

J. C. RYLE'S NOTES ON THE GOSPEL OF JOHN
7:25-36

25. Then some of them from Jerusalem said, Is this not he whom they seek to kill? 26. But, lo, he speaks boldly, and they say nothing to him. Do the rulers know indeed that this is the very Christ? 27. However, we know where this man is from; but when Christ comes, no man knows where he is from. 28. Then Jesus cried out in the temple as he taught, saying, Ye both know me, and ye know where I am from; and I have not come of myself, but he who sent me is true, whom ye do not know. 29. But I know him, for I am from him, and he sent me. 30. Then they sought to take him; but no man laid hands on him, because his hour was not yet come. 31. And many of the people believed on him, and said, When Christ comes, will he do more miracles than these which this *man* has done? 32. The Pharisees heard that the people murmured such things concerning him, and the Pharisees and the chief priests sent officers to take him. 33. Then Jesus said to them, Yet a little while am I with you, and *then* I go to him who sent me. 34. Ye shall seek me, and shall not find *me*; and where I am *thither* ye cannot come. 35. Then the Jews said among themselves, Where will he go that we shall not find him? Will he go to the dispersed among the Gentiles and teach the Gentiles? 36. What *manner of saying* is this that he said, Ye shall seek me and shall not find *me*? and where I am, *thither* ye cannot come?

25.--[*Then some...said, etc.*] It is likely that these speakers were some of the lower orders who lived at Jerusalem and knew what the rulers wanted to do to our Lord. They can hardly be the same as "the people" at the 20th verse. They, being probably strangers to the plans of the priests and Pharisees, said, "Who goes about to kill You?" These, on the other hand, say, "Is not this He whom they seek to kill?"

Tittman remarks that the argument of the preceding verses "appears to have had great weight in the minds of our Lord's hearers."

26.--[*But, lo, He speaks boldly, etc.*] There appears to have been a restraining power put on our Lord's enemies at this juncture. (See verse 30.) It certainly seems to have struck the people before us as a remarkable thing that our Lord should speak out so boldly, openly, and publicly, and yet no effort be made by the rulers to apprehend Him and stop His teaching. No wonder that they asked the question which immediately follows: "Have our rulers changed their mind? Are they convinced at last? Have they really found out that this is truly the Messiah, the Christ of God?"

The Greek words would be more literally rendered, "Have the rulers truly learned that this man is truly the Christ?"

27.--[*However, we know where this man is from.*] This means that they knew that our Lord was from Nazareth of Galilee. This, we must remember, was

the universal belief of all the Jews. When our Lord rode into Jerusalem just before His crucifixion, the multitude said, "This is Jesus, the prophet of Nazareth of Galilee." (Matt. xxi.11.) When an inscription was put over His head on the cross in the letters of the three languages, it was "Jesus of Nazareth the King of the Jews." (John xix.19. See also Matt. xiii.55, Mark vi.3, Luke iv.22.) Yet we know all this time that the Jews were mistaken and that our Lord was in reality born at Bethlehem, according to prophecy. (Micah v.2.) We can hardly doubt that the Jews might have found this out if they had taken the pains to inquire narrowly into the early history of our Lord's life. In a nation so strict about pedigrees and birth places, such a thing could not be hid. But it seems as if they would not take the pains to inquire and satisfied themselves with the common story of His origin, as it gave them an additional excuse for not receiving Him as the Messiah.

The entire ignorance which appears to have prevailed among the Jews about all the circumstances of our Lord's miraculous conception and His birth at Bethlehem is certainly rather remarkable. Yet it should be remembered, (1) that thirty years had passed away between our Lord's birth and His public ministry, (2) that His mother and Joseph were evidently in a very humble position and might easily be overlooked, as well as all that happened to them, and (3) that living quietly at Nazareth, their journey to Bethlehem at the time of "the taxing" would soon be forgotten by others.

After all, we must not forget that it is part of God's dealings with man not to *force* conviction and belief on anyone. The obscurity purposely left over our Lord's birthplace was a part of the moral probation of the Jewish nation. If, in their pride and indolence and self-righteousness, they would not receive the abundant evidence which our Lord gave of His Messiahship, it could not be expected that God would make unbelief impossible by placing His birth of a virgin at Bethlehem beyond the reach of doubt. In this, as in everything else, if the Jews had *honestly* desired to find out the truth, they might have found it.

[*When Christ comes, no man knows where He is from.*] It is rather difficult to see what the Jews meant by these words. Most writers think that they referred to the mysterious language of Isaiah about Messiah: "Who shall declare His generation" (Isa. liii.8); or to Micah's words, "Whose goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting" (Micah v.2); and that they had in view the Divine and heavenly origin of Messiah which all Jews allowed would be a mystery. Yet it is hard to understand why they did not say, "When Christ comes, He shall be born in Bethlehem," and why they should be supposed to speak of our Lord's earthly origin in the beginning of the verse and of Messiah's Divine origin in the end. There seems no explanation except to suppose that these speakers were singularly ignorant Jews who did not know that Messiah was to be born at Bethlehem and only knew that His birth was to be a mysterious thing. This is a possible view, if not a very probable one. The argument of the speakers before us would then be as follows: "When Messiah comes, He is to come suddenly, as Malachi foretold saying, 'the Lord shall suddenly come to His temple' (Mal. iii.1), unexpectedly, mysteriously, and taking people by surprise. This man, therefore, who is sitting in the temple among us cannot be the Messiah, because we know that He came from Nazareth in Galilee and has been living

there for more than thirty years." The prophecy about Messiah being born at Bethlehem they conveniently dropped out of sight, and, in fact, never dreamed that it was fulfilled by our Lord. The only prophecy they chose to look at was the one in Malachi (Mal. iii.1), and as the Lord did not appear to fulfill that, they concluded that He could not be the Christ. In religious matters people are easily satisfied with very imperfect and superficial reasoning when they want to be satisfied and to be spared further trouble. Men never lack reasons to confirm their will. This seems to have been the case with the Jews.

Rupertus mentions a common tradition of the Jews: that when Christ came, He would come at midnight, as the angel came at midnight when the firstborn were destroyed in Egypt, and he thinks it may have been in their minds here.

Hutcheson observes that "not comparing Scripture with Scripture, but taking any single sentence that seems to plead for that we would be at, is a very great nursery and cause of error. Such is the Jews' reasoning here. They catch at one thing, speaking of Messiah's Divinity, and take no notice of other places."

Besser quotes a saying of Luther's: "The Jews are poor scholars. They have caught the sound of the prophet's clock (Micah v.2), but they have not noted the stroke aright. He who does not hear well imagines well. They heard that Christ was so to come that none should know from where He came. But they understood not rightly, that coming from God He was to be born of a virgin and come secretly into the world."

28.--[*Then Jesus cried...taught.*] This is a remarkable expression. We find our Lord departing from His usual practice when we read that He "cried," or raised His voice to a high pitch. Generally speaking, the words in St. Matthew apply strictly, quoted from Isa. xlii.2: "He shall not strive nor cry, neither shall any man hear His voice in the street." (Matt. xii.19.) Yet we see there were occasions when He did see it right to cry aloud and lift up His voice, and this is one. The perverse ignorance of the Jews, their persistence in blindness to all evidence, and the great opportunity afforded by the crowds around Him in the temple courts were probably reasons why He "cried."

Our Lord is only said to have "cried" or lifted up His voice in four other passages in the Gospels: viz., Matt. xxvii.50, Mark xv.37, John vii.37, and xii.44. The Greek for "cried" in Matt. xxvii.46 is even a stronger word than that before us.

[*Ye both know Me...where I am from.*] This is an undeniably difficult expression, partly because it is hard to reconcile with John viii.14, and partly because it is not clear how the Jews could be said to "know our Lord" and "where He was from." The explanations suggested are various.

(1) Some, as Grotius, Lampe, Doddridge, Bloomfield, Tittman, and A. Clarke would have the sentence read as a question: "Do you both know Me, and do ye know whence I am? Are you quite sure that you are correct in saying this?" In this view it would be rather like the mode of expression used by our

Lord in John xvi.31: "Do ye now believe?" where the interrogative forms the beginning of the sentence.

(2) Some, as Calvin, Ecolampadius, Beza, Flacius, Gualter, Rollock, Toletus, Glassius, Olshausen, Tholuck, Stier, and Webster think that the sentence is spoken ironically: "Truly you do know Me and whence I am, and poor miserable knowledge it is, worth nothing at all." Bengel and others object to this view, that our Lord never spoke ironically. Yet it would be hard to show that there is no irony in John x.32, if not in Matt. xxvi.45 and Mark vii.9.

(3) Some think, as Chrysostom, Cocceius, Jansenius, Diodati, Bengel, Henry, Burkitt, Hengstenberg, Alford, Wordsworth, and Burgon, that the sentence is a simple affirmation: "It is true that you know Me and whence I am. I grant that in a certain sense you are right. You know where I have been brought up and who my relatives are according to the flesh. And yet in reality you know very little of Me. Of my Divine nature and my unity with my Father ye know nothing at all." On the whole, I prefer this last view to either of the other two.

[*I have not come of myself, etc.*] This sentence and the rest of the verse are evidently elliptical and must be paraphrased to give a full idea of the sense: "And yet ye do not really and thoroughly know Me; for I am not come of myself, independent of God the Father and without commission, but sent by the Father into the world. And He that sent Me has proved Himself true to His promises by sending Me, and is indeed a real true Person, the true and faithful God of Israel, whom ye, with all your profession, do not know."

Here, as elsewhere, our Lord's expression, "not come of myself," points directly to that intimate union between Himself and God the Father which is so constantly referred to in the Gospel of John.

Here too, as elsewhere, our Lord charges on the unbelieving Jews ignorance of the God whom they professed to serve and for whose honor they professed to be jealous. With all their boasted zeal for true religion and the true God, they did not really know God.

The word "true" here is of doubtful interpretation. It means "truthful" according to Cyril, Chrysostom, Theophylact, Lampe, Tholuck. But it is not clear that this is so. Alford maintains that it must mean "really existent." Trench takes the same view in his "New Testament Synonyms."

29.--[*But I know Him, etc.*] The knowledge of which our Lord here speaks is that peculiar and intimate knowledge which is necessarily implied in the unity of the three Persons of the Trinity in the Godhead. There is a high and deep sense in which the Son knows the Father, and the Father knows the Son, which we cannot pretend to explain because it is far above our capacities. (John x.15.) The Jews knew nothing rightly of God the Father. Jesus, on the contrary, could say "I know Him" as no one else could. "Neither knows any man the Father except the Son, and He to whomsoever the Son will reveal Him." (Matt. xi.27.)

The expression "I am from Him" must not be confined and cramped down to mean only that our Lord had come like any prophet of old with a message and commission from God. It declares the relationship between God the Father and God the Son: "I am from Him by eternal generations, always one with Him--always equal with Him--but always a distinct person--always the only begotten Son--always from Him."

The expression "He has sent Me" is, like the preceding one, something far more than the mere assertion of a prophet's commission. It is a declaration that He was the Sent One--the Messiah, the Prophet greater than Moses, whom the Father had always promised to send. "I am the Seed of the woman sent to bruise the serpent's head. I am He whom the Father covenanted and engaged to send for the redemption of a lost world. I am He whom the Father has sent to be the Savior of lost man. I proclaim myself the Sent One--the Christ of God."

Bishop Hall paraphrases the two verses thus: "Ye mutter secretly that ye know Me and the place of my birth and parentage; but ye are utterly mistaken, for I have a Father in heaven whom ye know not. I came not of myself, but My Father is He who sent Me, who is the God of truth; of whom ye, after all your pretenses of knowledge, are utterly ignorant. But I do perfectly know Him, as I have good reason; for both I am from Him by eternal generation, and am by Him sent into the world to do the great work of redemption."

30.--[*They then sought to take Him.*] This last declaration seems to have raised the anger of the Jerusalem multitude who were listening to our Lord. With the characteristic keenness of all Jews, they at once detected in our Lord's language a claim to be received as the Messiah. Just as on a former occasion they saw, in His "calling God His Father," that He "made Himself equal with God" (John v.18), so here in His saying "I am from Him, He has sent Me," they saw an assertion of His right to be received as Messiah.

[*But no man...hour was not yet come.*] This restraint on our Lord's enemies can only be accounted for by direct Divine interposition. It is like John viii.20 and xviii.6. It is clear that they could do nothing against Him except by God's permission and when God, in His wisdom, was pleased to let it be done. Our Lord did not fall into His enemies' hands through inability to escape, but because the "hour had come" when He voluntarily undertook to die as a substitute.

The doctrine before us, let us note, is full of comfort to God's people. Nothing can hurt them except and until God permits. We are all immortal till our work is done. To realize that nothing happens in this world except by the eternal counsels of our Father and according to His eternal plans, is one grand secret of living a calm, peaceful, and contented life.

Besser quotes a saying of Luther's: "God has appointed a nice, easy hour for everything, and that hour has the whole world for its enemy: it must attack it. The devil shoots and throws at the poor clock-hand, but in vain, for all depends on the hour. Till the hour comes and the hand has run its course, the devil and the world shall accomplish nothing."

31.--[*Many of the people.*] This means the common people--the lower orders, in contradistinction to the Pharisees and chief priests.

[*Believed on Him.*] There seems no reason to think that this was not a true faith, so far as it went. But it would not be safe, perhaps, to conclude that it was more than a general belief that our Lord must be the Messiah, the Christ, and that He deserved to be received as such.

[*When Christ comes...more miracles...has done?*] This language must clearly have been used by people who were familiar with many of our Lord's miracles wrought in Galilee, and who knew a good deal about His ministry. So few miracles probably had been wrought as yet in and around Jerusalem that the language would hardly be used by Jerusalem people. The word "more" probably means not only more in number but "greater" in character.

The question raised by these people was a fair and reasonable one: "What greater evidence could anyone give that He is the Christ than this man has given? He could not work greater miracles, even if He worked more numerous ones. What then are we waiting for? Why should we not acknowledge this man as the Christ?"

32.--[*The Pharisees heard...people murmured...Him.*] This would be more literally translated, "The Pharisees heard the people murmuring." They actually heard with their own ears the common people, as they walked about the temple courts and gathered in the streets of Jerusalem at the crowded time of the feast, keeping up their under conversation about our Lord. Here, as at the twelfth verse, the word we render "murmuring" does not necessarily imply any finding fault, but only a dissatisfied and restless state of mind which found vent in much conversation and whispering among the people.

[*And the Pharisees...sent officers to take him.*] It would seem that the talk and stir of men's minds about our Lord so alarmed and irritated the rulers of the Jews that they resolved even now, in the midst of the feast, to arrest Him and so stop His preaching. What day of the feast this was, and what interval elapsed between this verse and the 37th (where we are told of "the last day" of the feast), we are not told. It seems probable that the officers sought an opportunity for taking our Lord but could find none, partly because of the crowds that surrounded Him and partly because of a Divine restraint laid upon them. This was the state of things for three days at least.

Full well did these Pharisees justify our Lord's character of them in another place: "Ye neither go in yourselves into the kingdom; neither suffer ye them that are entering to go in." (Matt. xxiii.13.)

33.--[*Then Jesus said to them.*] The officers of the Pharisees and their supporters seem clearly to be the persons whom our Lord here addresses. Not only were they, through Divine restraint, unable to lay hands on Him, but they were obliged to stand by and listen to Him. They dared not seize Him for fear of the people, and yet dared not go away to report their inability to carry out their orders.

[*Yet a little while, etc.*] There is probably an undertone of sadness and tenderness about this and the following sentences. It is as though our Lord said, "Ye have come to lay hands on Me, and yet ye might well bear with Me. I am only a little time longer with you and then, when my time is come for leaving the world, I shall go back to my Father who sent Me." Or else it must mean, "Ye are sent to lay hands on Me, but it is useless at present; ye cannot do it because my hour is not yet come. I have yet a little longer time to minister on earth and then, and not till then, I go to Him who sent Me." Alford takes this view.

The Jews, of course, could not understand whom our Lord meant by "Him who sent Me," and this saying must necessarily have seemed dark and mysterious to them.

34.--[*Ye shall seek Me and shall not find Me.*] These words seem addressed both to the officers and to those who sent them--to the whole body, in fact, of our Lord's unbelieving enemies. "A day will come when you will anxiously seek Me and bitterly lament your rejection of Me, but too late. The day of your visitation will be past and gone, and you will not find Me."

There is a great Bible truth taught here, as elsewhere, which is far too much overlooked by many. I mean the possibility of men seeking salvation when it is too late and crying for pardon and heaven when the door is shut forever. Men may find out their folly and be filled with remorse for their sins and yet feel that they cannot repent. No doubt true repentance is never too late; but late repentance is seldom true. Pharaoh, King Saul, and Judas Iscariot could all say, "I have sinned." Hell itself is truth known too late. God is unspeakably merciful, no doubt, but there is a limit even to God's mercy. He can be angry and may be provoked to leave men alone. People should often study Prov. i.24-34, Job xxvii.9, Isaiah l.15, Jer. xi.11, xiv.12, Ezek. viii.18, Hosea v.6, Micah iii.4, Zech. vii.13, and Matt. xxv.11,12.

These words very possibly received a most awful fulfillment during the siege of Jerusalem, forty years after they were spoken. So think Chrysostom, Theophylact, and Euthymius.

But they were probably found true by many of our Lord's hearers long before that time. Their eyes were opened to see their folly and sin, after our Lord had left the world.

Burgon remarks that to this very day the Jews are, in a sense, seeking the Messiah and yet not finding Him.

[*Where I am.*] The place our Lord speaks of here is evidently heaven. Some have thought, as Bengel, that the words "where I am" should be translated "where I go." But it is neither a natural nor usual sense to put on the words. Nor is it necessary. There was a sense in which the Son of God could say with perfect truth, "Where I am thither ye cannot come." As God he never ceased to be in heaven, even when He was fulfilling His ministry on earth during His incarnation. As God He could truly say "Where I am" and not merely where "I was" or where "I shall be." It is like John iii.13

where our Lord, speaking to Nicodemus, calls Himself the "Son of man which IS in heaven." The expression is one of the many texts proving our Lord's divinity. No mere man speaking on earth could speak of heaven as a place "where I am." Augustine strongly maintains this view.

[*Ye cannot come.*] This is one of those expressions which show the impossibility of unconverted and unbelieving men going to heaven. It is a place where they "cannot come." Their own nature unfits them for it. They would not be happy if they were there. Without new hearts, without the Holy Ghost, without the blood of Christ, they could not enjoy heaven. The favorite notion of some modern theologians--that all mankind are finally to go to heaven--cannot possibly be reconciled with this expression. Men may please themselves with thinking it is kind and loving and liberal and large-hearted to teach and believe that all men and women of all sorts will finally be found in heaven. One word of our Lord Jesus Christ's overturns the whole theory. "Heaven is a place," He says to the wicked, where "ye cannot come."

The word "ye" is emphatic and in the Greek stands out in strong contrast to the "I" of the sentence.

35.--[*Then the Jews said among themselves.*] The expression "Jews" here can hardly be confined to the Pharisees and rulers. It must mean, at any rate, those among them who heard our Lord say the words in the preceding verse. Whoever they were, they were probably not friendly to Him.

[*Where will He go that we shall not find Him?*] This would be more literally rendered, "Where is this man about to go?" They could put no meaning of a spiritual kind on our Lord's words.

[*Will He go...Gentiles, etc.*] This would be more literally rendered, "Is He about to go to the dispersion among the Greeks and to teach the Greeks?" The Greek language, Greek literature, and Greek philosophy had so thoroughly leavened Asia Minor, Syria, and Palestine that the expression "Greeks" in the New Testament is often equivalent to Gentiles and stands for any people who are not Jews. Thus Rom. ii.9,10, iii.9, 1 Cor. x.32, xii.13. Yet it is a singular fact that this is the only passage in the New Testament where the word "Greek," standing alone and not in contradistinction to Jews, is rendered "Gentile."

The verse teaches two interesting things. One is the fact that the existence of a large number of Jews scattered all over the Gentile world was acknowledged as notorious in our Lord's time. The other is the impression that it proves to have prevailed among the Jews that a new teacher of religion might be expected to go to the Jews scattered among the Gentiles and, beginning with them, proceed to teach the Gentiles. This is in fact precisely what the Apostle Paul and his companions afterwards did. They did "go to the dispersed among the Gentiles and teach the Gentiles." The idea started here, of "teaching the Gentiles," was probably the suggestion of those who hated our Lord. We know from the Acts of the Apostles how much the Jews detested the opening of the door of salvation to the Gentiles.

Some, as Chrysostom, Theophylact, Hengstenberg, and many others, think that the words "dispersed among the Gentiles" mean the Gentiles themselves dispersed and scattered all over the world, and not the Jews. But our own version seems far more likely. There is an awkwardness in calling the Gentiles "the dispersion," and it is an expression nowhere else used. James calls the Jews "the twelve tribes scattered abroad." (James i.1.)

36.--[*What manner of saying, etc.*] This question of the Jews is the language of people who saw that there was probably some deep meaning in our Lord's words, and yet they were unable to make out what He meant. Hating our Lord bitterly as many of them did--determined to kill Him the first opportunity, vexed and annoyed at their own inability to answer Him or to stop His influence with the people--they suspected everything that fell from His lips. "Do not these words of His imply some mischief? Is there not some evil at the bottom of them? Do they not indicate that He is going to dishonor the law of Moses by pulling down the wall of partition between Jew and Gentile?"