

Understanding Opposition for Being a Christian

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John 7:1-10

October 8, 2023

There were people everywhere. Everyone had gathered to worship and celebrate God's provision, how he's taking care of them in the past and he's taking care of them in the present. Their hearts are filled with gratitude, that despite hardship, despite difficulties, despite trials of various kinds, they know God is with them and he will be with them forever, and that truth is good. That fact that God is with them fills hearts with a sense of security and thanksgiving and hope. But then all of a sudden, a voice shatters your attention. It pierces the moment. What he says doesn't seem to make sense at first because everybody is so thankful and hopeful, but yet what he says also resonates with you on a level that's deeper than the hope, deeper than the security, deeper than the gratitude that you were feeling that day.

He may have been speaking to thousands in the crowd, but it's almost like he was only talking to you when he proclaimed, "If anyone thirsts, let him come to me and drink." When Jesus shouted these words in the temple on the last day of the feast, he touched on something fundamental to the human experience, which is thirst. Thirst is the body's response to a lack of fluid. It's a response to the onset of dehydration. If you think about it, thirst is a gift. I mean, if you didn't get thirsty, if you suffered from adipsia, which is you lack the capacity for thirst, then you're constantly at risk from dehydration, which is a condition that if it's not treated leads to kidney problems, even kidney failure, seizures and even death. So, thirst tells you something is missing. It tells you something you need is missing. It tells you something essential for your life is missing, and Jesus uses thirst to describe a spiritual lack, something missing, a thirst deep in your soul.

Many of you here today, you know the thirst that he's talking about, your past, your mistakes, your sins created a lack in you, an uneasiness, a guilt, a thirst that you didn't know how to quench. You tried things that offered to satisfy but only added to the uneasiness deepened the guilt and increased the thirst. You tried those things. That is until you came to Christ, and then in him, you found the one who forgave your past and who took your guilt and who was punished for your sins and by doing so, he satisfied the thirst in your soul when you gave your life to him. That time in your life, that day, that moment is the best moment of your life. Your heart was changed, your life was changed. It's like the old you was gone, completely passed away and a new you was reborn, forgiven and satisfied, secure and free.

Now, you wouldn't trade that for anything in the world. You wouldn't trade what Jesus did for you. There's nothing that could take that away from you, and yet this best thing that's ever happened to you has also become the source of opposition. The greatest thing that's ever happened to you, your sins forgiven, your guilt removed, your acceptance with God forever

guaranteed, you start to see that not everyone is so thrilled about your soul's thirst being quenched forever. It's like as soon as you believed in Jesus, as soon as you gave your life to Him, you found that you became people's enemy. And our text today is going to help you understand opposition for being a Christian. See, in one way or another opposition for being a Christian is going to be our experience. In the midst of what one scholar called a travel log at the beginning of chapter 7 with little practical value, I think there is a ton of practical value in our text today.

Value because the truth here will help you with the opposition, maybe even the persecution that there is for being a Christian. As we jump into the text, I want to set the stage for what we're going to see. So, in total, Jesus spent around a year in the northern part of Israel in a region called Galilee around the Sea of Galilee. In total, the events it took place during that time are recounted in Mark 3 to Mark 9 with some of the most famous events during this time being His choosing of the 12 and calming a storm and feeding 5,000, which is probably closer to 10 to 20,000, which we also saw in John 6. Now when we compare John 6:4 four to John 7:2, we see there's a six-month gap between the end of John 6 and the beginning of John 7. And it talks about in verse two, this Feast of Booths, which I went in depth on that a few weeks ago.

So if you're like, what is that Feast of Booths? Well, I'd encourage you to go back to that message or just wait because we're going to come back to many of those things as we go through the rest of John as that feast takes place. One thing I do want you to know about the feast though is that this feast ended on Friday in Israel, and Hamas attacked on Saturday. That would be like us getting attacked on December 26th at a point when everyone is relaxed and satisfied and happy and enjoying life after a major holiday. Now during this last six months of this year in Galilee, Mark 7-9 tells us that Jesus fed 4,000. It's probably closer to 10,000. Peter confessed Jesus as the Messiah. Jesus was transfigured, and throughout that period of time, you see Jesus battling the religious leaders and that battle, that opposition, is clearly on display as we jump into verse 1. Notice, "After this, Jesus went about in Galilee. He wouldn't walk around in Judea because the Jews were seeking to kill him."

So, while Jesus' popularity is swelling to thousands in the north, in the south, the political and religious center of Judea, which is the county and Jerusalem, the capital city, hatred for Jesus has been swelling there. He is a wanted man, and those Jewish authorities are resolved that he has to die. So, Jesus stays up north for six months. What he does is he mostly trains his disciples who are going to be the ones that take this movement on after he ascends back to heaven, but hostility, this hostility we see in verse one is just going to build and build and build until six months after this feast, when Jesus is back in Jerusalem for the feast of Passover.

At that time, these authorities will get their wish and Jesus will be executed. Now here's the thing. Many of the people who received the Gospel of John, and many who have read this book down through the ages, would know what it is like to have people verse 1, "Seeking to kill them." So in a text that speaks to them in ways that it doesn't speak to us, with that in mind, it'd be good for us to point #1) ***Admit Opposition is Normal Christianity. Admit Opposition is Normal Christianity.*** If Jesus faced opposition, we will face opposition. It is normal.

It's interesting. In 1 Thessalonians 3, Paul describes what he did with this group of Christians in the city of Thessalonica, which is in modern Greece. He spent some three weeks to three months with these brand-new Christians and he tells us what it is that he talked to them about. And I would wonder, if you were around a brand-new Christian, they're like, I want to meet with you every day. What is it that you would keep telling them? What is it that you would keep reminding them of? I want you to hear what Paul kept reminding this group of Christians of. 1 Thessalonians 3:4. He says, "When we were with you, we kept telling you that we were to suffer affliction." Think about that. He wanted to make sure that they wouldn't be surprised that affliction and persecution wouldn't shock them when it came into their lives, so he kept telling them. Those are his words, kept telling them, that it was coming, that it was inevitable, it was inescapable because it's normal.

Opposition should be expected, opposition is predictable. Jesus does the same thing with his disciples. He prepares them for opposition. When he says, John 15:20, "Remember the word that I said to you." Remember what I told you in the past. I prepared you for this. I'm going to say it again though, "A servant is not greater than his master. If they persecuted me, they will also persecute you." Now, why is opposition normal Christianity? Because Satan is the persecutor of the church, and he prowls around like a lion seeking Christians to devour, and if you go find that verse in 1 Peter, you find that the way that he devours Christians is not through temptation. The way that he devours them is through suffering, affliction and opposition. Jesus talks about this. Mark chapter 4, he talks about seed that falls into the ground and sprouts up really fast, but you know what wipes that seed away, that growth away. Jesus says tribulation wipes it away. Satan's opposition to Christians will come through the world. 1 John 3:13 says, "Do not be surprised, brothers, that the world hates you." Don't be surprised when you see it.

Satan's opposition to Christians also comes through human governments as we see at the end of Jesus' life, as we see throughout the Book of Acts, let alone in places like China and North Korea, right? But Jesus did say Matthew 13:9, that some of his follower's quote "Will stand before governors and kings for my namesake." They will be persecuted by governments because they are Christians. In fact, Revelation 2:10 describes Satan as throwing Christians into prison. Read it. Revelation 2:10, it says Satan is going to throw you into prison. How does he do that? Through human government. Satan's opposition to Christians will also come through false religion. Again, as we see at the end of Jesus' life and as we can see throughout the book of Acts. Now listen, I know I'm saying all of this to Americans who hear all of that as completely foreign because we've enjoyed religious freedom and toleration for centuries.

We've known almost nothing of true opposition from any authorities for being Christians, at least until recently. I don't need to tell you that though. I mean you see it almost every day on your news or your newsfeed. Well, listen like Paul with the Thessalonians or Jesus with his disciples, point number one today is me, your pastor preparing you for when opposition comes to your life, getting your heart prepared for it so that if it comes or when it comes, it doesn't take you by surprise, because you know in that moment, wait a minute, this is normal Christianity." If Jesus

the Savior, the King, the Lord, if he was opposed, if he was persecuted, then our experience is not going to be any better.

But I do want you to see something in verse 1. Jesus did not go looking for suffering. Notice he didn't seek it out. He spent six months avoiding it so that he could do God's will for his life, which is teaching the truth and training the 12. So, in order to do God's will for his life, he stayed away from the areas that would cause him persecution. So in the same way, we should not purposefully put ourselves in dangerous situations, but if opposition comes while we're doing God's will in our homes or our neighborhoods or our jobs or at school, then just know what you are experiencing is normal. Admit in fact that what we've experienced for most of our lives, a country that tolerates and at times has promoted Christian ideology, admit that that is not normal. That's not normal for history. That's not even normal on our planet today.

But normal Christianity, true Christianity throughout the ages has been and will continue to be opposed to persecuted. That is until Jesus comes, and at that moment all opposition will cease. There's another source of opposition we need to be very aware of, and that source interestingly is what we see starting in verse 2. "Now the Jews Feast of Booths was at hand, so in light of that feast, his brother said to him, 'Leave here and go to Judea that your disciples also may see the works you are doing for no one works in secret if he seeks to be known openly. If you do these things,' you are doing these miracles, 'show yourself to the world.'" Now, before we get into the details, it might surprise you to learn that Jesus had brothers. In Matthew 13:56 says he also had sisters. These are the physical children of Mary and Joseph born after Jesus, who Luke 2:7 is called the firstborn son.

Jesus is called the firstborn son. That title only makes sense if what? If Joseph and Mary had other kids? Now the writings of the early Christians going all the way back to the 100s AD say that these brothers are just Jesus' relatives, maybe cousins, but certainly can't be his physical siblings. Now listen, the writings of early Christians, sometimes called church tradition, can be very helpful for tons of things, but when it contradicts the plain reading of the Bible like it does here, well we go with the Bible because the Bible is inspired. It came from God and tradition didn't.

And I want you to notice, Jesus' brothers have the pragmatic motives of a marketing firm, and they think that Jesus should too. They impugn his motives and even rebuke him. Like, we know that you really want to get your name out there. We know you want attention; we want to be famous. So go do that. Go get your name out there. Get out of backwoods Podunk Galilee and go to where the people are in Judea, especially during this feast where every Jewish male over 20 is going to be traveling to Jerusalem. Hey, you should go there. If you're really the Messiah, do your miracles there in the holy city. Thousands will be there if those religious leaders think you're great, thousands are going to follow you. Go to where the people are and be famous.

I want you to notice verse 5, John gives us some insight into why they said this, and their advice didn't come from a good or godly place. Verse 5, "They said this because not even his brothers," there's almost shock in those words, not even, "Not even his brothers believed in him." In fact,

their advice here sounds a lot like the opposing hiss of the serpent, doesn't it? Remember Matthew chapter 4? Satan takes Jesus to the temple and says, hey, climb up to the top and throw yourself down. The angels are going to protect you and everybody's going to see it. They're going to see this spectacular miracle and that's going to prove to everybody, you're the Son of God. Go be famous. Go do something like that. That same satanic advice is now coming out of the mouth of His brothers.

Well, Jesus would prove that he's the Messiah and the Son of God, right? But He would do that through a Roman cross in an empty tomb. Now listen, many Christians have found comfort in the love and acceptance of family, but not Jesus. And again, many who first read John, and many who have read it through the centuries would know the same doubt and the same opposition Jesus experienced from his family, and since that's the case it would be good for all of us to point **#2) Realize Opposition Often Comes from Family. Realize Opposition Often Comes from Family.**

Don't raise your hand, but anyone here know what I'm talking about? Every time I have asked that this weekend, I've gotten a response, every time, and most services, this is the point when people start to cry because this point is very real for many people in this room. I know many of you have wonderful godly Christian families, but I also know many of you don't, and that opposition from family is normal for you. Mark 3:21, Jesus' family, with the context including his brother and his mother Mary, they all tried to capture Jesus and get him away from the people because they actually thought, and I quote, "He is out of his mind." So listen, if Jesus' family thought he was out of his mind, do not be shocked when some or maybe even all of your family thinks that you are out of your mind for being a follower of Jesus. And Jesus in his kindness, his grace, his compassion for his followers gets us ready for opposition from family.

Listen to Matthew 10 verse 21. It says, "Brother will deliver brother over to death and the father, his child." I mean just even reading that. For us in America we're like, that's academic. That doesn't even make sense. But I remember going to a Muslim country and teaching people there that wanted to be missionaries into that country and one guy saying to me, telling me his testimony and saying to me, when I became a Christian, I hid it from my family, but somehow my family found out and as soon as they found out, my father started poisoning me.

This is real. "Children will rise against parents and have them put to death and you'll be hated by all," and now, "For My name's sake." You'll be hated because you are aligned with me. He prepares his followers again, Matthew 10:34, "Do not think that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I've not come to bring peace, but a sword." Now he explains what he means by that. "For I've come to set a man against his father and a daughter against her mother and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law." Jesus couldn't be any more clear on family opposition when he says Matthew 10:36, "That a person's family will be those of his own, a person's enemies will be those of his own household."

I mean we're not just talking about a couple snide remarks at Thanksgiving. This is serious opposition, even life-threatening persecution potentially coming from the people on earth who

are supposed to love and accept and support us the most, which is family and places where we're supposed to be the safest, the most beloved, receive the greatest benefit of the doubt. Our families can often be, like it was for Jesus, the source of opposition.

I got an email last night. I got an email between services just now from someone who was here last night, who told me that this part of the sermon was so impactful for her because she has lost her entire physical family when she became a Christian. There was a lady sitting right there in the last service, tears running down her face because I know her husband is so frustrated with her because she's a Christian. He cannot stand it. This is a story that I just hear over and over and over and I just want you to understand that God sees it and he doesn't just see it, he has experienced it. The opposition from family. I got an email last night from someone who watches our services regularly in Australia who told me that she sent this message to her nephew in Singapore, because right after he got baptized, his parents have just started attacking him for being a Christian.

So if you've experienced this, if opposition has been a regular interaction that you've had with your family after giving your life to Jesus, then let me remind you that you are a child of God and adopted into his family. A family where there is no opposition, a family where you are accepted now and forever. John 1:12 says, "To all who did receive Jesus, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God." Jesus put it this way, Mark 3:35, "Whoever does the will of God, he is My brother and sister and mother." So, if opposition has come from your family for being a Christian, let me also encourage you with Jesus words in Matthew 19:29, "Everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or children or lands for my namesake," not just because, but because you are a Christian, "They will receive a hundred-fold and will inherit eternal life."

What does he mean by that? Well, first, if your family ever forces you to choose between them and Christ and you chose Christ instead of them, they will see that as you hating them. But Jesus says it is clear evidence that you believe in him and have eternal life. And it also means that if your family abandons you because they forced you to choose between them or Christ, just know that the local church can be your mother and father. Older saints can speak into your life and be a blessing to you. It can be your brothers and sisters, peers who walk with you, learn from you and you teach them and carry the burdens of life that family is supposed to do for you. They can do that for you and even be your children, young people that you can pour truth into and see God use you in their lives.

The local church can be a substitute if your family abandons you for choosing Christ, instead of choosing them. Cults say, leave your family. So that's not what I'm talking about, just to be clear. I'm saying if your family ever leaves you for being a Christian, you have a family in your local church, and if opposition has regularly come from your family, let me motivate you that it may be the love you show them and the truth that you give them while they are opposing you, it may be that that is what God uses to save them.

You do know don't you that eventually Jesus' family believed in him, right? Acts 1:14 says that among the 120 who were meeting in the upper room after Jesus' resurrection were, "Mary the mother of Jesus," and I love this, "And his brothers." His brothers, the ones who said that he was out of his mind, realized that they were out of their minds for not believing in him, and so they believed. One of his brothers, Judas, also named Jude, writes the New Testament letter. Jude. Another brother, James becomes leader in the early church and pens the New Testament letter called James.

Well, what's the point of all that? Well, if it's a spouse who is frustrated with you, if it's a sibling who keeps tempting you to leave Christ like they did, it's an uncle who mocks you, listen, go back in and face their opposition again. Do it with gentleness and respect. Give them the truth and love and who knows, it could be that your patient endurance, your kind persistence in the face of their opposition will speak loudly to them that Jesus is the real thing and that they should give their lives to him too. Starting in verse 6, Jesus responds to his brothers who are just clueless about who he is and clueless about what he came to do, because they're giving him this pragmatic, demonic advice and he just shuts them down. Verse 6, "Jesus said to them, my time has not yet come, but your time is always here."

Translation, "It's not time for me to go to the feast, but you can go whenever you want." When Jesus talks about his time, he's referring to God's plan for his life. We saw this in chapter 4 verse 3 where it says Jesus "had to pass through Samaria." The idea there being that he is on a mission from the father and that included bringing the truth to Samaritans. We saw this also in chapter 4 when Jesus said that his food... You remember this? He said, "My food is to do the will of God and to accomplish his work." This is what motivates me and energizes me and satisfies me is doing God's will and accomplishing his plan for my life. He says in chapter 5 that he only does what the father does. So Jesus' will is in perfect conformity to the father's will, and so he says, verse 6, "I'm just going to wait."

In other words, it's not God's plan for my life for me to go to the feast, but he says, but you guys can go whenever you want, because you don't have God's plan working in your life. You don't have a divine timetable like I do, and also verse 7, if his brothers go to the feast, they're going to be fine and safe and all that, but not him, verse 7, "The world cannot hate you," so go ahead and go to the feast, the world can't hate you, "but it hates me because I testify about it that it's works are evil."

See, because his brothers don't believe in him, they are part of what is called here the world. The world is not every human being on the planet. That's not what the world means here. The world is humanity in rebellion against God. It's humanity rejecting Christ. In context, it's the Jewish leaders in verse 1 who want to kill Jesus. That's why they hate him. They hate him, they want to kill him. "Why," he says. Because like a prosecuting attorney, he exposes their guilt and because of that they cannot stand him. It wasn't his miracles or his compassion. Everybody loves that, it was his words that got Jesus killed because people love darkness instead of the light. And the reason they love the darkness is because they don't want to know the truth about themselves.

They spend all of their time ignoring the truth about themselves, but when somebody comes along and gives them the truth like Jesus was doing with them, they must die.

Well as part of the world, Jesus' brothers know nothing of God's plan for his life, so he says, verse 8, "'You go up to the feast. I'm not going up to this feast, for my time has not yet fully come.' After saying this, he remained in Galilee." In other words, "The Father hasn't told me yet, so I'm going to just stay here." Now, we learn in the next verse, verse 10, that he does go to the feast, but he travels there secretly. The exact opposite of his brother's advice, he goes there privately in the middle of the feast when everyone's already there in Jerusalem so that he can get there avoiding the massive crowds on the way to Jerusalem. But what we see here in Jesus' words is how to respond to opposition. We point #3) ***Trust God's Will When You are Opposed. Trust God's Will When You're Opposed.*** Whether we're staying in Galilee for a year to avoid the murderous opposition of the Jewish authorities or not going to the feast with his brothers who clearly didn't believe in him.

What Jesus is doing here in these verses is he's expressing a trust in God's will for his life. It was in God's plan, God's timing that he was going to rest in, and that resting in God's will for his life is a good example for us in the midst of the opposition that we might face. Everybody knows... I shouldn't say that. Romans 8:28 is a famous verse in the Bible, right? "All things are working together for good, for those who love God." We put it on our mugs, we put it on a flash guard, put it on our mirrors and all of that, but what we do when we treat it like a fortune cookie, we forget that within the context of Romans chapter eight, it is a truth like that that becomes a foundation that influences what Paul says in the rest of the chapter, which is about Christian's suffering.

So what we do in the midst of opposition, is we counsel ourselves to trust in God's will that he is working in our suffering. He's working through the opposition for our good and for his glory. We trust God's will that when we're opposed, that tells us that if the world didn't have a problem with us, it probably means what? Probably means we're still part of the world. And opposite of what Jesus says in John 15:19, "We haven't been chosen out of the world if the world is fine with us." We trust God's will, knowing that when we are opposed, it's because they hate Christ, and they can't do anything to Jesus like these religious authorities are eventually going to do. They can't do anything to Jesus and so they take it out on us.

We trust God's will because Jesus models that here in John 7. Modeling what He will say to his disciples later, John 16:33, when he says, "I've said these things to you." I've prepared you. I've told you that things are going to be difficult. "I've said these things to you that in Me, you may have peace, you may rest. In the world, you will have tribulation, but take heart, I've overcome the world." So, if or when you are opposed for being a Christian, when friends desert you, when family ridicules you, when your job fires you, when students or even teachers mock you, when the world is against you, be encouraged. Nothing is happening to you that isn't normal. Take heart. It's proof that what Jesus says that this whole Jesus thing is reality, it is true, because exactly what He said is going to happen, will be happening to you when you're opposed.

And be encouraged and be at rest, be at peace as you trust God's will for your life in the opposition. So, you may not have supernatural knowledge of God's will like Jesus did, like he could say here in verse six, but you do have the supernatural promises of God in His word. You don't have the audible voice of God telling you what to do every second of every day like Jesus probably did, but you do have the written voice of God to encourage you and guide you.

Now, listen, I know a lot more could be said about the opposition we face as Christians. In fact, entire books of the New Testament are written to address this issue. Hebrews, James, 1 Peter, are all written to Christians who are suffering, but from our text today, hope it helps to know that opposition is normal Christianity. It's normal for most Christians in history, it's normal for most Christians on the planet today. Opposition for being a Christian is normal. Hope it helps to know that opposition can come from the people who should love and accept you the most, your family, and that it's not a strange thing when it happens to you. It happened to Jesus, and I hope it helps to see that when you are in opposition, when the opposition is the fiercest, you can rest in God and trust his will for your life that he is working even opposition out for your good. That like Joseph, what people, even family members intend for evil against you, that God can at the same time intend their evil to do good in your life and to do good through your life.

I hope that what one scholar called a travel log with no practical value has actually provided tremendous practical value by preparing you for opposition or by encouraging you if you're in the opposition right now. See, opposition to Christianity is on the rise, no doubt, but it will be men and women who are not surprised by it. Men and women who understand this is normal Christianity, men and women who trust in their Lord regardless. It'll be those men and women that will meet the opposition in a way that shows Jesus really is Lord and this whole thing is true. It'll be men and women who face this opposition, who don't fall away, who don't leave, who aren't blown away by the opposition that they face, but who stay, who stand strong, who are like oak trees in a hurricane, not like these disgusting green things that we have here, Palo Verde, but are solid, rock-solid trees in the midst of the hurricane of affliction. These are the kinds of people that Jesus is encouraging his disciples to be, and so may we be these kinds of people in these dark days. Let's pray.

Jesus, you are a kind and gracious and compassionate shepherd. You do not look at all your sheep and say, everything's going to be fine. Don't worry about it. Everything is awesome, but your word deals with real life and you prepare your people in texts like this and the cross references we looked at, you prepare your people for the opposition that we face for being Christians. That's evidence of your kindness and your grace, your mercy, your love for your people, and so thank you for that. I pray that it is your word today that equips us, that teaches us, corrects us, even rebukes us, and trains us to do what's right in the midst of a world that is rapidly changing in a direction that can often be fearful for Christians. May we have the strength and the grace and the courage from you to stay faithful no matter what. For the glory of your great name, Amen.