

SERMON NOTES

“Yerevman Khach”
(Appearance of the Cross)

Synaxis Gospel
John 7:14-23

KNOWING THE TRUTH

INTRODUCTION

Today in our reading, the Armenian Church continues to reflect on some of the teachings of Jesus that the disciples did not grasp until after the Resurrection of our Lord. Next Sunday will be our last lesson in this series before we celebrate His Ascension.¹

The Gospel of John records that, during the three-year ministry, even our Lord’s physical brothers (or relatives) did not believe in Him. The time of our reading is probably six months before the Crucifixion. It is autumn, and Christ’s brothers have urged Him to go up to the yearly harvest festival, the Feast of Tabernacles, and support His claims with a demonstration of His powers. The Father, however, guided Jesus in all things and thus the timing of His attendance was not to be at the beginning of the feast but at its mid-point.

The people had been searching for Jesus, and He was the talk of the crowd. But, they were divided in their opinions about Him. Some believed that He might very well be the promised Messiah or Christ, the great Davidic king, Who was to come and bring their salvation. Others thought that He was a charlatan, who misled the people. (However, by the end of the feast, so many people had believed in Him that the religious leaders sent out a contingent of soldiers to arrest Him.) Our reading begins with Jesus’ appearance at the feast.

SYNAXIS READING

John 7:14-23

But when it was now the midst of the feast Jesus went up into the temple, and began to teach.

The Jews therefore were marveling, saying, “How has this man become learned, having never been educated?”

¹ The Ascension marks the end of the forty-day period when Christ was able to open the disciples’ eyes to understand all that He had taught and done during His three-year ministry. After Pentecost, ten days later, God, in the form of His Holy Spirit, continued that process of educating the disciples. See John 16:13-15.

Jesus therefore answered them, and said, "My teaching is not Mine, but His who sent Me.

"If any man is willing to do His will, he shall know of the teaching, whether it is of God, or whether I speak from Myself.

"He who speaks from himself seeks his own glory; but He who is seeking the glory of the one who sent Him, He is true, and there is no unrighteousness in Him.

"Did not Moses give you the law, and yet none of you carries out the law? Why do you seek to kill Me?"

The people answered, "You have a demon! Who seeks to kill You?"

Jesus answered and said to them, "I did one deed, and you all marvel.

"On this account Moses has given you circumcision (not because it is from Moses, but from the fathers), and on the Sabbath you circumcise a man.

"If a man receives circumcision on the Sabbath, that the Law of Moses may not be broke, are you angry with Me because I made an entire man well on the Sabbath?"

NOTES

But when it was now the midst of the feast Jesus went up into the temple, and began to teach.

This feast was the feast of Tabernacles, or Booths. It occurs in the autumn, after the harvest, and is a celebration of the harvest. Moreover, it is also a commanded remembrance of Israel's trek through the wilderness, 1400 years earlier, after the Lord delivered them from Egyptian slavery.²

The temple colonnade of the outer court is probably the venue of this teaching event. What Jesus taught on this occasion is not recorded. However, later during the feast, He used the water celebration as an illustration of His promise to give the Holy Spirit to those who believe in Him (Jesus).³

² For a fuller discussion of this feast, see the Notes for the Fifth Sunday after Christmas, "Living Water."

³Ibid

And the Jews therefore were marveling, saying, “How has this man become learned, having never been educated?”

Most Jewish men could read and write. The synagogues were established not only for the purpose of local worship, but also as centers for education. Therefore, the Jews were not amazed that Jesus was literate, but, rather, they were wondering how Jesus could discuss the Scriptures so powerfully without having ever studied with any of the famous rabbis.

Jesus therefore answered them, and said, “My teaching is not Mine, but His who sent Me.

The doctrine, or teaching, of Jesus, which amazed the Jewish leadership, was from God the Father. The Scriptures were from God in the first place. No wonder, then, that Jesus could expound them so brilliantly. He was, and is, the Word of God.

“If any man is willing to [should want to] do His will, he shall know of the teaching, whether it is of God, or whether I speak from Myself.

This statement gives us the key to knowing the truth. We do not know the teachings of Jesus are true by investigation or study, but by an attitude. This attitude is one of willingness to serve God, to do His will. If we are willing to do His will, it will be revealed to us whether the teachings of Jesus are from God or not. We are told in John 16:13 that the Holy Spirit will teach us:

*“But when He, the Spirit of **truth**, comes, He will guide you into all the **truth**; for He will not speak on His own initiative, but whatever He hears, He will speak; and He will disclose to you what is to come.”*

We can learn many facts from scholars, even scholars who are not believers in our Lord and who may even be atheists or agnostics. Many of these have excellent insights, from a literary point of view, into the Scriptures. However, their insights do not give us the confidence that what the Scriptures teach is actually true. This confidence can only come from the witness of the Holy Spirit with our spirit. Our reading teaches us that He does this for those who **want** to obey God.

“He who speaks from himself seeks his own glory; but He who is seeking the glory of the one who sent Him, He is true, and there is no unrighteousness in Him.

Here Jesus steps back to examine His own motives. If He were seeking His own glory, independent of the Father’s, He would claim the teachings as His own, or teach whatever He wanted to teach. However, this is not the case. Jesus seeks the glory of the Father and He teaches what the Father instructs Him to teach. Therefore, no unrighteousness can be found in Jesus. He is true (honest, genuine). He is the voice of God.

“Did not Moses give you the law, and yet none of you carries out the law?

The Jews of Jesus’ day recognized the writings of Moses, the Law, as God’s will for them. One of the reasons they so hated Jesus is that He showed them that, instead of obeying the Law, as they claimed to do, they really disobeyed it. Below, He will show them again that their murderous hatred for Him was disobedience to the Law.⁴ No wonder, then, that they could not know that Jesus was Who He said He was. Their willful disobedience to God blocked their ability to know.

⁴ In the judgment, it will be Moses who will testify against these Jews who claim that they honor and obey Moses and the Law. See John 5:45-46.

Even the most amazing things will not bring confidence concerning the truth about our Lord. As Jesus taught in the Parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus:

*“But he [Abraham] said to him, ‘If they do not listen to [obey] **Moses** and the Prophets, neither will they be persuaded if someone rises from the dead.’”⁵*

This concept, that willingness to obey God brings knowledge of the truth, was not new. The prophet Daniel had written:

*“As it is written in the Law of **Moses**, all this calamity has come upon us; yet we have not sought the favor of the **LORD** our God, by turning from our iniquities and giving attention [understanding] Thy truth.”⁶*

The people of Daniel’s day preferred their iniquities to obeying God; they therefore did not understand God’s truth.

Why do you seek to kill Me?”

Suddenly, to prove His point about their disobedience to the Law of Moses, He reminds them of His last visit to Jerusalem.⁷ At that time, Jesus had healed a cripple who had been unable to walk for 38 years. Jesus had performed this miracle on a Sabbath day. For this, the rulers wanted to kill him.⁸

The multitude answered, “You have a demon! Who seeks to kill You?”

The ‘multitude’ here is obviously those people whose opinion of Jesus was negative. They are accusing Jesus of being deluded. In the verses beyond our reading⁹, people are recorded mentioning that the rulers were, in fact, seeking to kill Jesus.

Jesus answered and said to them, “I did one deed, and you all marvel.

Again, Jesus refers back to the miracle of healing the crippled man at the Pool of Bethesda. They were all astounded at that time.

At that time, Jesus had defended Himself by maintaining that His activity was united to the Father’s activity. Now, He gives a legal reason why they should not accuse Him of breaking the Sabbath. It is the precedence of the law of circumcision over the law of the Sabbath.

“On this account Moses has given you circumcision (not because it is from Moses, but from the fathers), and on the Sabbath you circumcise a man.

The law of circumcision had not originated with the Laws of Moses. Abraham, the patriarch who lived hundreds of years before Moses, had been commanded by God to circumcise himself, his son, and all males who belonged to Abraham’s household. This circumcision was to be the sign of the Covenant between God and Abraham, and all of Abraham’s descendents.

“This is My covenant, which you shall keep, between Me and you and your descendants after you: every male among you shall be circumcised.

⁵ Luke 16:31

⁶ Daniel 9:13

⁷ See John 5. Because of this connection, some scholars believe that John 7 should follow immediately after John 5.

⁸ For a discussion of that event, see the Notes for Red Sunday, “The Offer of Eternal Life”.

⁹ John 7:25

“And you shall be circumcised in the flesh of your foreskin; and it shall be the sign of the covenant between Me and you.

“And every male among you who is eight days old shall be circumcised throughout your generations, a servant who is born in the house or who is bought with money from any foreigner, who is not of your descendants.

“A servant who is born in your house or who is bought with your money shall surely be circumcised; thus shall My covenant be in your flesh for an everlasting covenant.”¹⁰

If the eighth day fell on a Sabbath, the child was circumcised. The Law of circumcision took precedence over the Law of keeping the Sabbath free of work.

“If a man receives circumcision on the Sabbath that the Law of Moses may not be broken, are you angry with Me because I made an entire man well on the Sabbath?”

Moses had included the law of circumcision in the Law. In order to keep this law, the Sabbath law was, in effect, set aside. Jesus argues that if a tiny little piece of a male can be operated on [and, thus, that organ is made healthy], and the Sabbath is not *broken*, why are they angry that He restored to health an entire man on the Sabbath?

Later, according to Luke’s Gospel, as He made His last journey to Jerusalem, our Lord used other examples. They saw nothing wrong in giving their ox or their ass a drink of water on the Sabbath, or if their ox happened to fall into a pit, they did not think they were breaking the Sabbath to pull the animal out. Why did they accuse Him of breaking the Sabbath because He helped a human being on the Sabbath?¹¹

Clearly, these monitors of the Law of Moses were ignorant of the spirit of the Law (which they had no desire to keep), and could not, therefore, know the truth that was given only to those who truly desired to obey God.

APPLICATION

There are four Sundays in which the Armenian Church celebrates, with a feast, the symbol of our faith, the Cross of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. It symbolizes His death for us, the death we deserved, but which He gladly died, so that we might forever live with Him. The Cross is a symbol of this wonderful truth. Today is one of those four Sundays.

The Cross is not a symbol of truth for everyone, but only for those who know the truth about Jesus Christ. Jesus was not simply a man, not simply a wise and good man. He was not simply a prophet of God. He was, and is, God Himself. St. John tells us that Jesus is the incarnation of the Word of God. He functions as the Actor for the Father Who functions as the Initiator, and Director, within the Godhead—the One and only God. St. Paul tells us that in the man, Jesus Christ, dwells all the fullness of the

¹⁰ Genesis 17:10 ff.

¹¹ See Luke 13:15 and 14:5.

Godhead bodily.¹² This is the One Who hung on the Cross in our place. However, for the majority of the people of the world, this is just another teaching of a religion, the truth of which cannot be known.

Even among Christian teachers, it is often taught that one must take a ‘leap of faith’ and just blindly believe. This is not the teaching of our passage. On the contrary, our lesson teaches us that the truth can be known. However there is a requirement. One must be **willing** to obey God.

The knowledge that God exists is hardwired into our nature. St. Paul teaches this in the first chapter of his letter to the Romans:

“[B]ecause that which is known about God is evident within them; for God made it evident to them.

For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made, so that they are without excuse.¹³

This teaching is confirmed by anthropologists, who have never found a community of humans that did not believe in a Higher Power. Mankind believes there is a God. Those few who deny there is a God, atheists, are fools according to the Bible.¹⁴ Agnostics simply do not have proof, and so they do not feel they can definitely say one way or the other. For most of us, then, belief in God is not the problem; acknowledging our responsibility to Him—to be thankful and to glorify Him—is the problem. This insinuates obedience.

The Jews of Jesus’ day believed in God. They also believed He had spoken through Moses, and His will for them was written in the Law. This was not the problem. The problem for them was that they wanted to play at obeying God. They wanted to be thought of as obedient, even to the extreme. But their heart was far from Him and real obedience in spirit, and in truth, was not a part of their lives. This is the reason that they did not recognize Who Jesus was, and is. To this day they have the same problem. **To know the Truth, one must be willing to obey God. Really obey God.**

The Gentiles and nominal Christians have the same problem. Do we want to know if what Jesus taught about Himself and His mission is really true? Do we want to know if He really is God? Do we want to know if it is true that He died and rose again on our behalf, out of love for us? This does not take *a leap of faith*. It takes *a leap of obedience*. God has promised that we will know the truth *if* we are willing to obey God. If so, His Holy Spirit will confirm to our spirit that it is true. Until that time, we will never really know.

¹² Colossians 1:19

¹³ Romans 1:19-20

¹⁴ Psalm 14:1

On this special day, as we celebrate the great symbol of truth, the Holy Cross, let us once and for all commit ourselves to Him who died upon it for our sakes, let us commit to knowing His will for us and to obeying Him with a whole heart. In doing so, all doubts will be ripped from our minds, and we will know the Truth. We will **know** with confidence that Jesus Christ is God; that He died to pay the penalty for our sins. We will **know** with confidence that if we place our trust in Him—believing that He will forgive us when we repent, and that He will clear us of our sins—we have eternal life with Him.