

THE RADICAL RABBI: A RADICAL RIDICULE

(John 7:2-10)

2.13.22

INTRODUCTION

Family. Spouses. Siblings. These are sources of some of the greatest joys in our lives. Family. Spouses. Siblings. These are also sources of some of the greatest frustrations in our lives. Why is that? How is it possible that that same cast of characters can provide both the highest of highs and the lowest of lows at different times in our lives — and seem to do both so effortlessly? Simple — we all at the same time occupy that wonderfully crazy same space called “home.” And home is the place where we can just be ourselves, right? We can relax, dress how we want, react how we want, vent how we want, annoy how we want, and be disgusting how we want. And because we live together, people see the “real” us — sometimes loving and adorable, sometimes a royal pain. We don’t have to be on any kind of best behavior — we don’t have to keep things to ourselves; we don’t have to smile if we don’t feel like it; we don’t have to be polite or correct. We’re at home. We can be any way we want.

The author of the NT book of Hebrews wrote some of the most comforting words in all of Scripture. After writing that Jesus lived on earth *fully human in every way* — *Hebrews 2:16a*, he declared what that meant, saying that *we do not have a high priest who is unable to empathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are — yet He did not sin* — *Hebrews 4:15*.

And why is that comforting? Because it lets us know that whatever things we experience, Jesus experienced. Which means that, among everything else that Jesus lived out, just like us, He experienced the ups and downs and joys and sorrows of — family, which is what today’s story is all about: one particular experience that Jesus went through with His brothers. So, as we look at this moment between Jesus and some members of His immediate, earthly family, **let’s join together as a family in prayer.**

TEXT

We have mentioned in past times, in other messages and also in our Bible studies, that context — what’s happening around a particular scripture passage — is everything. For one thing, it paints the scene, it tells us the setting for what is going on. For another, it lets us know what, if anything, might be impacting the particular story we are reading. And that is incredibly important in this scripture we are going to look at today.

Our Scripture is from the beginning of John 7 but, to provide some color to what we’re reading, we need to understand some of what had taken place just prior to this particular moment:

First, Jesus had performed the miracle of the feeding of the 5,000, probably more like a crowd of some 20-25,000. John then tells us what happened next: *After the people saw the sign Jesus performed, they began to say, “Surely this is the Prophet who is to come into the world.” Jesus, knowing that they intended to come and make Him king by force, withdrew again to a mountain by Himself — *John 6:14-15*.*

Next, having traveled from the east side of the Sea of Galilee to now being in the synagogue in Capernaum, Jesus had given His great teaching identifying Himself as the Bread of Life — which prompted some serious arguing among His listeners: *At this the Jews there began to*

grumble about Him because He said, “I am the bread that came down from heaven.” They said, “Is this not Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know? How can He now say, ‘I came down from heaven’?” - John 6:41-42.

During this time as He taught, He concluded with the most difficult, provocative words His audience had ever heard: *“Very truly I tell you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you have no life in you. Whoever eats My flesh and drinks My blood has eternal life, and I will raise them up at the last day. For My flesh is real food and My blood is real drink. Whoever eats My flesh and drinks My blood remains in Me, and I in them. Just as the living Father sent Me and I live because of the Father, so the one who feeds on Me will live because of Me” - Jesus Christ, John 6:53-57.* As a result of hearing these words - words that seemed to be the ramblings of a crazy man, *many of His disciples said, “This is a hard teaching. Who can accept it?”* And, as a result, . . . *From this time many of His disciples turned back and no longer followed Him - John 6:60, 66.*

All of a sudden, for maybe the first time in well over two years of ministry, it seemed that maybe all the influence and momentum that had been surrounding this Radical Rabbi seemed to be waning. People were bailing on Him. His words were too difficult to understand. There was even maybe blasphemy to say that He was the “bread” that had come down to them “from heaven?” Really, Jesus; do you have the slightest clue what you’re saying? Everybody in the audience that day knew Him and, what’s more, they knew His family. Who in the world did He think He was? Even if He was doing, or supposedly doing, these great signs and wonders, that couldn’t cover the fact that, sometimes, the things coming out of His mouth were just flat-out weird.

What’s more, there were rumblings that *the Jewish leaders there [in Judea] were looking for a way to kill Him — John 7:1b.* So, it seemed best to keep Himself in Galilee. But the question was still out there: Was it possible that Jesus’ time had come, and now gone?

One more context thing: If we understand the Jewish calendar correctly, it is possible that somewhere around six months had elapsed between the events of John 6 and John 7. Scholars believe that the events of chapter 6 happened around Passover — April on our calendar. With chapter 7 beginning just as the Feast of Tabernacles was about to commence, that would place these verses sometime in October. While John does not explicitly write of anything taking place at this time, it is not terribly far-fetched to assume that Jesus, as His ministry time was starting to come to an end, was spending as much time with His disciples as possible, training them and teaching them for what lay ahead. And that brings us to our story today, so let’s begin:

[T]he Jewish Festival of Tabernacles was near — John 7:2. The Festival of Tabernacles, also known as the Festival of Booths, was a week-long, joyous celebration that both looked back and looked ahead. It was generally considered the most popular of the three main feasts — the others being Passover and Pentecost — in the Jewish year. In the immediate context, it celebrated that particular year’s harvest, but it also looked back into their history, to how God so providentially provided for them while they were living in tents in the wilderness.

The temple would have been lit with large candlesticks to remind people of the “pillar of fire” by which God led them at night. Every day, the priests would bring water from the Pool of Siloam and pour it from a golden vessel, that action reminding them of the time that God provided water for them from a rock. And the people would re-create the living in tents their ancestors had done

in the wilderness by building simple structures of light branches and leaves, and then living in them for the entirety of the week. This was easy for those living in rural areas; for those living in cities and towns, they would place similar structures on their flat roofs or in their courtyards. But as with the other festivals, the preferred location for celebrating this one was Jerusalem.

So back to the text: ***Jesus' brothers said to Him, "Leave Galilee and go to Judea, so that Your disciples there may see the works You do. No one who wants to become a public figure acts in secret. Since You are doing these things, show Yourself to the world"*** — ***John 7:3-4***. Now the first thing we see here is that this is a group discussion because John wrote that Jesus was with His "brothers" — plural. Now we know from Matthew that Christ had four named brothers: ***James, Joseph, Simon and Judas*** — ***Matthew 13:55b***. He also had at least two sisters, if not more. Anyway, while we don't know specifically which of His brothers are with Him now, at least two of them are driving this conversation. And as we can tell from their tone, Jesus is not exactly getting their ringing endorsement. Oh well, nothing like having the support of family, right? But there are a couple of things to keep in mind:

- 1) First, Jesus had very publicly been in Judea and Jerusalem any number of times, so telling Him to "leave Galilee" and head south might not have seemed to be such a big deal.
- 2) Second, it is possible that His brothers had never seen any of the miracles He had done. However, it is more likely that at some point they had heard His words; He had even spoken in their hometown synagogue of Nazareth. But remember their response at one point in His ministry? Things seemed so out of control with Him that ***they went to take charge of Him, for they said, "He is out of His mind"*** — ***Mark 3:21*** — this at the same time that the religious leaders were accusing Him of being demon-possessed.
- 3) And third, we can't forget some feelings may have been hurt one time when Christ's mother and brothers were trying to see Him; remember? ***Someone told Him, "Your mother and brothers are standing outside, wanting to speak to You."*** ***He replied to him, "Who is My mother, and who are My brothers?" Pointing to His disciples, He said, "Here are My mother and My brothers"*** — ***Matthew 12:47-49***. His point was that His "mother and brothers" were those who heard His word and obeyed it. But that distinction might have been lost on His family.

So why might they have wanted Jesus to go to Judea? They might have had something of their own agenda, such as:

- 1) They wanted to see something grand and glorious, like all the stuff they'd heard about, with their own eyes. Were all these stories' people were talking about actually the real deal?
- 2) They, like so many in Palestine at this time, may have had a very skewed idea of what a "messiah" would actually be. With Rome's occupation so immediately around them, the idea of a political and social savior to rescue them from foreign domination and restore them to the glory of David and Solomon was still very much a part of the national consciousness of what the "messiah" would do.
- 3) If Jesus was so "for real," then don't hang out here in the back woods, in secret, out of everybody's sight. Why not put it on display in Judea, better yet, in Jerusalem, for everybody to see? That for His brothers would be the acid test that would prove exactly who and what He was. So, come on, Jesus; go show Yourself. Prove to everybody who You are. Let's do this thing!

But there was something far more serious than younger brothers simply giving their older brother a hard time, and John's next words explain it: ***For even His own brothers did not believe in Him — John 7:5.*** Now at this point in ministry, Jesus had already expressed who He was, telling the crowd following Him in Galilee just a few short months before: ***“I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to Me will never go hungry, and whoever believes in Me will never be thirsty” — Jesus Christ, John 6:35.*** And He had even gone on to say: ***“For My Father's will is that everyone who looks to the Son and believes in Him shall have eternal life, and I will raise them up at the last day” — Jesus Christ, John 6:40.***

But His brothers did not yet believe in Him. The Greek word for believe means “to commit one's trust.” But Christ's brothers could not do that. They could not yet make that commitment; they could yet not hand over their lives to Him. They saw Jesus only as their older brother — always the perfect son, always doing as His parents said, always where He was supposed to be, always being kind to everybody around Him.

And think about that: Jesus was perfect, always absolutely correct in everything — even in how He treated His siblings. They had seen Him every day since they themselves came into the world — and they had seen nothing but completely holy perfection. But the brothers weren't able to see beyond their own misconceptions. So, whatever He might be in other people's eyes, or even in His own mind, they didn't seem interested in having any part of it. In fact, as unbelievers, they probably just wished He'd be anyplace else other than with them. So yeah; why not? “Just go, Jesus, go; Judea's that way. Go show the world what they're missing. Knock their sandals off with Your miracles and message. Just go.”

But Jesus had an answer for them: ***“My time is not yet here; for You any time will do.*** He then goes into more detail: ***The world cannot hate you, but it hates Me because I testify that its works are evil. You go to the festival. I am not going up to this festival, because My time has not yet fully come.” After He had said this, He stayed in Galilee - John 7:6-9.***

There are a couple of timeframes that Jesus is looking at: One is the timing of His going to Jerusalem for the festival, and the second is the timing of His going to Jerusalem for His death. But both events have the same thing in common: God's sovereignty — when does HE say it's the right time for His Son to go, either to the festival or to Jerusalem for the final time. Christ was totally obedient to His Father's timing for literally everything in His life. He Himself once memorably described His obedience: ***“I have come down from heaven not to do My will but to do the will of Him who sent Me” — Jesus Christ, John 6:38.*** His Father's will was what motivated Him and directed Him, not the suggestions, teasings, moods or opinions of the people around Him; not even their unbelief in who He was, was more important than His Father's timing. But because that is not what motivates or inspires His brothers, they can pretty much go to Jerusalem whenever they want.

But as He continues talking with His brothers, He points out an additional difference that has much more ominous tones. He notes that, while the world doesn't hate His brothers, it hates Him. The Greek word means “to despise.” Why? Jesus points out the truth in peoples' lives — their works are evil. Why? Their hearts are evil. Why? They are constantly in rebellion against God. That's why Christ came, to speak the truth to peoples' lives — the reality of their sin, and their absolute desperate need for salvation and, ultimately, their absolute desperate need for Him.

And that's the fight, the struggle, the battle. As John the Baptist said, ***"Light has come into the world, but people loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil. Everyone who does evil hates the light, and will not come into the light for fear that their deeds will be exposed"*** — ***John the Baptist, John 3:19-20***. Jesus' brothers weren't doing that; they weren't bringing the light of God's truth to people. They were just making their way through life like everybody else, so the world had no fuss with them — which is why Jesus told them that basically they could go whenever they wanted.

However, after His brothers had left for the festival, He went also, not publicly, but in secret — John 7:10. Eventually, He received the word from God that it was time for Him to go, so go He went — not on anybody's terms but His Father's.

APPLICATION

We don't get a whole lot of pictures in the New Testament of Christ's interactions with His family, but this picture today gives us a few things to hold onto:

First, God's directs our time. He put us on this planet with only so much time allotted to us; as He told us through David: ***[A]ll the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be — David, Psalm 139:16b***. In other words, our time is not ours; there is no such thing as "my time" or "my weekend" or "my vacation" or anything else. Our lives are God's, including the time we have to live them. And then, while we are here, He offers to lead us and guide us; in fact, the Bible teaches that the Lord will very personally tell us to assure us where to take our steps:

- 1) ***I will instruct you and teach you in the way you should go; I will counsel you with my loving eye on you — David, Psalm 32:8***.
- 2) ***Whether you turn to the right or to the left, your ears will hear a voice behind you, saying, "This is the way; walk in it" — Isaiah 30:21***.

So, because of that, we should take a page from Christ's "how to live in the Father's will" instruction manual and remember this idea, best expressed by the apostle James — coincidentally, one of Christ's brothers: ***Now listen, you who say, "Today or tomorrow we will go to this or that city, spend a year there, carry on business and make money." Why, you do not even know what will happen tomorrow. What is your life? You are a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes. Instead, you ought to say, "If it is the Lord's will, we will live and do this or that." As it is, you boast in your arrogant schemes. All such boasting is evil — James 4:13-16***. Our time is God's, so let's let Him ***direct our paths — Proverbs 3:6b (NKJV)***.

Second, the world hates followers of Jesus Christ. Take note again of Christ's words: ***The world . . . hates Me because I testify that its works are evil — Jesus Christ, John 7:7***. Simply put, we should never be put off or surprised that the world — meaning nonbelievers — reacts with hostility when Christian's state and live out their beliefs. I mean, let's think about it: We believe in a book they don't read which proclaims a Man they don't know who preached a gospel they don't accept. With all that, why should we be shocked when the world displays animosity towards us? As Jesus said so clearly to Pilate: ***"My kingdom is not of this world" — Jesus Christ, John 18:36a***. There is no part of Jesus — not His kingdom or His followers, not His words, not His works, not His outcome — that has anything even remotely to do with ***the rulers, . . . the authorities, . . . the powers of this dark world and . . . the spiritual forces of evil in the***

heavenly realms — **Paul, Ephesians 6:12b**. Therefore, hostility should be the norm, not the exception, of how the world responds to Bible-believing, Christ-reflecting, born again Christianity. And, in most of the world, violent hostility is exactly what Christians receive. But their overwhelming testimony: Whatever the world tries to do doesn't matter. The glory of the kingdom, glory for Jesus' name, is all they live for. There's our example — end of story.

CONCLUSION

And last, as we close, being close to the gospel does not make one a Christian. The author of Psalm 78 made note of this tragic outcome with the nation of Israel as a result of their time with God in the wilderness: ***In spite of all this, they kept on sinning; in spite of His wonders, they did not believe*** — **Psalm 78:32**. Despite all they saw directly from the hand of God, despite the blessings of His in which they participated and even directly touched, it never moved them from experience to belief.

In the same vein, many are the pastors or missionaries who sadly are the parents of children who have not followed in the steps of the Lord. But another picture of that is those who “grew up in church,” who have lived in or around church their entire lives. Some of those have developed the answer to why they expect to go to heaven as: “I was baptized as an infant,” or “I was confirmed,” or “I went to Sunday School.” They may know many songs of worship, and many Bible verses. But that nearness to the gospel does not make somebody a Christian. That is why we will continue to preach and teach the truth of Jesus Christ in this church. We can't say we 100% know our audience, but we can say with certainty we 100% know the saving truth of the gospel of Jesus Christ. The only thing that matters we hear through the words of Jesus Himself: ***Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God*** — **Jesus Christ, John 3:3 (NASB1995)**. That is a gospel fact.

Now we know from history that Christ's brothers did eventually experience personal salvation through Jesus. Following His resurrection, according to Paul, ***He appeared to James*** — **Paul, I Corinthians 15:7a** before appearing to ***all the apostles*** — **Paul, I Corinthians 15:7b** — which certainly could have included His other brothers. We also know that, according to Luke, in the Upper Room following Christ's ascension to heaven, numbered with the 120 at that time, along with the 11 remaining disciples, were ***the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with His brothers*** — **Acts 1:14b**, another one of whom would have been Judas, also known as Jude, who wrote the NT epistle that bears his name. But their kinship with Christ had nothing to do with their salvation. What their salvation was based on was placing their complete trust in Jesus Christ — in who He was, and in what He had done on the cross to release them from their sins. Their lives were now based on repentance from sin, reconciliation with God, and restoration into a relationship that saw them seen by God, through Jesus Christ, as perfect, clean, all sins gone, completely — and forever — redeemed.

That's what saved them. So, what about us? Is there anybody here unsure of their salvation? Being here isn't what saves you. Singing isn't what saves you. Sharing a tithe isn't what saves you. Jesus Christ — Him and Him alone — that is what saves you.

If that isn't you, then let's make that right. Let's come together, let's talk that through. Today, they tell me, is “Super Sunday”; the Super Bowl takes place today. Well, let's make it super for another reason, an eternal reason that will never pass away. Let's pray!