

Portraits of Unbelief

John 7

- TIME TO MAKE A DECISION

Public Celebrity or Public Enemy? (v.1-13)

- The first divided opinion is whether Jesus is a public celebrity or a public enemy.
 - We see that in v.1-13
- Jesus' ministry at that time was in Galilee because the Jewish leaders based in Jerusalem wanted to kill him.
 - But it was the Festival of Tabernacles.
 - This was a big camping festival.
 - To remember their time in the desert, Jews lived in makeshift huts outside Jerusalem.
 - This was apparently the most popular festival of the year.
- Jesus brothers come to him to convince him to go.
- READ V.3-4
 - You can see their logic.
 - Jerusalem will be packed.
 - You want to be the Messiah, you can't hide away up here in Galilee.

- Go down there and do your miracles.
- Become a *public celebrity*.
- But what is fascinating is what comes next.
 - “For even his own brothers did not believe in him.”
 - They said this “for” or you could translate *because* his own brothers didn’t believe
- Why would unbelief cause them to want to publicise himself
 - Perhaps they were speaking sarcastically “Oh go off to Jerusalem and prove it”
 - Unlikely.
 - No one denied Jesus did the miracles.
 - Even books written by Jews outside the bible talk of Jesus using demonic magic.
 - It’s unlikely they wouldn’t know he could do miracles
 - But we’ve seen countless times miracles do not equal belief.
 - It’s the same here
- What’s going on here is the brothers think Jesus is a miracle-working messiah.
 - They are happy to a celebrities’ brothers.
 - But they’ve failed to understand who Jesus really is.

- Jesus says to them “My time is not yet here; for you any time will do.”
 - You might think this is like when Jesus talks about his hour with Mary, referring to his cross.
 - But this is a different word.
 - Jesus is simply saying “It’s not time for me to go yet.”
 - He will go, but on a schedule.
- He explains why “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.”
 - The brothers can go whenever, but Jesus can’t.
 - He’d get lynched.
 - Far from being a public celebrity, he is a public enemy
 - Why? Because he tells the world they are evil
 - People don’t like that
- In Jerusalem, this is what we see:
 - Some of the people v.12 are saying “he is a good man”.

- Others are saying “No, he deceives the people”.
- Jesus does not get an easy ride.
- He can’t waltz into Jerusalem as a Public Celebrity.
- Indeed the leaders are trying to kill him.
- The brothers have not understood Jesus’ true message
 - Many modern Christians are the same.
 - They expect Jesus to be popular.
 - They expect him to be welcomed by all.
- Perhaps like the brothers they’ll feel the need to give Jesus some hints
 - “Jesus don’t talk about that. Jesus you need to get on board with this agenda.”
 - But they don’t realise Jesus always causes friction with the world because he says the works of the world are evil.
 - No one wants to hear that.
 - Jesus will never be a celebrity.
 - He will always be an enemy
- Some of you are unbelieving like the brothers.
 - You like Jesus.
 - You think he could have potential.
 - But you think you would do slightly better than him.

- Tone down this “the world is evil” Jesus.
- Get with the programme and you can be popular.
- You’re surprised when the message of Jesus meets with rejection.
- Whenever churches cause offence, you imagine it must be that they’ve been too aggressive, rather than faithfully presenting the message of Jesus.
- This is a form of unbelief.
- Because when we really believe in Jesus we recognise his time is the right time.
- And his message is the right message.

Demon-Possessed or God Sent? (v.14-31)

- Next step, is v.14-31.
 - And we asks is Jesus *demon-possessed* or *God sent*?
- Jesus is teaching and the crowd are amazed v.15 “How did this man get such learning without having been taught?”
 - Most people studied under a famous Rabbi, but this Jesus came out of nowhere.
 - Jesus tells them where he learnt.
 - V.16-18 READ
- The teaching comes from God.

- The will of God, we learnt in chapter 6, is to believe the Son
- If you do that, you will find out where it comes from.
- I'm not here to bolster my reputation (we saw that with his unwillingness to go up at first).
- I'm here to glorify God.
- Jesus is claiming to be *God sent*.
- But then the conversation shifts v.19 (READ)
 - What is Jesus on about?
 - The crowd look at each other v.20 ““You are demon-possessed,” the crowd answered. “Who is trying to kill you?””
- Jesus then explains.
 - There is a price over his head because he did a miracle on the Sabbath.
 - We read about that in chapter 5.
 - He healed a man on the Sabbath and the Jewish leaders said this was work and wanted him killed.
- But these people haven't thought it through.
 - Circumcision was the way a boy was welcomed into the family of the Jews.
 - He was circumcised on the 8th day.

- Now if that was a Sabbath, it was still done.
- Well if an exception can be made for circumcision, which heals a part of the body, why can't Jesus heal the man's whole body?
- V.24 READ
- That is "make decisions based on the evidence.
 - "Think it through.
- This causes a debate in v.25-27.
 - Is this the one they're trying to kill?
 - Well he's speaking publicly here and they're doing nothing.
 - Maybe the leaders think he's the messiah.
 - But then, we know this guy, but we don't know who he's from.
- v.28-29 READ
- Jesus tries to push them beyond what they see.
 - Yes Jesus is a known quantity.
 - But the authority of Jesus doesn't come from being known or not known.
 - It comes from being sent by the authority of God.
 - These people don't know him, how could anyone claim to know God?

- But Jesus knows him because ultimately he isn't from Galilee or even Bethlehem.
- He has come from heaven.
- So here are the options.
 - Is he demon-possessed or God sent?
 - He's definitely claiming a healthy dose of authority.
 - Maybe he has a demon and he's been sent with demonic powers to trick them.
 - Perhaps that's why he can do miracles.
 - Or maybe he is actually from God.
 - Maybe his miracle was on the Sabbath because God's law doesn't say that's wrong.
 - Maybe he's actually sent from God and has his authority.
- Notice how extreme the options are.
 - But that is how it is with Jesus.
 - Jesus has a tendency to divide.
 - Some look at him and say "He's demon-possessed".
 - In our society they would probably prefer to say "This is a dangerous belief."
 - Jesus has always faced that charge, untrue though it is.
 - But you can see why.

- How can someone claim to be from God and be a good thing for the world?
- Most people who think that are evil.
- But there is one option.
 - Maybe he really is from God.
 - What do you think?
 - Demon-possessed or God sent?

Deceiver or Messiah? (v.32-52)

- The final choice is the ultimate one.
 - Is Jesus a Deceiver?
 - Or is he the Messiah?
- We didn't read this section so I'll read it in full as we go through. READ V.32-36
- There's the usual confusion.
 - He speaks of going up to heaven where he will be with his father (somewhere they cannot go)
 - They assume he must be going out of the country.
 - They are still thinking of him like any other leader.
 - But he isn't any other leader.
 - He is something much greater.
- That comes up on the last day of the feast.
 - READ V37-39

- Jesus gives his familiar free welcome to all.
 - Anyone who is thirsty and wants to drink come to me.
 - John explains for us that this is the Spirit.
 - The Spirit hadn't been poured out on Jesus' disciples, and wouldn't be until he returned.
 - Jesus says that the Scriptures speak of this.
 - They say rivers of living water come from him.
- One of the big parts of this event was a water pouring ceremony
 - This was based on various passages about life giving water
 - So for Jesus to say he gives water is for him to say: this feast points to me.
- It would be like me getting up on Easter Sunday morning and saying
 - “Do you know why you get chocolate eggs at Easter?”
 - “It's to point you to me. As chocolate is sweet, so I can give you the sweetness of God's Spirit from on high.”
 - No ones going to turn and say “Ooo what a nice illustration Tim gave there.”

- No, you'd be saying "Who does he think he is?"
- And that's exactly what the people ask. There are some debates. Let's read v.40-44 (READ)
- What did people think?
 - Many thought he was a prophet, a man who spoke from God but a man nonetheless.
 - Others said "He is the Messiah" the coming king foretold in the Bible.
- But there's a problem. Jesus comes from Galilee.
 - The Messiah doesn't come from Galilee, he was supposed to be born in Bethlehem.
 - Now you and I know of course that while Jesus grew up in Galilee and ministered there, he was born in Bethlehem.
 - So there's a question there.
 - And some of them even wanted to seize him and have him put to death.

- But once again no one laid a hand on him.
- The scene then changes and we're in the courts of the priests. V.45-49 (READ)
- This is hilarious.
 - It is the classic evil villains sending out their henchmen who do a bad job.
 - These temple guards go out and decide no one speaks like he does, so they won't take him to prison.
 - The Pharisees jeer.
 - Oh this man has deceived lots of people and now he has deceived you too.
 - Have any of the rulers or Pharisees believed him?
 - The better class of people? No.
 - These people don't know anything about the law!
 - Any ruler of the people would condemn him as we do?
- At that point it gets a little awkward.
 - Because there is a Pharisee who does believe Jesus, at least on some level.
 - READ V.50-51
- You may remember Nicodemus from chapter 3.

- Nicodemus is the Pharisee who came to Jesus on a night and was told “You must be born again”.
- As we go through the book Nicodemus pops up 3 times.
- He’s almost a picture of where John wants us to be.
- In Chapter 3 he comes to Jesus tentitatively in the night, now he is tentative in his association with Jesus.
- By the end he takes the disgrace of being associated with Jesus when he died.
- But right now he asks a simple question.
- Are we going to condemn this man before we actually let him give evidence?
- Well this rattles the rest of the Pharisees.
 - They’ve just said “None of us believe in” and then Nicodemus starts to question them.
 - They rattle off the same comment of the crowds in v.52. READ
- Now there’s a whole heap that happens in these verses.
 - But it basically comes down to two options.
 - Is he a deceiver or the messiah?

- He could be a deceiver.
 - He wants to make a name for himself.
 - He doesn't fulfil the Old Testament prophecies.
 - He persuades weak minded people that he is God's son.
 - But no one in their right mind believes him.
- There'd be plenty saying that today.
 - It's a different argument.
 - But it's the same attitude.
 - "Any educated person knows that this world wasn't made by a God?"
 - "How could a man be divine? No one in their right mind believes that do they?"
 - Perhaps that same voice whispers in your head.
 - "Am I just being played for a fool to believe that Jesus is God?"
- Or is he the Messiah?
 - The guards went to arrest him but went home convinced.
 - Nicodemus was a Pharisee yet even he started to wonder.
 - And maybe you think that to.

- You assumed those in churches were away with the fairies.
- But actually, some of them know what they're talking about.
- And listening to this Jesus, there is something in the words he says that seem different.
- It's the same thought process going on 2000 years later.
 - Is he a deceiver?
 - Or is he the Messiah?
 - That's *the* question

Conclusion

- We've been studying John since December now.
 - We're going to take a break now and revisit soon.
 - Do you remember reading what John's purpose for the book was?
 - John 20:30-31 "Jesus performed many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not recorded in this book. But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and

that by believing you may have life in his name.”

- We’ve seen in this chapter, and all the way through, that Jesus divides opinion.
 - John is writing to convince you to be one of those who believes.
- Is he a public enemy or a public celebrity?
 - Well we’ve seen all the way through he has been rejected.
 - Even though he’s done nothing wrong, the world hates him because he convicts it of evil.
 - Has he convicted you?
 - Jesus says you are a sinner in need of a saviour?
 - Are you going to believe that?
- Is he demon-possessed or God sent?
 - Could any mere man do the miracles he does?
 - Yet what about his claims.
 - He’s made very clear he’s been sent from God.
 - Indeed he even is God.
 - Are you going to write him off as a lunatic or come to believe he really is who he says he is.

- Is he a deceiver or the Messiah?
 - Perhaps this is a trick that has fooled people for two thousand years.
 - Or perhaps he is the Messiah.
 - He is the one who can save us.
- Jesus calls us to have right judgement.
 - So study this man.
 - Look at his gospel.
 - Look at the evidence.
 - See if he is who he claims to be.
- But right judgement is not enough.
 - He calls out to the crowd, “Let anyone who is thirsty come to me and drink”.
 - It’s not enough to say “That Jesus isn’t so bad.”
 - You need to come to him as the water of life.
 - Come to him to have your deepest thirst quenched.
 - Believe in him and you will have eternal life.
- What about if you’ve done that?
 - Well today we come to the Lord’s table.
 - We come once again to eat the bread and wine that remind us of Jesus.

- We come to him as thirsty needy people saying “I am a sinner and I need feeding once again.”
- Come to the table with open hands, believing this one really is the one who saves you.
- Jesus says “Let anyone who is thirsty come to me and drink”.
- The question is will you come and drink?