

Reactions to the Lord's Teaching

John 7:40-53

John 7:40-53 - *"Therefore many from the crowd, when they heard this saying, said, 'Truly this is the Prophet.'⁴¹ Others said, 'This is the Christ.' But some said, 'Will the Christ come out of Galilee?'⁴² Has not the Scripture said that the Christ comes from the seed of David and from the town of Bethlehem, where David was?"⁴³ So there was a division among the people because of Him.⁴⁴ Now some of them wanted to take Him, but no one laid hands on Him.*

⁴⁵ *Then the officers came to the chief priests and Pharisees, who said to them, 'Why have you not brought Him?'"⁴⁶ The officers answered, 'No man ever spoke like this Man!'"⁴⁷ Then the Pharisees answered them, 'Are you also deceived?'⁴⁸ Have any of the rulers or the Pharisees believed in Him?'⁴⁹ But this crowd that does not know the law is accursed."*

⁵⁰ *Nicodemus (he who came to Jesus by night being one of them) said to them,⁵¹ 'Does our law judge a man before it hears him and knows what he is doing?'"⁵² They answered and said to him, 'Are you also from Galilee? Search and look, for no prophet has arisen out of Galilee.' And everyone went to his own house."*

Background Notes

The setting for this account was the Feast of Tabernacles in Jerusalem. *"On the last day, that great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried out, saying, 'If anyone thirsts, let him come to Me and drink. He who believes in Me, as the Scripture has said, out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.'"*

Notice the different reactions of the people and the Jewish religious leaders to the claims made by the Lord Jesus.

"Therefore many from the crowd, when they heard this saying, said, 'Truly this is the Prophet'" (v40). What did they mean by "the Prophet"? The people had the same reaction after the miracle of the feeding of five thousand? *"Then those men, when they had seen the sign that Jesus did, said, 'This is truly the Prophet who is to come into the world'" (John 6:14).*

They were referring to "the prophet" mentioned in Deuteronomy 18:15. In that prophetic passage of Scripture Moses wrote, *"The LORD your God will raise up for you a Prophet like me from your midst, from your brethren. Him you shall hear..."* And also in verse 18: *"I will raise up for them a Prophet like you from among their brethren, and will put My words in His mouth, and He shall speak to them all that I command Him."* The Lord had revealed this prophecy to Moses.

The Jewish people at the time of Christ didn't realize that Jesus was the fulfillment of this prophecy. In John 1, they asked John the Baptist if he was "the Christ," and John said "no." Then they asked him if he was "the prophet," and again John said "No." Here in John 7, now speaking of Jesus, *"many from the crowd, when they heard this saying, said, 'Truly this is the Prophet.' Others said, 'This is the Christ.'"* It was the early Christians who realized that the prophecy in Deuteronomy about "the prophet" was fulfilled in Jesus Christ.

A final background note. The last verse of John 7 and the first eleven verses of John 8 form a section of the Bible that is somewhat controversial. There is some evidence that these verses were not part of the original manuscript of the Gospel of John. However, there are some good arguments for the position that they are indeed part of the Gospel. We will deal with this question when we begin our talks on John 8.

Doctrinal /Teaching Points

1. The claims of Christ divide people.

“So there was a division among the people because of Him” (v43). Three times in his Gospel, John wrote that there was a “division among the people” because of Jesus Christ – here in John 7, in John 9:16, and in John 10:19.

Some said that He was the Christ, the Messiah. Were they true believers, or just merely professing to believe? Probably there was a mixture, as we saw back in verse 31: *“And many of the people believed in Him, and said, “When the Christ comes, will He do more signs than these which this Man has done?”* There were probably a lot of people who merely said they believed, but probably some were true believers.

Other people said that Jesus could not be the Christ because the Messiah was not supposed to come from Galilee. Old Testament prophecies said that the Messiah would be born in Bethlehem, in Judea, in the royal line of David, from the tribe of Judah. These people were right about the prophetic Scriptures predicting the coming Messiah. The prophecies of Isaiah 11 and Micah 5 very definitely said that the Messiah would be in the tribe of Judah, and from the line of David, and born in Bethlehem.

But these people never checked out the Lord’s credentials! Doesn’t it amaze you that the Lord, at this point, didn’t cry out, *“Wait a minute! I **am** from the tribe of Judah, I **am** in the line of David, I **was** born in Bethlehem?”* Why didn’t the Lord do that? I think His reason was the same then as it is today - He doesn’t force evidence down people’s throats! God is looking for an attitude of faith. The evidence is there, and it is available, and all we need to do is believe it! God is looking for a response in **faith** to the claims of Christ.

The people were divided. Some of the people even wanted to arrest Him! The claims of Christ divided people then, and the claims of Christ divide people now. In Luke 12:51-52 Jesus said: *“Do you suppose that I came to give peace on earth? I tell you, not at all, but rather division. For from now on five in one house will be divided: three against two, and two against three. Father will be divided against son and son against father, mother against daughter and daughter against mother, mother-in-law against her daughter-in-law and daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law.”*

God doesn’t want to cause division, but the claims of Christ will naturally cause division because most people don’t want to believe that Jesus is God, and the only way to Heaven. Expect your preaching and your witnessing for Christ to cause divisions. In an attempt to solve the problem of division, the “ecumenical movement” has watered down the claims of Christ. Unity is achieved at the expense of the truth about Him. Thus the ecumenical movement is not biblical. The claims of Christ divide people.

2. Religious prejudice is blind.

“Then the officers came to the chief priests and Pharisees, who said to them, “Why have you not brought Him?” (v45). The “officers” mentioned here were the Jewish Temple guards. The chief priests were from the wealthy Sadducee party. Normally the Sadducees and the strict religiously observant Pharisees were strongly opposed to each other, but notice that they united against Jesus Christ! This can happen today as well. All kinds of enemies unite in their prejudice against Christ.

Religious prejudice blinds people to evidence. These religious leaders were so prejudiced against Jesus that they were blind to the evidence - and blind to reason. The evidence that Jesus is the Christ was there, but they refused to see it. The Lord Jesus was in the line of David, and He was born in Bethlehem, but they didn't check out the evidence! When the Temple guard said, *“No man ever spoke like this Man!”* the prejudiced religious leaders sarcastically responded, *“Are you also deceived? Have any of the rulers or the Pharisees believed in Him?”(v47-48).* Here again, their pride and jealousy and prejudice blinded them to the evidence.

Nicodemus was a Jewish leader, and he was a believer. Joseph of Arimathea was a Jewish ruler, and he was a believer. And John 12:42 says, *“...even among the rulers many believed in Him, but because of the Pharisees they did not confess Him, lest they should be put out of the synagogue.”* Some of the Jewish leaders believed, but the prejudice of the Pharisees blinded them to the evidence. And fear that the powerful religious leaders would exclude them from the synagogue silenced those who did believe. They were afraid to confess their faith.

Notice what the Pharisees said to Nicodemus: *“Are you also from Galilee? Search and look, for no prophet has arisen out of Galilee” (v52).* Are you on His side? Are you like one of those gullible Galileans? No prophet has ever arisen out of Galilee! Here they showed their ignorance, because Jonah had come from the Galilee area, and he was an Old Testament prophet. Not only were these prejudiced Jewish leaders blind to the evidence; they were blind to reason as well. Even if no prophet had come from Galilee in the past, why couldn't one come from Galilee now? What kind of blind reasoning would deny that possibility?

Look at their weak and foolish argument with the Temple guards: *“Have any of the rulers or the Pharisees believed in Him?” (v48).* That's like people today who say, “The majority of scientists today don't believe in God, so that proves it: there is no God.” That's a ridiculous argument!

And in verse 49 they argued that the common people who were becoming believers didn't count. Why not? Because they don't keep the minutia of man-made laws and traditions of the elders - so they are accursed! What kind of argument is that argument! That's like saying, “Even though many people who live in rural areas have become Christians, they don't really count. They're only under-educated country bumpkins. They can't think straight!”

Finally, notice what the leaders said when Nicodemus, who was one of their group of leaders, tried to reason with them on the basis of their own Law. Nicodemus said, *“Does our law judge a man before it hears him and knows what he is doing?”(v51).* They didn't even answer yes or no. They just accused Nicodemus of being a gullible Galilean. How unreasonable! Religious prejudice can be blind to the truth.

This is still true today. The “Jesus Seminar” is a group of unbelieving biblical scholars who are theologically liberal. They don’t believe that Jesus is God; they don’t believe that the Bible is the Word of God, and they don’t believe that the miracles recorded in the Bible actually happened. If you were to try to show these scholars the evidence for creation, and evidence for the inspiration of the Bible, and evidence for the resurrection of Christ, they wouldn’t even look at the evidence. They would laugh at you - in fact, they would despise you! Like the Pharisees, their proud minds are already made up. Because of their prejudice, they will not listen to reason.

Practical Application

What kind of report does the unbeliever give about us?

In verse 46 the Temple guards reported, “*No man ever spoke like this Man!*” As to authority, as to wisdom, as to grace - no one ever spoke like this Man! What a testimony!

The Temple guards were unbelievers, but they couldn’t find a single flaw in the character or teaching of Jesus! And they were certainly looking for flaws. After all, they had been sent to find fault with Jesus, so they would have been looking for any reason to arrest Him.

Unbelievers are watching us, too. What kind of report do they give about us? We are to follow the example of Jesus Christ, and we are to live as He lived (Ephesians 5:1-2). He is our supreme Model!

In our character and speech, do unbelievers acknowledge, “Those Christians sure are different”? Do we mean what we say? Do we have insight? Do we really care about other people? Do we keep our promises?

Or - do unbelievers watch the way we live and say, “I can’t believe he calls himself a Christian?” Or, “How can she claim to follow Jesus Christ when she does just the opposite of what He would do?” Or, “Did you hear the nasty things he said? I thought he was supposed to be a Christian!”

What kind of report do unbelievers give about us?