



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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The Sermons of Dan Duncan

John 7: 25-36

Summer 2022

"A Last Knock"

TRANSCRIPT

Thank you Seth, and good morning. We are in John chapter 7, and the Lord has gone up to Jerusalem and it's October, or late September. It's the time of the Feast of Tabernacles, also known as the Feast of Booths, and Jesus has gone up in the midst of that feast. He has gone to the temple and He began teaching there; and then He entered into a discussion with the crowd that had gathered. And that's where we pick up in verses 25 through verse 36,

²⁵ So some of the people of Jerusalem were saying, "Is this not the man whom they are seeking to kill?" ²⁶ Look, He is speaking publicly, and they are saying nothing to Him. The rulers do not really know that this is the Christ, do they? ²⁷ However, we know where this man is from; but whenever the Christ may come, no one knows where He is from." ²⁸ Then Jesus cried out in the temple, teaching and saying, "You both know Me and know where I am from; *(Now, I am going to say something about this in the message, but really, the sense of that is, 'You think you know Me and where I am from'; and then He corrects that.)* and I have not come of Myself, but He who sent Me is true, whom you do not know. ²⁹ I know Him, because I am from Him, and He sent Me." ³⁰ So they were seeking to seize Him; and no man laid his hand on Him, because His hour had not yet come. ³¹ But many of the crowd believed in Him; and they were saying, "When the Christ comes, He will not perform more signs than those which this man has, will He?"

³²The Pharisees heard the crowd muttering these things about Him, and the chief priests and the Pharisees sent officers to seize Him. ³³Therefore Jesus said, "For a little while longer I am with you, then I go to Him who sent Me. ³⁴You will seek Me, and will not find Me; and where I am, you cannot come." ³⁵The Jews then said to one another, "Where does this man intend to go that we will not find Him? He is not intending to go to the Dispersion among the Greeks, and teach the Greeks, is He? ³⁶What is this statement that He said, 'You will seek Me, and will not find Me; and where I am, you cannot come'?"

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May the LORD bless this reading of His Word and bless our time of study in it together.

(Message) The most famous beginning to a symphony is the beginning of Beethoven's Fifth Symphony. You all know it. If however, you've forgotten, Josh here is going to help us. *[Four cords of music played]*. Thank you, Josh. He now holds the title of the shortest solo in Believer's Chapel. *[Laughter]*

Those chords to that symphony have been given different names or interpretations, I think. But the one that I've heard and that I like is, 'Fate knocking at the door'; for it just sounds ominous. I don't believe in fate; I believe in the Triune God who is absolutely sovereign.

But He is a God who knocks. Robert Murray M'Cheyne believed that. M'Cheyne is one of my heroes of the faith and I look forward to the day when I will meet him. He was a minister in Dundee, Scotland, in the early 19th century. He understood that life is short—and there is an urgency about it. In fact, he died young; he died at the age of 29. Well he once made a pastoral visit to a young girl and he said to her, "Christ gives last knocks. When your heart becomes hard and careless, then fear lest Christ may have given a last knock."

Well, I thought of that when I read our passage. The Lord is in the temple where He has taught the crowd—and taught them amazingly. Next He has a discussion with them and as He has was speaking to them it's been clear that this crowd has shown a hardness of heart and a carelessness toward the truth. So then He gave them a solemn warning—gave them a prophesy, He said, "You will seek Me, and will not find Me; and where I am, you cannot come." (vs34) —cannot come into His heavenly home. While He was with them they had opportunity to hear the truth, they had the opportunity to hear about salvation, to believe, and to receive eternal life. But that day of opportunity would end and that's the warning of the passage.

Now it's also a passage with great promises for us, real encouragement, such as the assurance of a protective providence throughout our lives and the reassurance that Christ's work of salvation would succeed.

But it's that solemn warning that hangs over the passage to remind us that days of privilege and opportunity end, that Christ does indeed give a last knock—and then no more. And it's a warning for the church today.

During the Feast of Tabernacles in the month of October, Jesus blessed Jerusalem with His presence. He brought light to the city with His teaching—but it was not well received. Certain people in the crowd, especially the Jewish rulers, were hostile to Him and had challenged His authority to teach. And in response to that, the Lord had defended Himself and His teaching as being from God. "My teaching is not Mine, but His who sent Me." (Jn 7:16).

As a result of all of this, the breadth of Biblical knowledge that He showed, His skill at teaching, and then His conversation with the crowd, people began to wonder about Him, and to ask each other, 'Who is He?' There were different factions in the crowd. There were really three groups here: the Jews, who are the Jewish leaders, and then the multitude from Galilee and other pilgrims who had come from outside of the land to worship at the feast, and then thirdly, the Jerusalemites.

The people of Jerusalem were better informed about events in the city than those from the outside. They knew about the plots and schemes of their rulers against Christ and their intention to seize Him and kill Him. And so they were surprised that Jesus was there openly in the temple, that He taught so boldly in the face of such danger and wondered aloud if their leaders were rethinking their opposition to Him. Did they now think that Jesus really was the Messiah? "The rulers", they said, "do not really know that this is the Christ, do they?" (vs26). Now their question, according to the grammar of the statement, expects a negative answer. "Surely not", they were saying. So they didn't consider it a plausible idea and suggested it really, only to dismiss it. 'This can't be what is going on', is what they're saying.

The reason for doing that, for thinking that, is given in the next verse. They had a standard for the Messiah and Jesus didn't meet that standard: "We know where this man is from; but whenever the Christ may come, no one knows where He is from." (vs27).

Now that was false. Micah 5, verse 2 states that the Messiah would be born in 'Bethlehem of Judah'. And you remember in Matthew chapter 2, the scribes told that to King Herod. When he asked them where the Messiah would be born, they quote Micah 5, verse 2, 'He's in Bethlehem', not very far from Jerusalem.

The people were either ignorant of that or they had adopted a notion that was popular at the time; that the Messiah, after coming, would remain hidden throughout His life until the very end when He made a public appearance, a public manifestation—but He'd be a hidden Messiah. And they may have based that on something like Malachi chapter 3, verse 1, which states that the Messiah "will suddenly come to His temple."

Well whatever the reasoning, it was a tradition—and it was a false one. The Scriptures reveal a great deal about the Messiah and if the people had considered the Lord's life in light of the Bible, they would have learned the truth about Him.

But they didn't do that. Instead of examining the Scriptures, they relied on popular traditions. That was the problem with the Pharisees and that was the problem

with the people: the theology of the Scriptures, and the Scriptures themselves had been neglected—and they followed after traditions.

So with their expectation of a 'hidden Messiah', they felt certain that Jesus wasn't the Christ. To them, there was nothing hidden about Him: He was out of Nazareth; He was a Galilean who had been a traveling rabbi for a few years. They knew all about Him—they thought.

The reality was, they didn't know about Him. And Jesus makes that very point when He answered them. Whether He overheard their conversation or had special, divine knowledge of it ... (And that's very likely. In fact we saw that in the adult class this morning in Luke chapter 7. Simon the Pharisee is sitting there thinking these thoughts that Jesus knew he was thinking. He knew exactly what he was thinking and you see this all through the Gospels), so it may very well be that He heard what they were saying, (because there's a discussion going on)—or just as likely, He knew what was in their hearts because He knows what's in the hearts of everyone.

And so Jesus, knowing what they were saying, makes the very point that 'They were wrong and they did not know Him.' And He made the point very strongly, too. We read that He "cried out", saying, "You both know Me and know where I am from;"... ('so you think'.) (vs28a). That at least, is the sense of what the Lord is saying here. They thought they knew Him but they really didn't. His response was intended to expose their deep-seated ignorance. "...I have not come of Myself," He said, "but He who sent Me is true...", meaning 'He who sent Me is real'.(vs28b). So regardless of what these Jerusalemites thought about His origin, He declared emphatically that it was not an earthly origin but a heavenly one. He was sent by God, the real God, "...whom", He adds, "...you do not know." (vs28c).

Now that was as stinging indictment on the Jewish nation; and these men of Jerusalem in particular. They were there at the capitol of the nation, where the Temple was, where worship took place, where the bright minds were. They were the ones who

should have known; and yet they did not know. They did not know God. That was their reason for existence. That was the reason Israel exists. They're God's chosen people. They were to be a light to the nations. They were to know God—and they didn't.

But that wasn't all that unusual when you consider Israel's history. It's not a new charge, actually. Isaiah began his great prophecy in chapter 1, verse 3 with that very charge. "An ox knows its owner, and a donkey its master's manger, but Israel does not know, My people do not understand."

The men of Jerusalem and of Jesus' day were no different from those of Isaiah's day. They didn't know God. And the reason was, they didn't know God's Son. They didn't believe the Scriptures, didn't believe the prophecies of His coming, and they rejected Him when He came. And the consequence was, not only did they not know the Son, they did not know the Father.

We know God by knowing Christ. He is the revelation of God. John made that clear at the beginning of this fourth Gospel in chapter 1, verse 18, "No one has seen God at any time; the only begotten God who is in the bosom of the Father, He has explained Him." If a person rejects the Son who has explained the Father, revealed Him, then that person can never really know the Father. And that's essentially what the Lord was saying here in verse 28. He goes on to say, "I know Him, because I am from Him, and He sent Me." (vs29). They don't know God—but He does because He has a personal relationship with Him, a relationship that goes back through all eternity and has no beginning and no end.

"I know Him because I am from Him", He said. Which can be translated, "I am from the side of Him", indicating the close fellowship that He had with God, with His Father, from all eternity. And in that, in that statement, He is making a claim to deity. There's no other way to take the statement that's made here. He was laying claim to a unique relationship with God—to being the revelation of God and sent on a mission

from God which He, in another place, in Luke 19, verse 10, describes as being, "...to seek and to save that which is lost."

But again, He was sent to do that. He did not come on His own initiative. He is from God—and the Lord stresses that here; which is important for us to understand. It's wrong to think of our salvation as having been 'won for us by a loving Christ from a reluctant Father'. As though, 'God is the judge, and ready to judge, but Christ intervenes as our Savior.'

Now the plan of salvation originated with the Father. He sent His Son to die for sinners because He loves sinners. And Christ came willingly, gladly, in obedience to His Father's will. "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life." (Jn 3:16). God in His Son, the second person of the Trinity; God, made man in Christ, reconciled sinners to Himself through the cross. Now that's the fuller implication of the words here by our Lord, "I am from Him, and He sent me.", which is one of the bright spots of an otherwise dark passage. God is for the sinner. He sent His Son to die for him and her, and us. His love is so great for us that it cost Him the life of His only begotten Son. And His love for us is seen not only in the sacrifice that He made for us but also in His constant care, because He guards us through this life, constantly guards us through every stage and step of this life in this world.

But this generation of our Lord's didn't know that—they didn't know God, the God of love and grace; and His Son who is the revelation of God. And so they were lost. They needed to know that, as offensive as that would be to them. That's the warning the Lord gave them here. "It was a knock", as M'Cheyne said. Would they respond to the correction? Would they repent or would they resent; receive Him or reject Him?

Well, we get the answer in the next verse: They were seeking to seize Him; they wanted to kill Him. They had the will to do it and they would have—but they were

prevented. John adds, "...no one laid a hand on Him, because His hour had not yet come." (vs30). Their hand was restrained by an invisible hand, so that the Lord's ministry would go forward, uninterrupted until God determined that it should end. Only then would men be allowed to seize Him and crucify Him. Which indicates an important fact about the cross: and that is that everything the Lord suffered, He suffered voluntarily.

Christ did not die because He was unable to prevent men from arresting Him and putting Him to death. When His hour came, He willingly offered Himself up for us. Neither the Jews nor the Gentiles could have put Christ on the cross unless the power to do that was given to them from God. The cross was not a mistake in history. It was the plan of God, under His control, and all according to His permission, according to His will.

And that is true of us as well; that is true of our lives, as the great evangelist, George Whitefield wrote in his journal, "We are immortal till our work is done." Our lives are governed by providence, not governed by 'chance' or 'fate'. They follow God's plan and protection and nothing can touch us unless He permits it.

And that includes Satan himself. That's one of the lessons of the Book of Job. The LORD let Satan afflict His great saint, take his wealth, take his health, take his family, but not take his life. God permits what touches us. But He also permits only what we are able to bear and uses it to bless us—He turns all of our afflictions into a blessing.

Well that's 1 Corinthians chapter 10, verse 13, "...God is faithful, who will not allow you, (*will not permit you*), to be tempted beyond what you are able..." And through his afflictions, Job became an even greater saint. But the trial nearly crushed him. We can only endure the trials of life by the power of God and by that power through faith; faith in who He is, faith in His promises.

God's will is not always easy. And if we think that the life of a saint should be easy and carefree and without difficulties, we don't understand the life of a saint and we're not reading the Bible very carefully. No, the will of God is not always easy but it is always best, we're always safest when we follow it. The Lord did that perfectly and He escaped injury from an angry crowd.

Now we learn in verse 31 that not everyone was hostile. "Many in the crowd", we read, "believed in Him; and they were saying, 'When the Christ comes, He will not perform more signs than those which this man has, will He?' " Now that question expects a negative answer; 'The Messiah won't do more miracles than Jesus has done'—the implication being that, 'He may, in fact, be the Messiah.'

Now there's nothing to indicate that these people were actually committed to Christ and were actually believing in Him in that way—but they were thinking correctly. The miracles He did were done as proof of His identity and as fulfillment of prophecy. They proved who He is and they fulfilled ancient prophecies. Isaiah 35, verses 5 and 6, for example, states that, 'When God comes', "the eyes of the blind will be opened and the ears of the deaf will be unstopped. The lame will leap like a deer..." Christ did all of that. He fulfilled prophecy. And so a person who believes God's Word would believe in Him and understand that He was sent from God. These people were at least reasoning according to the Scriptures and not false traditions. And so, they had hope of further enlightenment.

But their favorable response was heard by those around and moved the chief priests and the Pharisees to take action. They were disturbed by what they were hearing and so they sent the temple police to arrest the Lord. Now that shows the intense hatred that the Jewish rulers had for Christ; because those two groups, the priests and the Pharisees, were natural enemies. But they found common ground in their opposition to Christ so that they could set aside their differences and become temporary allies until He was removed.

Now this is an alarming situation: They're sending the authorities, those men who can arrest Him and take Him away—but none of this alarmed the Lord. He knew He was on God's path; He was doing His will; He knew the plan of salvation. And He knew His Father was in absolute control and that He cannot be frustrated—God cannot be frustrated.

So while the police were on their way, the Lord stays calm. He spoke again to the crowd, specifically to those who had hardened their hearts to Him, and gave them a solemn warning, a sad prophecy, in verse 33: "Therefore Jesus said, 'For a little while longer I am with you, then I go to Him who sent Me. You will seek Me, and will not find Me; and where I am, you cannot come.' " (vs33-34). Now that's a veiled reference to His death and ascension to heaven, and indicated that He knew that His time was short, that His mission would soon be completed. In six months He would be crucified.

But His words not only predicted His death but also a tragic future for the Jews with the statement, "You will not find me." It was a way of telling them that the day of opportunity would soon end. Luther said, "These are terrible words, I do not like to read them." They are that, and they have proved true down through history. The Jewish people had hoped for their Messiah and deliverer with a false hope.

Less than 40 years later, the Roman Legions would surround Jerusalem. The people were inspired by the hope that the Messiah would come at the last minute and save them and annihilate the enemy. It was a false hope. They looked for him. They looked for an imaginary Messiah and, of course, he didn't come.

The true Messiah, the real One, had already come and been rejected. For three years He had been with them; doing miracles, fulfilling prophesy, teaching them, weeping over Jerusalem, and desiring to gather them to Himself—knocking at the door, but they wouldn't open.

Finally there was a last knock. His hour came: He went to the cross and left them. It's possible to delay seeking so long that the promise of finding Him cannot be realized. God's patience is great—but the day of grace doesn't last forever. There comes a point when time runs out and opportunity ends.

Down through the pages of Scripture we read of men like Pharaoh and the consequence of rejecting God's revelation; of Esau, who wept bitterly asking with tears for the blessing he had lost; of Saul who said, "I have played the fool", (1Sa 26:21), and

Judas who cried, "I have sinned", —men who felt deep remorse but could find no place for repentance. The day of grace does not last forever, it would end for the Lord's generation. He would leave, and as a consequence, they would not go where He went; "Where I am, you cannot come."

Now that makes it very clear, doesn't it, that it is impossible for unbelievers to enter heaven. Universalism is a false hope; not everyone will be saved. "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God." (Jn3:3).

Faith alone is the way to eternal life, and these people did not have faith. They did not follow the instruction that the Lord gave earlier, in verse 17, about being "willing to do His will"—to believe. They were unwilling. And so because they lacked faith, they lacked understanding. They didn't have 'the key of knowledge.'

So the Lord's words for them were cryptic, they were mysterious, they were puzzling. So in verse 35, they begin to think about this, "The Jews then said to one another, 'Where does this man intend to go that we will not find Him? He's not intending to go to the Dispersion among the Greeks, and teach the Greeks, is He? What is this statement that He said, "You will seek Me, and will not find Me; and where I am, you cannot come"?' " (vs35-36).

Now that in itself is evidence of how devoid they were of spiritual knowledge and discernment. They could only think in secular, material, temporal terms—not spiritual realities. But there is some irony, I think, in their confusion. They could only imagine that they would not be able to find Him because He would have left the land physically and gone into the Diaspora, gone into the Gentile lands. The irony of that, or the surprise of that, is that through the church He did in fact go into Greek lands—and beyond that into the entire world. Where through His missionaries He filled those lands with disciples and teaches them through His disciples. And He can only do that through the church because He went to the Father, by means of the cross, where He bought salvation for His people.

And that's where the conversation ended, on a gloriously positive theme of salvation accomplished. He would go back to the Father triumphant; His death would not be the end but the beginning. He would return to the glory that He left and that He shared with the Father from all eternity. And all His people, those who believe in Him will share in that great, ineffable glory to come.

Later, in chapter 14, He would expand on this and tell His disciples that it was necessary that He go away, that He'd go back to the Father, so that He could prepare a place for them in His Father's house. But here the crowd understood nothing of that. They were spiritually dull. And so while the passage has a number of encouraging statements for believers, still, it's main lesson is a warning against delay, of not responding to the hopeful message of salvation.

We find that warning in the Psalms; and we find it in the Book of Hebrews. "Today", the Scripture urges, "if you hear His voice do not harden your hearts." (Heb 4:7). "Today!" —there is an urgency about things.

For Christians there's an urgency about life. It is constantly slipping away and the days of opportunity to serve Him will eventually run out. I've made the point before, I think a week or two ago, that *time* is not our enemy. *Time* is God's gift to us. He gives us *time*; He gives us opportunity to serve Him faithfully. And so we should use this precious gift of *time* wisely. But the reality is, it does eventually run out—and we need to be mindful of that.

Now the Lord gave that warning. We'll see this later in chapter 9, verse 4, when He said, "Night is coming when no one can work." Sundown ends the workday. And opportunities for spiritual labor end as well.

But here the Lord's warning was of a failure to seize the opportunity to come to Christ and believe in Him. Many people are given the opportunity, and many of them let it slip away—and some simply reject it.

Aaron Burr is famous for shooting Alexander Hamilton in a duel. He was a brilliant, ambitious, and worldly man who was born into privilege. The greatest privilege of all: Born into a godly home. Aaron Burr was the grandson of Jonathan Edwards, America's greatest theologian and thinker. But at a point in his young life, and according to some accounts, while he was a student at Princeton he rejected the Gospel. Years later he told a group of friends, "60 years ago I told God that if He would leave me alone, I would let Him alone. And God has not bothered me since."

There is a "last knock", as M'Cheyne said. If there's anyone here who has sensed the Lord knocking, speaking and appealing to him or her to believe, the Scripture says, "Do not harden your hearts." "Today is the day of salvation".

It may not come tomorrow. You may not be here tomorrow. Trust in Christ who died to save sinners. He saves all who turn to Him, all who trust in Him and His sacrifice. And for all those who do, His death is for them—it's specifically for them.

May God help you to do that. Do not delay. Hurry to Him. Cast yourself on His mercy and be saved.

Father, what a great thing it is to be able to sing with confidence and faith that we're in Your hand and nothing can pluck us from Your hand because Your Son took Your wrath that we deserve in our place. Thank You for the substitute and thank You for the gift of faith that would bring us to trust in Him, trust in our Triune God. Thank You for your providence that keeps us and preserves us. Thank You for Your grace.

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 upon you and give you peace. In Christ's name, Amen.

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