

Resistance at Christmas

John 7:37-52

Sermon Outline

Introduction: There is a great irony that we face every Advent: We talk a lot about the birth of Jesus and yet Jesus is largely ignored. We will consider two bad reasons for ignoring Jesus and one good reason for taking him seriously.

I) **First bad reason for ignoring Jesus: He doesn't fit our paradigm**

A) **The argument**

vv. 40-43 ...Has not the Scripture said that...

Jesus was an enigma to his contemporaries

B) **Jesus is an enigma to us as well**

We are drawn to his teaching and love, but put off by other things

1) He centers his message on himself:

If anyone thirsts, let him come to me...

2) His universalism

If anyone thirsts...

3) One way to sidestep the enigma of the biblical Jesus is to raise doubts about the historicity of that Jesus.

"The quest for the historical Jesus"

The latest and trendy expression of that quest: The Gnostic Gospels

C) **Response: Why this is a bad reason to ignore him**

If he did fit in—if he was "trendy"—then he most likely would have been made up by us

II) **The second bad reason for ignoring Jesus His followers are "lame" (or at least not like us)**

A) **The argument**

vv. 45-49 ...The crowd is accursed...Are you from Galilee too?

The Pharisees are avoiding Jesus by making fun of those who are urging them to take him seriously

"Ad hominem" argument: Commonly used and often effective with those who don't really want to think

The modern version: Granted c. 2.3 billion people profess Christ. But the vast majority are poor, powerless, and with limited education. What's more, their leaders are routinely involved in scandal. So why pay any attention to the Person they seek to promote?

B) **Response:**

This way of thinking is effective because it seems plausible.

But it is wrong-headed

When Jesus rose and cried out, he was pleading. “Look at me. Don’t let what other people say and do (some of them in my name) detract you from what I say and do. I am the issue, not them!”

Summary: Something revealing about how readily people welcome bad reasons for ignoring Jesus.

**III) A good reason for taking Jesus seriously:
He offers to transform our lives and our world**

A) Evidence: vv. 37-38

Not simply offering to make us feel better or to give us meaning.
Rather, offering to change us forever from the inside out and to make us part of the renewal of everything

The Feast of Tabernacles:

Remembrance of God’s care in the wilderness

A harvest festival

Had morphed by Jesus’ day into a feast that longed for the day when God would pour out his Spirit to raise the dead and renew all things.

B) Jesus’ offer in the light of the Feast of Tabernacles

C) What about us?

Conclusion: We can be sure that Jesus will follow through on this offer because of what he did to make it possible. He freely chose to suffer hell and death to those who trust him the sort of vessel that could hold him without fear.

Questions for Reflection this Week

- 1) In what ways did Jesus not fit into the paradigm of the religious leaders in this passage?
- 2) What about Jesus does not fit into your paradigm? What, in other words, troubles you about his life and claims? Why does it bother you?
- 3) Imagine a friend saying, “How dare you say, in the light of all the great world religions that vie for our attention, that Jesus must be at the center of things—not just for you, but for everybody?”
- 4) Discuss or reflect upon the following response to the contemporary fascination with certain Gnostic texts, promoted by some as valid alternatives to the picture of Jesus we find in the NT: “The fashion of favoring Gnostic texts, even admittedly very bizarre ones, over against the canonized Scriptures has a great deal more to do with the social and religious (or indeed anti-religious) fashion in North America than with actual historical research.” (N. T. Wright, *Judas and the Gospel of Jesus*, pp. 123-124).
- 5) The religious leaders in this passage use “ad hominem” arguments to dismiss the testimony of the “officers” and of Nicodemus (ironically, one of their own). What is an “ad hominem” argument? Why is it effective? Why is it a poor form or argument? How are “ad hominem” arguments used in our day to avoid serious engagement with Jesus?
- 6) What would Jesus’ offer of living waters have meant to his hearers, given such passages as Ezekiel 47:1-12, Zechariah 14:8-9, and Exodus 17:5-7 (see 1 Corinthians 10:4)? How do these passages help us to see that the promise is bigger than a promise simply to give us joy or meaning?
- 7) Reflect upon the following: “Jesus promises to live in you to make you less interested in how much sleep you got last night and more interested in how much sleep your spouse got; to make you less interested in pornography and more interested in seeing sex-trafficking brought to an end; to make you less concerned about your reputation and more interested in the reputation of your colleagues; to make you less interested in succeeding and more interested in being faithful.”