A World in Conflict with Christ
John 7:1-36

On Thursday morning, 11th August, 1664, an Englishman by the name of Sir John Lisle was on his way to church - at St Francois - here in Lausanne. And as he was walking up to the main door of the church to attend the morning service, he was assassinated, shot in the back by men lying in wait for him. Why?

Well, 15 years before, he was one of 59 men who had signed the death warrant for King Charles I. But the monarchy had been restored and Charles' son, Charles II, was hunting down the men responsible for his father's death. And with others, John Lisle had fled to Lausanne - but it was here where his past caught up with him.

Now, if it was considered a crime to execute a king, in today's passage we see an even greater crime in the planning. Verse 1, 'After this Jesus went about in Galilee. He would not go about in Judea, because the Jews [that's the jewish religious leaders] were seeking to kill him.'

And from the beginning of this Gospel, John has been presenting Jesus as the king above every king - the incarnate Son of God. And yet here are people trying to kill him, assassinate him. Because if John Lisle did not believe that King Charles had any divine right to rule, these leaders did not believe Jesus had any divine nature at all. 'He's not a king, he's a trouble maker.'

But did you notice? Their's is just one reaction to Jesus in a whole spectrum of reactions. There are his brothers, v5, and 'not even his brothers believed in him.' There were those saying, v12, "he is a good man" while others were saying, "No, he is leading the people astray." And then, v20, you've got some saying, "You have a demon." You're off your trolley, in fact, quite possibly, you are evil.

Why is everyone so conflicted about him? And that's not just a matter of historical interest is it? Like, why was a man assassinated 360 years ago. It's that we still see that same range of opinions today. Is he God or was he just good? Was he deceived, or was he a deceiver?

And if you're not yet a Christian, how are you supposed to decide? But if you are a Christian it still matters, doesn't it - because of the thinking, the underlying reasoning, beneath their responses. You see, that doesn't just explain why some people *don't* believe in Jesus, it *also* explains why those who do believe sometimes don't *live* like they believe.

Look at v7, where Jesus says to his brothers, "The world cannot hate you, but it hates me because I testify about it that its works are evil." And in the Bible that word 'world' can mean different things. Here, Jesus is talking about a way of thinking, a way of living, the spirit of the age, that's against the grain of God's wisdom and God's ways, so that he and the world are on a collision course. And his brothers are thinking like the world.

So today we're going to look at two things: Firstly, what the world gets wrong, and secondly, how to get it right.

What the World Get's Wrong
When I was a medical student I did not do well in psychiatry. I managed to memorise about one drug and in the oral exam at the end of there course that drug was the only medical treatment I could suggest, whichever condition they asked me about. I was so bad, the professor literally sat there and rolled his eyes at me. But there was one other thing I learned, and that was to ask the

patient: ‘Do you know what time it is, or what day it is? Or do you know where we are?’ Because if they’re disorientated in time and place, things are bad.

And it’s in thinking about **time and place** that’s the first way the world goes wrong. Verses 2-3: ‘Now the Jews’ Feast of Booths was at hand. So his brothers said to him, “Leave here and go to Judea, that your disciples also may see the works you are doing.”’

And Jesus’ brothers are probably aware of what we saw happening last week - people are turning away from Jesus. So he needs to seize the moment. He needs to promote himself, and put himself out there, before everyone else deserts him. Verse 4, “For no one works in secret if he seeks to be known openly. If you do these things, show yourself to the world.”

And it’s the Feast of Booths, Tabernacles, and Jerusalem will be full of pilgrims. So what better time, what better place, to get his movement back on track. Act now Jesus.

Look how Jesus responds: v6, ‘Jesus said to them, “My time has not yet come, but *your time is always here*.”

In other words, for them, this life is it, the moment is now. They live for today: ‘This time is all we have.’ Their time is always here. And unless Jesus makes a play for it, he’s going to miss it.

But nothing has changed, has it? You see, for the atheist, their time is also always here, because this time, this life, *is* all there is. And life ends when it ends, so make the most of it. And there’s no eternity - so just like here, they also don’t believe Jesus is who he says he is… I mean, how can he be?

But you don’t have to be an atheist to think like that, do you? - or, at least, to live like that. To live, or use your money, or see your relationships, or use your talents, as if *this* life is all there. And your time is always here. ‘One life - live it.’

Or, as we’ve been seeing over the last few weeks, you have these longings for eternity - for life and love and meaning and worth. But do you seek satisfaction for those in the things of here and now, in stuff that won’t last beyond the now, or in God and the things of eternity? Or do you ever struggle with delayed gratification? You want this thing, and you want it, now. Why? Because we live like our time is always here.

Or think about when life is hard. If we think this life is all there is, or live like it, then trials aren’t just trials, they’re a reason for me to complain and to be frustrated and resentful. Why? Because I only have this time, this life, and this is trashing it. It’s spoiling the party. So, listen to what Paul writes: ‘For this light *momentary* affliction is preparing for us an *eternal* weight of glory beyond all comparison, as we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen. For the things that are seen are *transient*, but the things that are unseen are *eternal*’ (2 Cor 4:17-18)

What’s he doing? He’s contrasting the momentary with the eternal; transient trials with everlasting glory. And we get down, or embittered, when we lose sight of eternity, and the One who has come from eternity.

Ok, but jump to the end of the passage and it's not just *time* the world gets wrong, it's *place*. And officers are sent to arrest Jesus, and v33-34, 'Jesus then said,, "I will be with you a little longer, and then I am going to him who sent me. You will seek me and you will not find me. Where I am you cannot come."' And he's talking of his return to heaven. But the crowd can't see further than this world: v35, "Where does this man intend to go that we will not find him? Does he intend to go to the Dispersion among the Greeks and teach the Greeks?"

And if you think that this world, just like this life, is all there is, you'll always going to be misunderstanding Jesus. But you'll also misuse the world. Because you'll think that this is your destination, that you've arrived. Augustine used the example of a traveller making his way home through a foreign country. If he thinks the *foreign country* is home, he'll spend too much time in the taverns, enjoying himself, and he'll never get home, instead of using those taverns as a means to get refuelled for the next leg of the journey to his real home.

So lose sight, not just of eternity, but your eternal *destination*, and you'll think you've arrived because you've made it in this world. And you'll become absorbed by the stuff of this world, by sport and leisure and food and travel and career, instead of using it to help speed you, and those around you, to your true destination, to living life the way God intended you to live it.

But the second thing the world gets wrong is **who to fear**. Verse 12-13, 'While some said, "He is a good man," others said, "No, he is leading the people astray." *Yet for fear of the Jews* no one spoke openly of him.'

And if you're not a Christian, and you're afraid of what people might think of you if you were to become a Christian, the danger is you'll never drill down to who Jesus really is, because that might have implications, and 'what would people say?'

But if you are a Christian, is your life free from the fear of others? Or does it sometimes make you stay quiet when you should speak, or speak when you should stay quiet? Proverbs says, 'The fear of man lays a snare, but whoever trusts in the Lord is safe' (Prov 29:25). In other words, let the fear of others dominate you and you'll be controlled by it. But get your fear right - fear God more than anyone else and it's liberating.

Then the third area of thinking the world gets wrong is **authority**. Jesus is teaching in the temple and v15, 'The Jews therefore marvelled, saying, "How is it that this man has learning, when he has never studied?"' Now, if you've got a paper or an essay to write, you've got to get your references right, haven't you? You've got to show where you're getting this from, who your authorities are.

And in Jesus day, those authorities were the rabbinic schools. 'I'm teaching *this* because *this* is what Rabbi X said, but Rabbi Y said this." And any traditional, conservative culture has its schools, its elders, its authorities, that tell you 'you're in line or you're out of line.'

But Jesus had never enrolled, let alone graduated from any such school. So you might expect him to say, 'you're right, I've never studied in your schools. I'm my own authority.' Which would be music to our modern progressive culture, wouldn't it? Because if traditional cultures locate authority in the elders, the establishment, our modern culture has located it in the self: 'I'm the authority. I get to decide for myself what's right and wrong.'

But look how Jesus responds: v16, “My teaching is not mine, *but his who sent me*.” So his authority is neither traditional nor modern. It’s God, his Heavenly Father.

And if you’re not yet a Christian and you approach Jesus as a case to be studied, using Jordan Peterson or Critical Theory as your authority, you’re going to struggle to see him for who he is. Because he’s going to be distorted through that lens. But similarly, if you locate the authority inside your self you’re also going to struggle - and for another reason. Verse 18: “The one who speaks on his own authority *seeks his own glory*; but the one who seeks the glory of him who sent him is true.”

In other words, Jesus is not out to make a name of himself in the way his brothers are thinking. He’s speaking under God’s authority, for *God’s* glory. But what happens when you make *yourself* the authority? - the one who decides what’s right and wrong in life. It makes you proud, doesn't it. Because now you’re the judge, and you’re the lawgiver. You’re the centre of life - the one around whom everyone else must move in orbit. And consciously, or subconsciously, life will be about your glory - and you getting what you want and having your way. Which will do terrible things to your relationships - you’ll use people rather than love them. And no one will thrive in your shadow.

But then Jesus gives the fourth area the world gets wrong - **morality.** Verse 19, “Has not Moses given you the law? *Yet none of you keeps the law*. Why do you seek to kill me?”

Now. who is Jesus saying that to? To people who have dedicated their lives to keeping and teaching the law. It’s like me walking into the changing room of premier league football club and telling the players, none of you play football.

And yet, Jesus is not wrong is he? They really *are* seeking to kill him - which really *is* in direct contradiction to God’s law: you shall not murder. But how can they be so blind to their own actions and attitudes? Well, that’s what legalistic religion does to you, doesn’t it? Your righteousness, your standing before God depends on your being better than others. And that inevitably means you’ll begin to see others as less worthy and valuable than you - and you dehumanise them. You begin to see them as enemies, to be got rid of them.

Think that you’ve got to earn God’s approval by your morality, and it doesn’t just shut you off from his grace - it leaves you further away than ever.

But it also blinds you to where you fail to keep the rules - sometimes the very same rules. Verse 20, “Who is seeking to kill you?” to which Jesus replies, v21-23, “I did one work, and you all marvel at it. Moses gave you circumcision… and you circumcise a man on the Sabbath. If on the Sabbath a man receives circumcision, so that the law may not be broken, are you angry with me because on the Sabbath I made a man’s whole body well?”

Rewind to chapter 5, where Jesus healed a man paralysed for 38 years. A healing that explains these leaders’ animosity to Jesus. Because he healed him, he made a man’s whole body well, on the Sabbath.

Look at Jesus’ argument: under the law of Moses, a baby boy had to be circumcised on the 8th day. So what happens if he’s born on a Friday? Because then, the 8th day would be Saturday - the Sabbath. But according to the Law you can’t work on the Sabbath. So which law takes precedence -

sabbath, or circumcision? Well, everyone agreed that circumcision took precedence. And they set aside the lower law - Keep the Sabbath - to keep the higher law - Circumcise on the 8th Day - and to admit this boy as a member of God's covenant people.

And Jesus is saying, 'you criticise me for making a man whole, and restoring him back to God's people, when you do exactly the same whenever you circumcise a boy on the Sabbath.'

You see, if you think that our standing before God depends on rule-keeping, on being good enough, or zealous enough, you'll be a critic and a fault finder. And instead of noticing all the evidences of God's grace you'll be noticing everything that's wrong. And you'll be so busy looking out for what others are or aren't doing, you'll be blind to your own issues. When, all the time Jesus is offering you grace, and with it healing and wholeness.

But fifthly, the world gets it wrong about **appearances.** Verse 24, "Do not judge by appearances, but judge with right judgment." You see, they're judging him by looking at the externals - he's broken the sabbath - but they're not probing deeper.

Think how we can do the same. If you're young and single, or not so young and single, you can be more impressed by external appearance than inner character - 'cor she's a stunner', or 'look at his hair, its so thick and wavy.' As if hair was anything other than over-rated. But in fixating on the externals, we blind ourselves to true beauty, beauty of character.

And make external appearance your highest thing, and you'll become increasingly superficial: you'll miss the beauty of Christ and with it, the beauty of others.

But the sixth and final thing the world gets wrong is **assumptions.** Verse 27, "But we know where this man comes from, and when the Christ appears, no one will know where he comes from." And they're probably getting that from Malachi: "And the Lord whom you seek will suddenly come to his temple" (Mal 3:1). And there's the assumption that when Messiah appears, he'll appear out of nowhere. And no one will be debating, 'Is he or isn't he?'

And here is Jesus failing to meet their essential and desirable criteria - as he says in v28, yup "You know me, and you know where I come from." Capernaum, Nazareth, so he can't be the Messiah. But what if they let their assumptions be challenged by other stuff the Bible says, like Micah 5:2, 'But you, O Bethlehem Ephrathah… from you shall come forth for me one who is to be ruler in Israel.' What if they dug deeper, and found out his birth place? Then would they have understood what he says in v28-29: "He who sent me is true… *for I come from him*."

So, just ask yourself, are your present assumptions about life, or about God, keeping you from seeing who Jesus really is? Or living the life he would have you live? Are you making God in your own image and deciding for yourself what he should be like.? Or you believing stuff about *yourself*, that you're unloved and unlovable? - when his word challenges those assumptions.

Ok, if that's what the world gets wrong, how can we get it right?

Getting it Right

Look again at v16-17: ‘Jesus answered them, “My teaching is not mine, but his who sent me. If anyone's will is to do God’s will, he will know whether the teaching is from God or whether I am speaking on my own authority.”

In other words, if you genuinely want to understand who Jesus is, and to know the truth about life, come in good faith, wanting what God wants, *and you’ll know*. How? Because you’ll see that Jesus really is the answer to what’s wrong with the world and our hearts.

You see, his brothers want him to seize the moment because they think this life is it. And Jesus says, v8, “I am not going up to this feast, for my time has not yet fully come.” And at one level, he’s just waiting for the right moment to go, when his Father gives him the nod. But there’s another level. Verse 30, ‘So they were seeking to arrest him, but no one laid a hand on him, *because his hour had not yet come*.’ And his brothers, and you and I, can be absorbed by this present moment - but Jesus is looking down the road - to the real reason he’s come, to the moment for which his Father has sent him.

And they want him to use Jerusalem as the re-launchpad of his ministry to push himself forward. And Jerusalem will be the place where he is lifted up, just not the way they imagined.

And here people are worried about what others will think of them or do to them. At his trial Jesus shows no such fear of men. Pilate says, ‘Won’t you speak to me? Don’t you realise I have authority to put you to death?’ To which Jesus replies, 'you have no authority over me that has not been given you from above. I do not fear you.’

And here the crowd are debating about authority, just like Pilate will. But the One who has ultimate authority over heaven and earth has humbled himself, and come as a servant, to die the death of outcasts and slaves - of those who have no authority.

And the leaders are hostile because they’re convinced of their own morality - their righteousness and Jesus’ unrighteousness. But as he goes to the cross the opposite is happening. And the Righteous One gives himself for the unrighteous.

And everyone is looking at the externals. But in Isaiah’s words, Jesus ‘had no form or majesty that we should look at him, and no beauty that we should desire him’ (Is 53:2). He wasn’t one of the world’s beautiful people. And at the cross, Isaiah says, ‘his appearance was so marred, beyond human semblance’ (Is 52:14).

And here people are missing who Jesus is, because he’s failing to meet their assumptions. But what if his death shatters every assumption? - that he was hated that you might be loved. He was rejected that you might be accepted. He was broken that you might be whole. He was marred that you might be made beautiful.

And what if his resurrection tells you, this life, this time and this place, is *not* all there is. That there’s a reality beyond this world, that is beyond all our imagining.

And Jesus is saying, come humbly, and you’ll know this is true. And your thinking and your world will be turned the right way up.