

CFM17 – John 7-10 – “I am the Good Shepherd”

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Feast of Tabernacles

Chapters 7:1-10:21 occur together in time surrounding the Feast of Sukkot, or Tabernacles, as follows:

- 7:1-9 A few days preceding the Feast, at home in Galilee
- 7:10-13 The opening days of the Feast, at Jerusalem
- 7:13-36 “about the midst of the feast”, in the Temple
- 7:37-8:59 The last day of the Feast, in the Temple
- 9:1-10:21 The last day of the Feast, just outside the Temple

This great Feast obviously dominates the physical setting and provides the context for the symbols employed by Jesus through these chapters. The Feast of Tabernacles is similar to the American tradition of Thanksgiving in that it is a harvest festival of thankfulness for the earth's bounty. Regarding the Feast of Tabernacles, Easton's Bible Dictionary states:

Tabernacles, Feast of - the third of the great annual festivals of the Jews (Lev. 23:33-43). It is also called the “feast of ingathering” (Ex. 23:16; Deut. 16:13). It was celebrated immediately after the harvest, in the month Tisri, and the celebration lasted for eight days (Lev. 23:33-43). During that period the people left their homes and lived in booths formed of the branches of trees. The sacrifices offered at this time are mentioned in Num. 29:13-38. It was at the time of this feast that Solomon's temple was dedicated (1 Kings 8:2). Mention is made of it after the return from the Captivity. This feast was designed (1) to be a memorial of the wilderness wanderings, when the people dwelt in booths (Lev. 23:43), and (2) to be a harvest thanksgiving (Neh. 8:9-18). The Jews, at a later time, introduced two appendages to the original festival, viz., (1) that of drawing water from the Pool of Siloam, and pouring it upon the altar (John 7:2, 37), as a memorial of the water from the rock in Horeb; and (2) of lighting the lamps at night, a memorial of the pillar of fire by night during their wanderings.

“The feast of Tabernacles, the harvest festival of the Jewish Church, was the most popular and important festival after the Captivity. At Jerusalem it was a gala day. It was to the autumn pilgrims, who arrived on the 14th (of the month Tisri, the feast beginning on the 15th) day, like entrance into a silvan city. Roofs and courtyards, streets and squares, roads and gardens, were green with boughs of citron and myrtle, palm and willow. The

booths recalled the pilgrimage through the wilderness. The ingathering of fruits prophesied of the spiritual harvest.", Valling's Jesus Christ, p. 133.

Jesus makes use of the symbols of pouring out of the water (cf. 7:37-38), the light from the lamps (cf. 8:12), and Moses' shepherding of the Exodus and Wandering in the Wilderness (cf. 10:11). Jesus also draws heavily on the tradition of Simchat Torah, the end and beginning of the Law, which John calls "the last day, that great day of the feast" (cf. 7:37), to point out the Pharisees' hypocrisy when it comes to the Law (cf. 7:19).

Shemini Atzeret, meaning "eighth day of assembly," is the day after the seven day festival of Sukkot. Shemini Atzeret marks the beginning of the rainy season following the harvest in Israel, adding to the water symbolism.

On Shemini Atzeret is observed the Simchat Torah, meaning "Rejoicing of the Torah." Simchat Torah focuses on the Law of Moses, the Pentateuch, the Torah. The annual cycle of weekly Torah portions, or readings, is completed on Simchat Torah with the final Torah portion, and then immediately proceeded with the first chapter of Genesis. Thus the end and the beginning of the Torah in the Jewish religious year, a never ending cycle. The considerable emphasis on the Law is what Jesus draws on in his castigation of the Pharisees, and what John draws on to build irony.

Jesus' Divinity and the Evil of the Pharisees

The major theme running through these chapters is the divinity of Jesus and the evil of the Pharisees. Jesus repeatedly asserts his divinity and his unity with the Father, and the Pharisees repeatedly find fault with him for it and want to stone him for blasphemy. Jesus repeatedly points out the miracles he is doing prove he is doing his Father's work, and they ignore the evidence and attack him.

The epitome of this theme occurs in ch. 9 where the blind man is healed. Jesus symbolically asserts his divine creatorship by making clay and healing the man's eyes with it, and then the healed man and Pharisees argue over the miracle. As the argument proceeds, the man's faith gets stronger and stronger while the Pharisees denials and attacks get more and more heated. The chapter starts with Jesus saying the blind man is not a sinner, and the Pharisees are blind sinners.

Remember that this group of Pharisees at Jerusalem are a specific subset who are beholden to the Sanhedrin, who are beholden to the Romans. This group does not necessarily represent the Pharisees of the Jewish countryside where Jesus spends most of his time. This particular group was very much interested in preserving their religious and political power. Pharisees in the countryside would have been less interested in such things.

Methods of the Pharisees

One of the major themes in these chapters is the conflict between Jesus and the Pharisees. The Pharisee's motives and tactics are exposed to full view herein. They are self-promoting, they find fault where there is none, they rationalize and falsely justify. When backed into a corner

and proven to be wrong, they retaliate with ad hominem arguments, personal attacks, insults, and intimidation to silence those who prove them wrong (cf. 7:35, 7:52, 8:22, 8:48, 8:52, 9:22, 9:28, 9:34, 10:20). Thus, an extreme example of unrighteous dominion. This is held up in sharp contrast to Jesus and his disciples (cf. 10:10).

Power and Powerlessness

Throughout John's Gospel (cf. JST 4:1-2, 5:16), but more specifically in these chapters, we see the lack of power Jesus' enemies have and the great power Jesus has (cf. 7:1, 7:30, 7:44, 8:20, 8:59, 10:31, 10:39). It is not until Jesus submits to them when his time is come (cf. 7:8, 10:17-18) and relinquishes his power that his enemies are able to do anything to him.

When he does submit to them, the tenor of John's Gospel completely changes. In the present text we see Jesus defiantly standing up to the Sanhedrin and its crony Pharisees, publicly attacking them, exposing them as frauds. They go around scheming to kill him, but are powerless to accomplish it. When Jesus finally submits he becomes quiet and passive, and the Sanhedrin successfully pulls all of its strings to have him executed by the Romans.

The irony is classically that of John. Jesus has all power in heaven and earth but never abuses it, he uses it only to heal others physically and spiritually. The Sanhedrin and ruling Pharisees have earthly power and abuse it all they can, but are still powerless to accomplish their goals, until Jesus submits. The power struggle is classically OT in tenor. The Lord has all the power and men struggle against him. He engineers history as He needs, and men fight against Him to accomplish their own will, but only end up doing so when it fits His will.

Comments on John 8

The text of verses 7:53-8:11 is not part of the original Gospel of John as it is not present in the earliest Greek manuscripts. When examined closely it is clear the story is an insertion as v. 12 continues the Tabernacles theme from the preceding chapter. Most scholarly commentators consider the original author of these verses to be John based upon content, rhetoric, and style of the Greek. Where the original text came from is unknown.

In attempting to trap Jesus, the accusing Pharisees violated the Law on a number of critical points:

They should not have brought the woman into the Temple precinct as she was unclean as a result of copulation, cf. Lev. 15:18.

They do not bring the man with whom the adultery was committed along, cf. Deut. 22:22-29.

Unless they themselves were the ones who caught her in the act, which is unlikely unless one of them was the one copulating with her, they are violating the Law by holding a trial without the minimum two witnesses, cf. Deut. 17:6.

The act of stoning someone within the Temple precinct, the act they are trying to provoke, would certainly not be permitted (cf. Deut 22:24 which says to stone people outside the gates, also cp. Lev. 24:14, Num. 15:35, Deut. 17:5).

They are attempting to trap Jesus in the letter of the Law while they violate it in order to set up the trap. This is probably why Jesus initially ignores their question in v. 6, because they are such gross hypocrites and their case is so intrinsically flawed. Their embarrassment in v. 9 when Jesus questions their righteousness certainly stems, at least in part, from these flagrant violations of the Law.

Jesus' stooping and writing with his finger means he continued on with his teaching (note in 7:14-15 Jesus is teaching the people with writing) as though he were not interrupted by them at all.

Comments on John 9

A number of rhetorical patterns are found within the text. The most obvious one is the physical blindness of the man is said to not be blind because of sin, is healed and his faithfulness results in him being spiritually seeing as well. But, the Pharisees who's physical eyes work, are spiritually blind and sinful.

A repetition of three is used twice, once for the blind man and once for the Pharisees. The blind man humbly confesses ignorance three times (v. 12, 25, 36) while the Pharisees arrogantly and confidently make inaccurate statements three times (v. 16, 24, 29).

Another more dramatic pattern is that of the increasing faith of the blind man contrasted with the increasing hardness of the Pharisees as the dialogue goes on:

Blind man

A man that is called
Jesus (v. 11)

He is a prophet (v. 17)

Whether he is a sinner I
know not (v. 25)

If this man were not of God
he could do nothing (v. 33)

Lord, I believe (v. 38)

Pharisees

Some say "This man is not of God"
others say "How can a sinner...
do such miracles?", division (v.
16)

We know that this man is a sinner
(v. 24)

We know not from whence he is (v.
29)

Thou wast altogether born in sin
(v. 34)

Are we blind also? (v. 40)

Note the adversity of the Pharisee's question steals the blind man's faith rather than cutting it down. He reasons through their arguments and exposes them as fraudulent. They respond with personal attacks and finally cast him out.

Comments on John 10

The shepherd and flock themes employed in this chapter have their roots in the Law (cf. Gen. 49:24, Num. 27:15-18), but are later developed to a large extent in the Prophets (cf. Isa. 40:10-11, Isa. 56:9-12, Jer. 12:10, Jer. 17:16, Ezek. 34, Micah 3, Zech. 11, Zech. 13:7-9, also cp. Ps. 14, D&C 33:4). As these passages indicate, the religious leaders were called to act as shepherds to Israel who were likened to flocks of sheep. However, the leaders more frequently acted as thieves and robbers who gorged themselves on the flock.

Jesus is drawing on this OT prophetic context in the present discourse. He is saying the present religious leaders of Judah are no better than these ancient religious leaders who exploited Israel for their personal benefit. In contrast, he holds himself up as the ideal example of what the religious leaders of Israel ought to be like.

The primary audience he is addressing is the Pharisees from the end of the preceding chapter, cf. 9:40-41. Naturally, there were others present in a public place, but the discourse in v. 1-18 is a result of the Pharisee's taunts. Jesus addresses them in response and contrasts them with himself using imagery they ought to be familiar with.

This chapter can be seen as Jesus' interpretation on Ezek. 34:11-22.

Verses 22-39 takes place some two or three months later at the subsequent Feast of Dedication, a.k.a. Chanukah. However, the same subject of shepherd and sheep is addressed, so the text is connected in theme while there is a transition in time.

Jesus is in the Temple for the observance of the Feast of Dedication (v. 22-23) when the Pharisees surround him and insist he tell them plainly whether or not he claims to be messiah (v. 24). Jesus responds saying he has already answered that question and his Father's works which he does bear witness of the truth of his testimony (v. 25). But, since they are not his sheep they will not believe him (v. 26), as his sheep hear him, believe him, and follow him (v. 27).

Jesus states he gives his sheep eternal life, and none of them are taken from his hands (v. 28), because they are held in the Father's hands (v. 29). Jesus states this is achieved because of his unity with the Father (v. 30).

The Pharisees take up stone to stone him with (v. 31), and Jesus asks them for which of the Father's works they are stoning him (v. 32). They respond saying they are not stoning him for good works, but for making himself God (v. 33). Jesus points out to them that the Law says that they are gods (v. 34-35), and Jesus points out to them that he has claimed to be the Son of God (v. 36), not God as they accuse. Jesus then appeals to the works he does, which they just previously confessed they could not stone him for, and says that if he didn't do the works of the Father, then they shouldn't believe him (v. 37). If they don't believe Jesus' testimony concerning himself as being the Son of God, then they should believe the works he does, as that proves the Father is with him (v. 38).

Jesus' argument effectively disarms their accusation of blasphemy as he points out he hasn't blasphemed. And he hamstringing any possibility of their finding fault with his works

because they admit they cannot stone him for any of them in v. 33. So, Jesus once again outwits them and escapes out of their hands (v. 39).

It is plain from the events the Pharisees are hostile from the outset and are looking for an excuse to attack him, cp. v. 39. The eagerness with which they take up stones to stone him with despite the fact that he has not blasphemed indicates what their real motives were the entire time.