

A summary of John 7:1-29.

John chapter 7 is a picture of the church life, typified by the feast of tabernacles (v. 2, 10) which Jesus attended. This may be one key to help us to unlock this chapter. With this in view, there are several burdens through which the Lord may speak to us:

- 1. Jesus went to the feast privately or in secret (v. 10).** Jesus' flesh brothers wanted Him to go to the feast openly and show Himself so that people would see the works that He was doing. However, they did not believe in Him (v. 5). They also went to the feast, but in an outward way. When we go to the church gatherings, how do we go? In an outward way or privately (in an inward way)? What does this mean? Jesus' siblings may typify us. We go to the gatherings, in particular Lord's day morning, but we may not recognize Jesus as the essence of the gatherings. We may know certain brothers and sisters very well, but do we recognize and treasure the Christ in them? The feast of tabernacles or feast of harvest, in the Old Testament, was the last of the seven annual feasts to be celebrated by the children of Israel, and functioned as the culmination of all the feasts. It was the richest and most enjoyable feast of all because it allowed the people to bring the rich produce of their harvest to offer to God and share with one another. Our gatherings should be like that: a presentation and celebration of the rich Christ gained by us. Indeed, we may go to the Lord's table meeting to celebrate, but do we know what we will bring to offer to God? Are we going in an outward way, to meet some people, socialize, or even sing some hymns and offer some prayers, or do we know Christ, and are we eager to gain Him and impart Him to others? Many go to look for Him, as did some in vv. 11-13. However, they had different opinions of Him, some concluding that He was a good man, and others disagreeing and saying that He was leading the crowds astray. This may be our case too. We seemingly go to the gatherings to look for Jesus, and we may even talk about Him, but we may come to different conclusions concerning Him. We may conclude that the gathering was great, joyful and that we felt loved and cared for. Or we may feel that the gathering was boring and the speaking too long. Neither conclusion indicates that we know Christ. In fact, if we do not know the Lord, we may even be affected by such murmuring (either positive or negative), and continue to come to the gatherings week after week, yet in an outward way.
- 2. The true essence of the feast (v. 14).** In the middle of the feast, Jesus went up into the temple and began teaching. He went to the feast privately, in order to supply the *logos* (in Greek, meaning "constant word") and the *rhema* (in Greek, meaning "instant") words of life so people could receive Him as the eternal life. This is the essence of all our gatherings. The Lord must speak to us the words of life, and we need to teach with such words, just as Jesus taught. If we go to the Lord's day meeting, we must speak the *rhema* words. Verses 16-18 reveal to us the peak of the feast. Not only in our speaking, but in everything that we do, in our contact with brothers and sisters, and in the services in which we participate, we must have the Lord's leading (v. 17), and we must exalt Christ and not seek our own glory (v. 18). However, we are in between. Many times, we may speak on our own, without the Lord's speaking to us. For example, we may speak something that we spoke before and that had an impact, and we feel that we can say the same thing again, but without the Lord's speaking to us in a fresh way. Or we may speak to show how much we studied the Bible. We also need to know when to speak. Jesus spoke to a small audience and was willing to dialogue with them, but He also spoke to a crowd in 7:37.
- 3. The rivers of living water must flow out of every brother and sister, not just a few (vv. 37-38).** In our gatherings, it is not enough for the rivers of living water (Christ as the *rhema* word spoken to us, and then spoken by us to others) to flow out only of the brothers and sisters who speak, but from everyone. Nearly always, we pay attention to our speaking, whether it was rich and nourishing. Some brothers who are close to us, and who know the Bible, may encourage us by telling us how rich was the word that we spoke, and we may feel satisfied. Actually, such speaking may have very little value if we are not close to many more saints. We like to pay attention to the saints who

pursue the Bible, who sit in the front row. What about those who sit in the back, in the wings and in the corners? How much do they get when we speak? Do we even care? Our goal should be that not only do we, when we speak, flow out Christ as our enjoyment, but that the so-called weaker ones (in our estimation) or those on the fringe of the church life, would flow out. The opportunity to flow out is enhanced by the smaller gatherings where more are practically able to speak what the Lord has spoken to them. Hence the value of small groups and skype fellowships which are more conducive to participation.

4. **We need revelation in reading the Old Testament (v. 19-24).** Jesus uses the law and circumcision and the Sabbath in the Old Testament, but in a totally different way from the religious people of the time. The “law-keepers” read the Old Testament according to the letter, and judged according to appearance (v. 24), being bound by the very letter of the word that they were reading. They did not touch the spirit of the word (6:63). What about us? When we read the Old Testament, what is our understanding concerning circumcision? Do we realize that this is a picture of the death of Christ, and, applied to us, a picture of our death with Christ? More practically, do we live in this reality by losing our soul life and denying our self? Often, we look at the outward blessing. For example, we may see how the younger brothers and sisters carried out an activity with the younger children, and how well they shared with the church what they did. But do we see the “inward” operation, how they sacrificed their holiday and time with their family to serve the younger ones? What is our understanding concerning the Sabbath? Do we realize that the Sabbath is a picture of real rest and enjoyment? Do we ever marvel that someone got healed through the church’s persistent prayer, or that someone got saved and baptized through the selfless labor of some saints who go out week after week to preach the gospel and lose their face in the process? Or do we only see the outward appearance of the church life, for example new people coming to the meetings, the different activities that are scheduled and the sweet and enjoyable family life?
5. **It is not easy to grow in the church life.** It is amazing that Jesus’ brothers in the flesh, even after thirty years, did not know Him. This is a warning to us. We need to be close to brothers and sisters. Without that, we will not grow. Without companions, it will be very hard to know the Lord. Yet that very closeness may also be a hindrance if we are not careful, and may replace the Lord. We may be satisfied with the closeness with saints, but we may not grow. If we stay the same every year, we may be like Jesus’ brothers. When Jesus was crucified, He did not ask His flesh brothers, but John (the writer of this gospel), to take care of His mother. In the church life, we need to “find John,” that is a brother or sister with whom we can grow together. We should try to avoid growing up with Jesus’ “flesh brothers.” We should treasure such brothers and sisters and be close to them, but “break through” that closeness to find Christ and know Him for ourselves and struggle for His speaking to us through His word.
6. **Jesus , as a man, had limitations and lived a restricted life in order to save us (v.1, 6, 8, 10).** Chapter 6 seems to end on a discouraging note, with many of Jesus’ disciples not walking with Him any more, and even one of the twelve whom He had chosen being identified as a “devil.” Chapter 7 begins on an equally discouraging note, with Jesus facing opposition not just from the Jews, but from His own brothers. This shows the limitations of Jesus. He did not have the liberty to go up to the feast in a public way because His time had not yet come. He remained in Galilee and would not go into Judea because the Jews were seeking to kill Him. These verses show us the human living of Jesus, in particular His family life and His interaction with His siblings. How is our living? Are we restricted? For example, in the church gatherings, we may feel it is “our time” to speak something because we think we have the Lord’s leading, or because we think we understand a passage from the Bible, and therefore can “educate” others. Yet, we may not have contacted anyone during the week. We may not have preached the gospel. We may not have been close to a brother or sister. Jesus could testify concerning the world because He knew the world (v. 7). Do we know the saints that we are speaking to?. Are we restricted in our speaking?