

CHOOSING TO DO THE WILL OF GOD

John 7:1-24

Key Verse: 7:17

“Anyone who chooses to do the will of God will find out whether my teaching comes from God or whether I speak on my own.”

A man was in the middle of a desert, seriously dehydrated, when he noticed a little shack in a distance. He went in and found a water pump and a jug of water with a note, which said, “Pour the entire jug into the pump to prime it first so that you can have as much water as you need.” This man had a choice to make. If he poured the water and the pump did not work, he would die of thirst. On the other hand, if he drank the jug of water, he would still get thirsty and die soon. He made a decision to trust the person who wrote the note. He primed the pump by pouring the whole jug of water and was able to pump up abundant water. This man made a good choice.

In today’s passage, Jesus says that anyone who chooses to do the will of God will find out whether his teaching comes from God. The word of Christ is the word of God. The Bible is the word of God that gives life to us. Do you really believe this in your heart? Do you have awesome respect for God’s word? If not, I pray that God may help you to open your heart and hear his voice this morning!

I. “MY TIME HAS NOT YET COME” (1-9)

Look at verse 1. *After this, Jesus went around in Galilee, purposely staying away from Judea because the Jews there were waiting to take his life.* Jesus wanted to avoid political confrontations with the Jewish leaders. He purposely stayed away from Jerusalem for several months and focused on helping his disciples and those who came to him. Jesus was a good shepherd first and foremost. There was a sharp contrast between this Jesus and the religious leaders who were so jealous of his healing power and popularity that they tried to kill him.

Look at verse 2. The setting of this passage is the Jewish Feast of Tabernacles. The Feast came at the end of September, at harvest time when the fruit of hard labor was gathered in. All males who lived within the 15-mile radius of Jerusalem were required to attend this major feast (Dt 16:16). The celebration included a holy convocation on the first and last day, and the offering of many sacrifices. The Israelites also lived in booths made of palm and willow trees during the seven-day festival. This was to commemorate their 40 years of wilderness wandering after the exodus from Egypt, when they lived in temporary shelters. So the Feast was to celebrate the harvest and to remember God’s grace during their desert wandering (Lev 23:33-43).

As the Feast drew near, Jesus’ brothers said to him, *“You ought to leave here and go to Judea, so that your disciples may see the miracles you do. No one who wants to become a public figure acts in secret. Since you are doing these things, show yourself to*

the world” (3-4). From a human point of view, their advice seemed reasonable. They knew that Jesus was performing great miracles in Galilee, including the changing of water into wine, the healing of the royal official’s son, and the feeding of the 5,000 people with five loaves and two fish. But Jesus had been going around the countryside for the past six months. And as the Feast of Tabernacles approached, his brothers thought that this was an excellent opportunity for Jesus to make a debut before the world as a fantastic miracle maker. So they began to egg him on to go to Judea and show his power to the world. They hoped that Jesus would gain fame and popularity during this festival, so they might cash in on his fame. They pushed Jesus to make a public appearance, as some politicians declare their presidential candidacy in Iowa with many fanfares to draw people’s attention. Jesus’ brothers had a strong desire for worldly fame. They yearned for a prime time interview with network anchors or an appearance on the David Letterman show. The author comments in verse 5: “For even his own brothers did not believe in him.” They were Jesus’ own brothers, but because of their worldly desires, they could not see who Jesus was. They could not understand the nature of Jesus’ mission. Their worldly desires blinded them so that they could not see what God was doing. Likewise, there is a danger for us to fall into unbelief when we follow our own desires for this world.

What was Jesus’ answer to them? Look at verse 6. *Therefore Jesus told them, “The right time for me has not yet come; for you any time is right.”* “My time” is one of the repeated words in John’s gospel, indicating that Jesus was following God’s time schedule. In most cases it refers to the time of Jesus’ death on the cross as the Lamb of God. But here Jesus is referring to the time to do things in God’s way. Jesus’ brothers thought that the festival was an excellent opportunity for Jesus to become famous. But Jesus did not try to seize the opportunity to please himself. Jesus wanted to please God, not himself or his brothers. People, then and now, seek for opportunities to please themselves. And the world hated Jesus because he was not like them (7). Jesus’ life of obedience offended those who lived the life of sin. He said to his brothers, “You go to the festival. I am not going up to this festival, because my time has not yet fully come” (8). We learn that we should seek the opportunity to please God instead of seeking to please ourselves.

Life gives us many opportunities. In fact, life is about making small and big choices, given these opportunities. We could watch TV or we could come to God’s word. We could spend hours daydreaming or have fellowship with God in prayer. It is more pleasing for us to relax in the evening after a hard day at work than to spend time with students for our Bible study and fellowship. But the Scripture teaches us that the purpose of our life is to please God. And Jesus set a perfect example that he laid down his life to save us from our sins and to give us a new life. We have to seek opportunities to please God somehow, especially by helping students come to Jesus through our 1:1 Bible studies. And we have to keep our motives pure so that we may not seek human recognition as Jesus’ brothers did. Let’s pray that God may help us to learn to seek opportunities to please God.

II. “MY TEACHING IS FROM GOD” (10-24)

After his brothers had left for the Feast, Jesus also went to Jerusalem, not publicly, but in secret (10). Now some people think that there was inconsistency in what Jesus did, because he said to his brothers that he wasn't going, and then he did. But there was no contradiction. He did not go to Jerusalem in his brothers' terms, that is, to please himself or them. He went to Jerusalem according to God's time schedule, that is, to do the will of God.

In Jerusalem, the Jews were watching for Jesus' appearance. The people had diverse opinions about him. There was widespread whispering about him. Some said, “He is a good man.” Others replied, “No, he deceives the people” (12-13). They had opinions about Jesus but did not know personally who he was.

So, about halfway through the Feast Jesus went up to the temple courts and began to teach (14). We don't know why he chose this particular time, but obviously it was an opportunity for him to please God. That is clear from the fact that he began to teach the word of God. Jesus taught the truth of God when his brothers asked him to impress the people with spectacular miracles. Teaching the truth of God was his priority. He taught the word of God early in the morning or late in the evening. He taught the word of God in season and out of season—whenever he had an opportunity. He taught the word of God in mountainside or in the temple courts. This time, he taught the word of God to the people in a festive mood.

What was the reaction of the Jews when they heard Jesus' teaching? They were amazed and asked, “How did this man get such learning without having studied?” (15) They were amazed by Jesus' teaching, but only because they did not expect to hear such teaching from him. They were not amazed by the substance of his teaching. They did not have a learning mind. They didn't pay attention to the content of his teaching. Instead, they saw Jesus with their human eyes. They knew that Jesus did not have a theology degree. Jesus was not one of the Pharisees. They questioned how a carpenter with no formal education had such profound knowledge of God's word.

Humanly, it must have been discouraging for Jesus to see their reaction to his teaching. They were judging him and his teaching by mere appearances (24). How did Jesus help them? Look at verse 16. *Jesus answered, “My teaching is not my own. It comes from him who sent me.”* He essentially told them, “Don't be impressed by my teaching because it's coming from a humble carpenter. Instead, you should be impressed by my teaching, because it is coming from God.” His teaching was not based on clever human ideas. His teaching was from God. More importantly he told them he was sent by God. He taught them that he was the Son of God. The words that came out of his mouth were the very words of God. They had to listen to him. This is what God told his disciples on the mount of transfiguration. Mark 9:7 reads: “And a cloud overshadowed them, and a voice came out of the cloud, ‘This is my beloved Son; listen to him.’”

Once I was on the campus of a prestigious university and invited a student to study the Bible with me. He rejected my invitation, saying, “Even if I were interested in studying, why would I study with you?” He probably meant that I didn’t look like a theologian or a scholar. Yes, humanly speaking, none of us are highly qualified. But the Bible is no ordinary book. It is the Holy Scriptures. It is the word of God. And it is not about us. It is about Jesus and the word of God. The word of God is the word of life. When we truly believe this in our hearts, we are compelled to share the word of God with others. Jesus says in John 5:24: “Very truly I tell you, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be judged but has crossed over from death to life.” St. Paul says in 2 Timothy 3:16-17: “All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.” May God help us to have awesome respect for the word of God as we share it with young people of our time!

Look at verse 17. *“Anyone who chooses to do the will of God will find out whether my teaching comes from God or whether I speak on my own.”* This is an important verse for us to meditate on and accept in our hearts. The crowds in this passage debated about who Jesus was, some saying he was a good man and others saying he was a crook (12). Some also wondered how he got his learning without going to seminary school (15). Even today, some people wonder if Jesus is the Lord and Savior as we believe or someone who knew how to manipulate people’s minds. They also wonder if the word of Christ is the truth as we believe or some clever sayings. To these people, Jesus gives the answer: *“Anyone who chooses to do the will of God will find out whether my teaching comes from God or whether I speak on my own.”* What does this mean?

First, whoever chooses to do the will of God. A person’s choice reveals his or her inner motive. Jesus did not choose to follow his own will. He chose to obey the will of God for him to die on the cross to save sinners like you and me. He chose to follow the painful path to the cross. On the other hand, the Jews in this passage chose to satisfy their own desires. They did not choose to do God’s will. So they did not accept Jesus as the Messiah. They refused to accept the truth that Jesus was giving them. Instead, they were filled with jealousy toward him and looking for a chance to have him killed. Jesus healed the invalid man at the pool of Bethesda. It was a work of God. But they didn’t care. They began to persecute Jesus. They had no love of God in their hearts. They had no love for God’s sheep. When they heard Jesus preaching in the temple courts, they did not listen to him. Instead, they said, “How did this man get such learning without having been taught?” (15) They could not hear the word of truth from Jesus because their hearts were far from God. This is a great lesson for us as well. We cannot accept the word of God when our hearts are not right. If we don’t have a right motive, we may hear the word of God, but pay attention to some unimportant details and miss the truth of God, as the Jews did.

Second, how to choose to do the will of God. What is the will of God for me? As a believer, we have to ask this question whenever we make small and big decisions in life.

Is it the will of God for me to major in economics or marketing? Is it the will of God for me to marry this person? It is the will of God to take this job? What does it mean to choose to do the will of God? A spiritually immature, dishonest or self-centered person will answer this question easily, saying, “Yes, this is the will of God for me,” when actually that is what he or she wants to do. Many times this is a difficult question for us to answer. Even Jesus had to struggle so much in prayer before he said, “Yet not my will, but yours be done” (Lk 22:42). There are several scripture verses that can help us to choose to do the will of God. Romans 12:2 says, “Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will.” 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18 read: “Rejoice always, pray continually, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus.” St. Augustine summed this up when he said, “Love God and do what you will.”

Look at verse 18. *“He who speaks on his own does so to gain honor for himself, but he who works for the honor of the one who sent him is a man of truth; there is nothing false about him.”* There was a clear difference between Jesus’ motive in teaching and that of the religious leaders. The purpose of Jesus’ teaching was to reveal God’s glory and honor. On the other hand, the Jewish leaders were seeking their own glory. As a result, their teaching tended to be self-serving. Jesus not only chose to do God’s will, but lived for the honor of God. This revealed that Jesus’ teaching was from God. He spoke the truth about God. He was a man of truth. There was nothing false about Jesus.

Finally Jesus showed that his teaching was from God because he practiced what he taught (21-24). The Jews were amazed at the miracle of Jesus when he healed the invalid of 38 years (21). Then they turned around and began to persecute him for breaking the Sabbath law. But Jesus told them it was the Jews who broke the law by having a murderous intention in their hearts on the Sabbath (19). Jesus knew that he would be persecuted if he healed the invalid on Sabbath. Still, he healed the man, freeing him from his suffering of 38 years. Jesus practiced his teaching of love, even at the cost of his life. We learn from Jesus that we should live and practice the truth of God as we share the word of God with young people.

In conclusion, we learn today that we should acknowledge the word of Christ as the word from God by choosing to do the will of God. Jesus says that anyone who chooses to do the will of God will find out his teaching comes from God. May God help us to accept the word of truth and live by the truth!