

I AM...The Light of the World

Read John, chapter 8, especially verses 1-12

I / INTRODUCTION: ABOUT THIS PASSAGE

1 / Depending on which Bible translation you are reading, this passage may be omitted altogether [**ch 7.53-8.11**] or be enclosed in brackets. You may find marginal note that says something to the effect, *“The earliest manuscripts do not include 7:53-8.11.”* The ESV also includes this note: *“Some manuscripts do not include 7:53-8:11; others add the passage here or after 7:36 or after 21:25 or after Luke 21:38, with variations in the text.”*

2 / Here’s what we do know:

1. We don’t an ‘original’ copy of what John himself wrote
2. Some old and ‘best’ manuscripts contain this passage; some don’t
3. Some very old ‘church fathers’/writers very close to the time when John lived and wrote refer to this passage; some don’t
4. Objections have been raised against the passage; defenses have been written for it – all of them from ancient and old faithful Bible expositors

3 / So let me quote J. C. Ryle, Expositions on the Gospel of John. After he had written at considerable length about all these discussions, he said: *“I leave the subject here. In cases of doubt like this, it is wise to be on the safe side. On the whole I think it safest to regard this disputed passage as genuine. At any rate I prefer the difficulties on this side to those on the other. After all, there is much ground for thinking that some critical difficulties have been purposely left by God’s providence in the text of the New Testament, in order to prove the faith and patience of Christian people. They serve to test the humility of those to whom intellectual difficulties are a far greater cross than either doctrinal or practical ones. To such minds it is trying but useful discipline to find occasional passages involving knots which they cannot quite untie, and problems which they cannot quite solve. Of such passages the verses before us are a striking instance. That the text of them is a ‘hard thing’ it would be wrong to deny. But I believe our duty is not to reject it hastily, but to sit still and wait. In these matter ‘he that believeth shall not make haste’ [Isaiah 28.16].”* This is where I am...

4 / So with all this in mind and heart, let’s get into the story...

II / ch 7.53-8.2 / JESUS PRAYS AND TEACHES

1 / Keep in mind, this is the day after the events of **chapter 7**. It is still the Feast of Booths [Tabernacles]. On the day before, Jesus had interrupted the ‘water ceremonies’ with His Divine declaration and invitation, **“If anyone thirsts, let him come to Me and drink. Whoever believes in Me, as the Scripture has said, ‘Out of his heart will flow rivers of living water’” / 7.37-38**. In so saying, Jesus is declaring His Deity. It was another way of saying, **“I AM...THE LIVING WATER,”** thus invoking the Name of Yahweh, **‘I AM,’ from Exodus 3.14**. He has already declared **“I AM...the Bread of Life” / ch 6.35**.

2 / Also, during these same events, the Jewish leaders had sent the ‘temple police’ to arrest Jesus and bring Him into custody so they could carry out their murderous plot and plans against Him / **7.32, 44-46**. They had argued among themselves in their frustrations during an ‘emergency damage control’ meeting. This was when Nicodemus spoke up and defended Jesus’ right to a fair hearing. He was shouted down and promptly ‘canceled’ / **ch 7.45-52**.

3 / The Jewish leaders all went to their own houses. Jesus went to the Mount of Olives to pray during the night, commune with His Heavenly Father, and seek wisdom and strength for the volatile day He knew lay ahead. Early the next morning, He comes again to the Temple compound and sat down to teach those

who came to hear Him. He had certainly aroused no small amount of curiosity, interest, along with some who were believing in Him.

III / ch 8.3-6a / THE WOMAN CAUGHT IN ADULTERY

1 / The Jewish leaders had not given up trying to entrap Him in some charge by which they could either destroy His influence among the people ... or even in some legal charge against their 'law.' That's when they brought this woman into the crowd and stood her in a prominent place of shame between Jesus and the crowd He was teaching. She **had been caught in adultery**. Whether someone else had caught her in the act and brought her to the leaders, or whether one of themselves had caught her – we don't know. What we do know is that, later on, no one will step forward to bear personal witness or testimony against her [as their own law commanded, as we shall see...].

2 / At least they announced and leveled their charges: **“Teacher, this woman has been caught in the act of adultery. Now in the law, Moses commanded us to stone such women. So what do you say?” This they said to test Him, that they might have charge to bring against Him.** There is so much hypocrisy and self-righteousness here! Clearly, they are not interested in justice or the purpose of the laws they were quoting.

1. The law did state in **Deuteronomy 22.22-24**: **“If a man is found lying with the wife of another man, both of them shall die, the man who lay with the woman, and the woman. So you shall purge the evil from Israel.”²³ **“If there is a betrothed virgin, and a man meets her in the city and lies with her, ²⁴ then you shall bring them both out to the gate of that city, and you shall stone them to death with stones, the young woman because she did not cry for help though she was in the city, and the man because he violated his neighbor's wife. So you shall purge the evil from your midst.”****
2. NOTE: the purpose of this commandment was **“So you shall purge the evil from Israel/your midst.”** But they weren't interested in that; all they wanted to do was to put Jesus in a dilemma, 'between a rock and hard place,' entrap Him in such a way that He wouldn't be able to give an answer that would not either discredit Him before the people or even endanger His life among the Jewish leaders. And they were willing to use this woman as their prey and pawn to do that.

3 / This is clearly a 'gotcha' question and encounter! They were intending and hoping to make Him appear to either show a disregard for the law by excusing her sin ... or make Him destroy His reputation among the people for showing mercy to sinners. After all, Jesus was already known to be **‘the friend of tax collectors and sinners’** [Matthew 11.19], and He had declared **“Truly, I say to you, the tax collectors and the prostitutes go into the Kingdom of God before you”** [Matthew 21.31-32].

4 / Make no mistake about it...Jesus will NOT violate any law that He Himself had given in the Old Testament. In truth, He had come to fulfill all the law! **Matthew 5.17: Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them.** Remember also **John 1.17: “For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ”!** So He will both be sure that all the Law is fulfilled in Him – AND He will show grace and truth to the sinner in this public display that follows...

IV / ch 8.6b-9 / ‘JESUS BENT DOWN AND WROTE WITH HIS FINGER ON THE GROUND’

1 / This is one of the most unusual acts that Jesus ever performed. There is so much mystery surrounding it. But if John does not give us any more details, then we don't need them to get the message. What we know for sure is that *those Jewish leaders got Jesus' message! They were ensnared in their own trap they had tried to set for Jesus!* **Proverbs 26.27: Whoever digs a pit will fall into it, and a stone will come back on him who starts it rolling.**

2 / Jesus did not answer them. He just quietly bent down and began to write something in the dust and dirt that had settled on the tile in the Temple courtyard. **Proverbs 26.4-5: Answer not a fool according**

to his folly, lest you be like him yourself. Answer a fool according to his folly, lest he be wise in his own eyes. Jesus will do both.

3 / By His not answering them at first, it gave them the false impression and confidence that maybe they had ‘stumped’ Him. Maybe He was just stalling. Had they silenced Him at last? Had they trapped Him in the quandary they had planned? Had He taken their bait?

4 / Jesus just kept on writing. He may have written for several minutes while the Jewish leaders were waiting for their answer – growing all the angrier and more frustrated as He just wrote in the dirt.

5 / Did the crowd who were listening to Him just get quiet waiting for the outcome of this spectacle? Or did they join in and maybe start heckling and jeering Him as they will later on around His Cross? We don’t know.

6 / What was He writing? Again, we don’t know. We just know that it had His intended effect on this woman’s accusers.

7 / The Jewish leaders are screaming and shouting at Him by now. *“Answer us, Teacher! We demand an answer! We are the intellectual and spiritual authorities here! This is our Temple! Give us an answer!”*

8 / Finally, Jesus did stand up. He faced the woman’s [and His] accusers with boldness and authority.

“Very well, you want an answer...I’ll answer you! Here is your answer! Let him who is without sin among you be the first to throw a stone at her!” This was a masterful stroke, full of Divine wisdom and authority. Truly, **one greater than Solomon is here!**

9 / Jesus did two things here:

1. He confronted them with their own sins. He most likely was not saying *‘without sin in general among you,’* but rather **“Whoever is without this sin among you, you be the first one to cast the stone at her!”** He had already called this same group of Jewish leaders **‘an evil and adulterous generation’ / Matthew 12.39.** Now He was ‘outing’ them and calling them out again for their self-righteous, wicked hypocrisy in trying to enforce the law on this woman that they excused and justified themselves for violating.
2. He also was requiring them to keep the very law they were seeking to impose on the adulteress. [1] Yes, the Law did require that adulterers who were guilty should be stoned to death. [see **Deuteronomy 22.22-24** above]. [2] But the Law also demanded that the sin should be credibly corroborated by two or three witnesses. **Deuteronomy 19.15: A single witness shall not suffice against a person for any crime or for any wrong in connection with any offense that he has committed. Only on the evidence of two witnesses or of three witnesses shall a charge be established.** [3] AND, furthermore, the Law also demanded that the accusers [who were not guilty of the same sin] should be the first ones to cast the stones. **Deuteronomy 17.7: The hand of the witnesses shall be first against him to put him to death, and afterward the hand of all the people. So you shall purge the evil from your midst.**

10 / So He turned the Law back on them and required them to fulfill it all ... just as He was!

11 / And with that ... **“...once more He bent down and wrote on the ground.”** His enemies were flummoxed and defeated by His Grace and Truth – and we should say also, His Justice. **But when they heard it, they went away one by one, beginning with the older ones, and Jesus was left alone with the woman standing before Him.** The KJV inserts here **‘being convicted by their conscience.’** Might we speculate that the older ones slunk away first because, being older, they had had more time and experience in acquiring their own sin and heaping up their own guilt? Jesus allowed His words of truth and conviction to do its own work in their consciences.

V / vv 10-11 / **‘NEITHER DO I CONDEMN YOU...GO, AND SIN NO MORE’**

1 / Now, Jesus stands up again while her accusers all slink out one by one. He is all alone with the accused adulteress. [Of course, the observant crowd is still gathered around]. How will Jesus deal with her?

1. First, He asks her about her accusers: **Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?**
NOTE: He didn't ask her, "*Has no one accused you?*" because they clearly had. Neither did He ask her: "*Are you guilty of adultery? Did you do what they accused you of doing?*" because clearly she had. She was caught in the act. But He asks her: "**Has no one condemned you?**" because they hadn't convicted her and condemned her. They couldn't fulfill the Law's requirements by producing the witnesses [see above]. She had sinned but had escaped the condemnation from lack of evidence against her. She could not be legally sentenced.
2. Second, He issued her pardon, forgiveness, and justification – upon her faith, believing in Him, and her repentance before Him. **She said, 'No one, Lord!' And Jesus said, 'Neither do I condemn you; go, and from now on sin no more.'**

2 / Jesus refused to participate in the Jewish leaders' self-righteous, hypocritical, judgment and condemnation on this accused sinner. He had not come to act as Judge; He had come to save.

3 / *Did Jesus condone her sin? NO! Did He overlook her sin? NO! Did He excuse her sin? NO! Did He allow her sin to go unpunished? NO! Here is the Gospel! Jesus will stand condemned by Holy Justice and die for her sin just a short time from now. But He will not condemn HER for her own sin ... HE will bear it upon Himself on the Cross because she believes and trusts in Him and the Grace He is showing her!* That is how you and I are saved from our sins also – ALL of them! / see **2 Corinthians 5.18-21; 1 Peter 2.24-25 & 4.18**

4 / If He had condoned her sin, overlooked it, or simply brushed it off, He would have told her: **Neither do I condemn you ... go, and do it again and live as you please. It's OK."**

VI / v 12 / "I AM...THE LIGHT OF THE WORLD!"

1 / This is not an abrupt change of subject. This is a natural illustration and segue to make His Divine proclamation of His Deity. "*This is what my Father has sent Me to do. This is who I AM. This is what I've just done!*" **"I AM THE LIGHT OF THE WORLD! Whoever follows Me will not walk in darkness, but will have the Light of Life."**

2 / John here is picking up some of the theme-threads that he first began weaving into this glorious tapestry of Jesus' Glory: **See, for example, John 1.4-13 & 3.19-21.**

1. **I AM:** this is Yahweh's personal God-Name [see Exodus 3.14]. **John 1.1-2 & 18**
2. **Light:** God is Light. Jesus is God. Therefore, Jesus is Light.
3. **Darkness:** Darkness is sin, ignorance, and death because it is the absence of God who is Light; separation from God because of sin.
4. **Life:** Life is knowing God, eternal life.

3 / So here is just some of what Jesus means by **'I AM THE LIGHT OF THE WORLD!'**

1. **LIGHT IS GLORY:** Jesus Christ manifests the Presence of God in Himself – He is the Glory of God in Himself / **John 1.9, 18 & 1 Timothy 6.16**
2. **LIGHT IS HOLINESS, KNOWLEDGE OF GOD:** Jesus Christ exposes our sin by His very Presence and by being Light / **Ephesians 5.8-13**
3. **LIGHT IS TRUTH:** Jesus Christ shines in Himself on our way to lead us to God / see **John 8.12-14 / also Psalm 119.105, 130**
4. **LIGHT IS LIFE:** Jesus Christ reveals, gives and imparts to us the knowledge of God / **John 1.4-5; 17.3**
5. **LIGHT IS ASSURANCE, CONFIDENCE, CLARITY, SECURITY, JOY:** Jesus Christ gives us all this when we 'follow' Him – believe in Him, trust and depend upon Him only for our salvation from our sin! **Whoever follows Me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life! Jesus knows where He came from and where He is going [John 8.12-14] Do you? / see also Psalm 36.7-9**

DO YOU BELIEVE?