Introduction

When things go from bad to worse. We’ve all been there. Times such as when one man realized his wife wasn’t happy with him. He decided to do something to make her happy. Every day was about the same—he went to work, came home dirty and sweaty, stumbled through the back door straight to the couch to watch TV until supper was ready.

So this day before he left work he showered, shaved, and put on clean clothes. He bought some roses on the way home. And, instead of coming in the back door, he went to the front door and rang the door bell. His wife opened the door, and started to cry. He asked, “What’s wrong?” She said, “It’s been a terrible day. This morning Billy fell and broke his leg and now he has a cast. When we got home from all of that your mother called and said she is coming to visit ...for three weeks! Then, I started the wash and the washing machine broke and there’s water all over the basement. And now you come home drunk!”

What do you do when things go from bad to worse?

Today we come to chapter 7 in the Gospel of John. The chapter begins with, “After this.” It is about six months after the events in chapter 6. If we go with Jesus’ public ministry being about 3½ years, we are now at about the 3-year mark. With this being chapter 7 of 21 it is clear that John’s gospel concentrates on the last part of Jesus’s public ministry. The religious establishment began opposing Jesus early in His ministry. It was ramping up its opposition now. Also, the curiosity seekers and casual followers were turning away.

John writes, “After this, Jesus went around in Galilee. He did not want to go about in Judea because the Jewish leaders there were looking for a way to kill him” (7:1 NIV). Management and public relations consultants would say that Jesus’ ministry was in serious trouble. It was a time when the circumstances were going from bad to worse. We find some help from Jesus’ example in this time for our times when things go from bad to worse as we live and speak for Him.

Jesus faces some difficult days.

Never underestimate the pressures on Jesus here on earth. Questioning, rejection and plotting to kill Him. The pressures were real and intense. The events in this chapter open with a challenge from His unbelieving, sarcastic brothers. It starts in verse 3.
“Jesus’ brothers said to him, ‘Leave Galilee and go to Judea, so that your disciples there may see the works you do. No one who wants to become a public figure acts in secret. Since you are doing these things, show yourself to the world’” (3-4 NIV).

They were saying, “If you really are so great, you can’t stay out here in the boondocks, you’ve got to make it in Jerusalem! We’re going there now for the Feast. If you are so special and unique, come with us and prove it there!” They did not believe in Him at this time. But more than that, they were ridiculing and taunting Him, throwing out a sarcastic challenge.

Jesus did not go with them and a large group of locals to the celebration in Jerusalem. This was not His time. He did go a bit later, as recorded in verse 10, but He chose the time and did it secretly or privately, because a public entry with a large group would play into the hands of the religious leaders who were seeking to kill Him at the earliest opportunity. And, as always, Jesus stayed true to His purposes and His own timetable.

When Jesus got to Jerusalem things continued to get worse as He taught curious, but unbelieving crowds. John records two times when Jesus taught during this Festival. The first one starts in verse 14. It is interesting that John does not tell us what Jesus taught at this time. What God wants us to know begins with the crowd’s response. Look at verse 15. “The Jews there were amazed and asked, ‘How did this man get such learning without having been taught?’” They were surprised and astonished. They were sceptical. They said, “He doesn’t have a formal education! What can He know?”

Jesus responds by telling them His teaching comes from God the Father, and anyone sincerely committed to knowing God would recognize this. Then Jesus challenges the crowd’s motives, asking “Why are you trying to kill me?” (19 NIV). The crowd denies the charge, and many write Him off.

Now Jesus gets specific, making it clear they were being inconsistent when they accused Him of working on the Sabbath when He healed the lame man (chapter 5), while practicing, doing the work of circumcision on the Sabbath. After this some wondered why their leaders hadn’t seized Jesus, “Do the leaders know He really is the Messiah?” Others said, “He can’t be the Messiah, we know where He comes from.” This came from an incorrect belief of the time that the Messiah would come out of nowhere. When Jesus tells them He came from the Father some wanted to seize Him, while others remained intrigued by His great miracles.

The second record of Jesus’ teaching starts at verse 37.

“On the last and greatest day of the festival, Jesus stood and said in a loud voice, ‘Let anyone who is thirsty come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as Scripture has said, rivers of living water will flow from within them’” (37-38 NIV).

This statement had a special impact because on the earlier days of the Feast water was brought up for ceremonies, but not on the last day. Jesus’ point was that the only water, the only life that satisfies and keeps on satisfying, is from Him. John interprets this for us in
verse 39. It is the work of the Holy Spirit within the believer that brings the everflowing stream of satisfying life.

The responses again are all over the place. Some now thought Jesus indeed was the Messiah, or at least The Prophet who they thought would come before the Messiah. Others said, “No way!” Some wanted to follow Him, others wanted to seize Him and turn Him over to their leaders. The leaders were frustrated because the people they sent to grab Jesus came back empty handed and amazed at what He had said.

Part of these difficult days for Jesus was teaching curious, but self-centered crowds. Their hearts and minds were focused on themselves and their own agendas.

Then we see Jesus avoiding attempts to seize and kill Him. We’ve already noticed this at the beginning of the chapter. John emphasizes the point by mentioning it four times in this chapter, verses 1, 30, 32 and 44. In the midst of this Nicodemus, a Pharisee who believed in Jesus, cautioned the leaders about violating the Law by rushing to judgment without evidence. The group responded with a sarcastic insult and dismissed his concerns. Jesus faced some very difficult days here. The circumstances, at least from a human view, were going from bad to worse.

Some lessons for our difficult days.

Let’s move from the difficult days to the lessons we can learn from Jesus in those situations. One lesson is that there are times when it is best to actively avoid conflict. It is always important to discern the right time. Remember that God tells us that “There is an appointed time for everything. And there is a time for every event under heaven.”

How do we know when it is best to actively avoid conflict? God does not give us a mechanical formula, but solid principles. Let’s note three of them. First, begin with living by Jesus’ statement in chapter 17 of this gospel that God’s Word, the Bible, is truth. It is the Bible which is our first and final authority because it is God’s breathed-out truth to us. It is what the Holy Spirit uses to sanctify us, that is to set us apart from our world’s changing and unreliable standards to being grounded and holy, to give us the mind of Christ. There is a practical example in 2 Timothy 2:2, “So flee youthful passions and pursue righteousness, faith, love, and peace, along with those who call on the Lord from a pure heart” (ESV). Run away from the conflict of sinful passions. Run to righteousness.

A second principle is to recognize that some things are more important than other things. In other words, live by priorities. Jesus clearly lived by priorities. We should take our stand with Christians down through the centuries who affirmed and defended the essentials of the Christian faith, many with their lives. The truths of Who God is, who and what we are, the reality of sin and God’s remedy being the only remedy for it, how one becomes a believer. Truths that are essential to being a true believer in Jesus Christ.
There are other truths which are important but are not essential to being a true believer. When it comes to the return of Christ, the security of our salvation, the mode of baptism, while taking a stand for what we understand we should not drop the gloves any and every time we hear a different view. This principle of priorities goes beyond matters of faith to every area of life. Some things are more important than others.

Finally, we need to ask for and live by God’s wisdom. God tells us, “But if any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all generously and without reproach, and it will be given to him.”  Having God’s wisdom is seeing things the way God sees them, seeing them the way they really are.

Some years ago there were two students in a U.S. university who came from a country where Christianity was not tolerated. They attended a Bible study and accepted Christ as their Savior. One of the students wrote to his family about his faith in Christ. Their return letter told him he was no longer their son, and he was never to come home.

He decided to go home and tell his and the other student’s family about Jesus. Their pastor said, “They will kill you!” The student replied, “Yes, but not for a few months. When they realize they cannot brainwash me, they will shoot me. But I will have those few months to lead our families to Christ!”

The only way he could know whether or not to engage this conflict at that time was by God’s wisdom.

A second lesson is to keep speaking God’s truth, even in the toughest times. In some ways this is a balance to the first lesson. Here in chapter 7 we see that Jesus faced people wanting to force Him to be their king and people wanting to kill Him. Neither extreme silenced Him. He actively avoided some conflicts, but He never stopped speaking and living the truth.

Sometimes we can be silent, too easily, for too long. An article opens with a question, “Have you ever been at a family gathering with a new believer who didn't have the sense to know you don't ruin a good turkey dinner by bringing up the gospel?” The writer continues, “He starts blabbing away about his new life in Christ and how you have to believe in Jesus to be saved, and soon the whole family is divided. You sit there as an older Christian thinking, ‘He'll learn we just don’t talk about those things here.’” The writer adds, “It is interesting that the apostle Paul never learned this.”

Know the truth, know God’s priorities for you, live by God’s wisdom and always keep speaking, sharing God’s truth, even in the toughest times. Yes, rely on God’s wisdom to not be obnoxious. But realize that Jesus is “a stumbling block and a rock of offense” to many, and also that “he who believes in [Jesus] will not be disappointed.” Sometimes the cost is great. Jesus gave His life for us. Many of his followers have sacrificed their lives for Him and his truth.

One more lesson: expect the full range of responses to Christian life and witness. Remember Jesus’ experience here in chapter 7. His brothers did not accept Him and
ridiculed Him. Some thought He was a good man, others that He was the Prophet before the Messiah, yet others thought He was the Messiah, while some were convinced He was leading the people astray. There were those who tried to seize and kill Him. Some did believe. Almost all of them on all sides were fearful, not talking about Him openly, but only in whispers. He was rejected because He had no formal education. He was not understood. Even those who believed, such as Nicodemus, made only a timid defense. That was a wide, full range of responses!

Jesus tells us later in this gospel, “If they persecuted Me, they will also persecute you; if they kept My word, they will keep yours also.” Count the cost of persecution and the reward of God’s blessing. Even though it is much more easily said than lived, never be surprised, expect the full range of responses to your Christian life and witness.

Conclusion

Jesus has given us these valuable lessons for times when things go from bad to worse. A key question is how are you, how am I going to see and respond to these lessons Jesus gives to us? Our attitude is important to shaping our response.

It was aunt Sarah’s 99th birthday. Her pastor was one of the guests at the party. As he prepared to leave he said, “Now aunt Sarah, I hope that one year from today I will be able to come and celebrate your 100th birthday with you!” She looked at him for a moment, and then said, “I don’t see why not. You look fairly healthy to me.” That was her perspective.

Your attitude toward yourself, God, your family, the things you have and don’t have, will affect your response. In these next moments with God, thank Him that Jesus not only spoke the truth, but He lived it, giving us His example to follow. Ask God to help you know whether it is the broad flowing river of peace or the raging sea-billows of sorrow, that “It is well with my soul.” Ask God to help you accept and live these lessons, to be faithful and leave that example for others.

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1 Ecclesiastes 3:1.
2 John 17:16, 19.
3 1 Corinthians 2:16.
4 James 3:5.
5 Original source not known.
6 Believe the source was an article in Confident Living magazine, spring of 1989.
7 Romans 9:33.
8 John 15:20.
9 Original source not known.