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## JESUS: TRUE, YET REJECTED

John 7:14-24

By

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January 26, 2014

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January 26, 2014  
John, Lesson 41

Jesus: True, Yet Rejected  
John 7:14-24

Cary Grant once told how he was walking along a street and met a man whose eyes locked onto him with excitement. The man said, "Wait a minute, you're ... you're—I know who you are; don't tell me—uh, Rock Hud—no, you're...."

Grant thought he'd help him, so he finished the man's sentence: "Cary Grant."

And the fellow said, "No, that's not it! You're...."

There was Cary Grant, identifying himself with his own name, but the fellow had someone else in mind! (*Leadership Journal* [Fall, 1990], pp. 48-49)

The apostle John wrote of Jesus (1:10-11), "He was in the world, and the world was made through Him, and the world did not know Him. He came to His own, and those who were His own did not receive Him." So throughout his Gospel John sets forth both the tragedy of unbelief along with the triumphs of belief. He wrote his Gospel to show who Jesus is so that (20:31) "you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing you may have life in His name." To have saving faith, it's crucial that you understand correctly who Jesus is.

In our text, Jesus is at the Feast of Booths in Jerusalem, six months before He would be arrested and crucified. Before He showed Himself publicly at this feast, the crowds were debating, with some saying (7:12), "He is a good man"; [but] others were saying, "No, on the contrary, He leads people astray."

John wants us to see that neither of those are viable options. Jesus could not have been merely a good man and said the things that He said. If a mere man claimed that he could give living water so that the one who drank it would never thirst again; or if he claimed to be the bread of life, so that whoever ate of him would never hunger and would have eternal life; or if he claimed to be the way, the truth, and the life and said that he was the only way that people could come to God; you would not say, "He's a good man."

You would say, "He's a crazy megalomaniac!" And, at the same time, Jesus was obviously too good of a man to be a deliberate deceiver. So John wants us to see that Jesus is the eternal Son of God in human flesh. He wants us to see Jesus' glory so that we might believe in Him as our Lord and God (20:28).

But John knows full well that believing in Jesus isn't the automatic response to Him. There is always division: some believe, some are indifferent, and others reject Him vehemently. So here John shows us the reaction of the Jewish leaders and the crowds to Jesus when He went into the temple in the midst of the feast and began to teach. Although Jesus was sent from God, taught God's truth, sought God's glory, and did God's miraculous works, people rejected Him because they valued the wrong things; they were not willing to obey God; they were legalistic hypocrites; they were under satanic influence; and, they were judging by outward appearances. Or, more briefly,

Although Jesus is the true and righteous one, people reject Him because of their many sins.

The Holy Spirit did not see fit to tell us the content of Jesus' teaching on this occasion, but rather had John record the reaction of the people to Jesus' teaching. But in the narrative, he gives us four solid reasons that Jesus is, as He claims (7:18), "true, and there is no unrighteousness in Him."

1. Jesus is the true and righteous one.

When Jesus claims to be "true" (7:18), He means that He embodies all that is true. He adds, "and there is no unrighteousness in Him." Jesus is claiming to be absolutely true, with no hint of deception (7:12) or sin in Him. Also, as Leon Morris points out (*The Gospel of John* [Eerdmans], p. 406, n. 39), in the only other places in John where a person is said to be "true," it is used of God (3:33; 8:26). Thus John wants us to see that Jesus alone shares this quality with God. Four facts support Jesus' claim to be true and righteous:

A. Jesus is true and righteous because He was sent here by God (7:16, 18).

Jesus emphasizes this twice here. In 7:16, He says, "My teaching is not Mine, but His who sent Me." And, in 7:18, He says, "He who is seeking the glory of the One who sent Him, He is true...."

He will mention it again in 7:28-29, "I have not come of Myself, but He who sent Me is true, whom you do not know. I know Him, because I am from Him and He sent Me." It is a major theme in John that Jesus is the one sent to earth by God the Father.

Why did Jesus emphasize this so often? It's a matter of His preexistence and authority. If He was a religious upstart, who came up with His own ideas and promoted Himself alone, then why believe in Him? But if the one true God sent Him and He is also true, then we had better believe in Him and obey Him. To reject Jesus is to reject the God who sent Him.

B. Jesus is true and righteous because He taught God's truth (7:14-17).

Jesus did not go up to the feast with His brothers to make a grand entrance, because the people wanted to make Him a political king. But sometime in the midst of the feast, He went into the temple and began to teach. A crowd quickly gathered around Him. Probably, the charge in 7:15 is coming from the Jewish leaders and addressed to the people listening to Jesus (R. C. H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of John's Gospel* [Augsburg Publishing House], p. 541). Their "astonishment" did not mean that they were favorably impressed by Jesus' teaching. Rather, they were amazed at His audacity to take on the role of a religious teacher in the temple when He lacked the proper credentials from the Jewish authorities. They were trying to discredit Jesus in front of the crowd by alleging that "this man" (a derogatory term) purports to be learned, but He has never been educated in our schools. John is again using irony: Here are these proud Jewish leaders calling the eternal Word who created the world (1:1-3) an uneducated fellow (Morris, p. 405)!

Jesus responds to their challenge by asserting (7:16), "My teaching is not Mine, but His who sent Me." Jesus is saying, "I don't need your education and humanly-conferred degrees because I am speaking truth directly from the living and true God who sent Me here to teach." In spiritual matters, the ideas of philosophers and religious teachers are mere speculation. Such thinkers have not come from God and they can only guess at what He is like. But since Jesus came from God, He could authoritatively teach us about God, man, sin, and how we can have eternal life.

I'll say more on 7:17 in a moment, but for now note what Jesus says about how a person can know whether His teaching originated with Him or with God: "If anyone is willing to do His will, he will know of the teaching, whether it is of God or *whether* I speak from Myself." When you're witnessing to an unbeliever about Christ, you should challenge him to read the gospels, paying attention to the teaching of Jesus. But many have read and even studied the gospels and come away as unbelievers. The key is to tell the unbeliever, "As you read, tell God that if He will show you that Jesus is true, you will be willing to obey Him." If the person comes to the gospels as a scoffer, he will read them and go away a scoffer. If he comes with a willing heart to obey God's will, then God will show him the truth about Jesus.

C. Jesus is true and righteous because He sought God's glory (7:18).

Jesus continues (7:18): "He who speaks from himself seeks his own glory; but He who is seeking the glory of the One who sent Him, He is true, and there is no unrighteousness in Him." When Jesus came to this earth, He voluntarily laid aside the glory that He had shared with the Father from all eternity and took on the form of a slave, becoming obedient even to death on the cross (Phil. 2:6-8). He is now risen, ascended, and restored to His rightful full glory at the Father's right hand (John 17:5). He will come again in power and glory to judge the living and the dead.

But when He was on earth, Jesus' aim was to glorify the Father. He states that this, not rabbinic credentials from the accredited schools, is the test of a true teacher. That is true of all who purport to teach God's truth: If a man glories in his academic degrees and seeks to exalt himself, he is not a true teacher of God's truth. When you have any idea of the righteousness and majesty of God, you'll be painfully aware of your own inadequacy and unworthiness. You'll cry out (Ps. 115:1), "Not to us, O Lord, not to us, but to Your name give glory because of your lovingkindness, because of Your truth."

Thus Jesus is true and righteous because He was sent here by God, He taught God's truth, and He sought God's glory. Finally,

D. Jesus is true and righteous because He did God's miraculous works (7:19-23).

John 7:19-23: "'Did not Moses give you the Law, and yet none of you carries out the Law? Why do you seek to kill Me?' The crowd answered, 'You have a demon! Who seeks to kill You?' Jesus answered them, 'I did one deed, and you all marvel. For this reason Moses has given you circumcision (not because it is from Moses, but from the fathers), and on *the* Sabbath you circumcise a man. If a man receives circumcision on *the* Sabbath so that the Law of Moses will not be broken, are you angry with Me because I made an entire man well on *the* Sabbath?'"

Jesus draws a contrast between Himself and the hypocritical Pharisees. There was no unrighteousness in Jesus (7:18), but the Jews, who boasted in the Law, didn't actually keep the Law, as seen by the fact that they were trying to kill Jesus. The crowd, which consisted of Jews from all over Israel as well as from other countries, may not have been aware of the evil intent of their leaders. So they accuse Jesus of demon-induced paranoia.

Jesus responds (7:21) by referring back to the incident in John 5:1-15, where He healed the man by the Pool of Bethesda and told him to carry his mat on the Sabbath. As a result of this one deed, the Jews were persecuting Him and seeking to kill Him (5:16, 18). It's not easy to understand what "for this reason" (7:22, which the ESV and NIV omit) refers to, but the thought seems to be (loosely paraphrasing F. Godet, *Commentary on the Gospel of John* [Zondervan], 2:66), "The reason Moses gave you the law that requires circumcising a baby on the eighth day even if that day is the Sabbath is that he was pleading My cause in advance. Moses was requiring you to commit the same Sabbath transgression that you are seeking to kill Me for. If it's lawful to purify one part of the body by circumcision on the Sabbath, then why was it wrong for Me to heal an entire man on the Sabbath?"

But the point is, as Nicodemus told Jesus (3:2), "No one can do these signs that You do unless God is with him." Or, as the man born blind whom Jesus healed told the hostile Jewish leaders (9:33), "If this man were not from God, He could do nothing." Or, as Jesus tells the same religious leaders (10:37-38), "If I do not do the works of My Father, do not believe Me; but if I do them,

though you do not believe Me, believe the works, so that you may know and understand that the Father is in Me, and I in the Father.”

So there is solid evidence for believing that Jesus is the true and righteous one: He was sent here by God; He taught God’s truth; He sought God’s glory; and He did God’s miraculous works. So, with all this evidence, why do people still reject Jesus as Savior and Lord?

2. People reject Jesus in spite of who He is because of their many sins.

The text reveals five sins that caused these religious Jews to reject Jesus:

A. People reject Jesus in spite of who He is because they value the wrong things (7:15).

As we’ve seen, these Jewish leaders valued their rabbinic training. They had a “good ol’ boy club” of those who had graduated from their schools. When they taught in the synagogues and in the temple, the rabbis would cite the proper rabbinic authorities. But here was this young upstart from the insignificant town of Nazareth teaching the people without citing the esteemed rabbis. He would say, “You have heard it said, ... but I say unto you” (see Matt. 5:21-22, 27-28, 31-32, 38-39, 43-44). Matthew (7:28-29) concludes the Sermon on the Mount by noting, “When Jesus had finished these words, the crowds were amazed at His teaching; for He was teaching them as *one* having authority, and not as their scribes.”

While there is nothing wrong per se with academic degrees, if we put such a premium on degrees that we disregard or belittle a godly man who lacks such degrees, we will miss some deep spiritual blessings. John Bunyan, the author of *Pilgrim’s Progress*, did not have any formal training, but he had deep insight into the Bible and he could preach it with power. The king of England once asked John Owen, the learned Puritan theologian who was the Vice-Chancellor of Oxford University, how he could go and listen to a tinker prate (Bunyan’s trade was to fix pots and pans). Owen replied (*John Owen: Prince of the Puritans*, by Andrew Thomson [Christian Focus], p. 125), “May it please your majesty, could I possess the tinker’s ability for preaching, I would willingly relinquish all my learning.” If we value the wrong things, we will miss Jesus.

B. People reject Jesus in spite of who He is because they are not willing to obey God (7:17).

We've already looked at 7:17, "If anyone is willing to do His will, he will know of the teaching, whether it is of God or *whether* I speak from Myself." But note further what Jesus is saying here: The reason that people do not recognize Jesus for who He is does not hinge on having enough evidence, but rather on having enough obedience. If a person is willing to obey God, he will know that Jesus was sent by God and speaks God's truth. As Augustine put it (cited by Morris, 406, n. 37): "Do not seek to understand in order to believe, but believe that you may understand."

In other words, if you come to the Bible as a scoffer, you'll go away a scoffer. Jesus never committed Himself to unbelief (2:24). That's a basic principle of human relationships. If someone comes to you with a critical, hostile attitude, you're not going to commit yourself to him. But if he comes wanting to be of help to you, you're more likely to open yourself up to him. Similarly, Jesus said (John 14:21), "He who has My commandments and keeps them is the one who loves Me; and he who loves Me will be loved by My Father, and I will love him and will disclose Myself to him." The opposite is also true: If you don't obey Christ, He won't disclose Himself to you.

C. People reject Jesus in spite of who He is because they are legalistic hypocrites (7:19).

The Jewish leaders prided themselves on obeying the Mosaic Law, but Jesus unmasks them by stating (7:19), "Did not Moses give you the Law, and *yet* none of you carries out the Law? Why do you seek to kill Me?" The scribes and Pharisees meticulously tithed their table spices, but they neglected the weightier provisions of the law (Matt. 23:23). Here, they want to break the sixth commandment by killing Jesus. Legalism is when a person keeps certain manmade rules or parts of God's Word that he can do externally, so that everyone will notice how "righteous" he is. But he doesn't deal with the sin in his heart.

Since the Lord knows every private thought that you have, it's foolish to try to put on an outward show of "righteousness," while at the same time you neglect judging sinful thoughts, such as pride,

greed, lust, selfishness, and jealousy. You may impress others, but God isn't impressed at all! Legalistic hypocrisy will cause you to reject Jesus, the righteous one, who sees right through you.

D. People reject Jesus in spite of who He is because they are under satanic influence (7:20).

The crowd may have been ignorant of the leaders' intent to kill Jesus, but their response of accusing Jesus of having a demon was evidence that they themselves were under demonic influence. Since they thought that mental illnesses, such as paranoia, stemmed from demonic activity, they may have only been accusing Jesus of being crazy. But, still, to charge the true and righteous one of having a demon can only come from satanic influence.

It's interesting that in John, there are no stories of Jesus casting out demons, as in the Synoptic Gospels, but there are several occasions where Jesus is accused of being demon-possessed (here; 8:48-52; 10:20-21; Morris, p. 407). The apostle tells us (1 John 5:19), "We know that we are of God, and that the whole world lies in the power of the evil one." Or, as Paul states with reference to those who are perishing (2 Cor. 4:4), "In whose case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelieving so that they might not see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God." For people to receive Christ, the Holy Spirit must open their eyes to see something of His glory.

Thus, people reject Jesus in spite of who He is because they value the wrong things, they are not willing to obey God, they are legalistic hypocrites, and they are under satanic influence. Finally,

E. People reject Jesus in spite of who He is because they judge according to outward appearances (7:24).

Jesus exhorts these scoffers (7:24), "Do not judge according to appearance, but judge with righteous judgment." The Greek here may be translated, "*Stop* judging according to appearance, but judge with righteous judgment." They were judging Jesus because He healed a man and told him to carry his mat on the Sabbath, which was a violation of their legalistic additions to the Sabbath commandment. But at the same time, they were rejecting the true and righteous one and seeking to kill Him!

Perhaps one of the most misunderstood and misapplied verses in the New Testament is Jesus' command (Matt. 7:1), "Do not judge so that you will not be judged." If people would bother to read just a few verses further, Jesus commands not to throw your pearls before swine (He was talking about *people* who are swine, not pigs!). He goes on to warn about wolves in sheep's clothing. Obviously, to obey those commands you have to make some judgments! The Bible commands us to be discerning with regard to false teaching and demonic activity (Pastoral Epistles; 1 John 4:1).

The point here is that if you judge who Jesus is superficially, you'll end up rejecting Him as He really is. There are many who think that Jesus was always gentle, kind, and nice. I'm not sure how that myth ever got started! Read the Gospels and you'll see Jesus strongly confront sin, as He is doing here. You can't trust in Him and walk with Him without Him confronting your sin. He always does it in love, because sin destroys us. But He does confront it. If you truly believe in Jesus, you will let His Word confront your sin regularly.

### Conclusion

That brings me back to 7:17 again. If you want to know who Jesus is and whether He is the true and righteous one, sent by God, you have to be willing to obey God's will as revealed in His word. The Danish philosopher Soren Kierkegaard wrote, "It is difficult for us to believe because it is difficult for us to obey." If you're willing to obey, God will show you that Jesus is God's true and righteous one. He is worthy of all your trust!

### Application Questions

1. How much does a person need to know about Jesus to be able to trust in Him for eternal life?
2. Why is willingness to obey God foundational for faith in Christ? How can an unbeliever become willing to obey God?
3. What are some lessons that we can learn from Jesus here on how to witness to skeptics?
4. Discuss some ways that legalism keeps people from trusting in Christ.