

*“Where Does He Come From?”*

During this school year, most of my sermons will be part of a major series related to my intensive sabbatical study of the Gospel of John a little over ten years ago. Today’s message is one of those sermons and it covers Chapter 7 of the Gospel of John. Since it is based on such a large portion of Scripture, I will not be reading aloud the entire chapter prior to the sermon but will raise up major sections of it throughout the message. Therefore, please take out your pew Bibles from the hymnal racks in the pews or open your personal Bible to **Chapter 7 of the Gospel of John**. It is found on page 133 in the New Testament portion of the pew Bibles. Please keep your Bibles open throughout the sermon, so you can more easily follow the flow of the themes we consider in chapter 7.

Since I will not be Reading aloud the entire chapter by itself, it might be helpful for me to provide you a brief summary of how this Scripture flows. In verses 1-9, we learn about the attempt of Jesus’ brothers to get him to perform some miracles to gain publicity. Although they tried to couch this as making a suggestion for Jesus’ welfare, he made it obvious he recognized they were selfishly seeking to gain notoriety and influence through his wondrous acts in public. Jesus, while seeking to avoid being arrested prior to *“the right time”* revealed his brothers were only thinking about themselves, for he said in verses 6-7, *“The right time for me has not yet come. Any time is right for you. The world cannot hate you, but it hates me, because I keep telling it that its ways are bad.”* Prior to reporting what Jesus said, John gave notice about this situation, revealing, *“(Not even his brothers believed in him.)”* It was certainly a difficult situation for Jesus – knowing how he would suffer to fulfill God’s Purpose, while his brothers gave no real support or true encouragement.

We are told Jesus stayed in Galilee and avoided going to Jerusalem in Judea because the Jewish authorities there wanted to kill him. After sending his brothers along to the festival, Jesus secretly also went to Jerusalem. About halfway through the festival, he began teaching publically in the Temple, which surprised the Jewish authorities. Each of the major parties or characters engaged in the activities of this chapter had their own agendas, which are interwoven, as the Gospel of John reported what happened during Jesus’ visit to Jerusalem during this festival.

These different agendas might be thought of as the themes in chapter 7. One of those themes was **the Jewish authorities’ intention to kill Jesus**. Another theme was **the various responses of the general population to Jesus**. Also, the Jewish authorities, the general public, and Jesus were intentionally engaged in a **confrontation about the theme or issue of where Jesus came from**. Jesus’ central concern or agenda was **to reveal his true purpose as the Son of God – Messiah**, through whom the Divine Parent seeks to invite and lead us into a New Reconciled, Forgiven, and Healing Relationship with our Creator and one another.

Throughout this school year sermon series, the messages will frequently lift up helpful evidence about the issues related to the current debate over the historicity, validity, and authenticity of the Gospel of John, especially when comparing and contrasting it with the Synoptic gospels. This Scripture is an example of how the Gospel of John often gives an extensive description of an event or episode in the ministry of Jesus — in stark contrast with the much shorter and less defined accounts usually found in the Synoptic gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke. Most of the

Synoptics' reports are like brief sound bytes in present day television and radio news reports, whereas, the Gospel of John provides something more like a documentary on the situation, flowing from Jesus' mission or task of revealing God's purpose in his being sent into this world. Further, many of John's details provided in addition to those in the Synoptics have been documented as accurate reports of the structures or geography, etc., which could have only been known by an eyewitness during the time frame of the reported event. The Synoptics' lack of such details testify to them being second hand or more distant from firsthand sources. Given all that, let's examine the themes interwoven in the Reading.

This chapter repeatedly reports the **Jewish authorities sought to arrest and kill Jesus**. The Synoptic gospels also report the authorities seeking to arrest him but those accounts take place very late in Jesus' public ministry. This theme is raised from the beginning of chapter 7 – in verse 1, ***“After this, Jesus traveled in Galilee; he did not want to travel in Judea, because the Jewish authorities there were wanting to kill him.”*** Chapter 7 shows some of the authorities' reasons or excuses for rejecting Jesus' claims of being the Messiah and for seeking to kill him, instead of recognizing and following him.

Verse 11 shares the news the Jewish authorities were looking for Jesus during the Festival of Shelters. The general public whispered their thoughts about Jesus to one another. The reason for such secrecy is shown in verse 13, when the Reading states, ***“But no one talked about him openly, because they were afraid of the Jewish authorities.”*** The reason for such fear by the people was their belief the authorities were very unhappy with and angry at Jesus and they were expected to express hate and even violence toward anyone supporting him. After the authorities did not find Jesus out in public during the early part of the festival, they, evidently, decided he wasn't going to make an appearance during the festival. So, when halfway through, Jesus appeared and taught in the Temple, the Gospel of John reports, ***“The Jewish authorities were greatly surprised and said, ‘How does this man know so much when he has never been to school?’”*** This response was an expression of their questioning Jesus' background, specifically his education. [As an aside, the author of this gospel may well have been the disciple of Jesus, who was well known to the authorities, according to John 18:15-16. Perhaps this was the case because he had been taught in their school – maybe it was there he learned Greek, the official language of the Sanhedrin, the Jewish Council, which would have enabled him to write this gospel in Greek.] **The authorities also questioned where Jesus came from.**

Beginning with verse 16, while Jesus was surprisingly teaching in the Temple, he responded to the authorities' attack on his background. In verse 19, Jesus directly confronted the authorities saying, ***“Moses gave you the Law, didn't he? But not one of you obeys the Law.”*** Jesus did not hesitate to document his charge of their going against the Law but immediately continued, ***“Why are you trying to kill me?”***

The gospel does not make it clear but certainly the angry response to Jesus' charge was made by the supporters or servants of the Jewish authorities, for they said in verse 20, ***“You have a demon in you! Who is trying to kill you?”*** Whenever someone or a group demonizes an opponent, that desperate tactic is often a begrudging admission of being exposed by the truth! Jesus then demonstrated the falseness of the authorities' arguments against his healing a man on the Sabbath. Remember, back in September the Scripture was about Jesus healing a man on the Sabbath, who had been sick for 38 years. That healing led the Jewish authorities to be very angry with Jesus and

after that they began plotting to kill him. The public noticed the authorities did not have a good response to Jesus' challenge against their legalistic interpretation of the Sabbath laws. They came to an important insight about the truthfulness and authenticity of the Jewish authorities, saying in verses 25 and 26, ***“Isn't this the man the authorities are trying to kill? Look! He is talking in public, and they say nothing against him! Can it be that they really know that he is the Messiah?”*** Note, the people acknowledged the authorities were seeking to put Jesus to death!

After Jesus went on to challenge the attack on his background by the authorities and to correct the false understanding of his origins by the crowd – no doubt as a result of the false propaganda of the authorities, verse 30 explains the authorities' enforcers ***“they tried to seize him, but no one laid a hand on him, because his hour had not yet come.”***

The gospel went on to share some of the positive comments of the crowd about Jesus and explained in verse 32, ***“The Pharisees heard the crowd whispering these things about Jesus, so they and the chief priests sent some guards to arrest him.”*** Jesus and the author of this Text make it clear the authorities would not be able to arrest him to kill him until ***“his hour had” “come”*** – until it was ***time to conclude his purpose of fully manifesting God's Self-Giving and Suffering Love for us in Jesus' unjust death.*** The gospel writer indicated what Jesus said to the guards was the manifestation of God's intervention, so they were unsuccessful in arresting him. Specifically, in verses 33-34, ***“Jesus said, ‘I shall be with you a little while longer, and then I shall go away to Him Who sent me. You will look for me, but you will not find me, because you cannot go where I will be.’”*** [Remember Jesus saying this when we examine chapter 13 and Jesus references what he said on this occasion during his last night with his disciples.] The fact the guards returned empty-handed was especially galling to the Chief Priest, the rest of the Sanhedrin, and the Pharisees! They could not comprehend what Jesus was talking about, when he said they would not be able to find him or follow him.

The last day of the Festival of Shelters was very important. Jesus delivered a powerful teaching on that day about him being the source of life – and how those who are ***“thirsty”*** should come to him to have ***“life giving water”***! Sounds reminiscent of when Jesus called his followers to eat his body and drink his blood, doesn't it? The crowd then debated if he was ***“the Messiah”*** or ***“the Prophet”***. In verse 44 the Reading reports, ***“Some wanted to seize him, but no one laid a hand on him.”*** Still not his hour? In verses 45-47 the gospel states, ***“When the guards went back, the chief priests and Pharisees asked them, ‘Why did you not bring him?’ The guards answered, ‘Nobody has ever talked the way this man does!’ ‘Did he fool you, too?’ the Pharisees asked them. ‘Have you ever known one of the authorities or one Pharisee to believe in him?’”***

In verses 50-52, we are given a glimpse of the debate going on among the authorities about the plan to arrest and kill Jesus. It reveals Nicodemus, the person, who previously met with Jesus under the cover of darkness in chapter 3 was a leader for those arguing against the plot to capture and kill Jesus. The Gospel of John says, ***“One of the Pharisees there was Nicodemus, the man who had gone to see Jesus before. He said to the others, ‘According to our Law we cannot condemn people before hearing them and finding out what they have done.’ ‘Well,’ they answered, ‘are you also from Galilee? Study the Scriptures and you will learn that no prophet ever comes from Galilee.’”*** The inference was Jesus was from Galilee. The assumption was such a charge gave credence to the authorities attacking Jesus and rejecting his claims. However, that understanding was false.

Let's turn now to the **theme of Jesus' origins** in chapter 7. The comments about where Jesus came from were a bit strange. His response to those attacks, evidently set the Jewish authorities on their heels. I say that because of a later statement from the authorities and their allies (pause) found in Chapter 9. Soon after the experience described in today's Scripture, Jesus healed a man born blind on the Sabbath. An angry comment against Jesus spoken by the Jewish authorities to the healed former blind man is recorded in 9:29, *"We know that God spoke to Moses; as for that fellow, however, we do not even know where he comes from!"* The healed man responded with great insight, saying in verse 30, *"What a strange thing that is! You do not know where he comes from, but he cured me of my blindness!"*

Returning to today's Reading – chapter 7, when the crowd was divided in their opinions about Jesus – between his being *"the Messiah"* or *"the Prophet"*, the gospel continued in verses 41-42, *"But others said, 'The Messiah will not come from Galilee! The scripture says that the Messiah will be a descendant of King David and will be born in Bethlehem, the town where David lived.'" Evidently, this questioning of Jesus' authenticity in connection with where he came from led Matthew and Luke to include their birth stories about Jesus being born in Bethlehem in their respective gospels.*

However, in verses 16-18 Jesus revealed the source – origins of his teachings, saying, *"What I teach is not my own teaching, but it comes from God, Who sent me."* Further, Jesus pointed out, *"Whoever is willing to do what God wants will know whether what I teach comes from God or whether I speak on my own authority."* He put in a verbal jab at the Jewish authorities, while contrasting himself from them, declaring, *"Those who speak on their own authority are trying to gain glory for themselves. But he who wants glory for the One Who sent him is honest, and there is nothing false in him."*

Then, in verses 28-29, Jesus brought forth his conclusion on the theme of his origins, *"As Jesus taught in the Temple, he said in a loud voice, 'Do you really know me and know where I am from? I have not come on my own authority. He Who sent me, however, is Truthful. You do not know Him, but I know Him, because I come from Him and He sent me.'"*

The best answer to the question of Jesus' origins is not Bethlehem but, instead, his ultimate origin – where he comes from is the **Divine Parent!** Now is the time to show our origins – we are from – with Jesus Christ, so our ultimate source is also the Divine Parent. It is by living God's unconditional love and welcome – living the invitation to a New Relationship with God and one another, which demonstrates our origin. The Highest Authority calls us to share **with all people God's "Agape" Self-Giving and Sacrificial Love**, which was manifested in the Only Son, Jesus the Messiah — the Christ! Amen.