

# John's Gospel - a Higher Education

by John Vissers

---

*Jesus' teaching is rooted in reality and comes from God his Father, and we can test its truth by obeying God's will and following Jesus' words.*

**Duration:** 35:03

**Scripture:** Luke 4:22, John 7:14-19

**Topics:** "Education"

---

## Description

In this sermon, the speaker emphasizes the importance of connecting our faith with our daily lives and the world around us. He highlights the significant investment many people make in pursuing higher education and the doors it can open, but reminds listeners that only Jesus can open the door to heaven. The character of Jesus' teaching is described as remarkable, leaving the Jews amazed and questioning how he acquired such knowledge without formal study. The speaker encourages the audience to come to Jesus, be taught by him, and test his teachings against their own lives to discover the truth.

---

## Transcript

Turn with me in your Bibles to John chapter 7, reading there at verse 14. John chapter 7 at verse 14, the Word of God. Not until halfway through the feast did Jesus go up to the temple courts and begin to teach.

The Jews were amazed and asked, how did this man get such learning without having studied? Jesus answered, my teaching is not my own. It comes from him who sent me. If anyone chooses to do God's will, he will find out whether my teaching comes from God or whether I speak on my own.

He who speaks on his own does so to gain honor for himself. But he who works for the honor of the one who sent him is a man of truth. There is nothing false about him.

Has not Moses given you the law? Yet not one of you keeps the law. Why are you trying to kill me? You are demon-possessed, the crowd answered. Who is trying to kill you? Jesus said to them, I did one miracle and you are all astonished.

Yet because Moses gave you circumcision, though actually it did not come from Moses but from the patriarchs, you circumcise a child on the sabbath. Now if a child can be circumcised on the sabbath so that the law of Moses may not be broken, why are you angry with me for healing the whole man on the sabbath? Stop judging by mere appearances and make a right judgment. Amen.

May God bless to us this reading from his word this evening. I was the first person in my immediate family and in my extended family to have the privilege of receiving a university education. My parents and my grandparents attended my graduation with a great deal of pride.

I can remember the day just over here in front of Convocation Hall over 20 years ago. And then I went on to three more years of education after that, to seminary for a theological education. And again, my parents and my grandparents, and by this time my in-laws as well, three years later, attended the graduation service with a great deal of pride and delight, and particularly that I had sensed a call to Christian ministry.

And then I went on to graduate school for a year of a master's degree and for four years of a doctorate, and by that time my parents thought that maybe I was being educated beyond my intelligence. And my in-laws, of course, by that time were beginning to wonder whether I'd ever get a real job to support my wife and my family. Although the parentheses there is that my wife also finished off two degrees while we were married.

But my grandfather, my dear grandfather, who's now gone to be with the Lord, thought it was all so wonderful that his grandson should pursue this kind of education, and particularly when I got my degree, Doctor of Theology. You see, my grandfather was an avid reader of Christian literature, an avid reader of theology, and really something of a lay theologian, but he felt rather intimidated by those who had a higher education, and particularly those who had a theological education. He never felt that he really had anything to contribute because he'd not received such an education.

He felt, in a sense, that sometimes he was even looked down upon by others who had such an education. He was a baker by profession, and the only Christian education that he'd received was through a thorough grounding in the catechism classes and through his own personal study of the Bible and his own personal habits of reading, which I think quite frankly I inherited from him. But now, and I can remember the day that I graduated, my grandfather saying, now we have a theologian in the family, and it was almost as if all those years had finally paid off.

Well, in our passage tonight, Jesus faced a similar reaction from the religious leaders of his day, and the Doctors of Theology, the religious leaders, don't come off looking very good in this passage. As we saw last week, Jesus did finally decide to go down to Jerusalem. His brothers had urged him to go, and he resisted, but he finally did go down to Jerusalem to the Feast of the Tabernacles, but he was sensitive to God's timing.

He was sensitive to God's leading. He was sensitive to God's will. He went when the time was right.

He went quietly, and he went down to Jerusalem for all the right reasons, not the reasons that his brothers wanted him to go, but the reasons that he knew he had to go. Ultimately, those reasons would take him to the cross. He didn't go to make an impression on the masses, but to follow the path which would ultimately lead to the cross.

The Feast of Tabernacles, or the Feast of Booths, as it is also known, lasted for an entire week, and our passage tells us that about halfway through that week, Jesus emerged, and Jesus began to teach in the temple. And this draws all kinds of interesting responses from the crowds and from the religious leaders. And tonight, what I'd like to do, what we want to do, is look at the nature of Jesus' teaching and the response that it draws from those who heard it.

And I want us to keep before us a couple of questions as we think through this passage together. What does this teach us about Jesus? What does it mean to believe in the Jesus presented in this passage? And what does it mean to be a disciple today of the Jesus presented in this passage in John's Gospel chapter 7 and verses 14 to 24? Now, the first thing that I want us to consider as we look at this passage is the character of the teaching of Jesus. Notice the character of his teaching, particularly in verses 14 and 15.

Verse 15 says, the Jews were amazed and asked, How did this man get such learning without having studied? The religious leaders, and the phrase, when John the Gospel writer uses the phrase, the Jews, he's not referring to all of the Jewish people, but it's a technical phrase that he uses to refer to the Jewish leaders, to the religious leaders, and the religious leaders are amazed at his teaching. No doubt the crowds were and the people were also amazed at his teaching, but the religious leaders here in particular are amazed at the teaching of Jesus. Jesus had a command of the Old Testament even though he had never studied.

At least he'd never studied at the rabbinic centers of learning. He didn't graduate from the centers of scholarship in Jerusalem or then known in the Jewish world. Yet, he had this tremendous command of the Old Testament, and in the other passages in the Gospels, we also know that the people were amazed at his teaching for a whole variety of reasons.

For example, in Mark chapter 1 and verse 22, we read these words, And they were astonished at his teaching for he taught them as one who had authority and not as the scribes. Now, the interesting thing is that the scribes taught by appealing to rabbinic authority. They would always quote from some great teaching from one of the great rabbis.

They were the scholars of their day. They knew how to quote one rabbi over against another rabbi, and in fact in the first century there were these great debates where one, the followers of one rabbi who would form a school would debate with the followers of another rabbi who would form another school, and Jesus, in fact, sometimes found himself at the center of these discussions. That's how they made their arguments.

They knew how to quote one rabbi over against another rabbi. But Jesus didn't teach that way. Jesus didn't appeal to the people by quoting the authority of one rabbi over against another.

Jesus, in fact, taught with a kind of inherent authority, and it was an authority which scandalized the religious leaders, but it was an authority which delighted the crowds as they heard Jesus teach. I noticed in the Globe and Mail yesterday, on the front page of the Globe and Mail, there's always something called Today's Smile or something to that effect, and the one that was on the Globe yesterday said this, if you quote from one source, if you quote from one source, it's plagiarism, but if you quote from more than one source, it's called research. And of course, those of us who've worked in the academic world will know that that's exactly how it is.

If you quote from one source and don't note it, don't document it, you're accused of plagiarism, but research involves more than quoting from one source. Well, Jesus apparently didn't quote from any sources other than directly citing from the Word of God. He taught with this kind of authority.

And then in Luke chapter 4 and verse 22, we read these words, The words of Jesus were not only carried forward with great authority, which impressed the crowds and scandalized the religious leaders, but they

also carried a note of grace. You see, the people were used to having burdens laid upon them. They were used to having burdens heaped upon them by the harsh teaching of the religious leaders.

But Jesus, in his teaching, shifted the burden. He had harsh words for the religious leaders, and he had words of grace for the people. And so Jesus' teaching was characterized by this inherent authority and by this graciousness.

He didn't seem to carry with him the kind of authority that the religious leaders had, the kind of authority that the world might expect, and yet he carried with him this kind of inherent authority which was rooted in the reality of his relationship with God, his Father. And in the end, that's ultimately what mattered. You see, sometimes authority has nothing to do with rank or with learning even.

It has to do fundamentally with reality, with what is real. There's a wonderful story which I heard not so long ago about a captain who was on the bridge of a large naval vessel, a large naval ship who saw a light ahead of him on a collision course. And he signaled with these words, Alter your course ten degrees south.

And the reply came back, Alter your course ten degrees north. The captain then signaled again, Alter your course ten degrees south. I am a captain.

And the reply came back, Alter your course ten degrees north. I am a seaman, third class. By this point, the captain was getting furious, and he signaled back, Alter your course ten degrees south.

I am a battleship. And the reply came back, Alter your course ten degrees north. I am a lighthouse.

You see, sometimes the reality is that truth, authority, is rooted in something that is real, that just is, and all the rank and all the authority can't change that. And Jesus had no rank by the world's standards. He did not have a formal education with recognized degrees.

He did not have social standing which made him influential. He didn't have the credentials which might look impressive to the world. He didn't have money or power as the world understands power.

But what we see again and again and again in the Gospels is Jesus as one who has authority, who dared to stare the religious leaders in the eye and watch them back down, who stood before people, hundreds and sometimes thousands, speaking with authority. Because what he said, he spoke with grace. What he said was real.

What he said touched people's lives. What he said ultimately changed people's lives. He had a spiritual insight and a spiritual wisdom which was rooted in the reality of his relationship with God.

And it's something, ultimately, that the religious leaders of his day and the people of his day could not finally understand. You see, becoming a Christian means in the first instance coming to terms with the reality of who Jesus is and with the reality of his teaching. Becoming a Christian and being a Christian means investing one's life in the teaching of Jesus.

He then becomes our rabbi. He becomes our master. We invest our lives in him and in his teaching.

We become students and disciples. He shapes our worldview. He shapes our insights.

He shapes the way we look at the world, the way we look at situations in the world. We begin to look at the world through the eyes of Jesus. Not through our own eyes anymore, but we begin to ask, what would Jesus have us do in this situation? What would Jesus have me think in this situation? What insight does following the Lord Jesus bring in to this situation? Jesus helps us make connections between our faith and our life, between our faith and the world in which we live, and how desperately, in very practical ways and in very meaningful ways, we need to make those connections day in and day out as we seek to live for Jesus Christ, as we seek to be faithful.

Some of you here tonight are pursuing either undergraduate degrees or graduate degrees. Some of you have graduated already and are pursuing vocations based on having graduated from your programs and you know what it's like to invest your life in four or five or six or more years of academic study in a particular field at university or graduate school. You invest your time.

You invest your energy. You invest your financial resources and how well we know that. Some of us spend years paying off our student loans after graduating from school.

It becomes a major part of our lives. It becomes almost all-consuming. We eat and drink and sleep and breathe that which we're studying in order to prepare ourselves for life.

The question is are we willing to invest the same kind of resources? Are we willing to invest ourselves in the teachings of Jesus? In following him in the school of discipleship? Are we prepared to work out what it means for us to live our lives in his laboratory? Are we willing to sit under the authority of his teaching? So that's the character of his teaching and the demands which it places upon us. Then secondly, I want you to notice that this passage goes on and Jesus talks about the source of his teaching in verses 16 to 18. You need to really grasp as you enter into this passage how scandalized the religious leaders really are by this encounter with Jesus.

Here they are facing an uneducated Galilean who's standing in the temple courts day after day during the Feast of the Tabernacles teaching. How dare he teach in the temple? How dare he step onto our turf? He has no training. He has no license to preach.

The natural inference is that he was simply propagating his own ideas. And they assumed that he was simply either propagating his own ideas, that he was mad somehow, or that he was simply making this up as he went along. One of the commentators captures nicely what's really going on here when he says this.

The irony of this passage is that the religious leaders are confronted by the incarnate Son of God and treat him like an uneducated peasant. That's really ironic, isn't it? Here is the one who's created the universe itself. The one who holds all things in his hands.

The one who knows all things. The one who is the Alpha and the Omega. And yet, he can't measure up to their standards.

Jesus replies in verses 16 and following. He says, My teaching is not my own. It comes from him who sent me.

If anyone chooses to do God's will, he will find out whether my teaching comes from God or whether I speak on my own. He who speaks on his own does so to gain honor for himself but he who works for the honor of the one who sent him is a man of truth. There is nothing false about him.

The reply of Jesus is simple and really rather straightforward. If other teachers draw from what they learned from their Rabbinic teachers, Jesus brings forth what he has learned from God his Father. If Jesus was speaking only for himself, if he were speaking only on his own behalf, the religious leaders might have a point.

But Jesus wants them to understand that he's not trying to seek or make for his own reputation. He's not trying to build a school. He's not trying to gather all kinds of people to follow him, to build up a school of followers.

He speaks only as the representative of the one who sent him, his Father, and his only desire is that men and women should come to know God his Father, obey his will, and glorify his name. That's why, as we've seen throughout chapter 6 and throughout chapter 7 to this point, that Jesus is quite willing to tell it as it is, even when it means that people turn away and no longer follow him. He's not interested in being successful.

He's not interested in becoming an effective and successful Rabbi according to the standards of his own day. He wants people to come to know God. He wants them to know his Father.

But, of course, this raises another question. Why should Jesus be believed? I mean, how do we know that what he says is true? Notice that the test that Jesus gives here of his teaching is not a rational proof or an appeal to the teaching of others, but rather it is the test of obedience. The test of obedience.

If people want to know whether what Jesus says is true, how can they find out? Jesus says they should do God's will. They should enter into a relationship with God, his Father. They should obey his words, obey his will, follow his way, and then they will find out.

Experimentally, then they will discover whether what Jesus is saying is in fact true. It can't be proven not rationally, but it can be tested. It can be borne witness to.

You see, Jesus here is making an ultimate claim. He's saying you can't prove my teaching from another source of authority because if you were to do so, then it wouldn't be the kind of claim that I'm making. If, in fact, we prove Jesus' truth and Jesus' teaching by some other source of authority, then it's denying the very authority which is inherent in him as the Son of God.

And so the test is obedience. The invitation is to enter into that relationship to see whether these things are not true, to obey the will of God, to obey the word of God, to walk in God's way and thereby to discover experimentally the truth of Jesus' teaching. Let me try to illustrate it this way.

If I say to you that my brother Wayne here is an excellent pastoral counselor, which by the way he is, you may choose to believe me or you may choose not to believe me. I mean, why should you believe me? Well, one of the ways, I suppose, is you could go and check the degrees that are hanging up on his wall and that may impress you or that may not impress you. Or you may trust my word, but why should you believe my word? Well, it may be because the Session says you should believe my word, but that may not be enough to you.

And why should you believe the Session's word? You see, it keeps going and it keeps going. Who should you ultimately believe? The only way, finally and ultimately, that you're going to discover whether brother Wayne here is an excellent pastoral counselor, if you go and see him. If you make an appointment and if you experimentally place yourself in his counsel and ultimately test what he says to you and find out then

whether these things are not true.

And that's what Jesus here is saying. I can't ultimately prove or make you believe that my teaching is true, but I invite you to come. I invite you to obey the will of God, my Father, and test and experiment to see whether these things are not true.

And then you will know. Then you will know God's will and God's way and God's word that it is true. You see, there is no bar of judgment before which God may be summoned.

Either God is God by definition or God is not God. Either Jesus is the revelation of God or he is not the revelation of God. And only those who throw their lot in with him ultimately find out absolutely and with certainty those who seek his mind whether these things are true or not.

You see, there is no other way in scripture ultimately of coming to know God. There is no other way of knowing whether Jesus is the Son of God other than by jumping in with both feet of faith. Only by submitting to God with complete willingness to do his will are we then in a position to evaluate that claim as we come in an attitude of humility and trust and obedience.

Now that runs contrary to the kind of rational proof, the kind of modern world that demands this kind of rational proof in which we live. But I suggest to you that in the world into which we are moving, where people don't trust reason as much as they used to, the claims of Jesus, this kind of a claim that Jesus is making, this kind of an invitation that Jesus is giving is precisely what men and women may respond to. Have you tested? Have you experimentally entered in to a relationship with God? Do you know Jesus Christ in this way? That's what Jesus is saying here.

That's what he's inviting you to do. And then finally, I want you to notice the concern of Jesus' teaching in verses 19 to 24. The teaching of Jesus is characterized by authority and grace.

The source of that teaching is God, his Father, and Jesus now takes up the issue of the law. The discussion, the dialogue, becomes a little convoluted here. The religious leaders are trying to eliminate Jesus because they feel that he's not keeping the law.

He heals people on the Sabbath, and we know a number of other encounters where Jesus has gotten into trouble because he's done things which in the eyes of the religious leaders appear to break the law. The religious law. And one of the great things, of course, that Jesus did is that he healed on the Sabbath.

And so he's accused of this, and Jesus doesn't back down. Not only does Jesus not back down, but notice he goes for the jugular. In verse 19, he accuses the religious leaders of breaking the law themselves by trying to kill him.

A clear breach of the commandment not to murder. And then in verses 21-24, he presents a tightly reasoned argument in support of his actions in healing on the Sabbath. And he points out without going into great detail, he points out that the religious leaders regularly break the law when they circumcise on the Sabbath and yet they've justified this.

Yet they've been willing to accept this. And Jesus says his action is in line with the saving purposes of God at the very heart of the Old Covenant. Jesus says stop judging by mere appearances and make a right judgment.

In other words, he's saying isn't it alright for me to be concerned about the whole man, about the whole person, to heal on the Sabbath if it's alright to circumcise on the Sabbath? If you've justified doing that isn't this a much more important reality? That men and women should come to wholeness and should come to healing and should come to the fullness of life. And so Jesus not only justifies himself before them but in fact he turns the whole nature, the whole understanding of the law on its head. In Matthew chapter 5 and verse 17, Jesus says that he did not come to abolish the law but to fulfill it.

You see, Jesus did not come to set aside God's law. He didn't come somehow to say that it wasn't important. He didn't come to set aside the will of God as revealed in the law of God, but he did come. He did come to recover the very heart of what that law was about.

That it was intended to bring men and women and young people and children, all of God's people into a saving relationship with the living God. And so Jesus came and his teaching is an attempt to recover the center of that reality. God's law was given that men and women might obey God's will that they might know God that they might come into a relationship with God, that they might trust in God, that they might live day in and day out at every point of their life in the presence of God and know that they had to do with God at every moment of every day and every decision with every step that they took.

That they might know God and so glorify God. And you see the purpose of the law ultimately was redemptive. The law was not given to separate people from God, but to bring them to God.

The law certainly stands over against us as our judge it shows us how far we fall short of God's glory and how desperately we need God's grace. In a very real sense, Jesus cuts through to the heart of the law so that it may become for us a law of the heart. Not an outward form of legalism, but an inner reality, an expression of God's will, a means of healing and wholeness and salvation.

And so you see the law in the Old Testament, when all is said and done, points beyond itself to the one who fulfills it even Jesus Christ whose purpose was to bring not death but life. And so the concern of Jesus teaching here as it is in so many other places, is to bring life, to bring healing, to bring wholeness as men and women repent of their sin and turn to the Savior and trust in Him. We live in a world where a lot of us spend a lot of money, a lot of time a lot of energy to get a higher education.

An education which is absolutely important which may even be essential for some of us, an education which may open many doors but we need to understand that no matter what kind of education we get by the world's standards it will never open the door to heaven. Only Jesus can do that. Only Jesus can do that.

And so tonight I invite you to come to Him to be taught by Him to listen to Him to let Him refocus your thinking to refocus your mind and to test His teaching against your own life. Come to Christ and receive the highest education possible. Let us pray.

Lord Jesus Christ we bow in your presence this evening You who are the great teacher You who are the Savior of the world You who are the Son of God You who came to fulfill the law not to abolish it but to fulfill it You who died on the cross of Calvary for sinners You who rose from the dead Lord Jesus we pray that we might be found faithful as Your students faithful as Your disciples, faithful in Your school We pray that we might be Your students that You might teach us indeed that we might know what it is to live for You We ask it in the name of Christ our Savior Amen

---

Audio: <https://sermonindex1.b-cdn.net/26/SID26648.mp3>  
Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/john-vissers/johns-gospel-a-higher-education/>

# *Grow in Your Walk with Christ*

---

Listen and read messages that will stir your heart for Christ and point you to deeper repentance and devotion.

- 50,000+ Sermons from speakers past and present
- 3,900+ Classic Christian Books freely readable online
- 1,200+ Bible Translations and Commentaries
- Over 450k forum posts — Join our vibrant online Christian forum

**[www.sermonindex.net](http://www.sermonindex.net)**