

## **The True Teacher**

*These Things are Written that You May Believe Series*

**John 7:1-24**

Pastor Bryan Clark

As people made in the image of God, we all have a longing to know God. So for many people, the logical next step is to pursue religion. One of the reasons religion is so popular is because it tends to be very clear, tends to be black and white. Here are the rules. Here's the, "Do's"; here's the, "Don'ts." "Here are the expectations. Here are the rituals." So it's clear. Do what you're told and it gets to be a little bit like Santa Claus. You either end up on the nice list or the naughty list, but at least you know where you stand. That makes sense to us because that is the way the rest of the world works in a performance-based reward system. But Jesus will say, "Not only is that not the way to God; it's the very thinking that keeps people from the relationship with God that your soul is longing for." So that's what we want to talk about. If you have a Bible, turn with us to the Gospel of John, Chapter 7. If you're visiting with us, we're working our way through the Gospel of John. We find ourselves in chapter 7, verse 1:

**After these things Jesus was walking in Galilee, for He was unwilling to walk in Judea because the Jews were seeking to kill Him. Now the feast of the Jews, the Feast of Booths, was near.** (\*NASB, John 7:1-2)

So chapter seven opens with, **After these things**, just the same way chapter six opened—the exact same words. It's just a phrase that refers to the passing of time. Since this is the time of the Feast of Booths, or the Tabernacles, we know that six months have passed. There are six months between the end of chapter six and the beginning of chapter seven. If you read the Synoptic gospels—Matthew, Mark and Luke—they record a lot of the activity of Jesus up north in Galilee. But John records very little; it's just not relevant to his particular purpose. So a lot has happened. Mostly it's been Jesus very quietly pouring into His disciples. The crowds have diminished, and it's a real training time. We know that the Feast of Booths or a Feast of Tabernacles was in the fall, typically in October. This was a very popular feast. It commemorated the time of the nation wandering in the wilderness. The people in Jerusalem built booths. There were three feasts the men of Israel were expected to attend. This was one of the three. So people would come from all over and invade Jerusalem. The visitors would set up booths anywhere they could find a spot. Basically it's just branches making a little hut, and for eight days they would live in this hut, commemorating the time when the nation wandered in the wilderness. Even the people that lived in Jerusalem would either go up on their roofs or out somewhere in the street and make a booth. It was full of pageantry. It was full of celebration—lots of candles and water commemorating different parts of the journey. Josephus, the first century historian, would say this was the most popular and meaningful feast of all the feasts. So Jerusalem would have been just full of people. Jesus has stayed up north because He knows it's very dangerous for Him to be in Jerusalem, because the religious leaders now want to capture Him and kill Him. We also know at this point that it's six months away from the crucifixion, and so things are going to get very intense as we're now counting down to His arrest and crucifixion. Verse 3:

**Therefore His brothers said to Him, "Leave here and go into Judea, so that Your disciples also may see Your works which You are doing. For no one does anything in**

**secret when he himself seeks to be *known* publicly. If you do these things, show Yourself to the world.” For not even His brothers were believing in Him. (Vs.3-5)**

So, after Jesus was born, Mary and Joseph had other children—Jesus had siblings—and at this point they don't believe. We do know from the book of Acts that after the resurrection, they did come to believe. But it's not hard to wrestle with how difficult this would be, to come to the conclusion that your own brother—your sibling—is God in the flesh, the long-awaited Messiah! That would be no easy thing to come to believe, so they are still wrestling with that. Some people think what the brothers said to Jesus is being kind of sarcastic, but there's no real reason to take it that way. When John says His brothers didn't believe, we'd refer to that as an editorial comment. He means believe in the sense that John's been using the term throughout his Gospel. It doesn't mean they didn't believe He had some sort of unusual power—maybe some sort of prophetic voice—that something about Him was different. I mean He had these massive crowds following Him at one time, but they did not believe in the sense of understanding He was God in the flesh, understanding He was the long-awaited Messiah. All they can see is at one time Jesus was very popular. He had huge crowds. Now they've all gone away, and they see this as an opportune time to go to Jerusalem during the feast. There'll be lots of people there and so, “Do Your thing. Do some miracles. Put on a good show; win the crowds back.” Essentially they're saying, “If Your goal is to get a following, You can't just keep doing what You're doing in secret. You've got to go where the people are.” Verse 6:

**So Jesus said to them, “My time is not yet here, but your time is always opportune.”**

What Jesus means by that is, if you're just trying to put on a show and gain a following, you can do that anytime. That's His brothers' agenda. That's not Jesus' mission. He's on a very specific mission with a very clear timetable. He's going to time this in such a way that at the next Passover, He will be arrested and crucified, fulfilling the Passover feast that's been practiced for hundreds of years. So Jesus has a very specific time table. Verse 7 is very interesting:

**“The world cannot hate you, but it hates Me because I testify of it, that its deeds are evil.”**

Jesus says to His brothers, “You can go to Jerusalem. Nobody there is trying to kill you. Nobody hates you; you'll fit right in; go ahead and go. They don't hate you. Why do they not hate you? Because you're one of them.” Now when He's saying **the world**, He's not talking about the pagans, He's talking about the highly religious people in Jerusalem. His brothers weren't pagans. They were highly religious people. But as long as they're fitting in with the religion, there's no reason to hate them. But they hated Jesus. Why did they hate Jesus? Because He exposed their deeds, and their deeds were evil.

Now think about what's being said here. Religion is supposed to be all about God. But when God actually takes on human flesh and comes to Earth, religion hates Him. He's breaking the rules. He's interfering in their business. They've decided they must kill Him. As long as no one is stirring the pot, He's saying to His brothers, “You're one of them. Go to Jerusalem. Everything's fine. They don't hate you.”

It's very interesting. When you read through Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, there's a consistent pattern that the people that flock to Jesus, the people that couldn't get enough of Jesus, the people that loved Jesus were the sinners and the misfits and the losers, the tax collectors, the prostitutes—the people that had no sense of self-righteousness. They had long since concluded they had no chance to

be right before God. Then they hear Jesus and think maybe, possibly, there *is* hope. They recognize there's no hope, other than the possibility of a Savior. When Jesus went to Samaria—people that the Jews despised—there was a harvest of souls because they heard it and they got it. They understood, “Here's the Savior and we need a savior.” The problem with religious people is they convince themselves that by doing good works, by following the rituals, by doing what they're told, somehow they get on the nice list, not on the naughty list. They look at themselves and say, “I'm as good as the next guy, and probably better than most.” And what happens is, this religion is not leading them to Christ. It becomes a substitute for Christ. As long as your religion can make you righteous, you have no need for a savior. So the Savior enters into this highly religious environment, but they have no need. Why do they hate Jesus? Because He exposes their sin.

Over the years I've seen this to be consistently true. It's the people that hit bottom. It's the people that are struggling. It's the people that are all messed up. It's the people that realize they have no hope. Those are the people that realize they need a savior. They can't make themselves right before God. They tend to be the most receptive to the message of the gospel. The most difficult crowd to reach is the highly religious crowd because they've convinced themselves that, on the basis of their religion, they don't need a savior, and they're highly offended at the suggestion that they're sinners, and they stand condemned before a holy God. So that's what Jesus is saying. “They hate Me because I expose their sin, and they will not recognize their need for a savior.” Verse 8:

**“Go up to the feast yourselves; I do not go up to this feast, because My time has not yet fully come.” Having said these things to them, He stayed in Galilee. But when His brothers had gone up to the feast, then He Himself went up, not publicly, but as if, in secret.** (John 7:8-10)

From where they were up north, to Jerusalem is probably a four or five day walk. So Jesus encourages His brothers to go. He waits a few days. The text tells us He comes in about the middle of the feast. So He waited several days before He goes to Jerusalem. But He goes in quietly; He sneaks in. The Jews are wanting to find Him and arrest Him and kill Him. So He doesn't want an entourage; He doesn't want his brothers right there trying to start some sort of a movement. He's trying to covertly sneak into Jerusalem. Verse 11:

**So the Jews were seeking Him at the feast and were saying, “Where is He?” There was much grumbling among the crowds concerning Him; some were saying, “He is a good man”; others were saying, “No, on the contrary, He leads the people astray.” Yet no one was speaking openly of Him for fear of the Jews.** (John 7:11-13)

So John uses the term **Jews** a couple of different ways in his Gospel. The only way to figure it out is to look at the context. Sometimes it's a reference to the religious leaders—the Pharisees and the Sadducees—and other times it's just a reference to the people in general. It's obvious at this point in the text, He's referring to the religious leaders, and the people in general are referred to as **the crowd**. So they're actually looking for Him. They're assuming He's coming to the feast. They're looking for Him. There's a debate among the people as to whether Jesus is good or whether Jesus is bad, but nobody's saying much for fear of the religious leaders and what they're going to do. Verse 14:

**But when it was now the midst of the feast, Jesus went up into the temple and *began* to teach.**

So the Feast of Booths or Tabernacles was eight days long. Somewhere in the middle, Jesus kind of surprises them, shows up in the temple courtyard, and begins to teach. For someone who was trying to move around secretly, the secret is over. Jesus has now revealed Himself, but He was wanting to get to this moment without being captured in order to speak to the people.

**The Jews then were astonished, saying, “How has this man become learned, having never been educated?”** (Vs. 15)

So whatever Jesus said was so impressive, it **astonished** them. I'm going to guess it's His command of Scriptures and ability to put the whole story together. They're just kind of listening, astonished and wondering how He became so learned when He didn't have a proper education. Now it doesn't mean that Jesus didn't go through the Jewish school system. I'm sure He did. What it's referring to is when you become a rabbi and stand up and teach in front of the people, you've studied under one of the famous rabbis. So Paul, in the book of Acts, identifies that He studied under Gamaliel, who was a famous rabbi. So that's what they're saying. “This is like seminary; this is grad school. Where did He go to seminary? Who did He study under?” Jesus knows if He tells them He didn't study under anybody—He's God—that they'll immediately shut Him down. So He responds,

**“My teaching is not mine, but His who sent Me.”** (Vs. 16)

Essentially what Jesus just said is, “My teacher is the Father. He's the famous Rabbi that taught Me, and I'm telling you what He said.” Now this has been a consistent message of Jesus. Jesus is the eternal Son of God, the Creator of the universe that became flesh. John chapter one, verse 14, and then in verse 18, “*He came to exegete, to reveal the Father to the people.*” He said over and over again, “I come from heaven. I'm coming to tell you what God told Me you need to know.” So this is that same message—that this comes from God! Verse 17:

**“If anyone is willing to do His will, he will know of the teaching, whether it is of God or whether I speak from Myself. He who speaks from himself seeks his own glory: but He who is seeking the glory of the One who sent Him, He is true, and there is no unrighteousness in Him.”** (Vs.17-18)

So, a couple of things there. First of all, there were many false messiahs, so the people are always wondering, “Is this a false messiah or is this the real Messiah?” So Jesus said, “Well, one of the things is the false messiahs do this for their own glory. They're in it for themselves.” What will happen is rather than Jesus seeking self-glory, He's going to follow the path of humiliation, where Jesus will eventually allow Himself to be arrested and die the most humiliating death possible in the Roman Empire. So Jesus is going to do anything but take the path of self-glory. But the other thing He says that's really important is in verse 17, when He's talking to the people about, “How do you know if this is true or not? How do you find the true teacher?” He said, “*As long as your heart's desire is to genuinely know the truth, in order to seek and do the will of God, God will get you there.*” When people seek after God to fulfill their own agenda, to have their own way in order to create a god they're comfortable with, they're led astray into all kinds of false teachings. But when our heart is genuinely to know God, and to know what's true, God has a way of getting us there. I can't tell you how many times over the years, I've had this conversation with people who are seeking, and they're trying to figure it out, and I tell them, “If your heart is genuinely to know God, and to know what's true, and to follow His will, God will meet you there.” It's not a game God is playing. He's not playing hide and seek. If that's genuinely what you want, He will get you there.

Jesus even will say later in the upper room that when He leaves, He's going to send His Holy Spirit, and the role of the Holy Spirit is to lead us into truth. I've said this before. If you were to ask me, "What is the number one reason I believe that the Bible is the inspired, authoritative Word of God?" my first answer would be, "Because I have a personal relationship with the Author of the Book." Now that doesn't convince a skeptic; I wouldn't say it to a skeptic. But you asked me, and I'm not a skeptic. I have the very presence of God in me who was given to me to lead me to truth. Ultimately I know it's true because God confirms in my heart that this is His truth. That's what Jesus is saying. As long as your heart is right, God has a way of getting you there. Verse 19:

**"Did not Moses give you the law, and yet none of you carries out the law? Why do you seek to kill Me?" The crowd answered, "You have a demon! Who seeks to kill you?"**

(Vs. 19-20)

So Jesus says, "Somebody is trying to kill Me." In our language, "You're crazy. Nobody's trying to kill you." But the first part of verse 19, the people revered Moses for *Moses gave them the law. But they all knew nobody keeps the law.* Jesus will say something similar when He says, "*Whoever is without sin, cast the first stone.*" They're all lawbreakers. "Then why are you angry with Me?" Now what Jesus is *not* saying is, "I'm a fellow law breaker." What He's saying is, "You can't even keep the law, yet you're judging Me!" And now He's about to tell them, "The biggest problem is you don't even get the law. You don't even understand it." Verse 21:

**Jesus answered them, "I did one deed, and you all marvel." (*You were all astonished!*)**

So He's referring to healing the man at the pool of Bethesda that started all this conflict, that now causes the religious leaders to want to kill Him. So, what started all this is He healed a man on the Sabbath. He broke the rules, and now He must die!

**"For this reason (*If I'm going to put that phrase into my own language, I would say, "Think about it this way."*) Moses has given you circumcision (not because it is from Moses, but from the fathers), and on *the* Sabbath you circumcise a man.**" (Vs. 22)

So what does that mean? It means that Moses, when he gave the law from God, the law required circumcision for every male child, and exactly on the eighth day. So how they calculated days was: if you're born on a Tuesday, then you're circumcised on the next Tuesday, not the seventh day, not the ninth day, but on the eighth day. But the law also lays out the requirements for the Sabbath. So now there's a problem. If a child is born on the Sabbath, then the child must be circumcised on the next Sabbath—but we're not supposed to work on the Sabbath. So now what do we do? The rabbi's got together and they concluded that circumcision would have to supersede the Sabbath because circumcision goes all the way back to Abraham. So, circumcision preceded the giving of the law by many, many years. God comes to Abraham and makes a promise. The promise is that through a seed of Abraham, He will send the Savior of the world. Abraham believes, and God credits him as righteous. It wasn't through anything he did. It's because he believes, just like John is saying. The sign of the covenant was circumcision. The promise would travel through the male organ. So the removal of the flesh from that male organ was symbolic—that you cannot fulfill this promise in your flesh. Jesus said last week, "The flesh profits nothing. You can't do this yourself, but rather it will be a miraculous gift from God." So the symbolism of circumcision was God made a promise. You can't do this yourself; you're going to have to trust Him to fulfill His promise. So the decision was made, that even on the Sabbath, the circumcision must be followed. Verse 23:

**“If a man receives circumcision on the Sabbath so that *the* law of Moses will not be broken, are you angry with Me because I made an entire man well on the Sabbath?”**

In other words, Jesus is saying, “Okay, you decided that's okay and it's not even breaking the Sabbath, but I find a man who has been sick for thirty-eight years, and I make his whole body well, not just one organ—the whole body—well on the Sabbath, and you think that's wrong!” So essentially what Jesus is saying is that the whole symbolism of the old covenant—of the Old Testament law, even going all the way back to Abraham and circumcision—was this picture that one day God would keep His promise by sending a Savior that would do for you what you could never do for yourselves. Circumcision was all about the removal of the flesh. In other words, “I can't do it myself. God will have to do it for me.” The Sabbath was meant to be a picture that, “We rest,” and, “God works,” symbolic of the fact that one day *God would do the ultimate work and we would rest in it*. These two things come together. God sends His Son to fulfill the promise to do for us what we could never do for ourselves, and we simply, by faith, believe and rest in what Jesus has done. So when Jesus made the man whole on the Sabbath, it again just symbolized that Jesus had come to do far more than that, but to make us completely whole and right before God.

The old covenant was full of pictures and images that foreshadow the coming of the Messiah. Jesus would be the true Temple; Jesus would be the fulfillment of the Passover feast and the Feast of Pentecost and the Feast of Booths. Jesus would be the fulfillment of the sacrificial lamb. Jesus would be the fulfillment of circumcision, the fulfillment of the Sabbath. Everything was pointing to Jesus, but now they've so misunderstood the law, that rather than pointing to Jesus, it's become a substitute for Jesus, to such a degree that when God Himself took on human flesh, He didn't fit in the system, and they determined He must die! Essentially what Jesus is saying is that they're so determined to keep the law and decide who's on the nice list and who's on the naughty list, that they have completely lost sight of what the old covenant was all about. So, verse 24:

**“Do not judge according to appearance (*meaning externals*), but judge with righteous judgment.”**

What He's saying is they have distilled the law down to this system of “Do's” and “Don'ts” with this external superficial judgment of determining who's on the naughty list, and who's on the nice list. And in the midst of all of that, they have completely lost sight of the promise made to Abraham, the promise pictured in the law, the promise that stood before them as the person, the long-awaited Messiah. He says rather with a **righteous judgment**—we maybe would just say *right judgment*—what Jesus is saying is the way to God is not through good works. It's not through a bunch of religious behavior. It's not by trying to see how you compare with somebody else. It's not about whether you're on the nice list or the naughty list. It's recognizing that no amount of religious behavior can make you right before a holy God. *Right judgment* is, “You're a sinner, and you cannot save yourself. And the only chance you have is to believe that Jesus did for you what you could never do for yourself!” This has been the consistent message of the Gospel of John.

One of the most challenging conversations is trying to convince highly religious people that they're actually sinners before a holy God, and that no amount of religion or good works can ever make them right before God. Until you're willing to change your mind and realize that can never make you right before God, your only hope is to recognize you're a sinner in need of a Savior, and Jesus came to be that Savior, to do for you what you couldn't do for yourself—to offer you salvation freely as a gift.

When we were growing up, every now and then my mom would fix Chinese food. Basically, Chinese food in our home was those hard, kind of crispy Chow Mein noodles, with some topping on top. You kind of buy it in a box and a can if I remember right. And honestly, it wasn't very good. *(laughter)* I ate it because I was hungry, but it wasn't very good. So when Patti and I got married, I knew that she had grown up in Korea until she was about fourteen. And after being married for just a few months, she said she was going to cook Korean food. For me, Korean food—Chinese food—I don't think so. *(laughter)* So I voiced my displeasure. She said, “Trust me, it's really good.” So she cooked all kinds of Korean food and much to my surprise, it was really, really good! As a matter of fact, here we are thirty-eight years later, and I think our family would say it's some of our favorite food that Patty cooks. I didn't know what I didn't know. I had no idea what I was missing.

I think of so many people who have a hunger for God, and logically they seek to satisfy that hunger through religion. But religion becomes a distasteful experience. They're sincere; they're trying; their soul longs for God. But it doesn't taste good, but they're hungry, so they continue to eat it, having no idea that they haven't actually found what their soul is longing for. They just don't know what they don't know. They have no idea what they're missing. There's got to be people in this crowd today who have sincerely tried to find that relationship with God that will satisfy their soul through some sort of religious behavior or activity. You sincerely have tried and tried to be on the nice list, not on the naughty list, but if you're to be honest, you would say this has been very unfulfilling, very distasteful. I eat it because I have to, but it has been anything but satisfying. You need to understand that you have not tasted of what God really offers you. It doesn't come through religious behavior, doesn't come through good works, doesn't come from attending the right church. It comes from recognizing you're a sinner in need of a Savior, and God offers you that salvation freely as a gift. He did for you what you could not do for yourself, and He offers it to you if you're simply willing to receive. What your soul longs for is not religion. It longs for a relationship with Jesus. If you have been up to your eyebrows in religion, I just want you to know that you have not tasted of what God wants you to experience, so accept His gift of a relationship with Jesus.

*Our Father, we're thankful this morning that when we were lost in our sin, with no hope, You sent Jesus to be our Savior. God, so often religion becomes the barrier to acknowledging our need for a savior. Lord, may there not be one person that hears this message, that walks away without, by faith, experiencing the forgiveness and the new life that Jesus offers. In His name we pray, Amen.*

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## **The True Teacher**

### *That You May Believe*

John 7:1-24

Pastor Bryan Clark

### **Opening Discussion**

1. Why do you think so many people are attracted to religion? What makes it so appealing to people?
2. Why do you think the culture in general treats Christianity so differently than all the other world religions? Can you imagine a comedian or politician or talk show host mocking Islam like they do Christianity? Why is this?

### **Bible Study**

1. Read John 7:1-9. What does it seem like Jesus' brothers are wanting? What do you think are the motives of the brothers? In Acts 1:14 Jesus' brothers came to believe. Why?
2. Compare Jesus' words in 7:7 with John 3:19-21. What sets Jesus apart from religion and why do religious people struggle with the gospel?
3. Read John 7:10-18. Jesus now comes to Jerusalem about 6 months before the Passover where He'll be arrested and crucified. Jesus sneaks in quietly then at the right moment appears and teaches. The crowd is "astonished" at His teaching. How does Jesus tell them they can discern if what He says is true or not? What does this mean for the average person today? See also John 14:16-17, 25, 26.
4. Read John 7:19-24. What is Jesus saying to these Jews? See also Matthew 11:28-30; 23:1-12. What does religion do to people?
5. Religious legalism is about making superficial judgments on people based on how well they keep the rules. What does Jesus mean by judging with righteous judgment in John 7:24?

## **Application**

1. How does religion keep us from Jesus? Even after we've trusted Christ it's easy to fall back into patterns of legalism that resemble religion more than new life in Christ. How do we prevent this from happening to us?
2. Sometimes an evidence that we've lost our way is when we major on the minors and lose sight of the love relationship Jesus wants to have with us. How can you make sure this doesn't happen to you? Are you more passionate about your relationship with Jesus these days or are you more passionate about things other Christians do that annoy you?