

“Jesus Glorifies God”

Devotional Reading: Psalm 119:113-128

Background Scripture: John 7:14-24

John 7:14–24 (NIV)

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. 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. 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.”

LESSON AIMS

- **Learning Fact:** To explore the origin of Jesus’ knowledge and teaching of Scripture.
- **Biblical Principle:** To be intentional in choosing to glorify God.
- **Daily Application:** To examine our motives and rely on the Holy Spirit to guide our thoughts, words, and actions.

INTRODUCTION

“Raccoon” John Smith

John Smith was born in East Tennessee in 1784 and moved to Kentucky with his family as a teenager. The Smith family lived in a remote area of what was still a state full of wilderness. John did not have much formal education but adhered to the Baptist faith as a child and young man.

Although he was ordained as a preacher, John wrestled with his faith, a struggle that intensified after he lost two of his four children in a fire and his wife to illness. When he heard the preaching of Alexander Campbell, John began to understand the Scripture more clearly and began preaching based on his enhanced knowledge. People affectionately began calling him “Raccoon” John Smith because of his plainspoken style of preaching and approach to life. He never gave up farming but worked to support himself and his family. And John preached to glorify the One who sent him, not himself. His motives shone clear to those who listened.

The current lesson finds its focus in John 7:18. As you study, consider: Do I teach for my own glory? Or am I seeking the glory of God?

LESSON CONTEXT

We have four Gospels in the New Testament that tell the story of Jesus. The first three Gospels (Matthew, Mark, and Luke) are very similar in their general structure. The fourth Gospel, John, is quite different from the other three. John wrote 30 or so years after those other three, and he was well acquainted with their material. For this reason he seems to avoid repeating most of their content. Instead, he chose to give new information from his wealth of eyewitness recollections (see John 21:24–25). About 90 percent of John’s material is not found in the other three Gospels.

A significant difference among the four Gospels is the way the writers choose to begin their accounts. Mark begins with the ministry of John the Baptist, without any reference to the birth or childhood of Jesus. Luke begins with the birth of John the Baptist and includes the nativity story of Jesus. Matthew begins with Jesus’ genealogy, thus pushing the story of Jesus back to the time of King David (reigned 1010–970 B.C.).

John the Evangelist (not John the Baptist) pushes the story back to the very beginning of creation and before. John's Gospel is an inclusive account of the entire sweep of human history. Most of this is accomplished in John 1:1–18, often referred to as the prologue of John. The current lesson explores the implications of the doctrine of the incarnation, especially concerning Jesus' knowledge and teaching of Scripture and God's will.

On Jesus' Teaching: John 7:14–18

Jesus was aware that the religious leaders were seeking to kill Him. This homicidal animosity was part of His stated reason for not being present in Jerusalem at the start of *the festival* of tabernacles (John 7:1–9). The Feast of Tabernacles was a harvest feast which commemorated the years of wilderness wandering. God instituted this feast for two reasons. First, it was a time of thanksgiving during the season of the olive and fruit harvests (the September–October time frame). Second, it was as a time to remember deliverance from slavery in Egypt (see Leviticus 23:33–44). As something of an object lesson, many who celebrated this feast would live in tents ("tabernacles") outside the city to reenact the 40 years that the Israelites had lived in tents while wandering in the wilderness. Apparently waiting until *halfway* through the feast was meant to allow Jesus' enemies time to cool their heels. This was the right time for Him to show up (contrast John 7:8).

In the meantime, the crowds watched for Jesus, divided as to whether He was a good man or a deceiver (John 7:12, not in the printed text for the current lesson). They had seen or heard of His signs (examples: 2:1–11; 6:2, 14), His teaching (examples: 5:17–47; 6:25–59), and of the witnesses concerning His identity and the source of His authority (example: 1:6–18). But were these things to be trusted? What did all of this really mean about Jesus?

The temple was still the center of Jewish life (2 Chronicles 6; Psalms 27:4; 66:13; Isaiah 2:3; Jeremiah 7:4, 13–14), though the Babylonian exile (beginning with its first wave in 597 B.C.; 2 Chronicles 36:9–10) saw the beginning of a less centralized religion. The first temple was destroyed in 586 B.C. during the third and final wave of exiles (36:11–20); the second temple (which stood in Jesus' day) was dedicated in 516 B.C. (Ezra 6:13–18). This is where Jesus went to teach (v. 14 of today's lesson).

The building's importance was never more evident than during a feast. Religious pilgrims came, sometimes from distant homelands, to celebrate and to learn (Acts 2:8–11). Jesus was never haphazard in His actions; choosing to teach in the temple during this feast was a choice to make His message public, not keeping it a secret (Luke 19:47; John 18:20).

1. Why did Jesus wait until the Feast of Tabernacles was halfway through to join? (John 7:14)

The Jews (presumably both the pilgrim crowds and the religious leaders) *were amazed* at what Jesus was teaching and the profound knowledge He had (compare Luke 2:46–47). Their amazement was because it was likely known that Jesus was not a trained rabbi; He had no formal education—that is, Scripture. He had not attended any rabbinical schools or been taught by a rabbi. They were amazed that He could be educated without ever having studied formally. This is no small objection, since sound knowledge is not often achieved without a sound instructor (examples: Nehemiah 8:7–9; Acts 8:30–31). However, they would have done well to remember that God sometimes chose unexpected people for His purposes (examples: Genesis 25:23; 1 Samuel 16:7–13; Amos 1:1).

Though we do not know exactly what Jesus was teaching that elicited this response from the crowd, we could point to other examples of Jesus' teaching that yielded similar reactions (example: Matthew 5–7:28).

2. Why were the Jews amazed at Jesus' teaching? (John 7:15)

What Do You Think?

What roadblocks to seeking wisdom might formal education create?

Digging Deeper

How can you encourage students to take their education seriously without losing sight of better sources of wisdom?

The people seemed to assume that Jesus taught His own thoughts on the Scripture. This would make the *teaching* His own, without any authority from God, history, tradition, or any other seemingly legitimate source. Though His audience might have expected their question was rhetorical—that no answer would be provided as to the source of Jesus’ knowledge—Jesus chose to offer the answer.

From the one who sent me is both a proclamation of the source of Jesus’ knowledge and of Jesus’ identity. Jesus’ authority and wisdom are from God, just as Jesus’ works came from the Father (John 5:36). *Anyone who chooses to do the will of God will find out whether my teaching comes from God* might appropriately remind us of Jesus’ refrain, “If anyone has ears to hear, let them hear” (Mark 4:23; compare Matthew 11:15; 13:15; Luke 8:8; etc.). The implication is that the heart that is prepared to hear the word of Lord will recognize it as a word from the Lord. This preparation allows a person to recognize the character and source of another’s teaching and to discern what is *of God* versus what is mere human ego or understanding.

3. How did Jesus answer the crowd with regards to His “spiritual education” (John 7:16–17)?

Jesus offered a sort of litmus test regarding where His own teaching came from: Whose *glory* was being sought? Those who speak independently do so for personal gain. They promote their ideas for their own ends, and their egos are probably involved. But those who speak what God reveals *seek God’s glory*, not their own. In this, the speaker acts correctly. The proclamation is not made to glorify the one who speaks but the one who gave the message. In short, the reason Jesus taught with such knowledge and authority is because He only taught what He received from God the Father, a higher authority than Jewish schools, and He only sought to glorify God!

4. What test did Jesus offer to evaluate the authenticity of His teaching? (John 7:18)

What Do You Think?

When do you experience the impulse to glorify yourself?

Digging Deeper

How does seeking God’s glory keep your ego in check?

On Moses’ Law: John 7:19–24

The law was the content of what the scribes and the Pharisees studied and taught (Acts 22:3), along with their own traditions (example: Matthew 15:1–9). What Moses gave, the people studied but failed to put into daily practice. Their knowledge without their actions was useless (James 1:22–25). From this lesser example, Jesus’ question implies that the people were receiving instruction from God but were not putting this wisdom into action. To do God’s will is to obey God’s law. Jesus is saying that the Jews had not kept the law and consequently they were not doing God’s will. Therefore they were not in a position to properly evaluate His message. In fact, they wanted to break the 6th commandment by killing Him, and they assume that Jesus is insane: “You are demon-possessed.”

Some of the people were not ignorant of the schemes of the Pharisees and the scribes (see John 7:25), and so did Jesus (7:1,19).

5. What did Jesus accuse the crowd of? How did they respond? (John 7:19–20)

What Do You Think?

How do you respond to others’ inaccurate assessments of you?

Digging Deeper

When might it be best to address the issue? to let it pass without direct refutation?

The *one miracle* Jesus had done was the healing of the lame man at the pool of Bethesda on the Sabbath (John 5:1–16). This caused them to plot His death. While in Jerusalem for a feast, Jesus visited this pool where many sick people gathered for medical care. There He met a man who had been lame for 38 years.

To the great surprise of the crowd—and especially to the surprise of the man himself—Jesus healed him (John 5:1–16).

The authorities objected because Jesus worked on the Sabbath (John 5:16) and told the man to work by carrying his mat (5:10). Sabbath was the weekly day of rest when Jews were not permitted to work (5:9; see Exodus 31:15). Some Jewish authorities who believed that carrying cots and healing were works prohibited on the Sabbath confronted the man and learned what Jesus had done. So in this case, it is clear that amazement does not have a positive connotation.

6. What was the “one miracle” Jesus said caused a surprise and negative response? (John 7:21)

Jesus appeals to the Jewish right of circumcision which could be performed on the Sabbath. If that work of ceremonial cleansing could be performed on the Sabbath, then a work of complete healing should also be performed on the Sabbath. The Jews had no logical answer for this convicting question.

The people had missed something fundamental about what the Sabbath was actually *for*. The concept went together with God’s promised peace—more than a break in violence but an end in violence that allowed for human thriving (see Leviticus 26:1–13). Elsewhere, Jesus justified His disciples’ picking corn to eat on the Sabbath by reiterating that the Sabbath was created for human benefit (Mark 2:27).

The primary reason for observing Sabbath was God’s own rest after creating the world. The secondary reason flowed from the first—namely, that God desired all people to be given rest from their own work (Exodus 20:10–11). The Sabbath rest was given by God as a gift for the wellbeing of His people. Following the letter of the law—doing no work—did not honor the spirit of the law—enabling people to thrive rather than only survive.

7. What point did Jesus make about their hypocrisy and desire to kill Him? (John 7:22–23)

What Do You Think?

Do you have any Sabbath-keeping practices? Why or why not?

Digging Deeper

How do Jesus’ actions and teachings about Sabbath challenge your own Sabbath activities?

Jesus tells the people to stop judging on the surface (*by mere appearances*), of working on the Sabbath as a violation of the law. But by judging *correctly*, discerning the order of priority based on knowledge of God and His will. Jesus had rightly chosen what was more important. A proper assessment of Jesus’ actions would conclude that He was fulfilling the moral obligation of the law. Jesus’ argument about circumcision not violating the Sabbath showed that the religious leaders themselves acknowledged that some laws were to be held in higher esteem than literalistic Sabbath-keeping.

Jesus’ own actions were in line with His summary of the Law (and the Prophets): “Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself” (Matthew 22:37–39; see Deuteronomy 6:5; Leviticus 19:18). The law to love the Lord and demonstrate that love in care for others fulfills the Sabbath.

8. Why did Jesus tell the people to stop judging? (John 7:24)

What Do You Think?

How do you guard against judging others by appearance?

Digging Deeper

What acts of repentance are appropriate if you have judged by appearance?

CONCLUSION

Whose Glory?

The beginning of this lesson asked: Do you teach for your own glory? Or are you seeking Someone else's glory?

Answering these questions is not a matter of numbering your years of knowledge, listing your formal Christian education, or quantifying the results of your witness. Instead, it is a heart matter. When you spread the gospel, do you primarily hope to gain something for yourself? Or do you hope to glorify Christ and His heavenly Father?

Our success or failure as disciples is not measured by how people react to us. Time and again, we see that Jesus' own audiences did not like what they heard Him say. They did not always judge His words correctly. The same will happen to us. As with Jesus, so with us: our success is measured in our intention to glorify the Lord. When we speak the truth and live it to the best of our ability—helped by the Holy Spirit—we succeed.

PRAYER

Heavenly Father, teach us to glorify You in all that we do. Diminish our desires to make a name or a fortune for ourselves and increase our desire to bring glory to Your Name. May we rely on the Holy Spirit to guide our thoughts, words, and actions. Thank You for the example we have in Jesus. It is in His name we pray. Amen.

THOUGHT TO REMEMBER

Choose: your glory, or His?