

John 7,8,9 Controversy

We human beings seem incapable of doing anything without some controversy. Watch the news and you'll see how for every new initiative there's protest and opposition, and here in John's Gospel we see something similar. The difference is that while our opinions on current affairs can differ fairly safely, our attitude to Jesus has life and death consequences now and eternally!

John chs7-10 have Jesus teaching at some of the religious festivals in Jerusalem and while these chapters contain some wonderful statements and actions that have been celebrated by Christians for 2000 years, John makes it clear these happened against a backdrop of constant criticism and threat. Read any one of these chapters and it sounds like there's a constant argument running between most of the religious leaders and Jesus Whom they are opposing.

Someone has written, 'No one is blinder than he who *will* not see' and that's true. If we stubbornly, continually refuse to see and accept something that is before our very eyes the day will come when we can't see it. The opportunity of light and grace will be gone and we will perish in our darkness.

Apart from Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea, most of the Jewish ruling council seem determined to reject Jesus of Nazareth. They harangue Him with questions, send guards to arrest Him, threaten to stone Him, despite the clear evidence He is presenting that He is in fact the Son of God and the Messiah prophesied in their Scriptures.

What about us? Are our eyes open or closed to Jesus? Are our hearts open to see and recognise and accept and welcome and follow enthusiastically the Saviour God has given? Let's see.

The Feast of Tabernacles was an annual festival during which Jews celebrated God's provision in the wilderness for their ancestors in the time of Moses and looked forward to the Messianic age when God's promised Servant would pour out the living water of the Spirit as suggested by Old Testament passages like Isaiah 11 +12 : 'A shoot will come up from the stump of Jesse; from his roots a Branch will bear fruit. The Spirit of the Lord will rest on him...With joy you will draw water from the wells of salvation.'

The last day of the feast was a happy occasion with music and dancing, during which the priests would take water from the Pool of Siloam (which is fed by the Gihon Spring) and pour it on the altar in the Temple. On this occasion Jesus stands and announces loudly, 'If anyone is thirsty, let him come to me and

drink. Whoever believes in me, as the scripture has said, streams of living water will flow from within him.'

It is a bold and unmistakable claim. He's saying the Messianic age they've all been waiting for has arrived. The Messiah is here. They're looking at Him!

Here is the One Who gives life in the Spirit and life for all eternity. Some are already beginning to taste this living water, this 'bread of life' - the wedding party in ch2, Nicodemus in ch3, the woman at the well in ch4, the disabled man at the Pool of Bethesda ch5. The disciples can bear witness, they've seen Him feed 5000, walk on water and calm the stormy seas as only God can do.

Are we persuaded yet? What does He do next?

He dramatically shows grace to a sinner. The opposition drag in someone caught red-handed in a serious sin. Her guilt is not in doubt. While Jesus is entrusted to Judge the world and is the only one present without sin, technically He could have thrown the 'first stone' but on this occasion chooses not to. He does not condone wrongdoing, He urges her to 'leave her life of sin', but instead of condemning her He offers her the new beginning He discussed with Nicodemus, the 'living water' He shared with the woman by the well in Samaria and promised the Jerusalem crowd the day before. The new life that liberates us with understanding love and forgiveness.

Jesus masterfully shames His opponents here, for who among us has not committed sin in our private thoughts or assassinated our neighbour's character with cruel words? None of us could have thrown that first stone. This is grace, quite outrageous sometimes, but something we're all in need of!

Immediately after this John records Jesus declaring, 'I am the Light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness but have the light of life.' Later in the chapter, as the Pharisees continue to cast doubt, He assures those who *do* believe in Him with these famous words, 'If you hold to my teaching you are really my disciples. Then you will know the truth and the truth will set you free.'

Trusting and obediently following Jesus Christ, this is the path of true enlightenment and freedom. Are we still unsure? He's not finished yet, look at ch9.

Here we find the episode of a man blind from birth. The disciples ask Jesus to comment on a popular puzzle of their time. Illness and disability are in general part of our human experience since the Fall in Genesis, everyone gets their

share. There are also some scriptures that suggest in certain cases individuals may bring extra affliction on themselves through sinful disobedience. So what happened here?

Jesus wastes no more time on fruitless discussion but says it is an opportunity to glorify God by doing something good and heals the man. (Symbolically He gets him to go wash in the life giving spring water of the Pool of Siloam!) With a mixture of tragedy and comedy John describes the Pharisees investigating this clear miracle, interrogating this man and finally throwing him out!

In a rather lovely example of follow-up, Jesus seeks the man and gives him an opportunity to better understand and believe and receive the fulness of life that is knowing the Lord. In dramatic comparison to the wilfully blind Pharisees, this man is eager to see and know and trust the Messiah!

Which brings us to Jesus' poignant little postscript here in 9 v 39: 'For judgement I have come into this world, so that the blind will see and those who see will become blind.'

Which are we? Seeing or blind?

Do we just observe some religious rules and rituals, or do we consciously trust and follow Jesus the Light of the world?

Do we pour our energies into merely upholding and defending certain traditions, or are we liberated by amazing grace?

Are we deaf and blind and closed in mind and heart to the truth, or are we bathing joyfully in the light and life of His redeeming love?

Let's choose to open our eyes and really see Jesus, while we still have a choice!