

2nd Sunday after Christmas
January 4, 2015

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Sermon Text: John 7:37-43

UNEDITED DRAFT

What will you do with Jesus?

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Christmas has come in gone. Yet in the church we spend one last weekend considering Christ's birth and its implications.

What will you do with Jesus?

There are those who actively oppose him. Some do so violently. There are Christians being openly, physically persecuted today in countries like Iran, Pakistan, Nepal, and China. Christians in those countries can lose their lives or their livelihood or their possessions because of their faith in Christ.

There others that oppose Christ intellectually or philosophically. This is the kind of opposition you are more likely to meet in America. In fact, if you have not met that kind of opposition yet, I would suggest that you have been hiding your faith under a bowl, because there are enough atheists and intellectuals in America, that if you were vocal about your faith, you would have had to deal with this kind of persecution. In this form, the Christian is mocked and put down for his ignorance and his dependence. He's accused of being medieval, backward or naïve in his thinking. While you may not lose life or possessions, you lose reputation and opportunity.

But in addition to active opposition to Jesus, many are indifferent about Jesus, or ignorant about Jesus. Increasingly, many people have simply never gone to church. They have never been taught about Jesus Christ, therefore they are not for him or against him... they don't know him. Others grew up in church, but for various reasons, they leave the church. Maybe they felt church was irrelevant, or they had a bad church experience. Maybe they were manipulated, or bullied or ostracized. For whatever reason, they used to go to church, now they no longer do and so they are indifferent about Christ.

But the people I want to focus on today are the ones who are here... you. Today we will read a portion of Scripture in which Jesus invites you into a relationship with him. He invites you to come to him and follow him. So the question I want you to wrestle today is this: **What will you do with Jesus?**

Let me tell you where I got this question. It's actually from another part of the Bible we're not going to study today. When Jesus was on trial for his life, he was before a Roman ruler name Pontius Pilate. Pilate could either release Jesus or condemn Jesus. Pilate found him innocent, but the people wanted Jesus dead. So Pilate gave them a choice. On the one side he gave them a hardened criminal, a rebel, a murderer named Barabbas. On the other side was gentle, humble and innocent Jesus. He asked which one he should release. The people shouted, "Give us Barabbas!" Pilate was shocked. He couldn't believe they would choose the murderer. Flabbergasted, he asked the question: "*What shall I do, then, with Jesus who is called Christ?*" What shall I do with Jesus? He was at a loss. The people's answer? "Crucify him!"

But it is this same question I want to ask you today, “What will you do with Jesus?” Reject him? Resist him? Shrug your shoulders concerning him? Watch him from a distance? Admire him from afar? Occasionally listen to him? Maybe once a week... or every other? Or will you come to him, place your full trust in him, and follow him as your personal Savior and as the master of every aspect of your life?

Let me give you the setting for this portion of Scripture we are looking at today. WHERE: Although Jesus conducted much of his ministry in the north part of Israel near Capernaum, what we’re about to read takes place in the southern part of Israel in Jerusalem. WHEN: Jesus is in Jerusalem for “the Feast.” From context we know this was the feast of Tabernacles or sometimes called the Feast of Booths. They remembered their 40 years of wandering in the wilderness when they lived in booths, or tents. God miraculously preserved them. Every year in the fall, they remembered this. Jesus entered Jerusalem secretly so as not to arouse the religious leaders against him. Nevertheless, about halfway through the 7 day festival, Jesus began to teach publicly. This all took place roughly six months before his crucifixion.

The Jews were absolutely floored by his teaching, and couldn’t believe he had never formally studied under a rabbi. Jesus assures them that his teaching was not his own, but came from his heavenly Father.

As the feast drew to a close, the stir and commotion of Jesus’ teaching was growing. People were trying to figure out who he really was. The rulers were against him, yet his teaching! And the miracles! And so there was much confusion about him.

And then, on the last and greatest day of the Feast, what we’re about to hear took place. One part of the last day of the festival was that the High Priest would take a golden pitcher fill it with water, and he would pour out the water on the altar in remembrance of how God miraculously brought water out of a rock for his people. They would recite Isaiah 12:3: **“With joy you will draw water from the wells of salvation.”** This whole festival was a remembrance of God’s salvation. Now we aren’t told specifically when Jesus said what I’m about to read, but it sure would make sense if Jesus said this when the priest was pouring out the water upon the altar. Perhaps the people had just recited: “With joy you will draw water from the wells of salvation.”

We’re told that Jesus stood up and shouted to the crowds in his loudest voice: John 7:37-43

37 [On the last and greatest day of the Feast [of Tabernacles], Jesus stood and said in a loud voice,] “If anyone is thirsty, let him come to me and drink. 38 Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, streams of living water will flow from within him.” 39 By this he meant the Spirit, whom those who believed in him were later to receive. Up to that time the Spirit had not been given, since Jesus had not yet been glorified.

By this, Jesus issued an open invitation to the hundreds, maybe thousands within ear shot. As they people praised God for his protection, preservation and salvation, Jesus calls out to the people to come to him for that protection, preservation and salvation. **“If anyone is thirsty, let him come to me and drink.”**

Jesus gave a similar invitation to the woman at the well in Samaria. **“Whoever drinks the water I give him will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life.”**

And again Jesus said in John 6: **“I am the bread of life. He who comes to me will never go hungry, and he who believes in me will never be thirsty.”**

You know what is like to be thirsty. You get that almost indescribable ache for water. Your body needs it to survive and so your body shouts to you that you must get water, and nothing will stop that inner ache until you get water to quench your thirst.

Spiritually, people thirst as well. When our conscience shouts at us that we are not right with the Creator because of the wrong things we have done, that is an ache that we desperately need to have relieved. This is a thirst all people experience, but many have become masters at masking or hiding or ignoring.

We have disobeyed and contradicted the most-high God, creator of heaven and earth. Our lives have not always perfectly lined up with the *right living* he requires. Our *attitude* has sometimes disappointed him. The words that have come out of our mouths, sometimes to the people we are closest to... to our spouse, children, parents, best friends... sometimes those words have offended God greatly. All these things are called “sins” and they have put us at odds with the Creator. And every sin creates a thirst for peace with God, for God’s acceptance, for God’s forgiveness. And to have a right relationship with God is like a long cool drink that thoroughly quenches your thirst.

Jesus says that if you are thirst, come to him and drink. Jesus is the Son of God in human flesh. The Bible claims and we teach that he is the King of kings sent by God himself as the solution to a problem we made but couldn’t fix. You can search for your own water. You can try to quench your own thirst. Many, many people look within themselves to quench their thirst, but you can’t find water in a dry well, and that is what we are by nature. They dig deeper and deeper within themselves and ultimately find nothing. Others do what they can to distract themselves from this deep thirst. They do it with self-medicating or various distraction methods. But none of these satisfies the thirst. The only way to quench this deep spiritual thirst is to come to Jesus and drink deeply of the water of life.

This is the invitation given by Jesus. How will you react? Well, let’s look at how the people reacted:

40 On hearing his words, some of the people said, “Surely this man is the Prophet.”

41 Others said, “He is the Christ.”

I don’t think these are really two different groups of people. These are both those who are following Jesus and trying to reconcile who is with what the Scripture says. “The Prophet” from Deuteronomy foretold. “The Christ” foretold throughout the Old Testament. Both of these are saying, “We think he is the promised one!” These are they who are coming to Jesus to have their thirst quenched. But there is a second group:

Still others asked, “How can the Christ come from Galilee? 42 Does not the Scripture say that the Christ will come from David’s family and from Bethlehem, the town where David lived?”

So the other group were the skeptics. These were the ones who were resisting Jesus and who relied on themselves and their own intellect to dismiss Jesus. Specifically, they were hung up on the fact that Jesus grew up in Nazareth in Galilee. They knew from the prophet Micah the words we heard earlier that the Christ must be born in Bethlehem, just outside of Jerusalem, the town of David. They presumed Jesus was not born in Bethlehem. They didn’t bother asking the

question or doing the research. They presumed to know something about Christ, but the truth is they didn't truly know him.

I can't tell you how many times as a pastor I have listened to people try to dismiss Christ or a part of his teaching based on rational intellectual arguments that are just plain wrong. They first dismissed Christ, and then tried to back it up with reasons, but their reasons were born out of unbelief, not out of facts. They presumed to know things that in fact they did not know, or were mistaken about.

I bet many of you have met such people too. Lots of people out there have rejected Christ then tried to justify it by doing just enough research and reading of others who have rejected Christ so that they feel they have a rational argument for their rejection. They have not listened to Christ, or followed Christ, or done an honest evaluation. Their rejection is unreasonable, and is born out of unbelief.

Those who take an honest look at the life and teaching of Christ learn who he really is and what he has really done.

And so the reading concludes:

43 Thus the people were divided because of Jesus.

Those who followed him were unconvinced by those who rejected him. And those who rejected him would not be convinced by those who came to him. A divide remained between those who believed on him, and those who did not.

The same remains today. Jesus sharply divides people. Sometimes even families are divided. A true believer cannot comprehend how a person can not follow the Lord and Savior. An unbeliever cannot comprehend how a person could follow him. Division.

But the question for you today is a personal one. What will you do with Jesus? Do you believe that you have failed God in your life... that your life has fallen short of God's holy and perfect requirements? Do you believe that God is a loving Father who intervenes and wants to fix what you broke? Do you believe that Jesus is God's son born of the virgin Mary and is God in human flesh? Do you believe his perfect life? His teachings? His miracles? Do you believe this innocent God-man was wrongly condemned? That he silently went to the cross? That he was crucified in your place as your substitute? Do you believe

If you believe this, friends, you are saved. You have life in his name. You have drank from the well of salvation and are satisfied. God accepts you, loves you, and is with you. Heaven is your eternal home. And this changes your life. It changes your reason for living. It changes what is at the center of your life.

If you reject Jesus, there is no salvation. There is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved. Apart from Jesus, there is nothing.

Before we say goodbye to Christmas, revisit the manger one more time and see the Son of God in human flesh who humbled himself to save you. Don't watch him from afar, but embrace him with your life. He is your salvation. One last time: Merry Christmas. Amen.