

# The Great Proclamation

## I. The Background

Notice that once again John identifies the Jewish feast that served as the backdrop for this section. The Passover feast motif shined through the events mentioned in the previous chapter. The Feast of Tabernacles motif will do the same for this chapter.

The Feast of Tabernacles was a time for the Jewish people to return to Jerusalem for the celebration. There, one would find little shelters erected all over the city as the people remembered their camping situation in the wilderness. Torches would be lit at night as a memorial to the pillar of fire that accompanied them in their wanderings.

## II. Marketing 101

Because of the Feast, the brothers of Jesus try to convince Him this would be a good time to go to Jerusalem and let his disciples see him performing miracles there. However, there were a couple of matters to take into consideration.

First, Jesus had been avoiding returning to Judea because the Jewish leaders were plotting to kill him. If He were to return, it would only be by His Father's guidance and direction.

Second, John divulges an unsettling bit of important information. Jesus's own brothers were not yet believers. Their recommendation for him to go prove Himself in Jerusalem was from impure motives. This is one of those very rare moments in scripture when we get a small glimpse of the private family life of Jesus, and what we see is shocking. His own brothers, Mary's other sons, were not convinced their half-brother Jesus was the Messiah. Jesus found others who were convinced and had left their family and careers behind to follow Him, but His own brothers were skeptics, yet we do not hear this mentioned very often. It is somewhat reminiscent of the story of Joseph and his jealous brothers.

The brothers were essentially challenging Jesus to prove His messiah-ship.

Here is the case the brothers try to make:

4 No one who wants to become a public figure acts in secret. Since you are doing these things, show yourself to the world.” 5 For even his own brothers did not believe in him.

Notice what is wrong with their statement. They believe Jesus wants to make a name for himself, and they say that anyone who is trying to build their own reputation, their own following, their own ministry, their own kingdom has to get their name and their talents and their assets out before the public. They think Jesus needs a publicist. He needs a manager. He is going about this all wrong by hanging out in Galilee. In the brothers' thinking, the Festival in Jerusalem would be an ideal place to promote himself. The city would be teeming with visitors from around the known world and Jesus could showcase his ministry and get all kinds of exposure and publicity.

To me, this represents the ongoing battle that we face in how the church goes about its business. There are churches today that buy into everything Madison

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Avenue teaches about advertising. They buy into everything popular gurus teach about leadership in general. They buy into everything the corporate world knows about running a successful business. Even 2,000 years ago these brothers of Christ understood fundamental marketing for success. What they did not understand is Christ was never into self-promotion. He set an example that few follow today. He wasn't interested in taking advantage of the swelling crowd in Jerusalem to pitch his ministry, so he didn't take the bait.

## III. Proper Timing

A. Timing is everything when you are trying to follow God

We are reminded of the events leading up to the miracle at the wedding feast in Cana. Christ's own mother appealed to Him to help fix their dilemma when they ran short of wine. Christ's response then was the same in essence as it was to his own brothers – His Father had not yet given him the go-ahead. Jesus sent his brothers ahead to the feast and he remained behind until the right time. Even then, in total contrast to the publicity and hype that his brothers recommended, Jesus went in secret.

B. Timing is meaningless to the spiritually clueless

The interesting statement in this portion of scripture is when Jesus refused to go to Jerusalem at the suggestion of his brothers and says,

6 “My time is not yet here; for you any time will do.”

There is an important principle worth mentioning here. Not only is timing meaningless to the spiritually clueless, but in a much broader sense unless we are dedicated to serving God and pleasing Him, we really don't have a firm objective standard to live by. I have encountered many instances in which people have sought counsel from me on the “right thing to do” when in reality, without a personal commitment to God, there was nothing to gauge the “right thing” by.

For instance, I had a lady come to me very upset that her daughter was going to get married by the justice of the peace. She wanted me to help her put together a solid argument why her daughter needed to be married in a church by a pastor.

My question was to the root of the matter: “Is your daughter a born again Christian?” If she isn't, why would it matter to her where she gets married? If she is not looking for how to please God and glorify and honor Him, she is not going to care about any arguments of how a church and a minister is so much better than a courthouse and a civil official. The argument is meaningless unless we first have that relationship with Christ.

Another example comes from a few years back when we learned that some older couples were divorcing and then living together in order to improve their tax and financial situation. The question was, “Is it a sin for them to live together if they are not married?” But the answer again went back to their spiritual condition. Are they born again? Do they claim to be trying to live to please and honor God? If not, why would it matter to them?

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And when Christ looks at his own brothers and basically says, “I cannot, will not, go right now because I am sensitive to the leading of my Father. I want to please Him. However, for all of you, any time will do. Go when you are ready. You are free to make your own decisions because none of you believe that God has any interest in leading and directing you. So, go do when you are ready. Timing is meaningless for those who are not trying to follow God’s lead.”

I know Christ didn’t say all that, but it was implied.

You have so many questions about life. You might have an opportunity for a career change and you want the pastor to help you figure out if this is a good thing to do. I don’t know. Are you trying to put God first in everything you do? Are you trying to honor and please Him? If you aren’t, then it is highly doubtful that it makes any difference what you choose.

## IV. Christ Confronts His Critics

In Jerusalem people were already talking about Jesus and asking where he was. The Jewish leaders were especially on the lookout for Jesus. He was the talk of the town. His reputation preceded him. There were opposing opinions about Jesus. Some were supportive and defended him as a “good man”. Some were skeptical and said, “He deceives the people.” But interestingly, whatever their opinion, no one wanted to express themselves publically because they feared the reaction of the Jews. Jesus was in town, but he had arrived secretly and had not yet been noticed by anyone. The halfway through the festival, Jesus finally arrives at the temple and begins to teach (all of this carefully orchestrated by the Father.) The crowd at the temple is astonished at the depth and skill of Christ’s teaching, knowing that he had not been formally trained.

Jesus points to His Father as the source of His wisdom and skill. He says, “Whoever speaks on his own does so to gain personal glory.” Christ didn’t do that. He spoke what the Father gave him to glorify the Father.

Then he suddenly says two astounding things:

First, “Moses gave you the law yet not one of you keeps the law.”

Second, “Why are you trying to kill me?”

The reply from the crowd was, “You are demon possessed. Who is trying to kill you.” That would be like someone today saying, “You are delusional!”

The way in which this dialogue plays out is very interesting. Jesus doesn’t argue to point of accusing certain people of trying to kill him, but immediately points back to the incident at the pool of Bethesda where the lame man was healed on the Sabbath, and the Jewish leaders were deeply offended Christ had healed on the Sabbath and that He had commanded the man to take up his bed and carry it on the Sabbath. If you remember that story, it said, “For this reason they tried all the more to kill him.”

I find it interesting that Jesus did not give a complete response to that issue when at the pool of Bethesda, but here at this later date and at the temple, he now

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gives a skillful defense of his healing of the man on the Sabbath. Jesus uses the Jews' own argument for performing circumcision on a Sabbath to defend healing a man on the Sabbath. Both were judged to be more important than the legalistic keeping of the Sabbath. He then closes out the argument by telling his critics, "Stop judging by appearances and instead judge correctly!" In other words, quit being so emotionally judgmental and try using some wisdom for a change." I can think of a number of people I have encountered in my lifetime that could benefit from that advice.

So those who said, "You are delusional! No one is trying to kill you!" were most likely lying about the plan, but Jesus was correct. There were those standing in the crowd who were part of the plot to kill Jesus.

## V. Who Is This Man?

After Jesus gives the brilliant defense of his healing on the Sabbath and scolds the Jewish leaders for failing to use wisdom and judge consistently, immediately we get this comment from another group of people we will simply call Jerusalemites – the common people who lived in Jerusalem but were not part of the Jewish leadership.

**25** At that point some of the people of Jerusalem began to ask, "Isn't this the man they are trying to kill? **26** Here he is, speaking publicly, and they are not saying a word to him. Have the authorities really concluded that he is the Messiah?

So there is the proof that some people indeed do know of the plot to kill Jesus, thus contradicting those who offered the previous denial, "You are delusional. No one is trying to kill you."

But the people began to speculate about Jesus again, debating about whether he is really the Messiah or not. Then someone offers this argument:

**27** But we know where this man is from; when the Messiah comes, no one will know where he is from."

Nothing could be more absurd than to try to argue expertly about what to expect about the coming Messiah and how the real Messiah, standing there in their midst, could not possibly be the real Messiah because he doesn't fit their theories about the real Messiah.

Jesus merely replies,

"Yes you know me, and you know where I am from. I am here on the authority of the one who sent me. You don't know him, but I know him because he sent me."

Then the debate resumes about the identity of the Messiah and some argued, "When the Messiah comes do you really think he will perform more signs than this man?" (thus arguing in favor of Christ as the Messiah). As the debate swells among the people, the Jewish leaders send guards to arrest Jesus on the charge of creating a disturbance. And the account of this growing debate among the people about the identity of Jesus is broken by the account of the famous proclamation of Jesus at what is known as the water ceremony.

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## VI. The Water of Life

**37** On the last and greatest day of the festival, Jesus stood and said in a loud voice, “Let anyone who is thirsty come to me and drink. **38** Whoever believes in me, as Scripture has said, rivers of living water will flow from within them.” **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.

After this short insertion, the narrative goes right back to the people fiercely debating who Christ really is. But let’s look at the proclamation first.

There was a seven day water ceremony and daily prayer for rain.

“Each day the priests drew water from the pool of Siloam carried a golden pitcher of water to the temple then around the altar with the high priest leading the way. As the priests neared the water gate, the shofar was blown and then the Psalm of praise and thanksgiving were sung to God for the harvest. As the ceremony developed, the Pharisees, who were primarily urban dwellers, insisted that significant emphasis be placed on the petition for rain because by this time of the year (Fall) their cisterns would be nearly empty after the dryness of the summer.

Now the Sadducees disagreed on the Pharisee’s emphasis on rain. In the time of King Janneus (about 100 years before Christ), the king, being a Sadducee priest, took the ceremonial water brought to him in the golden pitcher and poured it out at his feet, raising his hand in solemn affirmation of having carried out the will of the people. This made the Pharisees so angry they pelted the priest with citron fruit, which was the fruit the Sadducees used as their primary symbol of emphasis on thanksgiving, rather than emphasis on rain. The feud continued until the Pharisees finally won out and, by the time Jesus arrived, the prayers for water and rain became the accepted emphasis of the ceremony.

For six days the water ceremony was repeated and the prayers for rain continued. On the seventh day, the trip was made seven times.

It was on that last day, the greatest day of the feast, the day in which the water ceremony was performed seven times, that Jesus stood up and did something that had never been done in all the centuries of this ceremony. He cried out, “If anyone is thirsty, let him come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, rivers of water shall flow from within them.”

It was the most powerful illustrated sermon ever preached. The Pharisees had won the battle of defining the purpose of the water ceremony. There was no question the big emphasis was, “We need water. We can’t survive without water! Lord, send us water! Our cisterns are nearly dry. Send the rain Lord!

And Jesus capped that desperate cry for water with his bold proclamation, “I am the fulfillment of this ceremony. I am the water of life. If you are thirsty, come to me and drink. After your encounter with me, rivers of water will gush forth from your innermost being.” The Pharisees were in complete shock. Their ceremony was completely messed up. But aren’t you ready for Jesus to mess up your plans? Aren’t you tired of dead ritualism? Isn’t it tragic to be so focused on the

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dead ritualistic ceremony and the symbolism that we miss the fulfillment, the reality that the ritual points to?

It is not about having church. It is about experiencing the presence of God. He can mess up our little ceremony any time He wants to. And he still cries out today. "What you are here looking for today; what you need so desperately; what you long for so deeply; I am the answer to everything you are looking for and hoping for and longing for. Come to me! You have come to church! Now, come to Me!!! I am what it is all about!!