

His Purpose Prevails (John 7:1-31)

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“Who has believed what he has heard from us? And to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed? For he grew up before him like a young plant, and like a root out of dry ground; he had no form or majesty that we should look at him, and no beauty that we should desire him. He was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief; and as one from whom men hide their faces he was despised, and we esteemed him not.” (Isa 53:1-3).

Have you ever experienced withering opposition in a relationship? I’m not talking about a critical comment here or there. I’m talking about steady, persistent hostility, the kind that saps your strength, threatens your joy, and sorely tempts you to throw in the towel. You see your enemy’s face in your mind’s eye when you wake up. You hear their voice in your head when you lay down. Whether you’re a Christian or not, opposition at work, at home, or from a close relative or friend is deeply painful.

If you are living to please the Lord, and opposition arises not just on one relational front, but every front, all at the same time, and remains, then you have some idea of what Jesus experienced for most of his public ministry. Jn 7:1 sets the stage for the entire chapter. “After this Jesus went about in Galilee. He would not go about in Judea, because the Jews were seeking to kill him.”

How would you feel if you knew a whole group of people were dead set on taking your life at the earliest opportunity? Jesus’ experience in Jn 7 is a catalogue of scorn, derision, hatred, criticism, and opposition. It happened in private. It happened in public. It arose among his closest followers. He wasn’t just misunderstood. He was passionately resisted and aggressively maligned. Wherever he turned, people oppressed him.

Yet what do we read 30 verses later? “So they were seeking to arrest him, but no one laid a hand on him because his hour had not yet come.” Why not? Because the will and desires of men, no matter how strong the hatred or violent the opposition, cannot derail the sovereign work of Almighty God. Every expression of human antagonism the Apostle John records in vv. 1-30 is designed to illustrate and instill that reality in our hearts. For only when we live with an abiding confidence that the good purposes of the Lord will prevail will we be able to persevere in following Jesus in the midst of opposition.

This passage serves us as both saints and sinners. As saints, it is a practical word of encouragement and instruction. We too will experience the enmity of men on the path of obedience to Jesus and have much to learn from his experience and response to opposition. As sinners, it is a sober word of warning and conviction. For the actions and attitudes of those who opposed the Lord surface in our own hearts as well. Until Jesus returns to make all things new, we remain, even as the people of God, both oppressed and oppressors, saints and sinners. We suffer for the sake of God's glory, and we resist him in pursuit of our own. In most situations, both are in play.

So let's focus on how Jesus responded to opposition and pay careful attention along the way to how our attitudes and actions are more often like the crowd than our Sovereign Lord. How did he respond to human opposition?

1) JESUS OBEYED GOD'S WILL (vv. 1-13)

The apostle John informs us in v. 5 that "not even his brothers believed in him." Imagine that. The biological sons of Joseph and Mary literally spent years living in the closest possible company of the Son of God incarnate. They heard his words. They saw his deeds. They watched him perform miracles only God could perform. Yet it wasn't enough. The primary obstacle to faith in Jesus back then remains true today. It's not a lack of evidence. It's the pride in our hearts that would rather be God than worship God.

They basically told their older brother, "Listen, if you're really the Messiah, stop mucking around here in the backwoods of Galilee and go play with the big dogs. You know Jerusalem is the seat of power and prestige. It's the Feast of Booths where the entire nation gathers in Jerusalem. Make yourself known where it counts! Surely the Messiah would want the entire world to see and know him, assuming of course that you're actually the Christ, the anointed Savior of the world.

Jesus' response is insightful. V. 6, "My time has not yet come, but your time is always here." Jesus recognized his brothers were working with an entirely different paradigm for determining whether an action was right or wrong, wise or unwise. As far as they were concerned, no time was too early to build a following and secure the praise of men. If your goal is to get people to follow you, then what are you waiting for? Go up to Jerusalem and get it done!

You can almost hear the smug mockery in their voices when Jesus declines in v. 8, "You go up to the feast. I am not going up to this feast, for my time has not yet fully come."



"Yeah. That's what we thought. So long "messiah!" According to the wisdom of the world, Jesus was crazy. They will say the same of you too, Christian.

Why didn't Jesus comply? Because he had a higher allegiance than the approval of men, his own family included. He was ruthlessly committed to obeying his Heavenly Father and the guiding presence of the Holy Spirit convinced him it wasn't the right time. He didn't say he would never go. He simply refused their invitation to go for the beginning of the feat because he knew it wouldn't please the Lord. Jn 8:29, "And he who sent me is with me. He has not left me alone, for I always do the things that are pleasing to him."

Is that your response when you experience enmity from men on the path of obedience to God? First and foremost, Jesus' obedience to the Father's will reveals and confirms his identity as the Son of God, summoning our faith, urging us to trust and believe in him. At the same time, however, he gives us a provoking example to follow.

What are we tempted to do in response to opposition? Whatever will get our opponents to stand down, be quiet, or get off our case. We're tempted to make little compromises that don't violate an explicit command in God's Word, but nevertheless violate our conscience and the internal voice of the Spirit. We're tempted to start doing whatever makes sense from the world's perspective instead of obeying the will of God.

Christian, the more you experience oppression or opposition on account of your faith the more significant the smallest acts of obedience to Jesus become and the more important it is to focus on heeding the voice of the Lord in the little things. The standard God sets before us, and Jesus models in his response to his brothers, is far higher than avoiding scandalous sin. Pleasing the Lord means obeying his will in all the gray areas of life by obeying the faithful prompting of the Holy Spirit.

Don't exchange the freedom of living to please the Lord for the bondage of garnering the applause of men. Matt 10:28, "Do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell." When the pain of opposition from the world tempts you to conform to the world, lean hard on the power of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit of God is faithful to guide the people of God as he did the Son of God in applying in the Word of God to decisions big and small.

In the midst of opposition, Jesus obeyed God's will. Follow his example.

2) JESUS DECLARED GOD'S WORD (vv. 14-24)

If you knew a group of authorities in a particular city were hellbent on killing you, would you go to the most public location in that city, at one of the most crowded times of the year, and begin saying the very sort of things that got you in trouble in the first place? That's precisely what Jesus does in v. 14, demonstrating once again that he's ruled not by the fear of man, but by the will and command of his Heavenly Father.

The Jews listening to him were saying that someone can only have knowledge that can be transferred from one human being to another.

Jesus perceives their unbelief and addresses the real issue head on. He recognizes their objection to his divine identity reflects a deeper problem with divine authority. V. 16, "So Jesus answered them, 'My teaching is not mine, but his who sent me.'" He unapologetically asserts he's not peddling the religious musings of man. He's speaking on behalf of the One True God. He self-consciously identified himself as the prophet par excellence, called and equipped by God to speak as his authorized representative.

Christian, you cannot claim to speak the very words of God the way Jesus did. He's God. You're not. But God has called you to respond to enmity, persecution, and public scorn on account of your faith with the same unwavering commitment to speaking the truth. As Paul reminded the church in Corinth, "We are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us" (2 Cor 5:20).

When the Jewish religious leaders told the disciples in Acts 4:19-20 to stop speaking of Jesus, what did they say? "But Peter and John answered them, 'Whether it is right in the sight of God to listen to you rather than to God, you must judge, for we cannot but speak of what we have seen and heard.'"

Do not allow the enmity of men to intimidate you into silence, brothers and sisters. You are not accountable to men. You are accountable to God, and he will not fail to vindicate the truth of your words to the degree you courageously and respectfully speak his words on his behalf as his ambassador.

At first glance, the remainder of Jesus' response in vv. 17-24 to the Jews' question about the origin of his teaching might appear a bit scattered. It's a rapid-fire exchange, but there's a theme in the Savior's words. Opposition to his ministry has been mounting for a while. So he seizes the opportunity to explain why the Jews were unable to recognize his words as the authoritative words of God. We need to be on guard against the same pitfalls. Expect to encounter both obstacles whenever you declare God's word today.

A) They were unwilling to do God's will

V. 17, "If anyone's will is to do my will, he will know whether the teaching is from God or whether I am speaking on my own authority."

Friend, if you come to God's Word refusing to obey God's Word, you will never be unable to perceive the divine authority in God's Word. Absent the obedience of faith, our discernment of the truth is fatally flawed. It's part of the noetic effect of sin. You will remain blind to God's truth as long as you refuse to submit to God's will. Why? Because the true knowledge of God is reserved for the humble.

D.A. Carson says it well. "Finite and fallen human beings cannot set themselves up on some sure ground outside the truth and thus gain the vantage from which they may assess it. Divine revelation can only be assessed, as it were, from the inside."

If you're struggling to understand how something God says in his word could possibly be true, consider this. Could it be that you have exchanged the humility of obeying God simply because he is God for the arrogance of obeying God to the degree his commands make sense to you? And if the latter is true, friend, then who's really calling the shots in your life? They didn't recognize the authority of Jesus' words because they were unwilling to do God's will.

B) They were unwilling to seek God's glory

V. 18, "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."

The moment you admit the divine authority in Jesus' words is the moment you confess there is a glory greater than yourself that rightfully commands your allegiance. But our hearts are proud. We like living for our own glory. We love chasing whatever makes us feel good about ourselves or look good in the eyes of other people. We refuse to recognize Jesus' divine authority because we are fiercely committed to our own glory.

In contrast, what did Jesus do when he walked among us? He lived for the glory of God, he sought the fame of the One who sent him. He wasn't playing language games to create power for himself. The motives of his heart were pure and thus the words that came out of his mouth were true. He didn't twist the truth or hide the truth because he delighted in the truth. Therefore, whatever he said could be trusted. In him (v. 18) "there

is no falsehood.” They didn’t recognize the authority of Jesus’ words because they were unwilling to seek God’s glory.

The threat to Jesus’ life wasn’t new. It could be traced all the way back to the last time he was in Jerusalem for a feast in Jn 5 and healed a lame man on the Sabbath. According to the law, the Sabbath was a day of rest. You weren’t supposed to do any work. The Jewish authorities decided Jesus telling a lame man to pick up his mat and walk was work and got angry. Really angry. Angry enough to try to kill him.

He points out the egregious inconsistency of their accusation in v. 23. “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?” You allow parents to perform the “work” of circumcising their sons on the Sabbath day because it’s a holy act of consecration, pointing to the joy of living under the redemptive rule of God. So if on the Sabbath I do the “work” of enabling a man to actually experience the joy of God’s redemptive rule in his whole body, why are you upset?

The inconsistency in their application of the law exposed the real root of their beef with Jesus. It wasn’t his failure to honor the law. Jesus marvelously fulfilled the law. The accusation was a total smokescreen. Jesus knew the real reason they were angry with him. They had a fundamental problem with the authority of God, an authority Jesus exercised whenever he testified (v. 7) that their works were “evil.” They claimed to be upholding the law, but in reality, they weaponized the law to protect the arrogant pursuit of their own glory.

The Savior’s faithfulness to keep speaking the true words of God in the midst of relentless opposition sets a provoking example for us to follow. But might we have more in common with the angry crowd than the Lord they opposed? Do you really want to do God’s will? Are you diligently living for God’s glory, even when it’s exceedingly hard or defies the logic of your own mind?

Consider the way you interact with God’s commands. Do you throw the letter of the law at the slightest perceived failure in your boss, your spouse, your parents, pastors, or policemen to justify your rejection of their authority? Or do you give careful consideration to upholding the spirit of the law in your own life, humbly assessing your words and deeds in the mirror of God’s word?

Even when people refused to recognize his authority, Jesus persevered in declaring God's Word. Follow his example, my friends, starting with the testimony of a life devoted to doing God's will and seeking God's glory.

3) JESUS FULFILLED GOD'S MISSION (vv. 25-31)

The people in Jerusalem knew the Jewish authorities wanted to kill Jesus. Yet when he showed up in the most public areas in all Jerusalem, no one touched him. Some wondered (v. 26), "Could it be that the authorities really know that this is the Christ?" But then they recalled his humble origins and concluded he couldn't be the Savior of the world. They believed Jesus was a mere man, nothing more. The Lord Jesus challenged them to reconsider.

V. 28, "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." In the midst of opposition, how did Jesus respond? He remained focused on his identity as one who had been sent. He knew his presence on earth wasn't an independent initiative. He was here on a mission, sent according to the eternal wisdom of the Father to rescue sinners like us from the death we deserve.

Our origin is different, brothers and sisters. We are not the eternal Creator. We are finite creatures. Jesus was sent from the Father as no one else could be or ever will be. His mission, in a critical sense, was unrepeatable. Yet before his ascension, Jesus said to his disciples. In 20:21, "As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you." You too are not here in this world by accident, Christian. You too are a sent one. The Father has entrusted you with a mission, to delight in knowing him and making him known.

Remember that, especially when you feel opposition on every side. Your life is not worthless. Your existence is not pointless. Even in pain, even in sorrow, you've been given a divine purpose that no enemy in this world can take away from you, a reason for living that death itself cannot destroy. No matter how fierce the opposition, do not allow persecution to become your functional identity. You are a sent one.

Jesus made little sense to the people around him. The church still makes little sense to the world today. When we're engaged in popular social causes, perhaps. But not when we're preaching the gospel. Not when we're calling men and women to turn from their sins and bow their knee to King Jesus.

When you experience opposition on account of your faith in Jesus don't assume that if you could just say the right words in the right way everyone would recognize you really are speaking the truth. In their enmity toward the Father, the world rejected the Son, and they will reject you too, Christian. Don't be surprised when persecution comes. And when it does, brothers and sisters, rest in your knowledge of the Father the way Jesus did. The faith you hold is right because the Father in whom you believe is true.

And he is not sitting on the sidelines, waiting to see if you will finish the good works he has prepared for you. He's ruling. He's reigning. He's working all things together according to the perfection of his sovereign will. As the providence of God restrained the evil of men toward the Son, so too the providence of God restrains the evil of men toward all who have been united to him by faith.

V. 30, "So they were seeking to arrest him, but no one laid a hand on him, because his hour had not yet come." One day soon, his hour would come, the night of his betrayal, the day of his crucifixion. Yet even that greatest act of human evil could not occur a single moment earlier than Almighty God ordained and allowed. By the time we get to Jn 7, opposition to Jesus is rising and rising fast and at no point is the Son ever carried along on the tide of human enmity. The Sovereign Lord continues to reign.

He reigns in your life too, Christian. If your human enemies succeed in doing their worst, as they did to Jesus, remember that. His mission will prevail and therefore yours will too. Come what may, ours is not a lost cause, a relic of 1950s morality, or a danger to human freedom and flourishing. The mission of the gospel is the power of God for the redemption of the people of God, and with us, the entire cosmos. King Jesus will not be denied the reward of his suffering. God is too jealous for his glory. Victory is assured.

CONCLUSION

Even a day of withering opposition afforded a glimmer of the harvest to come. At the same time the Jewish leaders were seeking to arrest and kill him, what happened? V. 31, "Yet many of the people believed in him." Don't miss the connection. The enmity of man cannot prevail against the saving purposes of God. It couldn't back then. It can't today. There is one unstoppable force at work in the world, friends, and that force is the gospel of Jesus Christ, the good news of salvation from the wrath of God through faith in the Son of God, who lived, died, and rose from the grave to bring us home to heaven.

So when you are hated by men for Jesus sake, when your kids hate you, when your spouse hates you, when your relatives disown you and your coworkers avoid you, follow



the Savior's example. Obey God's will. Declare God's word. And fulfill God's mission. Why? Because his purpose prevails.

Dan 7:14 speaks the truth. "And to him (to Jesus) was given dominion and glory and a kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him; his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom one that shall not be destroyed."