

# John 7 Doubts and Questions / COB / 07.06.14

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## Introduction

- † **[Slide 1: Temple]** *Offer a dollar to someone who has a Bible; another to someone with something else spiritual; five dollars to the one who can repeat the first phrase spoken in the service...*
  
- † Y'all remember that game show, "Let's Make a Deal"? I don't remember how the whole show worked, but they used to do this sort of thing at the end, offering some woman \$100 if she had a paperclip. Sorry, we had to go a little low budget today, since we were using my money.
  - Also in that show, after you won a prize, you later could give up whatever you had won to claim a mystery prize behind one of three doors. If you picked right, you could win a new car! If you picked wrong, you might get a mule or two sheep. Oh wait, we *are* in farm country... some of you might prefer that prize! Well, in the show it was not seen as a good thing!
  
- † I used to play a version of this game with my students when I taught college economics. We would have a game show night. I would give them a quarter when they got a question right. At the end, they could trade their quarters for mystery envelopes. Someone would get a five dollar gift certificate, another would get a ten dollar bill, but someone would get an autographed photo of the professor. It was fun to see their reactions!
  
- † Jesus asks us to play something like Let's Make a Deal.
  - You already have won some reason to feel good about yourself through your own efforts: Maybe you've successfully raised children; you're successful in your career, you've accumulated wealth, you're popular, you're skilled in some way, you've achieved something, you have influence in your church or community. Maybe it's just that you've endured, that you are, as my neighbor in Florida describes herself, "a tough turkey!" I'm sure there is some reason you could feel good about yourself. Jesus asks you to give that up for what's behind door number one.
  - In Jesus' game there is only one door. And he will even open the door and raise the curtain for you! He offers you a package deal, a prize of his righteousness accounted to you, forgiveness of your sins, reconciliation with God the Father, and eternal life in his kingdom.
  - Do you want to make this deal? All you need to do is give up your sense of self-value or self righteousness. He asks you to admit that without him, you have no value, that you have no righteousness of your own, no matter how successful you are; that you need what he has to offer, and that you believe he can offer these things to you because he is the Son of God and the Messiah-savior prophesied in the Old Testament, who died to pay the penalty for your sins.
  - **[Slide 2: Title]** Maybe some of you have questions or doubts about this deal. That's what I want to talk about today, questions and doubts about Jesus and his deal.

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## Background

- † My comments today are based John 7, which we have studied verse by verse over the past two weeks. If you would like help studying this chapter or any of the six before it, we have devotions we can give to you. They are in a binder out at the welcome table.

- Today, we will be talking about one issue found throughout this chapter. We find in John 7 a series of confrontations, as people tried to figure out whether Jesus was who he said he was, the Savior, the Messiah/Christ, the Son of God, the prophetic Son of Man. This is an issue that is just as important today as it was back then.

† **[Slide 3: Evidence]** Back then, Jesus had just provided a great deal of evidence during the previous couple of years of his ministry:

- For one thing, he had done miraculous healings; miraculous exorcisms of demons; and other miracles, like walking on water; these were signs, relating to things prophesied about in the Old Testament hundreds or even thousands of years earlier. Jesus partially fulfilled those prophecies to show that he was the one who would fulfill them completely in his kingdom.
- Second, his teachings glorified God and showed great insight into God’s heart and character.
- Third, he exhibited a selfless and serving approach to life that glorified God.
- Fourth, there was the testimony of John the Baptist, a true prophet of God, and the testimony of God the Father, who spoke audibly about Jesus twice during his ministry years.
- Fifth, he could offer the life change in his followers; and they were hard cases when they started following Jesus: corrupt bureaucrats, prostitutes, burly fishermen... maybe even lawyers... some rough characters! Yet they believed and followed and began to change.
- Despite all this evidence, people were still struggling to believe in Jesus and the deal he offered.

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### Confusion and Debate

† **[Slide 4: John 7.5]** In John 7, Jesus’ own brothers were mocking him. Then v.5 [NIV] says, “For even his own brothers did not believe in him.” Jesus’ brothers might have been skeptical because of familiarity. Can you imagine if your own brother, at age thirty, suddenly declared himself to be the Son of God and Savior? I can picture my own sister’s face if I had tried that!

- Sometimes it is hard to convince your family to take you seriously. Have any of you come to faith in Christ and then tried to witness to your non-believing family members? How many of you found they were skeptical of your new faith?
- I majored in economics in college and went on to get a graduate degree in economics at Georgetown University. But when I would go home to visit my family, and we would all gather around the table to eat and argue, as Italians do, I found nobody was interested in my opinion about the economy. In their eyes, I was still “Little Billy.” I had seven years of study to their zero, but they believed they knew more than I did about economics.
- It’s the same today. If you compare the hours of my Bible study with that of my family members in a given year, I’d say I have about a thousand-to-one ratio advantage... but do you think they believe that I have any insight into spiritual matters? Not most of them, no...
- This is what Jesus was up against with his brothers. It probably was hard on Jesus to see his own family not believe; but to his brothers he was just one of them who suddenly got delusions of grandeur. They thought he had lost his mind. I imagine the question they kept asking was, “How can our brother turn out to be the Savior?”

- † **[Slide 5: John 7.15]** The religious leaders also had questions. In v.15 [NET] it says, “Then the Jewish leaders were astonished and said, ‘How does this man know so much when he has never had formal instruction?’”
- We see that they doubted Jesus’ teaching because he had not been taught in their schools. They also doubted him because he taught the Law with a different emphasis than they, because he made fun of them when they tried to trap him in theological arguments, and because he called them things like a satanic “brood of vipers” and “blind guides.”
  - Have you ever had a job where all the bosses were antagonistic toward you? I had no credibility at my first bank job. Everyone else they hired was fresh out of college, while I had a graduate degree in economics, had worked for a US Senator, and taught college classes for years. I was used to being a respected member of the team, but when the bank hired me, they expected me to stay quiet and do little while they trained me for a year. It won’t surprise most of you to learn that I struggled to be quiet, and so I quickly made things hard on myself. After three months, my bosses were trying to get me to quit. They told me they had no confidence in me, they yelled in my face, they made me a pariah so that nobody would help me, and they nitpicked my work.
  - This is the kind of environment Jesus faced with the religious leaders: they were dead set against him, because they saw he was not compliant to their ways. To the religious leaders, Jesus was at best a strange prophet who needed to be reigned into conformity, but most of them saw him as an upstart, a deceiver, an antagonist to themselves, and even a dangerous blasphemer, since he said God was his father and he and God the Father were one in unity.
- † **[Slide 6: John 7.12]** The crowds were not sure what to make of Jesus. V.12 says [NIV], “Among the crowds there was widespread whispering about him. Some said, ‘He is a good man.’ Others replied, ‘No, he deceives the people.’”
- The crowds had many questions about Jesus. Some thought the appearance of the Messiah should be sudden and mysterious, but they thought they knew where Jesus was from, and he had been around for a couple of years [vv.15-27]. Others thought the Messiah should come from a specific place, but not where they thought Jesus was from [vv.40-44].
  - Most of the people liked Jesus, but they had trouble getting past the fact that he was a poor man from a poor family from an obscure town in the wrong county.
  - In earlier chapters of John, we see that they had many more questions, like why Jesus went against the religious leaders, why he did not keep the Sabbath traditions, why he would say things they could not understand or teach things they could not accept.
  - They were trying to verify whether Jesus was the Messiah, but it was confusing that sometimes the prophets talked about a powerful Messiah King and sometimes about a suffering Servant Messiah. Were they to expect two Messiahs, two Christs? If so, which one was Jesus?
  - Maybe the people even wondered things like why Jesus did not heal everyone, why he did not establish his kingdom when he had the chance, and why he did not do what they asked.
  - I don’t know if you have ever faced a situation where you had to impress a crowd of people who didn’t know you. If you have ever done public speaking, run for office, taken over a group at a company, or taught a class, then you know how this is.

- During the past ten years, I have taught in several churches. I am sure some of those people – maybe even some of you! – were wondering, who is this guy? why should I listen to him? why does he think he knows more than I do?
- This is what Jesus was facing from the crowd, many questions, many doubts.

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### Good, Healthy, Questions

- † **[Slide 7: Define Faith]** It seems just about everyone had questions about Jesus. But, you know what? Those questions could have been a good thing, they could have been something that helped people get healthy spiritually.
  - Having faith does not mean you have no questions! Having faith means you overcome your questions. Say that with me...
- † Even Jesus' closest disciples had questions!
  - **[Slide 8: Disciples' questions]** They wanted to know why he would speak to a Samaritan woman. Many rabbis wouldn't speak to Samaritans or women.
  - About midway through his ministry to the people of Israel, "the disciples came and said to him, 'Why do you speak to them [the crowds] in parables?'" [Matthew 13.10 NET]. Then they asked him to explain the parables to them [Matthew 13.36]!
  - They wanted to know if they could call down lightning strikes on people and why they could not do some of the things Jesus had sent them to do.
  - At the last supper, when Jesus explained that he was going to die and be resurrected, Peter said, "Lord, where are you going?" [John 13.36 NET], Thomas said, "Lord, we don't know where you are going. How can we know the way?" [John 14.5 NET] and Philip said, "Lord, show us the Father, and we will be content." [John 14.8 NET]. Even at that late date, after all their time with Jesus, they still had questions and confusion.
- † You might have heard people refer to one of the apostles as "doubting Thomas." Poor Thomas, he is much maligned.
  - **[Slide 9: John 20.25]** When Jesus had been resurrected, he appeared to the apostles while Thomas was absent. When Thomas heard about this, he said, "Unless I see the wounds from the nails in his hands, and put my finger into the wounds from the nails, and put my hand into his side [where Jesus had been stabbed], I will never believe it!" [John 20.25 NET].
  - Even after all Jesus' teaching about how he had to die and be raised again, Thomas had doubts. Jesus did not condemn Thomas, however: instead he allowed Thomas to see the reality of his presence. Thus Thomas' faith was strengthened, and he spent his life diligently serving his Lord.
  - **[Slide 10: John 20.29]** What we should take to heart, though, is what Jesus did say to him afterward, "Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are the people who have not seen and yet have believed" [John 20.29 NET]. Are you waiting to see? are you waiting for more evidence? or are you ready to believe? [pause]
- † **[Slide 11: Seeker Questions]** If you are not yet a believer in Jesus, you must have many questions.

- Most likely, that is why you are here, to get some of them answered. You want to hear who this Jesus was, what he said and did, what evidence there is for him being the Son of God and Savior.
- I am glad you are here with us. We try to make this a safe place to seek answers. Please feel free to find someone mature in the faith with whom you can discuss your questions. We believe there is no shame or embarrassment in having questions.

† **[Slide 12: Believer Questions]** I am sure every believer in this room has questions too.

- I have questions! Even after investing many thousands of hours in Bible study, there are things I don't understand. Every class in seminary, I answered some questions but came up with more.
- One of my professors pointed out that God did not give us a systematized theology book, but instead gave us the Bible, with poetry, history, proverbs, songs, essays, and prophecies. His point was that apparently God believes there is value in our struggle to understand what he has revealed. It is in seeking answers that we grow in our faith and in our understanding.
- So dust off those Bibles, and read one page each day. If this is new to you, start in the New Testament, to learn about Jesus. We can help if you have questions about what you read.

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### When questions can be harmful

† **[Slide 13: Harmful Questions]** Our questions can be useful and good, but in John 7, they are harmful instead. Jesus gave some reasons that people were having trouble believing.

- First, they did not like feeling a conviction that they were sinful, so they reacted with anger and denial just as we do today. In v.7, Jesus said to his brothers, "The world cannot hate you, but it hates me, because I testify about it, that its works are evil."
- Second, they were not pursuing God. In vv.17-19, Jesus told the religious leaders they were having trouble knowing he was genuine because they were not willing to do God's will and were not obeying the law. Their hearts were not right with God. They were self-involved.
- Third, they were not discerning. In v.24, Jesus told them that they looked at appearances and thought like the world, like their culture, instead of like God, so they had no discernment of spiritual things or people.

† **[Slide 14: Big Issue]** At issue is our attitude: Ask yourself this: are you honestly trying to understand God's will and who Jesus is... or... are you trying to justify your skepticism?

- The people in John 7 were not looking for reasons to believe: they were looking for reasons to not believe, to doubt.
- Some of you are here today seeking the truth about who Jesus is and what he did. If you genuinely seek this truth, then I believe God will honor that effort and you will find the truth. But if you are here to prove the validity of your doubts, then you will obstruct your ability to see clearly and might never see the truth, and thus you will perish never having truly known God.
- Others of us are here today because we already believe in Jesus as our savior. Yet, we too can have both good and bad approaches to our questions. If we genuinely seek the truth in faith, then those questions will not limit us as we continue our walk in faith, growing spiritually and enjoying the fellowship of God.

- However, with the wrong attitude, we can allow our questions to develop into barriers to our walk in faith, with the result that we will not understand the truth, and so we will stagnate, become jaded in heart, live in bondage to sin, be easily deceived by false teachings, reflect the world instead of God's character, and be worthless in ministry.

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### How I dealt with my questions

- † One year, early in our marriage, LeeAnn and I lost several relatives and both pets to death.
  - **[Slide 15: Gospel]** When one relative died, I was deeply troubled spiritually, because as far as I knew he had never accepted that Jesus was God the Son, who had died to pay the penalty for his sins. So, I had to believe he was now in Hell.
  - Romans 6.23 [NASB]: "For the wages of sin is death [physical death and spiritual death, which is eternal separation from God], but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord."
  - The Bible makes clear that God asks us to believe that Jesus was who he said he was and that he accomplished what he said he would at the cross, and thus we can receive salvation.
  - Back then, I lay awake at night, crying out to God, because I could not understand. "Why would you create my relative, knowing he would never accept Christ in faith and therefore would perish? Why would a loving God do that?" I asked and I asked... I cried and I cried...
  - As it happened, I was studying the book of Romans in seminary that month. We came to Romans chapter 9 and God made his answer clear to me.
  - **[Slide 16: Romans 9.18-24]** Romans 9.18-24 ESV: "So then he [God] has mercy on whomever he wills, and he hardens whomever he wills. <sup>19</sup> You will say to me then, "Why does he still find fault? For who can resist his will?" <sup>20</sup> But who are you, O man, to answer back to God? Will what is molded say to its molder, "Why have you made me like this?" <sup>21</sup> Has the potter no right over the clay, to make out of the same lump one vessel for honorable use and another for dishonorable use? <sup>22</sup> **[Slide 17: Romans 9.18-24 part ii]** What if God, desiring to show his wrath and to make known his power, has endured with much patience vessels of wrath prepared for destruction, <sup>23</sup> in order to make known the riches of his glory for vessels of mercy, which he has prepared beforehand for glory-- <sup>24</sup> even us whom he has called, not from the Jews only but also from the Gentiles?"
  - **[Slide 18: Interpretation of Romans 9]** That is a challenging paragraph to understand, but I think it says two things: first, that the question is not why some are not saved, but why God bothers to save any of us; and second, I have no right to judge God.
- † This was not the answer I was looking for. I still have my question, and probably always will, but this answer helped me overcome. I still have a theological question, but I continue to walk in faith. God helped me overcome my question. As I considered how I went through this process, I came to some principles that are on your insert:
  - **[Slide 19: Process]** First, be honest about your questions, with yourself, with God, and with others who can teach you. There's no shame in having questions or doubts!
  - Second, seek answers in faith: search the Bible, pray persistently, seek out Bible teachers here in the church, discuss questions with your spiritual friends.

