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Subj: Last Nite's MOB Study

Last nite's MOB study, covering John 7:1-13, sets the scene for the rest of chapters 7 and 8, as Jesus travels to Jerusalem where Jewish people have come from all parts of the region to participate in the last of the three great yearly feasts they have been required to attend, and celebrate "before the Lord," since the time of Moses! The feasts--which have traditionally been joyous occasions and are explained in Exodus 23:14-17, Leviticus 23, and Deuteronomy 16--basically commemorate God's deliverance of the Israelites from bondage in Egypt, and His protection and provision during the years of their wilderness wanderings.

The Feast of Booths (or Tabernacles), which is the one connected with our passage in John 7, was the most popular of the three feasts and featured the building of makeshift structures of tree branches and leaves (and thus "booths" or "tabernacles"). According to Lev. 23, the Israelites actually lived in them for seven days "so that your generations might know that I (God) had the sons of Israel live in booths when I brought them out from the land of Egypt." As part of the ceremony in Jesus' time, it apparently also included "pouring out water" as a remembrance of water from the rock that sustained them in the wilderness, and a "candle-lighting ceremony" that commemorated God's presence with Israel through the "pillar of cloud by day, and pillar of fire by night." (I wonder if they still do this!)

There's a 6-month gap in John's writing between chapters 6 and 7, following Jesus' discourse on the "Bread of life," which we talked about last week, where the crowd was dumbfounded by Jesus' words and withdrew from following Him. We saw how even His disciples "stumbled" because of what they heard! And so, Jesus apparently used this time primarily in teaching His disciples and preparing them for what was ahead. Among the events that occurred during this timeframe--although not covered in John's gospel--was the "transfiguration of Christ" on a "high mountain" (according to Matt. 17) where Peter, James, and John witnessed the appearance of Moses and Elijah, and "a voice out of the clouds" declaring: "This is My beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased!" Can you imagine how this must have bolstered the spirits of these disciples, which included the writer of this gospel?

But how would Jesus now deal with the Feast of Booths, which was about to be celebrated in Jerusalem, where the Jewish leaders would be looking for Him and wanting to kill Him? When his brothers offered Him "unsolicited career advice" for Him to go there and perhaps do something spectacular to regain His following, and maybe re-establish Himself as the long sought "political Messiah," He responded that "His time had not yet fully come." Yet later, "after His brothers had gone," John writes that He "went up" (it's always "up" to Jerusalem!)--probably passing through Samaria (remember what happened there?) which Jewish travelers normally bypassed--in accordance, as always, with the divine will and timeline of His Father.

We're going to learn more about His venture to Jerusalem in our upcoming lessons, where we'll find Him again "teaching in the temple," saying many "astonishing things"--teachings He claimed were, in fact, those of His Father "who sent Him!" Wow! Interestingly, His offer of "living water" and claim of being "the Light of the world" not only fulfilled the symbolism inherent in the Feast itself, but made it overwhelmingly clear to those who were the "true

seekers" of who is was and is, and why He came into this world. And John writes that there were, in fact, some who believed! Nevertheless, His words only stirred up the already boiling anger of the Jewish hierarchy who were determined to "seize" Him immediately and put Him to death! And yet, they couldn't pull it off--because "His hour had not yet come!" But His time would indeed come! At the next feast--the Feast of Unleavened Bread, along with the Passover--and the cross! The Divine clock was running right on time!

So what can we take from this lesson?

One of the key things that stands out for me is recognizing the importance of knowing "who Jesus really is"! As we discussed, some people thought He was a "good man," while others thought a "deceiver." Sounds much like our day, particularly the idea of Jesus being a good man, even "great teacher," etc. yet denying the more critical things about who Jesus said He was, and what He came to do, and what He actually did! And as C. S. Lewis and other Bible commentators have consistently pointed out--He couldn't have been a "good man" if He wasn't all of what He said He was, and why He came into this world. He was then a liar and a deceiver, a portrayal as old as our text! If you don't know who Jesus really was and is, you certainly can't trust Him as Savior and Lord. Said another way: A correct understanding of Jesus is a must for saving faith in Him!

God's timing is another issue that comes out of our lesson. We can see that God's timing is always perfect, as we run through the pages of Scripture! But what about ours--and God and ours? This is something Tim O., in last nite's presentation, challenged us to think about in drawing the lesson to a conclusion. And so, can you see God's timing and His plan and purpose in your own life? Maybe that's easier to do in "looking back" over your life! Or, maybe, you still wonder!

As in all our lessons in John, this one too provides a better understanding, I think, not only of who Jesus was and is but of why He came, thus giving us more of a motivation to want to share the greatest of all stories with others!

I hope you're finding this study of great value to your life, as I have--and that you'll continue plunging into the Gospel of John!

It was neat to welcome Jim M. into our small group last nite!

Have a great week, men!

Lowell