trust in his Father's timing gave him the boldness to preach publicly at the temple during the festival, even while the powers were hunting for his life. And yet, before the mass of people, the Father's sovereignty was a shield of protection for his Son. The day will come when that shield will be lifted, and the hour of his suffering will come. Everything would happen according to the Father's will and decree.

How wonderful it is to be in the hands of an all-wise and sovereign God! All our fears and

anxieties come from a failure to recognize God's goodness in dealing with his children. And so much of our disobedience in the Christian life stems from a failure to trust his sovereign protection over our lives.

- I want to start that Bible study on my lunch break with my coworkers, but what if my boss is displeased with it?
- I would like to use my gifts here to serve the church, but what if I'm not gifted in it? What if I don't have those gifts?
- I need to talk to my friend about the gospel, but what if I lose the friendship?
- I want to obey the Lord at great cost and give my life as a missionary to make Christ known to others, but what if it doesn't work out?
- I'm compelled to admonish a brother in the church because I love him and am concerned. But what if it goes badly?

If you find yourself lacking boldness when the Lord has called you to a clear step of obedience, it probably stems from a failure to trust the sovereignty of God. And yet, Jesus reminds us that nothing will befall us in this life without the Father's permission. Nevertheless, we are to obey and trust in the sovereignty of God.

- Your boss may be displeased with you about starting a Bible study, or he may decide to join you! Trust in the sovereignty and obey!
- You may have gifts to serve the church in that area, or you may not. Trust in God's sovereignty and obey.
- When you share the gospel, you may lose the relationship with your friend, but you may gain a new sister in Christ! Trust in God's sovereignty and obey!
- You may travel overseas and go on mission and have a fruitful ministry for decades, or you may rather quickly return home. Trust in the sovereignty of God and obey!
- Your brother may recoil when you lovingly correct them, or maybe you are the means the Lord uses to protect them from the deceitfulness of sin. Trust in God's sovereignty and obey!

Jesus trusted in the sovereignty of God, even when some from the crowd wanted to arrest him. But while some loathed him, others believed in him. Look at verse 31: "Yet many of the people believed in him. They said, 'When the Christ appears, will he do more signs than this man has done?'"

While some expressed violent opposition to Jesus, others looked at the evidence of his miraculous works and were convinced he was the Christ. While the gospel of John warns us about seeking signs instead of the savior, the signs point to the savior's identity. And among many in the crowd, they believed that Jesus was the Christ. His miracles are the evidence that verify his claims. Jesus truly was sent by God and knows God.

And so we have helped find our answer to our first question: where did Jesus Come from? The answer: he is the Christ, the eternal Son of God, who was sent from God and who alone knows God. If you are first considering the Christian faith, do you believe Jesus' words? Does he speak the truth? If you believe Jesus is who he claimed to be, then your whole life will be changed by it. If Jesus has come from God, then he has all authority over your life, and he alone speaks the truth. Jesus' claims combined with Jesus' works provide compelling evidence on why you should believe in him. But will you throw up your fist in opposition against him, or will you believe that he is the Christ?

But while we have heard Jesus' answer to that first question, we have a second question that our text today raises.

2. Where will Jesus Go? (vv. 32–36)

With the crowd's unrest over Jesus' teaching at the temple, the Pharisees eventually get word of the muttering about Jesus. The secret whispering about whether Jesus was the Christ finally reached their ears, and they were unhappy. So, the authorities step in to get involved. Look at verse 32: "The Pharisees heard the crowd muttering these things about him, and the chief priests and Pharisees sent officers to arrest him." And so we see a bizarre coalition forming among the religious leaders. The Pharisees were the religious conservatives but were largely ostracized from positions of political influence. Instead, a theologically liberal group called the Sadducees dominated the Jewish ruling council called the Sanhedrin. The two groups did not get along. But as the saying goes, the enemy of my enemy is my friend. Their shared disdain for Jesus made the Pharisees and the Sadducees strange bedfellows. So the Pharisees hear what's happening with Jesus and partner with the chief priests to send officers to arrest Jesus.

The temple guards were like a Levitical police force, under the command of the religious leaders, to maintain order at the temple. For these officers to be arrested, they had to be commissioned to do so by the religious leaders of the Sanhedrin. Apparently, the group authorized Jesus' arrest warrant. We know that Jesus somehow evades the arrest. After all, as John just reminded us, his hour has not yet come (Jn 7:30). But while the authorities are moving their officers to action, we hear Jesus' final comments on this day of teaching at the temple. In it, Jesus gives a warning to those who reject them as Christ, as well as foreshadows his crucifixion and ascension back to the Father. Look at verses 33 and 34:

"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.'" (John 7:33–34, ESV)

Remember, Jesus addresses these words to those who reject him as a warning. Jesus' earthly ministry is drawing short. He will only be with them for "a little longer." In around six months, the

hour will come. The very ones who seek to kill him now will soon succeed. Jesus will be arrested on false pretenses, shoved through a mock trial in the middle of the night, and given up to be flogged and crucified.

And at his crucifixion, Jesus bears the wrath of God for our sins. He will pay the penalty we deserve to pay. And all who put their faith and trust in him as their savior will be healed by his wounds. From his veins will pour forth atoning blood, and by faith is the blood applied for the forgiveness of our sins. Only those who repent and believe in Jesus as the Christ will benefit from his sin-bearing death. His earthly ministry and teaching anticipate his messianic mission to die for sinners and procure their forgiveness.

Through his death, resurrection, and ascension back into heaven, Jesus will return to his Father. Jesus came down to us from heaven and will soon return to heaven. Therefore, the time is all the more urgent for his enemies to believe in him. Though they now seek his life, Jesus urges them to seek him now as savior. The precious time of his earthly ministry is drawing to a close. They will only have Jesus on earth for a few more months. And once he ascends, they will seek him and not find him because Jesus will go where they cannot. Only those who believe in Jesus as the Christ will be given entrance into heaven.

Here, Jesus warns them of the brevity of his ministry and the importance of not hardening their hearts against him. Jesus can be found now—he stands before them in the temple, seeking to convince them that he is the one sent from God and the Messiah. And as Jesus will soon return to heaven, they cannot go to him without faith. And if they do not have faith during his earthly ministry, hearing from Jesus in the flesh teaching at the temple and witnessing his miraculous works, what makes them think they will discover such faith after he departs?

When it comes to Jesus, hardened hearts tend to grow more calloused. The human heart that resists the gospel starts to build up layers of deadness from the friction and pressure of the gospel. And while the Holy Spirit certainly can overcome the most calloused human heart, Jesus warns that we should not delay in our response to him. So many people put off considering Jesus. Some are so offended by the gospel, about its bold insistence on our sinfulness and our need for redemption, that its teaching causes their repulsion. But many delay thinking about Jesus because they sense that in their youthfulness, they can put off faith until later in life.

In his classic sermon to young men, J. C. Ryle urged the young men a warning of their tendency to forget the reality of death and judgment. And so many put off the things of the faith until a later, more convenient season, failing to recognize that their time may be short. Ryle says, “Tomorrow is the devil’s day, but today is God’s. Satan cares not how spiritual your intentions may be, and how holy your resolutions, if only they are fixed for *tomorrow*.”² Whether you are seventy or seven, do not put off the things of the Lord. Put your faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, and recognize him as the one sent from God who paid the penalty for your sin. Repent and believe in him today. Do not put it off until tomorrow. For tomorrow, your heart may be hardened. The callousness to spiritual things may thicken. If the Lord is working in your heart now, respond today. Do not delay.

And yet again, in John’s gospel, we see the irony in the crowd’s confusion. Jesus’ comment about

his forthcoming departure raises questions among his critics. We see them stated in verses 35–36:

“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 7:35–36, ESV)

The Jews completely misunderstand Jesus. They assume that Jesus means he’s leaving Judea to go to the outer parts of the world to reach the Greek-speaking Jews all around the world. But perhaps they wonder if he is going to “teach the Greeks,” meaning the Gentiles, too. They speculate that Jesus is going to go into hiding in exile around the world and that when he does, they will be unable to locate him. And with great irony, in their misunderstanding, the Jews speak a truth they do not realize.

Jesus will go to the ends of the earth because the gospel is for all people. Though Jesus himself will ascend into heaven, the church, which is his body, will go with the gospel to the ends of the earth. Many of John’s readers were Greeks, so as they read, they picked up on the irony of their misunderstanding. As Greek readers of John’s gospel, they know that the gospel of Jesus has come to them.

The text is a subtle nod to the Christian mission: that as the body of Christ, we must go to all the peoples of the earth with the gospel message. By faith, we are united to Jesus, and so as his church goes to all nations, so does Jesus go. And so, yes, Christ has ascended into heaven. But He also goes throughout the earth by spreading the witness of his church. And so, as those who profess Christ, we are called to go.

Christ has come, and he has gone to heaven. Soon, he will return. But since Christ has come and now rules in heaven, where will you go? Where are the marching orders that Jesus has given you? Does he call you to go to your neighborhood to share his gospel with others? Has he urged you to reach your coworker or a friend with the gospel? Is he sending you to the community—sports leagues, community centers, parks, hospitals, or schools? Is he calling you to go to another city, perhaps to support a church plant in Greenville like Gospel Hope Church? Is he calling you to go strengthen another church nearby? Is the Lord calling you to go overseas in cross-cultural missions?

The Lord has recently brought many new faces to our church family. We have many guests and visitors who are going through our membership process even now. And while we rejoice that so many long to be a part of what the Lord is doing at Redemption Church at New Hope, we must remember that our goal is not to amass a crowd of clustered and cloistered disciples but to equip the saints for the work of ministry. Part of the mission of God is that his people go to the dispersion, to people who need to hear the gospel, to talk the gospel to the Gentiles.

It is wonderful to be in the same community and to belong to the same church for decades. There will be many of you in that category, and our prayer is that we will be a people on a mission

together to reach our community with the gospel so that more people might profess Christ and be disciplined. We will always have Great Commission work to do here until the Lord returns. But if I can challenge many of you, perhaps you assume you are staying when you should assume you will be going. As we start to hit our sitting capacity here, you will hear your elders urge you to consider going to help other ministry partners. We hope to continue building relationships with other church plants, assist in revitalizing other churches, and even take the lead in sending out a team for church planting in the coming years. Church, we train you and equip you so you can be on mission. And the time may come when all that the Lord has taught you, equipped you, and grown you here at Redemption Church at New Hope needs to be put into action in service of the greater mission of God. And so when we talk about who might go from among us, every name must be placed on the table before the Lord. Every member, every staff member, and every elder should be open to the Lord's leading to go with the gospel.

As those encouragements come and those opportunities arise, let me urge you to consider going. Pray about it before the Lord. Sending each other out can be painful. Parting is always a sorrow among a church family who loves and cherishes one another. But the goal is not to keep everyone here forever but to mobilize you to get the gospel to all people, to strengthen other churches, and to start new churches. And while we will miss each other, we love the Lord Jesus more. And though these religious leaders did not realize it, they spoke more truth than they realized. The Lord Jesus will go to all the peoples of the earth, but he does so through us, his church, his body.

We have received help answering two questions about Jesus from God's Word. First, where has Jesus come from? He has come to us from heaven; the Son of God sent to us to pay the penalty for our sins so that we might have everlasting life in him. Second, where will Jesus go? He has resurrected from the dead and has ascended to the right hand of the Father. And yet, through his union with his church, which is his body, his kingdom extends all around the world. And as the body of Christ, we take Christ to all the peoples dispersed around the world so that they might hear of his kingship and his wondrous salvation. Jesus has come. Will you go and tell?

Community Group Questions

What was most memorable from the sermon this week?

What are some pressing questions you think people have about Jesus today?

Where does Jesus come from? How does Jesus uniquely know the Father?

Does your lack of trust in God's sovereignty lead you to disobey the Lord because of fear? How do you see this in your life?

How are you being prepared to be sent? Why must we all be willing to go wherever the Lord calls?

¹ D. A. Carson, The Gospel according to John, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Leicester, England; Grand Rapids, MI: Inter-Varsity Press; W.B. Eerdmans, 1991), 317.

² J. C. Ryle, Thoughts for Young Men, 7.