



JOHN 7:1-13

But when the Jewish Feast of Tabernacles was near, Jesus' brothers said to him, "You ought to leave here and go to Judea, so that your disciples may see the miracles you do. No one who wants to be a public figure acts in secret. Since you are doing these things, show yourself to the world." For even his own brothers did not believe him.

(verses 2-5)

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This is an intriguing passage, full of behind-the-scenes human drama. It begins with the surprising insight that in Judea *"the Jews were waiting to take his life"* (verse 1). It will be many chapters yet before we get to the crucifixion, but the religious leaders, this early in the story, are already conspiring against him, eager to put him to death.

It's also intriguing that Jesus initially says he's not going up to this particular Feast in Jerusalem, but then almost immediately does an about-face and ends up going. The behind-the-scenes issue has to do with his own sense that *"the right time has not yet come"* (verse 8) – he's watching for the Father's direction rather than allowing himself to be coerced by his brothers.

But the central intrigue in this portion is with Jesus' brothers themselves. It raises an ongoing issue in John's Gospel over the nature of true belief. From what his brothers say, you'd think they were actually tracking with Jesus. They seem to be positively cheering him on. *"Go to Judea,"* they say. *"Do the miracles. Let people see. Show yourself to the world"* (verses 3-4). These seem to be words that evidence true belief. Don't they?

But John immediately tells us they actually don't. *"For even his own brothers did not believe him"* (verse 5). He's telling us that their words don't actually match the state of their hearts. No. Instead, there's actually skepticism rooted there. Presumably the tone of these brothers' voices, and the look in their eyes, would have given a very different slant on the words which they spoke. Rather than cheering him on, the words were thinly veiled scorn and sarcasm.

We've already seen a similar thing following the clearing of the temple. There we were told that *"many people saw the miraculous signs he was doing and believed in his name"* (John 2:23). Yet John tells us Jesus didn't trust them, *"for he knew what was in a man"* (John 2:25). Later, we'll discover another instance that initially seems to be true belief, but ends up revealing itself as prideful self-sufficiency instead. Jesus interacts with a group *"who had believed in him,"* but as he speaks about truth setting them free, they get defensive, arguing their own spiritual pedigree (*"Abraham's descendants"*), implying they have no real need for a Saviour (John 8:31-41). It doesn't look so much like *"belief"* after all.

John often seems to use this word *"believe"* ambiguously. In his Gospel, it's only by watching people's actions and attitudes that we discover if faith is real.

Which is as true today as it was then. It's not words which ultimately display faith. Rather, it's what's going on inside us. Behaviour and attitudes will subsequently spill forth (including words), but what's in the heart is most crucial. Are we trusting Jesus? Do we know our own *"righteousness"* isn't enough, that we absolutely need a Saviour? Do we realize that apart from him we can do nothing? Are we willing to submit to his timetable, rather than pushing our own? Will we

submit to his voice and follow his directives? Are we truly putting the weight of our lives in his hands?

It seems that Jesus' brothers eventually came to real, true, living faith. Indeed two of them even wrote portions of the New Testament. But they weren't there yet. They weren't really tracking with Jesus.

Even though their words might fool us.

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Lord Jesus, I reaffirm my trust in you. I believe. I know I need a Saviour. Truly. You alone are sufficient for my need. I place the weight of my life in your hands. If never before, I do it now. Thank you.

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Reflect:

At what points is faith thin? Are there places in your life where your own agenda or self-sufficiency get in the way, keeping you from real, radical, headlong faith? Confess those gaps to the Lord. Reaffirm true "*belief.*"