

Insights from Jesus' Ministry

By David Harrell

Bible Text: John 7:1-8
Preached on: Sunday, June 15, 2014

This morning we find ourselves in John 7 so if you will take your Bibles and turn to John's gospel, chapter 7. We will be looking at insights from Jesus' ministry which I've used as the title of my discourse to you this morning. Let me read verse 1-9 that we will be focusing on here today.

“1 After these things Jesus was walking in Galilee, for He was unwilling to walk in Judea because the Jews were seeking to kill Him. 2 Now the feast of the Jews, the Feast of Booths, was at hand. 3 Therefore His brothers said to Him, 'Depart from here and go into Judea, so that Your disciples also may behold Your works which You are doing. 4 For no one does anything in secret when he himself seeks to be known publicly. If You do these things, show Yourself to the world.' 5 For not even His brothers were believing in Him. 6 So Jesus said to them, 'My time is not yet at hand, but your time is always opportune. 7 The world cannot hate you, but it hates Me because I testify of it, that its deeds are evil. 8 Go up to the feast yourselves; I do not go up to this feast because My time has not yet fully come.' 9 Having said these things to them, He stayed in Galilee.”

I am profoundly fascinated with the life and the ministry of the Lord Jesus Christ. Not only because he is the second person of the Triune Godhead, but also because this same Triune God is shaping me into his image. Likewise, those of you that know and love Christ, he's making you to be more like him. According to Romans 8:28 we learn that right now we know that God “causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to his purpose.” And what is his purpose? To ultimately conform us into the image of Christ. The very next verse says, “For whom he foreknew, he also predestined to become conformed to the image of his Son.” It's an amazing thought to me, to know that God wants to make every believer into the likeness of his Son, that he wants to adorn us, his children, with the very glory of his beloved Son, our Savior.

Now, while the ultimate fulfillment of this will not occur until we receive our glorified bodies, we know biblically that the Spirit is gradually performing this work in us and one of the ways he does this is through the revelation of his word to his people which is going to happen once again this morning. In fact, Jesus prayed to the Father in John 17:17, “Sanctify them in the truth, thy word is truth,” and it is this glorious process of sanctification that we are experiencing right now by the power of the Spirit and his word and as long as we remain on this earth, we enjoy this unseen progressive miracle of sanctification. When a person comes to Christ, we know that the veil of unbelief and his

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spiritual perception is now lifted, the veil is gone, he now sees clearly. He sees the glory of God in Christ, in fact, Paul said in 2 Corinthians 3:18 that “we all with unveiled face beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord are being transformed.” Literally, there is a metamorphosis that is occurring here; we are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory. Practically speaking, the more we learn about Christ, the more we become like him.

Paul tells us that we are transformed. Again, this metamorphosis occurs by the renewing of our mind and according to Colossians 3:10 he says we are to “put on the new self which is being renewed in knowledge after the image of its Creator.” So the word is the fuel, the Bible is the fuel that causes us to grow, that causes this new self to become more conformed to the image of the one who created us, the Lord Jesus Christ and as we come to this historical narrative about Christ, if you are attentive and if you humble yourself before the word, the Spirit will use this to make you a little bit more like our Savior and one day, Jesus Christ, according to Philippians 3:21, will “transform the body of our humble state into conformity with the body of his glory by the exertion of the power that he has even to subject all things to himself.”

So, every time I read about the one who bore my sins in his body, every time I contemplate the Incarnate Word in whose image I am gradually being conformed, the one who will one day finish this metamorphosis by the exertion of his power, I get real excited and I also get real convicted. I want to be more like Jesus, don't you? In fact, I have a little plaque up here on this pulpit, we put it there many years ago when the church was first started to be a reminder to me and to anyone that stands behind this sacred desk. It says this: We would see Jesus. I don't want you to see me, I'm just the old clay pot, if you will, that holds the diamonds of the gospel. I have to decrease, far more even than John the Baptist, but I have to get out of the way so that he might increase. In fact, Paul said in 2 Corinthians 4:7, “We have this treasure in earthen vessels,” the treasure of the gospel. He says “that the surpassing greatness of the power may be of God and not from ourselves.” So I want to be more like Jesus; I want you to be more like Jesus. Therefore, like Paul said in Galatians 4:19, “I'm again in labor that Christ might be formed in you.” What a joy it is, therefore, to proclaim the unsearchable riches of Christ set forth in his word.”

This morning, I wish to draw your attention to three categories that emerge out of these first nine verses of chapter 7, as well as some other parallel passages from the synoptic gospels that will provide for us some additional insights into our glorious Redeemer. We're going to look at his priorities in ministry, his passion for obedience, and his perspective of the world. So, join with me and let's return, once again, to the beautiful countryside in Galilee and join Jesus and his disciples and here we can begin to examine:

1. his priorities in ministry. Notice verse 1 of chapter 7, “After these things Jesus was

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walking in Galilee,” which, by the way, means he continued to go around, he continued to travel around and minister in Galilee, “for He was unwilling to walk in Judea because the Jews were seeking to kill Him.” Now, the little phrase “after these things” refers to events that occurred over the last couple of days recorded in chapter 6. You will recall, the miraculous feeding of the vast multitude on what is now called the Golan Heights, then his return to Capernaum, his subsequent discourse in the synagogue that was so offensive to the Jewish leaders and even the vast crowd that wanted to make him king, a sermon that reduced his followers from about 20,000 to 12 in a day. It's important for you to understand that these events took place at the time of Passover which would have been around April. This is what we see in John 6 and now we come to John 7 and we see that the Feast of Tabernacles is at hand, that takes place in October so, therefore, there's a six month interval that Jesus is traveling around in Galilee with his disciples.

Now, John doesn't tell us what he did but the other gospel writers do tell us. For example, we know that he goes to the Jews first, then he goes to the Gentiles. Mark 7 tells us that he goes way north, even outside Galilee into the region of Phoenicia to the coastal cities of Tyre and then about 25 miles north of that would have been the city of Sidon and then Matthew tells us that he goes over to Caesarea Philippi which is another 25 miles or so from Sidon and then he goes all the way down to the southeast side of the Sea of Galilee to the Gentile region of Decapolis, a ten city region there which would have been another 70 miles from Caesarea Philippi. By the way, these are predominantly Gentile areas that he went to where virtually no one knew him. If you add up the direct distances to these cities and consider the travel within the various regions that they would have made, Jesus and the disciples would have walked over 250 miles during that six month period of time.

What did they do during that six month journey? Well, we know that he cast out a demon from a little girl in Tyre. You may recall that he healed a deaf man in Sidon. There was another incident where he there fed a multitude of 4,000. He did other miraculous healings and it was also during this time that he first announced to his disciples that he was going to die and rise again from the dead, Matthew 16. This was also the period of time in which the transfiguration took place where three of his disciples saw him in all of his glory: Peter, James and John; a preview of Jesus' future exaltation and the coming kingdom. But what we learn, especially from Matthew's gospel, is that Jesus' primary emphasis during this time was discipleship and if you look at his ministry, this is his primary emphasis throughout. This is very instructive in helping us understand priorities in ministry from which we can develop a biblical philosophy of ministry. Jesus was far more concerned with personal discipleship than he was speaking to vast audiences. I want you to think about it, in John 6, there are two days here where he's preaching: one to a large audience of about 20,000, the next day to a smaller audience there in the synagogue in Capernaum and then the rest of the time, we see from that point on to now here in John 7, he's discipling his core men. His priority was never attracting large crowds. He didn't

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rent out the local coliseums and theaters and do a vast advertising campaign to get people to come. I'm not saying that that's necessarily wrong but that was certainly not his priority. He was not interested in amassing large crowds, nor was he solely dedicated to public preaching like many preachers today that prefer a pulpit over a porch, if you will, prefer to preach publicly rather than to spend time discipling others.

Now, to be sure, he attracted large crowds because of his miraculous works and Scripture reveals how they came to him for all of the wrong reasons but what is fascinating is, when they did come to him, when they clamored after him, what did he do? He boldly proclaimed the truth that they didn't want to hear and they abandoned him. This is very instructive to me and I hope to you. That's what faithful preaching should do. The way I think about it, faithful preaching of the word of God should separate the phony from the faithful. It should evangelize the lost and edify the saved. On several occasions over the course of my ministry here at Calvary Bible Church, I have had very-meaning but I feel, ignorant people tell me as one man did, "Son, you need to tone down your rhetoric." I'll never forget that phrase. "You need to tone down your rhetoric," and he said, "More people would want to be a part of our church if you would just tone down your rhetoric," and I had him really explain that and what that basically meant was: avoid controversial topics. Another person told me, "Emphasizing controversial doctrines divides people." My response was, "Yes, that's why I do it. That's why Jesus did it. It separates truth from error." So, when you think about this, we realize that our calling, for example, as pastors, as preachers, is not to attract a large audience, that's up to the Lord. My calling and every preacher's calling is to preach the word and disciple the people. My calling and yours is to go make disciples, not church-attenders. There's a big difference. Matthew 28:19, Jesus said, "Go therefore and make disciples." He goes on to say, "teaching them to observe all that I commanded you."

Now, I rejoice knowing that those whom the Father has given to the Son will respond to the truth, they will be saved but in reality, only a humble few will respond to that truth and only a few of those even will respond to discipleship and shepherding, the rest will probably get mad and leave. I've seen this over and over again, even at our church. Paul described this in 1 Corinthians 3, these are people that are "men of flesh, babes in Christ." He talks about them and he explains how they are fleshly, he says. In other words, they're controlled by their fallen flesh; they come to the church but they're controlled by their fallen flesh. They are characterized, he said, by jealousy, by strife and therefore they are unable to receive, he says, the solid spiritual food that he wants to give them. To say it a little bit differently: people will gobble up like a baby, they will gobble up the ice cream and the sweet pudding of the basic gospel message but they will spit out the carrots and the green beans of deeper doctrine, especially when it's applied to them personally. How many times I've seen abusive husbands in the church rejoice over Christ's sacrifice on their behalf and the great truths of the gospel but then when you

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confront them that they need to love their wives as Christ loved the church and live out that same sacrifice in the context of marriage, they get all upset.

Now, back to Jesus' priorities in ministry. We know that a clear presentation of the truth is going to profoundly offend the vast majority but, remember, it is the power of God unto salvation for a small few. Jesus makes this so clear in Luke 13 and Matthew 7. There the true gospel is described as “the narrow gate,” a gate that is difficult to enter in because of man's pride, because of his love for sin, because of the opposition of the world and Satan and so forth. In verse 13 of Matthew 7, the Lord says, “Enter by the narrow gate.” Luke says, “strive to enter by the narrow gate for the gate is wide and the way is broad that leads to destruction and many are those who enter by it for the gate is small and the way is narrow that leads to life and few are those who find it.”

Again, don't think that preaching isn't important, we're commanded to do this. This is modeled by Christ and his apostles: it is very important to edify the saints, evangelize the lost but preaching is only a small part of what is to be done in the context of ministry. Jesus along with other men that served with him, devoted much time to discipleship. I think of a number of men, one is John MacArthur, one of the greatest and most listened to expositional preachers in church history and he said this, “Discipleship must also be a priority for the church. The Lord did not commission the church to attract large crowds but to go and make disciples,” Matthew 28:19. “Likewise,” he says, “Paul charged the young pastor, Timothy, in 2 Timothy 2:2, 'The things which you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses, entrust these to faithful men who will be able to teach others also.’” Finally he says, “The measure of any church's success is not the size of its congregation but the depth of its discipleship.” This, of course, is one of the main reasons why we have called Pastor Joe Miller here to help us be more effective in this area. This is why a number of you are in the process of being trained in the area of discipleship so you can be more effective in helping to make disciples and teach them. But not just teach them, teach them to observe all that Jesus has commanded. Discipleship is part of the one anothering ministries that we're all called to do. This is one of the ways that we present our bodies as a living and a holy sacrifice as Paul said. So, here we see the motive and the content of Jesus' preaching ministry and the high priority he places on discipleship. As a footnote: I find it interesting, he pours his life into 12 men, one of them is a devil and out of, shall we say, that 11, he really pours his life into three, Peter, James and John. And through those three men, I should say, those 11 men, the church is birthed. Look what has happened. The idea is you go deep with a few, not wide with a lot, not shallow with a lot. Concentration equals multiplication.

We move from his priorities in ministry, secondly, to his passion for obedience. This is a constant theme throughout the gospels but I find it being uniquely manifested here in this text. In verse 1 at the end, he says, “He was unwilling to walk in Judea because the Jews

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were seeking to kill Him.” I want to take you back a little bit: in the first five chapters of John's gospel we see Jesus going back and forth, south to north, north to south, from Judea to Galilee, back and forth, back and forth, and then between John 6 and 7, Jesus has spent about a year here in Galilee because the Jewish leaders want him dead. We learn a couple of things from this: one certainly is that Jesus did not needlessly expose himself to danger. He avoided his enemies, in fact, we will see this even more vividly in John 11, beginning in verse 53. There we read, “So from that day on they planned together to kill Him. Therefore Jesus no longer continued to walk publicly among the Jews, but went away from there to the country near the wilderness, into a city called Ephraim; and there He stayed with the disciples.” Of course we know that about six months later, he deliberately walks right into the lion's lair after raising Lazarus from the dead. He triumphantly enters Jerusalem and then within a few days, he is crucified.

Now, what determined all of this for Jesus in terms of what he would do and when he would do it? Well, the Father's perfect will and timing. He was passionate to do the Father's will which, by the way, as we see here, is linked to specific times when he would do certain things, times that were ordained in eternity past as we will see. But first, I want you to notice something beginning in verse 2, “Now the feast of the Jews, the Feast of Booths, was at hand. Therefore His brothers said to Him, 'Depart from here and go into Judea, so that Your disciples also may behold Your works which You are doing. For no one does anything in secret when he himself seeks to be known publicly. If You do these things, show Yourself to the world.’” Then John adds this, “For not even His brothers were believing in Him. So Jesus said to them, 'My time is not yet at hand, but your time is always opportune.’”

Let's unpack this a bit. The context here is the Feast of Booths or sometimes called the Feast of Tabernacles or Ingathering, is at hand and if we go to, for example, Leviticus 23, we learn that God revealed seven feasts that Israel was to observe over the course of a year and three were really highlighted as being of special importance. According to Deuteronomy 16:16, the Lord says there, “Three times in a year all your males shall appear before the LORD your God in the place which He chooses, at the Feast of Unleavened Bread and at the Feast of Weeks and at the Feast of Booths,” again, also called the Feast of Tabernacles. By the way, the Feast of Unleavened Bread and the Feast of Booths or Tabernacles will be something that we will all enjoy some day in the millennial kingdom according to Ezekiel 45 and Zechariah 14.

Again, back to Leviticus 23, we learn that this particular feast would last about eight days culminating with a special festival on the last day and the feast was basically one associated with the ingathering of harvest and the harvesting of grapes and olives. This was really the most important of the feasts for the people, the most popular, I should say, not necessarily the most important but the most popular among the people because it

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commemorated God's deliverance and protection and provision for his people during the wilderness wanderings and during this feast, the people even to this day, will make makeshift structures of light branches and leaves. Some of them will do them up on the flats of their houses and other people will do it out in open areas and these are little shelters that they will live in during this time, reminding them of the shelters in which their ancestors lived during the Exodus, their exodus from Egypt. So, what we have here is Jesus' brothers telling him to go to Jerusalem during this feast and let the massive crowd behold all these miraculous things that you're doing.

Who were his brothers as it says here? And what was their motive? Well, we know that the brothers here referred to his half-brothers from Mary and Joseph, they were: James, Joseph, Simon and Judas, or Jude, according to Matthew 13:55. And John tells us that at this point, they did not believe that Jesus was the Son of God, in fact, early in his ministry in Mark 3, we learn that they thought Jesus was insane, that he had just lost his mind and by their advise to Jesus about going to Jerusalem to put himself on display publicly, knowing full well the murderous intentions of the Jews and the mass defection of his followers, I believe that they are frustrated with Jesus. They don't understand what's going on here with him and they probably had it up to here. Stop and think about it: what if your brother said, "I'm the Son of God. I've come down from heaven," and he's doing all these things. It would be hard to swallow, wouldn't it? Furthermore, they were probably like the rest of Jesus' fickle followers that wanted a political Messiah and Jesus keeps blowing it all the time because every time he gets a crowd, he starts speaking to them and they all abandon him and now even the leaders are trying to kill him. Moreover, by asking Jesus to basically submit himself to the scrutiny of the Jewish leaders in Jerusalem and perform more miracles publicly, I believe that they really wanted to settle his true identity once and for all and I think we see this in verse 4. There seems to be a mocking, kind of an antagonistic attitude, "No one does anything in secret when he himself seeks to be known publicly. If you do these things," notice, "*if* you do these things, show yourself to the world." By the way, can I give you a glorious footnote? According to Acts 1:14, later on they all believed. Isn't that great? Amazing. In fact, James and Jude penned the epistles that bear their name and James even became the senior pastor of the large church there in Jerusalem, kind of the mother church that many other smaller home fellowships all around the area would come to that submitted to and so forth.

But what we see here is Jesus is not going to dance to their tune. Verse 6, "So Jesus said to them, 'My time is not yet at hand, but your time is always opportune.'" What does this mean? When he says "my time is not at hand" he's basically saying and it could be translated this way "my time is not yet here" or "the right time for me has not yet come, for you, any time is right." This is reminiscent of Jesus' words to his mother in chapter 2:4, remember, at the wedding feast at Cana where he said, "My hour has not yet come,"

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referring to the sovereignly ordained time of Jesus' death and glorification. So, essentially what Jesus is saying here is that, "My passion is to do the will of my Father who sent me, not yours. Therefore, I operate on his time-table. Not yours, not any other man's, a time-table that was decreed in eternity past unlike the rest of you, unlike the rest of the unbelieving world who care nothing about the plans and the purposes of God and operate solely on the basis of your own lusts." You see, the unregenerate operate on the basis of passion, not providence. They don't believe that God's sovereignty is ruling over all of the nations, that his providence is orchestrating all things, that he rules over all of people and all events. For example, they don't believe what the Psalmist said in Psalm 33:11 that "the counsel of the Lord stands forever, the plans of his heart from generation to generation."

I would submit to you that probably most people that call themselves Christians really bristle at the thought of the sovereignty of God. Most don't believe Psalm 103:19, "The Lord has established his throne in the heavens and his sovereignty rules over all." It doesn't seem hard for me to understand. They don't believe Isaiah's words in chapter 14, verse 24, "The Lord of hosts has sworn saying, Surely, just as I have intended so it has happened and just as I have planned, so it will stand." Or Isaiah 25:1, "He has worked wonders, plans formed long ago with perfect faithfulness." It's interesting, according to Galatians 4:4, we learn that Jesus was born "when the fullness of the time came and God sent forth his Son, born of a woman, born under the law." And Luke tells us in Acts 2:23 that "this man," as Peter is preaching, Luke is recording it, "this man," referring to Jesus, "delivered up by the predetermined plan and foreknowledge of God you nailed to a cross by the hands of godless men and put him to death." And Paul says in Romans 5:6, "At the right time, Christ died for the ungodly." God's got a time-table. Jesus is obeying that time-table. We know that, according to Ephesians 1:11, he works "all things after the counsel of his will." Job tells us that he has ordained the days of our life. He has fixed a day when Jesus will return. In fact, Paul reminded Timothy of "the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ which he will bring about at the proper time," 1 Timothy 6:14.

So Jesus tells his unbelieving brothers, "My time is not yet at hand but your time is always opportune. It's always convenient for you because like the rest of the world, you operate on your own time-table not God's, so it really makes no difference if and when the world sees you coming into Jerusalem. It makes a big difference for what the Father has for me." So, basically he's saying, "Look, brothers, I don't jump through your hoops. I do the will of my Father. My itinerary is regulated by him, not by you." He went on to say in verse 7, "The world cannot hate you, but it hates Me because I testify of it, that its deeds are evil." We've seen his priorities in ministry, his passion for obedience and now, thirdly, here we see his perspective of the world. "The world cannot hate you but it hates me because I testify of it, that it's deeds are evil." "Testify" means, "I give irrefutable evidence; I bear witness." Once again, this is so instructive to me and I hope to you, here's why: I marvel at the lack of discernment in modern evangelicalism today with

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respect to its belief that somehow the church must become like the world in order to win it, that somehow we need to conform to the culture but never confront it because that's offensive, that somehow we must do all we can to make the world love us, yet as we read in James 4:4, "whoever basically makes himself a friend with the world becomes an enemy with God."

I marvel at this, especially as I look at passages like here in verse 7 and others that I'm about to give you. How can you come up with this mindset? Rick Warren is one of the leading proponents of this kind of thinking and, of course, his church attracts vast crowds and people that follow his thinking all around the world, attracts multiple millions of people. I want you to consider his own words from the "Purpose Driven Church," a book that has experienced enormous popularity over several years now. I'm going to summarize some things that he said. He says, "We need to figure out what mood we want our service to project and then create it. He says we start positive and end positive. We use humor in our services. It's not a sin to help people feel good. We cultivate an informal, relaxed and friendly atmosphere." He says that, "We made a strategic decision to stop singing hymns in our seeker services. We have attracted thousands more because of our music. Saddleback now has a complete pop-rock orchestra." He tells churches, "You need to use more performed music than congregational singing," the emphasis on entertainment. He says, "The ground we have in common with unbelievers is not the Bible," and certainly that's true, he says, "but our common needs, hurts and interests as human beings," so, therefore, you cannot start with the text.

Now, there is no Scripture to support these things, therefore, you don't find it in the book. Of course, folks, we want to be sensitive to cultural values and the prevailing ignorance within our culture, especially in certain specific cultural settings. We don't want to be needlessly offensive, we want to be understood. In fact, Paul said in 1 Corinthians 9:22, "To the weak," referring to those weak in understanding, "to the weak I became weak that I might win the weak. I have become all things to all men that I may by all means save some." In many other settings where I go to preach, you probably wouldn't know I was the same person. I preach to you at a much higher level than I would most churches because you're at a higher level of maturity and understanding but, friends, nowhere in Scripture do we see Jesus and his apostles "using humor to make people feel good" or trying to "cultivate an informal relaxed and friendly atmosphere and focus on common needs, hurts and interests as human beings." All of this is foreign to Scripture. By the way, I would argue as well that it is rooted in an errant soteriology, an errant understanding of the doctrine of salvation. Basically, this is Arminianism.

Jesus tells his unsaved brothers in verse 7, "The world cannot hate you," meaning, "You're a part of the world." The world loves its own, he says in chapter 15, verse 19. "You're one of them." He says, "but it hates Me because I testify of it, that its deeds are

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evil.” Again, just think of what Jesus preached to the multitudes in John 6, take what he preached and preach that to a stadium full of so-called seekers. Tell them that you must repent of your sins and have faith in Christ or you'll never enter into the kingdom, otherwise, you will perish in your sins. Tell them that Jesus is the Son of God, that there is no other hope of salvation. Tell them that you, according to God, are so depraved and alienated from him that unless the Father draws you by his uninfluenced sovereign grace, you will never be saved. But hear the good news: tell them that Jesus has promised that “all that the Father gives me shall come to me and the one who comes to me I will certainly not cast out.” Tell them, dear friends, herein is the hope of salvation, that those who simply cannot and will not repent and believe in Christ will be drawn by the Father, that the Father will see to it that his chosen bride will come to his groom who will never turn her away.

So Jesus says, “Come to me. Believe in me and you'll be saved.” That's what Jesus preached. If you did that today, the same thing would happen as what happened with Jesus: the crowds would withdraw, you'd go from 20,000 to 12 in a day. But you know what? Others in time will be gloriously saved. You see, I'm not saying that we need to go out and pick a fight and be deliberately caustic. I hope you understand that, but friends, don't fool yourself into thinking that somehow you can get the world to like your message and love your Savior unless you compromise both. You simply cannot be popular with the world and be faithful to Christ. They hate him. Anyone can attract a crowd but only God can save a sinner, only God can build a church.

Again, notice verse 7, “The world cannot hate you, but it hates Me because I testify of it, that its deeds are evil.” The basic meaning of the term “world,” “cosmos” in Greek, is “order” or “arrangement,” the idea of a system and theologically, the term “world” here really portrays the system of human society that we find ourselves in, that system even that includes governments that is warped by sin, a system that is hostile to God, controlled by Satan, plagued by beliefs and passions that surge blindly and wildly all around the globe. Scripture describes the world as a place of darkness where spiritual forces, demonic forces that we cannot see, serve Satan, and scheme against God and man. The world constitutes a Satanic kingdom from which believers have been supernaturally delivered by Christ so I would ask you, do you really want this system to love you? Do you really want to align yourself with this system? In how you look? In how you act? In how you talk? In how you think? Moreover, do you really want to adjust the gospel and somehow morph the church of Christ into something that is appealing to this evil, fallen world system comprised of spiritual cadavers that hate the God that we love? A system dominated by those who are ruled by the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the boastful pride of life? 1 John 2:16, which John says, “This is not from the Father but is from the world.” He goes on to say, “and the world is passing away and also its lusts but the one who does the will of God abides forever.”

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Insights from Jesus' Ministry

By David Harrell

Bible Text: John 7:1-8
Preached on: Sunday, June 15, 2014

My friends, do you really want to be loved by a system controlled by Satan who according to Peter in 1 Peter 5:8 “prowls about like a roaring lion seeking someone to devour”? Peter goes on to say “resist him.” He doesn't say “join him,” he doesn't say “support him,” he doesn't say “accept him,” he doesn't say “ignore him, rebuke him, exorcise him, bind him,” any of that stuff, he says, “But resist him,” and then he says this, “firm in your faith knowing that the same experiences of suffering are being accomplished by your brethren who are in the world.” Once again, here in John 7, Jesus reminds us that the world hates him because he testifies of it, that their deeds are evil. So help me understand: why are we as Christians and the church in particular, why are we to make it a priority for the world to love us and for us to become more like it so that somehow we can win them?

Again, we want to be winsome, we want to love the world, we want to be compassionate to them, but folks, I believe that you are fooling yourself if you think that all of these techniques will win people to Christ. It will win them to an organization but not to Christ. Let me be clear: I want them to come to this church, for example, and feel unusually loved and genuinely welcomed but more importantly, I want them to feel like they are amongst a group of aliens that they don't fully understand, people that worship God in ways that they just don't understand because that's what the Lord uses to bring people to himself. You see friends, it is our difference from the world, not our similarity with it, that brings conviction and leads people to genuine repentance and faith in Christ. That's the testimony of Scripture. Plus, I don't want to be like them. I don't want to love what they love. John will tell us in 1 John 2:15, “Do not love the world nor the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him.” Let me speak real practically to you from one believer to another: we are to love the Lord our God with all our heart, mind, soul and strength, we are to love our neighbor as ourselves but many times, even as Christians, we can find the world more appealing.

So, rather than, for example, presenting our bodies as a living and a holy sacrifice acceptable to God we end up presenting our bodies as a living and unholy sacrifice to the god of this world, to Satan. We allow the contemporary thinking and values of the world system to shape us into its image without even realizing it. That's why in Romans 12:2, Paul says, “Do not be conformed to this world.” Literally, “Do not let the world shape you into its image without you even realizing that it's happening.” But, many times, even as Christians, we allow that to happen. For example, we adopt its immoral dress; we feel like it's important to feed upon its immoral entertainment; we get addicted to its chemical anesthetizers; we indulge in its materialism. Then we go to great lengths to somehow justify the idols that we erect in our hearts. As a result, we end up grieving and quenching the Spirit. We end up breaking our communion and fellowship with God. We no longer present our bodies as a living and holy sacrifice acceptable to God. We lose our zeal for

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evangelism. Some of you are there right now. Think about it. This is what happens. You lose your power and effectiveness in serving Christ. You become a branch that no longer bears any fruit. You lose your appetite for the word of God. You become miserable. You become discouraged, ineffective. You forfeit earthly blessing and heavenly reward. This is why Jesus said in John 15:18, "If the world hates you," literally "since the world hates you, you know that it has hated Me before it hated you. If you were of the world, the world would love its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, because of this the world hates you. Remember the word that I said to you, 'A slave is not greater than his master.' If they persecuted Me, they will also persecute you."

I want to close this morning with a warning. In Scripture we see that we are to beware of the schemes of the devil. He is the father of lies; he is a murderer from the beginning; he is a deceiver; he is far more ingenious with his temptations than we are in spotting them. Let me tell you how Satan works in this world system. First of all, what he does is he deceives people into believing things contrary to the will and word of God. He doesn't care what you believe as long as it's a lie so he's going to give you all kinds of false teachers. Secondly, he's going to make you feel comfortable in your sin. "Ah, it's not that bad. After all, I'm just human. We all make mistakes." We see this today prevalent in our society. Then, he's going to want you to be demanding that others be tolerant of your sin. Isn't it interesting how tolerance seems to be the supreme virtue today in our culture because there's no moral authority, just live and let live. Then what begins to happen is sin gets redefined so it's no longer sin. I mean, after all, killing an unborn infant, abortion, is really just terminating a pregnancy, right? That's just a woman's right to choose. Homosexuality is just an alternative lifestyle. Hooking up, living together, sex outside of marriage which the Bible calls fornication, you know, that's just kind of okay these days. I mean, let's don't get hung up about all the Bible stuff. Drunkenness, whatever it is. We redefine sin so it's no longer sin and then we write laws that criminalize those who disagree with the new morality. Can you spell "hate crime"? That's what's happening today. It's a hate crime to say many things that God says in his word. Then finally, a culture will persecute those who violate their moral code. Do you realize right now, I was talking with some pastors in Canada, it's illegal for them to say anything negative about homosexuality on the air in Canada. Right now in certain places in Europe, they are forcing by law pastors and churches to marry homosexuals.

Very simply, the way Satan works, he uses what I like to consider a four stage progression. First, with respect to believers, we are maligned, then we're marginalized, mistreated and then murdered. It starts out slow, the maligning, the marginalizing and then it begins to gain momentum. Folks, this is what happened to Jesus. This is what is happening in the church today. Right now in the United States, we're somewhere between marginalize and mistreat.

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So Jesus said, “The world cannot hate you,” the reason being, you're like them, “but it hates Me because I testify of it, that its deeds are evil.” So he says, “Go up to the feast yourselves; I do not go up to this feast because My time has not yet fully come. Having said these things to them, He stayed in Galilee.” What we will see is rather than joining his brothers in the typical Jewish caravans that would enter the city and have a lot of fanfare and risk being spotted by the Jewish authorities and taken by force, maybe even taken by the multitudes to make him king, he sends them on by themselves and then later we see that he goes up in secret and soon after, then we find him continuing to emphasize preaching and teaching but especially discipleship because he has a passion to obey the Father's will, operating solely on his time-table. He will continue to confront the world, exposing their sin, calling them to repentance and faith in him, offering them eternal life and because of all of this, they will eventually murder him. But because of our glorious and merciful God, some were saved. Not a lot, but some. And look what he's done ever since and we're all recipients of that grace, aren't we? What an amazing thing. I just pray that we will all learn from these insights revealed to us through the life and the ministry of the Incarnate Word of God and because of this, become just a little bit more like Jesus.

Let's pray together.

Father, thank you for these truths, use them to shape us into your image as you have promised to do. Speak to those who are here without Christ, convict them of their sin. By the power of your word, cause them to be born-again. We ask these things in the precious name of Jesus and for his sake. Amen.

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