

John Chapter Eight

SIN AND LIGHT

John 8:1-18

Forgiveness—what is the first thing that comes to your mind when you hear that word? Perhaps you are thinking how difficult it is to forgive someone who has hurt you. Perhaps you wish you felt forgiven for some of the things you have done. Or possibly you are recalling the sense of relief you have felt because you have been forgiven. Maybe you are one of those people who feel they have done something so horrible that they cannot possibly be forgiven for it. The boys in the following story may have had such feelings.

“Pastor Jason Martin woke from a solid sleep to find firefighters dousing a 3 by 5 foot cross burning on the lawn in front of his family's home in a community north of Seattle, Washington. When authorities arrested two teens on the charge of malicious felony harassment, Martin told his church he hoped to have an opportunity to talk to the boys himself.

“The Sunday after the incident, Martin told his church he wanted to tell the boys who set the fire that he had forgiven them and that he would like to offer the young men guidance if they were willing to listen. Martin said, “We want to throw sticks and stones and cuss and all kinds of things when someone hurts us, but if we want to be good Christians, if we want to be a good community, I say send your enemy flowers.

“Martin asked his congregation to pray for the teens saying, ‘They may feel they've done something that can't be forgiven. They can be forgiven.’”¹

One of the reasons Jesus came to earth was to provide a way for us to be forgiven and to teach us how to forgive others, as we will see in our text this morning.

John 8:1-5 NAS:

1 But Jesus went to the Mount of Olives.

2 Early in the morning He came again into the temple, and all the people were coming to Him; and He sat down and began to teach them.

3 The scribes and the Pharisees brought a woman caught in adultery, and

¹ The Associated Press, March 28, 2004. Submitted by Jim Sandell and related in *Fresh Illustrations*, WordSearch7.

*having set her in the center of the court,
4 they said to Him, "Teacher, this woman has been caught in adultery, in
the very act.
5 "Now in the Law Moses commanded us to stone such women; what then
do You say?"*

As we come to chapter 8 of John's Gospel, the Feast of Tabernacles has just concluded, and as was Jesus' custom when in Jerusalem, He spent the night in the Garden of Gethsemane on the Mount of Olives.² He rose early the next morning, the day after the feast had ended, and returned to the Temple where it did not take long for a large crowd to gather to hear Him teach. As Jesus was teaching, the Pharisees and teachers of religious law rudely interrupted Him. They apparently had something up their sleeve to try and distract the crowd from being convinced by the power of Jesus' words. So they dragged in this poor woman whom they had convicted of adultery and stood her in full view in front of the crowd. Just imagine the shame she must have felt being humiliated like that in front of possibly hundreds of people, some of whom may have known her. Then they said to Jesus: "*in the Law Moses commanded us to stone such women;*³ *what then do You say?*" They were probably hoping that Jesus would tell them that the woman should be forgiven of her sin and set free. If He did that the people would very likely question whether Jesus was truly from God because they held Moses in the highest of esteem because of his relationship to God in being the one to whom God entrusted the Law. If anyone contradicted God's Law, they would be regarded as a false teacher.

Since they had not been able to arrest Jesus, the Pharisees hoped to destroy His influence by forcing Him into a situation in which He would either have to directly violate the Law of God, or a law established by their Roman rulers. The Law of God demanded the execution of this woman, but Rome had removed the authority of the Jewish leaders to order the death penalty except for temple violations. Thus the Jewish leaders were hoping to put Jesus in a lose/lose situation. If He were to say that the woman should be forgiven, He would be rejecting God's Law as given to Moses and that would very likely turn the people against Him because Moses was highly respected for his role in receiving the Law of God which they lived by. If, however, Jesus were to say that the Law should be carried out and the woman stoned, then He would be violating Roman Law and the Jewish leaders could report Him to the Roman authorities.⁴ Have you ever been in a situation that no matter what you did someone would be mad at you? That is the kind of situation the Jewish leaders tried to place Jesus in.

John 8:6-11 NAS:

*6 They were saying this, testing Him, so that they might have grounds for
accusing Him. But Jesus stooped down and with His finger wrote on the
ground.*

7 But when they persisted in asking Him, He straightened up, and said to

² 18:1-2; Luke 22:39; cf. also Mark 11:1, 11.

³ Lev. 20:10; Deut. 22:22.

⁴ Keener, Craig S. ; *InterVarsity Press: The IVP Bible Background Commentary : New Testament*. Downers Grove, Ill. : InterVarsity Press, 1993, S. Jn 8:4.

them, “He who is without sin among you, let him be the first to throw a stone at her.”

8 Again He stooped down and wrote on the ground.

9 When they heard it, they began to go out one by one, beginning with the older ones, and He was left alone, and the woman, where she was, in the center of the court.

10 Straightening up, Jesus said to her, “Woman, where are they? Did no one condemn you?”

11 She said, “No one, Lord.” And Jesus said, “I do not condemn you, either. Go. From now on sin no more.”

Jesus did not answer these Jewish leaders, but bending down He began to write in the dust. Some have suggested Jesus was jotting down the details of sins committed by the accusers. As they continued to insist on a judgment, Jesus looked up. *“If any one of you is without sin, let him be the first to throw a stone at her.”*⁵

One by one these Jewish leaders, undoubtedly condemned by their own consciences, slipped away. Left alone with the woman, Jesus announced, *“Neither do I condemn you. Go now and stop living a sinful life.”* The Jewish men slinked off, neither having forgiven the woman, nor having been forgiven themselves. The woman, on the other hand, left Jesus’ presence forgiven. I daresay she probably felt a sense of freedom and joy, along with a resolve to do as Christ had commanded her. I hope you are able to see the contrast here between Jesus’ way and the way of the Jewish leaders. Jesus has brought to the people a way of life which comes from the grace of God in contrast to a legalistic way of life that is promoted by the Pharisees and teachers of the Law.

The legalism promoted by the Pharisees would use this woman’s situation to try and turn the people against Jesus. She had no value as a human being to them, so they did not care what happened to her. But Jesus cared about her as one of God’s children. She was guilty, but in spite of her sin Jesus refused to condemn her. Grace values human life and will not allow it to be destroyed without provision for its restoration. God knows that all of us have sinned, but withholds condemnation in order to give life, and to encourage the sinner to *“leave a life of sin.”*⁶

The Law was a good and holy expression of righteousness. Adultery is wrong, and we are to care about doing what is right. But the Pharisees were not concerned with what was the right thing to do for the people whose care they were entrusted with. In this particular situation they had no concern for this woman being reformed. Their motives were not righteous, but vengeful.

On the other hand, everything Jesus did was righteous, and was designed to produce righteousness. Jesus supported the Law’s penalty for sin, but demanded a sinless history of living from anyone who would execute it! Christ Himself judged the sin wrong, but rather than condemn the sinner, Jesus withheld the penalty so that she might go and sin

⁵ Richards, Larry ; Richards, Lawrence O.: *The Teacher's Commentary*. Wheaton, Ill. : Victor Books, 1987, S. 728.

⁶ Ibid.

no more!⁷

But once again Jesus shows that He is far superior in wisdom to be taken in by any earthly plot to discredit Him because His answer does not go against the Law of Moses or the Roman Law.

So Jesus very calmly told them if that was what the Law said then they should go ahead and stone her, but that only the person who had not sinned was to throw the first stone. What a predicament for the Pharisees. Now they had to deal with the reality of Jesus having agreed with what the Law commanded in the case of adultery, but if they stoned her one of them would have to be declaring that he had never sinned and the people would not have accepted that. Plus the Pharisees themselves would then have been the ones in violation of Roman Law. They would have very likely therefore angered the crowd making the people even more likely to support what Jesus was telling them. In the way that only Jesus could, He pulled off another master stroke of genius here and at the same time made it clear to the woman and the crowd that there was no condemnation from God or from Jesus for those who were repentant of their sin and who believed what Jesus was teaching them. Romans 8:1 tells us: *“Therefore there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus,”* a promise that applied to this woman as well. God’s forgiveness is available to **anyone** who will come to Him and sincerely trust in Christ’s work on the Cross for their salvation.

I am quite sure you can imagine what the reaction of the crowd was to Jesus after seeing this. He had beaten the Jewish leaders at their own game. They had interrupted Him in the middle of His message to the people hoping to make Him look foolish, but Jesus easily turned the tables making them the ones who looked foolish. The crowd must have been eager by this time to hear what else Jesus had to say. So Jesus went directly to the heart of what He wanted the people to understand.

In John 8:12 (NAS), Jesus said:

12 *“I am the **Light** of the world; he who follows Me will not walk in the darkness, but will have the **Light** of life.”*

As the Light of the world, Christ claimed to be God, for God is light. In 1 John 1:5 (NLT), John writes: *“This is the message we heard from Jesus and now declare to you: God is light, and there is no darkness in him at all.”* Darkness speaks of death, ignorance, and sin; light speaks of life, knowledge, and holiness.⁸

When you are driving down a dark road at night, what do you do? You turn on your lights, your headlights, so you can see where you are going. When you are looking for

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Wiersbe, Warren W.: *Wiersbe's Expository Outlines on the New Testament*. Wheaton, Ill. : Victor Books, 1997, ©1992, S. 232.

something in a dark closet, you shine a light on the area you are searching so you can find what you want. Light shows you the way and helps you find things.

Jesus Christ, as the Light of the world, shows us the way to God and helps us find Him.

You all have probably noticed the frequent references in the Bible to light when referring to God and Jesus. In John's Gospel the term **light** specifically refers to **God's love for all people**. It also refers to the fact that **God is willing to demonstrate that love in and through Jesus Christ**, who has been sent to teach us that **God loves each person so much that He is willing to offer them the free gift of forgiveness and salvation and eternal life in Heaven if they will believe what Jesus is telling them and doing for them through His earthly ministry**. God wants the people to know that Christ is His messenger and that He has been sent to set all people free from lives darkened by sin. Jesus has been sent to provide the way to forgiveness for all of us. This fact should really provide new meaning for you when reading John 3:16:

John 3:16-18 (NASB)

¹⁶ *"For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life.*

¹⁷ *"For God did not send the Son into the world to judge the world, but that the world might be saved through Him.*

¹⁸ *"He who believes in Him is not judged; he who does not believe has been judged already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God.*

So Christ refers to Himself as "*the light of the world*" (also see John 9:5; 12:46). We could translate John 8:12 to read as follows in today's language:

"Jesus told them, 'I am God's messenger from Heaven sent to earth in a physical body to tell you just how very much God loves each and every one of you. Anyone who believes what God is saying through Me will no longer have to be alone in the darkness of their sin which leads to eternal damnation and Hell, but will receive God's promise of salvation, joy and peace in this world and eternal life with God in Heaven in the next.'"

Then in the Sermon on the Mount Jesus applies this term, "light," to His disciples.

Matthew 5:14-16 NAS:

¹⁴ *"You are the **light** of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden;*

¹⁵ *nor does anyone **light** a lamp and put it under a basket, but on the lampstand, and it gives **light** to all who are in the house.*

¹⁶
*"Let your **light** shine before men in such a way that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven.*

Anyone who believes Jesus' message from God becomes God's messenger of divine love as well, just as Jesus was. Believers are to light the way for others to come to Jesus.

2 Corinthians 4:6 (NLT)

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For God, who said, "Let there be light in the darkness," has made this light shine in our hearts so we could know the glory of God that is seen in the face of Jesus Christ.

Light is God's message of love and salvation to all of His children, and that means every single person who has ever been born on this earth. Think of the wonder of it all. God was willing to come to earth in the form of the man, Jesus Christ, to bring us His message of love and then He was willing to die an excruciatingly painful death to seal that love in our eternity. Do not let a day go by without thanking Him for that. And if you have not yet accepted that free gift of love through Jesus Christ, today would be a good day to do that. Why live in darkness one moment longer?

Now according to John 8:20, Jesus delivered this message in The Court of Women, which was one of the busiest parts of the temple. It was the perfect place for what Jesus wanted to do. You see the Feast of Tabernacles had just concluded the day before, and there were two great ceremonies that took place during the feast. One, as we have seen, was the pouring out of the water. The other was called the "Illumination of the Temple" and it took place in The Court of Women at the beginning of the feast.⁹

In the center of the Court of Women great torches were set up. Some accounts say that the torches were as high as the highest walls of the temple and that at the top of these torches were gigantic bowls holding sixty-five liters of oil. There was a ladder for each torch and in the evening of that first day young priests would carry the oil up to the top, where they would light the protruding wicks. The great flames that leapt out of these torches illumined the whole temple and much of Jerusalem. It was spectacular! The *Mishnah* describes what happened after the torches were lit: Men of piety and good works used to dance before them with burning torches in their hands singing songs and praises and countless Levites played on harps, lyres, cymbals, and trumpets and other musical instruments. They would dance until dawn. It was an exotic festival celebrating the great pillar of fire that led the people of Israel during their travels in the wilderness. It was in this place, no doubt with the charred torches still in place, that Jesus chose to raise His voice above the crowd and proclaim, *"I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life."* There could be no better way to announce the reality of who and what Jesus was, and what they needed to understand about Him.¹⁰

⁹ Hughes, Kent, *Preaching the Word*, John 8:12-20.

¹⁰ Ibid.

Jesus said, *"I am the light of the world."* Those great torches in the temple symbolized the *Shekinah* glory, a Hebrew word from the root 'to dwell' that is translated as the 'Presence' of God.¹¹ Christ was saying in effect, *"Do you remember the pillar that came between you and the Egyptians near the Red Sea, the pillar that protected you and led you on your wanderings in the wilderness? I am the Light of the world. I am that Shekinah glory."* What a statement! Jesus was claiming to be God. He was claiming to be the same one who protected them and guided them through the wilderness. Jesus is the *Shekinah* glory.

Jesus also makes a claim for those who follow Him. *"Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness"* (John 8:12). Are you stumbling through life, frightened, confused, and discouraged first by this thing and then by that thing? Jesus provides the light of life and peace and joy can be found when we discipline ourselves to look to the light, gaining courage even though we exist in a dark world.

If you want to be assured of Heaven forever and the presence of God in your life 24/7, and you believe His message, ask Him right now to come into your life as your Savior for sin, past, present, and future. Tell Him that you believe that His sacrificial death for you served as payment for your sin. Receive His gift of forgiveness for your sins.

You know Karl Menninger, the famed psychiatrist, once said that if he could convince the patients in psychiatric hospitals that their sins were forgiven, 75 percent of them could walk out the next day!¹² You do not need a psychiatrist or anyone else to convince you that your sins will be forgiven.

Just believe what God tells you in the Bible: that if you believe that Jesus died and came back to life to take the penalty for your sins, you are forgiven (Romans 10: 9, 10).

When you do that you will become a member of the kingdom of Heaven with all the privileges and benefits of being part of that royal family. Now listen to what those dunderheads in Jesus' time said in response to this gracious, merciful promise.

John 8:13 NAS:

13 So the Pharisees said to Him, "You are testifying about Yourself; Your testimony is not true."

This is proof of the pudding of what we said earlier. No matter what Jesus said or did, He could heal the blind and lame one right after the other, or He could walk on water, or turn water into wine, or speak with the love, compassion, and eloquence of an angel, and yet a committed fool would not give up what they wanted to believe for their own selfish purposes in spite of all the wonders and miracles they saw and heard. How powerful must be the lure of Satan.

¹¹ Achtemeier, Paul J. ; Harper & Row, Publishers ; Society of Biblical Literature: *Harper's Bible Dictionary*. 1st ed. San Francisco : Harper & Row, 1985, S. 938.

¹² *Today in the Word*, March 1989, p. 8.

Imagine the sun telling the world that it provides light and the world saying back to the sun, “*Sun, what you said is not true. You don’t produce any light.*” How ridiculous. The sun does not need anyone else to support the reality that it provides light to the earth. Such truth is self-evident. Because of the things Jesus has done, because of the reason He has done them and to whom He has given the glory, and because the wisdom of His teaching is so far superior to that of man, Jesus has provided adequate evidence that He has been sent from Heaven as the spokesman of God.

But in spite of these continuing insults toward His personal character and honesty, Jesus did not tell them what they could do with their opinion, like some of us might. Instead He tried to show them that what He was teaching could not just be about Him. After all, Jesus never uttered a word that was not from God or pointing to the glory of God. He never claimed to be the Big Man. He was always pointing toward the glory of the One who sent Him and His main objective was to help people see the light that would lead them out of the dark tunnel surrounding them.

John 8:14-18 NAS:

14 Jesus answered and said to them, “Even if I testify about Myself, My testimony is true, for I know where I came from and where I am going; but you do not know where I come from or where I am going.

15 “You judge according to the flesh; I am not judging anyone.

16 “But even if I do judge, My judgment is true; for I am not alone in it, but I and the Father who sent Me.

17 “Even in your law it has been written that the testimony of two men is true.

18 “I am He who testifies about Myself, and the Father who sent Me testifies about Me.”

Jesus made it clear that their witness was not dependable because their judgment was faulty. They judged on the basis of externals, mere human judgment, but He judged on the basis of supernatural knowledge. The way they judged the woman taken in adultery proved that they neither understood the Law nor their own sinful motives.¹³ When the Pharisees demand proof of Jesus’ claims, Jesus points out that God, His Father, has already testified—through the miracles He has performed--that He is the promised Messiah.¹⁴ The witness of the Father at Christ’s baptism and transfiguration are further proof of who Jesus is.

Jesus tells these Pharisees that if they think He is just a mere man, they should pay attention to His teaching and the miracles He has performed over and over again. If they would do that the evidence would make it clear that no such wisdom and power could come from any source other than God. We need to keep in mind that Jesus came not to do His own will, but the will of his Father.

¹³ Wiersbe, Warren W.: *The Bible Exposition Commentary*. Wheaton, Ill. : Victor Books, 1996, ©1989, S. Jn 8:12.

¹⁴ Richards, Larry: *The Bible Reader’s Companion*. Wheaton, Ill. : Victor Books, 1991, S. 685.

John 6:38-40 (NLT) :

³⁸ *For I have come down from heaven to do the will of God who sent me, not to do my own will.*

³⁹ *And this is the will of God, that I should not lose even one of all those he has given me, but that I should raise them up at the last day.*

⁴⁰ *For it is my Father's will that all who see his Son and believe in him should have eternal life. I will raise them up at the last day."*

Jesus came as a witness of those things which He had seen and known in Heaven and no man could judge those things because no man had seen them. Remember what Nicodemus asked?

John 3:9-11 (NLT):

⁹ *"How are these things possible?" Nicodemus asked.*

¹⁰ *Jesus replied, "You are a respected Jewish teacher, and yet you don't understand these things?"*

¹¹ *I assure you, we tell you what we know and have seen, and yet you won't believe our testimony.*

Because Jesus came from Heaven; because He knew His Father's will; because He had seen the eternal world, and known the wisdom of His Father, so His testimony was trustworthy. Because they had not seen and known these things, they were not qualified to judge.¹⁵

Having the light of Christ will determine where we spend eternity. No concern or need is more urgent than that. Without it we will walk into eternal darkness.

¹⁵ Barnes, Albert, *Notes on the New Testament Explanatory and Practical*, (: ,), WORDsearch CROSS e-book, -1.