

Appearances can be deceiving

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[0 : 01] Afternoon folks. It's very good to see you. For those of you who don't know who I am, I'm Andy. I'm one of the ministers in training here.

Our Bible passage for today, you'll find that in John chapter 7, on the piece of paper you have, and we'll be reading from verses, well we'll read from verse 10 through to verse 31.

Okay. Yet for fear of the Jews, no one spoke openly of him.

About the middle of the feast, Jesus went up into the temple and began teaching. The Jews therefore marveled, saying, how is it that this man has learning when he has never studied?

So Jesus answered them, my teaching is not mine, but his who sent me. If anyone's will is to do God's will, he will know whether the teaching is from God or whether I'm speaking on my own authority.

[1 : 29] The one who speaks on his own authority seeks his own glory. But the one who seeks the glory of him who sent him is true. And in him there is no falsehood.

Has not Moses given you the law? Yet none of you keeps the law. Why do you seek to kill me? The crowd answered, you have a demon, who's seeking to kill you?

Jesus answered them, I did one work and you all marvel at it. Moses gave you circumcision, not that it is from Moses, but from the fathers.

And you circumcise a man on the Sabbath. If on the Sabbath a man receives circumcision so that the law of Moses may not be broken, are you angry with me because on the Sabbath I made a man's whole body well?

Do not judge by appearances, but judge with right judgment. Some of the people of Jerusalem therefore said, is not this the man whom they seek to kill?

[2 : 38] And here he is speaking openly. And they say nothing to him. Can it be that the authorities really know that this is the Christ?

But we know where this man comes from. And when the Christ appears, no one will know where he comes from. So Jesus proclaimed as he taught in the temple, you know me and you know where I come from.

But I have not come of my own accord. He who sent me is true and him you do not know. I know him, for I come from him and he sent me.

So they were seeking to arrest him. But no one laid a hand on him because his hour had not yet come. Yet many of the people believed in him. They said, when the Christ appears, will he do more signs than this man has done?

Well, let me pray for us. Father, as we study your word now, we pray that we would meet the genuine real Lord Jesus.

[3 : 46] No fraudulent version that is indoctrinated in us by the world around us. But the real Christ we see in scripture. And we pray this in Jesus' name.

Amen. Last week, we saw that Jesus' brothers and the religious leaders couldn't accept Jesus or his words because they belonged to a different kingdom, a kingdom that opposes Jesus.

They belonged to the world. They were part of an anti-God state that was set up against God and his rule. That was Jesus' assessment of them.

And that's why they couldn't grasp Jesus' motives or why he did things the way that he did. Everything that Jesus did as a perfect man living under God's rule and living for God's agenda made no sense to them whatsoever because, well, they lived for themselves.

And only a miracle, the Holy Spirit opening up human hearts to believe and trust in Jesus' testimony, would change that.

[5 : 01] Well, in today's passage, we'll see similar themes at play as last week. But there is some development too. And a development comes in the crowd's response to Jesus.

In the first few verses of our passage today, we see how the religious leaders are still baiting for Jesus' blood. Remember how they vowed to kill him back in chapter 5?

Well, here in verse 11, they're watching, they're waiting for an opportunity to arrest Jesus and have him killed. And such is their hatred for Christ, they not only want to kill him, but they also want to shut down any conversation about him.

Do you see that in verses 12 and 13? There was widespread whispering about Jesus. Some said he's a good man. Others replied, no, he deceives the people.

But no one would say anything publicly about him for fear of the leaders. The religious leaders had Jerusalem on shutdown.

[6 : 09] If any Jewish leader caught wind of you speaking about Jesus, then who knows what they might do to you? It wasn't just that you weren't allowed to follow Jesus.

You weren't even allowed to discuss him or what he had done or the claims that he made. For the religious leaders were terrified about losing their following. Their authority was at stake.

The religious leaders prove here that they do indeed belong to the world that hates Jesus, just like he's already said earlier in the chapter. They will shut down discussion of him and try and keep society on a shallow engagement with him because they don't want anyone to believe.

It's quite chilling, isn't it? It reminds us somewhat of life in Soviet Russia or of North Korea today and of other states to some degree as well, even here in Scotland to some measure, where there's a clamp down in Christianity.

The world hates Jesus and doesn't want anybody engaging with him. But notice how things have developed by the end of the passage.

[7 : 19] Jesus has had a long dialogue with the crowd, as we'll look at in a moment, and the religious leaders who are within the crowd. And it silences the religious leaders in verse 26.

They know exactly who Jesus is now. He's not there in secret anymore. He's disclosed himself. And the religious leaders are absolutely flummoxed by him. And this gets the crowd wondering.

They start wondering whether the religious leaders actually know who Jesus is, whether they actually have come to the conclusion that he really is the Messiah. Are the religious leaders becoming convinced?

Well, the crowd start to think so. So they start talking a bit more openly and asking questions. With the lid lifted and their tongues finally untied, they start to question Jesus in verse 27.

And by the time we get to the end of our passage today, some are still furious with Jesus. That's always the case, verse 30. Some still want to arrest him and some still want to kill him.

[8 : 23] But some have been convinced by what Jesus has said and have shifted camps. No longer are they part of the kingdom of the world, but God has worked a miracle in them as they have engaged with Jesus properly and they have become a part of Jesus' kingdom too.

So it begs the question, what has provoked this change in the some who have come to believe? Well, verse 31. It seems that the crowd has based their assessment of Jesus somewhat on the signs that he has performed so far.

Namely, the big healing of the quadriplegic man back in chapter 5. If genuine, that sign proves without a shadow of a doubt that Jesus really is the Messiah.

No one can do greater signs than this. But before this encounter in the temple, the crowds had discredited this event because of what they had heard from the religious establishment.

So what has Jesus said that has changed the crowd's mind so that they now recognize that this work he performed in chapter 5 was genuine. It was the real deal. Well, throughout the dialogue he has with the crowds and religious leaders, he responds to various misunderstandings and lies that have been said about him.

[9 : 48] He unmasks one by one each lie and each misunderstanding and shows them to be shallow misrepresentations of the reality. Jesus calls the crowd in this chapter to stop judging by mere appearances, but instead to judge correctly.

Verse 11. He knows that if the crowds genuinely engage with him and his teaching and not just swallow the lies of the religious leaders, not just treat him at face value through the lens that the religious elite have constructed for them, they will actually see that he really is who he said he is all along.

For up until now, the religious leaders have tried to control the media. They have tried to indoctrinate the masses with lies in a quest to hold on to their own power. But things are about to change.

Now that Jesus has the platform and the Feast of Tabernacles, this great feast, he's going to unmask all these lies one by one and reveal the truth. The Jews have called him a liar.

Jesus is going to show us that he's the one person who speaks the truth. The Jews have called him a lawbreaker. Jesus is going to show us that he's the one person who fulfills the law.

[11 : 05] The Jews have said that he's merely from earth. He's just a man. Jesus will show us that he has heavenly origins. So let's look at those in turn. Verses 14 to 18.

The world calls Jesus a liar, but Jesus speaks the truth. As I've said already, we must remember this whole narrative is based upon what happened in chapter 5 with the healing of the quadriplegic man.

And at that event, Jesus called God his very own father. And that was part of the reason the religious leaders wanted him dead.

They deemed him a blasphemer. But by calling God your father, well, you were claiming that you were equal with God. And for any other man, of course, that would be both a blasphemy and a lie.

No man is equal with God. Though there may be some exceptions to that rule, or at least one exception to that rule. What if the Son of God himself, the third person of the Trinity, stepped down into our world, put on our humanity without losing any of his deity?

[12 : 22] Then perhaps he could be a man who could claim to be God, claim to be equal with God. Which, of course, is what Jesus states all through his passage. Verse 16, he says, My teaching comes from the one who sent me.

Verse 17, my teaching comes from God. Verse 18, the one who sent me is a man of truth. Jesus' claim is that he really has come from God and is indeed equal with God.

Thus, he is neither a blasphemer or a liar. The religious leaders were just dealing with him at surface level and assumed that he must be a liar because they were treating him like any other regular person.

But he's not any regular person. He's the son of God come in human flesh. And Jesus shows that he is not a liar. Indeed, he is the great truth speaker in these verses.

[13 : 30] Verse 14, you remember last week that Jesus went up to the feast in secret. Well, here, verse 14, he takes a platform to speak in secret too.

He hasn't disclosed his identity at this point in the narrative. And both the crowd and the religious leaders have no idea who he is at this point. And what do they make of him?

Notice that when they judge his teaching without their prejudice of knowing who he is, the man that they already want dead, they're amazed. They ask, how did this man get such learning without being taught?

Verse 15. They recognize that his teaching has genuine authority and is genuinely true. And Jesus explains why.

It's because his teaching comes from God the Father. Verse 16. It's no normal human teaching. No, it comes from the Father in heaven. Like he has come from the Father in heaven. And he hasn't just made all this up to claim a following for himself like people claim he has.

[14 : 38] No. He's a man of truth through and through. But here's the problem. Verse 17. Only those who choose to do the will of God will recognize that his teaching is true and comes from God.

Jesus says, the problem has never been with me and my teaching. Everything I say is true. Everything I say glorifies God.

Everything I say comes from God and I come from God. What I said back in chapter 5 about being God's son, that is true too. The problem doesn't lie with me.

It lies with the hearer. Some people just don't have the ears for truth. Because they have no desire to act upon that truth. They don't want to honor God.

They don't want to put their trust in him and act like he's king. They want to be king themselves. They want to honor themselves. So they won't believe the truth even if it's plain and obvious.

[15 : 46] And that was the case with the religious leaders. They appear to care for the truth, don't they? They're in the synagogues teaching every day. They're there at the feast of tabernacles.

They never miss a festival. But secretly, they don't really want to do God's will at all or keep his law. And that's evident by the fact they're trying to kill Jesus.

They're trying to murder God's very own son. Verse 19. Though the religious leaders had piped out through the airways that Jesus is the liar.

He's the deceiver. It was actually them who were doing the deceiving. They were hypocrites putting on a face. But secretly plotting an unjust murder of the son of God himself.

So Jesus shows that he isn't a liar. He isn't who he's been painted to be. But rather the religious leaders are. They're like double agents.

[16 : 51] Playing the part. Pretending to honor God. And looking like they're part of his kingdom. But in reality, they belong to the kingdom of this world. Which is ruled by the father of lies.

Because only Jesus speaks the truth in this world. Well secondly, verses 19 to 24. The world calls Jesus a law breaker.

But Jesus fulfills the law. The other reason the religious leaders wanted Jesus dead. Was that they deemed that he had broken the Sabbath. By healing the quadriplegic man on it.

This is the one miracle that Jesus refers to in verse 21. And it's caused a mighty uproar. But the question is, should it have?

Jesus says in verse 23. If on the Sabbath a man receives circumcision. So that the law of Moses may not be broken. Are you angry with me?

[17 : 52] Because on the Sabbath I made a man's whole body well. The Jews thought it lawful and legitimate. To do certain works on the Sabbath.

In fact, the law stipulated. That the Jews were to do good on the Sabbath. If the opportunity arose. For example, if you found your neighbor's ox in a pit.

Well it was your duty to dig that ox out. You were to do good, not evil. For it's better to do good on the Sabbath. Than evil. To preserve life.

Than to kill. Therefore the Jews would circumcise on the Sabbath. If needed. Because they recognized that withholding. The sign of the covenant promises.

From their children. Was an evil. It was wrong. And in so doing. They weren't breaking the Sabbath. They were actually pleasing God. And keeping the law.

[18 : 51] Jesus says he is doing something very similar. But far greater. With his healing on the Sabbath. He too. When he healed the quadriplegic man. Was keeping the law.

He was doing good, not evil. Promoting life. But what Jesus did was far greater. Than what the Pharisees did with their circumcision.

Circumcision was a sign that you were waiting for the promises of God to arrive. For the messianic kingdom to come. But when Jesus heals on the Sabbath. When he heals the quadriplegic man.

He demonstrated that the messianic kingdom has indeed come. The kingdom where there's no more sickness. Tears or death has broken into the world.

What he's done is far greater. It's not just the promise of good. That Jesus does on the Sabbath. But he actually brings fulfillment. Jesus says to the world.

[19 : 51] I'm not a religious rebel. Like people are making me out to be. I've not come to overturn the law. I'm not a Sabbath breaker. I've come to fulfill the law. Don't discredit me.

Because I healed on the Sabbath. Look a bit deeper. And you'll see I didn't break the law at all. I'm filling it full. I'm bringing what the Sabbath pointed towards all along.

A world of rest. Where there are no more evils. So Jesus is the law fulfiller. What about the Jewish leaders?

Verse 19. Contrasting to Jesus. None of the Jewish leaders kept the law. For they were guilty of breaking the first.

The sixth. And the ninth commandment. As they are speaking these words to Jesus. They're willing to speak lies. Breaking the ninth commandment. They're willing to murder.

[20 : 51] Breaking the sixth commandment. And they're willing to even kill the son of God himself. Breaking the first. Appearances. Are deceiving again.

Jesus shows to the crowds. Yet again. That they are misunderstood. About him. And the religious leaders. Whose propaganda. They've been lapping up.

Well finally. Verses 25 to 30. The world calls Jesus a mere man. But he comes from above. The discourse moves on.

After the crowds think. That they've been freed up. To speak a bit more openly. About Jesus. Based on the authorities reaction. In verse 26. And the topic now shifts.

Onto Jesus' origins. Where is he from? Jesus has addressed the question. Of whether he speaks truth. Or whether he's a liar. He's addressed the question. Whether he's a law breaker.

[21 : 49] Or fulfills the law. Now he's going to clear up. Whether he's a mere man. With purely earthly origins. Or whether he really is the Messiah. Come from God.

For the problem the Jews have. For the problem the crowds have. Verse 27. Is that they have been told. That no one. Will know where the Messiah comes from. And yet.

They know exactly where Jesus has come from. He's come from Galilee. And yet. This objection they have. Towards Jesus. Is based only on a half truth again.

In one sense. The origins of the Messiah. Were to be unknown. After all. The Old Testament claimed. That he was from of old. The ancient of days. Therefore prophesying that the Messiah.

Was no mere man. He had heavenly origins. But in the exact same verse. In Micah chapter 5 verse 2. Which we often read at Christmas.

[22 : 47] It also prophesies. That he will come. From the town Bethlehem. So the Jews would expect. The Messiah. Not just to be a mere man. Correct.

But to be from heaven too. But also. To have come. From Bethlehem. To have some earthly origin. Now it's hard to tell. It's hard to tell at this point. Whether the crowds know.

Jesus was born in Bethlehem or not. Or if they thought that he'd lived in Nazareth. His whole life. But presumably his brothers and others. Who they had come across.

Into contact with. Would have known that Jesus was born. In Bethlehem. Either way. Scripture was very clear. That they were to expect a Messiah. Who is both from heaven. And from earth.

The crowd seemed to have completely ignored. The born on earth part of the Old Testament prophecies. And Jesus here just simply states. Both of these things are true about me.

[23 : 44] Verse 28 and 29. Jesus proclaimed as he taught in the temple. You know me. And you do know where I come from. But I have not come of my own accord.

He who sent me is true. And him you do not know. I know him. For I come from him. And he sent me. He says yes you know where I come from.

In an earthly sense. But I'm also from heaven. From God the Father. Who only Jesus knows truly. Because he is the only one who's been with him.

Along with the Holy Spirit. For all eternity. Before coming to earth. Jesus saying. That this really shouldn't be a big problem at all.

This question of where he comes from. He matches up perfectly. With what was to be expected. Again. The problem does not lie with Jesus.

[24 : 40] The problem lies with the crowds. They're still just engaging with him. At a very surface level. And have shallow misunderstandings. Just like they had shallow misunderstandings.

About Jesus being a liar. And a law breaker. All through the passage. Jesus says. Don't judge me. By your shallow misunderstandings. Look deeper.

Judge rightly. And it's plain and obvious. That I tell the truth. Don't discredit me. Because I don't map onto your misinformed expectations. Engage with me properly.

There was an excellent example of this. Just a few months back. At the European Parliament. Molly Scott. Who's an MEP. For the Green Party there.

Was discussing in front of the Parliament. About the dangers of a no deal Brexit. To the British economy. And. One member of the Parliament.

[25 : 39] A Brexit Party member. Really thought Molly Scott. Was quite unassuming. So unassuming fact. He didn't really think. She had any credentials. Whatsoever.

To talk on the matter at all. So when it came to question time. He asked her. You're saying. You're making some big claims here. But what. Do you actually. What qualifications. Do you have to back up.

What you're saying. To my understanding. You have none whatsoever. Well. That man ended up. With egg on his face. As Molly Scott.

Very graciously. Responded to his criticism. By stating. Her CV to him. Not only was she. An economist. Economist. I can never say that right. But also.

A professor. Of economics. And her special. Field of expertise. Was in trade. Policies. And she had been studying. The trade negotiations.

[26 : 35] Between Europe. And Britain. From the very beginning. Of the Brexit process. There was probably nobody. In the room. More qualified. Than Molly Scott. In that moment.

But she was overlooked. By this slightly. Censorious. And arrogant. Other. Member of the European Parliament. Because he had shallow. Misconceptions. About her.

He made wrong. Assumptions. About her. And the lesson is. For us today. Don't judge. Jesus. With shallow assessments. Either. Look properly.

At his CV. Engage properly. With what he says. Or you too. Might end up. With egg on your face. Don't just believe. The lies. That are pumped. Through the airways. About him.

That he's a phony. A liar. A religious. Renegade. Someone who just wanted. To put a cat. Amongst the pigeons. A man who got. Above his station. Hopefully.

[27 : 31] You've seen today. That clearly. Cannot be the case. As Jesus. Methodically. Unmasks. Every misconception. About him. And shows the reality. And the truth.

Engage with him properly. Not by mere appearances. Verse 24. And verse 17. Engage with him. With an attitude. That actually.

Wants to please God. And do God's will. Even. Even. If you don't yet. Know. Whether you believe in God. At all. At least be willing. To submit to him. If you come to the conclusion.

He really does exist. And if you do. Come to him. With those attitudes. Engage with him. With those attitudes. I think. The conclusions.

Are obvious. Jesus really. Is the Messiah. Sent by God. To reveal truth. To this world. That we might believe in him. And have eternal life.

[28 : 26] Amen.