

Judging by Appearances (John 7:14-24)

By David Soper

"Look beneath the surface so you can judge correctly." John 7:24

No one likes to be judged, but Jesus said that we are supposed to make a judgment about Him. In fact, the single most important judgment that we will make in our lives is what we decide about Jesus Christ. However, this judgment is not an easy one. Judging by appearances, we could easily come to the conclusion that Jesus was an exceptional man, but not the Son of God. These people in John 7 who were an eye witness to the teaching and ministry of Jesus did not see him as Messiah. They were amazed that Jesus was such a great teacher (v15), but they got tripped up by his lack of formal rabbinical training. They loved his insights, but couldn't believe that His teaching was directly from God. They were amazed that Jesus miraculously healed a paralytic, but because He did it on the Sabbath they thought his actions dishonored God, not flowed from God Himself.

How can we know if Jesus is really from God? He gives us the answer in verse 17. *"Anyone who wants to do the will of God will know whether my teaching is from God or is merely my own."* Simply stated, put His teachings into practice in your life and it will become obvious. **Spiritual obedience unlocks the door to spiritual insight.** No one can fully satisfy their spiritual hunger through just intellectual inquiries. A serious spiritual seeker must take action before some things will make sense. And when you take that step, God reveals himself to you, spiritual truths become clearer, and trust in Jesus begins to grow and take root in your heart.

Jesus challenged the people to judge Him correctly. They had a wide range of opinions about Him, but He made a bold claim, *"My message is not my own; it comes from God who sent me"* (v16). In other words, Jesus claimed to have the exclusive truth. It was not a popular statement then, and it is even less popular now. No one today can claim that they have the truth about God. Anyone who does is labeled intolerant and arrogant. Sadly, tolerance no longer means to have respect for people who believe or think differently, it's become a universal paradigm for the notion that there is no absolute truth. Christians, more than anybody, should be gracious and respectful of others who are different (1 Peter 2:17). But at the same time, when it comes to Jesus, we either believe or we don't.

Have you judged Jesus without looking at the evidence? Fueled by TV documentaries, and movies intended to entertain, it's easy to be swayed by alleged 'contradictions', but never look beneath the surface. In order to really know, we must examine all the evidence, read the scriptures for ourselves and pray that God would help us to know the truth about Jesus. This is what Jesus expects us to do. No one should make a decision about Him lightly. We should be people who are careful to discern, careful to pray, careful to think, and careful to judge. But at the end of the day, we still must make a judgment. The popular sentiment in modern society says that as long as you believe in something - anything, you're ok. But it's not ok. The words of Jesus are the words of God himself. There is a decision to make, and we must look beyond appearances to judge correctly.