

John 42 – Is Jesus Really the Messiah?

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Scripture 1: (Jn. 7:25-32 ESV)

Some of the people of Jerusalem therefore said, "Is not this the man whom they seek to kill? And here he is, speaking openly, and they say nothing to him! Can it be that the authorities really know that this is the Christ? But we know where this man comes from, and when the Christ appears, no one will know where he comes from."

So Jesus proclaimed, as he taught in the temple, "You know me, and you know where I come from. But I have not come of my own accord. He who sent me is true, and him you do not know. I know him, for I come from him, and he sent me."

So they were seeking to arrest him, but no one laid a hand on him, because his hour had not yet come.

Yet many of the people believed in him. They said, "When the Christ appears, will he do more signs than this man has done?" The Pharisees heard the crowd muttering these things about him, and the chief priests and Pharisees sent officers to arrest him.

Sermon:

The question of, “Is Jesus really the Messiah?”, is the most important question any of us can be asked to decide and it is the most important question for us to answer correctly.

There are very few people today willing to argue that Jesus never was. Few suggest that He is simply a fictional character. The preponderance of accepted evidence supports the probability that a tradesman by vocation named Jesus from an inconsequential Galilean town called Nazareth lived, worked, and developed a social and religious following in the Roman province of Judea during the early 1st Century AD and furthermore, that this Jesus and His followers later experienced religious and political persecution. However, even as the world: our contemporary culture's knowledge and wisdom; is willing to accept the premise of a historical “Jesus”, there is little agreement regarding Who and What Jesus is, was, or did. Sadly, this holds true even with some who claim to be Christian, for example:

- Jehovah's Witnesses¹ completely deny the deity of Christ as present day Arians; believing that there once a time was when Jesus was not. They believe that both before the Incarnation and after His resurrection, Jesus was/is the Archangel Michael; believing that He is the greatest of created beings, misunderstanding Him as the “firstborn of creation” (Colossians 1:15). Instead they believe that He was simply the “perfect Man”. To justify this, they assert that the text of the New Testament has been corrupted or mistranslated: for example that John 1:1 should read, “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was **a god.**” (New World Translation) instead of “...*the Word was God.*” (John 1:1 ESV).
- Mormons² deny both the inerrancy and finality of the New Testament Scriptures. Although they admittedly accept the “essential details of the Gospels”, they leave those undefined. They do believe that Jesus was fully human and fully the “Son of God”; possessing the powers of a God but, was not Himself God. Instead they “...believe that Jesus’ teachings and His own matchless and perfect life provide a pattern for men and women to live by and that we must emulate that pattern as best we can to find true happiness and fulfillment in this life.”. Furthermore, they deny the doctrine of “salvation/justification by grace alone”: by the monergistic work of the Holy Spirit; instead, affirming a form of cooperative salvation, believing that “We must work to our limit and then rely upon the merits, mercy and grace of the Holy One of Israel to see us through the struggles of life and into life eternal (2 Nephi 31:19; Moroni 6:4).” and also defining human faith as a salvific work.
- Meanwhile, much of the secular world seems to agree with the Mormons’ view about Jesus as being just a “moral exemplar” and a “good teacher”. However, I think C.S. Lewis best argues against that as an acceptable view, arguing that, on account of Jesus’ many claims of divinity, for if those claims were false, then Jesus would be recognized as a liar, therefore losing all credibility as a “moral exemplar”.
- Many Hindu³ religious and political leaders, like Gandhi, have considered Christ, not in a historical context, but as an “incarnation (*avatāra*) of divine origin”; accepting him as ‘a highly evolved spiritual being who transcends any particularity of time, place or context, that provided a message and example

1 <https://evangelicalbible.com/articles/jehovah-witness-and-the-deity-of-christ/>

2 <https://newsroom.churchofjesuschrist.org/article/what-mormons-believe-about-jesus-christ#:~:text=We%20believe%20Jesus%20is%20the,the%20fulfillment%20of%20those%20prophecies.>

3 <https://www.reform-magazine.co.uk/2016/09/a-hindu-jesus/#:~:text=Many%20Hindu%20religious%20and%20political,a%20message%20and%20example%20of>

of universal relevance.” To their view, Jesus is not God, nor is He numbered among their gods, even though many Hindus will honor and revere Jesus and affirm His moral teachings from the Gospels.

- Lastly, the Quran⁴ teaches, and Muslims believe, that Jesus (whom they call Issa) was merely “A” **prophet** and neither God (Allah) nor the “Son of God”. They believe that he was born of a virgin (but in a different manner from the Gospel narrative), and that he lived as a witness to Allah by performing miracles and doing works of kindness. They deny the historical facts of both the crucifixion and the resurrection, but they do affirm his ascension into heaven (similar to Elijah and Enoch), asserting that he will return on the day of judgment to condemn the wicked and repudiate both the Jews and the Christians for their lack of faith and their pagan idolatry.

So, it is quite plain that the important question of **who** and **what** Jesus is: of, “Is Jesus really the Messiah of God?”; has confounded people for the past two thousand years and it continues to do so today.

Now, returning to our text, during this particular Feast of Booths, while Jesus was teaching in the Temple, *“Some of the people of Jerusalem therefore said, “Is not this the man whom they seek to kill? And here he is, speaking openly, and they say nothing to him! Can it be that the authorities really know that this is the Christ?”* However, who were the ones speaking since “the crowd” had just recently responded to Jesus' assertion that “the Jews” were trying to kill Him by saying, *“You have a demon! Who is seeking to kill you?”* (Jn. 7:20 ESV). Who were these *“people of Jerusalem”*?

Throughout His Gospel, John uses certain expressions to describe different classes or specific groups of people. The most commonly used expression appears to be “the Jews”: used fifty six times in specific reference to the religious leadership (people like the Priests and Pharisees). John does not use this expression as a referent for the general, corporate body of Jewish believers (adherents to the Jewish faith) {although his use of it as an adjective, when compounded with a mention of the Festivals: as in, “the Passover of the Jews”; can be debatable as a more general use or it could imply John's understanding (similar to the Apostle Paul's) of the Jewish religion/practice as being more of a man-made construct}. Next, whenever he refers to “the crowd”, it is always dependent upon the particular narrative context but, generally and broadly, he means the “common folk”. However, this expression of the *“people of Jerusalem”* is **uniquely** used by John here {this is the only time that it is actually used} since the two other distinct classes are also mentioned in the narrative. So, we need to try and reason out just who they were and why they might have reason to say what they say.

Thinking this through, Scripture implies and the historical record affirms that Jerusalem was the religious center (the “religious capital”) for Jews in the region, but it was not the administrative center. It had not been since the death of King Herod (in 4 BC) caused the kingdom of Judea to be divided into three territories (Tetrarchies), with three separate administrations: Archelaus was over the south and western half (including Judea, Idumea, and Samaria), Antipas was over the north western region of Galilee, and Philip was over the north east region (presently known as the Golan Heights) (Luke 3:1). At the time of Jesus's crucifixion, the region once ruled by Archelaus was under the authority of a Roman Governor, Pontius Pilate, who administered the region from the port city of Caesarea Maritima, while Antipas ruled Galilee from Tiberius (previously from Sepphoris). But, although Jerusalem was not a regional capital, its status as the religious center preserved its importance because of the three required annual pilgrimages that caused its population to temporarily swell.

So, since Jerusalem's principal importance was due to the Jewish religion, we know that it was the primary home for the priestly caste and other dedicated religionists: namely the High Priest and his family, the Levitical Temple workers, religious students, scribes, and Pharisees (i.e. “the Jews”); an understanding supported by the

4 <https://al-dirassa.com/en/who-is-prophet-issa-jesus-in-islam/>

archaeological record. Yet, since it was “the Jews” who wanted to kill Jesus (7:1), they clearly were not the ones speaking, who else could it have been? During this period, only the wealthy and socially preeminent, devout Jews could afford to live in Jerusalem; they could only ordinarily do so because they were either independently wealthy {like Joseph of Arimathea appears to have been (Matthew 27:57; Mark 15:43; Luke 23:50; John 19:38)} or because they were supported by the Temple {like the priests}. So, if “the Jews” were the main people living in Jerusalem, and if they were not the ones speaking, then who did that leave? Who else might rightly be called the “*people of Jerusalem*”? I think the answer will seem simple, clear, and obvious once you hear it, “the help”: the servant class and their families.

- Just as “the Jews” lived in Jerusalem to serve the Temple, the actual, common “*people of Jerusalem*” lived there (or nearby) to serve the needs of “the Jews”.
- This is little different from the present situation in Orlando, Florida {and partly why I say that it is **the most** miserable place on earth} where the primary people living there are: the Disney {or Universal} executives, people who work in the parks, or the people who serve the innumerable visitors that annually come to Orlando on vacation: making the executives like “the Jews”, the vacationers like “the crowd”, and all the rest like the “*people of Jerusalem*”.
- {Side Note: When I visited Israel (Jerusalem) in May of 2023, my observations led me to conclude that their practice of tourist direction, containment, concessions, and souvenir sales put the abilities and successes of the Orlando tourism industry to shame. The Israeli's did it far better. Disney could learn a lot from them.}

Recognizing this, we then begin to realize how that supports and influences John's narrative, because as anyone who has ever watched a TV show like *Downton Abby* knows {because they surely do get this historical idea right} servants know all of their master's secrets. They know what their bosses know, and think, and plot, and plan. They know where they go, what they do, and who they are doing it with. It is reasonable then that “*Some of the people of Jerusalem...*”, the servants of the Jews, might ask, “*Is not this the man whom they seek to kill? And here he is, speaking openly, and they say nothing to him! Can it be that the authorities really know that this is the Christ?*” because they were aware of their master's plotting. So really, these questions are just “downstairs gossip” and musings from the unseen, common class of folks that know more than the general public, yet are unable to say so publicly because their knowledge comes from “behind the scenes”.

Now this digression was just a short perspective shift in John's narrative further demonstrating the division between Jesus and “the Jews”. Through this, John presents us with a secondary, human witness to the fact of their conspiracy against Jesus {second after Jesus's assertion}, and then he describes the people's observations, followed by their interpretation and conclusion.

- These “people” knew that “the Jews” were conspiring to kill Jesus; but since,
- Jesus was teaching publicly in the Temple and “the Jews” neither refuted or opposed Him, nor did they try to silence Him, nor did they act against Him;
- They interpreted this to mean and led them to conclude that “the Jews” had decided that Jesus actually is the Christ: the silence of “the Jews” was interpreted as their consent and approval of Jesus and His teachings.

But then they also question and doubt their conclusion's wisdom and correctness, saying “*But we know where this man comes from, and when the Christ appears, no one will know where he comes from.*”. Although

considered as more socially “common”, we should expect that these “*people of Jerusalem*” were more theologically knowledgeable and discerning than the average Jewish believer on account of their easier, proximate access to religious teaching because they lived and worked under the shadow of the Temple.

Now, their reason given for doubting it is quite odd. I have not found any biblical foundation for their belief, especially in light of Herod's question to the chief priests and scribes asking, “Where would the Messiah be born?” and their answer of “Bethlehem” (Matthew 2:1-6). However, one of the ancient church fathers, Justin Martyr (died ~165 AD), recorded a Jewish tradition asserting that the Messiah “...is unknown, and does not even know Himself at all nor has any power, until Elijah shall have come and anointed Him, and shall have made Him manifest to all.” (Justin Martyr, “Dialogue with Trypho”, chapter 8), a tradition which the 20th Century biblical scholar, F.F. Bruce, suggests was the source for these “people's” doubt.

Yet the Old Testament Scriptures do give clues regarding where the Messiah would be from, even if it requires hindsight and the Holy Spirit's guidance and wisdom to understand it:

- Jesus coming from the town of Nazareth, can be viewed as a fulfillment of Isaiah 11:1, “*There shall come forth a shoot from the stump of Jesse, and a branch from his roots shall bear fruit.*” (Isa. 11:1 ESV) since the Hebrew term translated as “branch” is *natzar*, the root of Nazareth.
- Similarly, Jesus's birth in Bethlehem was a fulfillment of Micah 5:2, “*But you, O Bethlehem Ephrathah, who are too little to be among the clans of Judah, from you shall come forth for me one who is to be ruler in Israel, whose coming forth is from of old, from ancient days.*” (Mic. 5:2 ESV)
- Lastly, according to Matthew 2:15, the Egyptian sojourn of Joseph, Mary, and Jesus is viewed as a fulfillment of Hosea 11:1, “*When Israel was a child, I loved him, and out of Egypt I called my son.*” (Hos. 11:1 ESV)

Regardless, although John demonstrates that the “*people of Jerusalem*” were trying to judge for themselves by not merely trusting the opinion of “the Jews”, it is obvious that they were not judging “*with right judgment*”. They were not judging “*with right judgment*” because they did not rightly understand the Scriptures since, not knowing the Christ's point of origin was less a question of “from where”, but more “from who”.

Then, Jesus again demonstrates His extraordinary and supernatural knowledge and understanding of what is in the hearts and minds of men, by answering and responding to the “*people of Jerusalem's*” concern. “*So Jesus proclaimed, as he taught in the temple, "You know me, and you know where I come from. But I have not come of my own accord. He who sent me is true, and him you do not know. I know him, for I come from him, and he sent me."*”.

- He affirmed that they knew Him, as a person.
- He affirmed that they knew His personal background and details.
- He denied that His is teaching and His actions were for His own personal benefit.
- He affirmed that He was acting as someone else's agent.
- He affirmed that He had been sent on a mission to reveal His sender; a sender whom they did not rightly know (which would make the “*people's*” incorrect assumption correct; but, from a very different point of view).

However, despite already knowing that some of “the Jews”: like Nicodemus (John 3:2); recognized, knew, and believed that Jesus actually did come from the LORD, this last point was the real rub for everyone that opposed Jesus because He charged them with not knowing God; with not knowing the LORD, YHVH: the God of Israel.

So, not only did Jesus assert that He truly knows the LORD and that He was sent by Him, but that (corporately) the Priests, the Levites, and the Pharisees did not, He did so publicly within the Temple precinct {probably while teaching upon the steps leading up onto the Temple mount}; from within the boundary of their sacred authority and their religious fiefdom.

- How extraordinarily outrageous!
- How easy it would be for the Jewish leaders to take offense!
- How politically dangerous this was for Jesus!

So, it is no wonder that “the Jews” would be “...*seeking to arrest him, but no one laid a hand on him, because his hour had not yet come.*”.

Remembering how Jesus had explained to His brothers that it was not yet His *kairos*, John's narrative clearly demonstrates the omnipotent power of God's sovereign decree here because, no amount of human self-control, or restraint could prevent the religious “powers that be” from immediately going after Jesus, right then and there.

- I cannot imagine “the Jews” simply listening to Jesus, suffering His righteous rebuke with silent, humble acceptance.
- I would expect that there was a lot of “clutching at pearls” instead; cries of indignation, angry shouts, and loud protestations against Jesus' accusation.
- I would expect there to be immediate calls for His arrest, the summoning of the Temple guards to seize Jesus, followed by Him being hauled away to be tried publicly for blasphemy; with Jesus being convicted according to the standard of Torah while, at the same time, “the Jews” would be justified according to their righteousness.

But, no. Even though they sent folks to arrest Jesus “...*no one laid a hand on him...*” and, I can only understand this as a miracle of God's providence and protection; of God's eternal decree and plan “...*because his hour had not yet come.*”, because it was not yet the right, divinely appointed moment in redemptive history for it to happen. Thus, “...*many of the people believed in him.*” because of the silence of “the Jews”; because of their non-response to Jesus's implicit challenge to their religious authority and political power.

Not only this, but because of everything that Jesus had done: His publicly known miracles and wonders; and because they were being emboldened by the implicit approval of “the Jews”, many of the “*people of Jerusalem*” that were becoming convinced, beginning to wonder, “*When the Christ appears, will he do more signs than this man has done?*”. Ultimately, the evidence that was convincing them were all of the “Signs” that Jesus did. The specific evidences which John provides in this Gospel, prove Who Jesus is; they prove that Jesus really is the Messiah, and through this narrative, John shows us how these 1st Century people were becoming convinced of this fact.

Remember, the true purpose of prophetic signs: of miracles and wonders; was to confirm the messenger and their message, which is why there are only three periods in the history of redemption when miracles are commonly recorded and connected with individuals.

- Moses and Aaron during the time of the Exodus;
- Elijah and Elisha during the time of the Divided Kingdoms; and,
- Jesus and the Apostles {the Eleven and Paul} during the 1st Century.

Each group of “miracle-workers” spoke uniquely for the LORD to the people. God gave them the ability to perform their miracles to demonstrate their authority to speak on His behalf, as His messengers {apostles} and representatives. They spoke for the LORD and they demonstrated His power before God's chosen people and before the Nations {Gentiles}, with the miracles serving as their “credentials”.

Ultimately, those who judged “*with right judgment.*”, by using the revealed standard of Scripture: the Law, Prophets, and the Writings; the “*people of Jerusalem*” who believed, reached the correct conclusion about Jesus: believing that, on account of His signs and wonders (John 10:37-38), Jesus is the Messiah. They believed the evidence presented and they believed God; trusting His revealed Word.

But, on the other hand, when “*The Pharisees heard the crowd muttering these things about him, and the chief priests and Pharisees sent officers to arrest him.*”. “The Jews” that were not judging “*with right judgment.*”, who were not using the revealed standard of Scripture: the Law, Prophets, and the Writings; reached the wrong conclusion: believing that Jesus was a fraud, a blasphemer, a religious and political troublemaker upsetting the social order and not the Messiah. They did not believe the available evidence and so, by sending officers to try and arrest Jesus, they proved that they did not know God, the LORD; proving that they did not trust His revealed Word and preferred the judgment and wisdom of sinful men.

Now what does all this have to do with us today?

Like the people in 1st Century Judea and across the Roman Empire we are presented with an abundance of:

- evidence for the existence of God – like nature and the whole ordered universe surrounding us;
- evidence explaining who God is: the LORD, Jesus, the Holy Spirit – the Old and New Testament Scriptures
- evidence confirming the truth of Scripture –
 - the miracles described within the Old Testament confirmed the divine message and messengers,
 - the miracles of Jesus confirmed the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecies,
 - the miracles of the Apostles confirmed their divine message,
 - the written Law of God (His commandments) confirms the correctness our conscience convicts us of; our recognition of moral absolutes (right and wrong) and our internal sense of justice;
- evidence confirming people's trust, confidence, and faith both in Scripture itself and the truth of its teaching -
 - the willingness of Gospel eyewitnesses and of Jesus to die rather than repudiate and recant them as lies, falsehoods, or fictional myths;
 - the willingness of successive generations of Christian believers to die as martyrs or to risk their lives and human comfort by living obediently to the propositions of Scripture by:

- refusing to obey corrupt and pagan governments trying to force them to engage in false worship,
 - by entering plague infected places to love, care for, and show mercy to the “least of these” that were sick and dying,
 - by adopting unwanted children that were abandoned to the elements and bringing them into their families
- evidence from the historical record, both documentary and archaeology, supporting the biblical narrative and the absence of opposing evidence refuting or contravening the biblical narrative;
 - evidence by internal testimony from the Holy Spirit who dwells within the regenerate Elect.

Five of those six evidences are primarily intelligence-based: being rational, logical, and/or physical; while only one is spiritually-based and dependent entirely on faith. Those five evidences and their consequential implications should be enough to cause every rational person to lean towards the Christian faith, as in Blaise Pascal's famous “wager”.

So, like those in 1st Century Judea and the Roman Empire, we also must weigh the evidence and decide for ourselves by using “*right judgment*”, “Is Jesus really the Messiah?”.

- Is Jesus Christ really the Savior of mankind?
- Is Jesus Christ really the Lord of heaven and earth?
- Will Jesus Christ really return someday to judge the living and the dead?
- Will I really be able to stand justified and righteous in that judgment?

Those five types of evidences I listed are to us, like the five “Signs” which John has demonstrated the 1st Century Jews having observed. So, I ask you to consider for yourself and decide:

- “Would, or should, the savior of humanity **need** to provide any more evidence to convince you, if a person (if you) had the ultimate power, within themselves, to choose whether or not to believe in and trust Jesus Christ?”
- Is the physical evidence and the testimony of witnesses reason enough to believe in Jesus?
- Is your reason alone, enough for you to believe, and enough for you to unreservedly entrust the entirety of your present and future life to Christ, even though it might cost you your friends, your freedom, or your worldly future?
- Do you trust your reason enough to judge rightly? Do you have enough confidence in your own, personal decision making capabilities to?

I cannot say that I do, which is why I am so grateful that God gives us His Holy Spirit: to give us faith, knowledge, and understanding. That is why I am eternally grateful that God first chooses us: that God chose me; because I am not at all confident that I could have chosen Him on my own. Frankly, for much of my earlier life, I cannot say that I ever chose Christ, over the things of this world. While:

- I believed that God is; and
- I believed that Jesus is who He says He is; but,

- My actions at the time, proved that I did not really believe that God or His commandments held any priority or degree of importance for my life or how I lived; something I have since repented of and have asked His forgiveness for.

I would not be truthful if I claimed to have been “good”, or an entirely good person, in those days. However, I remember that I certainly did not think of myself as being bad, wicked, or evil but, looking back now, I know how wrong I was. It took something more than just my mind to convince me of the truth. It required the work of the Holy Spirit to bring me around: to pick me up, and set me down on the right and proper path. That is something which I thank God for daily and I would never want to go back.

So, with Jesus and with John, I encourage you and implore you to decide for yourself by using “*right judgment*”, and become convinced that “Jesus is **really** the Messiah”. Then, once believing it, live like you believe it.

If you believe that Jesus Christ is your Savior, your Rescuer, and your King, then you need to live heeding His Words: obey His commandments by loving God and your neighbors, repent and flee from your sin, surrender your whole self to Christ, and live holy because He is holy.

Believe that Jesus is the Messiah: the Son of God and God the Son; the *Logos* who is *Theos* and *Andros*; trust it, and live according to it.

AMEN