



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

6420 Churchill Way | Dallas, Texas | 75230 | t 972.239.5371 | believerschapeldallas.org

The Sermons of Dan Duncan

John 7: 14-24

Summer 2022

"The Key Of Knowledge"

TRANSCRIPT

Thank you Seth, and good morning. We are in the Gospel of John. If you're visiting, if you haven't been here for a little while, we are in chapter 7. We began that last week after spending some time in chapter 6, but this is now something like six months later, after the events of chapter 6, and it's the fall and the time of the Feast of Tabernacles. The Lord delayed His trip there because of the hostility that was waiting for Him in Jerusalem. But now we read in verse 14,

¹⁴ But when it was now the midst of the feast Jesus went up into the temple, and *began to* teach. ¹⁵ The Jews then were astonished, saying, "How has this man become learned, having never been educated?" (*What they meant by that is, '...having not attended the schools of the rabbis.' He was obviously educated; He could read the Scriptures; He was a literate man, but He was not one that was trained in their schools.*)

¹⁶ So Jesus answered them and said, "My teaching is not Mine, but His who sent Me. 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. 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.

¹⁹ "Did not Moses give you the Law, and *yet* none of you carries out the Law? Why do you seek to kill Me?" ²⁰ The crowd answered, "You have a demon! Who seeks to

kill You?" ²¹ Jesus answered them, "I did one deed, and you all marvel. ²² 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. ²³ 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? ²⁴ Do not judge according to appearance, but judge with righteous judgment."

John 7: 14-24

May the LORD bless this reading of His Word and bless our time of studying it together; may He guide our thoughts.

(Message) There's a phrase, I'm sure you're familiar with it: "Knowledge is power." It's often attributed to the English philosopher Francis Bacon but it has been used by many others. Our third president, Thomas Jefferson, copied it in numerous letters that he wrote. Theologian B. B. Warfield stated it in his lectures. (I think that's the first place I read that expression.) It's a common statement—and true: 'Knowledge is power.'

But before we can have knowledge, the greatest knowledge, life giving knowledge, we must have faith. That's the key to knowledge. That's what the Lord taught in John, chapter 7.

It happened in Jerusalem. Jesus had delayed going there to celebrate the Feast of Tabernacles because the Jewish authorities were plotting to kill Him. But at the right *time* He left Galilee. He traveled secretly to Jerusalem and then He entered the temple midway through the festival—and suddenly, there in the outer court, began teaching.

The city was filled with pilgrims from all over the land; and from foreign lands, people who had never heard Christ speak. But it wasn't long before He had a large crowd; and included in that crowd were some of the religious leaders.

John didn't record the subject of the Lord's lesson. But he did give the people's response: They were astonished at His mastery of Scripture and His power of

persuasion. They wondered to one another, 'How has this man become learned having never been educated?' —Meaning never having had a formal education in the school of the rabbis, yet He had a command of Scripture.

Later, after the Lord's ascension into heaven, after the day of Pentecost, Peter and John went up to the temple and they preached. The authorities had them arrested and brought to court. They stood before the Sanhedrin and there they spoke to the court with such confidence that, again, the leaders were amazed knowing that they were uneducated—meaning they were simple men who had not been trained in their schools. They had never sat at the feet of Gamaliel as Saul of Tarsus had.

Then Luke wrote that, "...they...*began* to recognize them as having been with Jesus." (Acts 4:13). That tells us more than, 'Now they could recognize who they were through association.' It makes the point that, 'That makes the difference; being with Christ and learning from Him makes all the difference. —It changes people.'

Early in the Reformation, Martin Luther had an important debate with Dr. Eck, (Johann Eck), who was the Pope's leading scholar and debater. Eck was a very bright, clever man and better than Luther on church history and the councils of the church. But Luther surpassed him in knowledge of the Bible—and that was evident to everyone who witnessed the debate.

And that is where the power is: it is in the Word of God. That's why the Reformation succeeded and it's the only reason a church will succeed. Or a Christian in his or her spiritual life will succeed; it is by God's Word.

And here, the Lord astonished the crowd with His mastery of Scripture by giving the knowledge of God's revelation. And that's what He pointed the crowd to in verse 16, "My teaching," He said, "is not Mine, but His who sent Me." In other words, there's nothing novel about what He was teaching; He wasn't inventing doctrines. It was all according to Scripture, all according to the revelation that God had given. All the prophets before Him were spokesmen of God. They didn't deliver their own message, they delivered God's message. "Thus says the LORD", they would say.

But when Jesus spoke it was with personal authority; and we see that all through the Gospels. He didn't say, "Thus says the LORD", but "I tell you the truth", or "Truly, truly, I say to you." He spoke God's Word. He spoke what God taught Him but He spoke in His own authority as the Son of God, as one who had a personal and eternal relationship with God His Father. Well it distinguished Him from the scribes and Pharisees.

The crowds in Galilee noticed the difference and they commented on how unlike them Jesus taught. He taught with real authority. The scribes and Pharisees would quote other scribes and Pharisees. That was what they based their teaching on. That was their authority. Their authority was the previous teachers and the kind of consensus that those teachers had established—which was tradition.

In my library at home I have six volumes of The Mishnah, (actually there's a seventh, but it's an index and some other supplemental writings). If you're not familiar with The Mishnah, that is a collection of the writings of the rabbis, the writings of those who taught around the time of Christ and sometime after, with all the discussions that they had. And those books, those statements, those teachings, became the basis of the Talmud.

Well, open any one of those volumes, and you can read statements like, "Rabban Gamaliel says...", "Rabban Joshua says...", "Rabban Akiva says...", and then there's the record of the decision that they made and the debates that they had. Much of it is mundane material dealing with daily life, like activity on the Sabbath. In fact, there's a whole section devoted to the Sabbath; what is permitted and what's not permitted. And subjects like tithing and court procedures. No in-depth theology, no, "This is my God." It deals with the things that people are concerned about when they think that a relationship with God is all about keeping the rules and the regulations—keeping the Law in order to have God's favor.

Christ came revealing God and grace. John in this fourth Gospel, you'll remember, introduced Him as "the Logos", as "the Word" who is the Creator; "...apart from Him, nothing came into being..." (Jn 1:3). And here, His creatures were dismissing Him as

uneducated. But they couldn't escape the fact that He spoke with authority and power and substance—real substance, the revelation of God. He taught the Scripture, not traditions.

He gave light and knowledge. But in order to receive that knowledge and have the power that knowledge contains, they needed 'the key of knowledge.' And the Lord gave that to them in verse 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." It all begins with doing God's will. Knowledge: the knowledge of God is not simply a matter of intelligence, it is fundamentally a matter of the heart.

It is a matter of intelligence; you must understand it. But there's more to it than that. There is the will that's involved. It is being willing to do God's will. And what is His will? It is to believe in Christ. He said that earlier to the Galileans in chapter 6, verse 29. They asked, "What shall we do?" And He answered, "This is the work of God, that you believe in Him whom He has sent." —Believe in Christ.

So what does God require? He requires faith. It is a work of God—and Jesus explained that to them in chapter 6 as well; in verse 44 He said, "No one can come to me unless the Father...draws him."

We are all debtors to mercy; nevertheless, we are responsible to come. We are responsible to believe, to have faith in Christ as He reveals Himself in Scripture: faith in Him as the eternal Son of God, the Creator and the Savior of the world. Unless a person is willing to do that, he or she will never accept the things of God, never accept and understand the revelation that Christ has given. They can't understand it and therefore can't advance in the truth of it. Now that's logical, isn't it? It follows that if you distrust a person, you will not follow that person. If you dismiss a statement or teaching as untrue then you cannot believe that it is true. Now that's true here of the Gospel.

But if there is a willingness, a readiness to do God's will and believe Christ's words, then the capacity for understanding God's message will occur.

This is the teaching of the rest of Scripture as well. It's given in one of the best-known statements in the Bible on the necessity of faith for knowledge, the necessity of faith for understanding and comprehension, and that's Hebrews 11, verse 3, "By faith we understand that the worlds were prepared by the word of God, so that what is seen was not made out of things which are visible." By faith we know that God created everything.

Remember the LORD asked Job, "Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth?" (Job 38:4). Job was at the same place that we all were; not there—and nowhere. So we can only know how this universe came into being by believing God's revelation, by looking to the Creator who has revealed it to us. When we do that we learn the truth and we have understanding. Otherwise we're left to nothing but speculation.

And that's true of all God's revelation. We know the human condition, and the solution, from revelation. And we must approach it as the Lord instructs us here—by faith: Through faith in God's Word we have knowledge. And we know it is true because the Word of God, which we put our faith in, is self-authenticating. It proves itself. It has the ring of truth so that we know it is right, that it is true.

Now if that seems to beg the question, to assume too much, ask yourself, 'How do you know that you exist?' You don't have to debate that, question that. You know that, you're born with that knowledge. You know that. You assume that—and you're correct. How do you know that the sun exists? Do you have to run calculations and tests to prove the sun's existence? No, you know it because it shines on you. And the Word of God shines in your heart, in the heart of the believer, so that he or she knows that it is true.

Paul spoke of that in 2 Corinthians 4, verse 6. "God, who said, 'Light shall shine out of darkness...' (He's speaking there, of course, of Genesis 1, where God spoke light, material light, into existence.) And he, (*Paul*), from that draws the analogy: God is, '...the One who has shone in our hearts to give the Light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ.' " (2 Cor 4:6).

He gives us understanding; He shines His Light; and it confirms itself to us that it is true. Spurgeon said, "We need no candle to see the sun. We sit by its own radiance and then see everything else by the same luster." The same is true of God's Word. Approach the Bible with a willingness to learn, to believe, and it will prove itself to you.

The Bible is a unique book. The author of Hebrews tells us that; it is "alive and powerful." You can't say that of any other body of literature. This is unique. It is "alive and powerful." It is "sharper than any two-edged sword." (Heb 4:12). It exposes our condition as we read it. It speaks to us in a unique way. It brings conviction because the Holy Spirit makes it effective in the heart of the believer, so that by the testimony of the Spirit we have certainty in it. He gives 'eyes to see', and 'a heart to understand'. So it is a supernatural work. The Spirit of God works within the Word of God to convince us, and to give us understanding and confidence in it, in the Scriptures, by its self-authentication.

But the truth of it is also evident from the Bible's connection with reality. I periodically make this point as I'm reading a text, how that it's a book that's ancient, 2000 years old in regard to the New Testament; 3000 in regard to the Old Testament; and about things way beyond that. And yet you come to so many statements in it that speak to the reality of life. It is as vital today and as precise today as it was back then. And so, the reality that it addresses is also an evidence of it. What we learn and believe from Scripture fits reality. We're not asked to believe anything that is unreasonable.

There are many proofs that support Scripture. Jesus Himself stated in chapter 10, verse 38, that 'His miracles supported the truth of His teaching.' And we have reason to believe it—there's lots of evidence. He made such a case for faith in Him and the reasonableness of believing His teaching—and then He goes on to do that in verse 18 when He says, in effect, 'Look at My life, look at My character.' That itself speaks to the truth of what He was saying in verse 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."

False prophets, demagogues, and charlatans are self-promoters. They are in it for selfish reasons; for money, or power, or influence. And to gain that influence, they boast. They seek their own glory. The Lord has been accused of being that. Earlier, some of those in Jerusalem who were looking for Him, waiting for Him coming, were grumbling about Him: In verse 12 some were saying, "He leads the people astray."

They had people like that, as we do today: people who pitch a tent or rent a stadium and claim to heal people—but really don't. It's all about money to them; and they bamboozle the naïve to get it. Well that's what these were accusing the Lord of being, and doing. And so He answered that and every charge of deception and hypocrisy; 'Look at my life', He was saying. It proves the genuineness of His character and the truth of His teaching. He wasn't seeking self-glory for He was completely committed to the Father's glory and to the Father's teaching. So He could be trusted completely and believed for His life was evidence of that.

Later in chapter 8, He asked, "Which one of you convicts Me of sin? If I speak truth, why do you not believe Me?" (vs6). They couldn't find fault in Him. Still, they didn't believe Him—or believe in Him. And because they didn't, they were opposed to Him and everything that He said or stood for.

Faith is necessary for understanding. If we don't have faith the Scriptures are closed to us. And if the Scriptures are closed to us and we don't have faith, we oppose Christ and everything He stands for. Faith is necessary for understanding.

They were not willing to do the will of God—so naturally, and inevitably, they were against Him—unjustly. The problem was in them, not in Him; they were the ones guilty of fraud and lawlessness. And to prove that, the Lord again calls Moses as a witness against them: " 'Did not Moses give you the Law...' He says, '...and yet none of you carries out the Law?' " (vs19a). These were men of the Law and they took pride in their knowledge of the Law and their debates about the Law. But He's saying, 'You don't keep the Law yourself.' The Law of Moses says, "Thou shalt not kill". But the Jewish leaders were trying to kill Him, murder Him, so they were Law breakers.

Now as you consider this incident in the temple among the Lord's enemies who wanted Him dead and were earnest about it, you must be impressed with the Lord's complete presence of mind. He was as calm and incisive and convincing in His defense as the most persuasive lawyer in a court of law. In fact, there were lawyers, scribes, in the audience who were out to take His life; and yet Christ was completely cool and reasonable. He knew the situation; He knew the hostility and the intent of the crowd and yet He is in control of all of this, in control under fire during this interchange between them.

But equally impressive is the courage it took to do that, to be there in the first place. He came to Jerusalem according to God's will: Not to court violence, not to put Himself needlessly in danger; He was there in obedience to the LORD.

Still, it put Him in great danger. Jerusalem was the hotbed of opposition to Him—and the temple was the center of that opposition. The priests and scribes, the Pharisees were His implacable enemies. But He went there in obedience to the Law and in obedience to the LORD. He went there in faith and taught openly.

The courage to do that was based in the knowledge of God: that His Father is always faithful and blesses obedience. He knew Psalm 23 and He knew that as He "walked through the valley of the shadow of death", His Father was with Him and would never forsake Him. That's the value and the importance of theology which one has as one enters into the Word of God by faith.

And that's what the Word of God does for us. It has power to give wisdom to those who read it and who believe it. It gives confidence, not in self, but in the LORD because He reveals Himself to us in God's Word. Psalm 119, which is all about the Scriptures, (it's the longest Psalm in the psalter and it's all about Scripture; it's about the Word of God), and there the psalmist praises the Word of God for its life changing power. He said, "Your commandments make me wiser than my enemies." (vs98).

Well, we see that here. Because the Lord knew the Scriptures His teaching amazed the crowd and He was empowered to face His enemies with wisdom, courage, and confidence. And that will be true for us as well, as it was for those disciples, as I mentioned earlier in Acts chapter 4, when they go to the temple and they preach—and then they stand before a hostile Sanhedrin.

When we are willing to do His will, we learn His will, we learn His person, His character—and we're changed. The Word of God through the Spirit of God changes us so that we become like Christ and exhibit His character.

He was in the temple making a case for the reasonableness of believing His words based on the proof of His character, His pure life, which He lived in condemning contrast to the lives of His enemies. And they felt it; it convicted them. But it didn't produce regret, didn't produce repentance, only a defensive, self-justifying, self-protective response—at least from the opponents who were there in the crowd. They angrily accused Him of being insane.

He said, "Why do you seek to kill me?" (vs19b). And they said, "You have a demon! Who seeks to kill you?" (vs20). Of course, the answer to their question was, 'You do.' Those who were seeking to kill Him were right there in front of Him—and they knew that.

The Lord knew that but He didn't argue the point with them here, He didn't take them on, like I just mentioned. Instead He proved their hypocrisy by going back to the event that began this opposition: The miracle that He did in chapter 5 when He healed the cripple at the Pool of Bethesda on the Sabbath, "I did one deed, and you all marvel." (vs21). Their amazement was not at the power of it and the cure that it produced but amazement of indignation for healing on the Sabbath. The Law prohibits work on the Sabbath and the leaders considered His act of healing to be Sabbath breaking—and therefore worthy of death.

In fact, it was not a violation of the Sabbath at all; it actually was a fulfillment of the Sabbath. It's the most appropriate act one could engage in on the Sabbath—it was

always good to do good on the Sabbath. And to show that, and show them their own inconsistency in judging Him, He reminded them of their own practice of circumcision.

The rite of circumcision was instituted by Abraham and then it was carried out by the patriarchs, "the fathers", (as John mentions here, verse 22). But centuries later it was codified in the Law of Moses; and in Leviticus chapter 12, verse 3, it is stated that it must be done "on the eighth day" after a male child is born. It was an important rite:

Circumcision was the sign of the covenant God made with Abraham and his descendants. It signified that they were separated from all the peoples of the world—they are His people.

But naturally the eighth day would often fall on the Sabbath, which presented a problem: Which law has priority, the rule to circumcise a child on the eighth day or prohibition against regular work on the Sabbath? Circumcision was the work of a priest or a rabbi. Would performing circumcision on the Sabbath violate the Law? So this is what the rabbis debated—and it was a fair debate; it was a necessary one. And they concluded that it would not violate the Sabbath.

In the Mishnah that I mentioned earlier, they record that circumcision is great, and overrides even the rigor of the Sabbath. And so the Lord said in verse 23, "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?" Now they were correct to circumcise children on *the* Sabbath. They weren't breaking the Law by doing that; and the Lord agreed with their practice. But if they were right in cutting away a small piece of flesh from one part of the body on the Sabbath, it cannot be wrong to heal a whole body on the Sabbath. If it was right to make a person ritually, ceremonially right, how could it be wrong to make a person physically right and whole? —It couldn't be. Their judgment against Him was inconsistent with their own practice—it was hypocritical.

And so Jesus said in verse 24, "Do not judge according to appearance, but judge with righteous judgment." In other words, their judgment was very superficial; they

condemned Him for doing a good deed. It can never be wrong, as I said earlier, to do good on the Sabbath—that's keeping the Sabbath. "The Sabbath...", He explained elsewhere in Mark chapter 2, verse 27, "...was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath."

But they didn't understand the Sabbath. They didn't understand the Law. They didn't understand its spirit and purpose—and so they had this confusion. And they were unwilling to learn or search the Scriptures and reflect on the Lord's words and deeds. Instead they made quick judgments—and they made those judgments according to their prejudice.

We can do that as well. We can judge on the basis of some false idea that we have. The only way to guard against that and gain the wisdom of God is through the Word of God. The Jewish leaders did not have that wisdom—or care to, because they had no real concern for the Word of God and the will of God. They put man's traditions over God's revelation.

But the great principle that Christ sets forth here is that knowledge and power are in the Word of God; and the key to that knowledge is faith—it is the willing heart. And as we respond to the life that God gives us, He gives us even more.

John gave an example of that back in chapter 1 when Phillip told Nathaniel about Jesus. Nathaniel, you'll remember, asks, " '...Can any good thing come out of Nazareth?' Phillip said to him, 'Come and see.' " (vs46). 'Look for yourself', one of the best responses you can give someone. 'Don't trust me. Come and see.'

And so he did. He came to Christ with his doubts and he saw Him, talked with Him, then he believed in Him. By God's grace, he became willing. He came to know Christ—and he grew in that knowledge. Now that's what we're responsible to do: To believe and obey God's Word; that's how we begin to learn the ways of God, and how we continue to learn His ways.

H. A. Ironside told a story. (It's in his commentary on the Book of John, and James Boice also picked this story up.) It's the story about a young man, a friend of his who

came to the Lord, who came willingly to do God's will. He was a cowboy in Arizona, (so this goes way back to the early part of the 20th century), who had gotten far away from God. He'd lived a rough life for years, had begun ridiculing the Bible, then rejected the Bible.

But a day came when God spoke in power to his soul and he came under the conviction of his sin. (It was that that Paul spoke of in 2 Corinthians 4; as the 'light shining in the darkness of this man's heart.' (vs6).) Finally someone said to him, "Why don't you just go to God yourself and ask Him to make it clear to you?" He decided to do that. One night he knelt down by the side of his cot and he prayed, "O God, if there is a God, and if You look down on a poor, lost sinner like me, and if You can hear my prayer, if Jesus is Your Son, reveal it to me, and I promise I will serve you the rest of my days."

Well, the cowboy was serious about that because he began to search the Scriptures for the truth. (And that's the only place one's going to find the truth; it's there in the Word of God; it's there in the Bible.) And so he searched the Scriptures. Afterward he said, 'Although he could not explain it, a change took place.' And within three days he knew beyond the shadow of a doubt that the Lord Jesus Christ was the Son of God and his Savior. And he became a faithful servant of the Lord for many years until the LORD took him home.

Well, if you're here with doubts in your heart, or unbelief, let me challenge you to do the same thing. Take your doubt to God. Ask Him to make it clear to you.

It's true, Jesus said, 'Faith is the work of God.' He said, "No one can come to Me unless the Father draws him." (Jn 6:44). That's true. But that doesn't mean you cannot come; it only means you cannot come in your own power. In God's power you can. And only in His power. So look to Him. Look to the One who can bring you. Christ promises that the willing heart will be given understanding, the knowledge that is power, power that cleans spiritually, power that gives eternal life. May the LORD turn your heart to Him, to trust in His Son whom to know is life everlasting.

Father, You've given us a glorious vision of Your Son in this seventh chapter, of how He stood over the crowd in which many were hostile, and yet, calmly, correctly, corrected the crowd; corrected those who were His enemies and directed them and us to the truth. The way to know the truth is to believe Your Word. And as we believe it, all is opened up to us.

So Father, give us faith, increase our faith that we might understand more and more about You and live wisely—and live to Your glory. We thank You for the gift of life in Your Son.

Bless us Father this weekend; give us a good time in this extended weekend with our family. And may we live lives that bring honor to You.

Now the LORD bless you and keep you. The LORD make His face shine on you and be gracious to you. The LORD lift up His countenance on you and give you peace. In Christ's name. Amen.

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