

## **Gospel of John Study**

### **Session 17**

In our last session we saw how Jesus used the Old Testament Feast of Booths to reveal that He was actually the fulfillment of that Feast and it was ordained by God in order to point to Him and the new life brought about by the Holy Spirit. Again, He used the symbolism of a water-drawing ritual to point to Himself as giver of living water, which is the Holy Spirit, given to all who will come in faith to Him. We also saw two other major developments in the ministry of Jesus. The crowd was deeply divided over Jesus' identity. On the other hand the Jewish religious leaders were set against Him even more vehemently than in the past. They were determined to kill Him.

Now we come to an interlude of sorts this week. Jesus will continue His discussion during the Feast of Booths later in chapter 8. Before we continue we need to examine a story that we all know and cherish yet in truth, is not part of John's original work. In this we need to revisit our study on how the Bible was put together to see how this narrative came to be in our Bibles but also what it means for us.

Before even getting started in the exposition, we need to realize that John 7:53-8:11 do not exist in any of the earliest manuscripts we've found. In fact, the very earliest it appears in any copy of a Bible is in the third century (well over 100 years after the authors of the Bible died). However, before we throw this narrative out completely, we need to understand the difference between historically accurate and inspired.

The earliest version of this story comes to us from Papias, who became the Bishop of Heiropolis, who actually knew the apostle John and drew much of his own source material from his association from John. It is in Papias' writings that we first find a version of this story. John commented at the end of his gospel that Jesus said and did so many other things that the books of the world could not contain it all (John 21:25). It is believed this account was part of an oral teaching that was passed down that stemmed from Papias hearing it from John and spreading it. None of the early church fathers, all of whom wrote commentaries on the portions of Scripture they possessed at that time, commented on this passage. It wasn't until the 10<sup>th</sup> century that any Eastern church father commented on the passage. No one has ever doubted that this took place, its historicity, merely that it was part of John's gospel. Over the next several hundred years, this story comes to take its modern shape and ends up being placed in the various ancient texts, mainly in the Western part of the Roman Empire first. Even then, there are several different versions of the story. Some of the other reasons that we know that it wasn't part of John's original writing is that in those early texts where it appears, it is placed in different locations. Some in John 7, some in Luke 21 and some here in John 8. Also, several of the words found in this passage are not words that John uses anywhere else in his gospel. They are words found in Luke and Acts (and a one in Matthew and another in Mark) but the sudden change in vocabulary draws attention to it as inauthentic. One last argument against it being authentic is that if you cut it out, 8:12 is actually a continuation of chapter 7 and the Feast of Booths. By putting this story here, it leaves us thinking that 8:12 and following is actually a different day of teaching than in chapter 7. If you recall from our study on how the Bible was put together, we noted that when the King James Version was published (1611 A.D.) it used the best manuscripts available at that time. The problem was that most of the ancient and best copies of the books of the Bible were

not discovered for hundreds of years after the KJV was written. Thus to maintain continuity with the KJV (due to it being the predominant version of the Bible until the late 1970's) many of these passages that do not appear in the reliable ancient manuscripts were retained.

So that leaves modern translators and editors of the Scripture with a conundrum. It obviously isn't an inspired work that John wrote but on the other hand, no one doubts that it actually happened as it fits perfectly with what we see in Jesus' character in the gospels. For this reason, most modern translations put the narrative in brackets with a note explaining that this passage does not exist in the reliable early manuscripts. It ends up being put in the category of not authoritative but useful in training and edification of believers - so there is no foul in teaching from the passage based on Jesus' character. Since it did happen, I feel free to use it as a teaching passage and another account of Jesus' mercy and compassion. The reason I spend any time of this, since I am going to treat it as I would any other inspired passage, is that there are other things in our Bibles which are, likewise, not inspired but have been handed down to us in our Bibles. Most of these are insignificant (a word or phrase or one verse at most being added) but Mark 16 is a case where it doesn't belong in the Bible at all due to it being an addition to the book of Mark much later in history and with a message is drawn from other passages.

### **[John 7:53-8:2]**

This is similar to Jesus' passion week in that He taught and ministered in Jerusalem by day but then retired to Bethany where He stayed with Lazarus, Mary, and Martha at nights.

The outer court of the Temple served as the main venue for the scribes to gather their students and begin to expound upon the Law. The outer court was a public court and has easy access by anyone who wanted to be at the Temple area.

**[Luke 21:38]** - Notice how the wording here is similar to the opening of our passage. This is one of places where this story appears in several of the early manuscripts that contain it. Another logical place is in John 7. That location shows that Jesus showed up to the Feast at the midpoint and this event (trap) was set and explains why the authorities were searching for Him. This could have happened before the discourse and debate that ensued in that chapter.

### **[John 8:3-5]**

The scribes were students and expositors of the Law of Moses. If you mixed lawyers with theologians, and jurors, that's what scribes were. Most of them were also Pharisees by conviction since they spent their lives studying and explaining the Law and applying it to various real life instances they encountered. What's interesting is that this is the only place in John that the word "scribes" is used. The rest of the time, as we've seen, John uses the word "Jews". Here in this account, we see them acting as jurors seeking a trial.

Q: What is the sin the woman is accused of doing? (*v.3 - adultery*)

Q: Is adultery a sin that can be committed by just one person? (*no - it requires a second party*)

Q: Since adultery is a sin which requires more than one person to commit, where is the accused man in this account? *(We are not told of his whereabouts)*

Here's the deal. One of the following three scenarios must have taken place:

- 1) The man who was also caught committing adultery was faster than the woman and those who caught them in the act and so he escaped their clutches.
- 2) The accusers were sufficiently biased to focus solely upon the woman.
- 3) Since catching people in the act of adultery is not something done regularly as those who tend to commit the sin are usually stealthy as to avoid being caught, this was a trap by the accusers. They set up the encounter with the promise to allow the man to go free while they dragged the woman before Jesus. As we will see as the story unfolds, this last option is the strongest.

Q: How do we know from v.5 that the accusers are more interested in trapping Jesus than justice being meted out to the woman? *(This question shows that the scribes are not interested in evenhanded justice being meted out but rather that this entire scenario has been played out to thrust Jesus into a dilemma before the crowds around Him.)*

Now we need to visit our history to get a more full picture of what is happening in this account. The scribes were actually breaking the law by setting this trap. There were courts among the Jews that handled these types of situations where the Law of Moses was broken. By bringing the accused woman to Jesus, the scribes were actually breaking their own law instead of taking her to the appropriate court. This is just one more way we know the scribes were not interested in justice or fidelity to the Law but only to ensnare Jesus before the multitudes.

Another issue is the punishment. We are not told anything about this woman other than she is an adulterer. We don't know whether she is a wife or the betrothed of a man. If she didn't fit one of these categories, she'd just be a woman who could claim she was raped or be open to the claim she was a prostitute or whore. The deal is that there are different penalties depending if the woman was a wife or a fiancé.

#### **[Deuteronomy 22:22-24]**

Q: What is the penalty for adultery for both parties if the woman is a wife? *(Both parties are to be put to death. The manner of death is not prescribed. The method of execution prescribed by the rabbis was typically strangulation.)*

Q: What is the penalty for adultery for both parties if the woman is engaged to a man and is caught with another man within a city? *(Both parties are to be stoned to death.)*

With this information, we can guess that the woman is actually engaged to a man and yet she was found having sex with a man who was not her fiancé. That man was let go or escaped while the woman was hauled before this impromptu court.

The scribes were reminding Jesus that the Law stated that a woman caught in adultery should be stoned. Yet, this brings up another possible violation of the law. The Jews lived under Roman occupation and only the Romans could impose the death sentence. This was the case

when they wanted to crucify Jesus but had to wear Pilate down so that he actually rendered the sentence of death against Jesus. This was just another way we see the trap working. If Jesus gave in and recommended the death by stoning for the guilty woman, then He'd be open to the scribes accusing Him to the Romans as having incited an execution without Roman consent. The penalty for that would be death. Also, His reputation for showing compassion and mercy to sinners would be ruined. If Jesus didn't recommend stoning the woman, then He'd be accused of going against the Law of Moses and they would hang this charge around His neck like a noose. His credibility would be shot.

We can tell by the setting that this point of this entire episode was the trap Jesus and not at all about punishing the woman.

### **[John 8:6]**

What is interesting here is that Jesus is the person who the most books in all of human history have been written yet there is never any record of Him writing anything. This is the only place where Jesus is shown as writing anything and it was in the sand or dirt on the stones of the Temple ground that would not survive. (However, if we count His finger being the one that wrote the Ten Commandments on stone then this would be the second time recorded of Him writing anything.)

Q: What did Jesus write when He stooped down? What do you think He wrote? (*We have no idea what He wrote. No one knows.*)

There are many possibilities and theories of what Jesus actually wrote in the sand that day. Was He writing words or drawing pictures or arrows. What is obvious is that Jesus appears to be embarrassed for both the woman who was caught in adultery but also the hard-hearted scribes who He is about to embarrass by their own short-sightedness. One of the oldest and best possibilities are the following:

**[Jeremiah 17:13]** - Thus Jesus is accusing the scribes of forsaking the Lord and missing out of the living water He provides. (This is probably why this story was actually placed here because chapter 7 dealt with Jesus being the living water and they were forsaking Him.)

Some have thought that Jesus wrote the word "adultery" on the ground and began drawing arrows towards those accusing this woman signifying that they had been guilty of the same charge. Again, like everything, this is speculation.

### **[John 8:7-9]**

Q: After Jesus stood up after writing whatever it was the He wrote, what did He say to the woman's accusers? (v.7 - *"He who is without sin among you, let him be the first to throw a stone at her."*)

Q: What did this question do in terms of this situation? (*Jesus turned the tables on the woman's accusers. He now called them to judge their own hearts and righteousness before judging the*

*adulterous woman.)*

Like the accusers, it's easy and it happens often that we are fast to accuse others of sin without taking into account our own sins.

**[Matthew 7:1-5]**

**[James 2:10-13]**

**[Galatians 6:1]**

We must always examine our own hearts before the Lord before we begin accusing our brothers and sisters in Christ of sin. Calling out the sin of another needs to be done in love and gentleness with mercy knowing that we are likely to fall into sin ourselves - whether it be that same sin or another one. It must be a work of the Holy Spirit within us as the Holy Spirit is the One who convicts people of sin. Christians are called to judge sin and righteous behavior but it's how we do it that is critical. To do it without the gentleness of knowing that we ourselves have been guilty of plenty of sins too shows that we are hard-hearted like the scribes who confronted Jesus and we are seeking something other than a kingdom end.

Notice that Jesus stooped down again and wrote a second message in the sand. In truth we have no idea what this second message was either.

**[Deuteronomy 17:7]** - This may have been the second thing Jesus wrote on the ground stating that it was the responsibility of the witnesses to be the ones who threw the first stone in an execution for one was condemned by the Law. This would be a great follow up to His statement before this that those who had no sin could throw the first stone.

Notice that the crowd starts to thin out.

Q: Who were the first ones to leave the scene? (*v.9 - The older ones*)

Q: Why do you think the older one left first? (*While it is unknown and not explained, it may have been that they recognized their lifetime of sin and the multitude of various sins they knew they had committed. It could also be possible that, unlike the firebrands of the younger generation, they were more contemplative and saw what Jesus had done and realized that the trap failed and instead He had turned the tables upon them. Being wiser they saw fit to leave before the younger men came to the same conclusion. There are some manuscripts of this event that actually include a reason and it is they left due to "stunned conviction" upon themselves.*)

**[John 8:10-11]**

Now we see Jesus address the woman for the first time. The word "woman" is an entirely respectful greeting. There is no condescension in the term. Jesus never asked the woman if she was actually guilty. He also never asked her the details of supposed sin. Her guilt is presupposed

by Jesus as her accusers witnessed the event.

Q: What is the first question Jesus asked this adulterous woman? (*v.10 - Where are they? Did no one condemn you? In other words, did no one stick around to throw the first stone at you?*)

No one dared cast a stone at the woman once Jesus set the terms for throwing the first stone.

Q: How often have we actually thrown the proverbial stones at others we've found "in sin"?

Q: Did your actions or words lead to the person repenting or becoming indignant with you?

Q: What was Jesus' final statement to this woman? (*v.11 - I do not condemn you, either. Go. From now on sin now more."* *The last sentence can be translated - Leave your life of sin or don't continue walking in your sin any longer.*)

Jesus gives us the perfect example of how to confront those caught in sin. He was embarrassed for them and had mercy upon them - treating her with the utmost respect and dignity considering she was guilty without a doubt. His goal was to win her back to God rather than push her further away than she already was. Now the woman was free and encouraged not to sin any longer. Don't use her freedom for sin that would lead to more trouble in her life and forget what she'd been freed from. Now she could live a life of thanksgiving and praise to God for His mercy upon her.

### **[John 3: 16-17]**

Q: Why did Jesus come into the world according to v.17? (*That the world would be saved through Him, not judged.*)

Q: Do you have any questions, comments, rebukes or rebuttals?