

An Open Invitation

(John 7:37-53)

(preached 11/11/18; Pine Grove BC Sun AM)

Introduction

Last Sunday, the newspapers were abuzz in London.

The headline on Monday.

Queen Elizabeth extends royal invitation to Doria Ragland to attend Christmas with the royals this year.

Doria Ragland is the mother of Meghan Markle, the wife of Prince Harry..

According to a spokesman for the queen, “it only seemed fitting to have Ms. Rogland over for Christmas, seeing that the royal couple is expecting their first child.”

According to sources, Christmas with the royals is an exclusive event.

The family exchanges gifts, plays a game of soccer, and eats a hearty dinner of consisting of venison or pheasant.

For the newspapers in London, the invitation was somewhat shocking, since Kate’s family had never been invited to the same festivities..

According to one reporter, “the queen doesn’t pass out invitations very often. So when you receive one, it is a sign of great respect.”

In the life of Christ, he issued invitations nearly every day..

In fact, the most royal King ever passed out invitations every chance He got..

In just a few chapters of the gospel of John, Jesus has invited a woman at the well to believe in Him..

Jesus has invited the crowds to believe in Him...

Jesus has invited the Jewish leaders to believe in Him...

Jesus has invited the disciples to believe in Him..

The life of Jesus was invitation after invitation after invitation..

Sadly though, the life of Christ was also rejection after rejection after rejection..

In fact, people who would never think of turning down an invitation from an earthly queen, quickly turn down an invitation from the king of heaven..

Well, today we come to the end of chapter 7 and Jesus is still at the feast of booths in Jerusalem..

It is final fall of his earthly ministry.

He will be hanging on a cross in this same city only 7 months later in April, so He sees the urgency to invite people to believe in Him..

And so we will look at this invitation that occurred the final day of the feast of booths...

Let me read it to you, and then we will take a closer look at all the details...

Look with me and follow along..

John 7:37-53...

37 Now on the last day, the great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried out, saying, “[g]If anyone is thirsty, [h]let him come to Me and drink. 38 He who believes in Me, as the Scripture said, ‘From [i]his innermost being will flow rivers of living water.’” 39 But this He spoke of the Spirit, whom those who believed in Him were to receive; for the Spirit was not yet given, because Jesus was not yet glorified.

Division of People over Jesus

40 Some of the people therefore, when they heard these words, were saying, “This certainly is the Prophet.”

41 Others were saying, "This is [j]the Christ." Still others were saying, "Surely [k]the Christ is not going to come from Galilee, is He? 42 Has not the Scripture said that the Christ comes from the descendants of David, and from Bethlehem, the village where David was?" 43 So a division occurred in the crowd because of Him. 44 Some of them wanted to seize Him, but no one laid hands on Him.

*45 The officers then came to the chief priests and Pharisees, and they said to them, "Why did you not bring Him?" 46 The officers answered, "Never has a man spoken the way this man speaks." 47 The Pharisees then answered them, "You have not also been led astray, have you? 48 No one of the rulers or Pharisees has believed in Him, has he? 49 But this crowd which does not know the Law is accursed." 50 Nicodemus (he who came to Him before, being one of them) *said to them, 51 "Our Law does not judge a man unless it first hears from him and knows what he is doing, does it?" 52 They answered him, "You are not also from Galilee, are you? Search, and see that no prophet arises out of Galilee." 53 [l]Everyone went to his home.*

Let's begin to look at this passage in verses 37-29 with...

I. The Preacher (37-39)

As we come to the end of John 7, we also come to the final day of the feast of tabernacles or booths..

The Jews call this fall festival Succoth, which is the plural of the Hebrew word sukkot, which is the Jewish word for a hut..

And I remind that this festival in the fall was designed to help the Jews remember God's deliverance of them in the wilderness...

Jewish fathers would build makeshift huts for the family to live in for a week...

The kids loved the idea, and that allowed the parents to teach them of God's faithfulness to Israel by providing food and shelter for them in their wilderness wanderings..

Well, the feast went on for 7 days, and verse 37 lets us know that this is the 7th and final day of the festival..

Now, that is a very important note...

You see, the festival had a number of rituals that helped remind people of what God did for them...

And one of those rituals was on the final day of the festival where the priest would go down to the pool of Siloam and scoop up some water in a pitcher..

He would then take that pitcher of water and pour it out on the altar, and the people would recite Isaiah 12:2-3, which says..

2

***“Behold, God is my salvation,
I will trust and not be afraid;
For the Lord God is my strength and song,
And He has become my salvation.”***

3

***Therefore you will joyously draw water
From the springs of salvation.***

And as they read those verses, it was intended to remind them of the water that God provided for them in the wilderness and how it saved the life of the Jewish nation.

Here are some pictures of Jews celebrating the feast of tents today..

Well, that is what was also happening on this final day of the feast of tents in John 7..

There was this focus of God’s provision of physical water to the nation...

And with all that going on, let's look back at verse 37..

37 Now on the last day, the great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried out, saying, “[g]If anyone is thirsty, [h]let him come to Me and drink. 38 He who believes in Me, as the Scripture said, ‘From [i]his innermost being will flow rivers of living water.’” 39 But this He spoke of the Spirit, whom those who believed in Him were to receive; for the Spirit was not yet given, because Jesus was not yet glorified.

You see as the priest and the people had this focus on water on the final day of the festival, it was a fine time for Jesus to preach on the fact that he was living water..

Yes, God had provided for the physical needs of Israel in the wilderness..

But now, Jesus has come to provide spiritual water as Israel thirsts in spiritual darkness..

And so the invitation here makes perfect sense considering what was going on that final day of the feast of booths..

This isn't a random invasion to come and taste the living water of Christ...

No, Jesus has positioned himself in the temple at just the right time to point people to help people look beyond the physical water of remembrance to Him who is the spiritual water of life..

Just as Jesus invited the woman at the well to come and drink of Him, he invites the Jews in Jerusalem to do the same..

“If anyone is thirsty, let him come to men and drink.”

There it is..

An open invitation to anyone who wants to come to Christ..

If you are spiritually thirsty, Jesus can quench that thirst to the point that you will never thirst again...

This is the invitation of the gospel, and it was the invitation on that final day of the feast of booths...

Not only can the people drink the water of life, they can also become rivers of life themselves..

In verse 38, Jesus tells that the water he gives will become rivers of life-life-giving water flowing out of them..

Now, the text makes it clear that this is prior to the Holy Spirit coming into the lives of those who believe, but the promise is the same...

Come to the water of life, and your life will become a river of life to the world..

Look, every believer in here should be a source of spiral water in the world...

As the current of living water comes into our life in the form of the gospel, it flows through us into the world..

As you have been the Spirit of God, that Spirit indwells you but He also moves through you into the world..

My childhood home in Whitmire had a fire hydrant in front of it..

Twice a year, the town would come and open that hydrant to make sure it was working and it shot water 20 feet in the air..

It was a glorious display of the power of water flowing underground through the town's water system...

Look, we are hydrants of the living water that Christ has given to us...

But unlike the fire hydrants of the world, we aren't to be shut...

Our valves should always be set to open and the water of life should flow through us..

Now clearly, we aren't the source of living water but sure ought to be pointing others to that source as we live and move in the world...

So, the preacher offers an invitation to the crowds...

If you are thirsty, come to the water of life..

If you are thrifty, drink of the water of life..

And when you do, you will become a river of spiritual water in the world..

And I will tell you this..

Some of you need to open your valves and get the gospel water flowing again..

There are loads of people on fire around you...

How dare you be a hydrant of living water that doesn't work....

So the preacher preaches, but how will the crowds react?

Well, we have already seen this previously in the gospel of John, but let's look at 4 reaction to the invitation of Christ....

The first reaction is in verses 40 and 41a...

We will call this group..

II. The Persuaded (40-41a)

This group is easy to identify, but small in number..

Verse 40..

40 Some of the people therefore, when they heard these words, were saying, “This certainly is the Prophet.”

41 Others were saying, “This is [j]the Christ.”

The two titles seen here of “the Prophet” and “the Christ” are Messianic titles of Jesus..

He was a prophet, but He was also the prophet, the ultimate speaker of truth in the world..

He was the also the Christ, which means the anointed one...

Jesus is prophet, priest, and King.

Jesus is Savior and Lord, and some on that day came to believe that..

For them, the invitation to come to the living water made sense.

They knew and remembered God’s provision of water in the wilderness, but now they saw God’s provision of living water to save their soul...

Let me tell you something..

I was in and out of church as a kid and a teenager, and so I heard these catch phrases of the Bible...

Jesus is the bread of life.

Jesus is the door for the sheep..

Jesus is the water of life..

And for years, it sounds like good poetry, but then one day, I embraced the truth of those things..

I sensed my spiritual thirst, and I came to the water of life..

This isn't poetry for the believer..

This is truth that we love and embrace and base our entire future on..

We have been persuaded that Jesus is the only water that truly quenches our thirst..

A second reaction to the preaching on this final day of the feast of tents is found in the second half of verse 41 - 42..

III. The Prejudiced (41b-42)

Look at the second half of verse 41...

Still others were saying, “Surely [k]the Christ is not going to come from Galilee, is He? 42 Has not the Scripture said that the Christ comes from the descendants of David, and from Bethlehem, the village where David was?”

While some were persuaded, most of the people listening to Christ fell into the group described in verses 41-42..

I call them the prejudiced.

For these people, they knew what the Bible said about the coming Messiah, but they simply couldn't believe that Jesus was that Messiah..

Now note what they say here...

Isn't the Christ from the line of David?

Isn't the Christ from Bethlehem?

And look, they were exactly right on both questions, but the strange thing is that both of these things were true about Christ..

He was from the line of David on both his father's and mother's side...

Mary was a descendant of David.

Joseph was also a descendant of David.

And that is why they were in Bethlehem when Jesus was born..

The census sent everyone to the hometown of their ancestors..

Now, the problem is that these people had a prejudice that they couldn't overcome..

For them, they couldn't believe in a Messiah that came from Galilee..

You may remember what Nathanael said when he heard that Jesus was from Nazareth...

“Can anything good come out of Nazareth?”

This is the kind of built in prejudice that is found in sinful human hearts...

Though Jesus was of the line of David.

Though Jesus was born in Bethlehem..

Some people couldn't believe in Him simply because he was from the wrong neighborhood in Israel..

How sad the the Savior of the world was rejected because people don't like the fact that he is from the wrong part of town..

Yet, that was certainly true for many in the crowd that day..

They simply didn't come to Jesus because he wasn't "one of them."

Be careful of your prejudice, it may send you to hell..

It did for some on this day..

A third reaction to the preaching of Christ is found in verses 43-49..

WE have seen this before, but we see it again...

WE can call this group...

IV. The Perplexed (43-49)

43 So a division occurred in the crowd because of Him.

44 Some of them wanted to seize Him, but no one laid hands on Him.

45 The officers then came to the chief priests and Pharisees, and they said to them, “Why did you not bring Him?” 46 The officers answered, “Never has a man spoken the way this man speaks.” 47 The Pharisees then answered them, “You have not also been led astray, have you? 48 No one of the rulers or Pharisees has believed in Him, has he? 49 But this crowd which does not know the Law is accursed.”

As the crowd reacts to the teaching of Jesus, we now turn our attention to the religious leaders of Israel..

They have been planning to grab Jesus and kill him, but their plan isn't succeeding for a couple reasons..

First of all as we saw last week, God is fully in control of not allowing Jesus to be arrested until the proper time..

But second of all, the officers sent to arrest Jesus are a little perplexed at what is going on..

You see their confusion in versos 45-46..

They report back to the Jewish leaders and tell them that they can't arrest Jesus simply because they had never heard anyone speak like him..

And we know by that because everyone is impressed with the authority in his teaching...

It has even impressed those sent to arrest Him..

They are confused.

On one hand, the experts in the law want his arrested..

On the other hand, the teaching of Jesus has authority even beyond what these officers had ever seen...

Now remember these officers are used to seeing authority...

All they do is respond to the authority over them, yet Jesus seems to have an authority beyond those in charge of the temple..

And these men are taken aback by it...

Though this stops of saving faith, I can tell you one thing...

These officers are a lot closer to salvation than the majority of the crowd...

Yet I would say this...

The perplexed and the prejudiced are still in the same boat until they come to Christ in faith and repentance...

Don't be amazed by the authority of Christ only...

You need to also respond to that authority by submitting your life to Him..

A 4th and final reaction to the teaching of Christ is found in verses 50-53...

And it is a very interesting response...

We will call this the reaction of...

V. The Pondering (50-53)

In verse 50, our old acquaintance Nicodemus shows up..

You may remember him from John 3...

He was a religious leader that came to Jesus one night...

He was a teacher of Israel but the miracles and teaching of Jesus has thrown his whole world for a loop...

So he comes to Jesus saying that no one could do what Jesus did unless God was with him..

From that opening statement, Jesus begins one of the highest portions of Scripture describing salvation as the process of being born again...

Well, we went through that, but what we don't know from that night is Nicodemus' response to it...

But here he is again in verse 51, and he seems to be coming to the defense of Jesus..

The other leaders are ready to arrest and kill Jesus but Nicodemus simply says that they ought to hear from Jesus first..

Now, I don't know where Nicodemus stood with Christ at this point..

It doesn't say that he was a believer here..

In fact, verse 48 says that none of the rulers or Pharisees had believed in Jesus..

And I am tempted to think that included Nicodemus as well..

But what I want to note here is this...

I think some people react to Christ by simply pondering or thinking about what he has said...

Look, I preach with urgency because I have no idea if I will ever see any of you ever again..

And I ask people to respond now to Christ...

Today is the day of salvation.

But I also recognize that some people are simply processing all the information about Christ...

I tend to think that is Nicodemus here..

He isn't sold on Christ but he also isn't ready to reject Him yet either...

Now, let me be clear.

If you die while thinking about salvation, it doesn't make a difference in where you go..

Both the rejector who is hundreds of miles from Christ and the ponderer who is inches from Christ end up in the same place...

So don't delay in coming to Christ, but I also say that not everyone hears and falls on their face immediately before Christ...

Some simply need time, and today you may have been thinking for some time about your standing with Christ..

And maybe today is the day to end your pondering and start your commitment to Him in faith and repentance..

If that is you, leave the land of confusion and come to the land of certainty...

Conclusion

Well that is the preaching of Christ on the final day of the festival of booths, and those are the 4 reactions to that preacher...

I will simply ask you...

What is your reaction to Christ today..

Are you persuaded?

Are you prejudiced?

Are you perplexed?

Or are you simply pondering all these truths in your heart?

Jesus stood in the temple to preach these truths to the crowds on that October, but come April, he will stand before these same crowds as a criminal...

The crowds that he preached to will become his jury..

And Pilate will walk Jesus out to the crowds in Jerusalem and he will ask the crowds..

Should I release Jesus or Barabbas?

And the crowds will pick Barabbas to go free..

And then Pilate will turn to these crowds and ask the most important question in the world to them...

“What shall I do with Jesus Christ?”

The crowds on that day will say, “Crucify Him.”

But what do you say to that question?

What will you do with Jesus Christ?

This morning, we are reminded of that tragic crucifixion of Christ..

Yet in that tragedy, there was triumph..

In that crucifixion, there was atonement...

In that death, there was life..

Though the crowds called for the cross, we are believers are beneficiaries of that death..

And today we gather at the Lord’s Table to remember the sacrifice of our Savior..

The festival of tents was a remembrance of God’s goodness to Israel in the wilderness..

The Lord's Table is a remembrance of God's rescue of us in the spiritual wilderness of sin..

So we celebrate as we remember..

And we also proclaim Christ's death until he returns...

This table is a reflection to the world of the living water that flows through us..

WE eat the bread and we drink the cup and we are reminded that the bread of life and the water of life died for us..

The Lion became the Lamb..

The King became the Criminal...

The Christ became the condemned..

And our Savior became our Substitute..

If you are here this morning as a born again believer, you are invited to this table...

If you here this morning at any other stage of unbelief, this table is closed to you until you repent and believe the gospel...

That is not my rule.

That is the Lord's rule.

And I also warn any believer here who is living a lifestyle of sin to stay away from this celebration until you repent of that sin..

The Bible is clear.

Taking part in the Lord's Table in an unworthy manner of unbelieving heart or an unrepentant heart is a very dangerous practice..

So I warn you to examine yourself before you take part in a flippant manner...

I would advise parents to exercise caution with young children in allowing them to take part or not..

With that said, let us go to the Lord's Table with joy in our hearts this morning church..

Let us pray..