



“Dangerous Righteousness”

John 7:14–24: Jesus Teaches at the Festival of Tabernacles

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I. Introduction

This past week I was able to participate in a ZOOM meeting with other Baptist ministers in our area. Andrew Page, the new pastor at our sister church, Belmont Baptist led the meeting. One of the discussions we started to have was around what churches should do if the government required vaccination passports to enter a church building. The ministers who gathered didn't have an answer, but we used to the time to start the discussion.

One pastor said that they predicted that this issue would eventually lead to a massive conflict in the church. They said that they thought this eventual eruption of emotion couldn't be avoided. And they dreaded the consequences of it when it does eventually come.

There were two ethical issues that seemed to arise from our discussion. The first was that getting the vaccine provided protection for our families, church friends and neighbors. Getting the vaccine was an expression of love to those around us. It showed that we considered any risk of taking the vaccine as not as important as protecting the health and wellbeing of others.

The second issue was that, as a church, we never want to prohibit someone from coming to church to receive care and support. Someone had said that they could never think of a time in the history of the church where a church community closed its doors to others. Especially to those who were marginalized and vulnerable like those who don't receive the vaccine.

Getting the vaccine helps others. The church doesn't want to prohibit people from being served. How can these two ethical issues be upheld and fulfilled with a church family like ours at MBC?

Hook

What we will see in today's passage won't be easy to follow. Not at all! In fact, we will struggle to respond to Jesus' call through this passage. And yet, we know that the Spirit

is guiding us, filling us and comforting us so that we may know Jesus more fully and that we would show his resurrected and perfect life in us.

II. Context

Last week we went through the first thirteen verses of this chapter. We saw how Jesus felt that he had no home in the nation nor even in his own home with his family in Nazareth. His home was with his Father in heaven. The Feast of Tabernacles or Booths was coming, and the Jewish leaders were waiting for him. And they were looking for a way to kill him. His brothers were mocking Jesus, telling him that he should go to the festival as well to become a prominent leader of Israel. They think Jesus is looking for political power. But Jesus goes to the festival quietly and secretively. But we will see in our account today that Jesus' service eventually results in a crowd of onlookers. A crowd builds because they recognize that Jesus is teaching with great authority but the crowds are confused. They are confused because they can't link him with any political or religious party they are used to hearing. That Jesus' teaching isn't in alignment with religious and political institutions in Israel will put Jesus' life at risk. But why is Jesus' teaching new?

III. Unpack

1.) Jesus Sought His Father's Will, Not Just Human Institutions

In John 7:14–17, Jesus tells the people that what he teaches doesn't come from human institutions. Jesus' words don't come from the Sadducees or the Pharisees. Jesus doesn't speak like those who align themselves to these religious institutions serving in Israel. Jesus doesn't support his teachings with quotes from local religious leaders. He doesn't need their testimony to support what he is saying. No, Jesus speaks only what he is given by his Heavenly Father.

Jesus speaks what one teacher has given him. He doesn't need another teacher to rely on. That is, he doesn't need another teacher to explain what his Heavenly Father is teaching him. For Jesus, there is only one authority, one teacher. We may recall that when Paul was sharing the Gospel of Jesus in Athens how he seemed to have made use of local teachers. Paul tells the Athenians that God has created everyone; a concept that even there local poets recognized when they said, "We are (God's) offspring" (Acts 17:28). But Paul isn't aligning himself with their poets. He is merely illustrating that God's revelation in Jesus wasn't too difficult for them to understand. No, Paul is not relying on the teachings of others but is instead relying only on what Jesus had previously taught him.

And in our account today, we see that Jesus teaches from God and when he does it shows that he is unaligned with any human institution. To be sure, human institutions are useful and themselves created by God, but their purpose isn't permanent. They are

grossly imperfect. So when Jesus speaks, he speaks perfection and unchanging truth. The people recognize it as such, but they also know that Jesus' teaching doesn't come from expected sources of learning. Why is this so important?

¹⁴ Not until halfway through the festival did Jesus go up to the temple courts and begin to teach. ¹⁵ The Jews there were amazed and asked, "How did this man get such learning without having been taught?"

¹⁶ Jesus answered, "My teaching is not my own. It comes from the one who sent me. ¹⁷ Anyone who chooses to do the will of God will find out whether my teaching comes from God or whether I speak on my own.

2.) Jesus Sought His Father's Glory, Not His Own

In John 7:18, Jesus declares that when someone speaks they do so to glorify someone or something. If after Jesus had healed the blind, Jesus quoted a famous rabbi as support for what he had done, that rabbi would take part in the glory of God shown through Jesus. If Jesus had quoted works and teachings of the Sadducees, while doing the miracles he performed, he would have been well supported by them, even protected. If Jesus would have aligned himself with the Pharisees, he wouldn't have had to run from them when they sought to kill him. But Jesus didn't come to glorify the Sadducees or the Pharisees. Jesus came only to glorify his Heavenly Father. That is why he was able to show signs of the power of heaven. Jesus came only to speak what his Heavenly Father told him to speak. What is the result of speaking and glorifying only what his Heavenly Father had told him?

¹⁸ Whoever speaks on their own does so to gain personal glory, but he who seeks the glory of the one who sent him is a man of truth; there is nothing false about him.

3.) Jesus Sought God's Righteousness, Not Merely Societal Norms of Righteousness

In John 7:19–24, we see that Jesus ministers to those who are not his friends. Indeed, many listening are unconscious of the fact that they will soon want Jesus murdered. Why? Because Jesus is speaking and acting in a way that doesn't fit the societal norms of any religious or moral institution they have become affiliated with. Jesus is doing good. They recognize this. But Jesus speaks from the Heavenly Father and from the Father comes the judgment, "not one of you keeps the law." Through Jesus, we see that God doesn't align more with the Sadducees nor the Pharisees. God doesn't favour the men over the women. God doesn't favour the freeborn over the slave. His judgement is just and true. No one keeps the law. All are sinners.

Jesus shows a dangerous righteousness. Someone who speaks only what God desires. Someone who only aligns with God and His kingdom. Someone who only seeks to

glorify one teacher. It would seem easier to glorify the teachings of others. This way Jesus would gain some support from within the community. But if he had, what power would he have had? Could he have multiplied the fish and bread or would he have been just as weak as the religious leaders in Israel, only heaping onto their followers laws and rules that they themselves weren't able to bear?

So Jesus shows how dangerous it really is to speak only what God has given and to glorify Him alone. It means speaking to all of humanity's institutions and calling for repentance through His Son in order to be made right and at peace with God. But without seeking friendship or alignment in this world, all would soon want Jesus dead. And for those whom the Spirit was guiding to follow Jesus, for the disciples, it meant following a leader that would put their lives in danger.

The disciples are seeing the cost for following God through His Son. They must speak only the words that the Father has given the Son and they must rely on the Spirit to guide and empower them to do so. Their lives were becoming more engaged in the world, much more than they had ever done or imagined. But in doing so, they sought no friendship with the institutions of the world nor in glorifying them. To do so was to glorify this world and the people within it. No, for the disciples they are learning through Jesus to glorify God alone and to live a life of righteousness given through the Son by the Spirit.

¹⁹ Has not Moses given you the law? Yet not one of you keeps the law. Why are you trying to kill me?"

²⁰ "You are demon-possessed," the crowd answered. "Who is trying to kill you?"

²¹ Jesus said to them, "I did one miracle, and you are all amazed. ²² Yet, because Moses gave you circumcision (though actually it did not come from Moses, but from the patriarchs), you circumcise a boy on the Sabbath.²³ Now if a boy can be circumcised on the Sabbath so that the law of Moses may not be broken, why are you angry with me for healing a man's whole body on the Sabbath? ²⁴ Stop judging by mere appearances, but instead judge correctly."

IV. Application

What is our application for today?

1.) We Are Called...

Every morning that the Lord gives us is His. Each day, He calls us to follow Him. He provides us His Son to restore our relationship with Him. Now we are one with Him. We are His permanent family. He provides us with His Spirit to guide us and to keep us

united with Himself and the grace He has given to us in Jesus. We no longer live for ourselves for we were rescued and redeemed.

We don't belong to this world. We are called to live out the life of Jesus in us to serve and even to sacrifice our lives in that service. We don't have to align ourselves with community institutions no matter how influential they may seem to us. Our obedience to God's guidance in our lives supersedes loyalty to any institution whether it be political or religious.

Many of you know that I was raised in a Roman Catholic home, but when I heard the Gospel of Jesus' death for my sin, I started attending a Protestant church. I didn't attend the Protestant church because it was perfect. I didn't attend because I wanted to align myself with that church. I went because I felt God bringing me there to teach me more about Himself.

I have a friend in a similar situation. He was born in a Muslim family in Sri Lanka. He moved here and eventually met his wife who is a Christian. He tells me that he attends her church because he wants to support her. He told me that because he is zealous for God, he seeks to learn about Him from others outside of his religious community. My prayer is not that he would join our church so much as he would be united with God through His Son and be given guidance in this life through His Spirit. My friend needs to be loyal to God alone and not to the religious institution we create here in Milford.

2.) We Are Called to Glorify God...

At the beginning of today's sermon, I spoke a bit about the need for Baptist leaders to decide what to do about the requiring vaccination certificates to attend church services. We know that the government is concerned that by not being vaccinated we are putting others, especially the vulnerable at risk. Their concern is that we love our neighbour enough to get vaccinated. Their concern is that we love our neighbour enough by not putting them at risk in large gatherings by being indiscriminate with those who choose not to get their vaccination. Do we glorify their position?

There are others, including leaders, in the Baptist church who would argue that we should never prohibit or treat differently anyone who would come to hear God's Word. They might argue that the church has never in its history prohibited people from hearing the Gospel preached at church. Their concern is that the church should serve all people and should never discriminate. Their concern is that the church should never ostracize those that are considered of the family of faith. Their concern is that even if one soul is precious enough to receive with open arms regardless of their being vaccinated. Do we glorify these people, these brothers and sisters in the Lord?

Or is God calling us to glorify Him. Is there difference between the glory of the government, members of our institutional church and God Himself?

3.) We Are Called to Glorify God's Righteousness

Is there a dangerous righteousness for us in Jesus to live out here in Milford? We recognize that the government's position to protect others from harm seems good. We recognize those in a church that would want to be open to everyone. What is Jesus calling us to do? How is God glorified in us to our community in Milford?

Maybe our first task isn't to align with others right away. Although both positions seem good, we must remember that by following God, we may find ourselves not aligning with any institution. Why? Because we know that no one can judge another. We are all sinners. And yet isn't there an element of judgement against those who don't get vaccinated? Don't some institutions talk about them as if they were the only stubborn sinners in society? And isn't there a bit of judgement on the others side? Don't some in the church act as if the government is filled with devious people while we in the church are holy and pure? Maybe Jesus is calling us and equipping us to be humble and to serve all, to serve both the vaccinated and unvaccinated.

Maybe our task is to serve those in the community who might come to our church by keeping them as safe as we can. And maybe our task is to serve those who need the church but who don't feel it's safe to be vaccinated. Maybe it's Jesus' call to do both. How do we do it? Well, we have the Spirit of God in us and we are united with God in His Son. Certainly, He will give us His wisdom, righteousness and glory so that those around us see God's Kingdom and not just another human institution like all the rest. What is Jesus saying to you? That is the most important question to ask yourself. Follow him, walk in his righteousness and our Milford community may see a more glorious response to those provided by the institutions that desire to lead us.

V. Conclusion

1.) We Are Called...

2.) We Are Called to Glorify God...

3.) We Are Called to Glorify God's Righteousness