

JOHN — WEEK 9

OPPOSITION



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A DEEP Study

The Fellowship of Ailbe

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Many of Jesus's disciples go back and walk with Him no more. He's saying many difficult things, but the opposition to Him is also getting extreme. People are afraid to even discuss Him openly.

Yet He keeps avoiding arrest. Something supernatural is going on. Things seem to be following a script.

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1 John 6:63–71

It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh profits nothing. The words that I speak to you are spirit, and they are life. But there are some of you who do not believe.” For Jesus knew from the beginning who they were who did not believe, and who would betray Him. And He said, “Therefore I have said to you that no one can come to Me unless it has been granted to him by My Father.”

From that time many of His disciples went back and walked with Him no more. Then Jesus said to the twelve, “Do you also want to go away?”

But Simon Peter answered Him, “Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. Also we have come to believe and know that You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.”

Jesus answered them, “Did I not choose you, the twelve, and one of you is a devil?” He spoke of Judas Iscariot, the son of Simon, for it was he who would betray Him, being one of the twelve.

Jesus finally manages to drive some disciples away. Their brains are just too full, and they can't stand all the apparent contradictions. This is by design. Jesus wants the core of His church to be a handful of guys with bulletproof faith.

Except for one. One of the twelve will play a very different role. He will help deliver Jesus to the cross.

“Did I not choose you, the twelve, and one of you is a devil?” This statement is shocking—and surely shocked the twelve. Why announce this now? What's the point?

Most everything else Jesus said was to set the stage for later events. Why not this? If so, what difference will this make later?

Judas and the others now suspect that something extreme is coming and that Jesus knows what it is. It may be a surprise to them, but it won't be a surprise to Jesus.

They'll know that He's still in control.

In a perverse twist, this will make His crucifixion even harder on His disciples. They will watch Him go to the cross, all the time exuding confidence. They know He's in control. He acts like He's in control.

But that makes them think that He's going to emerge victorious somehow. They keep waiting for the great plot twist where He escapes or wins somehow. This distracts them from remembering Jesus's other predictions of His death and being in the ground three days.

Then He dies. The end. Their depression and confusion is total.

Then He pops back up again. Then they remember, and it all makes sense.

You want bulletproof faith? You got it.

2 John 7:1–13

After these things Jesus walked in Galilee; for He did not want to walk in Judea, because the Jews sought to kill Him. Now the Jews' Feast of Tabernacles was at hand. His brothers therefore said to Him, "Depart from here and go into Judea, that Your disciples also may see the works that You are doing. For no one does anything in secret while he himself seeks to be known openly. If You do these things, show Yourself to the world." For even His brothers did not believe in Him.

Then Jesus said to them, "My time has not yet come, but your time is always ready. The world cannot hate you, but it hates Me because I testify of it that its works are evil. You go up to this feast. I am not yet going up to this feast, for My time has not yet fully come." When He had said these things to them, He remained in Galilee.

But when His brothers had gone up, then He also went up to the feast, not openly, but as it were in secret. Then the Jews sought Him at the feast, and said, "Where is He?" And there was much complaining among the people concerning Him. Some said, "He is good"; others said, "No, on the contrary, He deceives the people." However, no one spoke openly of Him for fear of the Jews.

Yes, some of Jesus's brothers didn't believe in Him. These are family members who've known Him for a long time, and they surely know of the circumstances surrounding His birth.

Amazingly, they're not believers, not yet anyway. So, they urge Him to show off His works. "*Depart from here and go into Judea, that Your disciples also may see the works that You are doing.*"

But is it really so that everyone else can see His works, or so that they can see them?

The controversy described at the end of today's passage shows the answer. Everyone is abuzz about who Jesus is. No one is quite sure—including His brothers.

Especially His brothers. They know Him as a person, not as some legend, and the claims He has made are not easy to believe. They'd like to see some more evidence, so they just nudge Him a bit.

"For no one does anything in secret while he himself seeks to be known openly. If You do these things, show Yourself to the world."

And they're not nasty about it, which is impressive given that they're brothers.

The *Feast of Tabernacles* is a Jewish festival commemorating Israel's life in the desert after fleeing Egypt. Thus, the last sentence is a bit confusing. *However, no one spoke openly of Him for fear of the Jews.* They're all Jews. This has to be a reference to the Jewish authorities.

The point isn't just that there's a lot of intimidation going on.

It's that everyone knows it.

3 John 7:14–24

Now about the middle of the feast Jesus went up into the temple and taught. And the Jews marveled, saying, “How does this Man know letters, having never studied?”

Jesus answered them and said, “My doctrine is not Mine, but His who sent Me. If anyone wills to do His will, he shall know concerning the doctrine, whether it is from God or whether I speak on My own authority. He who speaks from himself seeks his own glory; but He who seeks the glory of the One who sent Him is true, and no unrighteousness is in Him. Did not Moses give you the law, yet none of you keeps the law? Why do you seek to kill Me?”

The people answered and said, “You have a demon. Who is seeking to kill You?”

Jesus answered and said to them, “I did one work, and you all marvel. Moses therefore gave you circumcision (not that it is from Moses, but from the fathers), and you circumcise a man on the Sabbath. If a man receives circumcision on the Sabbath, so that the law of Moses should not be broken, are you angry with Me because I made a man completely well on the Sabbath? Do not judge according to appearance, but judge with righteous judgment.”

Jesus is keeping His presence at the feast low key, but He shows up in the temple and teaches there. In a way, this counts as another miracle. His knowledge can’t be explained naturally. So, Jesus points out that it isn’t natural; it’s from God. “My doctrine is not Mine, but His who sent Me.”

Then, as He always seems to do, He cranks up the volume—this time accusing them. “Did not Moses give you the law, yet none of you keeps the law? Why do you seek to kill Me?”

Their response is curious. “You have a demon. Who is seeking to kill You?”

Remember how yesterday’s lesson concluded with the point that everyone knows about the intimidation of talk about Jesus. Their tongues seem plenty loose now.

This is not a contradiction or a change in the situation. It shows that the intimidation is all on one side.

Being against Jesus is perfectly okay with the authorities.

This kind of one-sidedness is common. People have a natural tendency to suppress views they don’t like. This often turns into group-think, where an unpopular view isn’t tolerated, much less listened to.

This have been happening to an amazing extent lately. An unpopular or unorthodox view gets you canceled. Even the press, which is formally schooled in how to resist this tendency, has given in to it.

Just this last month, the press’s suppression of some views on the origin of COVID-19 resulted in some significant consumption of crow. This had led to some serious introspection, but on this one issue only.

They need a revival of objectivity.

4 John 7:25–30

Now some of them from Jerusalem said, “Is this not He whom they seek to kill? But look! He speaks boldly, and they say nothing to Him. Do the rulers know indeed that this is truly the Christ? However, we know where this Man is from; but when the Christ comes, no one knows where He is from.”

Then Jesus cried out, as He taught in the temple, saying, “You both know Me, and you know where I am from; and 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.”

Therefore they sought to take Him; but no one laid a hand on Him, because His hour had not yet come.

This passage poses many puzzles, starting with the confirmation that people are aware that Jesus is *He whom they seek to kill*. That seems to contradict what the people in the temple said in verse 20.

It does, but that just reflects a wide range of views among different people at that time. The ones *from Jerusalem* seem to know more about what the authorities are up to. That makes sense; they live “inside the beltway” so to speak.

The locals ask the right question too. How come the people who are trying to kill Jesus are just letting Him speak? *But look! He speaks boldly, and they say nothing to Him. Do the rulers know indeed that this is truly the Christ?*

The rulers most definitely don’t know (or think) that He’s the Christ. So, it is surprising that He’s free to preach. This is another puzzle. How can this be?

The next “puzzle” is the same, except it includes the answer. *Therefore they sought to take Him; but no one laid a hand on Him, because His hour had not yet come.* In other words, Jesus is being supernaturally protected. That’s why He seems to be free to preach and that’s why they can’t *take Him* when they try.

The whole sequence seems tightly scripted—which is exactly what it is.

The greatest miracle the people are seeing may not be the works Jesus performs, but this scripting. The authorities look like the keystone cops trying to catch Jesus.

But notice that Jesus doesn’t always flaunt this protection. Remember, back in verse 10, *He also went up to the feast, not openly, but as it were in secret.* Jesus is following a script too.

There’s a deeper lesson here. While Jesus never struggles to figure out the script, the apostles won’t be so adept (particularly in Acts). They’re good at discerning the Lord’s will, but many struggles are recorded.

And we’re even less good at it. The foremost job of every Christian isn’t to do the Lord’s will; it’s to discern it.

Being sure you’re doing the Lord’s will is perfect peace.

5 John 7:31–36

And many of the people believed in Him, and said, “When the Christ comes, will He do more signs than these which this Man has done?”

The Pharisees heard the crowd murmuring these things concerning Him, and the Pharisees and the chief priests sent officers to take Him. Then Jesus said to them, “I shall be with you a little while longer, and then I go to Him who sent Me. You will seek Me and not find Me, and where I am you cannot come.”

Then the Jews said among themselves, “Where does He intend to go that we shall not find Him? Does He intend to go to the Dispersion among the Greeks and teach the Greeks? What is this thing that He said, ‘You will seek Me and not find Me, and where I am you cannot come’?”

I just love the scene where the keystone cops come to pick Jesus up. He says to them, *“I shall be with you a little while longer, and then I go to Him who sent Me. You will seek Me and not find Me, and where I am you cannot come.”*

Their response is to wonder what He’s talking about and where He can go that they cannot come.

And that’s the end of the passage! They forget to pick Him up. It’s like Obi-Wan Kenobi saying, “These are not the droids you’re looking for.” Oh, to be a fly on the wall when the *officers*, who were *sent to take Him*, return to the priests.

“Did you find Him?”

“Yeah. He said that He would only be with us a little while longer.”

“So, where is He?”

“Dang, I knew I forgot something.”

All kidding aside, the big lesson in today’s passage is in the beginning, where some of the people basically say, “If this isn’t the Christ, who is?” The standard answer is, “Someone who overthrows Rome.”

This shows the tragic error of the Jews at that time. Jesus didn’t come to deliver them from Rome; He came to deliver them from sin. Rome isn’t the problem.

Their mistake is thinking they’re the good guys. That’s the problem.

We make the exact same mistake. Everyone does. Everyone thinks they’re the good guys.

I know we preach the doctrine of total depravity. I know we memorize it, but do we really take it to heart? Do we really question whether we’re on the right side of the issues in, say, politics and justice?

I don’t.

Questions for reflection or discussion

1. When should Christianity be a "big tent" and when should it cull out the lightweights?
2. Is the evidence for Christianity central to your faith?
3. Where is group-think worst?
4. Have you ever been sure you were sure you were doing the Lord's will?
5. Who is overconfident in their goodness?

Items for prayer: