

Gospel of John Study

Session 18

In our last session we saw Jesus' compassion and mercy upon a woman who had been caught in the act of adultery. He turned the tables upon her accusers by stating that the person who had no sins should be the first to throw a stone at her. Of course, they realized that since they had sins of their own were in no position to stone this woman. Again, the trap they so cleverly devised against Jesus fell apart when illuminated by the truth of God's heart and Jesus' mission to save people rather than condemn them. As noted in that session, that narrative of the trap, broke up the discussion and debate Jesus was having with the Jews at the celebration of the Feast of Tabernacles. One of the rites of the feast was that of water-pouring and into that imagery Jesus invited all who were thirsty to come and drink from Him and enjoy non-ceasing living water.

In this session, as we go back to Jesus speaking at the Feast of Tabernacles with the Jews, we are going to see Jesus make another self-proclamation about His identity based on another rite associated with the festival. This leads to yet another confrontation with the Jews over Jesus' identity and this time Jesus lets them know the dangers of their refusal to accept who He truly is.

Before we get to the Scriptures, we need to understand the other ritual or ceremony that happened during the Feast of the Tabernacles. This was the lamp-lighting ceremony. The Temple was actually a series of large, stone courtyards designed to allow worshipers a place to worship yet also maintain the appropriate distance from the Lord's holy of holies. There was an outer court that was open to anyone, including Gentiles. Then there was what was called the women's court. This was a place where husbands and wives, if in good standing, could go and sing, pray and worship together. In this court was also the Temple treasury and as soon as one walked into the women's court, there were 13 chests for the contributing of money for various things. Each chest had a sign on it telling the donor what the money place in that chest would be used for. From the far side of this court, those in this court could view the priest offering the sacrifices. Men and priests in good standing could go from this court into the court of Israel which was for Jewish men in good standing only. Then past this court was the inner court where the priests actually performed the sacrifices and let into the Temple building proper. This lamp-lighting ceremony took place in the court of women.

Four extremely large torches or lamps were set up in the four corners of the court of women. This ritual commemorated God being a pillar of fire during their deliverance from Egypt until they entered the Promised Land. He was their compass and guide during their time in the wilderness. These torches were lit every night of the feast and during the night and it there was an exuberant celebration each night where the men of piety would dance and sing songs of praise all night long. The Levitical orchestra played songs of joy and praise. Now the huge torches cast their light all around the Temple but especially upon the tallest part of the Temple. This was ancient up-lighting and since the Temple was on the highest portion of Jerusalem and Jerusalem was on Mount Zion, everyone camping below the city and around the city could see the Temple (which was the symbolic of God's presence) glowing every night of the feast. The Temple was a magnificent structure with an exterior of polished white marble. If you saw it during a sunny day, it appeared be shining brightly. For these nights during the lamp-lighting ceremony, the yellow/orange glow of the torches would hit the marble and make the building

look as if it were a tall column of fire, glowing brightly. It would have been a powerful reminder to the Jews of God leading their ancestors by a huge pillar of fire during their wanderings to the Promised Land. This is the backdrop for Jesus' next revelation concerning His identity.

[John 8:12]

This verse begins with Jesus speaking to the Jews "again". This is only to show that if you cut out John 7:53-8:11, this session fits very nicely after John 7:52. It's a more natural progression than having the narrative of the woman caught in adultery forced into the middle of this continued discussion. The event could have happened at the feast but it could have been put at the end of chapter 8 to avoid splitting up the debates.

Q: Who does Jesus claim to be? (*v.12 - the Light of the World*)

Q: What does Jesus say will be the fate of those who follow Him? (*v. 12 - They will not walk in the darkness.*)

The phrase "walk in the darkness" is a standard and common depiction of humanity living in sin. Into the context of the celebration, Jesus is saying that just like Israel followed the pillar of fire through the wilderness to the place God promised them, people are now to follow Him so that they reach the new Promised Land - eternal life in God's presence. The light Jesus is the Light of life. Now it is the very last portion of what Jesus just said that set the Pharisees off.

Q: Why do you think the phrase "Light of life" would set the Pharisees into a tizzy? (*Because God alone gives life. By claiming to be the Light of life, Jesus is claiming to be the source of genuine life and this indirectly making a claim to being God.*)

Light, as a metaphor, is used extensively in the Old Testament to describe God. By making this statement, Jesus is pointing to Himself as the fulfillment of all of these Old Testament allusions.

[Exodus 13:21-22] - We've already discussed this one as it related to the Feast of Tabernacles and it showed God as the guide for His people to the Promised Land. God was faithful in doing this and the light never went out.

[Exodus 14:19-20]

Q: What was God doing for His people in this passage? (*protecting them from the Egyptians*)

In the same way, God protects His children while following Him through this life.

[Psalms 27:1] - God was both David's light and his salvation. Now Jesus is both our light and our salvation. The light He offers is the truth of reality and shows it to us so that we can know where He is so as to follow Him as well as save us from the pitfalls of this life. His light reveals sin to us so that we see it for what it is and are able to be saved from its effects in our lives.

Jesus reveals to us the path of salvation.

[Psalm 119:105] - For anyone who cherishes instruction, this verse shows us how God's light acts for our benefit. A lamp showed a person their direct surroundings in the dark while a light showed them the path forward. Jesus acts as one who shows us where we are, even in darkness, and illuminates a path that leads where He wants us to be.

[Ezekiel 1:4] - God's light comes with His revelation. When Jesus came, there was a bright star pointing the wise men to Him. He was the bright light mentioned in Isaiah 9:1 who ends all gloom and dispels darkness because He brings God's Word to man.

[Psalm 44:3]

Q: What did not save the people? *(their own strength)*

Q: What did save the people? *(The Lord's right arm and hand, the light of His presence)*

What we see here is that light is actually God in action. Jesus being the Light of life is God's action in bringing life to all mankind - to all who will believe. Light produces life without sin. Just as we cannot and didn't save ourselves, Jesus is Who saves us. His life is the light that leads to our salvation.

[Isaiah 49:6] - The servant of the Lord will be the light to the Gentile nations. Again, we see Jesus declaring that He is the Light of life for all who will come to Him.

This is just a smattering of the uses of light in the Old Testament. The key is that they find fulfillment in Jesus Christ. This is one of the instances Jesus gives Himself a title that deals with light. (In the next chapter, He will reveal Himself as the Light of the World again.)

[John 8:13-18]

The center of this debate revolves around the truth, testified by Jesus, versus received tradition, attested to by the Pharisees. Jesus explained the truth of God to them all the while they were seeking to use their traditions, received from their elders, to identify Jesus and His purpose.

Q: Why did the Pharisees say that Jesus' testimony was not true? *(v.13 - because He was testifying about Himself)*

Q: How did Jesus answer this accusation? *(v.14 - that because He knew where He came from and where He was going, His testimony was true)*

Q: Where did Jesus come from ultimately? *(He came from heaven, from the presence of His Heavenly Father)*

Based on the fact that He came from heaven, that makes His testimony true. Heaven is

where God resides and there is not partiality or falsehood with God so anything originating from heaven is true and valid. Here Jesus was building on what He had stated earlier.

[John 5:19-20]

[John 5:31, 36]

Jesus only speaks what is in perfect harmony with His Heavenly Father, thus everything He says is reliably true. In John 5:31 Jesus agrees with the Pharisees in that His own witness is not sufficient to validate His claims as true. Yet, as we saw in John 5, He didn't make those claims alone. He had others, primarily His Heavenly Father, who also testified on His behalf that what He said was true and His great signs also provided evidence of His truth.

Q: What is the point Jesus is making in v.15-16? *(That the Pharisees were not qualified to render a verdict on the validity of His witness because they were using the wrong criteria - worldly criteria. By Jesus saying that the Pharisees were judging Him based on their flesh, they were saying that they were using the standards of fallen human nature without the input or control of the Holy Spirit.)*

[John 1:14, 17]

The Pharisees, because they were judging Jesus on the basis of their fallen human nature (flesh), they could never see that Jesus was the "Word made flesh". The reason for this is that Christ is not measurable or able to be judged by any human standards. It requires spiritual discernment to understand the things of the spiritual realm and as discussed in past weeks, the only way to gain spiritual truth is by placing your faith in Jesus Christ - who He is and what He does. Go back to John 1:17 we just read. Grace and truth are realized through Jesus Christ -not the Law.

[I Corinthians 2:14-16] - The natural man is the lost man.

Q: While Jesus didn't come to judge, what does He say about any judgments He could possibly make? *(v. 16 - They would be true because it would be the Father's judgment. His words would merely be the proclamation of what the Father had judged to be right.)*

We need to make a distinction between two English words that both often get translated "judge" in the New Testament. One is to judge in the sense of discern or make a decision of what is right and what is wrong. The other is to judge in the sense of condemning another person. Context is the key to understanding which meaning is best in a specific passage. This is why Jesus in this passage says He does not judge anyone. He is not condemning anyone despite being in a unique position to do so as the Son of God.

Q: How many men are required by the Law to certify a statement or action as true? *(v. 17 - Two)*

[Deuteronomy 17:6]

Q: How did Jesus claim that the formal conditions of the Law were met by Him in making these claims about Himself? (*v.18 - The Father and Jesus are both on the same page and testify to Jesus' identity and purpose for being on Earth*)

Notice there is an "I am" statement in v.18. This is not the same as this is not Jesus revealing a portion of His identity to mankind. Rather He is describing His qualifications to render a judgment on what is true or false. The Greek precludes this as an identity statement by its construction. It would have had to have read "I am the testifier" or the like.

Q: What does Jesus call the Law in v.17? (*Your law*)

Jesus uses this term because the Pharisees are appealing to the Law to question Jesus' practices. Yet Jesus is claiming to be the new center of revelation from the Father - revelation that always finds its fulfillment in Him. This is the crux of the debate - His revelation from the Father versus their adherence to the traditions handed down to them that sidestepped the heart of God's intent. No where is this more plainly stated than in the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5. Jesus makes a statement of "*You have heard it said...*" then He follows up with "*But I say to you...*" (Matthew 5:21-22, 27-28, 31-32, 33-34, 38-39, 43-44) The Father has sent His Son to restore the Scriptures and Law so that they fulfill their original purpose and are true to His heart once again.

[John 8:19-20]

The Pharisees are bewildered and becoming exasperated with Jesus at this point. Jesus' most profound statements are commonly misunderstood by the religious leaders. Jesus has been discussing His unique relationship with His Heavenly Father as this relationship bears witness of the truth. His opponents want to identify His Father on a purely human plane.

Q: What was the question the Pharisees ask Him at this point? (*v.19 - Where is your Father?*)

Q: Do the Pharisees know who Jesus truly is at this point? (*no*)

Q: Because the Pharisees don't really know who Jesus is, what do they know about the Father? (*Nothing - because Jesus reveals the Father perfectly*)

There is a historical note on this point. The Pharisees were confused but also still angry with Jesus with His actions and teachings. In the East, to question a person's paternity is a slur against one's legitimacy. If one doesn't know their father, then they are illegitimate and then according to Jewish custom, they and their teachings can be discarded. This may be a partial reason for this question. Jesus had been referring to God when He spoke of His Father and the Pharisees are unwilling to admit that He had an intimate relationship with God. Jesus asserted here, as elsewhere, that true knowledge of God, the Father, depended upon knowing Him. And people only come to know Jesus through special revelation of the Holy Spirit to them. God, the entire Trinity, is essential in coming to know who God truly is.

V.20 sets the formal end to this round of the debate. The location of this discussion is given as the women's court of the Temple. This is where the large torches were set up nightly for the festivities. The Treasury is mentioned as it was where those 13 wooden boxes were located to give money for various needs. This is mentioned to give the context of the lamp-lighting ceremony and the treasury let the readers know exactly which court was being mentioned.

Notice the Pharisees wanted to seize Him and have Him arrested, like in 7:45, but no one could lay a hand on Him. God's divine protection extended to Jesus all the days of His ministry until His hour did come - for the cross. This protection of Jesus is mentioned 7 times in John.

[John 8:21-30]

The word "again" in v.21 suggests a pause and a fundamental continuity with what came before it. Thus, while we don't know for sure when this debate happened, it was a continuation of the earlier one we just finished from 8:12-20.

Q: According to Jesus, why won't the Pharisees be able to find Jesus once He goes away? (v.21 - *because they will die in their sins*)

Q: When Jesus goes away, where is He going? (*heaven to be in the presence of His Father*)

Q: So why can't the Pharisees go to heaven? (*They are stuck in their sins and will die in them if they don't get past their fleshly outlook about Him and put their trust in Him.*)

This is just the tip of the iceberg for this discussion by Jesus over dual destinies. Jesus will reiterate that He is going to leave earth and go to heaven to be with His Heavenly Father while those who persisted in unbelief in Him will die in their sins and not go to heaven.

Q: What did the confusion of the Jews over Jesus' statement about going away lead them to wonder? (v.22 - *if He was going to commit suicide*)

Again, we see the worldly mindset of the Jewish leaders (and crowds). They could not see past the physical to the spiritual. Jesus' response at the end of v.22 signifies that Jesus is from a completely different world than those questioning Him. Only by faith in Him could they attain the insight to be on the level where He was. The insurmountable barrier between the Pharisees and Jesus was unbelief. Unbelief, as presented by John, is both an unwillingness to accept the statement of fact but also it is resistance to the revelation of God in Christ.

Q: Where does Jesus say the Pharisees are from in v.23? (*From below - this isn't speaking of hell or hades or the afterlife. This is speaking of the world - the earth - the world of matter and not the Spirit. The contrast is between the material world and the spiritual world - the realm of God and the realm of His fallen, rebellious creatures. Their birth into this world and their clinging to this fleshly view of Jesus is what keeps them from understanding Jesus' teaching.*)

Q: Where does Jesus say He is from? (*From above - not of this world - i.e. - heaven*)

Q: What is the fate of those who are of this world, according to Jesus in v.24? *(They will die in their sins.)*

Q: What is essential for one to avoid dying in their sins? *(v.24 - to believe that Jesus is "I Am" - that He is God.)*

The "I Am" statement in v.24 is a reference to Jesus being God. Jesus is telling the Pharisees directly that they need to believe that He is one with God. What is interesting in the Greek is that there is no completion of the phrase. Jesus said earlier that He was the Light of the world (8:12). He said He was the bread of life (7:48). The full meaning of this phrase is not given until v.58.

[John 8:58]

Now if there were any doubts about Jesus' identity, they should all be cleared up now. He is the God in the flesh - the same God who spoke to Moses at the burning bush (Exodus 3:14). That makes Jesus' next statement in v.24 a bomb. They will die in their sins - according to God Himself.

Q: According to Jesus, in this passage, what is the only way to escape dying in one's sins? *(To believe that Jesus is God - in other words - they need to possess true belief in Jesus)*

Q: What is necessary to correctly identify Jesus? *(God's revelation from the Holy Spirit - it is an act of God to reveal Himself to those who seek Him.)*

For us who live in the new covenant of grace, we need to understand one of the main principles of the new birth that we experienced at salvation. We were taken out of the earthly lineage of Adam and the new birth placed us into the lineage of Christ. Thus, by our new birth, we cannot die in our sins because we don't have them hanging around our necks any longer. Instead we live in the light of perpetual forgiveness. We can now say with Jesus, that we are from heaven, instead of this earth. Our faith in Christ has opened our eyes to see and know the true revelation of God in Christ. When talking to Nicodemus in John 3:3, Jesus stated plainly that a person had to be born from above (or born-again) in order to see the kingdom of God. He's building on that theme in this public discussion with the Pharisees.

[Romans 5:12-21]

[Ephesians 2:5-7] - We are seated with Christ in the heavenly realm already. Our spirits have been made alive and are with God now just waiting for Jesus' second coming so that they can be united with our glorified bodies to spend eternity with God in His presence.

The next question of the Pharisees in v.25 is one of exasperation. The more Jesus spoke, the less they felt they understood. The conclusions they had to draw from His statements were less satisfying. What is important to understand is that Jesus avoids making a direct reference to Himself being the Messiah. That had way too many political overtones and they were all wrong

at this time in history. He also avoiding saying directly that He was deity. He was allowing His works and His teaching point people to that conclusion. His works and character both bear witness that Jesus is from another world - a world different from that where humans inhabit. Not only did His works testify that He was from a different world but also that He was fundamentally different from humans (though He Himself was fully human but also fully divine simultaneously) and that He had a unique mission to complete that was given to Him from the Father.

In v25 - the end phrase in Jesus' comments can be translated a slew of different ways. It is rare to find this kind of disparity in translations. It is very difficult in the Greek as to whether this is an affirmation or if it is a question. Listen to the host of ways it's translated into English.

KJV - "Even the same I said unto you from the beginning"

Amplified - "I am exactly what I have been telling you from the first."

NASB - "What have I been telling you from the beginning"

RSV - "Even what I told you from the beginning"

NEB - "Why should I speak to you at all?"

Beck - "What should I tell you first?"

What make it so difficult is that John doesn't use this phrase anywhere else. Also, no other New Testament author uses it so there is no context to how others use it in Scripture. A good translation of it comes out to be "*Just what I've been telling you all along*" or "*Primarily what I'm telling you.*"

Q: In v.26, though Jesus said that He had many things to say to His questioners, what was it He was going to tell them? (*Only the things that He heard from His Father*)

What is interesting is the Jesus could have marshaled several judgments against this people but the only one He even implies is that they are unwilling to acknowledge Jesus' relationship with the Father. By testifying what the Father has told Him to say, He is testifying that the world does evil. If they weren't engaged in evil and sin, there would be no need for Jesus to have been sent from the Father to earth.

In v.27 we are shown the huge gulf between the spiritual discernment of the Jews and Jesus. They didn't understand that Jesus had been speaking of His Heavenly Father. Thus, they missed the full message of this first part of this passage. Understanding that they missed the point, Jesus patiently continued His explanation of when they would finally recognize who He truly was.

Q: When would the Jews recognize who Jesus was? (v.28 - *when He was lifted up*)

There are two phrases we need to understand to make sense of v.28.

1 - The phrase "lifted up" usually meant to be lifted up to a place of prominence or to exalt someone or something. What is interesting is that when it refers to Jesus, it also carries the meaning of the cross. From a human standpoint, crucifixion would be the opposite of exalting a person yet since it is the instrument by which Jesus brought salvation to mankind and completed

God's plan, it is an expression of exaltation. Jesus is glorified through the cross. When will the full glory of Jesus be revealed? When He is set on the cross for all to see.

[John 3:14-15]

[John 12: 23, 32]

2 - The phrase "I Am" (*then you will know that I am He*). This phrase occurs three times in this passage. The phrase when spoken by God in Exodus meant that He was the self-existent One. In this sense, Jesus is saying that He is the One who He claims to be. But He reasserts His subordination to the Father as just the bearer of the message. When Jesus is crucified, His opponents will know for sure that He is the who is from the Father. He will be glorified in that He will be resurrected from the dead. Think of it. One of the many functions of the cross in God's mind was to identify Jesus as the Messiah. The Jews would come to know the truth after He was hung on the cross because He wouldn't stay dead. Remember the mocking of the religious leaders while Jesus was on the cross. "*He saved others, let Him save Himself if this is the Christ of God, His chosen One*" (Luke 23:35). It's just that the Father had a different, not of this world, method to glorify His Son on the cross. Instead of taking Him down, He let His Son die so that He could raise Him from the dead. Remember, the cross was not Jesus' idea but rather the Father's idea. Jesus was thus submissive to this plan.

Jesus then completes His argument with a statement about continued unity with the Father. He knew the Father was with Him and would not leave Him alone. He always carried out His Father's will and His goal was first and foremost to please His Heavenly Father at all times. His devotion to His Father showed in everything Jesus did. The goal of our lives should be the same as Jesus' - to please our Heavenly Father in all that we do and say and think.

Q: What was the result of this discussion/debate with the Jews? (*v.30 - many of them came to believe in Him. Of course it is speculation if these people actually stayed with Jesus or if they fell away as in chapter 6 and their faith was only superficial. We aren't told other than this seems that some came to understand who Jesus was and His special relationship with the Father.*)

Q: Are there any questions, comments, rebukes or rebuttals?