

Teaching Points

Tonight's lesson will draw from the Pharisees and their reaction to Christ. Sadly, these religious leaders were some of the staunchest opponents of Christ. Their religion, with all its man-made traditions, stood in direct opposition to the person and work of Christ. But as we'll see in a moment, not all of them were enemies of Jesus.

1. See the Pharisees' futile attempts to apprehend Jesus.

Jesus had just got done making His offer of living water to any who would come to Him to have their thirst quenched. The crowd exhibited a divided response. Some responded positively, others expressed skepticism.

Verses 45-46 reveal to us that there were some men in the crowd who were sent by the Pharisees to apprehend Jesus. They were "officers" (servants or attendants) of the chief priests. Apparently these men were not able to capture Jesus so easily. When they came back empty-handed, the Pharisees were seriously frustrated.

The reason they give for failing to capture Jesus is remarkable. Jesus didn't have to lift one finger to physically resist any of them. Instead, there was power in His words that rendered these men incapable of completing their mission. **"Why have you not brought Him?" The officers answered, 'No man ever spoke like this Man!'"** (John 7:45-46)

Discussion Question: What's going on here? What was it about the way Christ spoke that prevented these men from apprehending Him?

Thoughts: *It seems that these officers were completely captivated by the words of Christ. They were so moved by the things Christ spoke that they couldn't bring themselves to lay hands on Him. This speaks to the awesome power of Christ's message - a message that both captivates and subdues the human heart. It also speaks to the power of providence. Since it was not yet His hour, it was impossible for anyone to arrest Him. The day would come when His hour had arrived, but until then, no one could harm Him. The Pharisees' order to apprehend Jesus faded into obscurity as these men stood and heard Christ preach with the power and authority of God Himself!*

2. See the pride and malice of the Pharisees.

They say, **"Are you also deceived? Have any of the rulers or the Pharisees believed in Him? But this crowd that does not know the law is accursed."** (John 7:47-48)

The Pharisees considered themselves enlightened, while they thought everyone else was deceived. In their minds, there's no way they could be wrong. They couldn't entertain the thought that the common people were right for listening to Jesus.

Ironically, they were the ones who were ignorant and accursed! They had the Messiah standing in their midst, and they neither could nor would receive His words.

How can they call the people cursed for listening to Jesus? If these men really understood the law, they would realize that they were the ones with a curse hanging over their heads.

Consider Galatians 3:10, **“For as many as are of the works of the law are under the curse; for it is written, ‘Cursed is everyone who does not continue in all things which are written in the book of the law, to do them.’”**

The Pharisees were the ones who tried to obtain justification through keeping the law. This could only lead them to being cursed. The people who were listening to Jesus were listening to the only way to be saved from the curse.

Discussion Question: Why were the Pharisees so opposed to Christ?

Thoughts: *There’s a number of reasons. Generally speaking, the Pharisees were more concerned with the praise of men rather than fearing God. That’s why they made long public prayers and gave alms for all to see. They also boasted in their traditions and neglected the heart of God’s word - which is to love God with all our being. They maintained an appearance of strict religious commitment to the law - but their hearts were devoid of love for God or their neighbors. As a group, they were a sad illustration of what it looks like to “[have] a form of godliness but [deny] its power.” (2 Timothy 3:5).*

All this put them in opposition to Christ - who was the embodiment of true righteousness. There was nothing hypocritical or vain about Jesus. And since He constantly exposed their vanity and hypocrisy - they resented Him deeply.

3. See God’s grace at work - even in the heart of a Pharisee!

Before we condemn all the Pharisees for their opposition to Jesus, we need to remember that God’s grace knows no bounds. Nicodemus was a Pharisee and he was an exception to their typical unbelief.

We first met Nicodemus back in chapter 3 when he visited Jesus by night. At that time it seems that he was unwilling to be seen talking with Christ. But here he is again in chapter 7, and this time he seems to have grown a little more bold in his stance on Jesus.

He’s willing to speak up in defense of Christ and in opposition to the rest of the Pharisees and their scheming. **“Does our law judge a man before it hears him and knows what he is doing?”** (Verse 51). Nicodemus is basically saying, “Hey, you guys

can't just condemn Jesus, you haven't brought any legitimate charges against Him. You guys are just acting out your bias against Him - and that's not right."

Needless to say the rest of the Pharisees are displeased with Nicodemus' comments. They chide him as if he were from Galilee like Jesus. Then they throw shade at Christ's credentials, implying that He can't be the Messiah because He's from Galilee.

Discussion Question: To what do you attribute Nicodemus' interest in the cause of Christ?

Thoughts: *Remember, this is the man who had a one-on-one interview with Jesus back in chapter 3. He came to seek truth from Christ - and he was not disappointed. The same power that froze the officers of the chief priests here in chapter 7 had the effect of softening and enlightening Nicodemus' heart back in chapter 3. Jesus had begun to work in Nicodemus - and we know that **"He who has begun a good work in you will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ"** (Philippians 1:6). Nicodemus is still a work in progress, but it seems that Christ's words had gotten down into his heart. And we know that God's word never returns void.*

This isn't the last time we'll see Nicodemus in John's gospel. The next time he appears we'll see more fruit as his confidence in Christ continues to grow.

Prayer Focus

Focus your prayer time tonight on the awesome power of God's word. Christ's words stopped the officers in their tracks. His words also softened and drew Nicodemus. His same word is at work in the world today. Praise the Lord!