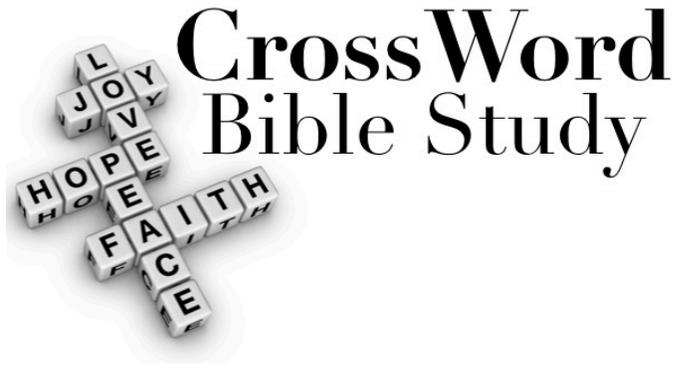




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St. John's Gospel

Packet #11

Review of: John 7:53-8:59

Preparation for: John 9:1-41

Lecture Date: Jan. 9, 2019

REVIEW OF LECTURE ON JOHN 7:53-8:59

Introduction

Chapter 7 ends with Jesus in Jerusalem at the Feast of Tabernacles proclaiming that from Him will flow rivers of living water to all who believe in Him. Jesus remains in Jerusalem for the duration of chapter 8 where He encounters a challenge from the leading religious authorities to condemn a woman caught in adultery. In this encounter Jesus reveals His quick wit against His adversaries and also His mercy toward sinners. He also rebukes religious hypocrisy, especially toward those who believe themselves to be without sin. This story shows us that Jesus Christ, the Son of God, has the power and authority to restore life and freedom to all who, like the woman caught in adultery, are in the bondage of sin and have been condemned to a spiritual death as a result.

Having rebuked the Pharisees Jesus turns to the crowds following Him and proclaims Himself to be the source of light, the revealer of truth, the judge of sins, the redeemer of souls, and the Great I AM.

The Woman Caught in Adultery

A theme that runs throughout the seventh through ninth chapters of the Gospel of John is the widespread nature of sin and the need for the human race to be saved from that sin. Given this context, the encounter with the woman caught in adultery fits well in this part of the narrative.

As Jesus is teaching in the Temple, the scribes and Pharisees bring to Him a woman caught in the act of adultery and they challenge Jesus to pronounce judgment on her (which would be death by stoning). Their interest is not in justice or upholding the Mosaic law but to trap Jesus because there was no right answer.

According to the Mosaic law, anyone caught in the act of adultery was to be executed (Lev 20:10 and Deut 22:22), but under Roman occupation the Jews had lost the right to inflict the death penalty, that law being reserved only for the Roman authorities. To pronounce the death penalty was therefore an unlawful challenge to the authority of Caesar which was itself a crime worthy of execution.

Jesus was presented with what the Pharisees saw as an impossible dilemma. If Jesus condemned the woman to death, He could be turned in to the Roman authorities and be charged as an insurrectionist. If He spared the woman, the Pharisees would be able to denounce Jesus as a false Messiah who sets aside the Mosaic law.

Jesus Bent Down and Wrote with his Finger in the Ground

In a great moment of suspense, surrounded by friends and enemies alike who eagerly await his answer, "Jesus bent down and wrote with His finger on the ground" (John 8:6). This literary style of writing is found nowhere else in the New Testament nor in any other document from antiquity, and it strengthens the argument that this encounter was recorded by an eyewitness.

Jesus is making several statements with this action. The first is that He is unperturbed by the pressure of the situation that He finds himself in. The second is Jesus is making a nonverbal claim to divinity. In the context of a discussion of the Mosaic law, Jesus bends down and writes with His finger in the sand which recalls the writing of the law by "the finger of God" (Exodus 31:18). Finally Jesus is drawing to mind the prophecy of Jeremiah: O Lord, the hope of Israel, all who forsake you shall be put to shame; those who turn away from you shall be written in the earth, for they have forsaken the Lord, the fountain of living water" (Jeremiah 17:13).

Let Any Among You Who Is Without Sin Be the First to Throw a Stone at Her

Jesus replies, "Let any among you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her" (John 8:7). In a simple statement Jesus turns the argument around and traps the trappers. At first glance, it appears that He actually is condemning the woman, which

would allow the Pharisees to condemn Jesus as an insurrectionist, but a deeper look reveals that Jesus is actually getting the Pharisees, who insist on their own moral perfection according to law, to admit to their own sinfulness. If the Pharisees really were perfect they would continue with the execution, but then themselves be subject to the death penalty according to Roman law. In order to avoid the death penalty they are forced to leave, and in doing so, tacitly admit to their sins.

Once the scribes and Pharisees leave, Jesus refuses to condemn the woman. In doing so He is upholding Mosaic law, which required the witness of two or three witnesses in order to convict a person. Jesus has mercy but is also firm in telling her to “go your way, and from now on do not sin again” (John 8:11). Jesus rescued this woman from physical death that came as a consequence of her sin, just as Jesus rescues all believers condemned to spiritual death as a result of their sins.

Light of the World

Jesus remains in Jerusalem following the Feast of Tabernacles. In chapter 7, Jesus proclaimed to be the source of rivers of living waters to all who believe in Him during the special climax of the feast when priests carried water from the Pool of Siloam and poured it on the altar. Another special ceremony of the feast is called the “Illumination of the Temple,” wherein the entire Temple compound would be illuminated after dark symbolizing the pillar of fire that led them in the wilderness during the time of Moses. Just as the light of the pillar showed the Israelites the way during their time in the wilderness, Jesus, who is the light of the world, will shine His light on all who come to Him and follow Him. Jesus is the source of living water and the light of life.

Jesus is the light of life, but He is also the light that reveals truth to those who walk in His ways. He is given the authority to judge according to the truth because of His relationship to the father, having come from above in order to do the will of the Father. But Jesus did not come to condemn; He came to redeem souls from the slavery of sin.

Sons and Daughters of Abraham

It should be noted that at this point in the narrative Jesus is now talking to those who have recently begun to believe in Him (vs. 31). When Jesus makes a distinction between His Father and their father, the Jews become outraged, exclaiming that Abraham is their father (vs. 39). According to their argument, they are exempt from original sin, from a need to be saved, because they are descendants of Abraham, but Jesus declares to them that salvation isn't hereditary. A distinction has already been made between “children of the flesh” and “children of the spirit” in the third and sixth

chapters of John. St. Paul also writes: "For not all Israelites truly belong to Israel, and not all of Abraham's children are his true descendants" (Romans 9:6-7).

For Jesus, a true child of Abraham is one who hears the news that they are a sinner and accepts the Good News that the Messiah has come to save them from their sins. All human participation in the divine life is the result of grace and not the achievement of individual human goodness.

I AM

Jesus' new converts are bewildered at this point, unable to do much more than accuse him of being a Samaritan and possessed by a demon (vs. 48). Jesus stands His ground, however, because proclaiming the truth of His salvation was much more important than presenting a watered down message that would gain more followers. The final nail in the coffin, is when Jesus openly proclaims himself to be God by saying: "Very truly, I tell you, before Abraham was, I am" (John 8:58). Here Jesus is specifically linking Himself to the God who spoke to Moses from the burning bush (Exodus 3:14). At this point the crowd is so infuriated that they attempt to stone Him, but He hides Himself and leaves the temple.

A true child of Abraham is one who possesses the faith of Abraham (Genesis 15:6) and not just his DNA. A true child of Abraham believes in the promise of salvation and their own need for God's grace in order to be delivered from their sins.

Questions on John 7:53-8:59

Read Notes and References again and answer questions 1-3.

1. In John 8:1-6, why are the scribes and Pharisees testing Jesus?
2. In John 8:12, Jesus calls Himself the "light of the world." What does He mean by this and what is the context in which He says it?

3. The Jews repeatedly claim that Abraham is their father, but Jesus disputes this. What does Jesus say is the distinguishing characteristic that identifies children of Abraham (see Romans 9:7-8)?

Preparation for John 9:1-41

Read Exekiel 18:1-4, Genesis 2:7

Memory verse for the week ahead

"He answered, 'I do not know whether he is a sinner. One thing I do know, that though I was blind, now I see.'" (John 9:25)

Light for those in Darkness

John 9:1-12

1. What is the assumption behind the disciples' question to Jesus: "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?"
2. How does Exekiel 18:1-4 address the relationship between suffering and sin alluded to in John 9:2-3?
3. What theme from John 8:12-13 does St. John repeat in John 9:5? What is the significance of Jesus' rubbing clay on the eyes of the man born blind in order to give him sight (see Genesis 2:7)?

Division Among the People

John 9:13-34

4. Why are the Pharisees so preoccupied with questioning the blind man so rigorously? What do they fail to see?
5. What was the man's first response to the leader's statement that Jesus was a sinner?

Do you Believe in the Son of Man?

John 9:35-41

6. What question did Jesus ask the man after he was expelled from the synagogue? Why?
7. After Jesus identified Himself, what did the man do?
8. Although not all of us are physically blind, many of us are spiritually and emotionally blind. Think of some times in your life when you were "blind." What blinded you? How did you regain your "sight"? What might you be blind to in your life at this moment?