



## The Book of Signs - Week 4

### Week 4, Day 1

#### John 7:1-9

*After this Jesus went about in Galilee. He did not wish to go about in Judea because the Jews were looking for an opportunity to kill him. <sup>2</sup>Now the Jewish festival of Booths was near. <sup>3</sup>So his brothers said to him, 'Leave here and go to Judea so that your disciples also may see the works you are doing; <sup>4</sup>for no one who wants to be widely known acts in secret. If you do these things, show yourself to the world.' <sup>5</sup>(For not even his brothers believed in him.) <sup>6</sup>Jesus said to them, 'My time has not yet come, but your time is always here. <sup>7</sup>The world cannot hate you, but it hates me because I testify against it that its works are evil. <sup>8</sup>Go to the festival yourselves. I am not going to this festival, for my time has not yet fully come.' <sup>9</sup>After saying this, he remained in Galilee.*

#### Understanding the Passage:

Here we meet Jesus' brothers, as in his biological brothers born of Mary. They look at Jesus and see, not Christ, but celebrity. Jesus has followers to the south in Judea; the movement has spread beyond rural Galilee and into the urban cities of Jerusalem and its suburbs. The disciples to the south don't have the same opportunity to see Jesus perform signs and wonders since his ministry has mostly been confined to the north in Galilee. "So," his brothers say, "Why not give the southern disciples a show? Let them see what you can do, and word about you will spread like wildfire. Don't you want more people to know about you?" John says, "For not even his brothers believed in him." (John 7:5). To them, Jesus is a flashy celebrity. Celebrity can be paraded in front of the masses and leveraged by those closest to them. Then the celebrity's inner circle can have a piece of the action- the glory, the popularity, the money. The brothers are attempting to *use* Jesus. "Big brother is a gold mine. Let's leave the small market of Galilee and get this guy in front of a bigger crowd." The more famous Jesus gets, the more those closest to Jesus stand to gain.

The ploy is to take advantage of the harvest festival, the Festival of Booths, which happens every fall in Jerusalem. Technically, every Jew is obliged to attend the Festival if they're able, creating a huge potential for Jesus' fame to skyrocket. But Jesus sees through his brothers' hidden agenda. He elects not to attend the Festival, at least not with these brothers. He says his time, *kairos*, meaning the "appointed time," has not yet arrived.

And there's the statement in verse 7: "the world cannot hate you, but it hates me." The world will always tolerate, if not celebrate, those who play by the world's measures of success- more headcount, more profit, more fame, more glamor, more and more. The world *cannot* hate those things, for those measures are what the world is made of. But Jesus has come to begin and welcome us into a new world which has different measures of success. The world must hate the leader of this new world just as darkness must hate light. So we are left with a choice: will we be like the brothers and choose the measures of success of the darkness, or will we stand with the light knowing the darkness will never accept us?

### **Questions for Discussion and Reflection:**

1. Where have you seen people confuse Jesus with celebrity?
2. When have you been misunderstood or even used by the people closest to you?
3. What are the measures of success of the new world Jesus is creating?

### **Week 4, Day 2**

#### **John 7:10-24**

*<sup>10</sup> But after his brothers had gone to the festival, then he also went, not publicly but as it were in secret. <sup>11</sup>The Jews were looking for him at the festival and saying, 'Where is he?' <sup>12</sup>And there was considerable complaining about him among the crowds. While some were saying, 'He is a good man', others were saying, 'No, he is deceiving the crowd.' <sup>13</sup>Yet no one would speak openly about him for fear of the Jews.*

*<sup>14</sup> About the middle of the festival Jesus went up into the temple and began to teach. <sup>15</sup>The Jews were astonished at it, saying, 'How does this man have such learning, when he has never been taught?' <sup>16</sup>Then Jesus answered them, 'My teaching is not mine but his who sent me. <sup>17</sup>Anyone who resolves to do the will of God will know whether the teaching is from God or whether I am speaking on my own. <sup>18</sup>Those who speak on their own seek their own glory; but the one who seeks the glory of him who sent him is true, and there is nothing false in him.*

*<sup>19</sup> 'Did not Moses give you the law? Yet none of you keeps the law. Why are you looking for an opportunity to kill me?' <sup>20</sup>The crowd answered, 'You have a demon! Who is trying to kill you?' <sup>21</sup>Jesus answered them, 'I performed one work, and all of you are astonished. <sup>22</sup>Moses gave you circumcision (it is, of course, not from Moses, but from the patriarchs), and you circumcise a man on the sabbath. <sup>23</sup>If a man receives circumcision on the sabbath in order that the law of Moses may not be broken, are you angry with me because I healed a man's whole body on the sabbath? <sup>24</sup>Do not judge by appearances, but judge with right judgement.'*

#### **Understanding the Passage:**

If you were with us yesterday when we studied 7:1-9, you know Jesus decided *not* to attend the Festival of Booths in Jerusalem. But he went anyway, in secret. Why in secret? For at least two reasons.

First, the people closest to him, including his biological brothers, would like to raise him higher on the celebrity pedestal and increase his following, and the huge crowds at the Festival are the perfect opportunity. But Jesus is not going to the Festival looking to increase his following; he's going to preach.

Second, there are those among the Jews who would enjoy seeing Jesus dead. He's a threat to the religious establishment of the day, which in our time is not a crime; we might call it a virtue. We might praise someone for speaking truth to the powers of religion. We might applaud them for taking a stand, unless you're the one in power and now this prophet could undo the very systems that keep you in power. "The Jews" in the Gospel of John are not all Jews. They are the power-brokers. They keep the religious, political, and social machine going. Eventually they'll catch up to Jesus, but not today.

The preaching of Jesus creates a fault line separating the crowds in Jerusalem. There are those who call Jesus "good" and those who call Jesus "deceiving." We must all take a stand on one side of the fault line or the other. Jesus lends us a hand in verses 17-18. If the preacher is speaking "on their own," meaning their message is not of God, then you can tell because they seek their own glory. Their preaching is a means of self-increase. But if their message is of God, then they'll lift up the one who sent them: they as the preacher will seek to decrease, and God they will seek to increase. So which one is Jesus - the good preacher or the deceiver? The reader is left to choose and believe.

Verses 19-24 were originally placed earlier in the Gospel, after 5:47. In John 5, Jesus heals a man on the sabbath during a visit to the Temple. The Jewish leadership in the Temple said Jesus was breaking the sabbath by healing the man. Therefore, the "one work" of 7:21 refers to healing on the sabbath. Jesus cites rabbinic custom and argues that since it's lawful to circumcise a baby on the sabbath, if the eighth day of the baby's life falls on a sabbath, then why shouldn't it be lawful to heal a person's entire body on the sabbath? The Jews are following the letter of the law, not the purpose of the law. They don't have "right judgement" (7:24). Right judgement would ask a different question- not, "What does the law say exactly?" but "What is God intending for us to do?" To ask the second question requires someone who can help us discern God's intentions in every situation, and that person is the Christ.

#### **Questions for Discussion and Reflection:**

1. When have you struggled with the "letter of the law" in the Bible? Who do you go to for help?
2. Consider the characters in today's story- the disciples, the brothers, the crowds, the Jewish leaders, the man who was healed. Who are you?
3. Who can you lift up today so that you decrease and they increase?

#### **Week 4, Day 3**

##### **John 7:25-31**

*<sup>25</sup> Now some of the people of Jerusalem were saying, 'Is not this the man whom they are trying to kill?' <sup>26</sup> And here he is, speaking openly, but they say nothing to him! Can it be that the authorities really know that this is the Messiah? <sup>27</sup> Yet we know where this man is from; but when the Messiah comes, no one will know where he is from.' <sup>28</sup> Then Jesus cried out as he was teaching in the temple, 'You know me, and you know where I am from. I have not come on my own. But the one who sent me is true, and you do not know him. <sup>29</sup> I know him, because I am from him, and he sent me.' <sup>30</sup> Then they tried to arrest him, but no one laid hands on him, because his hour had not yet come. <sup>31</sup> Yet many in the crowd believed in him and were saying, 'When the Messiah comes, will he do more signs than this man has done?'*

### **Understanding the Passage:**

The crowd in the Temple is asking the obvious question: if the Jewish leaders have such a problem with Jesus, why haven't they killed him already? It's not like they haven't had the chance. In John, Jesus goes to Jerusalem not once but many times over three years. Jesus shamelessly and loudly proclaims himself sent from God. Unlike the other Gospels, Jesus in John does not keep his identity a secret. Quite the opposite - he shouts it. So why haven't the religious elite done anything to stop him?

One explanation that John is addressing is the possibility that Jewish leadership *did* know Jesus was the Messiah and their accusations against him were distractions making it look like they didn't believe in him. This possibility will be addressed later when the Jews try to have Jesus arrested. They did *not* believe in him, whatever the rumors say.

Then John addresses another problem. The Messiah's origins are supposed to be mysterious. The Messiah should ride in as the conquering hero from places unknown, and only Elijah can speak to where he came from. But everyone in Jerusalem knows where Jesus is from: Galilee. So how can he be the Messiah?

Jesus' response is: you're all wrong. Jesus was somewhere else before he was in Galilee. He was with God in the beginning, before anything was made. As if he suspects they already know this deep down, he says they know where he's actually from; they know his true eternal origin, yet they refuse to believe it. Instead, they try to seize him, for he is clearly guilty of blasphemy for insulting God by claiming to be equal with God. Jesus escapes. He lives to preach another day.

But Jesus wins a few over. A few of the Jews believe he is who he says he is. Their logic is, "There can't be another Messiah. How could anyone perform more signs than this guy?" They believe because of what they've seen Jesus do in the Temple. Anyone who can do what this man has done, as they've seen with their own eyes, *must* be the Messiah. No one else could do more. It's not the gold standard of belief that John raises up, believing without seeing, but it is belief all the same.

### **Questions for Discussion and Reflection:**

1. When have you believed because of what you saw God do in your life or someone else's life?
2. Think about the people in your life who do *not* believe in Jesus. What about a life of faith do you want for them? What are the gifts of believing in Jesus that you wish they had?

## **Week 4, Day 4**

### **John 7:32-39**

<sup>32</sup> *The Pharisees heard the crowd muttering such things about him, and the chief priests and Pharisees sent temple police to arrest him. <sup>33</sup>Jesus then said, 'I will be with you a little while longer, and then I am going to him who sent me. <sup>34</sup>You will search for me, but you will not find me; and where I am, you cannot come.'* <sup>35</sup>*The Jews said to one another, 'Where does this man intend to go that we will not find him? Does he intend to go to the Dispersion among the Greeks and teach the Greeks? <sup>36</sup>What does he mean by saying, "You will search for me and you will not find me" and, "Where I am, you cannot come"?'*

<sup>37</sup> *On the last day of the festival, the great day, while Jesus was standing there, he cried out, 'Let anyone who is thirsty come to me, <sup>38</sup>and let the one who believes in me drink. As the scripture has said, "Out of*

*the believer's heart shall flow rivers of living water." ' 39Now he said this about the Spirit, which believers in him were to receive; for as yet there was no Spirit, because Jesus was not yet glorified.*

### **Understanding the Passage:**

The Pharisees are extreme literalists of the Torah, the five books of Moses, and they're tight with the chief priests in charge of the Temple. They can't let Jesus preach in the Temple forever. His claim to be the Christ can't go unchecked. So instead of confronting him themselves, they send the police. These are *not* the public servants of our day. These are hired guns (or better, swords) in the employ of the priests. They are no match for Jesus, but as Jesus has said, it is not his time (*kairos*) to return to the Father, so it's time for him to find the exit.

On his way out, Jesus says he'll soon go where no one can follow. We know he's talking about his death and resurrection, but the Jews heard a signal that he would try out his message with Greek-speaking Jews elsewhere in the Roman empire. Because many of the Jews in the Temple don't believe in him, they don't know what to make of his words. Making sense of Jesus requires believing in him if only a little bit. That first tiptoe of faith is the hardest, but all remaining faith is built on it, and, without it, Jesus' words will be just that, words, not wisdom.

The Festival of Booths lasted seven days, and on the seventh day, the priests would walk around the altar seven times carrying water from the Pool of Siloam, a small body of water in Jerusalem fed by an underground spring. They would pour the water into a bowl set on the altar as a libation offering to God. Accompanied with the libation would be music, joyful music, and loud singing. It was a time of joyful worship.

So while the priests are walking around the altar, perhaps even while they're pouring the water into the bowl, there is Jesus shouting over the music: "Let anyone who is thirsty come to *me*." Not to the priests. Not to the Temple or the altar or the sacred rites of religion. To me. John makes an editorial note that Jesus was referring to the gift of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit will be like living water flowing out of Christ and into the believer. Implicit here, against the background of the celebration, is the fruit of joy. Where is living water to be found? In Jesus. What will the living water produce? Joy, pure joy in the heart of those who have drunk deeply from living water.

### **Questions for Discussion and Reflection:**

1. When did you take that first tiny step of faith in Christ? Or what would it take for you take that step today?
2. When do you drink deeply from Christ? Is it prayer? Or worship? Or in community? Or something else?
3. Take a moment and pray for someone you know who hasn't yet taken that first tiny step.

## **Week 4, Day 5**

### **John 8:1-11**

*<sup>1</sup>while Jesus went to the Mount of Olives. <sup>2</sup>Early in the morning he came again to the temple. All the people came to him and he sat down and began to teach them. <sup>3</sup>The scribes and the Pharisees brought a woman who had been caught in adultery; and making her stand before all of them, <sup>4</sup>they said to him, 'Teacher, this woman was caught in the very act of committing adultery. <sup>5</sup>Now in the law Moses commanded us to stone such women. Now what do you say?' <sup>6</sup>They said this to test him, so that they might have some charge to bring against him. Jesus bent down and wrote with his finger on the ground. <sup>7</sup>When they kept on questioning him, he straightened up and said to them, 'Let anyone among*

*you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her.’<sup>8</sup>And once again he bent down and wrote on the ground.<sup>9</sup>When they heard it, they went away, one by one, beginning with the elders; and Jesus was left alone with the woman standing before him.<sup>10</sup>Jesus straightened up and said to her, ‘Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?’<sup>11</sup>She said, ‘No one, sir.’ And Jesus said, ‘Neither do I condemn you. Go your way, and from now on do not sin again.’*

### **Understanding the Passage:**

One of the most powerful stories of the mercy of Jesus, the story of the woman caught in adultery is also one of the greatest mysteries in the Gospels. We simply don’t know how it ended up in our Bibles. Most modern translations will bracket the entire passage of 7:53-8:11 and supply a footnote saying something like, “The most ancient sources of the New Testament do not contain this passage at all. Other sources place it elsewhere in John, and still others place it in Luke.” The ambiguity is disturbing for readers who want to be certain that this story happened in history, that Jesus actually did something so loving and gutsy. In fact, we have no reason to assume Jesus did not do this. Since this story *is* in our Bibles, we are to read it like any other piece of Scripture, as valid revelation of the heart of God.

What we know for certain is that someone in the early church was moved by this story and convinced that this Jesus is the Jesus of abundant life as remembered by John, and this anonymous editor decided to place the story here between the confusion of the Jews of Jerusalem about who Jesus is (7:40-52) and the confession of Jesus that he is the light of the world (John 8:12). The Jesus who refuses to condemn the woman caught in adultery defies all explanation, but he is no less gripping and compelling, like a light shining so brightly in the darkness that all who see it find their feet moving toward it. Who wouldn’t move toward someone like this?

The passage is straightforward enough. It’s the day after the climax of the Feast of Booths. The Temple is swarming with people, and Jesus returns to preach after a night off. The scribes and Pharisees are desperate to lay hands on Jesus and stop him, so they sink to a new low. They bring a woman who, they say, was caught in the very act of adultery. Note we’re not sure if the woman really was unfaithful. All we have to go on is the word of the scribes and Pharisees, and they’re not exactly trustworthy. Yet whether she’s innocent or not, the woman’s danger is the same. Men in power say she’s unfaithful, their word trumps hers, so she is to be stoned per the law of Moses in Deuteronomy 22:22-25. The commandment in Deuteronomy also says the man caught in adultery is to be stoned, too, but where is he? Why isn’t the man facing the same judgment as the woman? Clearly, there’s a double-standard.

The story hinges on the question directed at Jesus in verse 5: “Now what do you say?” The law of Moses is clear on the outcome of this situation: the woman must be stoned. But what is Jesus to say on the matter? Is he to be a judgmental literalist like the scribes and Pharisees, or is he something else?

That Jesus is being asked publicly to rule on a matter of law helps us to understand why he draws on the ground with his finger. The Ten Commandments were written on tablets of stone *by the finger of God*. The rest of the law of Moses was to have equal authority. Ultimately, the law of Moses is not Moses’ law at all; it’s God’s law, as if from God’s very fingertips. So what is Jesus doing? He’s writing a new law. This new law isn’t on tablets or paper, or on the ground. It’s on the heart of every believer. The point is that Jesus is the true and highest authority of what God’s law is. It’s not Moses and certainly not the scribes and Pharisees. If Jesus says something is lawful of God, then it is. Period.

The new law of Jesus says mercy wins over judgment. The law of Moses may say to stone the woman, but the new law of Jesus, as a fulfillment of what the law of Moses was intended to do, says to have mercy on the woman because none of us, not a single one, is without sin. If Jesus says that's what Deuteronomy means, then that's what Deuteronomy means. His finger *is* the finger of God.

**Questions for Discussion and Reflection:**

1. What questions do you have about today's passage?
2. Who in your life was "caught" in a terrible mistake, and you wish they had been shown mercy?
3. When were you "caught" in a terrible mistake, and you wish you had been shown mercy?

**Video Questions:**

1. Why doesn't Jesus want his biological brothers to join him on the way to Jerusalem?
2. Colin says the "shadow of the cross" hangs over the Book of John. What does he mean?
3. How do the brothers understand being "lifted up?" How does Jesus understand being "lifted up?"
4. So how could someone see Jesus as "deceiving?"
5. How are the people who say "no" to Jesus keeping their integrity?
6. What difference does it make to go all in to Jesus rather than partially in?
7. What does Jesus being "living water" mean to you?
8. Colin and David provide a few possibilities for why Jesus wrote in the sand. Do you agree with one or more those? Or what other explanations have you heard?

**Prayer requests and other notes.**