

A Nameless Face in the Crowd

By Pastor Greg
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John 7:1-9

Bunkertown COB

For several months, Jesus and His disciples have been traveling around the region of Galilee. And as they walked, Jesus spent a great deal of time teaching and training His followers. Lately, we've been studying some of those teachings in the gospels of Matthew. But what we need to realize is that Christ not did descend from Heaven just to pass along lessons for living. Of course, He came to be our Teacher and our Redeemer, but by walking among us, Jesus has given us an incredible glimpse into heart of God.

John the Apostle points out that after Jesus taught in and around the region of Galilee, many of His disciples quit following Him because the teaching became hard (6:66). But then John shows us something about the heart of Jesus, and how He viewed His work and His ministry here on earth. *After this, Jesus traveled around Galilee. He wanted to stay out of Judea, where the Jewish leaders were plotting his death.² But soon it was time for the Jewish Festival of Shelters,³ and Jesus' brothers said to him, "Leave here and go to Judea, where your followers can see your miracles!⁴ You can't become famous if you hide like this! If you can do such wonderful things, show yourself to the world!"⁵ For even his brothers didn't believe in him.⁶ Jesus replied, "Now is not the right time for me to go, but you can go anytime.⁷ The world can't hate you, but it does hate me because I accuse it of doing evil.⁸ You go on. I'm not going to this festival, because my time has not yet come."⁹ After saying these things, Jesus remained in Galilee.¹ (John 7:1-9)*

John says that Jesus stayed in Galilee rather than travel down to Judea. Galilee was located in the northern part of Israel while Judea was located toward the south where Bethlehem and Jerusalem are located. The reason His brothers made this suggestion was that it was near the time when the Jews celebrated the Festival of Shelters or Booths. This was a celebration to remember how the Israelites lived in the wilderness after leaving Egypt. And it was one of the three major Jewish celebrations (Passover and Pentecost were the other two). So there would have been

¹Tyndale House Publishers. (2004). *Holy Bible : New Living Translation*. Wheaton, Ill.: Tyndale House Publishers.

a huge crowd down in Jerusalem for the eight-day festival. This would have been a tremendous opportunity for Jesus to really make a name for Himself and maybe gain more followers as well. But Jesus refused and remained behind.

His brothers say, “You can’t become a public figure if you hide like this”. And yet Jesus did act privately. Often times we see Him working without a huge crowd around Him, or sometimes He would ask people not to say a word about what He had done (see Matthew 8:4, 9:30 or Mark 5:43 for example). So I imagine He did the same thing here; traveling around Galilee doing great things in private.

“Don’t rush me”, Jesus says to His brothers. “These people are important to Me.” Christ’s ministry was not a show. He didn’t hold a “Going out of Ministry” sale (two healings for the price of one). Jesus wasn’t out trying to sell His religion. He wasn’t in the middle of an October Enlargement campaign. He was trying to bring people back to God through one to one personal contact.

It seems Jesus preferred to work up close and personal rather than on a stage performing at a distance. Jesus would rather know a person by heart instead of having some ushers bring them up to the stage so He can wow the audience with His power. Instead of keeping His distance and looking across all the nameless faces in the crowd, Jesus reached out and touched people one by one. And nothing has changed. Christ continues to be tender and personal. And yet many of us still try to hide in the crowd. Many of us fear getting close to Jesus because we feel like an idiot. We’re embarrassed by all the mistakes, the weaknesses, and the struggles we deal with day by day. And so we try to hide in the crowd.

In a crowd, our fears, our sadness, our pain, and our sorrows are easily hidden from those around us, and hopefully from God as well. We picture Jesus up on the stage performing signs and wonders so He can’t find us in the crowd. But in the scriptures, we don’t see Jesus standing off in the distance. We don’t see Him jumping up and down, throwing a tantrum just so He would be noticed. We see Him walking through the crowds touching, healing, and loving. Consider the story about the woman with a bleeding problem. She approached Jesus from behind, not wanting Him to know or see her problem. But something happens that she did not expect. Jesus did indeed realize she was there. And He wants to meet this woman

face to face. *“When the woman realized that she could not stay hidden, she began to tremble and fell to her knees in front of him.”*² (Luke 8:47) Don’t we do the same? Don’t we all try to keep Jesus at a distance? Don’t we all try to keep Him from seeing the ugliness within us? We may come to Him, but we hide behind our religious rituals and traditions. We mingle within the crowd hoping that Jesus will keep His distance. But He doesn’t. Christ still looks straight into each of our hearts and knows what pain or sorrow is hiding there.

Isaiah spoke about the heart of our Savior when he said, *“He will not cry out or raise His voice, nor make His voice heard in the street. A bruised reed He will not break and a dimly burning wick He will not extinguish.”*³ (Isaiah 42:2-3). Our Savior is interested in you. Our Savior desires to be near you. Jesus denied the glory and the spotlight just so He could spend some one to one time with those He loves. You are important to Jesus. How important? Consider that this eight day Festival occurs in late September or early October. So six months later these Jewish people would be celebrating the Passover, and by then our Lord would be crucified on a cross. Jesus has six months left in His earthly ministry; six months to walk this earth and show this world the heart of God. And yet He chooses to touch people in a personal way. People like you and me.

On those days when I feel worthless, He walks up to me and says, “Remember that I called you, regardless of what some may say”. There are times when I just need to get away from the world only to find Jesus asking if He can tag along. And even on those days when I try to run from Him, the Hound of Heaven is there, not to condemn and criticize, but to love and embrace. And I imagine you know what I’m talking about here. I imagine you too have felt the cold, hard knife of condemnation for who you are and what you’ve done. And so you hide. You hope the Savior would be more concerned with the crowd than with you. That way you can remain one more nameless face in the crowd. But instead, Jesus chooses you over the fame and the glory. He chooses to stay behind so that He can spend just a few more minutes with those He came to love and to save.

²Tyndale House Publishers. (2004). *Holy Bible : New Living Translation*. Wheaton, Ill.: Tyndale House Publishers.

³*New American Standard Bible : 1995 update*. 1995 (Is 42:2-3). LaHabra, CA: The Lockman Foundation.