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Gospel of John 10:22–25, ESV

²² At that time the Feast of Dedication took place at Jerusalem. It was winter, ²³ and Jesus was walking in the temple, in the colonnade of Solomon. ²⁴ So the Jews gathered around him and said to him, “How long will you keep us in suspense? If you are the Christ, tell us plainly.” ²⁵ Jesus answered them, “I told you, and you do not believe.”

Gospel of John 7:14–17, ESV

¹⁴ About the middle of the feast Jesus went up into the temple and began teaching. ¹⁵ The Jews therefore marveled, saying, “How is it that this man has learning, when he has never studied?” ¹⁶ So Jesus answered them, “My teaching is not mine, but his who sent me. ¹⁷

Gospel of John 5:41, ESV

⁴¹ I do not receive glory from people.

Seeking approval.

Today, all of our Bible quotes are from the Gospel of John. Of the four Gospels, John is the most unique. The other three are so similar that most scholars believe that the Gospels of Matthew and Luke are actually derivatives of the Gospel of Mark. The Gospel of John does indeed stand alone. It has no parables. There is nothing similar to the Sermon on the Mount in it. There is no healing of lepers. The author makes heavy use of contrasts, such as light and darkness and Jesus’

teachings vs. Judaism. The Gospel makes heavy use of symbolism, as well. Here is something interesting: we don't know that anyone named John actually wrote it. It is simply long-standing church tradition that the Apostle John wrote the Gospel. Significantly, John 21:24 says this: ²⁴ *This is the disciple who is bearing witness about these things, and who has written these things, and we know that his testimony is true.* This is a pretty clear statement that one of the disciples of Jesus wrote this Gospel. Keep in mind, though, that this does NOT mean that the author is necessarily one of the twelve Apostles, just that it was a companion of Jesus, someone who knew him. The biblical Greek word disciple is *mathētēs*, and it means "one who is learning" or "student". The biblical Greek word apostle is *apóstolos*, and it means "messenger" or "one sent on a mission". It's clear who the twelve messengers were, the people who spread the word after Jesus left the Earth – but there were countless students of Jesus. There are indeed valid arguments that the author was John, the son of Zebedee, who was one of the twelve. But more importantly, the author claims to have known Jesus, which adds to our belief that the Gospel is authentic and accurate. However, there is strong evidence within the Gospel that it has been heavily edited by multiple people, so perhaps John the Apostle or some other close "disciple" of Jesus wrote the Gospel and later authors massaged it. One of the problems with reading

translations is that we don't see the changes in writing style, vocabulary, and sentence structure that pop out at the reader of the original Greek text of the Gospel. Most likely, the final version of the Gospel wasn't created until about the year 100, long after the Apostles would have died.

Let's look at our first quote for today. First, keep in mind that one theme comes through strongly as we read this Gospel. The author, whomever it was, had as a primary goal to help early Christians understand the true, godly identity of Jesus. He is the Messiah. He is the son of God. He is not just a good man with a good message. The author of the Gospel wants to strengthen the faith of local Christians, probably those who were members of one or more churches of which the author was the leader, as well as new Gentile and Jewish believers everywhere. Our quote says this: ²²*At that time the Feast of Dedication took place at Jerusalem. It was winter,* ²³*and Jesus was walking in the temple, in the colonnade of Solomon.* ²⁴*So the Jews gathered around him and said to him, "How long will you keep us in suspense? If you are the Christ, tell us plainly."* ²⁵*Jesus answered them, "I told you, and you do not believe."* The author places Jesus in Jerusalem during the Feast of the Dedication, also known as Hanukkah, which celebrates the cleansing of the Temple in Jerusalem after the Syrians had desecrated it. Jesus uses a complex analogy, where he calls himself multiple

things. He tells listeners that the only legitimate way into a sheepfold is through the door. Someone who enters any other way is doing so illegitimately; they must be a robber. Jesus then says that he is the gate, the door. Jesus is the only way for us, the sheep, to get to know the father, God. Jesus also says that he is a shepherd, and that a good shepherd, like him, lays down his life for his sheep. Those who were listening to him realized that he was referring to the Messiah when he calls himself the gate to God and the shepherd of God's people. Later, people gather around him and ask him if he is indeed the savior. Jesus answers that he has already answered that question, but they simply won't believe him.

Let's step to a point earlier in this Gospel. Another Jewish feast is happening, this time, the Feast of the Tabernacles, which celebrates the forty years that the Israelites spent in the desert. It is also known as the Feast of the Booths, and it required Jews to live in booths or handmade huts, often made from tree branches. The people are simulating the lives of those who had to survive in the desert. Jesus is talking to his followers. The religious authorities of the day are trying to hunt him down. But Jesus is teaching in the Temple and he is unafraid. Here is what unfolds: ¹⁴ *About the middle of the feast Jesus went up into the temple and began teaching.* ¹⁵ *The Jews therefore marveled, saying, "How is it that this man has learning, when he has never studied?"* ¹⁶ *So Jesus answered*

them, "My teaching is not mine, but his who sent me. ¹⁷ I happen to like this passage a lot. Remember that Jesus is uneducated. At the time, in his community, for a person to be considered learned, they would have to study under a high-ranking rabbi for an extended period of time, like the great evangelist Paul. Jesus tells them that no, he does not have this formal training, but he gets his wisdom from God. His authority is not from this world. To the people questioning him, they see this as a preposterous statement.

The reason I like this passage so much is because I was an academic for so many years. In that environment, formal education is considered the most important trait of any human. What advanced degrees does a person have? If it's not a Ph.D., they are not fully educated. They are intellectually inferior. And importantly, if you are asked to judge the contributions of a person, you don't even begin to judge them if they don't have a Ph.D. If all they have is a four-year degree, they couldn't possibly have anything truly novel to offer society. I love Jesus' answer to these first century academics. He doesn't need their formal training. He is educated directly by God. Knowing God's way is the most important thing a person can possibly know.

Once, I was in a meeting with a few other faculty members. I think it had to do with what graduate level courses we needed to offer in order to make sure

that our Ph.D. students were properly trained. Once we had finished our business, the discussion turned to other things. The topic of religion came up. One of them started mocking Jews, Muslims, and Christians for thinking that their faith was somehow superior because they worship the one, true God and not a whole host of gods, named after a bunch of planets. But, this professor argued, the Jews didn't even invent monotheism, the belief that there is only one God. The Jews got it from the Zoroastrians. They thought there was only one god, and his name was Ahura Mazda. They believed in monotheism four thousand years ago. All the Jews, Muslims, and Christians did was rename this guy and give him the bland, generic name of "God". Everybody laughed at this. Religion is stupid, it was agreed. True knowledge comes from math and science. If you want to really be educated, you studied mathematics and the pure sciences.

Let's look at our last quote. It is from even earlier in the Gospel of John. Notice that we have looked at two passages in John, one related to the feast of the Dedication and one related to the Feast of the Tabernacles. As it turns out, in the middle of the Gospel of John, Jesus' teachings are discussed in the context of Judaism, and four Jewish festivals are used as literary vehicles. In Chapter 5, the Sabbath is discussed. The fourth one, by the way, which we are not looking at today, is Passover. What the writer is doing is directly addressing Jews who might

want to follow the teachings of Jesus. He is implying, in a very sophisticated way, that Jesus is the heart and the fulfillment of all the expectations of Jewish people. He's not criticizing Judaism. He's not saying that it is inferior or that Christianity replaces it. Remember that the notion of Christianity was still emerging when the Gospels were written. The author of the Gospel was simply trying to argue that the Jews were right: ancient scriptures promised a Messiah – and he was here. In Chapter 5, Jesus does something that is considered sacrilegious by the Jewish leaders of the day. He heals people on the Sabbath. In our passage, Jesus challenges, and in fact dismisses, the power and the knowledge and the authority of the Jewish leaders. He says that he, Jesus, does “not *receive glory from people.*” The original Greek word in the Gospel of John that is translated as “glory” is *doxan*. It can mean praise or honor. In this part of the Gospel Jesus tells the Jews who are judging him that the truth comes from God. It goes from there to Jesus, and from him to people. Jesus is thus a conduit of the truth. So, Jesus doesn't look to humans to approve of him. He doesn't need these people to praise or honor him. Jesus gets his glory only from God. Notice that this word, *doxan*, is a complex word. Keep in mind that we tend to turn the word “glory” into a religious word. Jesus spoke in Aramaic, but the Gospels were written in biblical or Koine-(A), which means “common” Greek. In the context of the Gospel,

the word *doxan* really means renown or recognition. What Jesus is saying here is that when it comes to the truth about God, Jesus doesn't get his recognition as a knowledgeable person from other people. He gets it from God. God acknowledges or certifies his knowledge. God gives him his degree, if you will, in the study of true faith, of forgiveness and eternal salvation.

After these academics dismissed Christianity and other religions that believe there is a single, true God who is our creator and our guide in life, and instead said that real truth can only be found in Math and Science, what flashed in my mind is that humans are the ones that certify our knowledge of Math and Science. So, academics, who are people, get their glory, if you will, from other people, other academics. And this is quite true. Academics, like many other professionals, seek the acceptance, the approval of people who are the most like them. People turn to their peers for approval. It's actually kind of funny. The more that other people have in common with us, the more we desire their approval. It's all rooted in insecurity. We need the person next to us in life, the person who is very much like us, to accept us, to approve of us. But we, as Christians, look to God, to someone who is far above us in terms of knowledge, power, and goodness, to approve of us. Our faith isn't rooted in insecurity. It's rooted in the absolute security of who God is and what God does in our lives.

Remember this whenever you are criticized, rejected, treated as insignificant, or passed over. When some other person makes a point of putting you down, whenever someone says that you don't write well or speak well or know how to cook or know how to behave in public or deserve to be invited to some special event, keep in mind that they seek renown from people. You do not do this, however. We look only to God for approval. Please pray with me.

God, let us turn only to you for approval. Cleanse us of the insecurity that pervades humanity. While scientists turn to scientists to glorify them, while lawyers depend on lawyers to give them earthly authority, and while carpenters allow only other carpenters to judge their value to humanity – let us never forget that we do not need our neighbors, our coworkers, our friends, or our relatives to make us renown. Knowing that we have your approval frees us from the pain that causes nonstop anguish among non-believers. Free us from the insecurity of the faithless. When we are judged by other people as being below them, as being unworthy, remind us that there is only one source of approval that matters. We turn only to you for approval. And God, most importantly, let us never judge other people as being less than us. Let us only offer them our grace. Let us tell them that they are our equal, that we are all made in God's image. Let us tell them that only God can truly approve of them. Amen.