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When we were together last week, Jesus went secretly down to Jerusalem during one of the big annual festivals—the feast of tabernacles. Everyone was looking for Him, especially the Jewish leaders who wanted to kill Him. They had issued a warning, actually more of a threat, which circulated amongst the crowd, that if anyone spoke favorably of Jesus they would be punished.

Then unexpectedly, Jesus made His way to the Temple and began to teach. He said that He speaks with true authority for He speaks the message that God has given Him and anyone who desires to do the will of God will know that He is speaking the truth; and the reason they can trust His message is because He seeks for God to be glorified and He is not seeking His own glory.

With this statement Jesus publically rebukes the religious leaders who were hunting Him down. He was in effect contrasting His authority with their authority, His legitimacy with their legitimacy, His motivation with their motivation.

If you remember the history lesson from Chapter 1, these religious leaders did not descend from a legitimate high priestly line; rather, these religious leaders received their position, their title, and their authority as a political handout, prior to the Roman occupation, when Israel was invaded by a terrible King from the Seleucid Empire. This explains why they had to use fear and power as weapons to keep the people in check and ensure that no one interfered with their political, economic, and social system; they were afraid of one day losing their control because they knew it rightfully belonged to another.

Jesus came from God, He spoke the things given to Him by God, and He always sought to honor God. Simply stated, they did not! And He called them out. How dare they try to kill Him and violate the law, which they so zealously “claimed” to keep! If they would only open their eyes, they would see that their true High Priest was in their midst.

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Before we move on in this text, I want to stop and talk about the legitimate priesthood. If you have been born again, if you have been adopted into the family of God, then you have been commissioned as a true priest of God; and, as such, you can speak the truth with the authority which derives from the Spirit of God who lives in you.

*1 Peter 2:9-10*

But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God's own possession, so that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light; for you once were not a people, but now you are the people of God; you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.

This is one of the blessings of being a Christian. You belong to God; you are His personal possession and you are precious to Him. You have become part of a chosen race of people; you are amongst those who are God's favorites. Imagine, out of the billions and billions of people who are alive right now (much less who have ever lived), you have been specifically chosen to be part of a royal—or kingly—priesthood, a holy nation belonging exclusively to God. As such, you have been commissioned; your job is to proclaim the Excellencies of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light. And when you speak of His Excellencies, when you speak the truth about Jesus, you speak with the full authority that comes from the Father. This is an amazing privilege.

However, you have to understand a little bit about your job. Unlike those illegitimate religious leaders, being a priest is not about serving your own political,

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economic, or social interests, it is about serving people. In effect, you are an intermediary between God and those who do not know God. In *2 Corinthians 5:18-21* Paul says it this way: we are His ambassadors of reconciliation drawing people back to God helping them understand that God no longer counts their trespasses against them. This is a very important responsibility and something that we need to always keep at the forefront of our minds.

However, like our High Priest, we must only seek the glory that belongs to the Father. We cannot be in any part of ministry or involved in any aspect of serving God that is focused on our own glory. This is difficult since it is so easy, and so natural in our *Old Man*, to turn the attention of others towards ourselves in such a way that we find validation in our service to others and in our service to “God.” We must constantly guard against this temptation by being maniacally focused on walking in the Spirit of God desiring only His will. We must never act, even for a moment, like the results of God using us had anything to do with us. We must always know and believe that without Him we can do nothing; therefore, we must always give Him the honor, the credit, the praise, and the glory. This is a choice we have to continually make.

Secondly, we have to know the Word of God in order to ensure that we are using it properly and not as some weapon to manipulate others or to get them to conform to what we want, when we want it. The only way we are going to know the Word of God is if we read it, chew and gnaw on it; consume it entirely. If not, we run the risk of misrepresenting the Word of God, and the results of that can be tragic not only personally but to anyone to whom you are ministering. We will see in this next part of *Chapter 7* that when a person does not know the Word, they can miss out on life itself, even it is being handed to them on a silver platter.

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Remember, the Holy Spirit has dispersed the truth in all 66 books of the Bible. It is only in studying the entirety of the Bible that you will be able to grasp and adequately handle the Word of truth. Please do not look at your Bible as the Jewish Old Testament and the “Christian” New Testament, but look at this as once continuous message system that proclaims the Excellencies of Christ from one end to the other. It is up to you to seek out the truth and search for insight, understanding, and wisdom as you would search for lost treasure. As a priest appointed by God Himself, you must let the Word of God become your passion!

### *2 Timothy 2:15*

Be diligent to present yourself approved to God as a workman who does not need to be ashamed, accurately handling the word of truth.

Third, we have to let the Word of God be the ultimate authority over our lives. It is not enough to know the Word or even preach it like the religious leaders of Jesus’ day; it has to be real to you and it has to become the very basis for how you live your life, make your decisions, and choose to be in fellowship with God and each other. You must bet your life on it; that is the only way you will experience its power and the reality of the intangible truths in the Word of God.

Did you notice last week how easy it was for the religious leaders to tell Jesus that it was unlawful for Him to heal on the Sabbath; yet, they wanted to kill Him for saying that His Father assigned to Him His teachings and miracles? The Word was not their authority, it was their weapon and they conveniently used it whenever it advantaged them and ignored it when it did not serve their purposes. As legitimate priests, we cannot be like them. We cannot come to God seeking His

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will and His wisdom on the things that we feel safe giving over to Him and hold on to the things in our life that we feel are ours to protect and hold dear. That is not the way! God's word must be your authority in all areas of your life or you will have such a limited and believe me frustrating experience with Him.

Fourth, we must remember that a priest is set apart in all things unto the Lord. If you read *Exodus 39*, you will find that the Lord clothed the priests in a very interesting and ornate way, which I believe was a word picture of how we are clothed in the beauty of Jesus righteousness and belong exclusively to Him. The priests wore a medallion on their turban upon which was engraved: "*set apart as holy to the Lord.*" If you have been born again, this is you. You are set apart exclusively for Him.

It is for this reason that you must let His Word be authoritative in your life so you don't end up acting like one of those illegitimate priests who have the adornment and the attire, but whose hearts are darkened with self interest; and, therefore, speak the Word of God with no authority and no power having to resort to fear, coercion, and legalism in order to get people to follow.

Remember, you are His possession; He bought you with the price of His own precious blood. Therefore, I urge you, please live as part of this legitimate royal priesthood, this holy nation, as one belonging exclusively to God, daily proclaiming His excellencies with the power and authority of the Holy Spirit. Let's continue in our text.

### ***John 7:25-27***

Some of the people who lived in Jerusalem started to ask each other, "Isn't this the man they are trying to kill? But here he is, speaking in public, and they say

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nothing to him. Could our leaders possibly believe that he is the Messiah? But how could he be? For we know where this man comes from. When the Messiah comes, he will simply appear; no one will know where he comes from."

This is hilarious. The very thing that they religious leaders did not want the crowd to think, they were thinking: "could our leaders possibly believe that He is the Messiah? Everyone knew they wanted to kill Jesus but after Jesus publically rebuked them, they had nothing to say. They had been humiliated and were made to look like fools. I don't think, however, the crowds were so dull as to conjecture that the leaders would actually "believe" Jesus was the Messiah, only that they might know the truth and be hiding it to protect their jobs and their lifestyle. After all, it was clear that His authority trumped theirs.

Then they make this statement that the Messiah will just appear out of nowhere. It sounds crazy, but there was a rabbinical tradition the Messiah would make a sudden descent on the temple—a dazzling appearance coming in the clouds of heaven. This notion probably originated from *Daniel 7:13-14* or *Malachi 3:1*.

#### ***Daniel 7:13-14***

I kept looking in the night visions, and behold, with the clouds of heaven One like a Son of Man was coming, and He came up to the Ancient of Days and was presented before Him. "And to Him was given dominion, Glory and a kingdom, that all the peoples, nations and men of every language might serve Him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion which will not pass away; and His kingdom is one which will not be destroyed.

***Malachi 3:1***

Behold, I am going to send My messenger, and he will clear the way before Me. And the Lord, whom you seek, will suddenly come to His temple; and the messenger of the covenant, in whom you delight, behold, He is coming," says the Lord of hosts.

This tradition was passed along by the following rabbinical proverb: Three things come unexpectedly: 1) A thing found by chance; 2) the sting of a scorpion; and, 3) the Messiah. This is probably what they were referring to when they said that the Messiah will simply appear. Then they make the comment that they know where Jesus comes from (at least they think they do), but no one knows where the Messiah comes from.

We will see in *verse 47* that it was clearly understood by everyone that the Messiah would come from Bethlehem. So, again, they were not talking about His birth. But they also believed that after His birth, the Messiah would be hidden or taken away until the time of His mysterious arrival at the temple. Many of the rabbinical writings point to *Song of Solomon 2:9* "my beloved is like a gazelle or young stag" where the young man in the Song of Solomon is a picture of the Messiah. They believed that like a gazelle who appears and then all of a sudden is gone, so will be the Messiah. Then also in *Isaiah 53:8* they would take just part of that verse that says: "who shall declare His generation" (or, "as for His generation, who considered") and say that no one will know where the Messiah comes from.

This wrong belief might be what Jesus was referring to when He told the disciples in *Matthew 24:23, 26-27* that if anyone says here is the Christ or there is the Christ, do not pay any attention to him..."So if they say to you, 'Behold, He is

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in the wilderness,' do not go out, or, 'Behold, He is in the inner rooms,' do not believe them. So here is a perfect example of where the lack of knowledge, or a misunderstanding, of the Word of God that actually becomes cultural folk lore with devastating consequences. This is why we are admonished to accurately handle the Word. God is in their midst and their wrong belief and misunderstanding of the scriptures results in wide spread unbelief.

### ***John 7:28-30***

While Jesus was teaching in the Temple, he called out, "Yes, you know me, and you know where I come from. But I'm not here on my own. The one who sent me is true, and you don't know him. But I know him because I come from him, and he sent me to you." Then the leaders tried to arrest him; but no one laid a hand on him, because his time had not yet come.

To battle their wrong belief, Jesus says that although they know He comes from the region of Galilee, He originally came from God. So His appearance was not only uniquely peculiar, it was unexpected. Had they really considered where He was born (Bethlehem) and the manner in which He was born (the miraculous virgin birth), they would have realized that He is the One who was sent by God.

As if His public rebuke was not enough, these illegitimate priests are once again confronted with the ultimate claim of legitimate authority; that which comes from God. They panic and react with the only power available to them and like a bunch of bullies they try and arrest Jesus. But, their power is nothing compared to the power of God. They could do nothing against Him. Jesus was protected by the Father until the time that was appointed for Him. Until that time, it did not matter



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what these power mongers tried to do; it would not work. Jesus had like a force field around Him and no one could do anything to Him—the Father would not allow it. He probably had these massive angels walking around as body guards and they kept everyone at bay.

This should give you some comfort as well. If you a priest of the living God, “*set apart as holy to the Lord,*” then you belong to Him—you are His possession. Therefore, no one can do anything that He does not allow—no one! And if He allows it, you know that it is an expression, one way or another, of His love for you and His desire to further transform you into the image of His Son.

This is an awesome truth that is difficult to accept. However, if you are willing to believe this truth, you will be flooded with the peace of God. You will no longer have to live in fear from anything or anyone in this world; you can rest knowing that your Father calls the shots in your life. It is this truth that enabled Jesus to stand up in the temple, in the midst of people who wanted Him dead, and boldly speak the truth. That confidence can, and needs, to be yours!

### ***John 7:31-36***

Many among the crowds at the Temple believed in him. "After all," they said, "would you expect the Messiah to do more miraculous signs than this man has done?" When the Pharisees heard that the crowds were whispering such things, they and the leading priests sent Temple guards to arrest Jesus. But Jesus told them, "I will be with you only a little longer. Then I will return to the one who sent me. You will search for me but not find me. And you cannot go where I am going." The Jewish leaders were puzzled by this statement. "Where is he planning to go?" they asked. "Is he thinking of leaving the country and going to

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the Jews in other lands? Maybe he will even teach the Greeks! What does he mean when he says, 'You will search for me but not find me,' and 'You cannot go where I am going'?"

Notice the distinction John draws between the crowds who can discern the obvious and the priests whose minds are darkened by their self interest. It is also shameful that the crowd had to whisper these things; again, living in total fear of those who were supposed to be their spiritual care takers. Perhaps the temple guards had started circulating through the crowd trying to move in on Jesus and no one wanted to risk the guards turning on them.

Unafraid, Jesus bewildered the crowds and religious leaders by saying that He was soon going to die and would return to His place in heaven, speaking of His ascension. But there is a fascinating prophetic statement buried in this text. He said they will look for Him and not find Him. This is an allusion to the fact that His physical body would be resurrected from the dead. Therefore, no matter how hard they searched for His dead body, in an attempt to prove false the claims of Christianity, it would not be found.

As we have discussed before, our entire faith rests on a couple of key historical events, Jesus' virgin birth and His bodily resurrection. The only reason we can be in fellowship with God is because He lived a sinless life and died as the perfect sacrifice; and the only reason we can live as priests that are set apart as holy unto the Lord is because He lives. There is no body to be found. Sure enough, after Jesus' death, they mustered together all their resources and still were not able to find His body. Jesus had gone into the presence of the Father; a place they could not go. The only ones who can enter into the Holy of Holies with Jesus are His legitimate priests: everyone who has been born again of the Spirit of God.

***John 7:37-39***

Now on the last day, the great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried out, saying, "If anyone is thirsty, let him come to Me and drink." He who believes in Me, as the Scripture said, 'From his innermost being will flow rivers of living water.'" But this He spoke of the Spirit, whom those who believed in Him were to receive; for the Spirit was not yet given, because Jesus was not yet glorified.

According to *Leviticus 23:36*, on the 8<sup>th</sup> day of the festival there was a solemn closing assembly. Although not prescribed in the scriptures, there was a tradition that developed where the priests would go to the pool of Siloam and draw water out and mix it with wine and then pour it out at the foot of the altar while chanting *Psalms 118:25*: "Please Lord, please save us. Please, Lord, please give us success." No one really knows when this tradition started, but as this festival commemorated the wilderness journey, it was likely symbolized the time when God split open this huge rock bringing water to their ancestors whose throats were parched from the heat of the desert. It has also been suggested that it was based on their misunderstanding of *Isaiah 12:3*, "Therefore you will joyously draw water from the springs of salvation." But even though they did not understand the scriptures, it is interesting that this ritual was very symbolic of the blood and water that flowed from Jesus side when He brought salvation to the world; and, even that passage in Isaiah points to the Messiah. I love the way God always works in and amongst His people and points them to the Son, even when they do not realize it.

On the day of this sacred ceremony Jesus screams out: "If anyone is thirsty, let him come to Me and drink." He who believes in Me, as the Scripture said, 'From

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his innermost being will flow rivers of living water." We don't have to guess at this symbolism, John tells us that this is a reference to the Holy Spirit, who had not yet been given but would be given to every believer after Jesus' ascension into heaven.

Are you still thirsty? Are you still drinking from wells of humanity that will never satisfy the yearning and the craving within your soul? The answer to your yearning lies in this passage. Jesus wants you to come and drink and continually drink. The verb "come" is in the singular, present, middle voice, and is an imperative. This means that although God is commanding you to come, you have to make the decision to come; He will not force you and no one can come on your behalf. In addition, it must be an ever present decision; you must always come to Jesus. Many believers are not continually in that place of always coming to Jesus, which is why they are always thirsty. You are still wondering here and there trying to see if something else just might satisfy; but it won't. That is why He commands you to come. He knows that He is the only One who has the water that satisfies.

In addition to coming, Jesus commands you to drink. Coming is simply not enough; you must drink if you are going to be satisfied! The verb "drink" is also an imperative. But it is also in the present active tense meaning that you are the one who has to continually be drinking. One gulp is not enough! Our life in Christ is intended to be a 24x7 reality—ongoing continual fellowship with the Lord. We have to always be coming to God and always be drinking of His water. We cannot narrow our walk with God to the times when we meet for church and prayer or even to our own personal times of study. Our fellowship with God is intended to be in the now—in every aspect of our life. This is the only way our thirst is quenched.

Mark my word, if you are still thirsty, it is not because God does not satisfy. As the "I Am," He always is exactly what you need. I guarantee that the problem is

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that you are not actively drinking of His living water. I can relate. Often, I come to God with fears, worries, or concerns and I pour them out before Him, but I am unwilling to rest in the fact that He is in control, that He loves me and will give me the strength to endure anything that He brings my way. So, although I come, too often I don't drink, and I walk away thirsty. What a waste.

However, Jesus says that if we actively and continually drink, not only will we be filled with the Spirit but He will overflow from our lives to others—like a river of living water. Yes, the Spirit of God will flow from your life and become a source of fresh water for those whose souls are parched. Yes, you will truly be that priest, *set apart as holy unto the Lord*, who becomes the intermediary between God and man as you declare His Excellencies to those who are desperate for His life.

#### ***John 7:40-44***

When the crowds heard him say this, some of them declared, "Surely this man is the Prophet we've been expecting." Others said, "He is the Messiah." Still others said, "But he can't be! Will the Messiah come from Galilee? For the Scriptures clearly state that the Messiah will be born of the royal line of David, in Bethlehem, the village where King David was born." So the crowd was divided about him. Some even wanted him arrested, but no one laid a hand on him.

Jesus stood up and said: "If anyone is thirsty, let him come to Me and drink." He who believes in Me, as the Scripture said, 'From his innermost being will flow rivers of living water'" and look at the reaction. They seemed to have understood what He was communicating because when they heard this declaration and they started to believe. He is the Prophet, He is the Messiah! Even those who were

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confused it was only because they did not know the facts. Yes, Jesus was raised in Galilee but according to *Matthew 2:1* He was born in Bethlehem, just as the scriptures foretold. If they would have understood this little bit of history, I am sure the crowd would have gone crazy. But take note, it seems wrong belief always left them in unbelief. Once again, I cannot stress enough how important it is to know the truth, believe the truth, and live the truth. If you have not read your Bible from beginning to end, start tomorrow. You will not regret it. It will be one of the most important things you ever do.

### ***John 7:45-52***

When the Temple guards returned without having arrested Jesus, the leading priests and Pharisees demanded, "Why didn't you bring him in?" "We have never heard anyone speak like this!" the guards responded. "Have you been led astray, too?" the Pharisees mocked. "Is there a single one of us rulers or Pharisees who believes in him? This foolish crowd follows him, but they are ignorant of the law. God's curse is on them!" Then Nicodemus, the leader who had met with Jesus earlier, spoke up. "Is it legal to convict a man before he is given a hearing?" he asked. They replied, "Are you from Galilee, too? Search the Scriptures and see for yourself—no prophet ever comes from Galilee!"

These guys can't get a break. Not only did Jesus totally humiliate them in public and cast a disparaging eye on their so called authority, even their ultimate weapon of intimidation and control does not work. Their temple guards cannot even bring themselves to arrest Jesus. It's actually kind of a funny scene. I can picture them going up to Jesus, circling Him, and all of a sudden begin stopped in their tracks by

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these big angels and not knowing what was happening, they just stand there and listen to Him speak. The Spirit is moving in the crowd and they are mesmerized. They start thinking, “I am thirsty, I want this water; I want to be satisfied.” And so they leave without laying a hand on Him.

I have been talking a lot about how illegitimate authority has to use fear, intimidation, and manipulation to get and maintain control. You see a good picture of it here. After their guards show up empty handed, those who were speaking include everyone in their defiant proclamation: "Is there a single one of us rulers or Pharisees who believes in him?" Well, if there was, they sure were not going to admit it after that statement. There is so much power in this pack mentality that assumes it is in the right and assumes it is in the authority just because of their positions and titles. They create such a hostile and coercive environment where no one can have a differing opinion.

Then these priests reveal their true darkness. The job of a priests is to be an intermediary between God and the people; a representative of His love and His mercy. Yet, these priests not only said that the crowd is ignorant of the law they then curse them with vitriol and disgust. Yes, these are some real classy leaders; something to be proud of. It is really sad that their hearts were that dark and cold. As Jesus pointed out earlier, they don't really care about the law, they just used the law as a weapon when it fits their purposes.

Nicodemus' comment makes this clear. It seems that He has a soft spot for Jesus after his one-on-one meeting in Chapter 3, but they just jump all over Him. Nicodemus says it is not lawful to try and kill this man without a hearing, but they do not care about the law. They totally ignore his point and the pack turns and attacks him. They then wield their weapon of the scriptures and use it as a way to silence dissent. The funny thing is that they just finished saying that the crowd was

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ignorant of the law, but the reality is that they have proven over and over again that they are the ones who are ignorant! No prophet will come out of Galilee, is that so? Funny that *Matthew 4:15-16* just happens to quote from *Isaiah 9:1-2* which says just the opposite.

"The land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, by the way of the sea, beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles—the people who were sitting in darkness saw a great light, and those who were sitting in the land of the shadow of death, upon them a light dawned."

Oops, I guess these experts conveniently forgot that passage. Once again, we find that both ignorance of the Word of God and the refusal to let the Word be authoritative leads to total darkness. It does not matter how much authority and power you think you have, if you do not stand on the authority of the truth of the Word of God, you have nothing! Let us not be in any way like these illegitimate priests. Let us take a hold of our true calling, our true identify and fulfill the purpose for which God purchased us with the blood of His Son. Let us always come to Him, always continually drink of His living water, and let that water—let the Spirit of God—flow from our lives to others as we proclaim His Excellencies!

### ***John 7:53***

Then the meeting broke up, and everybody went home.

Kind of fitting, don't you think? .... Let's Pray.