

Order in the Midst of Chaos

John 7

Our chapter begins with a debate between Jesus and His brothers as to whether He should go to the Feast of Tabernacles (tents) in Jerusalem. This was the third of the three major Jewish feasts of the year. The first was Passover which celebrated the gift of the Exodus at the Red Sea. The second was Pentecost which celebrated the gift of the Law at Sinai. The third was the Feast of Tents which celebrated the gifts of provision in the wilderness. Israel remembered God's provision in the wilderness by pitching tents and living in them for the seven days of the feast. This was often experienced as the most joyous of the feasts. Imagine the children who had to move into the backyard and live in a tent for a whole week. Camping out is always a great adventure and this feast brought together religious observance with family recreation.

Jesus' brothers (still in Galilee) felt that Jesus should use the opportunity of the feast when so many of the Jews would be present for self-promotion. Actually the great crowd expected at the feast was exponentially greater because everyone was expecting Jesus to make an appearance. The word about Jesus was out, specifically, the recent miracle of the bread and fish would certainly resonate at a feast whose purpose was to celebrate God's provision for His people in the wilderness. Then, the animosity among the religious elite toward Jesus was very well known. The probability of a clash between Jesus and the temple powers seemed likely and if there is going to be a fight, who wants to miss it?

In the context of this contest between Jesus and His opponents and defenders and doubters, Jesus made some very pithy remarks that are worthy

of deeper thought. It is to these sayings of Jesus that we now turn our attention.

Notice first that the conflict between Jesus and His brothers was over time and circumstance. They thought that Jesus should act now to gain the attention and notoriety that His miracles deserved. Jesus answer was not yet and not that way. We all run into the frustration of God's timing vs. our timing. Our timing is usually

yesterday and God's is most likely tomorrow. Put another way, We say that when we pray, God will answer by saying Yes, No, or wait. We tend to dread the "wait" answer the most. Actually, the wait answer should be welcomed for it means that God shares our concern, that He is also deeply concerned for our general welfare, that He is paying attention to the state of our lives and has our best in mind, that He has His own specific priorities in respect to our needs, and that He is working to put us together in the way that He knows will work out for our good. Any answer that God gives should be welcomed because it is His answer. We should learn to love God's timing because it is His timing.

We can also be very impatient about our circumstances. If you don't have a job and you need one or if your health is bad or if your marriage is unhappy, or if your car breaks down too much or if your boss is mean or if your finances are upside down, God is in any and every circumstance. You are not alone. If God is with you and if He hears you and if He loves you and if He knows you, and if He comforts you, and if He is always working to meet your deepest needs, isn't this enough. Where would you rather be, if ideal circumstances on your own or in difficulties with God at your side? When we complain about our

circumstances we are choosing option #2. At one time, when I was young, an older preacher advised me to not worry about my future in the ministry. "God knows where you are," He said. His advice was golden but missed because my problem then was that I was not content where I was. In order to be satisfied with the conviction that "God knows where I am." I have to be happy to be where I am. Wherever you are, there is every reason from a spiritual and Biblical perspective to be happy to be exactly where you are.

Upon arriving at the feast, Jesus came out publicly when he was ready. Everyone had been talking about Him but in whispers since they did not want to become part of the drama. They just wanted to see the drama when it happened. As Jesus taught His detractors whispered that He was unqualified to teach the Law since He had no formal training. They were the experts. Jesus asked, "Did not Moses give you the Law, yet none of you keeps the Law? Why do you seek to kill Me? Ironic, right? The very people who complained that Jesus did not know the Law well enough to teach it were plotting to kill Him, an act which would break

the sixth commandment. This demonstrated that their commitment to the Law was one of convenience rather than conviction. The conviction that the Law was given by God as a standard by which all believers are called to live would know that it would never be necessary to break the Law in order to achieve God's best and God's way is always best. But before you condemn the opponents of Jesus you might face the same question. If you believe in God, why do you lie? In our minds we rationalize our sin, whatever form it might take. We might believe that our cause is just and that the particular compromise we are making is necessary and worth it for whatever gain we

have in mind but this is the devil's deception. We become the very thing that we fear the most.

The other thing in the air was the accusation that Jesus had broken the Sabbath Day by healing the man who was by the pool called Bethesda. Jesus had healed the man and He told him to take up his bed and walk. The controversy was ignited when the man was confronted for carrying his bed on the Sabbath. Jesus argued for what He had done by pointing out that when Moses commanded that all males be circumcised on the 8th day he had subjugated the Sabbath commandment to that of circumcision. This introduced the factor of principle in that whatever could be considered more important than circumcision would also by extension be more important than Sabbath observance. Jesus point was made in the context of "everybody knows this." So our lesson is that Jesus expects us to be well versed in the Scriptures. We are not spiritually healthy if we are not eager to know the Word and if we do not pursue every opportunity to do so that we can.

When they were speculating as to who Jesus was and as to where He was from Jesus answered in terms of the ultimate rather than in the earthly. When they said, "Can anything good come from Nazareth?" Jesus did not answer that He had been born in Bethlehem just as Micah prophesied but instead He said, "I have not come of Myself, but He who sent Me is true, whom you do not know. But I know Him, for I am from Him, and He sent Me." Notice the intimate way in which Jesus speaks of the Father. "I know Him. I am from Him. He sent me." Jesus presented Himself as the link between ourselves and God. The intimacy that Jesus spoke of is what God intends.

Then, on the last day of the feast, Jesus cried out, "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." Jesus had promised living water to the woman at the well at Sychar in Samaria. He was the living water and when she drank of Him by believing in Him the living water flowed through her to the entire village. This is how it works. The thirsty who come to Jesus and believe taste of His living water. It satisfies so completely that it is not containable. It overflows into the lives of others.