

Keeping the Feast, Rejecting the Christ

(John 7:1-13)

Quick recap from last sermon: We talked about forgiveness last Sunday. In ancient Israel, God's people were known for worshipping the Lord God alone. All their neighbours worshipped many gods. In Israel, monotheism was their hallmark — what made them different from everybody else. In the same way, forgiveness is the hallmark of Christianity. While the world around us praises revenge and exclusion, we boast in forgiveness — it's what makes us different from everyone else.

Today's Sermon Scenario: Think of going to a party while not being fond of the main guest. You would wish he would throw the party while remaining absent. That's how they felt about Christ at the Feast of Tabernacles.

Verse 5 says that “even his brothers did not believe in him,” and verse 8 says, “they went to the festival, but Jesus stayed behind.”

What was the Feast of Tabernacles?

In Israel there were six main religious feasts: three spring feasts (Passover/Unleavened Bread, First fruits, Pentecost) and three fall feasts (Trumpets, the Day of Atonement, and Tabernacles).

Eschatological Perspective: Christians differ in how they see these fulfilled by Christ. In my personal opinion, I like to interpret the spring festivals as having been fulfilled *literally* by Christ at his first coming: his death on Passover, his resurrection on the Sunday of First fruits, and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on Pentecost. Then, at his second coming, he will *literally* fulfill the last three feasts, culminating in the Feast of Tabernacles, with the New Jerusalem being God's final and perfect tabernacle.

O.T. Perspective: In the Old Testament, this festival was established as a memorial to the 40 years the Israelites wandered in the desert, where they lived in tents. Hence the name.

The first couple of verses give another layer of context: there was a price tag on Jesus' head. Being a follower of Christ was costly; it could cost your life. It is similar to being a Christian in the Arabic world, North Korea, or China today.

1. Wrong Motive: Self-Promotion

The high cost of discipleship, so clear in the text, seems to be underestimated by Jesus' brothers, who urged him to attend the feast and draw as much attention as possible.

I draw your attention to the reason behind their wrong suggestion: **marketing and disbelief.**

A. Self-promotion

Verse 4 clearly reveals their hearts: "No one who wants to become a public figure does things in secret."

Think of the billion-dollar industry of marketing, with paid advertisements everywhere you look. Companies spend millions on it, and they make billions from it. If you go to a party, there are cameras and cellphones everywhere capturing every moment. The photographer is ready to go home and make a nice video with a cool song in the background. That video will be posted, and thousands of people will have all kinds of thoughts about the party.

That is essentially what Jesus' brothers are advising him to do — with a catch: while marketing promotes a product or service, they wanted Jesus to promote **himself**.

- "Do your miracles in the capital, Jerusalem, not just in Galilee."
- "Preach your best sermon in the Temple."
- "Display your wisdom to everyone, not just to your inner-circle disciples."

Jesus, obviously, rejects such advice.

B. Disbelief

Verse 5 says, “They said those things because they did not believe in him.”

After all, this was not advice; it was a trap, a challenge, a temptation — similar to the temptations the devil had previously brought before Jesus: “If you are the Son of God, make these stones become bread,” or “throw yourself down from the Temple.”

His brothers did not believe in him in the past (Mark 3); they did not believe in him now; and they would only believe in him later — after the resurrection.

2. Right Motive: Promoting God

Jesus’ reply is threefold: his relationship with God, with the world, and with his brothers.

A. His Relationship with God

He does the Father’s will, not his own.

This echoes the 40 years the Israelites spent in the wilderness: they moved according to the command of the Lord. When the cloud rose and moved, the whole assembly moved. When the cloud stopped and rested, the whole assembly stopped.

B. His Relationship with the World

Jesus loves the people in the world; he came to save them. Yet they hate him because they do not understand his love for them.

He wants to bring them into the light, but they love darkness instead.

C. His Relationship with His Brothers

They must go to the feast without Jesus. They can go publicly, while Jesus can only go in secret.

And here we find the most painful truth of today’s sermon — and really of this whole chapter: *they went to a religious feast while the Lord of the feast was left behind.*

That is where the title comes from: **“Keeping the Feast, Rejecting the Christ.”**

3. The Public Opinion: A Mix of Opinions

The last point of today’s sermon is the public opinion. There are three different opinions:

- Jesus is good.
- Jesus is a deceiver.
- Jesus deserves to be killed.

There is tension in the air. You can feel it. People are whispering about him. It almost resembles election season, when you try to say who you are voting for without directly saying it, because your goal is to convince your neighbour that your candidate is the best choice.

They are basically saying: “He is good — I would vote for him.” Or: “He is a deceiver — I would not vote for him.”

Among the leaders, there is even a deeper layer to the issue, since they are discussing killing him.

It is important to note that all of this happens in private conversations among the leaders. It would look bad for them to openly say they wanted to kill someone — especially someone performing miracles. So, this information remains “in the air,” with no official statement to confirm it.

They were all wondering whether Jesus would attend the feast or not.

We finish this introductory sermon here, with their expectation. I can give you an obvious spoiler alert: Jesus does attend the feast — and we will see that next week.

Conclusion:

A. Saving Faith

Pastor John Piper points out that mere knowledge about Jesus is not enough for salvation. His brothers knew he did marvelous things, yet they did not believe in him.

B. Clarification Regarding the Doctrine of Mary's Perpetual Virginity

Some throughout church history have proposed that Mary remained perpetually a virgin.

It is clear that Mary had children with Joseph — which is not sinful. Children are a blessing, and so is sexual intimacy within the covenant of marriage.

Obviously, Jesus' birth was different from that of his brothers. Mary bore Jesus' brothers, while Jesus is eternally begotten of the Father.

C. Choose Jesus Rather Than Rituals

The feast makes no sense without the guest of honour. Worship makes no sense if the one who should be worshipped is absent. Heaven is heaven because Jesus is there.

Therefore, choose Jesus — always.