

Sermon preached by Pastor Ben Kuerth on October 9, 2016 at Victory of the Lamb on John 7:25-52

Series: Who Is This Man?

Today's Focus: The Man Who Won't Go Away

Theme: You Have to Hear Him Out to Find Out

There was a show on PBS when I was a kid. Levar Burton was the host. Who knows what I'm talking about? *Reading Rainbow*. How many of you remember that show? I loved it because Levar as the host made reading cool. He'd give you a snippet of this great story and then he'd say (anybody remember this?)... "You don't just have to take my word for it." In other words, go read the book yourself. Go to the source. Without a doubt this was great advice to get kids like me interested in reading. "You don't just have to take my word for it."

Friends, as we start this new series today "Who is this man?"... this is also good advice when it comes to knowing Jesus. The theme in our service today is "The man who won't go away." And this is pretty remarkable when you think about it. Because Jesus wasn't born in a palace. He never held public office. He never commanded an army. He never wrote a book or published a blog or launched a YouTube channel. We don't even have a picture of him. He never took selfies, never had a statue made of himself. He didn't discover new lands like *Christopher Columbus* (although guess where his name comes from?). Jesus didn't even own any land. He didn't accumulate great wealth. Just the opposite.

Wrapped in rags, his first crib was a feeding trough. He grew up in almost complete obscurity in a far flung place in the Roman Empire called Galilee and then came to public attention for the brief season of about 3 years. And when he died, ingloriously, unjustly, and brutally crucified, it seemed for all the world at first that his tiny failed movement had met its end. His little band of followers had scattered into the shadows. And normally, when a person dies, their impact on the world immediately begins to fade away, right? And yet, here we are today some 2,000 years later and the influence and the impact that Jesus has had on the world is staggering.

We take for granted just how deeply our world has been shaped by Jesus and if you want to study and discuss more about this, please join Pastor Bill starting this Wednesday evening right here in our ministry center. He's hosting a small group study for those of you not already connected in a group. This group will meet the next 5 Wednesdays to help you dig deeper in to the question, "Who is this man?"

We're talking today about how Jesus is the man who won't go away. And no matter where you stand in regard to Jesus, I'm inviting you all to hear him out to find out why. In the words of Levar Burton, "You don't just have to take my word for it." So let's dig into an account about Jesus recorded in the Bible from John chapter 7.

²⁵ At that point some of the people of Jerusalem began to ask, “Isn’t this the man they are trying to kill? ²⁶ Here he is, speaking publicly, and they are not saying a word to him. Have the authorities really concluded that he is the Messiah? ²⁷ But we know where this man is from; when the Messiah comes, no one will know where he is from.”

So let’s set the context here. The scene is Jerusalem. The season is Fall. By our calendar it’s early October. Crowds of pilgrims have swelled the population of Jerusalem. They’re present to celebrate for a whole week one of the three prominent Jewish festivals called the Feast of Tabernacles. And Jesus eventually showed up there too where he talked freely and openly and honestly. By this time though the religious authorities had already begun to hatch a plot to have Jesus killed and apparently it was the worst kept secret in the city. So stepping into the situation it feels pretty tense. And the people themselves were divided. Jesus had become a polarizing figure.

John related this earlier in the chapter about the crowds that were swelling in the city. Some people, **“He is a good man.” Others replied, “No, he deceives the people”** (John 7:12). Two radically different opinions about the same person, does that sound at all familiar to what’s going on in this year’s campaign season? It seems that it was mostly the pilgrims from out of town who thought highly of Jesus while many within the city were of a somewhat similar mind as the religious leaders of the Sanhedrin. And of those folks, many of them thought they had Jesus all figured out. They thought they knew him. They *knew* that Jesus was from Nazareth in Galilee which was kind of like saying he was from nowhere special. They *knew* that Jesus’ parents were Joseph and Mary—common, uneducated folks. They *knew* that Jesus couldn’t possibly be the Messiah. Or so they thought they knew this man Jesus. How about you?

²⁸ Then Jesus, still teaching in the temple courts, cried out, “Yes, you know me, and you know where I am from. [Do you sense the irony here? Jesus is saying, “Yeah you know me...or so you think you do.”] I am not here on my own authority, but he who sent me is true. You do not know him, ²⁹ but I know him because I am from him and he sent me.” [In other words, Jesus is saying, “You think you know me, but you don’t. And because you don’t know me, that means you don’t really know God either because I have come from God. He sent me.]

³⁰ At this they tried to seize him, but no one laid a hand on him, because his hour had not yet come. ³¹ Still, many in the crowd believed in him. They said, “When the Messiah comes, will he perform more signs than this man?” [Jesus had done miracles that people couldn’t deny. For example, on his previous visit to Jerusalem Jesus had healed a lame man who hadn’t been able to walk for 38 years. It was an undeniable miracle. Jesus was fulfilling before their very eyes what the Old Testament prophecies had foretold that the Messiah would do. No wonder some people started to whisper, “Maybe he’s the Messiah!”]

³² The Pharisees heard the crowd whispering such things about him. Then the chief priests and the Pharisees sent temple guards to arrest him.

³³ Jesus said, “I am with you for only a short time, and then I am going to the one who sent me. ³⁴ You will look for me, but you will not find me; and where I am, you cannot come.”

³⁵ The Jews said to one another, “Where does this man intend to go that we cannot find him? Will he go where our people live scattered among the Greeks, and teach the Greeks? ³⁶ What did he mean when he said, ‘You will look for me, but you will not find me,’ and ‘Where I am, you cannot come?’”

You understand what Jesus is talking about here? He’s putting before them ahead of time the very things that would later take place—that he would die and be buried but that he would also rise. That he then would return to heaven to reclaim his rightful place at his Father’s side. And so no matter how hard people tried to find him they would not find him here anymore. Jesus is saying, “If you don’t believe in me—that I am who I say I am, you can’t follow me to heaven. No unbeliever can come with me to heaven. **Where I am, you cannot come.**” In other words, unbelief in Jesus will keep you out of heaven. And it will cause you to be always searching, but never finding, always hungry for something to give you true fulfillment but never being truly fulfilled, always thirsty, but never truly satisfied.

³⁷ On the last and greatest day of the festival, Jesus stood and said in a loud voice, “Let anyone who is thirsty come to me and drink. ³⁸ Whoever believes in me, as Scripture has said, rivers of living water will flow from within them.” ³⁹ By this he meant the Spirit, whom those who believed in him were later to receive. Up to that time the Spirit had not been given, since Jesus had not yet been glorified.

⁴⁰ On hearing his words, some of the people said, “Surely this man is the Prophet.” ⁴¹ Others said, “He is the Messiah.”

Still others asked, “How can the Messiah come from Galilee? ⁴² Does not Scripture say that the Messiah will come from David’s descendants and from Bethlehem, the town where David lived?” ⁴³ Thus the people were divided because of Jesus. ⁴⁴ Some wanted to seize him, but no one laid a hand on him.

⁴⁵ Finally the temple guards went back to the chief priests and the Pharisees, who asked them, “Why didn’t you bring him in?”

⁴⁶ “No one ever spoke the way this man does,” the guards replied. Think about this. The temple police, the guards, are sent to do their job and bring Jesus in because the religious leaders, the experts, have had enough. They’re ready to do away with Jesus, but the guards instead come back empty handed. And what was their excuse? They said, “**No one ever spoke the way this man does.**”

Now on the one hand, this might mean something else if it was said about a presidential candidate. Certainly we’ve heard remarks by a certain candidate that make you say, “No one

ever spoke the way this man does.” But perhaps this contrast helps us all the more to think through what makes Jesus so unique and special. **“No one ever spoke the way this man does.”**

Consider. Whoever wins this year’s presidential election will one day die and be forgotten (no cheering!). Their legacy will not endure. Their influence will fade away. But Jesus is the person in all of history who still won’t go away. Why? I think what this account teaches us today is that it’s because his words are the kind of words that we don’t want to go away. And Jesus once promised: **Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away** (Matthew 24:35). It’s remarkable how well preserved the Bible is. And his words, if you make the effort to hear them, still have the power to do what Jesus said 2,000 years ago. They have the power to quench our deepest thirst. The only question is, friends, are you thirsty?

If you think all is right in this world and it’s a perfect place free of trouble or that it’s just getting better and better all the time and it is that way in no small part because you’re a part of it... then chances are you’re not thirsty. None of this makes any sense. But maybe you’re more like the Samaritan woman Jesus met one day at the well. You can read about this in John chapter 4. Her past was checkered. She knew trouble. She felt shame. As she got older she found out more and more that her life wasn’t just get better and better all the time.

She’d shared a bed and her body with numerous men. The guy she was currently living with was not her husband. One is left to think that this poor woman was seeking love, seeking protection, seeking happiness or perhaps (we don’t know) being exploited by sinful men using her and in these pursuits this poor woman found not happiness or protection but emptiness and pain. Her daily walk to the well to have to get water was like a metaphor for her life. Trying, trying every day needing to quench her thirst. Yet at the end of the day, still thirsty again.

Until she met Jesus. And as they talked, as Jesus broke through the social barriers of his day that said a man like him shouldn’t be talking to a woman like her, a Samaritan, someone from a different race and religion...she found in him what she could never find anywhere in all her looking. Someone to satisfy her deepest needs. Her spiritual needs. Her need for God’s forgiveness. Her need for unconditional love. Her need for eternal security. Her need for ultimate and lasting happiness in heaven even if and especially when life here on earth is hard. Her need for Jesus—no mere man but the one who is also her mighty God and Savior.

And in meeting Jesus, in hearing his words, her life would never be the same. Jesus said, **“Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again, but whoever drinks the water I give them will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give them will become in them a spring of water welling up to eternal life.”** (John 4:13). After meeting Jesus and hearing his words she would never be the same. In fact neither would her town be the same. Because the rivers of living water that Jesus talked about flowed from her as she witnessed to her friends and neighbors about her Savior, bringing them life, quenching their spiritual thirst. Perhaps this is ultimately why Jesus is the man who won’t go away and why his words won’t ever go away. Are you thirsty? Of course the Jewish leaders weren’t.

47 “You mean he has deceived you also?” the Pharisees retorted. 48 “Have any of the rulers or of the Pharisees believed in him? 49 No! But this mob that knows nothing of the law—there is a curse on them.”

Friends, do you hear the scorn in their tone of voice and in their words they choose? “You mean you’re that gullible? Have any of us important people, we intellectuals, we experts fallen for this? No, but this deplorable, ignorable rabble—a curse upon them.” Basically what was their argument for getting so angry? “We’re smarter than you are. Trust us.”

Sounds pretty elitist, isn’t it? “Let us make the decisions for you. We’ll tell you how to think. We’ll tell you what to do. We’ll tell you who to believe. Leave it to us experts. We’re the ones qualified to interpret the law. Your job is to follow our program.” Friends, do you like it or buy into it when people today want you to think this way? Fortunately, Nicodemus wasn’t buying it when it came to Jesus.

50 Nicodemus, who had gone to Jesus earlier and who was one of their own number, asked, 51 “Does our law condemn a man without first hearing him to find out what he has been doing?” 52 They replied, “Are you from Galilee, too? Look into it, and you will find that a prophet does not come out of Galilee.”

There’s great irony here. Because you know who Nicodemus was? He was in fact a Pharisee. He was **one of their own number**. And he had the perfect answer for all his colleagues who thought they were so smart. What was his answer? Basically, *you have to hear him out to find out* when it comes to Jesus. This is what Nicodemus himself had done. He didn’t settle for soundbites. He didn’t just swallow what he was told. He had personally gone and talked with Jesus. And he points out the hypocrisy of the Pharisees here who were ready to murder an innocent man in disobedience to the 5th commandment of God’s law without even giving him the opportunity for a fair trial again in disobedience to God’s law...all the while mocking people for not being smart enough to know the law like they do.

It’s why I think Nicodemus’ advice is still super relevant today. And you don’t just have to take my word for it. Go to the source. Dig into the Scriptures yourself. Pursue knowing Jesus. And don’t reject Jesus until you’ve taken the time to hear from Jesus yourself.

How have you done this? Friends, this is what the Jr High confirmation class is doing. This is what we do in my Bible 101 class for those of who are adults. It’s your opportunity to go to the source. And this is why Pastor Bill is leading a class the next five Wednesday evenings to help you grow deeper with this sermon series. Can you make time for this? This Wednesday evening—for an hour and a half? Remember what the temple guards discovered, “No one ever spoke like this man.” Who is he? Jesus the Messiah, the Risen One, who is not going away and neither are his words. Hear him out and find out how your thirst can be quenched. Amen.