

## ***FPFWC Christian Development***



## **Love Completes, Law Falls Short**

September 2023

Fall Quarter

**September 23, 2023**

## **Lesson #4 – Jesus Prevents Two Stonings**

SCRIPTURE TEXT – John 8:1-22, 56-59

### **ICE BREAKERS-**

1. What would be the best way for you to respond when someone asks a question to trap you?
2. How can you control your emotions to give a wise response in such a situation?

***Key Verse: “Jesus said unto her, Neither do I condemn thee: go, and sin no more.”—John 8:11b***

### **LESSON BACKGROUND –**

The events and teachings recorded in John 7 and 8 occurred during one of Jesus' visits to Jerusalem for the feast of tabernacles (see John 7:1–2, 37; 8:20). God instituted this festival for two reasons. First, it was a time of thanksgiving during the season of the olive and fruit harvests (the September–October time frame). Second, it was a time to remember deliverance from slavery in Egypt (see Leviticus 23:33–44).

As something of an object lesson, many who celebrated this festival would live in tents (“tabernacles”) outside the city to reenact the 40 years that the Israelites had lived in tents while wandering in the wilderness. “And every man went unto his own house” (John 7:53) closes the day before the events considered in the first half of this lesson (see lesson 3).

The second half of this lesson begins in John 8:56. In John 8:12–55 (not in our printed text), Jesus responded to questions from a crowd of both laypeople (some who believed Him, others who did not) and Pharisees. Of particular interest to the following episode are the conversational threads about being Abraham's descendants. Despite the Jews' confidence that they were Abraham's family, Jesus declared that their own actions revealed them to be children of the devil (John 8:44; compare 1:13)! No crowd would respond well to being called children of the devil, and this crowd was no different. They went so far as to claim Jesus must be demon-possessed to think that if Abraham and all the rest of the prophets died, Jesus' own followers would not (8:52–53).

We do well to note that the contrast Jesus set up can apply broadly to anyone who claims to be a child of Abraham (and therefore chosen by God, including Christians today) but acts in evil ways that contradict this heritage. Neither

Jesus' words here nor anywhere else justify violence against Jews, past or present.

## **LESSON COMMENTARY**

### Woman Caught in Adultery (7:53–8:11)

7:53–8:2. Based on what is thought to be the most reliable mss, the majority of scholars, including evangelicals, believe that the adulterous woman narrative (7:53–8:11) is not part of the original text. Support for its inclusion includes the following. First, about 1,350 continuous-text mss of John contain the narrative. Second, the story fits the context well. A woman was brought to Jesus in the temple. The only appropriate location for this event would be the Court of Women, the location described in 8:20. Since the Feast of Booths was now over (7:37, 53), everyone went from living in tents (see comment on 7:1–2) to his home [lit., “house”], supporting the legitimacy of 7:53 as part of this episode. In characteristic irony over against the Council’s claim that no prophet comes from Galilee (v. 52), John noted that Jesus went to the Mount of Olives (8:1). It was at the Mount of Olives that Jesus, the greatest prophet of all, would soon give the greatest prophecy of the NT apart from the book of Revelation (Mt 24–25; Mk 13; Lk 21). Early in the morning (v. 2; *orthros*, “at dawn, daybreak”) symbolically (cf. 21:4) depicts the breaking in of moral light in the person of Jesus (see comment on 7:52) who, in 8:12, is the “light of the world.” This carries on the light/darkness theme of John. In contrast to “everyone [who] went to his house” (7:53), Jesus went into the temple, His Father’s house (cf. 2:16, where Jesus called the temple His Father’s house).

Against the inclusion of this episode are several factors. First, it does not fit as well in the context as it is often argued. In 7:52, the Pharisees disputed His claim to be a prophet because of His Galilean origins, and Jesus’ statement in 8:12 serves as a response to their argument. In this case the episode is an unnecessary intrusion into the text. Second, the symbolic connection between Jesus coming “at dawn” into the temple (8:2) with Him dawning as “the light of the world” (8:12) is not clearly borne out in the text. Third, the style and vocabulary are atypical of John’s writing (for the details, see Daniel B. Wallace, “Reconsidering ‘The Story of the Woman Taken in Adultery’ Reconsidered,” *NTS* 39 [1993]: 290–296). Fourth, at this time, the Jewish people did not have the autonomy to execute people on their own authority. Rome was the final arbiter and probably would not have permitted this. Stephen’s stoning was mob action, not judicial, but this episode does not have the “mob action” feel associated with Stephen’s murder. This makes it unlikely that the episode is historically accurate. Fifth, Jesus words in 8:12 about being the Light of the world are more likely to have been said on the last day of the Feast of Booths (7:37). On that day, there was always a huge torch ceremony on the Temple Mount, as a symbol of the Messiah being the One who would bring light to the world.

Finally, the external ms evidence is strongly in favor of the omission of the episode. Virtually all Alexandrian mss, considered by the majority of scholars to be the oldest and least corrupt mss, omit it, and virtually all Byzantine mss, viewed by

the majority of scholars as much later and generally more corrupt, include it. But even when they include it, the episode also “floats around” in various locations in the various mss. This indicates great doubt about its inclusion even among the mss that contain it.

While the preponderance of evidence is against its inclusion, the evidence is not airtight, and since this episode is loved by those who cherish John’s gospel, a commentary on it is provided here.

8:3–5. Since Jesus was being contested as a teacher of the law, scribes who were interpreters of the law came with the Pharisees. Together they brought to Jesus a woman caught in adultery ... in the very act (v. 4). In light of the fact that the man involved was not brought, the Jewish leaders revealed their malicious intent and their disregard for fairness required by the law (cf. 7:50–51). According to the Law of Moses (v. 5), all adulterers (male or female) were to be put to death by stoning (Lv 20:10; Dt 22:22), not just such women.

8:6–7. The scribes and Pharisees were testing Jesus. If Jesus called for her stoning as an adulteress, this would put Him in defiance of the Roman government’s sole authority to try capital cases and carry out executions. (cf. 18:31). If He chose to free her, He would be disobeying the Mosaic law. After Jesus stooped down and with His finger wrote something on the ground, He straightened up (v. 7) to say, “Let the witness who is without sin ... be the first to throw a stone at her,” as the law commanded (Dt 17:7). But the law also required that any witness guilty of malicious intent was to be stoned to death instead (Dt 19:16–19).

8:8–9. What Jesus wrote is not identified. More important is that Jesus stooped down and wrote with His finger (v. 6) and that He wrote twice (v. 8). God came down at Mt. Sinai (Ex 19:11, 20) and wrote the Ten Commandments twice with His finger (Ex 31:18; 34:1, 4; Dt 9:10). Jesus, by writing twice with His finger, was revealing symbolically that He was here fulfilling the same role God the Father fulfilled for Israel as the giver of the law (Jn 1:1; 5:18; 8:58; 20:28). Then they began to leave (v. 9), beginning with the older ones, the ones whose conscience weighed on them longer.

8:10–11. According to the law, a person could be put to death only with two or more witnesses (8:17; Dt 17:6; 19:15). But now there were no witnesses to condemn her to be stoned to death. Jesus could fully obey the Mosaic law in releasing the woman since there were no witnesses (v. 11): I do not condemn you, either. As in this case, forgiveness always precedes the command to sin no more, and forms its greatest motivation.

d. Light of the World Message (8:12–59)

8:12. Jesus again spoke to them refers to the Pharisees (8:3, 7). During the Feast of Booths, large menorahs lit up the temple complex, commemorating the fire that guided the Israelites during the wilderness wanderings (Nm 9:15–23) and anticipating the Messiah who would bring light to nations. After seven days of dramatic illumination in the temple, Jesus declared, I am the Light of the world (1:4–5, 9; cf. “Jesus’ Seven ‘I Am’ Claims” at 6:35). If one believes in Christ and then follows Him (cf. 8:31), he or she will not walk in the darkness (1Jn 1:5–10).

8:13–14. The law called for multiple witnesses to the truth (v. 17). But a single testimony was not necessarily false. So Jesus claimed (v. 14), My testimony is

true, for I know where I came from and where I am going. His heavenly origin, mission in the world, and return to the Father validated His testimony. But the Pharisees did not acknowledge His glorious origin or ultimate destiny.

8:15–16. Jesus criticized the Pharisees for evaluating His claims according to the flesh, i.e., according to human values. His response, I am not judging anyone, seems to contradict other statements He made (5:22, 27; 9:39). But here He meant that judgment was not the primary purpose of His first coming (3:16–17). Yet rejecting His claims invited His and His Father’s judgment (I am not alone in it, v. 16). Like the law (v. 17), two Witnesses—Jesus and the Father—will testify and execute the final judgment.

8:17–18. In saying your law (cf. 10:34; 18:31), Jesus was distancing Himself from the law since He would replace the Mosaic law (cf. 1:17; 7:19) with the new covenant (Mt 26:28; Mk 14:24; Lk 22:20). The Pharisees agreed that the testimony of two men was true (Dt 17:6; 19:15; Nm 35:30). So Jesus offered two Witnesses (v. 18), Himself and the Father—far greater than any human witnesses.

8:19–20. The question of the Jewish leaders, “Where is Your Father?” exposed a serious spiritual problem: they did not know the Father. “If you knew Me, you would know My Father also” asserts that a true knowledge of God comes through a personal knowledge of the Son. According to v. 20, Jesus’ “Light of the world” message (v. 12) took place in or near (NIV, NET) the treasury (cf. Mk 12:41–42; Lk 21:1–2), where the Court of Women was located. (See chart, “The Temple Area.”) The Court of Women was the temple area in which all Jews including women (but no Gentiles) could gather. It was also called the treasury because in this court there were 13 offerings boxes, each shaped like a trumpet (m. Seqal. 6.5). For His hour had not yet come, see 7:30.

John 8:21–23 (MBC): 8:21. For the third time in John, Jesus explained He was going away (7:33; 8:14, 21). After Jesus’ death, these same Jewish leaders will seek for Him (see comment on 7:34). But they will die in their sin and come into eternal judgment. One has only until death to believe in Christ for eternal life (Heb 9:27).

8:22–23. The Jewish questioners rightly understood Jesus to be alluding to His death, but thought that He might kill Himself. Ironically, Jesus would not commit suicide but would willingly give up His life (10:11, 15, 18). Their origin explained their discrepancies with Jesus (v. 23): from below versus from above, and of this world (the natural, sinful, human realm) versus not of this world, but sent from the Father.

John 8:56–59 - Abraham rejoiced at God’s promise that he would see the day of the Messiah. This took place when Abraham received the promise that through his offspring (i.e., the Messiah, Gl 3:16) “all the families of the earth will be blessed” (Gn 12:3; 17:17; 22:18). Then when Isaac was born 25 years later, Abraham saw Messiah, in that he anticipated the fulfillment of covenantal promise and looked for the coming of the Messiah and was glad. Abraham also witnessed, through the binding of Isaac, a foreshadowing of the death and resurrection of Christ (Heb 11:19).

The remark before Abraham was born, I am (not “I was”; ego eimi) makes a claim to deity and eternity (see comments on 4:26 and 8:24). The reaction of the Jewish leaders verifies that Jesus made a claim to deity. They picked up stones to throw at Him (v. 59), but Jesus hid Himself. Spiritually, the Jewish leadership was blind, and His departure from the temple pictured God’s OT glory departing from the temple (Ezk 10–11).

**LESSON NUGGET** – The woman was guilty, but where was the man? Both of them deserved to die (Leviticus 20:10). It was a trap and Jesus knew it, but He ended up trapping the trappers. Did He write on the ground to remind them that He had written the Law (Exodus 31:18) or to refer them to Jeremiah 17:13 (see Luke 10:20)? Here is our wonderful assurance: “There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus” (Romans 8:1)

***Sources: Moody Bible Commentary, Standard Lesson Commentary, and The Essential Everyday Bible Commentary***