

Is this the Christ (part 3)

HN/SS 20/03/05 am

Reading: Deuteronomy 18, Matthew 10

Study Text: John 7:40-44

Psalms: 139:14-17, 139:18-24, 92:4-8, 119:65-70

If anyone thirsts let him come to me and drink. He who believes in me, as Scripture has said, out of his heart will flow rivers of living water. Can you imagine any human being standing up and speaking like this? Jesus was not standing by a water pot giving out drinks. He was not talking about H₂O but something quite different. The people that were listening realized this. They realized that there was something different about this man Jesus – and it was not in the way he looked but in what he said.

No man ever spoke like this man said the officers sent to arrest Jesus. The people were astonished at his teaching for he taught as one having authority and not as the scribes (Matthew 7:28-29). Jesus spoke with authority; he spoke with wisdom, such that the people marvelled at his teaching. He said right at the beginning of his teaching at this feast my teaching is not my own, but his who sent me. He claimed to be teaching the truth from God, to be speaking the words of God. No wonder he spoke as no man ever spoke before.

‘For a combination of power and simplicity, of courage and prudence, of faithfulness and tenderness we may well say no man ever spoke like this man’ (J.C. Ryle). Jesus spoke the words his Father gave him. The words of God have power to impact not only the minds but also the hearts of people. *The word of God is living and powerful, sharper than any two edged sword piercing even to the division of soul and spirit* (Hebrews 4:12).

The words of Jesus impacted on those listening. Responses differed greatly. There was a division, a schism in the crowd. Some concluded he was the Prophet, others he was the Christ, and others rejected him altogether. Like a sword, his words pricked the conscience of some, while others were impervious, hardened by sin.

Jesus prepared his disciples for such a response when he sent them out to preach the kingdom of God. *I send you out as sheep among wolves; therefore be as wise as serpents and as harmless as doves* (Matthew 10:16). It is still the same today. The gospel of Jesus Christ causes divisions, even within so called Christian families – there are those who get ‘too religious’, those who start talking about ‘mission’! But what about Jewish families, what about Muslim families? What terrible and even tragic divisions can erupt when a family member becomes a follower of Christ?

We must be alert to such things and not be surprised. When we see the suffering and the persecution a convert is going through we might feel they were better off as they were before. When they are thrown out of the family, when they lose their job, lose their inheritance, and are even threatened with death, we might feel the cost is too great. Jesus knew what the cost would be for those who followed him. But he promised a greater

inheritance than any family could give – an inheritance kept in heaven that no one can take away.

The Prophet

The Jews at this time were living under Roman occupation. In their own land they were being oppressed by these Gentile rulers. There was heightened expectation therefore that God would send a deliverer to overthrow the Romans.

But there was no clear or unified understanding of where this deliverer would come from, what he would be like, or what exactly he would do. The Scriptures spoke in various ways of such a person – a prophet like Moses, a ruler from the line of David, a suffering servant, a Messiah. It was not until after his death and resurrection that all these features were seen in the one person, Jesus Christ.

As Jesus spoke about thirst and giving drink, the people probably thought of how Moses gave their fathers water in the desert. The whole Feast of Tabernacles was a time to remember their fathers in the wilderness anyway. Moses not only gave their fathers water but he delivered them out of bondage in Egypt. Moses was the great deliverer whom God sent to his people.

As he gave his last sermon before he died, Moses said that the Lord would raise up *another Prophet like me from your midst* (Deuteronomy 18:15). Previously the Jews had confronted John the Baptist with the question *are you the Prophet* (1:21). He said no. They also asked him if he was the Christ but again the answer was no. Now they are listening to Jesus. Strangely they do not ask Jesus the same questions.

Were they afraid to ask – afraid to hear his answer? Was Jesus demanding more than they were prepared to give? *Believe in me* he said. They wanted to be delivered from the Romans but Jesus seemed to speaking about deeper things. They wanted a deliverer who would do what they wanted, not one who demanded they believe in him and do the will of God.

Nevertheless, on the basis of what Jesus was saying, some concluded *truly this is the Prophet*. This is the Prophet like Moses.

The Christ

Christ is the Gk equivalent of the Heb word Messiah which means anointed or anointed one. Messiah is spoken of in **Psalm**, **Daniel** 9, and other passages. The Jews were expecting Messiah but there was no clarity or unity in their understanding. They asked John if he was Messiah. Even the Samaritan woman was expecting the Messiah – Jesus told her that he was Messiah (4:26). She expected the Messiah to explain everything.

Many of those who heard Jesus teaching in the temple had already acknowledged him as the Christ (7:31). They did this on the basis of the signs which Jesus performed. Whether it

is these same people or a different group acknowledging him as the Christ here we do not know. But here it is after hearing the words Jesus spoke, after they *heard* him call them to come to him and believe in him.

There is a bit more substance in their conclusion that this is the Christ than before – it was not just signs but words he spoke that moved them to believe. Still, what they meant or understood by calling Jesus *Messiah* we cannot be sure about. But it was a positive response upon which Jesus could build, in contrast to the outright rejection of others.

Not the Christ

Divisions in the crowd were being opened up. Some were saying he is the Christ. Some said he cannot be the Christ. People had to decide. These people had all heard Jesus teaching and calling them to believe in him. They had all witnessed his works and his words. And who were the ones who rejected him? The educated ones, the ones who knew the Scriptures! It is hard to believe that their knowledge could be a stumbling stone to faith but there it is.

We are aware of how secular learning can be a great stumbling block to many today. Young people going to university can get caught up in philosophy and science. Philosophy, man contemplating his own existence, often fills the mind but blinds the heart of man. Science, or what is falsely called science, asserts that the world was not created by God but just happened, and that all life forms, including man, have evolved from some cell over millions of years. Man's great learning has led him away from God. There is nothing wrong with knowledge of course. Knowledge is a great blessing to the human race but would be a greater blessing if men remembered they are studying the universe created and sustained by God.

But the knowledge these Jews in the temple had was Scriptural knowledge. How can knowledge of the Scriptures cause men to stumble, you ask? See the reason they rejected Jesus as being the Christ. Because he comes from Galilee they said! And Scripture says that *the Christ comes from the seed of David and from the town of Bethlehem* (7:42). Their knowledge of Scripture was correct – Micah did indeed prophecy the Christ would come from Bethlehem (Micah 5:2).

How incredible, how could these learned people make such a basic mistake in applying the Scriptures they knew so well? Paul gives us a clue when he writes – *Though I have the gift of prophecy and understand all mysteries and all knowledge...but have not love I am nothing* (I Corinthians 13). He also said *knowledge puffs up but love builds up* (I Corinthians 8:1). And he prayed that *your love may abound more and more in knowledge and all discernment, that you may approve the things that are excellent, that you may be sincere and without offence till the day of Christ* (Philippians 1:9-10).

From what Paul says we can see the stumbling block of the Jews. They lacked discernment, even as they also lacked love and sincerity. In their religious pride they thought they knew everything about the Christ and about Jesus. But the simple fact about his birthplace they

had wrong. Knowledge must be accompanied by grace and love if we are to be useful in the kingdom of God.

We can see in the history of the church how Bible scholars have been led away from true faith by their study of languages, history, archaeology, philosophy and the like. The church in the dark ages was not without its scholars. The church in the last two centuries has had an abundance of scholars – many of which led the church into liberalism.

Knowledge itself is not to blame of course. Knowledge of the Scriptures is most necessary. But the heart must continue in grace and humility, even as the head grows in knowledge, if the whole person and the whole body of Christ is to be edified, to grow up into Christ who is the head to the glory of God, amen.

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