

Logan Smith
June 8th, 2025

John 8:12-59

The Light of the World

My normal method for beginning a sermon is no mystery: I always begin with reading the passage of Scripture that the sermon comes from, so that we can begin with hearing God Himself speak, through His Word, before we hear anything that comes from me; to underscore the importance of this, we even all stand in reverence of hearing God speak through His Holy, Inspired, and Inerrant Word; then we pray, asking for the illumination of God's Spirit throughout the sermon delivery. Then, I typically begin the sermon introduction with some kind of story or illustration about the passage or why we need to hear this part of God's Word. Needless to say, every single part of how I begin the sermon is intended to focus our intention on *God's Word*.

But today, I need to begin by talking about what is *not* in our sermon text of Scripture this morning; namely, I need to give an explanation for why we skipped over John 7:53 - 8:11, the story of the woman caught in adultery. If you're using pretty much any Bible translation other than the KJV, then when you look down at John 7:53 - 8:11, you'll see brackets around that passage, and some kind of heading or footnote that explains that the earliest manuscripts of the Bible don't include these verses; in other words, it has brackets around it showing that these verses cannot be trusted to be part of the original, inspired, inerrant Word of God. We've talked about this a few times; this is called "Textual Criticism," the study of the ancient copies of Scripture to confirm the accuracy and validity of what the original writings of Scriptures, by the prophets and Apostles under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, truly said. When you see footnotes and brackets about manuscripts in your Bible, that's what it's referring to. It's not that Scripture is wrong, but rather there are bits of verses that slipped into copies over the years that aren't actually Scripture. This doesn't happen often, thankfully; this is a testament to how nearly *all* of Scripture can be very confidently and definitively affirmed as original, authentic, accurate, and reliable. But there are a few, rare places where that isn't the case - such as John 7:53-8:12.

Rather than preaching a text that isn't scripture, or just skipping and ignoring it, I think it's far better to talk about *why* this is the case, what it means, and how this actually *strengthens* our understanding of Scripture. So I'm going to walk through and carefully explain why I *don't* think these particular verses are Scripture, precisely because I want your trust in the accuracy and validity of Scripture to be *strengthened*, not undermined.

So that means we're going to have to go into the weeds of Textual Criticism for a little bit here, and I encourage you not to check out, but to pay attention, because it is *absolutely crucial* that we all know what Scripture is, what *isn't* Scripture, and why. Textual criticism has to do with studying manuscripts - the thousands of copies of Scripture written over thousands of years - in order to accurately and reliably determine what the *original* Scriptures said. We don't have the original books and letters that John and the other Apostles wrote, those decayed; but we do have *thousands* of copies, written by thousands of scribes over the millenia that meticulously copied the originals, and then the copies of the originals, preserving them over time. If it sounds like we don't really know what the Apostles and Prophets actually wrote, don't be worried: this process actually shows that the Bible is the *most* reliable and historically accurate ancient writings in the world, by a *very* large margin. We are able to take these thousands of copies of the original Greek and compare them with each other; nearly *all* of it is the same, proving its accuracy and validity; but occasionally, there are differences; slight mistakes by copyists, that we can rule out because 90% of the rest preserve the original. Or, occasionally, we can see where something was inserted *into* the text and wasn't in the original. That's what's happened here, with these verses.

The evidence for these verses being inauthentic and not written by John is "overwhelming."¹ These verses are absent from virtually *all* early Greek manuscripts. All of the early Church Fathers (that is, all of the writings, sermons, and commentaries we have from the early Church era, prior to the medieval period) completely omit this narrative; all of them, when commenting or preaching on John, skip right from 7:52 to 8:12 and do not seem to be aware of its existence at all.² No Greek Church Father prior to 12th century (over a thousand years after the New Testament was written) ever commented on this passage, and when he did comment, what he said was that the most accurate and reliable copies of scripture do not contain this story.³ The earliest mentions of this narrative are very different from the story printed in our Bibles today, and they were not even included in the book of John at that time.⁴

When this narrative *did* begin to show up in copies of Scripture, around a thousand years after the New Testament had been written, it was always broken off from the text with asterisks, or some other mark, like we use brackets today, to show that these verses are suspicious and not

¹ Bruce Metzger, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament*, Second Edition, p.187.

² Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, Pillar, p.333.

³ Bruce Metzger, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament*, Second Edition, p.188

⁴ Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, Pillar, p.333

reliably authentic. And each of those accounts was different from the other, with numerous variations. Furthermore, none of them agreed on *where* the story should go: some put it here, between John 7 and 8, others put it earlier, some as late as John 21, and still others put it in the book of Luke. All of this concludes that these verses are not authentic. Furthermore, the passage itself just doesn't fit in the context of John. We know John, the Apostle, wrote the rest of this book under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit; it is Scripture, written by a real human person, John, with his own voice, writing style, and vocabulary. But this story about the adulterous woman doesn't *sound* like John. For example, it uses 14 words that John doesn't use anywhere else in the book.

Most tellingly, however, this story completely disrupts the flow of the narrative. Chapter 7 takes place at the Feast of Booths (or Tabernacles), as we saw in a sermon a few weeks ago. This festival was specifically about remembering God's provision for His Old Covenant people, Israel, in their travels through the wilderness after their Exodus from Egypt on their way to the promised land. It included a water ritual, remembering when God provided water from a rock for His people in the wilderness. We saw how this context helped inform our understanding of the passage, when Jesus proclaimed that He offers rivers of living water for whoever is spiritually thirsty and comes to Him in faith. When the story of the adulterous woman is artificially inserted into this narrative, it falsely gives the impression that the rest of chapter 8 (vv.12-59) takes place on another day, in another context. But that's not what's going on at all. In v.12, ch.8 actually picks up right where we left off in chapter 7: "Again Jesus spoke to them, saying, 'I am the light of the world.'" Again, Jesus is at a feast was all about remembering, celebrating, and re-enacting God's preservation of Israel in their wilderness wanderings, on their way to the promised land. To do this, they made booths like Israel's tents; they had a water ritual like water flowing from the rock; and they also had a candle lighting ceremony, reflecting how God led His people through the wilderness with a pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of fire (a bright light) by night.⁵ In this context, Jesus "spoke to them again, saying, 'I am the light of the world.'"

Therefore, based on the manuscript evidence, the historical commentary of the church, the very late appearance of this story far after the canon of Scripture was written and closed, the unique language used here, and how this story interrupts the literary flow of the narrative of John, I agree with the majority of conservative commentators and scholars that the evidence is

overwhelming: the story of the woman caught in adultery, John 7:53 - 8:11, was not written by John and was not originally included in Scripture; and that means we have no reason at all to assume that it was inspired by God as all true Scripture was; even if this is based on a story that did actually happen in the life of Jesus, we have no way of knowing what truly happened, nor which account is even the most accurate, and we cannot view this story as inerrant or inspired (or else that would go against our entire doctrine of the verbal plenary inspiration of scripture, the sufficient and inerrancy of scripture, and that the canon of scripture is closed). This is why the ESV, and the vast majority of Bible translations, put brackets around the verses to show that they are not part of the original text of Scripture.

That is why we're skipping over these verses in our sermon series, because I see it as my pastoral duty and obligation under God to preach Scripture - the Holy, Inspired, and Inerrant Word of God - all of Scripture, and *only* Scripture. I will not preach on anything else, because nothing else bears the infallible truth and authority of God's Word. I'm not playing fast and loose with the text and trying to cut out Scripture; by no means! I'm making sure we don't tamper with God's Word by *adding to it* what is *not* Scripture.

But then, you may ask, why spend so much time talking about a passage this morning, just to say that we cannot view it as Scripture? In fact, maybe you're even wondering if this *undermines* the reliability and trustworthiness of the Bible. But no, I believe it actually does the opposite: as we study textual criticism and see just how much evidence there is against the validity of this passage as compared to the overwhelming evidence of the validity of the entire Bible, this should actually *buttress and strengthen* our confidence in the credibility and trustworthiness of Scripture because it shows just how accurately and certainly we can know what was originally written by the Apostles under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit and what was not. This shows all the more that we are not putting blind faith in traditions and superstitions of old, nor just in stories that we like or that make us feel good; it also shows us that we can trust, with great confidence, that God's true Word lies untampered with; it is pure, trustworthy, and reliable. The Lord, in His kind and all-powerful providence, has meticulously preserved His canonical Word for us, better than any other written document of history by a long margin, so that we may know with certainty what He has spoken concerning His Son.

And that's exactly what we see revealed here in the rest of chapter 8: we see that Jesus is the light of the world, He is the one who comes to reveal truth - the very truth of God the Father -

that we can be set free by the truth, know God as His children, be saved from our sins unto eternal life, and be transformed to follow Jesus and walk in the light with Him. V.12 is like a thesis for the whole chapter and gives us the main idea of the passage - and therefore, the main point of our sermon today: Jesus Christ is the light of the world. Whoever follows him will not walk in darkness, but will have life in the light.

I. The light of Christ reveals the truth and salvation of God so that we don't have to die in our sins (vv.12-30)

The passage begins with Jesus's second major "I am" statement, "I am the light of the world." Those who follow Jesus walk in light, not darkness - truth not falsehood, righteousness not evil - are Jesus's disciples and receive the light of life. This recalls the very first chapter of John, where Jesus, the incarnate Word, God the Son who has become Man, is "the light and life of men." Jesus has come to reveal the light of truth and salvation and eternal life, to call us out of the darkness to come into the light of Christ through faith.

But not everyone likes the light. V.12 isn't just a thesis summary for the rest of ch.8; it also serves as a spring-board for the discussion and argument that follows. In v.13, the Pharisees accuse Jesus's claim to be false because He is testifying about Himself. In 14-18, Jesus makes it clear that testifying about yourself doesn't mean what you say is wrong but is simply not enough evidence by itself: there must be more than one witness testifying. Otherwise, that would mean that if someone testified that they were innocent it automatically meant they were guilty; but if they really are innocent what else could they say? If a man is on trial and is truly innocent, then he will testify about Himself that he is innocent. But we of course need *more* than just the one man's testimony about himself. So, Jesus says that there *are* two witnesses that testify to who Jesus is: both Himself *and* His Father: God Himself.

In vv.19-20, the Pharisees challenge Jesus, asking where is Father is; but Jesus responds by saying that don't believe Jesus because they don't truly know God the Father; if someone truly knows and believes in God they *will necessarily* know Jesus through faith; to reject Jesus is to reject God. "If you knew me, you would know my Father also" (v.19). They are in the dark, spiritually ignorant and blind, because they do not believe in Jesus: Jesus is the light, and the only way to rightly see and know and understand and worship God is through the Son, Jesus Christ. As we see in vv.21-27, this means that whoever does not believe in Jesus will die in their sins and will go to eternal judgment, not eternal life with the Father. The truth that the "light" of

Christ reveals is not mere knowledge or facts; it is also *moral*. Jesus reveals the truth of who the Father is, including the *righteous character* of God. By contrast, the light exposes the darkness of sin; He exposes evil and unbelief - even inside of us. But He exposes the darkness in order to point to the hope found in the light: in Christ Himself.

We see this in vv.28-30: “So Jesus said to them, ‘When you have lifted up the Son of Man, then you will know that I am he, and that I do nothing on my own authority, but speak just as the Father taught me.’” Jesus most fully reveals who He is - the Savior sent from God the Father - by being lifted up in death on the Cross, raised in His resurrection, and lifted in ascension to the throne of Heaven, so that we may believe in Him. The light of the gospel of Christ reveals the *only way* to be saved from our sins and have eternal life with God: we must leave the darkness and come to the light; we must *repent* of our sin and unbelief, turn away from it, turn to the light, and *believe* in Jesus Christ, trusting that He alone can save us from our sins as the light of salvation, the “light of life” (v.12). The light of Christ exposes our sin and shows us the way of eternal life and salvation that Jesus alone provides.

The light also sets us free from sin to follow Jesus in this life, as we see in point 2...

II. The light of Christ’s truth sets you free from sin to walk in the light with Him (vv.31-36)

“As Jesus was saying these things, many believed in him” (v.30). In vv.31-32, Jesus says to those who believe Him that “if you will abide in my Word” - that is, continue to believe in what He says and strive to follow His Word - they will 1. truly be His disciples in truth; 2. Know the truth; and 3. Be set free by the truth.

In v.33, they respond that they are offspring of Abraham and have never been enslaved and thus do not believe they have a need to be “set free.” They claim this physically and spiritually. They are physical descendants of Abraham, as Jews, and are not slaves but free. But spiritually, they mean they are God’s chosen, covenant people. Jesus explains what he means in vv.34-37: They are slaves to *sin* (v.34). “Everyone who practices sin is a slave to sin” - and therefore, everyone must be set free from sin through believing in Jesus Christ and abiding in His word of truth. In vv.35-36, Jesus further explains by way of example. Slaves are temporary members of a household, but a son is permanent, as a family member and the heir; therefore, if the Son sets a slave free, he is free indeed! Likewise, Jesus Christ, the Son of God, came to set us free from our

slavery to sin so that we may be free indeed through believing in the light of the truth of His Word.

We should see clear references to the Exodus here. Again, that's what Jesus's context at the Feast of Booths brings to mind, just as we saw in the last chapter. Just like God led the Israelites by a pillar of cloud and fire in the Exodus, out of slavery in Egypt to the Promised Land, so Jesus leads us in an even greater Exodus out of our slavery to sin.. He is the light of the world that leads us out of our spiritual slavery to the Promised Land of eternal life with God! In Christ's death on the cross and victorious resurrection from the dead, He crushed the power of Sin and Satan that enslaved us, so that we can be set free! Free from sin, free from the Kingdom of Satan, free from the power of the Law that condemns us in guilt because of our sin, even free from Death and the judgment we deserve; the truth of who Christ is and what He has done sets us free when we repent and believe in Him.

To repent and believe and follow Christ is to turn from the darkness and come into the light. Christ puts the light of life within us, not only exposing and revealing our sin but freeing us from it; not only showing us the truth to believe and the righteous way to live, but leading us *into* believing truth and practicing righteousness. True conversion, true Christianity begins with each of us personally recognizing our slavery to sin and our need to be set free; each of us must personally turn to Christ and believe in Him, trusting in Him as the truth - the only truth - that can truly set us free. We must make this clear in our conversations with unbelievers, just like Jesus did. We can't sugarcoat the truth: if you are not following Christ, you are in the darkness and are a slave to sin and you need to be set free! Come to the light of Christ, for the truth of who Jesus is and what He has done for you *truly can* set you free!

And if we truly believe in Jesus, if we have turned from the darkness and come into the light, we are called to *live* as free children of God, the true offspring of Abraham, God's beloved people. We are no longer slaves, but sons. The light of God's true Word, in Christ, has set us free from sin and shows us the way to live! Christ is the perfect picture of righteousness, and to be a Christian is to walk in the light, to follow Jesus and imitate His perfect example. This does *not* mean we can only be a Christian or be saved if we're perfect, or meet certain moral requirements - that would be impossible. Rather, it means we come to Christ *while* we are slaves to our sin, and trust Him to set us free! And so we must *continue* to daily turn from darkness to light: to confess our sins and turn from them, to turn to the light of the gospel of Christ and believe in

Him for forgiveness and salvation - *and then* to abide in His Word, to follow Jesus's example and the truth of His Word - *all of Scripture* - as the light that guides our path and shows us how to live. The light of Christ sets us free from sin that we may walk in the light and follow Him. May God give us grace to do so daily.

But we must remember: the dividing line between who is saved and who is not does not come down to how good and righteous we are: it comes down to how we respond to Jesus.

III. The light of Christ is the dividing line: those who believe Christ's Word are children of God, those who do not believe are children of the Devil (vv.37-47)

Jesus continues his explanation in v.37, saying "I know that you are offspring of Abraham; yet you seek to kill me because my word finds no place in you." Now this is striking because remember who he's talking to, starting back in v.31: "to the Jews who had *believed him*." These are the Jews in the crowds at the Festival who believed in what Jesus was saying so far. Yet these are the ones he says are still slaves to sin. They objected that they are free children of Abraham; he's saying here that though they are *physical* offspring, descendants of Abraham, they are not true, *spiritual* offspring of Abraham. Though they claim to believe, they have a superficial, fickle faith that's only skin deep; this isn't true conversion, giving one's heart completely over to Christ in faith. And that means it doesn't count in the end.

The most important thing about a person is how they respond to Jesus. Jesus represents his Father - God - and the Jews represent their father (v.38). But who is their father? In v.39, the Jews again claim that their father is Abraham - both physically and spiritually, symbolically. But Jesus disagrees: They are not true children of Abraham because if they were, they would do the works of Abraham: namely, the work of *faith*, of believing in God; but they do the work of unbelief, seeking to kill Jesus, the Man of God (vv.39-40). They are doing the works of their true father - which is not Abraham, nor is it God, as they claim; if God were their Father, they would love and believe in Jesus (vv.41-42). They do not believe in Jesus or the truth of God's Word because their true father is "the devil," the Father of lies, shown in that they reject the truth and do the will and desires of the devil: even murder (foreshadowing the murder of Christ) (vv.43-44). They reject Jesus *precisely because* they reject the truth and prefer to believe lies instead, because they are of the Devil, not God (vv.45-47).

It all comes down to how someone responds to Jesus. Christ is the dividing line; whoever is of God hears and believes the Word of God in Christ Jesus; whoever does not believe shows

they are not of God but of the Devil. There is no Middle Ground; there is no such thing as spiritual neutrality: everyone is either a child of God or a child of the Devil; everyone is either in darkness or in light. We all start out in the dark and the only way to come into the light is through personal repentance and faith in Jesus Christ, because He *is* the light.

And Jesus Christ *must* be the dividing line because He alone fully reveals God to us...

IV. The light of Christ reveals God to us because Jesus is the unchangeable “I Am” (vv.48-59)

Jesus has come out swinging, by calling these Jews children of the Devil. So it's no surprise they get offended and swing back. In v.48, they respond by calling Jesus a “Samaritan” (a half-Jew heretic) and demon-possessed (out of his mind and the one who is actually of the Devil). In(vv.49-50, Jesus asserts that he does not have a demon but honors His Father, God, implying that as the Jews dishonor Jesus, they are dishonoring God, the true Judge of all who will vindicate and glorify Jesus before all (which occurs in Jesus's resurrection, ascension, and eventually, His Second Coming). Jesus proclaims, in v.51, that whoever keeps His word (that is, whoever believes and follows Him) will “never see death” - they will have the “light of life,” in the language of v.12. But the Jews respond in astounded disbelief, in vv.52-53, saying this confirms Jesus is demonic and out of his mind because He's claiming to be greater than Abraham and the prophets, since they all died, yet He claims to be the Light of Life.

So Jesus responds in vv.54-56. He tells them He isn't seeking to vindicate and glorify His own name; God the Father will do that, at the proper time (v.54). (v.55) But He also won't lie; He has come to reveal and glorify God the Father, since He knows and obeys Him fully, which is why the Jews reject Him, because they *don't* know God (v.55). So He shows that He is, indeed, greater than Abraham because “Your father Abraham rejoiced that he would see my day. He saw it and was glad” (v.56) In other words, Abraham's faith was in the promises of God, and He looked forward in faith to when they would be realized and fulfilled in the Messiah the Christ, Jesus, God the Son. He looked forward to the coming of Christ and rejoiced! THis is why all who believe are true children of Abraham, and why the Jews who do not are not really the offspring of Abraham.

But they still don't get it; they object, in v.57, that Abraham lived thousands of years before their time; Jesus isn't even 50 years old; how in the world can He claim that Abraham knew Jesus, saw his day, and rejoiced? Jesus tells them how, in vv.58-59: He is greater than

Abraham and the object of Abraham's faith because He is eternal and precedes Abraham, as the eternal God. This is what Jesus is saying in the bombshell, climactic moment of v.58: "Jesus said to them, 'Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I am.'" Jesus is claiming that He is God, Yahweh, using the same name God the Father used to reveal Himself to Moses, that the Israelites would know who He is: "I am that I am." Jesus is explicitly claiming to be God, here; yes, in His human nature, He is less than 50 years old; but in His divine nature, as the eternal God the Son, He has no beginning, since He created the world, and He was the Word spoken to Abraham in ages past, and the very object of Abraham's faith and the means of fulfilling all of God's promises for redemption and salvation! The Jews' response in v.59 makes it crystal clear this is *exactly* what Jesus was claiming: the significance of His words, scripture reference, and identity claim as God is not lost on them, since they respond in utter outrage by picking up stones to stone him with: they intend to murder and execute Him, right then and there, for blaspheming and claiming to be God. But Jesus escapes because it is not time yet for Him to die - for He did not die as a blasphemer, but as God the Son, the Lamb of God who died to take away the sins of God's people, the *true* offspring of Abraham, all who truly believe in Jesus Christ and the promises of God, just as Abraham did.

Jesus Christ is God. He is the light of the world, the light and life of mankind, the true light that exposes and dispels the darkness of sin and unbelief by revealing God the Father to us, that we may know and be reconciled to God *through* believing in the truth of who Jesus is, what He has done, and that He calls us to follow Him as His disciples and walk in the freedom of the light. This is the call to faith that every single one of us must hear, believe, and respond to, day after day. There is no middle ground; there is no other way to know God or be saved to eternal life. We must turn from the darkness and turn to the light of Christ. You must personally repent, believe, and follow Him. And if you do, you, too, will have the light of eternal life by His grace.

If that's you, this morning - if you are a baptized, professing believer of Christ in good standing with a gospel believing church - then we invite you to join us at the Table in just a few moments, where we will take the Lord's Supper together, proclaiming our faith in Christ, yet again, as His disciples, children of God, walking in the light by grace through faith in Him alone.

But if that doesn't describe you, then just like Jesus did with his audience here, so we warn you that if you do not repent and believe in Jesus, you will die in your sins; but there is hope! Turn and lift your eyes to Christ, believe that He really is God who came down to earth as

a man, that He lived a perfect life of righteousness, that He not only exposes your slavery to sin but also *defeated* your sin in His sacrificial death on the cross and glorious resurrection! Turn from the darkness of sin and unbelief and put your faith in Christ alone, the light of the world, so that you can be set free as a child of God and receive the light of eternal life with God, by His grace! If you have any questions about this, we would love to speak with you after the service. Until then, let's have a moment of silence as we prepare to come to the Table.