

## SERMON NOTES

Sunday, April 20

Synaxis Gospel  
John 7:14-23

### KNOWING THE TRUTH

#### INTRODUCTION

Today in our reading, the Armenian Church continues to reflect on some of the teachings of Jesus that the disciples did not grasp until after the Resurrection of our Lord. Next Sunday will be our last lesson in this series before we celebrate His Ascension and the end of the forty-day period when Christ was able to open the disciples' eyes to understand all that He had taught and done during His three-year ministry.

The Gospel of John records that during the three-year ministry even our Lord's physical brothers (or relatives) did not believe on Him. The time of our reading is probably six months before the Crucifixion. It is Fall and Christ's brothers have urged Him to go up to the yearly harvest festival, the Feast of Tabernacles, and support His claims with a demonstration of His powers. The Father, however, guided Jesus in all things and thus the timing of His attendance was not to be at the beginning of the feast but at its mid-point.

The people had been searching for Jesus and He was the talk of the crowd. They were divided in their opinions about Him. Some believed that He might very well be the promised Messiah or Christ, the great Davidic king Who was to come and bring their salvation. Others thought that He was a charlatan who misled the people. (However, by the end of the feast, so many people had believed on Him that the religious leaders sent out a contingent of soldiers to arrest Him.) Our reading begins with Jesus' appearance at the feast.

#### SYNAXIS READING

John 7:14-23

*Now about the mid-point of the feast Jesus went up into the temple, and taught.*

*And the Jews marveled, saying, "How does this man know letters, having never learned?"*

*Jesus answered them, and said, "My doctrine is not Mine, but His that sent Me. If any man will do His will, he shall know of the doctrine, whether it is of God, or whether I speak of Myself"*

*He that speaks of himself seeks his own glory: but He that seeks the glory of Him that sent Him, the same is true, and no unrighteousness is in Him.*

*Did not Moses give you the law, and yet none of you keep the law? Why are you seeking to kill Me?"*

*The people answered and said, "You have a devil: who is seeking to kill you?"*

*Jesus answered and said to them, "I have done one work, and you all marvel.*

*Moses therefore gave you circumcision; (not because it is of Moses, but of the fathers;) and you on the Sabbath day circumcise a man.*

*If a man on the Sabbath day receives circumcision, that the law of Moses should not be broken; are you angry at Me, because I have made a man completely healthy on the Sabbath day?"*

## NOTES

Now about the mid-point of the feast Jesus went up into the temple, and taught.

This feast was the feast of Tabernacles, or Booths. It occurs in the Fall after the harvest and is a celebration of the harvest. Moreover, it is also a commanded remembrance of the trek through the wilderness 1400 years earlier after the Lord delivered them from Egyptian slavery. For a fuller discussion of this feast, see the Sermon Notes for January 27, 'Living Water.'

The temple colonnade of the outer court is probably the venue of this teaching event. What Jesus taught on this occasion is not recorded. However later during the feast He used the water celebration as an illustration of His promise to give the Holy Spirit to those who believe in Him (Jesus). See the Sermon Notes, 'Living Water.'

And the Jews marveled, saying, "How does this man know letters, having never learned?"

Most Jewish men could read and write. The synagogues were established not only for the purpose of local worship but also as centers for education. Therefore, the Jews were not amazed that Jesus was literate but, rather, they were wondering how Jesus could discuss the Scriptures so powerfully without having ever studied with any of the famous rabbis.

Jesus answered them, and said, “My doctrine is not Mine, but His that sent Me.

The doctrine, or teaching, of Jesus that amazed the Jewish leadership was from God, the Father. The Scriptures were from God in the first place. No wonder then that Jesus could expound them so brilliantly. He was and is the Word of God.

If any man will [should want to] do His will, he shall know of the doctrine, whether it is of God, or whether I speak of Myself.

This statement gives us the key to knowing the truth. We do not know the teachings of Jesus are true by investigation or study, but by an attitude. This attitude is one of willingness to serve God, to do His will. If we are willing to do His will, it will be revealed to us whether the teachings of Jesus are from God or not. We are told in John 16:13 that the Holy Spirit will teach us:

“Howbeit when He, the Spirit of **truth**, is come, He will guide you into all **truth**: for He shall not speak of Himself; but whatsoever He shall hear, that shall He speak: and He will show you things to come.”

We can learn many facts from scholars, even scholars who are not believers in our Lord and who may even be atheists or agnostics. Many of these have excellent insights from a literary point of view into the Scriptures. However, their insights do not give us the confidence that what the Scriptures teach is actually true. This confidence can only come from the witness of the Holy Spirit with our spirit. Our verse teaches us that He does this for those who **want** to obey God.

He that speaks of himself seeks his own glory: but He that seeks the glory of Him that sent Him, the same is true, and no unrighteousness is in Him.

Here Jesus steps back to examine His own motives. If He were seeking His own glory independent of the Father's, He would claim the teachings as His own or teach whatever He wanted to teach. However this is not the case. Jesus seeks the glory of the Father and He teaches what the Father instructs Him to teach. Therefore, no unrighteousness can be found in Jesus. He is true (honest, genuine). He is the voice of God.

Did not Moses give you the law, and yet none of you keep the law?

The Jews of Jesus' day recognized the writings of Moses, the Law, as God's will for them. One of the reasons they so hated Jesus is that He showed them that instead of obeying the Law as they claimed to do, they really disobeyed it. Below He will show them again that their murderous hatred for Him was disobedience to the Law.<sup>1</sup> No wonder then that they could not know that Jesus was Who He said He was. Their willful disobedience blocked their ability to know.

Even the most amazing things will not bring confidence concerning the truth about our Lord. As Jesus taught in the Parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus:

“If they hear [obey] not **Moses** and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded, though one rose from the dead.”<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> In the judgment, it will be Moses who will testify against these Jews who claim that they honor and obey Moses and the Law. See John 5:45-46.

<sup>2</sup> Luke 16:31

This concept that willingness to obey God brings knowledge of the truth was not new. The prophet Daniel had written:

“As it is written in the Law of **Moses**, all this evil is come upon us: yet made we not our prayer before the LORD our God, that we might turn from our iniquities, and understand thy truth.”<sup>3</sup>

The people of Daniel's day preferred their iniquities to obeying God; they therefore did not understand God's truth.

### Why are you seeking to kill Me?”

Suddenly, to prove His point about their disobedience to the Law of Moses, He reminds them of His last visit to Jerusalem.<sup>4</sup> At that time, Jesus had healed a cripple who had been unable to walk for 38 years. Jesus had performed this miracle on a Sabbath day. For this the rulers wanted to kill him. See last weeks' Sermon Notes: 'The Offer of Eternal Life' for a discussion of that event.

### The people answered and said, “You have a devil: who is seeking to kill you?”

The 'people' here are obviously those who were in the group whose opinion of Jesus was negative. They are accusing Jesus of being deluded. In the verses beyond our reading, people are recorded mentioning that the rulers were, in fact, seeking to kill Jesus.

### Jesus answered and said to them, “I have done one work, and you all marvel.

Again Jesus refers back to the miracle of healing the crippled man at the Pool of Bethesda. They were all astounded at that time.

At that time, Jesus had defended Himself by claiming His activity was united to the Father's activity. Now He gives a legal reason why they should not accuse Him of breaking the Sabbath. It is the precedence of the law of circumcision over the law of the Sabbath.

### Moses therefore gave you circumcision; (not because it is of Moses, but of the fathers;) and you on the Sabbath day circumcise a man.

The law of circumcision had not originated with the Laws of Moses. Abraham, the patriarch who lived hundreds of years before Moses, had been commanded by God to circumcise himself, his son, and all males who belonged to Abraham's household. This circumcision was to be the sign of the Covenant between God and Abraham and all of Abraham's descendents.

“This is My covenant, which you shall keep, between Me and you and thy seed after thee; every man-child among you shall be circumcised. And you shall circumcise the flesh of your foreskin; and it shall be a token of the covenant between you and I.

And he that is eight days old shall be circumcised among you, every man-child in your generations, he that is born in the house, or bought with money of any

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<sup>3</sup> Daniel 9:13

<sup>4</sup> See John 5. Because of this connection some scholars believe that John 7 should follow immediately after John 5.

stranger, which is not of thy seed. He that is born in thy house, and he that is bought with thy money, must needs be circumcised: and My covenant shall be in your flesh for an everlasting covenant.”<sup>5</sup>

If the eighth day fell on a Sabbath, the child was circumcised. The Law of circumcision took precedence over the Law of keeping the Sabbath free of work.

**If a man on the Sabbath day receives circumcision, that the law of Moses should not be broken; are you angry at Me, because I have made a man completely healthy on the Sabbath day?”**

Moses had included the law of circumcision in the Law. In order to keep this law, the Sabbath law was in effect set aside. Jesus argues that if a tiny little piece of a male can be operated on [and thus that organ is made healthy] and the Sabbath is not ‘broken’ why are they angry that He restored to health an entire man on the Sabbath?

Later, according to Luke’s Gospel, as He made His last journey to Jerusalem, our Lord used other examples. They saw nothing wrong in giving their ox or their ass a drink of water on the Sabbath or if their ox happened to fall into a pit, they did not think they were breaking the Sabbath to pull the animal out. Why did they accuse Him of breaking the Sabbath because He helped a human being on the Sabbath?<sup>6</sup>

Clearly, these monitors of the Law of Moses were ignorant of the spirit of the Law (which they had no desire to keep) and could not therefore know the truth, which was given only to those who truly desired to obey God.

## APPLICATION

There are four Sundays in which the Armenian Church celebrates with a feast the symbol of our faith, the Cross of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. It symbolizes His death for us, the death we deserved but which He gladly died so that we might forever live with Him. The Cross is a symbol of this wonderful truth. Today is one of those four Sundays.

The Cross is not a symbol of truth for everyone, but only for those who know the truth about Jesus Christ. Jesus was not simply a man, not simply a wise and good man. He was not simply a prophet of God. He was and is God Himself. St. John tells us that Jesus is the incarnation of the Word of God Who functions as the Actor for the Father functioning as the Initiator and Director within the Godhead—the One and only God. St. Paul tells us that in the man, Jesus Christ, dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily. This is the One Who hung on the Cross in our place. However, for the majority of the people of the world this is just another teaching of a religion, the truth of which cannot be known.

Even among Christian teachers, it is often taught that one must take a ‘leap of faith’ and just blindly believe. This is not the teaching of our passage. On the contrary, our lesson

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<sup>5</sup> Genesis 17:10 and following

<sup>6</sup> See Luke 13:15 and 14:5.

teaches us that the truth can be known. However there is a requirement. One must be **willing** to obey God.

The knowledge that God exists is hardwired into our nature. St. Paul teaches this in the first chapter of his letter to the Romans (1:19-21):

“Because that which may be known of God is manifest in them; for God has showed it to them.

For the invisible things of Him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead; so that they are without excuse: because that, when they knew God, they glorified Him not as God, neither were thankful; but became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened.”

This teaching is confirmed by anthropologists, who have never found a community of humans that did not believe in a Higher Power. Mankind believes there is a God. Those few who deny there is a God, atheists, are fools according to the Bible.<sup>7</sup> Agnostics simply do not have proof and so they do not feel they can definitely say one way or the other. For most of us, then, belief in God is not the problem; acknowledging our responsibility to Him—to be thankful and to glorify Him—is the problem. This insinuates obedience.

The Jews of Jesus day believed in God. They also believed He had spoken through Moses and His will for them was written in the Law. This was not the problem. The problem for them was that they wanted to play at obeying God. They wanted to be thought of as obedient, even to the extreme. But their heart was far from Him and real obedience in spirit and in truth was not a part of their lives. This is the reason that they did not recognize Who Jesus was and is. To this day they have the same problem. **To know the Truth, one must be willing to obey God. Really obey God.**

The Gentiles and nominal Christians have the same problem. Do we want to know if what Jesus taught about Himself and His mission is really true? Do we want to know if He really is God? Do we want to know if it is true that He died and rose again on our behalf, out of love for us? This does not take a ‘leap of faith.’ It takes a ‘leap of obedience.’ God has promised that we will know the truth if we are willing to obey God. If so, His Holy Spirit will confirm to our spirit that it is true. Until that time, we will never really know.

On this special day, as we celebrate the great symbol of truth, the Holy Cross, let us once and for all commit ourselves to Him who died upon it for our sakes, let us commit

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<sup>7</sup> Psalm 14:1

to knowing His will for us and to obeying Him with a whole heart. In doing so all doubts will be ripped from our minds and we will know the Truth. We will **know** with confidence that Jesus Christ is God; that He died to pay the penalty for our sins. We will **know** with confidence that if we place our trust in Him, believing that He will forgive us when we repent and that He will clear us of our sins, then we have eternal life with Him.