John 7:1-24

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[0:00] Well, do turn to John 7. John chapter 7, and we'll look at verses 1 to 24. You know what it's like, don't you, in London in the summertime.

It's beautiful sunshine, and then the cloud comes over, isn't it? Dark, menacing clouds of hostility. And you know what's coming. You know that at some point there's been a period of pressure, and at some point the clouds will break, the heavens will open, and there'll be a deluge of rain.
And what you see in John 7, 1 to 24, are dark, menacing clouds of hostility that haven't yet broken out into the open. Remember chapter 6?
Chapter 6, it started, there were 5,000 people. 5,000 people coming and following Jesus, sitting under his teaching. They have their breath taken away by his miracles.
They enjoy a feast that Jesus provides. And then Jesus says, in chapter 6, boys and girls, men and women, unless you eat my flesh and drink my blood, you are not going to have eternal life.
[1:14] And people think he's gone over the deep end. It's blasphemy, it's cannibalism, it's too intense, and they leave en masse.

There's a whole lot of them. It's a big rejection. Jesus goes from 5,000 people following him to 12. He goes from being a mega church pastor to a small group leader in four hours.
And you're thinking that's pretty bad, isn't it? Another chapter doesn't finish, chapter 6, before Jesus says that one of his own 12 hand-picked disciples is going to reject him.
It's another hit. It's rock bottom, isn't it? Another form of rejection. And you think, well, it can't get any worse. But then you come to chapter 7, and we'll see that the rejection of Jesus is even operating within his own family, from his brothers who came from the same womb.
So John 7 begins with him leaving the north in Galilee, and relatively safely, in order to go down to the south, and Judea, into real danger.
[2:20] And the storm clouds darken of opposition. There's a dark background to John chapter 7. And as the events unfold, there's no doubt that the main theme of this chapter is the rising tide of opposition towards Jesus.

The rising opposition to who he says he is. And that is something, isn't it, with which we're not completely unfamiliar with as a society.
Ruben's really helpfully shown us that in James, hasn't he? That we're living in a negative culture. Storm clouds gathering over Christ's church.
And so we should be interested in what John has to tell us in chapter 7. Just look with me. See the theme. Verse 1. They're seeking to kill him. Verse 13.
There's a fear of the Jews, so no one spoke openly about him. In verse 19, he asked, why do you seek to kill me?
[3:20] In verse 20, you have a demon. Verse 25. They are whispering about him. Is not this the man they seek to kill?

Verse 30. They talk about arresting him, but don't. And then in verse 32, you see the same theme. And verse 45. The chapter is about the rising tide of opposition towards Jesus.
And what I want us to do is just look at the three groups. I'll spend far longer on the last group. But the three groups in these first 24 verses. The first group is the brothers of Jesus.
Look at verse 3 and following. Leave here, they say, and go to Judea. Go to Judea, that your disciples, your followers, Jesus, may also see the works that you are doing.
And it seems to me that actually there's a touch of manipulation there. Even a touch of cynicism. Jesus, if you want to be a main player on the religious scene, you need to get amongst the big boys in Jerusalem.

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[4:26] There's no point wasting your time here in the sticks. There's no point ministering in a place like Cornwall or South Wales. Who's ever heard of places like that? Jesus, you need to be in St Paul's Cathedral, Westminster Abbey.

You need to be in the corridors of religious power. Verse 4. No one works in secret if he seeks to be known. If you want to be a public figure, don't hide the light under a bushel. If you do these things, show yourself to the world.
We can hardly believe it, can we? That the brothers, the flesh and blood of God incarnate would come out with something like this.
They had ate meals with God incarnate. They had done sweating work at times. They had had relaxing holiday times with God manifest in the flesh for 30 years.
They knew him. And yet the explanation is given in verse 5 where we learn that they are not believers. And that in a sense makes the puzzle all the greater, doesn't it?
[5:36] These brothers of Jesus, they've been with him all these years and yet they don't believe in him or accept his message. Such misunderstanding.

And of course that puzzle exists today, doesn't it? Those who've had most access to the truth of the gospel, but they can't see it. Members of a family, maybe in your family, they've had a living Christian living amongst them for years and years and years, but they don't believe it.
They reject it. And so if that is you, don't beat yourself up mercilessly as a failure. You may feel like you've been the only Christian in your family for years and years and nobody seems to take the slightest bit of notice or has got the slightest clue about who you are and who you love.
So great encouragement, isn't it? That the same thing happened to the Son of God. He knows. And don't you think in chapter 7 and verses 3 and 4, Jesus felt acute pain and hurt and anguish.
Here is his own kith and kin, his own flesh and blood through Mary and they haven't got a clue. But the story, of course, has encouragement at the end of it.
[6:57] There's a postscript, isn't there? That by the time you get to the Acts of the Apostles, the brothers have become disciples. And one of them was James, the brother of our Lord, who became a great leader in the early church.

So do not lose heart. Do not lose heart. The Gospel means that very surprising things can happen to people.
Very surprising things. That's the first group, the brothers. The second group is the Jews, the Jewish people. They're mentioned in verse 1, but they're mentioned more specifically in verse 11 and 13 and 15.
Now by Jews, he probably means Judeans. That is the general population that's in and around the capital city, Jerusalem.
And if the brothers' opposition is marked by cynicism, then Judea's opposition to Jesus is marked by confusion.
[7:57] And that confusion is seen in that divided estimate of Jesus they have. Look at verse 12. Some say he's a good man. Some say he's a good man.

Others say, no, he's leading the people astray. I want to pause for a moment and just ask, which of the two reactions in verse 12 are the more confused?
There's a question. Which of the two reactions in verse 12, good man or leading the people astray, is the more confused? Those who thought Jesus was a good man or those who thought Jesus was a deceiver?
And so we're not the kind of church that normally asks you to raise your hands, but we're going to do it tonight. All right? Okay. So think about the question. Do you think that the more confused attitude was those who said Jesus was a deceiver?
If so, raise your hands now. I'm serious, right? Or do you think that the more confused were those who Jesus said, who said Jesus was a good man?
[9:11] If you think the second, raise your hands now. There's about three quarters abstentions. You're a disgrace. You really are. Okay, so you're not too sure, are you? Even the elders are slightly bottling it.

I think it's the second group. Let me read to you the quote from C.S. Lewis that most of you have heard before. C.S. Lewis says this, I'm trying here to prevent anyone saying the really foolish thing that people often say about him.

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I'm ready to accept Jesus as a great moral teacher, but I don't accept his claim to be God. That is the one thing we must not say. A man who was merely a man and said the sort of things Jesus said would not be a great moral teacher.
He would either be a lunatic on the level with the man who says he's a poached egg or else he would be the devil of hell. You must make your choice. Either this man was and is the son of God or else a madman or something worse.
You can shut him up for a fool. You can spit at him and kill him as a demon or you can fall at his feet and call him Lord and God. But let us not come with any patronizing nonsense about his being a great human teacher.
[10:28] He's not left that open to us. He did not intend to. Some of the Jews, verse 20, if you look there, they thought he was mad. You've got a demon. That's an option.

Some of the Jews, verse 12, said you're bad. He's a deceiver. That's an option. And others of the Jews said he was good. Verse 12, he's a good man but that is not an option.
So they're more confused. In the midst of all the confusion that there was in the opposition to Jesus at this time and that confusion still exists today, doesn't it?
People still have views about the Lord Jesus that are so confused. There are many that think he was a good man. He was a good moral teacher.
Many think he was maybe a mythical figure. Some people think he's on the equivalent of a fairy tale. That's the second group. The brothers are the first group.
[11:30] The Jews are the second group. But then there's a third group. And group is not really the right word. Category would be better. It's a category which the other two groups in John 7 belong to.

Which all groups of human beings belong to. And that is the category of the world, verse 7. The brothers' opposition was cynical.
If the Jews' opposition to Jesus was confused, Jesus teaches us that the world's opposition to him is marked by hatred. That's what Jesus says.
If you look at verse 7, it's so stark. The world hates me. It's very simple and yet very profound. The world hates me. You've probably understood if you've been here over the duration of our studies in John that the word world is a very important word in John's Gospel.
[12:37] It's a very important category for John. He uses it many, many times and it means for him not just, not the physical globe, but it means humanity in opposition to God.

So right at the beginning of the Gospel, he's mentioned the world, isn't it? Chapter 1, verse 10. John saying this, he was in the world and though the world was made through him, the world did not recognise him.
The world did not recognise Jesus. A few weeks ago, I went to the rugby and I met someone who I didn't have a clue who they were and they knew me and I didn't have a clue who they were.
They said, you know me and I looked at them and I thought, I don't know him and I didn't know who they were until they revealed themselves. 25 years have passed. I obviously hadn't changed a bit. But I didn't recognise them. I didn't recognise them until they revealed themselves. But human beings have got no excuse for not recognising our maker in Jesus.
[13:51] And there'll be certainly no excuse on that day when we meet him on that judgement day. The world does not recognise Jesus.

That's what John is saying in chapter 1. But in chapter 7 he says something more serious, doesn't he? He says, the world hates me. And perhaps you're saying, well, is that really the case?
You might think, well, it's the case in a place where militant Islam rules and reigns. maybe northern Nigeria, Pakistan, certain parts of Iran. Maybe you've read about the hatred in parts of the world for Christians and for the Lord Jesus Christ.
And we know, don't we, that there is much hatred for Jesus in many parts of the world. But what about in our part? What about in our hearts?
Can that be so? Well, it does seem to be the Bible's teaching, isn't it? In that very first sermon in Acts, in Acts chapter 2 on the day of Pentecost.
[14:52] Do you remember how Peter finished it? He had this great appeal to the people and he said to the people, repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of sins.

And then the text goes on to say this, Peter warned them by many, many words and he pleaded with them, save yourself from this wicked generation. And that wicked generation, we are meant to

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see that that applies throughout every period of history.
Right down to today. The world hates Jesus. And every human heart is ultimately resistant to Jesus.
There are different ways of expressing it, aren't there? And so you can just, you can display that by apathy. But apathy is not the problem.
We often think it is that people don't care. But apathy is not the problem according to the Bible. Antagonism is. And people express that antagonism according to their different personalities, depending on their upbringing, depending on their education, depending on their different abilities to express themselves.
[16:07] So people can be really courteous, can't they? They can be polite. They can even be flattering. But they still hate Jesus. Why does the world hate Jesus?

Jesus gives us the reason. Look at verse 7. The world cannot hate you, but it hates me. And here's the key, because I testify about it, that its works are evil.
So when Jesus begins to expose us, feathers start to be rustled and feathers start to fly.
There's an example of that in verses 14 to 20. Do you see what's being said there? What is it that changed the interested observers from verse 15 to violent opponents in verse 20?
And the answer has to be, Jesus said to them, verse 19, has not Moses given you the law in the Old Testament? Yet not one of you keeps the law. Merely exposing their hypocrisy and duplicity and sinfulness.
[17:06] And then he goes further on asking, why are you trying to kill me? And the crowd protests. They say, you're demon possessed. They go mad at that.

We're not trying to kill you, but they were. And Jesus is right and he's proved right in time and given half a chance the world would murder its maker all over again.
Because the world hates Jesus because he testifies, he shows that what it does is evil. Second example is in verses 21 to 24 and it's a rather complicated section but there's a basic simplicity to it. Some of the Jews were quite happily circumcising their children on the Sabbath day. Though strictly speaking it was against their laws to do that on the Sabbath. And they got absolutely mad with Jesus.
Do you remember when he healed the whole body of a man who'd been lying by the side of a pool for 38 years? They went mad at him for doing that because he'd done it on the Sabbath.
[18:11] Even though Jesus was fulfilling his father's intention in the giving of the Sabbath. And when Jesus exposes their hypocrisy again, then their hatred is rekindled.

They see their hypocrisy. Is not this the man whom they seek to kill, they say? The world hates Jesus because Jesus testifies against its evil.
evil. And I mustn't use the impersonal there. Our evil. Even when we become believers in the Lord Jesus, and those of us who are Christians here tonight, we will, we're aware, aren't we, there's a remnant of opposition that exists in our nature towards the Lord Jesus and his absolute claims on our lives.
maybe you've been a Christian for years, but you're aware that there's a rebellion that exists inside you. There's a resistance many times that takes place within us.
And so if we're honest tonight, when we are aware that, aren't we, that when things go wrong and disappointments occur, our knee-jerk reaction indicates that very often we become resentful of God's plan or we start to blame him or we start to express doubt or disappointment or even anger towards him.
[19:34] When our pride rebels and the kind of defence mechanism kicks in, that takes place within us. And all kinds of rationalisations take place.

When Jesus puts his finger on something in my life and on in your life, we can often rile up, can't we? I don't know what it's like in your house.
If I say someone in your house says to you, you're always on your phone. What's your first reaction? Well, this happened in our house last night.
So I'll tell you what my first reaction was. You're on your phone all the time. You're on the phone more than me. That's immediate. What happens, isn't it? We know this and as Jesus puts his finger on something in our lives, we know our gut reaction, even those of us who are believers, it's often to really kick against it.

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And it's so important tonight for us to come clean about this and to admit that. We will never, we're never going to develop, we're never going to mature if we don't admit that.
[20:45] It struck me this week, I read an interview with a man called Fergal Keane, he's an Irish journalist and a BBC correspondent. I've not read his memoirs. They sound brilliant.

He had a wild upbringing. But in the interview I read, he comes clean and he tells the readership about the kind of guy he is like.
He said he'd been covering it up for years with various masks and then he says this about himself. He says in personal relationships I was a taker. I was dependent, needy, manipulative and quick to use the pain of my past as an alibi for selfishness.
Poor me. If you had had the childhood I had you would be the same. Those who were closest to me saw a man who retreated into silence when he was challenged who could not communicate feelings.
A man with the self-obsession and compulsiveness of a truly driven man a man running. It's a remarkable admission isn't it? There's hope for a man or a woman or a boy or a girl who comes clean tonight because Jesus can remake us when we say yes Lord you've put your finger on it.
[22:07] I might have been mad about it Jesus but I capitulate I agree or you can be like the world the world hates Jesus because Jesus testifies to its evil.

It puts a whole new light doesn't it on the most famous verse in the Bible John 3 16 for God so loved the world that's actually meaningless jargon to most people.
Jesus loves yeah yeah meaningless jargon until you actually understand that the God the world God's love is a world that hates God and once we discover that it makes the good news of Christianity absolutely wonderful I can't finish there because John is giving this gospel to present the world saviour and so in John 7 we find some marvellous teaching on the planned salvation of the world look in verse 6 the right time for me Jesus says has not yet come the word used there is this phrase a point in time might simply be a reference to the feast of tabernacle as in verse 8 I'm not going up to this feast for my time has not yet fully come in other words Jesus is saying there's a timing in everything to do with salvation and it's not the right time for me to go up to the feast with the brothers very likely if he'd have gone up there would have been some kind of palm sunday scene and that wasn't the father's plan at this particular time it's a wonderful reminder of how precise and how exact and how minute
God's timing is in the unfolding of salvation and in the lives of his people it's a wonderful truth isn't it that God's perfect timing in our lives is so exact so accurate so precise but the word can mean a point in time it can also mean significant time and if that is the case that gives us an understanding of this huge gulf in verse 6 in the reference to Jesus in the reference to his brothers verse 6 my time has not yet come but your time is always here and what he means by that is you brothers at this particular stage what you're doing is completely insignificant to God as far as salvation is concerned God it's a really strong thing Jesus saying a really stark truth for the unbeliever who sets his life in opposition to God by going his own way the living of his life is absolutely completely and utterly insignificant in the eyes of God as far as salvation is concerned but with
Jesus Christ the timing and the plan is everything there's the utmost significance in what Jesus has come to do as saviour there was a right place and a right time for Jesus to give up his life to pay the penalty for our sins and to pay the price for our salvation and yet it wasn't yet Jesus says my time has not yet come and you know over and over again in John's gospel certainly right up through the first half you find this same idea repeated chapter 2 verse 4 different words but same idea at the wedding of Canaan and Galilee my time has not yet come chapter 7 verse 30 it says they could not seize him because his time had not yet come chapter 8 verse 20 almost exactly the same thing they couldn't lay hold of him because his time had not yet come all the way through this chapter Jesus saying my time has not yet come not yet not yet and then you reach chapter 12 verse 23 and he says now the time has come for the son of god to be glorified and you ask what time and the time is holy week he'd come to the shadow of the cross he's come to within a stone's throw of calvary and Jesus was not killed he gave up his life to pay the price for our salvation and so john chapter 7 is pointing you ultimately to the cross and the right place and the right time where jesus would lay down his life to be our saviour and so you can take the content of john chapter 7 and actually understand the cross in the light of what happens in john chapter 7 and ultimately when the time came all the hatred of the world was poured onto the lord jesus christ were you there when they crucified my lord all our insults all our curses all our blasphemies were put onto him all my sins of

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every kind all the thoughts that stain my mind all the evil i designed laid on him all the ways my feet have strayed all the idols i have made all the times i have not prayed laid on him all the told and acted lies all the success and all the tries sins that i legitimize laid on him all that sinks me in the mire all the times of base desire all that needs a cleansing fire laid on him all my misdirected powers all my many wasted hours all my dreams of ivory towers laid on him john chapter 7 says that jesus testifies against the evil but at the cross jesus christ took the evil upon himself he took the hatred and he bore it on his own body on the tree as though he had done it he never spoke back on the cross as a sheep before her shearers is silent so he opened not his mouth but he bore it meekly and lovingly the hatred the evil alas and did my saviour bleed and did my sovereign die did he devote a sacred head for such a worm as I was it for crimes that I had done he died upon the tree amazing pity grace unknown and love beyond degree and if tonight you will accept him if [28:57] tonight you will capitulate and take him Jesus will be your saviour and you say to me how can I accept him I'm not sure how to do that where can I start and the answer is given in verse 17 where Jesus gives a universal principle we'll finish with this it's not just to the Jews it's to anyone in the world anyone of us tonight verse 17 if anyone if anyone's will if anyone chooses to do God's will he will know whether the teaching is from God or whether I'm speaking my own authority the principle is really simple let me explain it to you if we are willing to do what God says we will find out that Jesus is our saviour and tonight you may not understand 95% of what God says but don't start there you start with the 5% that you know that God is saying and you obey that and there may be only one thing tonight that you've understood from the sermon well will you do that and you keep on doing the things that you do here and understand and as you do it you find out that

Jesus is your saviour being willing to do what God says and God's great commandment is this the supreme commandment which John the gospel writer expresses in his epistle in chapter 3 and verse 23 he says this is the command of God what is the great command of God that you believe that you believe in the name of his son Jesus Christ and you love one another and if you've understood anything tonight of Jesus Christ the saviour of the world and his death on the cross for our sake bearing our sin and our hatred if you understood anything of that and you see him as the available risen saviour who's alive here's the command place your trust in him give your heart to him surrender your life to him and you might not understand much more than that but you can understand this can't you believe trust believe in the
Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved take that command and do it and for those of us who are Christians for many of us the principle still applies doesn't it are you willing to do what God says day by day as we hear his word Sunday by Sunday and there'll be a lot that we don't grasp and a lot that we don't understand but there are some things we know and are we willing to do it and if you're not willing to do it you will stay in the same spot for 30 years willing to do what God says let's pray

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