

WE HAVE SEEN HIS GLORY

THE PROBLEM OF POPULARITY

Introduction

We all take great joy when our family members succeed. For many years at Christmas time and at the end of school our street would be backed up with vehicles of parents and relatives attending plays and ceremonies at the school. We love to see our children and our family members do well. It's natural. It's normal. It would be abnormal not to want to envision success in our family.

Today in our Scripture text we witness a similar phenomenon. We see the brothers of Jesus wanting him to succeed, to become well-known, to be popular. Turn with me to the passage as we read it.

Scripture Text: John 7:1–13 (ESV)

Let me point out a couple of interpretative issues and one major interpretative problem before we move on in the sermon. First, between verses 1 and 2 there is a long time period. In verse 1 we read: "After this Jesus went about in Galilee."¹ The Greek tense would lend itself to being translated: "After this Jesus continued to go around Galilee." Why because the Jews in Judea wanted to kill him.

Secondly, we already know that John has no intention of including every event of Christ's ministry (John 21:25). He is being selective and choosing those events that contribute to his aim. He is writing to 2nd generation, post-Temple, post-resurrection people in Asia Minor. So, he doesn't include such things that Jesus did after the feeding of the 5000, such as:

- a. He heals the Canaanite woman (Matthew 15:21ff) and the deaf man (Matthew 15:29ff).
- b. We have the confession of Peter that Jesus is the Christ (Matthew 16:13ff).
- c. There is the Transfiguration (Matthew 17).
- d. Plus, there are multiple healings, parables and instruction by our Lord prior to these next events that John records.

So, a lot occurred between verses 1 and 2. Now John takes us to a Jewish feast – The Feast of Booths (or Tabernacles; or Succoth). This Feast lasting about a week in early October celebrated the faithfulness of God while Israel was in the wilderness. Everyone gathered in Jerusalem for this. For a Jewish man it was compulsory. Jesus as a righteous Jew was expected to be there.

The last interpretative detail that I need to point out is the obvious problem between Jesus saying to his brothers: "I am not going up to this feast"² in verse 8; and then two verses later we read: "after his

¹ [*The Holy Bible: English Standard Version*](#). (2016). (Jn 7:1). Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles.

² [*The Holy Bible: English Standard Version*](#). (2016). (Jn 7:8). Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles.

brothers had gone up to the feast, then he also went up.”³ Was Jesus lying to them? Was he deceiving them? This issue is a very real translation problem. The older manuscripts have the Greek word translated “not yet”. Most modern translations either in the margin or in the text translate it “I am not going up to THIS feast.” I am not capable of solving the problem, simply to say that the text should read, “I am not going to the feast YET; or I am not going to THIS feast.” If we interpret the phrase contextually the problem is reduced because what Jesus is saying “I am not going to this feast, or the feast now when you, my brothers, say I should. I am regulated by my Father’s timetable.”

Jesus’ response to his brothers is not that he is planning to stay in Galilee forever, but that because his life is regulated by his heavenly Father’s appointments he is *not* going to the Feast when they say he should.⁴ The point is that he did go to the feast, not with his brothers, not when they went, but at a later time, in secret.

The Story

The story is straightforward. As a devout male Jew, it was expected that Jesus would attend the Feast of Booths in Jerusalem. His brothers, for whatever reason, thought that this would be a good opportunity for Jesus to “strut his stuff”. With all the celebrative crowds in the city, this would be a time for Jesus to launch his ministry into stardom. His brothers were not believers, yet, but anyone could see that this would be the perfect time for Christ to do some miracles and launch his career into celebrity status.

Jesus dismissed their idea by making two obvious points: One, human reasoning and logic do not control his agenda. He is subject to and guided by His Father’s timetable. Twice he said, “My time has not yet come.” These brothers are not believers in Christ Jesus. Therefore, as unbelievers their time is their own. They feel no compulsion to bow before the King and follow his timetable.

Secondly Jesus pointed out the reality that he is not hated because of his miracles. He’s hated because he talks about sin. Anyone who speaks the truth about sin is not going to become popular with the world. Their carnal thinking was wrong.

But the story shows that Jesus did go to the Feast later and in secret. Meanwhile we have an account of the people expecting him. “Where is he,” they asked. The crowd, we are told, muttered to themselves about Jesus, but not to loudly, because they feared the response of the Jewish leaders.

Main Point

I believe that the main lesson we see in this record of Jesus’ life points us to a 2 major differences between Christian godliness and worldliness.

³ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#). (2016). (Jn 7:10). Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles.

⁴ Carson, D. A. (1991). [The Gospel according to John](#) (p. 309). Leicester, England; Grand Rapids, MI: Inter-Varsity Press; W.B. Eerdmans.

1. The world follows its own timetable. It is a foreign concept for the world to say, “Not my will, but Thy will be done.”
2. Secondly, the world doesn’t want to talk openly about important things like sin – things like who Jesus really is.

This isn’t rocket science. Let’s say you work in an office. Go to work tomorrow and try to engage a conversation about Jesus – about who He really is. Try to show your co-workers that Jesus Christ is Lord and we are to respond by falling before Him in worship and service. Talk about sin and see how far you get. Tell your co-workers that adultery is sin; that homosexuality is sin; that stealing pencils from your boss is sin; and so on. See how popular you become!

In other words, if you are motivated as Jesus’ brothers were for popularity and acceptance by non-Christians, people in the world, you will never talk openly about sin and you will never share candidly about the person and work of Christ. If popularity is the goal!

If you are in a large church led by Joel Osteen, you will have Muslims, secularists, and all kinds of people come and enjoy their time in your service, but you will never talk about sin and you will never talk about the exclusive nature of the true Jesus.

If you buy a so-called christian book at the bookstore and EVERYBODY likes it – I promise you that it doesn’t speak correctly about sin or about Jesus Christ the Son of God.

If you want to be popular in university, college, high school or whatever, don’t live a holy life, don’t call sin, sin and don’t tell your friends that Jesus is the Christ, the one and only Savior of the world.

Application

In this passage Jesus illustrates for us how we are to live – how we are to relate to people we work with and people we go to school with and people in our relationships. We are not on this planet to be popular. It is not our ambition to make a name for ourselves. People will relate to us as they want but our purpose and our commitment should be to follow the will of our God.

When we choose to value popularity and acceptance over Christ, we will always compromise truth. God’s plan for us is always in conflict with the worlds. *“Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him.”* (1 John 2:15, ESV). The most important question that arises from this text is found through the words of Paul:

“For am I now seeking the approval of man, or of God?” (Galatians 1:10a, ESV)

The desire to be accepted and approved by our fellow-workers, fellow-students, family and friends is rooted in our carnal nature. To follow this desire is to live according to the flesh and those who do so will die. *“For to set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace.”* (Romans 8:6, ESV)

Beloved, if you're a Christian, or say that you are, "Ask yourself this question before you make the next decision, 'Am I seeking someone's approval or God's?'" It really is that simple.

If you are not a Christian, I need to tell you that the Bible says that you are on a very wide and a very popular journey. But I need to tell you that the end is destruction. Unless you see Christ in all His glory and bow before Him in humble submission, you will enter eternal damnation. But there is Good News!

[The Gospel]