
Day 309 - November 5

Jesus the Christ (5 BCE-30 CE)
In Jerusalem for Feast of Tabernacles

Readings: *John 8:12-10:21*

Reflections:

- **Light of the world:** One of Jesus' most famous statements is that he is the light of the world. Here we see again Jesus taking onto himself the complete calling of Israel. Isaiah 42:6 and 49:6 declared that Israel was to be a light to the Gentiles. By using the phrase "world" Jesus encompassed all of Israel and all of the Gentiles into one. Jesus is the sole source of divine revelation to the world and is the total fulfillment of all that was prophesied to Israel. Jesus making this statement would have been outrageous to the religious leaders of his day.
- **Father, Son and Spirit:** Jesus is challenged again by religious leaders and describes his interdependent relationship with the Father. The relationship of Father, Son and Spirit, described in theology as the trinity or tri-unity of God is a mystery. They have their own mind but they are of one mind. They make decisions but they make them together. It is something we will never comprehend.
- **Warning against unbelief:** John 8:21-30 captures Jesus again making cryptic statements about his death, resurrection and return to the Father. He spoke in a way that explained what would happen but also in a way that left the religious leaders baffled as to what he was saying. If they knew exactly what God's plan was they would have tried to work against it. Instead, they unwittingly fulfilled God's plan to their own ultimate demise as they will die in their own sins. The phrase, "you have lifted up the Son of Man" is again cryptic and yet rich in meaning. This may be a parallel image to the healing bronze serpent on a pole (Numbers 21:4-9). It may be an image of worship. It may be simply a reference to Jesus' future crucifixion. It may be Jesus' way to bring all three images together.
- **On spiritual freedom:** Jesus says, "If you hold to (embrace and apply) my teaching, you are really my disciples. Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free." Jesus' teaching, as we have said, is completely counter-intuitive. It is easy to just give lip service to but hard to apply to our lives. Only when we start to live his teaching do we both understand and then internalize God's truth about grace, peace and love. The

religious leaders respond by saying that they have always been free. This in fact is not true as they have been in perpetual bondage for centuries. It is amazing how people can rationalize their own bondages: "I am not addicted to cigarettes. I can stop any time I want." Jesus again pushes past their constant focus on the externals and makes it clear that they are perpetual slaves to sin in their hearts. Slaves are on the outside looking in at true family. God wants to move us from being slaves to sins to being son and daughters in his family, empowered, free, and blessed with every spiritual blessing (See Ephesians 1). The freedom Jesus offers is real freedom, right to the core of who we are.

- True children of Abraham: Jesus points out that in fact there are only two families: God's family and Satan's family. The religious leaders are members of Satan's family. Again we can see why they wanted to kill Jesus. Jesus describes Satan as a murderer and a liar. He rejected God's truth and became the father of lies. Satan's rebellion led him to oppose all that God is and all God declares as true. One of the hallmarks of religion is that it lives contrary to what Jesus taught. Although it may have many good things, in actual practice it causes people to live directly contrary to what Jesus taught. People are judgmental rather than full of grace. People are obsessed with appearances rather than what is in the heart. People are hoarding wealth instead of living simply and generously. This disconnection with God ultimately leads to a disconnection with Jesus and all he taught.
- Declares eternal existence: The religious leaders try to insult Jesus by calling him demon possessed and a Samaritan. We can see here the bigotry of the religious leaders. Jesus goes on to affirm his relationship with the Father, the gift of eternal life for those who live his truth, and then finally his complete unity with God and eternal existence: "Before Abraham, I am." This is a clear alignment with God's name in Exodus "I AM" and to Jesus pre-existent state. Jesus was not created by God but was God. Immediately the religious leaders want to stone him for blasphemy but he escapes unharmed.
- Healing of the man born blind: The disciples see a man born blind and are wondering what sin caused this terrible thing. We naturally want to associate sin with sickness or tragedy. Jesus rejects this concept of sin being linked with all sickness or health problems. Jesus declares that God allowed this to happen so that this man's life could be used to display God's glory and illustrate the truth of Jesus being the light of the world. Jesus puts mud made from his own saliva (a symbol of healing) on this man's eyes and then tells him to go wash himself in a public pool. This man is led through the crowds as a living illustration of how blind the religious leaders are. They cannot see the truth that Jesus is the light of the world because they are blind guides. Jesus is basically saying, "To all you blind religious leaders, here's mud in your eye!" Yet as this man washes, a symbol of repentance, he is miraculously healed and has full sight restored.
- Pharisees question the man: the story continues as the religious leaders wonder how Jesus could do such a thing. The man really doesn't know Jesus and was blind when Jesus talked to him. At first the man simply believes Jesus is a prophet.

- Parents are questioned: The religious leaders confirm with the parents that this man was truly blind. When we doubt, we want evidence. There is nothing wrong with looking for supporting evidence and in this case it is clear that the man was blind.
- Man questioned again: His response to this second round is simple: I was blind and now I see. How can you doubt such an obvious transformation? This is a great example of how to tell someone your own story about God. Just keep it simple. Tell them the before and after and let the evidence of life change speak for itself. The man then pushes the religious leaders with the truth that God would not be working through Jesus if he wasn't right before God. The religious leaders categorically reject this, label the man as a sinner from birth, and throw him out. They had their minds made up and regardless of the evidence would not accept the truth. They were the blind ones.
- Jesus confronts the healed man: Jesus reaches out to the blind man and tells him that he is the Son of Man, or the Messiah. The man believes and worships Jesus. Again this would be shocking as only God was to be worshipped. This man somehow recognized that Jesus was God. Jesus then declares that he is also bringing judgment into the world where the blind will see and those that see will become blind. How we respond to Jesus will move us either into spiritual insight or blindness. There is no fence sitting. Jesus confronts the religious leaders one final time about their blindness and guilt, pulling no punches.
- Sheep and their shepherd: The focus of Jesus' teaching now shifts to the image of a shepherd and his flock. This is one of the richest leadership passages in Scripture. There are three kinds of leaders: 1) thieves who only want to selfishly use the sheep; 2) hired hands who will do their job but really care nothing for the sheep because they are more interested in their pay than the sheep; and 3) true shepherds who own and love the sheep. Shepherds enter into relationship with sheep legitimately (through the gate rather than climbing over a fence). They know the sheep by name, lead them through their voice (trust relationship and communication) rather than by driving them with a rod (using power and coercion).
- The gate for the sheep: Jesus mixes metaphors by also stating that he is the gate for the sheep. In other words, his life is the doorway to salvation and security. The thief (Satan) has come to steal, kill and destroy (escalating destruction) but the shepherd (Jesus) has come to give life to the full (escalating health and freedom).
- The good shepherd: Jesus returns to the image of the shepherd and continues to explain true spiritual leadership. True servant leadership willingly sacrifices life for others. The relationship with Jesus and his people is just as intimate as his relationship with the Father. This is a wonderful promise and invitation. We can be as close with Jesus as Jesus is with his father. Jesus' shepherding leadership wants to gather in all people, both Jews and Gentiles. Also, Jesus' authority to lay down his life also means he has the authority to take it back up again. Jesus' death and resurrection both flowed from his

authority. When we have true authority from God, we are free to serve and to lead as God directs.

- Jews still divided: The crowds are still divided. The religious leaders still declare Jesus a demon possessed maniac. The crowds still ask, "Can a demon heal the blind?"
- We see in this section the escalation of the division between Jesus and the religious leaders. Jesus is clearly on a mission and very soon that mission will reach its culmination. Are we as passionate and focused on the mission Jesus has given us?