

J. C. RYLE'S NOTES ON THE GOSPEL OF JOHN  
7:1-13

1. After these things Jesus walked in Galilee; for he would not walk in Judea, because the Jews sought to kill him. 2. Now the Jews' feast of tabernacles was at hand. 3. His brethren therefore said to him, Depart from here and go into Judea, that your disciples also may see the works that you do. 4. For *there is* no man *who* does anything in secret while he himself seeks to be known openly. If you do these things, show yourself to the world. 5. For neither did his brethren believe in him. 6. Then Jesus said to them, My time is not yet come, but your time is always ready. 7. The world cannot hate you, but it hates me because I testify of it that its works are evil. 8. Ye go up to this feast. I will not go up yet, for my time is not yet fully come. 9. When he had said these words to them, he remained in Galilee. 10. But when his brethren had gone up, then he also went up to the feast, not openly, but as it were in secret. 11. Then the Jews sought him at the feast, and said, Where is he? 12. And there was much murmuring among the people concerning him. Some said, He is a good man; others said, No, but he deceives the people. 13. However, no man spoke openly of him for fear of the Jews.

1.--[*After these things...Galilee.*] These words cover a space of about six months. The events of the last chapter took place about the time of the Passover, in spring. The events of the chapter we now begin took place in autumn, at the feast of tabernacles. What our Lord did in Galilee during these six months St. John passes over in silence. His Gospel, with the exception of the 1st, 2nd, 4th, and 6th chapters, is almost entirely taken up with our Lord's doings in or near Jerusalem. He was at this period of His ministry entirely absent from Jerusalem, it would seem, for about eighteen months.

The expression "walked" must be taken figuratively. It simply means that our Lord "lived, dwelt, sojourned, was going to and fro, and passing His time." The Greek word is in the imperfect tense and denotes a continuous action or habit.

[*He would not walk in Jewry.*] This would be more literally rendered, "He did not will, or desire, or choose to walk." The use of the word "Jewry" by our translators is to be regretted and seems uncalled for. The Greek word so rendered is the same that is rendered "Judea" in the third verse.

[*Because the Jews sought to kill Him.*] By "the Jews" we must understand the leaders and rulers of the Jewish nation. There is no proof that the lower orders felt the same enmity that the upper classes did against our Lord. "The common people heard Him gladly." (Mark xii.37.) The depth and bitterness of this hatred against Christ may be seen in their wish to kill Him. It seems to have been a settled plan with the Jews from the time when the miracle was wrought at the pool of Bethesda. (John v.16,18.) They could neither answer Him, nor silence Him, nor prevent the common people

listening to Him. They resolved therefore to kill Him.

Our Lord's example recorded in this verse shows clearly that Christians are not meant to court martyrdom or willfully expose themselves to certain death under the idea that it is their duty. Many primitive martyrs seem not to have understood this.

2.--[*Jews' feast of tabernacles.*] This expression, like many others in St. John's Gospel, shows that he wrote for the Gentiles, who knew little of Jewish customs and feasts. Hence "the Jews' feast."

The feast of tabernacles was one of the three great feasts in the Jewish year when, by God's command, all pious Jews went up to Jerusalem. (Deut. xvi.16.) It was held in autumn, after the completion of the harvest, in the seventh month. The time of the Jewish "Passover" answered to our Easter, "Pentecost" to our Whitsuntide, and "Tabernacles" to our Michaelmas. The seventh month was remarkable for the number of ordinances which the law of Moses required the Jews to observe. On the first day was the feast of trumpets, on the tenth day was the day of atonement, and on the fifteenth began the feast of tabernacles.

There are several things peculiar to the feast of tabernacles which ought to be remembered in reading this chapter, because some of them throw light on it. (1) It was an occasion of special mirth and rejoicing with the Jews. They were ordered to dwell in booths, or tabernacles made of branches, for seven days in remembrance of their dwelling in temporary booths when they came out of Egypt, and to "rejoice before the Lord." (Lev. xxiii.39-43.) (2) It was a feast at which more sacrifices were offered up than at any of the Jewish feasts. (Num. xxix.12-34.) (3) It was a feast at which, once every seven years, the law was publicly read to the whole people. (4) It was a feast at which water was drawn from the pool of Siloam every day, with great solemnity, and poured upon the altar while the people sung the 12th chapter of Isaiah. (5) It was a feast which followed close on the great day of atonement, when the peculiarly typical ordinances of the scapegoat and the High Priest going once in the year into the holy of holies, were fresh in the minds of the people. These things should be carefully noted and remembered as we read through the chapter.

Josephus calls the feast of tabernacles "the holiest and greatest feast of the Jews." It was a Rabbinical saying, "The man who has not seen these festivities does not know what a jubilee is."

Whether this very year, when our Lord went to the feast of tabernacles, was the precise seventh year in which the public reading of the law took place, we cannot now know for certainty. Whether the custom of dwelling on booths was literally kept up when our Lord was on earth may also be matter of question. It certainly had not been observed for many years in the days of Nehemiah (Neh. viii.17). But that this feast was kept up with extraordinary festivity and rejoicing in the latter days of the Jewish dispensation is testified by all Jewish writers.

It was in the middle of this public rejoicing and the concourse of Jews from every part of the world that the things recorded in this chapter took

place. It stands to reason that all that our Lord said and did this week must have been more than usually public and would necessarily attract great attention.

Wordsworth, Burgon, and others consider the feast of tabernacles to have been a very significant type of our Lord's incarnation. I confess that I am unable to see it. If the feast was typical at all, which is not certain, I venture the conjecture that it was meant to be a type of our Lord's second advent. My reasons are these:

(a) It was the last in order of the Jewish feasts every year and formed the completion of the annual routine of Mosaic ordinances. It wound up all.

(b) It was kept at the end of harvest when the year's work was done and the fruits were all gathered in.

(c) It was an occasion of special rejoicing and festivity, more than any of the feasts. The dwelling in booths seems to have been a circumstance of the feast less essential than the rejoicing.

(d) It followed immediately after the feast of trumpets and the day of atonement. On that day the High Priest went into the holy of holies and then came out to bless the people. (See Isa. xxvii.13; 1 Thes. iv.16.)

(e) It followed immediately after the jubilee every fiftieth year. That jubilee, and proclamation of liberty to all, was in the seventh month.

(f) It is that special feast which, after the Jews are restored and Jerusalem rebuilt, the nations are yet to keep in the future kingdom of Christ. (Zech. xiv.16.)

I venture this conjecture with much diffidence, but I think it deserves consideration. In the six points I have mentioned, I see much more of the second advent than of the first. To my eyes the feast of passover was a type of Christ crucified; the feast of pentecost--of Christ sending forth the Holy Ghost in this dispensation; the feast of tabernacles--of Christ coming again to gather His people in one joyous company, to reap the harvest of the earth, to wind up this dispensation, to come forth and bless His people, and to proclaim a jubilee to all the earth.

3.--[*His brethren.*] Who these "brethren" were is a matter of dispute. Some think, as Alford, Stier, and others, that they were literally our Lord's own brethren and the children of Mary by Joseph, born after our Lord's birth. (See Psalm lxix.8.) Some think, as Theophylact and others, that they were the children of Joseph by a former marriage and brought up by Mary under the same roof with our Lord. Others think, as Augustine, Zwingle, Musculus, and Bengel, that the word "brethren" does not necessarily mean more than cousins or kinsmen. (See 1 Chron. xxiii.22.) This is the most probable opinion. I take these "brethren" to have been relatives and kinsmen of Joseph and Mary, living at Nazareth or Capernaum or elsewhere in Galilee, who naturally observed all our Lord's doings with interest and curiosity but at present did not believe on Him. To suppose, as some do, that these brethren were some of our Lord's Apostles, is to my

mind a most improbable theory and flatly contrary to the 5th verse of this chapter.

If Mary really had sons after the birth of our Lord, it certainly seems strange that our Lord, on the cross, should commend her to the care of John and not to her own sons, His half-brethren. That at the later part of His ministry He had some "brethren" who were not Apostles but believed is clear from Acts i.14. But whether they were the "brethren" of the text before us, we have no means of ascertaining.

[*Depart...that your disciples, etc.*] This recommendation, as well as the next verse, looks like the advice of men who as yet were not convinced of our Lord's Messiahship. The expression, "that Your disciples may see," seems also to indicate that the speakers were not yet of the number of our Lord's disciples. The language is that of bystanders looking on, waiting to see how the question is to be settled before they make up their own minds. It is as though they said, "Make haste, rally a party round Yourself, show some public proof that You are the Christ, and gather adherents." The "works" here mentioned must evidently mean miracles. This speech seems to imply that our Lord had a party of disciples in Judea and at Jerusalem. Many, it should be remembered, "believed on Him" at the first passover He attended. (John ii.23.)

4.--[*For there is no man, etc.*] This sentence is a kind of proverbial saying. Everyone knows that if a man seeks to be known openly, it is no use to do his work secretly.

[*If...show Yourself to the world.*] There seems to be a latent sneer about this sentence. "If you really are doing miracles to prove Yourself the Messiah, do not continue to hide Yourself here in Galilee. Go up to Jerusalem and do miracles there." That the speakers said this from an honest zeal for God's glory and a sincere desire to have our Lord known by others as well as themselves, is a view that I cannot think probable.

Some think that the words "if You do" mean "since You do," and see a parallel in Col. iii.1 where "if" does not imply any doubt whether the Colossians were "risen with Christ." Lampe thinks it means, "if You really and truly, not illusively, do miracles."

The false standard of an unconverted man is very manifest in this and the preceding verse. Such a one has no idea of waiting for man's praise and favor, and of being content without it if it does not come. He thinks that a religion should have the praise of the world, and labor to get it. The man of God remembers that true religion does not "cry, nor strive," nor court publicity.

5.--[*For neither did his brethren believe.*] These words appear to me to admit of only one meaning. They mean that these brethren of our Lord had at present no faith at all. They did not yet believe that Jesus was the Christ. They had no grace. They were not converted. The idea of some that the words mean, "His brethren did not fully and entirely believe in Him," seems to me utterly without foundation. It cannot, moreover, be reconciled with the language that soon follows: "The world cannot hate

you," etc. Such language cannot be applied to disciples. The whole teaching of the Bible shows clearly that it was quite possible to be a relative of Christ according to the flesh and yet not be converted. He that does God's will is as dear to Christ as "brother, or sister, or mother." (Mark iii.35.)

How frequently even the natural brethren of God's most eminent saints have been graceless and ungodly every Bible reader must often have observed. The cases of the brothers of Abel, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, and David will occur to our minds.

We should learn from a verse like this the desperate hardness of man's heart, the absolute necessity of grace to make anyone a disciple, and the extreme danger of familiarity with high spiritual privileges. We should remember too that a man may be a truly good and holy man and yet not have converted relatives. No one can give grace to his own family. "A prophet is not without honor but in his own country." (Mark vi.4.) Even our Lord was not believed by all around Him. He can truly sympathize with all His people who are in a similar position.

6.--[*My time is not yet come.*] These words must mean that our Lord did everything during His earthly ministry according to a pre-ordained plan, and that He could take no step except in harmony with that plan. He doubtless spoke with a Divine depth of meaning that none but Himself could comprehend, and that must have been unintelligible at the time to His "brethren." To them His words would probably convey nothing more than the idea that for some reason or other He did not think the present a favorable opportunity for going to Jerusalem.

[*Your time is always ready.*] This sentence must mean that to unconverted people, like our Lord's brethren, it could make no matter what time they went up. All times were alike. They would excite no enmity and run no risk.

A Christian not possessing foreknowledge can only pray for guidance and direction as to the steps of his life and the ways and times of his actions; and having prayed, then make the best use of his judgment, trusting that a faithful God will not let him make mistakes.

7.--[*The world cannot hate you.*] These words surely settle the question as to the present state of our Lord's brethren. They were yet unconverted. Our Lord says, in another place, "If ye were of the world, the world would love his own." (John xv.19.)

[*But it hates Me...its works are evil.*] The true reason of this enmity of many of the Jews against Christ is here distinctly indicated. It was not merely His claims to be received as the Messiah. It was not merely the high and spiritual doctrine He preached. It was rather His constant testimony against the sinful lives and wicked practices of the many in His day. That adultery, covetousness, and hypocrisy were rife and common among the leading Pharisees is evident from many expressions in the Gospels. It was our Lord's witness against these darling sins that enraged His enemies.

The wickedness of human nature is painfully shown in this sentence. Christ was "hated." It is an utter delusion to suppose that there is any innate response to perfect moral purity or any innate admiration of "the true, the pure, the just, the kind, the good, and the beautiful" in the heart of man. God gave man, 1800 years ago, a perfect pattern of purity, truth, and love, in the person of our Lord while He was upon earth. And yet we are told He was "hated."

True Christians must never be surprised if they are "hated" like their Lord. "The disciple is not above his Master." "Marvel not, my brethren, if the world hates you." (Matt. x.24, 1 John iii.13.) In fact, the more like Christ they are the more likely to be "hated." Moreover, they must not be cast down and make themselves miserable under the idea that it is their inconsistencies the world hates, and that if they were more consistent and lovely in life the world would like them better. This is a complete mistake and a common delusion of the devil. What the world hates about Christians is neither their doctrines nor their faults, but their holy lives. Their lives are a constant testimony against the world, which makes the men of the world feel uncomfortable, and therefore the world hates them.

Let us note that unpopularity among men is no proof that a Christian is wrong, either in faith or practice. The common notion of many--that it is a good sign of a person's character to be well-spoken of by everybody--is a great error. When we see how our Lord was regarded by the wicked and worldly of His day, we may well conclude that it is a very poor compliment to be told that we are liked by everybody. There can surely be very little "witness" about our lives if even the wicked like us. "Woe unto you when all men shall speak well of you." (Luke vi.26.) That sentence is too much forgotten.

Erasmus used to say that Luther might have had an easy life if he had not touched the Pope's crown and the monks' bellies.

Bengel observes, "Those who please all men at all times ought deservedly to look on themselves with suspicion."

8.--[*Ye go up to this feast.*] These words can hardly be called a command. They rather mean, "If you wish to go at once, go, and do not tarry for Me."

[*I will not...time is not yet fully come.*] Here the reason already given and commented on is repeated. Our Lord did not say He would not go to the feast, but, Not yet. There was "a time" for all His actions and every step of His ministry, and that time had not yet fully arrived; or, as the Greek literally means, was not "fulfilled." True Christians should remember that, like their Master on this occasion, they and worldly men cannot well work and act and move together. They will often find it so. Their principles are different. Their reasons and motives of action are different. They will often find that "two cannot walk together unless they are agreed."

It seems strange that any reasonable person should see difficulty in this passage, as if it threw a color of doubt on our Lord's veracity. Yet

Augustine has a Homily on the subject in defense of our Lord. Surely the simplest and most natural view is that our Lord meant, "I am not going up yet," and "am not going, at any rate, in the public caravan with yourselves." This is Chrysostom's view and Theophylact's. At an early period Porphyry tried to fasten on our Lord the charge of inconstancy of purpose, out of this passage. An enemy of Christianity must be sadly at a loss for objections if he can find no better than one founded on this place.

9.--[*When he said...remained in Galilee.*] This means that He stayed at the place where this conversation took place while His brethren started on their journey to Jerusalem. What the place in Galilee was we are not told.

10.--[*But when his brethren...he also...feast.*] We are not told what interval there was between our Lord's setting off for Jerusalem and His brethren's departure. The words before us would seem to indicate that He set off very soon after them. One reason, perhaps, for our Lord not going with them was His desire to avoid being made a public show by His relatives. They had very likely a carnal desire to call attention to Him and to rally a party of adherents round Him for their own worldly ends. To avoid affording any opportunity for this, our Lord would not go in their company. He had not forgotten, no doubt, that in Galilee there was a party who once would fain have "taken Him by force to make Him a king." (John vi.15.) He wished to keep clear of that party.

[*Not openly, but...in secret.*] This probably only means that our Lord did not go in the caravan or large company of His kinsmen who, according to custom, went up together from Galilee, but in a more private manner. How large the caravans or gatherings of fellow travelers going up to the three great feasts must have been, we may easily see from the account of our Lord being not missed by Mary and Joseph at first when He went up to Jerusalem with them at the age of twelve. "Supposing Him to have been *in their company*, they went a day's journey, and sought Him among their kinsfolk and acquaintance." (Luke ii.44.) Our Lord never sought publicity but once, and that was when He entered Jerusalem at the last passover, just before His crucifixion. Then he wanted to draw attention to the great sacrifice He was about to offer up on the cross. The contrast between His conduct on that occasion and the present one is very remarkable.

When it says that "He went in secret," it does not necessarily mean that He went alone. There is no reason to suppose that His own chosen Apostles had gone without Him. It only means that He did not go up publicly in the company of all "His kinsfolk and acquaintance" from Galilee.

11.--[*Then the Jews sought Him.*] If, as usually is the case in St. John, the "Jews" here mean the rulers and Pharisees, there can be little doubt that they sought Jesus in order to kill Him, as the first verse tells us they wished to do. They naturally concluded that, like all devout Jews, He would come up to Jerusalem to the feast.

[*Where is He?*] Here, as in many other places, the Greek word rendered "he" implies dislike and contempt. It is as if they said, "that fellow" (see Matt. xxvii.63), "that deceiver."

12.--[*There was much murmuring.*] As a general rule, the Greek word rendered "murmuring" means an undercurrent of discontent or dislike not openly expressed. (Thus, Acts vi.1.) But here, and at verse 32, it does not seem to mean more than muttering and private conversation, implying only that people were not satisfied about our Lord and privately talked much to one another about Him.

[*The people.*] This word in the Greek is in the plural and evidently means the multitude, or crowd of persons who were gathered at Jerusalem on account of the feast, in contradistinction to the rulers who were called "the Jews."

[*Some said...others said, etc.*] These expressions show the feeling of the common people towards our Lord and are doubtless indicative of the classes from which the two opinions came. The class of simple-minded, true-hearted Israelites, who had sufficient independence to think for themselves, would say of Our Lord, "He is a good man." So also would the Galileans, probably, who had seen and heard most of our Lord's ministry. On the other hand, the class of carnal Jews who thought nothing of true religion and were led like a mob at the beck of the priests and Pharisees, would probably take their cue from the rulers and say, "He deceives the people," simply because they were told so. Such, probably, was the feeling of the lower orders at Jerusalem.

Let it be noted that Christ is and always has been the cause of division of opinion, wherever He has come or has been preached. To some He is a savor of "life," and to others of "death." (2 Cor. ii.16.) He draws out the true character of mankind. They either like Him or dislike Him. Strife and conflict of opinion are the certain consequences of the Gospel really coming among men with power. The fault is not in the Gospel but in human nature. Stillness and quiet are signs not of life but of death. The sun calls forth miasma and malaria from the swamps it shines upon, but the fault is not in the sun but in the land. The very same rays call forth fertility and abundance from the cornfield.

13.--[*However no man spoke openly...fear of the Jews.*] This expression, of course, applies specially to those who favored our Lord. Those who hated Him would not fear to say so openly. This verse shows the length to which the enmity of the Jewish rulers against our Lord had already gone. It was a notorious fact among the lower orders that the heads of the nation hated Jesus and that it was a dangerous thing to talk favorably of Him or to manifest any interest in Him. The fear of man is a powerful principle among most people. Rulers have little idea how many things are secretly talked of sometimes among subjects and kept back from them. Two hundred years ago the Stuarts could persecute all open and outspoken favorers of the English Puritans, but they could not prevent the lower orders secretly talking of them and imbibing prejudices in their favor.