

Exalting Jesus Christ

"Jesus in the Lion's Den"

INTRODUCTION:

- I. One particular Bible story that has captivated both old and young for generations is the story of Daniel in the Lion's Den
 - A. Even if you haven't read the story in years, most likely you can still vividly recall the events.
 1. Daniel, whom king Darius appointed to rule over all his land, was falsely accused by a group of jealous men.
 - a. Even though Daniel was innocent and faithful to the King, the evidence against him seemed irrefutable.
 - b. And so, as punishment for his alleged crime, Daniel was thrown into a den of hungry lions.
 2. Early the next morning, when the king went to check on Daniel, to his amazement, Daniel was still alive.
 - a. God had rescued him by miraculously closing up the lions' mouths.

B. But Daniel wasn't the only one to be thrown to the lions. Some five-hundred years later Jesus would spend the last six months of His life in a lion's den, of sorts.

1. His enemies, like savage lions, were intent on tearing Him to pieces.
2. Eventually, these brutal beasts cornered Him at the cross.
 - a. The psalmist David described the Lord's enemies with these words as they mocked Him during His crucifixion: **Psalm 22:13** – *They gape at Me with their mouths, like a raging and roaring lion.*
3. However, in our story this morning, Jesus escapes His enemies' sharp fangs and manages to silence them just as completely as God shut the mouths of the lions in Daniel's day.

II. As we continue through our series of studies in the gospel of John, we turn to the seventh chapter where we find "Jesus in the Lion's Den."

A. Before we take a closer look at these events, let's take a moment to put all this in its geographic and cultural context.

1. John chapter seven actually contains two events in which Jesus found Himself facing an enemy that either taunted Him, or wanted to destroy Him:

- a. One event took place in Galilee (**John 7:1-9**), which was the quiet, safe home of Jesus.
- b. And the second took place in Jerusalem (**John 7:10-52**).

2. What prompted these events?

- a. Jesus was very quickly making enemies with His claim of being the Son of God.

(1). Claims of being "*the bread which has come down from heaven.*"

(2). Claims of having seen the Father because He had been with the Father in heaven.

- b. The Lord's enemies were outraged, and were now beginning to plot His assassination. They wanted to kill Jesus.

- c. Therefore, it was becoming increasingly dangerous for Jesus to be seen in Judea, and especially in Jerusalem.

B. But it's the timing of these events that are most important for our understanding.

- 1. Most biblical scholars and commentators agree that the time of these events occurs within the last six months of Jesus' life.

- a. Verse two tells us the specific time when these events took place: **John 7:2** – *Now the Jews' Feast of Tabernacles was at hand.*

2. The people of Israel celebrated three great annual feasts:
Passover, Pentecost, and Tabernacles.
 - a. The latter occurred in early October, and was a feast of thanksgiving for the blessings of God during the harvest.
 - b. The Feast of Tabernacles was also a time of remembering the blessings the Jews received during their wilderness wandering in the days of Moses.
 - (1). It was a time when God manifested Himself in the tabernacle, and a time when the people themselves lived in tents.
 3. All Jewish males living within a twenty-mile radius of Jerusalem were required to participate in this feast by coming to Jerusalem.
 4. However, the feast was so important that devout Jews all over Palestine and other parts of the Roman world came to Jerusalem to attend.
- C. Let's turn to the seventh chapter of John where we find Jesus, the Lamb of God, surrounded by enemies just as certain as Daniel had been surrounded by lions.
1. Even though the enemies of Jesus were mere men, they were like savage beasts in their relentless attacks.
 - a. The first group happened to be the Lord's own brothers.

- b. They were followed by many of the Jewish religious leaders.
- c. And eventually, Jesus was attacked by the crowd in general who, for the most part, rejected Him and His message.

BODY:

- I. In the seventh chapter of John we find Jesus in Galilee where we meet the first group of those who opposed Jesus – His own brothers.
 - A. There is a mistaken belief that Jesus was the only child born to Mary.
 - 1. The Catholic Church has erroneously taught that Mary remained a virgin all her life – but that's simply not so.
 - a. Even though Jesus was conceived by the Holy Spirit while Mary was a virgin, she didn't remain a virgin.
 - 2. After her marriage to Joseph and following the birth of Jesus, Mary had other children, some of whose names are actually given in the Bible.
 - a. **Matthew 13:53-57** – *Now it came to pass, when Jesus had finished these parables, that He departed from there. 54 When He had come to His own country, He taught them in their synagogue, so that they were astonished and said, "Where did this Man get this wisdom and these mighty works?*

55 Is this not the carpenter's son? Is not His mother called Mary? And His brothers James, Joses, Simon, and Judas? 56 And His sisters, are they not all with us? Where then did this Man get all these things?" 57 So they were offended at Him.

3. So, the Bible tells us that Jesus had several brothers and sisters – four brothers whose names we know, and at least two sisters whose names we do not know.
- B. Going back to John chapter 7 we find three important pieces of information in the first two verses.
1. **John 7:1-2** – *After these things Jesus walked in Galilee; for He did not want to walk in Judea, because the Jews sought to kill Him. 2 Now the Jews' Feast of Tabernacles was at hand.*
 - a. After being deserted by most of His disciples because He refused to continue feeding them, Jesus remained in the northern region of Galilee. But there was a good reason for doing this.
 - b. He didn't go south into Judea because the Jewish religious leaders there were seeking to kill Him. They resented His claims of being the Son of God, of having come from heaven, and of having actually seen and been with the Father.

- c. But, as we said earlier, this was also the time in the Jewish calendar when the Jews celebrated the Feast of Tabernacles.
 - d. And since every devout Jew in Palestine went to Jerusalem to celebrate the Feast of Tabernacles, Jesus obviously wanted to go there as well – even if it meant putting Himself in harm's way.
- C. Unfortunately, the Lord's reluctance to go to Jerusalem gave His doubting brothers just the ammunition they needed to taunt Him.
- 1. **John 7:3-5** – *His brothers therefore said to Him, "Depart from here and go into Judea, that Your disciples also may see the works that You are doing. 4 For no one does anything in secret while he himself seeks to be known openly. If You do these things, show Yourself to the world." 5 For even His brothers did not believe in Him.*
 - 2. Keep in mind that the brothers of Jesus had grown up with Him as their older brother.
 - a. We don't know for certain, but it is possible Joseph and Mary gave Jesus preferential treatment – even though Jesus certainly didn't seek that kind of special treatment.

- b. Unfortunately, parents who show partiality to one child over others open the door for resentment among the other children in the family.
 - 3. Clearly, the brothers of Jesus felt some resentment. Perhaps they didn't really see Him as the great miracle-working Messiah everyone was talking about.
 - 4. As so, they mocked Jesus by essentially saying, "If you're the Messiah then why are you hiding out in Galilee. Why aren't you going to Jerusalem to show yourself off there? Jerusalem is the place for Messiahs!"
- D. But, despite their sarcasm Jesus responds with seriousness.
- 1. **John 7:6-9** – *Then Jesus said to them, "My time has not yet come, but your time is always ready. 7 The world cannot hate you, but it hates Me because I testify of it that its works are evil. 8 You go up to this feast. I am not yet going up to this feast, for My time has not yet fully come." 9 When He had said these things to them, He remained in Galilee.*
 - 2. Even though the brothers of Jesus were among those who attacked His claims they wouldn't always remain so.

- a. Following the resurrection of Jesus Christ, Mary and the brothers of the Lord are all found numbered among the 120 disciples mentioned in **Acts 1:14**.
 - b. And later, the apostle Paul called James the Lord's brother one of the "*pillars*" of the church in Jerusalem, in **Galatians 2:9**, along with Peter and John.
 - c. Plus the first letter written to Christians in New Testament times was the epistle of James, written by the Lord's brother, as well as the epistle of Jude written by another brother of the Lord.
3. No doubt, the disbelief and taunting of His own brothers prompted Jesus to say: **Matthew 13:57** – "*A prophet is not without honor except in his own country and in his own house.*"
- a. Meaning, a prophet can find honor almost anywhere except in his own hometown and among his own family.
- II. However, since the Feast of Tabernacles was at hand in Jerusalem, Jesus decides to make the journey into Judea, keeping in the shadows to avoid being seen.
- A. But knowing He would probably come to the feast, the religious leaders in Jerusalem were looking for Jesus to arrest Him.

1. **John 7:10-13** – *But when His brothers had gone up, then He also went up to the feast, not openly, but as it were in secret. 11 Then the Jews sought Him at the feast, and said, "Where is He?" 12 And there was much complaining among the people concerning Him. Some said, "He is good"; others said, "No, on the contrary, He deceives the people." 13 However, no one spoke openly of Him for fear of the Jews.*
2. Finally, during the middle of the feast, Jesus makes His identity known – a courageous act in light of the fact that He's a target for assassination.
 - a. **John 7:14-15** – *Now about the middle of the feast Jesus went up into the temple and taught. 15 And the Jews marveled, saying, "How does this Man know letters, having never studied?"*
 - b. The Jews – namely, the chief priests and the Pharisees – objected to Jesus teaching publicly because He lacked the proper credentials – in their minds.
 - c. He had never attended any of their schools, and had never sat under the feet of any of the leading rabbis'.
 - d. So what makes this man think He is capable of teaching?

3. Ironically, they didn't realize they were criticizing the Biblical knowledge of the man whom John described as "The Word" – the very author of the Scriptures themselves.
 - a. Wouldn't you think if anyone should know something about the Scriptures it would be Jesus?
- B. And so, Jesus answers – but His reply sparks even more controversy.
 1. **John 7:16-19** – *Jesus answered them and said, "My doctrine is not Mine, but His who sent Me. 17 If anyone wills to do His will, he shall know concerning the doctrine, whether it is from God or whether I speak on My own authority. 18 He who speaks from himself seeks his own glory; but He who seeks the glory of the One who sent Him is true, and no unrighteousness is in Him. 19 Did not Moses give you the law, yet none of you keeps the law? Why do you seek to kill Me?"*
 2. There are several key points Jesus made in this short response:
 - a. First, Jesus said His teaching didn't originate from Himself, but from God.
 - (1). His teaching didn't come from merely regurgitating the teachings of some rabbi.
 - (2). Nor, did Jesus add His own personal interpretation to the Scriptures.

(3). His teaching came directly from God who had sent Him.

b. Second, anyone who sincerely seeks to do the will of God, and takes the time to investigate the teaching of Jesus, and compare them to the Scriptures will see that He isn't making this up.

(1). He is not speaking by His own authority because if He was, He wouldn't be glorifying God – only Himself.

(2). What He teaches are true because there is no unrighteousness in Him – which is another way of saying, "I'm not a liar or a false teacher. I speak to glorify God, not Myself."

c. And finally, Jesus said these religious leaders – and the people who follow them – claim to love the Law Moses gave them, but apparently not enough to actually keep it.

(1). One way or another, they were all lawbreakers.

(2). So, why were they trying to kill Him? What wrong had He done that would be worthy of death?

III. Jesus didn't get an immediate response from the religious leaders, but those in the crowd listening to Him had some very strong and very mixed feelings about this man from Galilee.

- A. Some apparently felt Jesus was paranoid – even demon possessed.
1. **John 7:20** – *The people answered and said, "You have a demon. Who is seeking to kill You?"*
 - a. Essentially they were saying, "It's all in your mind, Jesus. No one is trying to kill you. A demon must be causing you to have this persecution complex."
 2. Here's what the Lord said in response: **John 7:21-24** – *Jesus answered and said to them, "I did one work, and you all marvel. 22 Moses therefore gave you circumcision (not that it is from Moses, but from the fathers), and you circumcise a man on the Sabbath. 23 If a man receives circumcision on the Sabbath, so that the law of Moses should not be broken, are you angry with Me because I made a man completely well on the Sabbath? 24 Do not judge according to appearance, but judge with righteous judgment."*
 - a. The issue that sparked the controversy surrounding Jesus was because He healed a man on the Sabbath Day (**cf. John 5:1-15**). In in the mind of the Pharisees, Jesus had broken the Law of Moses.

- b. However, Jesus said they circumcised every male Jew on the eight day in keeping with the Law, even if the eight day falls on the Sabbath.
 - c. So, Jesus simply asked (**v. 23**), *"If a man receives circumcision on the Sabbath, so that the law of Moses should not be broken, are you angry with Me because I made a man completely well on the Sabbath?"*
- B. However, others in the crowd were a little more courageous, and still others were convinced Jesus was the Christ. But some simply refused to see Jesus as the Messiah at all.
1. **John 7:25-27** – *Now some of them from Jerusalem said, "Is this not He whom they seek to kill? 26 But look! He speaks boldly, and they say nothing to Him. Do the rulers know indeed that this is truly the Christ? 27 However, we know where this Man is from; but when the Christ comes, no one knows where He is from."*
 2. The silence of the Jewish religious leaders prompted some in the crowd to conclude their leaders might be changing their minds about Jesus.
 3. But others weren't convinced. They knew Jesus was from Galilee, and they knew He was the son of Joseph and Mary.

IV. Finally, the Pharisees and chief priests speak out.

A. They were outraged by the things Jesus said.

1. **John 7:32** – *The Pharisees heard the crowd murmuring these things concerning Him, and the Pharisees and the chief priests sent officers to take Him.*

a. They had heard enough.

b. The only way to silence Jesus was to have Him arrested, stand trial and be executed for blasphemy.

B. But the reply Jesus gave threw his enemies into total confusion.

1. **John 7:33-36** – *Then Jesus said to them, "I shall be with you a little while longer, and then I go to Him who sent Me. 34 You will seek Me and not find Me, and where I am you cannot come." 35 Then the Jews said among themselves, "Where does He intend to go that we shall not find Him? Does He intend to go to the Dispersion among the Greeks and teach the Greeks? 36 What is this thing that He said, 'You will seek Me and not find Me, and where I am you cannot come'?"*

a. They didn't have a clue as to what Jesus meant.

b. Some thought He was going to leave Palestine altogether and go where "*the Dispersion*" lived – those were Jews who

lived among the Gentiles in all the other regions of the Roman Empire.

(1). In a way, that would be good news for the religious leaders in Jerusalem – at least they would be rid of this wanna-be Messiah named Jesus.

2. But Jesus is obviously making reference to His impending death on the cross – which was approximately 6 months away.

a. He knew they would kill Him.

b. After all, that's why He had come into the world in the first place – to become the Lamb of God that takes away the sins of the world.

c. And once He is resurrected from the dead and ascends to the Father in heaven, they won't be able to touch him – and certainly won't be coming where He is, unless they turn to Him in belief, repentance and baptism.

C. Still, as we see at the end of this chapter, the crowd remained divided over who Jesus was.

1. **John 7:40-44** – *Therefore many from the crowd, when they heard this saying, said, "Truly this is the Prophet." 41 Others said, "This is the Christ." But some said, "Will the Christ come out of Galilee? 42 Has not the Scripture said that the Christ comes from the seed*

of David and from the town of Bethlehem, where David was?"

43 So there was a division among the people because of Him. 44

Now some of them wanted to take Him, but no one laid hands on Him.

2. There was a mistaken belief that when the Messiah came no one would know where he comes from – it will be a total mystery.
3. Of course, they were ignorant of one very important prophecy concerning the Christ.
 - a. When the wise men from the east came to Jerusalem asking for the One who is born King of the Jews, we read: **Matthew 2:3-6** – *When Herod the king heard this, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him. 4 And when he had gathered all the chief priests and scribes of the people together, he inquired of them where the Christ was to be born. 5 So they said to him, "In Bethlehem of Judea, for thus it is written by the prophet: 6 'But you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are not the least among the rulers of Judah; for out of you shall come a Ruler Who will shepherd My people Israel.'"*
 - b. Jesus may have been raised in Galilee, but He had been born in Judea – in Bethlehem – just as the prophet Micah had prophesied. **(Micah 5:2)**

D. Even those who had been sent to arrest Jesus weren't entirely convinced He was a criminal. They came back empty-handed.

1. **John 7:45-49** – *Then the officers came to the chief priests and Pharisees, who said to them, "Why have you not brought Him?" 46 The officers answered, "No man ever spoke like this Man!" 47 Then the Pharisees answered them, "Are you also deceived? 48 Have any of the rulers or the Pharisees believed in Him? 49 But this crowd that does not know the law is accursed."*

E. However, there was one man who knew the truth about Jesus – and He was one of the religious leaders who secretly believed Jesus was the Messiah.

1. **John 7:50-51** – *Nicodemus (he who came to Jesus by night, being one of them) said to them, 51 "Does our law judge a man before it hears him and knows what he is doing?"*
2. Nicodemus managed to quell the rage of his fellow leaders by simply reminding them of the fact that the Law of Moses demands a man be properly only after all the facts have been presented.
3. But even he was scorned by the others: **John 7:52-53** – *They answered and said to him, "Are you also from Galilee? Search and look, for no prophet has arisen out of Galilee." 53 And everyone went to his own house.*

- V. While Jesus was mocked by His brothers, sought as a criminal by the Jewish religious leaders, and said to have been demon possessed by a crown in Jerusalem, the Lord was able to boldly stand His ground against the ravenous beasts that surrounded Him.
- A. First, Jesus was able to stand His ground because the Father in heaven stood with Him.
1. Going back to verses we read earlier (**John 7:16-18, 33-34**):
 - a. Jesus boldly claimed He had come speaking by the authority of the Father who had sent Him. Therefore He sought to glorify the Father in heaven.
 - b. Jesus knew God the Father stood with Him in everything He said and did.
 - c. And He knew He was going back to the Father soon – where His enemies would never be able to touch Him.
- B. Second, Jesus was able to stand His ground against His enemies because the Holy Spirit stood with Him as well.
1. On the last day of the feast, Jesus makes a dramatic statement about Himself.
 2. **John 7:37-39** – *On the last day, that great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried out, saying, "If anyone thirsts, let him come to Me and drink. 38 He who believes in Me, as the Scripture has said,*

out of his heart will flow rivers of living water." 39 But this He spoke concerning the Spirit, whom those believing in Him would receive; for the Holy Spirit was not yet given, because Jesus was not yet glorified.

3. To fully appreciate this statement of Jesus, we need to understand the ceremonial background to the final day of the Feast of Tabernacles.
 - a. In his wonderful book, *The Gospel of John*, William Barclay tells us that at one point during the Feast of Tabernacles a priest would take a golden pitcher and go down to the pool of Siloam and filled it with water.
 - b. As he carried it back through the Water Gate the people recited **Isaiah 12:3**: *"Therefore with joy you will draw water from the wells of salvation."*
 - c. The pitcher of water was then poured out on the great altar as an offering to God, thanking Him for the gift of rain, and in memory of the times God miraculously provided water for the children of Israel in the wilderness.
4. In a bold statement, Jesus compared Himself to the life-giving water God provided the children of Israel during their wilderness wandering.

- a. All who are spiritually hungry can come to Him and be filled with the bread of life come down from heaven.
- b. And all who thirst spiritually can come to Him and drink of the water of life.

CONCLUSION:

- I. It's easy to fall into the trap of familiarity.
 - A. And in many ways, we're actually a lot like those who saw and heard Jesus on this occasion.
 - 1. To the religious leaders, Jesus was the enemy – He claimed to be the Son of God.
 - 2. To the people, Jesus was nothing more than Joseph and Mary's son – He was nothing special, just the neighborhood boy they saw every day with his of brothers and sisters tagging along.
 - 3. But to those who really looked at the miracles He performed, and to those who truly listened to the words He spoke, they saw Jesus as the Christ, the Son of the Living God.
 - B. The question for you is how do you see Jesus?
 - 1. Do you see Him as simply some nice Jewish teacher who did a lot of good, but not as the Son of God?

2. Or do you see Him as the Savior of the World – the Christ, the Son of the Living God who came into the world to redeem you from your sins by dying on a cross?
- C. How you see Jesus will determine what you do in the next few minutes.
1. If you see Jesus as the Savior, and you know you've never committed your life to Him, then you will come to Him today in obedience – coming in faith, repenting of your past sins, confessing your faith in Him before others, and be baptized into Him for the remission of your past sins.
 2. And if you see Jesus as the Savior, and yet you know you haven't been faithful to Him, you will come back to Him, repenting of your sins, confessing those sins to the Father in heaven, and be restored once again as His disciple.
 3. How you see Jesus will determine what you do right now as we stand and sing.