

Light of the World

Portraits of Jesus--John 8

February 21, 2021

DAY 1: The woman caught in adultery

John 8:2 At dawn he appeared again in the temple courts, where all the people gathered around him, and he sat down to teach them. ³ The teachers of the law and the Pharisees brought in a woman caught in adultery. They made her stand before the group ⁴ and said to Jesus, "Teacher, this woman was caught in the act of adultery.

John 8:5 In the Law Moses commanded us to stone such women. Now what do you say?" ⁶ They were using this question as a trap, in order to have a basis for accusing him.

1. The Pharisees were setting a trap for Jesus. What were His no-win options?

But Jesus bent down and started to write on the ground with his finger.

2. Why didn't Jesus speak immediately?

3. Why do you think He wrote in the dirt?

John 8:7 When they kept on questioning him, he straightened up and said to them, "If any one of you is without sin, let him be the first to throw a stone at her."

4. This is one of the most well-known verses by our secular culture! It is the "John 3:16" of unbelievers! Jesus turned the tables on them. Now they are in a no-win situation.

John 8:8 Again he stooped down and wrote on the ground.

John 8:9 At this, those who heard began to go away one at a time, the older ones first, until only Jesus was left, with the woman still standing there.

5. Why do you think all of them left?

John 8:10 Jesus straightened up and asked her, "Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?"

6. What do you hope would happen with the woman with this question?

John 8:11 "No one, sir," she said. "Then neither do I condemn you," Jesus declared. "Go now and leave your life of sin."

7. How does Jesus address both compassion and holiness with her?

DAY 2: Who is Jesus? Light of the world.

*John 8:12 When Jesus spoke again to the people, he said, "**I am the light of the world.** Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have **the light of life.**"*

1. What does it mean that Jesus is “the light of the world”? Light is a metaphor for many things.

a. Light in the darkness—it helps you see clearly

*Isaiah 9:2 The people walking in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of the shadow of **death a light has dawned.***

b. Light gives life, like the sun for flowers, crops, and for people.

*John 1:4 **In him was life, and that life was the light of men.**⁵ The light shines in the darkness, but the darkness has not understood it.*

c. Light gives beauty, like a beautiful sunset.

*Psalms 27:1 **The LORD is my light** and my salvation-- whom shall I fear? The LORD is the stronghold of my life-- of whom shall I be afraid?*

*⁴ One thing I ask of the LORD, this is what I seek: that I may dwell in the house of the LORD all the days of my life, **to gaze upon the beauty of the LORD** and to seek him in his temple.*

d. Light represents purity.

*1 John 1:5 This is the message we have heard from him and declare to you: **God is light; in him there is no darkness at all.***

e. Light represents hope.

*Micah 7:8 Do not gloat over me, my enemy! **Though I have fallen,** I will rise. **Though I sit in darkness, the LORD will be my light.***

f. Light represents the removal of shame and the miracle of redemption and dignity.

*Micah 7:9 Because I have sinned against him, I will bear the LORD's wrath, until he pleads my case and establishes my right. **He will bring me out into the light;** I will see his righteousness.*

g. Light represents truth, as in “Hopefully we can shed some *light* on this mystery.”

*2 Corinthians 4:6 For God, who said, "Let light shine out of darkness," made his light shine in our hearts to give us **the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ.***

2. Which of these verses helps you understand Jesus being the light of the world? Why?

DAY 3: Who is Jesus?

1. After Jesus declared Himself to be the light of the world the Pharisees reacted.

John 8:13 The Pharisees challenged him, "Here you are, appearing as your own witness; your testimony is not valid."

2. Jesus tries to explain His deity. Under each of the verses below jot down what He is saying.

John 8:14 Jesus answered, "Even if I testify on my own behalf, my testimony is valid, for I know where I came from and where I am going. But you have no idea where I come from or where I am going."

John 8:15 You judge by human standards; I pass judgment on no one. ¹⁶ But if I do judge, my decisions are right, because I am not alone. I stand with the Father, who sent me.

John 8:17 In your own Law it is written that the testimony of two men is valid. ¹⁸ I am one who testifies for myself; my other witness is the Father, who sent me."

3. Remember, one of the reasons Jesus came as a human being was to give us a clearer picture of the nature and character of God. He came to reveal God to us.

4. However, His teaching, character, presence and miracles were not enough to persuade the Pharisees of His deity. So Jesus "goes for the jugular".

John 8:28 So Jesus said, "When you have lifted up the Son of Man, then you will know that I am [the one I claim to be] and that I do nothing on my own but speak just what the Father has taught me."

5. This verse refers to the upcoming cross. They will not understand who He is, that He is the Messiah until He voluntarily offers up His life as a sacrificial lamb for the sins of man.

6. What about the cross should have persuaded the Pharisees of His identity? Why would an innocent person voluntarily die in place of the guilty?

7. What would have gone through your mind if you heard these words, blew them off, and then saw Jesus being "lifted up" onto the cross?

DAY 4: What does it mean to be a child of God?

1. Just because someone claims to be religious or a “believer” or “child of God” does not mean that they really are. It is possible to have a huge disconnect between thinking you are a Christian and actually being one. I should know. I lived this reality for twenty years!
2. In our passage from John 8 today, look for what characteristics you should see if you are a Christian. Jot down what you see in verses 31-32, 36, 39b.
3. This will be contrasted with what the Pharisees claimed as the basis for their being in the family of God—that they were children of Abraham. Jot down their mistaken thinking in verses 33, 37-39a, 40.

John 8:31 To the Jews who had believed him, Jesus said, "If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. ³² Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free."

³³ They answered him, "We are Abraham's descendants and have never been slaves of anyone. How can you say that we shall be set free?"

³⁴ Jesus replied, "I tell you the truth, everyone who sins is a slave to sin. ³⁵ Now a slave has no permanent place in the family, but a son belongs to it forever. ³⁶ So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed.

³⁷ I know you are Abraham's descendants. Yet you are ready to kill me, because you have no room for my word. ³⁸ I am telling you what I have seen in the Father's presence, and you do what you have heard from your father." (Jesus implies their real father is Satan). ³⁹ "Abraham is our father," they answered.

(39b) "If you were Abraham's children," said Jesus, "then you would do the things Abraham did. ⁴⁰ As it is, you are determined to kill me, a man who has told you the truth that I heard from God. Abraham did not do such things.

4. Just because someone claims to have religious credentials, does that make them a true believer?
5. What growing characteristics should we see in a genuine Christian?

DAY 5: The rawness of human nature, and the slickness of Satan

1. Jesus finishes the discussion He's had with the Pharisees. So far it was like talking to a brick wall. In this section He attempts to make a connection between their behaviors, their blindness, and the corrupt source of their behaviors.

John 8:42 Jesus said to them, "If God were your Father, you would love me, for I came from God and now am here. I have not come on my own; but he sent me.

⁴³ *Why is my language not clear to you? Because you are unable to hear what I say.*

2. Jesus tells them, "Imagine if God were your real Father in heaven. What would that mean? If you loved your heavenly Father you would love Jesus.

3. Then, Jesus hits them right between the eyes!

John 8:44 You belong to your father, the devil, and you want to carry out your father's desire.

4. His argument is a simple argument. Every son wants to carry out his father's wishes and desires. This is no different with these men. If they had stopped to ponder what Jesus was telling them they would have asked this question: "Are we carrying out Satan's desires?!"

5. I wonder what would happen if we asked ourselves that question!

John 8:44 ... Satan was a murderer from the beginning, not holding to the truth, for there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks his native language, for he is a liar and the father of lies.

6. And here Jesus connects the dots between their behavior—their desire to kill Jesus—and what motivates that desire—Satan himself.

7. Jesus tries again to have them consider the evidence before them...

John 8:45 Yet because I tell the truth, you do not believe me! ⁴⁶ Can any of you prove me guilty of sin? If I am telling the truth, why don't you believe me?

8. What evidence about Himself does He want them to see and consider?

John 8:47 He who belongs to God hears what God says. The reason you do not hear is that you do not belong to God."

9. And here is Jesus' closing argument.

10. It is astounding how we can believe we are as religious as they come, and yet be closer to following Satan's desires for our lives than God's.

8:1-11 The woman caught in adultery

8:4 If she was “caught in the act of adultery” which they claimed, where was the man? Why not bring him as well? (Lev. 10:10). This tips their hand that all is not as it seems. The pretext of their question is one of needing godly direction, and wanting to do the right thing. But as we’ll see in v. 6, that was all a sham.

8:5 See Deut. 22:22

8:6 They hoped to put Jesus in a lose-lose dilemma. If Jesus told them to not stone her they would accuse Him of not being true to the scriptures, thereby discrediting Him with the people. But if He told them to stone her they hoped this would also discredit Him with the people, putting Him in jeopardy with Roman law. The Jews could not execute someone.

How easily people assume the high moral ground, and then pronounce on judgment on “those people,” fully convinced that we are in the right.

They were using her for their own political and personal purposes.

“But Jesus bent down and started to write on the ground...”

John doesn’t tell us what He wrote. We are left to speculate what He wrote. Based on how this episode ends there are likely theories.

First, He began to write down the names of those men standing there who had committed adultery with her. Discovering that He knew what they had done in the dark, the episode soon ended. Second, He was writing the names of the men standing there with their sins next to each name. Third, He began to write the Ten Commandments, inferring that no one keeps all the Commandments.

8:7 “...let him be the first to *throw a stone at her.*”

Jesus did not condone her sin. Jesus tacitly agrees with what the Law of Moses says, but He adds a condition to would be executioners.

“...let him be the first to throw a stone at her.”

That condition exposed their hearts. For those who are in positions to make such judgments here is the point. Wise judgment emanates from honest and unbiased motives. Leadership demands self-examination of motives and bias.

Jesus exposed the dishonest motives and thus the injustice that they would perpetrate.

8:8 Jesus gave time in the silence for the Holy Spirit to do His work in their hearts.

8:9 Why did the older leave first? When we are younger our self-righteousness is more pronounced, and we are usually less aware of the depth of depravity that drives us.

8:10 Sometimes stating the obvious has a profound impact on the hearer. Coming from Jesus, and under these circumstances, this must have been powerfully profound!

8:11 “...neither do I condemn you.”

Just like the woman at the well, Jesus did two seemingly opposite things. He confronted their sin but done with such compassion that both women were redeemed and drawn to the grace of God.

“...leave your life of sin.”

“Jesus didn’t just free her from the Pharisees, he wanted to free her from her sin...” Life Application New Testament Commentary.

Jesus did not condone her sin or excuse it. He acknowledged it, challenged it and exhorted her to turn away from it.

Sin never has to have the last word in our lives.

8:12-30 The validity of Jesus’ testimony

8:12 Jesus was in Jerusalem at the Festival of Shelters, commemorating how God led the people through the wilderness. They slept in temporary shelters, and were led by a pillar of fire that led them. In the temple were large lamps that lit up the temple. This was the setting for His next words.

“I am the light of the world.”

Light is a symbol for holiness (Ps. 271; 36:9; Acts 9:3; 1 Jn. 1:5).

Light enables us to see what is important. It illuminates truth, reveals God to us and reveals all that He has done for us.

“...walking in darkness...”

Darkness is a metaphor for evil, for lies and the absence of truth, and no ability to make sense out of life or the ways of God. It is to walk “blindly” but without knowing we are walking blindly. This darkness “persuades” that we know what we’re doing, that we’re on the right track, that we don’t really need God in a functional sense, and that we are not in need of a savior. Ultimately, we are not a victim of this darkness. It is a darkness we have chosen. We have rejected God’s light. Ultimate “darkness” is to live in hell, apart from anything and everything that would give us light and real life.

In God’s severe mercy to us in this life, we can see and taste darkness. When we are confused, don’t know what to do, are frustrated with our continuing bad choices, broken relationships, resentment, bad attitudes, etc. These should awaken us to our need for greater light.

8:13 Anyone can make false claims about themselves. Can you corroborate those claims? You can’t corroborate your own claims. You can’t be a witness for yourself (Deut. 19:15).

8:14 Jesus claims a double testimony: Himself and God the Father. The claim is rooted not just in being with God the Father for eternity and in heaven, but in being one with the Father (v. 18).

8:15 Their judging of Him was by “human standards” meaning it was limited to the five senses, the here-and-now, human finiteness, and fallen rationality (John 7:24; Rom. 1:18, 21-22, 25, 28). It was completely outside their human mental box to conceive of Jesus being pre-existent and eternal. If something doesn’t fit our nice tidy box we usually reject and ridicule it.

8:16 Jesus contrasts their human judgment with His judgment. He is not limited to the five senses, time, the here and now, etc. He is in sync with the Father’s will (5:27, 45).

The mystery of the Trinity also is here. The Father *sent* the Son, and The Father is *in* the Son.

8:19 Their response is, “Fine, let’s hear from your father. Bring him here.”

His response shines the light on their problem of unwillingness. Because they are unwilling to believe Jesus’ uniqueness as Messiah, they are unwilling to go down any path that may lead to that conclusion. They have shut themselves off from “knowing Him”, and that same unwillingness shuts them off from really knowing God. When Jesus or God have to fit your standard of Jesus and God you have cut off your own way in knowing Jesus and God.

8:20 “His time had not yet come.”

One of several times when John records a “pausing” of some action due to a needed delay in timing for the finale of the cross when “His time had come.”

8:21 “...you will look for Me...”

The Jewish people have always looked for a Messiah, but because the Messiah must fit their view of Messiah—a political ruler who will restore Israel to her previous heights, He could be standing right in front of them and they would not see Messiah.

“...you will die in your sin.”

The sin condition is so fatal that a savior is mandatory. Man cannot save himself, thus they would die in their condition of sin. This negates any chance of going to heaven.

8:22 They illustrate their spiritual blindness by these questions.

8:23 He does not respond to their blind questions. They are far, far off the trail. They must be shocked out of their spiritual blindness. Jesus applies a spiritual cardiac defibrillator, hoping for a different kind of “electric” shock in this discourse.

Humility is openness to the fact that I might be wrong. However “impossible” that might seem I still could be wrong. Is there anything more natural than the belief that “I’m right”?

Jesus tells the leaders they are wrong but focuses on why they’re wrong. They are living on a defective plain. They are “from below”, and are “of this world”. In contrast He is right because of the opposite of both of those. He is “from above” and not “of this world”.

“You are from below, I am from above.”

His “home” had been heaven. He had “seen” God “face-to-face” and knew and loved God. He is eternal and Creator. He is infinite. His perspective is far-ranging. They had never been to heaven, seen or known God from eternity, and had only finite perspective and understanding, yet claim to know enough to be certain of their rightness.

They are like fourth graders who after conquering the multiplication table proudly and defiantly announce to their teacher and parents that they don’t need any more math.

“You are of this world, I am not of this world.”

The idea here is twofold. (1) Corrupt. There is something wrong with the way they live, think, act, and relate. (2) Worldly. The Jewish leaders think in the ways of the world, they hold the values of the world, they operate and live the way the world lives.

They are like students who cheated their way through lower levels of chemistry, math, and physics. They justified their cheating; “everybody does it.” But now, they are hopelessly lost in upper level courses. They are *corrupt* and *worldly*.

8:24 He means they would die in their sinful condition. They have the opportunity to have their sins and sinful condition changed. But there is only one remedy for our sinful nature. It will not undergo an overhaul in any other method: not any other religion, atheism, materialism, good intentions, trying harder, accountability, goal-setting, etc. The consequences of not taking Jesus up on His offer is spiritual and personal suicide. It is to live eternally cut off from every resource which could have dealt with your sin nature, but now you must live with it, as you've always wished.

8:25 The Pharisees will ask the same question over and over and over again throughout John. Most of the time they are questions meant to entrap Jesus. Jesus' answer is always true, but is often heard as vague to them. If they had been open and curious to understand they might have learned. However, they were bent on discrediting Him. They closed the door on understanding Him.

8:26 This is another "shock therapy" statement meant to jolt them out of their self-righteousness. His statement hints at some level of restraint. Instead of dumping the full contents of judgment which would likely have infuriated them to the point of no return, the Father hopes to create enough curiosity to woo them toward humbly learning.

8:28 "...lifted up..."

The crucifixion. No verbal claims of divinity or even public divine miracles could crack the hard, stubborn shell of resistance in human souls. It would take the utter selfless, sacrificial, voluntary, tortuous death of an Innocent for the guilty to finally break sinful man's pride. It is the power of grace.

"...I am..."

Is the equivalent of "Son of Man."

John 8:31-41 The children of Abraham

8:31 Holding onto the teaching of Jesus means to obey it, endure in it, live it. It is to hold it above any earthly "wisdom". It is one of the hallmarks and proofs of discipleship.

8:32 The truth of Jesus' teaching has a liberating element to it. It slowly unravels the devious python of sin in our hearts. We become increasingly freer to do God's will and accomplish His purposes for us.

His listeners do not understand being a slave to sin. They only think in natural terms.

8:33 Here is an exquisite example of people forgetting their history! The Jews had been slaves to the Egyptian, Assyrians and Babylonians. Later they were slaves at the death camps under Hitler.

8:34 The problem with sin is much deeper than the fact that we do sin. It is we want to sin, and becoming enslaved to sin. We have sold our soul to sin. This is the contrast to Jesus' statement before and following of freeing us from slavery to sin.

8:35 The central key to becoming free from slavery to sin is not will power, trying harder, or more accountability (though all things help). The central key to becoming free from slavery to sin is to become a son of God the Father. The image is of a young adult who was once a slave on a plantation, but who is now adopted into the family with full rights of sonship. He is now an heir of what belongs to the father.

The Jews were relying on being descendants of Moses, but that has no power to free us from our real slavery to sin. Only Jesus can free us from sin.

8:37 Jesus exposes the lunacy of their security in being descendants of Abraham. They were plotting how to kill Jesus! What a disconnect!

8:38 Instead of being sons of Abraham, they were acting like sons of Satan.

8:39 This was the basis of their stated identity. They believed they were “good with God” because of their relationship with their heritage. There are several problems with this. (1) Human nature flatters itself to make our sin invisible to us (Psa. 36:2) (2) Just because we believe we’re “good with God” doesn’t mean we are (2 Cor. 10:18). (3) Whatever basis we attach our belief that we are “good with God” is false (Rom. 3:10; Ps. 53:3).

Jesus cuts to the quick. It is not enough to claim to be “good with God” based on your own identity. What matters is how you live. The proof of belief is practice.

8:40 They profess to be living in the example of Abraham, yet there is murder in their heart and intent.

8:41 Jesus insinuates that what they intend to do is right in line with Satan’s desires.

They prove their true state with this slur against Jesus about being a supposed illegitimate child to Mary.

Their fallback position is another claim, which even more than the other is debunked by their intention to murder Jesus.

John 8:42-47 The children of the devil

8:42 Jesus challenges them to “consider your ways” (Haggai 1). If God were really your Father this is what one would expect. Instead, the opposite happened.

It’s one thing to claim God as your Father. Anyone can claim that. The question is “Is it true?” And, “How can you tell?” This is where they should have realized their disconnect. To have God as your Father would mean to love what He loves. They should have loved Jesus. Why? His origin—He came from God. His mission—He was sent by God.

8:43 Why were they unable to hear what He said? Their mind was already made up. They were unwilling to hear Him.

8:44 The same standard of disconnect Jesus used in v. 42 He applies here in reverse. Here, when you consider their acts, intentions, and controlling desires they point to the source of their actions, intentions, and controlling desires, Satan. That they cannot and will not see this is the greatest tragedy and irony. The river flows downstream from its source, and the source of the river can be found by paddling upstream. The two are connected.

“...not holding to the truth...”

Satan knows the truth. Knowledge is not the problem. He has eradicated all truth from himself. He has done so to such an extent that nothing but lies come flowing out of his mouth. If that weren’t evil enough, he is now the “father of lies.” Jesus draws this full circle back to the topic of who their father is.

Lying has become his “native language.” He speaks lies in the same way that someone who speaks English speaks English. You don’t have to think about English. It just comes out of your mouth.

8:45 In contrast to the lies of Satan Jesus speaks truth. He pinpoints a direct correlation between Him speaking the truth and their refusal to believe Him.

8:46 When anyone speaks truth, there is always some pushback. One of the pushbacks is hypocrisy. “Does the person live the truth? Does he live consistently with what he teaches?” Jesus invited that scrutiny. No one could lay a glove on Him. And Jesus uses that silence to ask them again, “Why don’t you believe Me?” His sinless life was another proof of His divinity.

8:47 Unbelief comes from our fallen, sinful nature. It is exacerbated by determined and stubborn refusal to believe and from a hardening of the heart. Only God can soften the human heart (Ezek. 36:25-27).

John 8:48-59 Claims of Jesus about Himself

8:48 Deception runs its evil course as seen here. How can any human being look at Jesus Christ and vilify Him as possessed by Satan? After seeing what Jesus had done in miracles, miracles of healing, teaching and relating, this is the conclusion they draw? (John 7:20; 8:52; 10:20).

8:49 When someone can’t win a debate they resort to ad hominem attacks and name-calling. Xenophobe! Narcissist! Homophobe! Racist! White supremacist! Transphobe! Hater! Deplorable! Bigot! But of all the names someone might be called in our day, being “demon-possessed” is the most despicable.

Yet, Jesus did not react to that charge! (Another example of divinity)!

“...honor my Father...”

Jesus illustrates His purpose of reflecting the character of God before evil men.

It is a difficult trial for the Christian to be seeking to honor God with your life and yet face such evil and vile criticism, and to be misunderstood so badly. And yet, should we be surprised when it occurs? If it happened to Jesus why wouldn’t it happen to you and me?

8:50 He is not out to honor Himself or bring Himself glory. He is out to honor the Father and to glorify Him.

“...and He is the judge.”

Jesus gives a mild warning and at the same time puts His reputation into the hands of God who judges justly.

8:51 **“...keeping My word...”**

In a global sense of course this is true. But how we think about this truth may be dumbed down to how the Pharisees thought about obeying the commands. They sought to obey the letter the law but in doing so missed the spirit of the law, and thus ended up disobeying both.

“...death...”

As we’ve seen elsewhere, this is more than physical death. It is a kind of living death cut off from God, cut off from the life of God, cut off from the resources of God, cut off from the fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22-23),

8:52-53 Another illustration of not understanding something, vilifying what was said, countering with straw man arguments, and demonizing the person speaking.

8:54 Jesus is completely anchored in God. He entrusts His identity into the hands of His Father. He trusts His reputation to His Father. He is not “knocked off the horse” by their vilifying and demonizing remarks.

8:55 It’s been said that one must always be open to know what one does not yet know. A few corollaries: (1) Just because you think you know something doesn’t mean you actually do. (2) Just because you know something doesn’t mean you understand it. (3) Just because you know about something doesn’t mean you know enough about it.

8:56 “...Abraham rejoiced at the thought ... he saw it...”

The Abrahamic covenant promised that all mankind would be blessed. A Messiah would save God’s people. (Gen. 12; 15; 17:7; 22:8). Abraham developed the eyes of faith to look forward to receive what was not yet given (Heb. 11:8-16). He didn’t just recognize (see) what was coming but he rejoiced in what was coming!

There would be a savior for both Jew and Gentile alike (Isa. 49:3, 6)

8:57 Another example of how we draw conclusions we want to draw. Jesus had not claimed to *see* Abraham or that Abraham had *seen* Him. Abraham *foresaw* the day of Messiah’s coming, and rejoiced. Instead of being curious they drew a conclusion that was absurd and ridiculed Jesus for the wrong conclusion they drew.

8:58 The eternal nature of Jesus Christ, timeless, another picture of divinity. This is one of the clearest statements of His claim to be God in the flesh.

This is one of those claims of divinity which leaves the hearer no middle ground of Jesus being a “good” man. Either He was a madman who would make such a claim or divine.

8:59 The leaders’ actions indicate that His claim was blasphemous, and the penalty for blasphemy was stoning. Ironically, the blasphemers were the ones with stones in their hands. They ridiculed and cursed the God they claim to serve.