

John 39 – Jesus the Anti-Politician

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Scripture 1: (Jn. 7:1-24 ESV)

After this Jesus went about in Galilee. He would not go about in Judea, because the Jews were seeking to kill him.

Now the Jews' Feast of Booths was at hand. So his brothers said to him, "Leave here and go to Judea, that your disciples also may see the works you are doing. For no one works in secret if he seeks to be known openly. If you do these things, show yourself to the world." For not even his brothers believed in him.

Jesus said to them, "My time has not yet come, but your time is always here. The world cannot hate you, but it hates me because I testify about it that its works are evil. You go up to the feast. I am not going up to this feast, for my time has not yet fully come." After saying this, he remained in Galilee. But after his brothers had gone up to the feast, then he also went up, not publicly but in private.

The Jews were looking for him at the feast, and saying, "Where is he?" And there was much muttering about him among the people. While some said, "He is a good man," others said, "No, he is leading the people astray." Yet for fear of the Jews no one spoke openly of him.

About the middle of the feast Jesus went up into the temple and began teaching. The Jews therefore marveled, saying, "How is it that this man has learning, when he has never studied?"

So Jesus answered them, "My teaching is not mine, but his who sent me. If anyone's will is to do God's will, he will know whether the teaching is from God or whether I am speaking on my own authority. The one who speaks on his own authority seeks his own glory; but the one who seeks the glory of him who sent him is true, and in him there is no falsehood. Has not Moses given you the law? Yet none of you keeps the law. Why do you seek to kill me?"

The crowd answered, "You have a demon! Who is seeking to kill you?"

Jesus answered them, "I did one work, and you all marvel at it. Moses gave you circumcision (not that it is from Moses, but from the fathers), and you circumcise a man on the Sabbath. If on the Sabbath a man receives circumcision, so that the law of Moses may not be broken, are you angry with me because on the Sabbath I made a man's whole body well? Do not judge by appearances, but judge with right judgment."

Sermon:

During His life on earth, Jesus was an “anti-politician”. However, I do not mean this in the sense that Jesus is entirely opposed to politicians or the political sphere. Even now, He reigns as the highest political officer in the universe. Jesus is not anti-government, nor is He generally against those who operate the wheels of political power.

What I do mean by saying that Jesus is an “anti-politician”, is that He refused to play along with the political “game”. Jesus refused to play according to the ordinary, accepted, human rules that governed the social systems of the day. Jesus was not a professional politician. He did not think like one, nor did He act like one.

That simple fact, in certain ways, greatly explains why people did not understand Him or many of the things that He did. He was always acting outside of their common frame of reference and expected social mores. But,

- If Jesus had been trying to do or accomplish what many people assumed or thought that He was trying to do, then yes, according to their ordinary expectations, He was doing everything wrong.
- If His goal was political power, and if His purpose was the re-establishment of a temporal Davidic kingdom, then yes, Jesus went about everything wrong but that was never His purpose nor goal.

Today's passage showcases His unwillingness to play our political games, by our rules.

After performing a Sign with His miraculous feeding of over five thousand men in northern Galilee, and after performing another Sign by walking across the Galilean Sea in the dead of night, and after He accused the crowd of following Him for all the wrong reasons, and after many of those followers abandoned Him because what Jesus was teaching and what He expected of them was too hard and difficult for them to accept, the Apostle John resumes his narrative after about six months: the length between Passover and the Feast of Booths (Leviticus 23:5, 34); writing “*After this Jesus went about in Galilee. He would not go about in Judea, because the Jews were seeking to kill him.*”.

During this intervening period, we remain assured by the other Gospels that Jesus did not stop His itinerant ministry across Galilee. He did not take a break nor stop, reset, and then begin a new campaign. He continued to visit the many towns in the region, teaching in their synagogues and, despite John's noted reduction in the size of crowds that followed Him, Jesus and His ministry continued to be both popular and controversial.

It was these controversies that kept Jesus in Galilee. They kept Him away from Judea and Jerusalem because that was where the Jewish leadership and religious establishment (those whom John references whenever he writes “the Jews”; the Priests, Pharisees, and Scribes) had the most power, influence, and authority. He stayed away because they were looking for an excuse to kill Him. John implies that they did so because:

- Jesus was not playing by their rules, He was upsetting the “status quo” of their social and religious system.
- Jesus was from the tribe of Judah, not the priestly tribe of Levi.
- Jesus was a simple carpenter, without any formal religious instruction.
- Jesus was not pledged to the sect and strictures of the Pharisees (a small portion of the population with a greater influence than would ordinarily be expected [Josephus Antiquities 13:288]), which, if He were, would have offered Him a kind of legitimacy as an accepted human authority.
- Jesus kept Himself to the outskirts of Jewish society, associating with and teaching the low-born common folk. By avoiding the centers of political and social power, He had a greater effect, impact, and

influence upon those we might today call “We the People”, thereby building, what they feared, a populist movement which might be transformable into revolution.

- Jesus did not hesitate to answer concerning controversial and other sensitive subjects, and when He did, He did not stay “in line” with conventional wisdom or popular opinion.
- Jesus spoke authoritatively; speaking under His own authority and speaking His own wisdom rather than “regurgitating” the teachings of earlier Jewish experts and leaders {like Hillel and Shammai}; not quoting or citing the opinions and interpretations of the so-called “experts”.

Thus Jesus disrupted everything that they considered important, making them all very uncomfortable.

So, it is no big surprise that “the Jews” wanted Jesus “out of the picture” since they considered some of His teachings to be blasphemy, particularly His claim of divinity: that God is His Father and that He is the prophetic “Son of Man”. So, if Jesus were to travel around in Judea, then He would have been giving them an easier opportunity to “remove” Him. Yet, while it was safer for Him to stay in Galilee (and continue to fulfill the Isaiah 9 prophecies), as a devout Jew there were still regular times, according to Torah, when He must go up to Jerusalem.

“*Now the Jews' Feast of Booths was at hand.*”. The “Feast of Booths”, also known as or “Feast of Tabernacles”, was the third of three annual religious festivals that required every male Jew to appear before the LORD, at the Temple in Jerusalem (Deuteronomy 16:16), for worship. Therefore, attendance was not optional for righteous, orthodox, and observant Jews like Jesus; for any of those who would keep the Law. So, Jesus, had to go, being Who and What He is, in order for Him to fully keep God's law. He had no choice except to travel to Judea and risk the wrath of the Jews.

So, at that time, Jesus's “*...brothers said to him, "Leave here and go to Judea, that your disciples also may see the works you are doing. For no one works in secret if he seeks to be known openly. If you do these things, show yourself to the world."*”. Now, before we begin to think that this was loving and well-meaning, brotherly advice; before we assume that they were actively trying to help Jesus in His mission, we must consider what John tells us about them, “*For not even his brothers believed in him.*”. Remember, the Synoptic Gospels also imply that Jesus's brothers and even His mother, Mary, may have tried to stage something like an “intervention” (Matthew 12:46-49; Mark 3:31-33; Luke 8:20-21), because of what He was saying and doing. But also remember, Luke tells us that they were gathered with the Apostles when they chose a replacement for Judas Iscariot (Acts 1:14) {and thus presumably on the day of Pentecost also}. The Apostle Paul told the Corinthian church that after the resurrection Jesus appeared to His brother James, specifically (1 Corinthians 15:7). Lastly, two of Jesus' brothers, James and Jude {Judas per (Mark 6:3)} wrote letters that were accepted into the biblical canon, so we know that they eventually came to faith; but for now, their faith and regeneration was still in the future. So, while we should not assume bad intentions from them, we also cannot assume the best because they did not believe in Him as the Christ yet, although it seems like they might have been beginning to believe Him to be “Someone” on account of His popularity. What they were suggesting for Him to do, by “encouraging Him” to reveal His works more publicly in Jerusalem, was to do all that He has been doing in Galilee, in front of the biggest crowd possible and not just His “disciples”, because everyone who is anyone would be present as witnesses.

Why did they suggest this?

They suggested this because they believed that they were looking out for His best political interests, and maybe their own, by extension. They were suggesting that He leverage His popularity into political populism, because if He wanted to be “successful” and lead a movement for social, religious, and political change, then He needed to begin playing the game. But, by telling Jesus, “*For no one works in secret if he seeks to be known openly. If you do these things, show yourself to the world.*” they merely proved that they were “worldly, wise men”.

- They could not understand or imagine that, if what Jesus claimed were true, that He might want to keep His power and abilities hidden. They expected that if someone were blessed with such miraculous power as He had exhibited, then they must have been given it to use it and enjoy it; to take advantage of it and exploit this providence to the fullest extent possible.
- They could not understand or imagine why their brother, Jesus, if what He was saying were true, would not want to build social, political, or religious power. They believed that He was going about it all wrong, if He was trying to achieve the ultimate goal that they assumed: to claim the throne of David and put an end to Roman rule in Judea.
- They did not and could not understand what Jesus was doing or why because they were not yet regenerate.

They did not understand, so Jesus explained things to them, “*Jesus said to them, "My time has not yet come, but your time is always here. The world cannot hate you, but it hates me because I testify about it that its works are evil."*”.

- They belonged to the world, to the fallen *kosmos*.
- They belonged to the world's time.
- They were loved by the world because they had not yet been turned away from it; they were not yet redeemed from Satan's dominion.

Conversely, Jesus knew and explained that He was hated and feared by the world.

- This was proven when the crowd abandoned Him.
- This was proven by the Jew's animosity, hatred, and fear of Jesus and His teachings.
- This was proven by the religious establishment's ardent opposition to Jesus, which was therefore, a tacit defense of the world's satanic doctrine and evil works.

The world hated and the world still hates Jesus because He testifies “*...that its works are evil.*”; because:

- He declared the truth about the world's fallen, moral character.
- He shined a brilliant and divine light into its satanic darkness and misery;
 - a light for the *kosmos* to see itself in;
 - a light to drive back the darkness;
 - a light to call and draw the Elect out from their love and fellowship with the *kosmos* and bring them into the *agape* of Christ instead;
 - a light to purge and cleanse the Elect of all their prior evil, their wickedness, and their sin;
 - a light which justifies them before the Father;
 - a light through which He would save the *kosmos* by redeeming the Elect from every nation, tribe, family, time, and place.

Then He told his brothers, “*You go up to the feast. I am not going up to this feast, for my time has not yet fully come.*” After saying this, he remained in Galilee. But after his brothers had gone up to the feast, then he also

went up, not publicly but in private.”. However, when we read this plainly and most simply, we are challenged with something that may be problematic.

- Did Jesus just lie to His brothers?
- Did Jesus just break the Ninth Commandment?

The answer, of course, must be “No”, but how?

The key to understanding this is found in what Jesus's brothers wanted Him to do (or be) and also within the question of “time”. John shows us that His brothers wanted Him to reveal Himself and His glory, although they did not understand what they were asking. They wanted Him to reveal Himself as a political Messiah. But Jesus was more concerned about the “time”: that it was not yet the correct, appropriate, and divinely appointed time for Him to reveal Himself, in glory, as God's chosen Messiah: the Suffering Servant.

Remember, one of the defining characteristics of John's Gospel is that John was more concerned with marking the specific passage of time: or *kronos*, as in “chronological” or “clock” time; than the writers of the Synoptics {hence how we know that the duration of Jesus's ministry was around three years, because of the multiple and separate trips to Jerusalem for the Passover}. John's narrative focus emphasizes Jesus's greater concern with *kairos* time: God's divinely appointed time; the foreordained and planned moments and events which were necessary to achieve our redemption within history and *kronos*.

Three times in this passage, Jesus relies upon the *kairos* with His brothers:

- *My time has not yet come;*
 - Jesus's time, the moment when He would do what He came into the world to do, had not yet come. It was not yet time for His humiliation, nor was it the time for His glorification.
- *but your time is always here.*
 - The present time belonged to the world, to whom they belonged. The present moment belonged to Satan: the present “ruler of the world” (John 14:30) and their enslaving master.
- *I am not going up to this feast, for my time has not yet fully come.*
 - That is why Jesus would not go up to Jerusalem openly, as Who He truly Is.
 - Jesus would not be going up to Jerusalem for this feast, in power and glory.
 - Jesus would not be going up to this feast as the revealed Messiah, because it was not yet God's *kairos*.
 - Jesus would not go up to the feast as the Christ, but He would as Jesus of Nazareth, the man.

Jesus did not lie to His brothers because He would not go up to Jerusalem as the public figure whom they wanted Him to be. Instead, He would go as Himself, privately and simply; as a humble worshiper of the LORD. Jesus refused to be manipulated for the sake of worldly politics. Instead He would stick to God's plan, and follow it just as God the Father had decreed from all eternity past, just as He, as God the Son, had agreed.

So, Jesus's brothers went up to Jerusalem and then, a little while later, Jesus went up separately. Jesus distanced Himself from His family, from the crowds, and from His public persona. Jesus went up privately to lose Himself within the crowds of Jewish faithful. This was a time when He could simply worship His Father in heaven, without being distracted by His mission.

- Jesus took time to worship God simply, purely, and earnestly just as all who trust in the LORD should.

Meanwhile, in Jerusalem, “*The Jews were looking for him at the feast, and saying, "Where is he?"*”. The religious leaders were looking for Jesus. They were all on guard, looking out for this popular teacher from the north, because they perceived Him as a political threat to their comfortable status quo.

- They knew about His popularity among the people; that people loved Him for His “alleged” miracles, signs, and wonders.
- They knew about Jesus and his teaching; how it was radically different from theirs {a different *halakhah*}, being more spirit centered rather than works based; that it was changing hearts and changing lives, similar to John the Baptist's.
- They knew He was unafraid to speak against their established order.
- They feared His popularity being converted into a populist movement: a revolution against their religious and political establishment; with Jesus at its head.
- They feared what might happen to them personally, and how Rome would respond if Jesus became a successful anti-establishment, populist, revolutionary.
- They feared their whole world being turned upside down. If Jesus had been playing their political game, then they would have been right to fear Him for this.

While the Jewish leaders were worried and wondering, “...*there was much muttering about him among the people. While some said, "He is a good man," others said, "No, he is leading the people astray."*”. Jesus’s popularity was so great that He was the talk of the town, even when nobody knew He was around. This “chatter” is proof of Jesus’ original social impact. Even during the 1st Century in Judea, everyone who heard about Jesus had an opinion about Him and no one was apathetic about it. Whether their opinion was positive or negative; Jesus and His political influence could not be ignored.

Although it was not His intention and was contrary to His purpose, the idea of Jesus as a “social revolutionary” developed its own great political weight and became dangerous for everyone involved, as “...*for fear of the Jews no one spoke openly of him.*”. Whether someone loved Him or hated Him, supported Him or opposed Him, all talk of Jesus was political and dangerous because Jesus was naturally disruptive to every part of the system, because the system of the *kosmos* is fallen and corrupt and opposed to God's system.

- If someone openly supported Him, then they risked the ire of those in authority.
- If someone openly opposed Him, then they risked the ire of “the people”: the crowds and the masses.

However, despite the continual ease with which the idea becomes popular, Jesus was not born to be an agent of social or political change. God the Son did not become Incarnate to merely bring about social reformation. “*The Word became flesh and dwelt among us...*” to give us new life: spiritual life; and to give us new lives as the sons and daughters of God, instead of remaining the “*children of wrath*” (Ephesians 2:3) that we were born as. Christ came to deliver us from our bondage to sin, our willing service to Satan and the *kosmos*. He came to reimpose the divine political order, the Kingdom of God, upon the world; a kingdom which has been breaking through and growing ever since Jesus was born, the consummation of which every Christian eagerly awaits upon the return of Christ.

- Although the goal and purpose of the Incarnation was not our social reformation, it is a consequence of our justification, adoption, regeneration, and sanctification that Jesus has effected.
- We are being reformed, transformed, and renewed in our whole selves: mind, body, and spirit. Living now as God’s obedient children, we should be living righteously, justly, mercifully, and with love for all others.

- Now that Christ's Holy Spirit dwells within us, we now belong to a completely different political system.

Despite not playing the political “game”, Jesus is a political figure and force. Even though He refused to play the world's game in the world's way, Jesus is political. Instead of playing politics to achieve temporal power; instead of trying to sway and direct the minds of people through persuasion and influence; He played to win our salvation and effect a permanent change upon our heart. So now, because the Father in heaven has given Him all authority and power, He transforms and renews our hearts and minds by giving us the Holy Spirit, Who regenerates us and sanctifies us; Who comforts us and educates us in the way of Christ.

So, as much as Jesus was Himself, an anti-politician, even the “idea of Jesus” is political. Jesus was neither a Republican or Democrat, Liberal or Conservative, Libertarian or Communist (He is apolitical in that sense). Many of those “-isms” contain viewpoints which are contrary to the Gospel and to the Kingdom of Christ, our elections and earthly governments are not what Jesus is most concerned with, regardless our faith in Christ must should guide our politics.

Remember, all earthly authorities have been appointed, established, and are upheld by God (Romans 13:1-7; Colossians 1:16; Titus 3:1-2; 1 Peter 2:13-17), so long as they serve justice and the cause of righteousness. But, as Christians, we take comfort knowing that they are just temporary and are subject to Him even now. God is Sovereign and Jesus Christ is our King, and they will be held accountable (Deuteronomy 32:35).

Now as then, everybody has an opinion about Jesus and anyone who expresses their opinion today, whether it is for Him or against Him, risks the ire of the opposite side. It is a grievous flaw in our culture that we have transformed Jesus into a political football, because this only proves our ignorance and our lack of understanding. Jesus is never on any political side. The proper question is whether any political side is on His; or which is closest to His.

Since we still live in the world, but are no longer of the world, it is challenging but very important for Christians to remember that:

- Jesus did not live and die to save the United States of America, Great Britain, Russia, China, Iran, or even the nation of Israel but to save the world: the *kosmos*. His work of salvation transcends all divisions of nationality, ethnicity, or politics. Jesus died to redeem people, individuals, not countries.
- Jesus's Kingdom is not of this world, yet. It is not our job, nor is it the purpose of the Church to try and establish the Kingdom of God on earth. The LORD will do so when it is His proper *kairos*, and He neither requires our help, nor can we hurry Him along.

Today, we who believe and trust in Christ are citizens of His Kingdom, first and foremost, and we must live accordingly. Although Jesus Himself refused to “play politics”, sometimes we should and sometimes we must in order to be as obedient to God as we can. We must follow His Law and keep His commandments, while also following the laws of the country in which we reside. We must work for the betterment of our hometowns, our State, our country, and even the world because all human persons are our neighbors. We do this, not in the hope that we will somehow transform the world into and bring about Christ's Kingdom on earth {this is largely a view point and perspective of post-Millennial (optimistic) folks}, but because it is the right, and loving, and most God glorifying thing to do. We do this because we are loved by God, our Father, and because we want to be obedient children and bring Him glory.

We are citizens of that heavenly country as well as residents of this earthly land, therefore we should not be afraid to speak about our King, Jesus Christ. We must not worry that we might “cause offense” to others by talking about Jesus and telling them about God's grace and what He has done, because it is their choice to be offended. Their offended-ness is not our fault, it is their response to the Gospel and the fallen *kosmos* will

always be offended by the Gospel. Jesus never worried about causing offense when speaking God's truth, because He understood that the problem was in others because of their sin.

- Jesus simply lived and did what the LORD commanded.
- Jesus followed God's eternal divine plan.
- Jesus spoke the truth to people, in love.
- Jesus loved people, in truth.

Jesus spoke and showed the truth about Who God is: loving, gracious, merciful, and just; who people are: sinners in need of God's grace, sinners in need of redemption; and what God requires of us: faith in Him, our absolute trust for everything. Meanwhile, God the Father and God the Holy Spirit took care of all the rest: calling the Elect and changing their hearts and minds.

Regardless of what the Jews thought or feared, Jesus was not an “anti-establishment, populist”. Instead, He is the true “establishment” and He is an “anti-populist”. His power is not derived from the people. Jesus is not concerned with popularity or public opinion, He is concerned with what is right and with the LORD's opinion (the only opinion which ultimately and eternally matters) {That which is right is rarely popular, while what is popular rarely seems to be right.}. The Sovereign LORD is the true establishment and He does not care about our opinion, because it is our duty and privilege to align ourselves with Him for, as John Knox said, “One man with God is always in the majority.”¹.

God does not need to play the political game and Jesus does not need to play by our human rules.

When God came to earth, entering into our time and space, to do His great work for our salvation, He did not do it “our way” because “our way” was what created the problem in the first place. The consequences of doing things “our way” is what Jesus was born, lived, and died to undo because a broken system cannot fix itself. Sometimes parts of a broken system can be repaired, but sometimes the only thing you can do is replace the whole broken system and reset everything to the “factory default”.

So, we should be grateful that Jesus did not play politics and that He did not do things “our way”, since the One who made the system knows it best and is the only One trustworthy and reliable enough to restore it. It is precisely because Jesus did not play politics that we can trust and be confident, believing that when He said “*tetelestai*” on the cross: saying “it is finished”; that it truly was.

AMEN

¹<https://www.puritanboard.com/threads/john-knox-quote.3147/>