



SUNDAY SCHOOL MINISTRY

Discipleship Plan

Gospel of John
Part 4

Deacon Jerome Yorkshire, Sr., Sunday School Superintendent
Deacon Eric Dolce, Director of Discipleship
Reverend Patrick J. Walker, Senior Pastor

Lesson 13: Fashionably Late—Jesus At the Feast of Tabernacles Part 1	Page 3
Lesson 14: Life of the Party—Jesus At the Feast of Tabernacles Part 2	Page 4
Lesson 15: A Light That Testifies	Page 5
Lesson 16: A Truth that Divides	Page 6
Article: The Light of the World	Page 7
Article: Children of the Devil	Page 9
Article: Before Abraham Was	Page 11

Lesson 13: Fashionably Late—Jesus At the Feast of Tabernacles Part 1

Primary Verses: “About the middle of the feast Jesus went up into the temple and began teaching. The Jews therefore marveled saying, ‘How is it that this man has learning, when he has never studied?’ So Jesus answered them, ‘My teaching is not mine but his who sent me. If anyone’s will is to do God’s will, he will know whether the teaching is from God or whether I am speaking on my own authority. The one who speaks on his own authority seeks his own glory but the one who seeks the glory of him who sent him is true, and in him there is no falsehood.’” (John 7:14-18 ESV)

Teaching Text: John 7:1-24

Supporting Texts: Leviticus 23:33-43, Ezra 3:1-4, Nehemiah 8, John 2:1-5

The old saying “time is money” has some merit. However, upon further examination, we find that such an equation ultimately breaks down quite quickly. After all, factories produce watches, and treasury departments mint coins, but who makes time itself other than the Maker of all things? Watches help us tell time, and we exchange legal tender (money) for another’s time and skill, but the Designer and Dispenser of time is the same: God and God alone. Therefore, it is His timing that we should seek and not our own.

God’s timing, rather than something to make us groan, is a gift for which we should be grateful. This truth adorns and augments the atmosphere of chapter seven because of the particular festival being celebrated: the Feast of Tabernacles (Booths). The seven-day holiday (plus one day for solemn assembly per Numbers 29:35-38) was to commemorate the 40 years that God sojourned in the wilderness with His people, Himself in a tent (Tabernacle) just as they did, faithfully tending to their needs.

Historically, the feast held great significance when it was re-introduced during the time of Ezra and Nehemiah. The nation’s determination to celebrate the feast was evidence of God’s power to re-establish His people in the land a *second* time, after Babylonian Exile. Additionally, this feast was an exercise of faith in God in at least two ways: 1) New Testament scholar Gary Burge notes that this feast would have been held at a time most likely in threat of drought. Observant Jews gathered in faith that God would replenish water for the nation as He had done in the desert wanderings 2) Israel’s fear of “giants in the land” (Numbers 14) and continued cravings for Egypt condemned almost all of that first generation to die in the wilderness. This feast served to remind the nation of the dangers that follow *resistance* to God’s timing.

Questions to Consider: Can you identify at least two reasons Jesus might not want to travel with his brothers at the time they indicated? What was Jesus’ relationship like with his family? Why should His experience with family be a source of encouragement for us today? The majority of believing scholarship understands the term “the Jews” (see verses 2, 11, and 13) refers to the *leadership* in Jerusalem and **not** referring to all Jews in general. Why might those scholars be right? Explain why Jesus didn’t start teaching at the beginning of the feast (v.14). Why are there so many different opinions about Jesus? Can you understand the three that appear in this narrative (vs. 12-15)? Do you understand Jesus’ defense for his miracle (vs. 20-23)? Is John 5:24 a contradiction of Matthew 7:1? Why or why not?

Challenging the Class: In what ways are you most tempted to doubt the wisdom of God’s timing? Without a regular practice of commemorating God’s good work in His time, we are prone to forgetfulness, and our faith is weakened. Purpose in your heart to mark and celebrate God for His wisdom and timing!

Lesson 14: Life of the Party—Jesus At the Feast of Tabernacles Part 2

Primary Verses: “³⁷ On the last day of the feast, the great day, Jesus stood up and cried out, “If anyone thirsts, let him come to me and drink. ³⁸ Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, ‘Out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.’” ³⁹ Now this he said about the Spirit, whom those who believed in him were to receive, for yet the Spirit had not been given, because Jesus was not yet glorified.” (John 7:14-18 ESV)

Teaching Text: John 7:25-52

Supporting Texts: Exodus 17:1-7, Isaiah 12, and 44:1-4, Ezekiel 47:1-12, John 4:10-14

“Each day of the Feast of Tabernacles witnessed a water ceremony in which a procession of priests descended to the south border of the city to the Gihon Spring (flowing to the Pool of Siloam). There a priest filled a golden pitcher as a choir chanted Isaiah 12:3. The water was then carried back up the hill to the Water Gate... crowds would shake palm branches and sing the Hallel Psalms. When the procession arrived at the temple, the priest climbed the altar steps and poured the water onto the altar while the crowd circled him and continued singing. Two silver bows rested on top of the altar. The priest poured water into one bowl; then he poured wine into the other and both drained simultaneously onto the altar. On the great and final day of the festival, the water procession took place seven times, drenching the altar thoroughly.”¹

It is said that a picture is worth a thousand words. But the picture of Jesus, standing on the last day of this particular feast, declaring to be the all-satisfying source of drink for the soul—that picture is worth a thousand books. It is not hard to imagine why some persons immediately saw Jesus as “the Prophet” and others recognized Him as Christ. By His proclamation, Jesus brought a dozen or more scriptures to life and more importantly, exclaimed His determination to fulfill them.

Questions to Consider: Why do you think Jesus’ message appears to cause more division than unity? Is there any biblical support for your answer? Has Jesus Himself indicated a strong cause of that disunity in his preaching during this chapter? Please be specific. Considering Jesus’ declaration on the last day of the Feast of Tabernacles, could it be said that He was creating a distraction during worship or that He was unfairly stealing attention for Himself? How would you explain or defend against such charges? What kind of standards are the crowds in John 7 using to judge who Jesus is? How many can you find? How does Jesus’ message in John 7:28-29, 37-38 compare with His message in John 6:35-51? Is there a common goal in the two settings? Is there a common subject? How do the geographical and chronological backgrounds of chapters six and seven contribute to the messages Jesus preached? How would you describe the value of keeping the Old Testament on your mind while reading the New Testament?

Challenging the Class: Is Jesus really the water for your soul? Do you truly find refreshment and satisfaction in Him? If you know persons who can’t honestly describe Jesus in these terms, have you considered what John 7:33 could mean for them? When was the last time you earnestly pleaded with anyone to look to Christ the way He cried out for men to come to Him? What’s stopping you?

¹ Gary Burge, *Jesus and the Jewish Festivals*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2012), p.75

Lesson 15: A Light That Testifies

Primary Verses: “¹⁷ In your Law it is written that the testimony of two people is true. ¹⁸ I am the one who bears witness about myself, and the Father who sent me bears witness about me.” ¹⁹ They said to him therefore, “Where is your Father?” Jesus answered, “You know neither me nor my Father. If you knew me, you would know my Father also.” ²⁰ These words he spoke in the treasury, as he taught in the temple; but no one arrested him, because his hour had not yet come. (John 8:17-20 ESV)

Teaching Text: John 8:1-30

Supporting Texts: John 3:16-21 and John 7

“Another ceremony that occurred during the first-century celebration of the Feast [of Tabernacles] was a nighttime event that would conclude the weeklong festivities on their final day with a display so awe-inspiring as to leave the revelers speechless. Four enormous golden lampstands—seventy-five feet in height—had been set up in the Court of the Women earlier in the day. Bowls mounted on top would hold the oil to feed the flames... the wicks for the oil lamps were thick, twisted together from the linen of the priestly garments worn during the previous year. The Light from the lamps was bright, and the Mishnah reports, ‘There was no courtyard in Jerusalem that was not lit up with the light.’”²

The Scriptures teem with a super-abundance of positive references to light, going so far as to say that God is light and devoid of darkness (1st John 1:5). The allure of light is known in the broad band of beauties we call the color spectrum. Light is undoubtedly glorious, but it is also as useful as it is a thing of splendor. In the natural realm, light is more commonly associated with heat and warmth. However, the glory of light in the Scriptures, besides its direct reference to God, is its power to reveal.

Light is closely linked with the revelation of God’s truth (Psalm 119:30, 2nd Peter 1:19). But in our English language, the word “reveal” may have the same function but has a different connotation than the word “expose.” The word “reveal” carries the idea of displaying something good and attractive, but we generally use the word “expose” when we bring to light the things that some would prefer to remain hidden. Whether the motives of those who would use a woman to trap God’s Son or those who use external righteousness as a pretext to hid sinful living, Jesus, as the Light of the World, exposes them all.

Questions to Consider: How does the light of Christ both condemn and rescue the woman discussed in John 8:1-11? How does that story illustrate that man can corrupt the words of Scripture (not defeating God’s ultimate purpose)? In Jesus’ case, why is His solitary testimony valid even when the Law revealed by Moses requires at least two witnesses for testimony to be considered? How does Jesus explain this in 8:14, 17-18? Compare John 8:28 with John 5:27. What is Jesus saying about Himself?

Challenging the Class: Is there unconfessed sin in your life? What is stopping you from confessing your sin to the Lord? He knows about it anyway! Why not reveal your sin to Him *before* He exposes you? He is great in mercy and will not turn away the contrite of heart! Psalm 51 is a great place to start!

² John R. Sittema, Meeting Jesus at the Feast: Israel’s Festivals and the Gospel (Grandville, MI, Reformed Fellowship Inc, 2010) pp. 128-129

Lesson 16: A Truth that Divides

Primary Verses: ⁴³Why do you not understand what I say? It is because you cannot bear to hear my word. ⁴⁴You are of your father the devil, and your will is to do your father's desires. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks out of his own character, for he is a liar and the father of lies. ⁴⁵But because I tell the truth, you do not believe me. ⁴⁶Which one of you convicts me of sin? If I tell the truth, why do you not believe me? ⁴⁷Whoever is of God hears the words of God. The reason why you do not hear them is that you are not of God." (John 8:43-47 ESV)

Teaching Text: John 8:31-59

Supporting Texts: Exodus 3:13-15; Leviticus 24:10-23, Isaiah 43:1-10 & 25

Dividing "Believers" from "Abiders": Like any good Shepherd, Jesus found separating the sheep from the goats. Some persons say they "believe," and indeed, they do in some sense believe in Christ. Whether that means they have accepted the facts of His moral message or have intellectually agreed that Jesus is who He says He is, they believe on *some* level. But Jesus impresses on the crowd and on the reader of this gospel that there is a better test that divides so-called believers from true disciples. To put it in one question: Are you abiding in the Word of Christ?

Dividing Abraham's (Mere) Offspring from Children of God: It is hard for almost every New Testament believer to feel the blade of separation Jesus inserts here. Most of us have been told, and rightly so, that "God has no grandchildren." Of course, this is a phrase that emphasizes the necessity of possessing, maintaining, and nurturing an authentic **personal** faith in Jesus and not to presume guaranteed entrance into the Kingdom of God on the coattails of our parents, grandparents, or guardians who nurtured us in the faith. Though the Bible contains examples of non-Hebrew/Jewish believers in the True God (Rahab, Ruth, Uriah the Hittite, Naaman the Syrian, etc.), many Jews equated mere circumcision and ceremonial observance with salvation, failing to prioritize circumcision of the heart (Jeremiah 9:25-26).

Questions to Consider: Why do you think Jesus puts such emphasis on "abiding" in His word? Is there biblical evidence to demonstrate that all "believers" are not necessarily abiders? The sinner's paradox is this: he longs to be free, but he becomes a slave in sinning. Do you agree with this saying? Why or why not? Why does Jesus make a distinction between being the offspring of Abraham and being children? Why aren't those two the same? What did John the Baptist teach concerning this? Can you identify the specific verses (in this week's teaching text) where Jesus prescribes the test that distinguishes mere offspring from real children of Abraham? How does that test also identify the children of the devil? How does that same test apply when examining whether we are the children of God? Why were the Jews that heard Jesus' statement in John 8:58 ready to stone Him?

Challenging the Class: "We are all apart of God's great big family..." said Tina Turner, a Baptist turned Buddhist in the 80's song "We Are the World." If you claim to be a child of God, on what basis do you make that claim? Is it your profession of faith? Are you confident of heaven because of your church on earth? Are you trusting in your years of faithful service in ministry? How does the basis of your confidence match up with Jesus' test for true discipleship as seen in the teaching text?

The Light of the World

“Jesus spoke to them, saying, ‘I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life’” (v. 12).

- John 8:12–30

Reading through the Gospels leads one to the inevitable conclusion that Jesus’ words and actions made it impossible for people not to come to a conclusion about His identity and place in the plan of God. Many people were convinced that Jesus was the final and greatest prophet (John 7:40). Others thought He was the second coming of John the Baptist (Matt. 16:13–14). Still others were convinced that He was the Messiah (John 7:41a). The people who held these varying opinions did not always get along well with each other. In fact, Jesus once had to go up privately to celebrate the great Jewish festival known as the Feast of Booths (or Feast of Tabernacles) because of the stir His appearance might cause. Even then, He was discovered and almost arrested, but He escaped because the hour of His death and resurrection “had not yet come” (vv. 30, 44). After that attempted arrest, Jesus began teaching again, telling the Pharisees: “I am the light of the world” (8:12).

We see the significance of the light metaphor when we consider how often Scripture uses light to describe our Creator. For example, 1 John 1:5 describes the glory and moral purity of God by stating, “God is light, and in him there is no darkness at all.” Thus, our Lord’s claim to be the Light of the World is yet another instance of Jesus’ making the implicit claim of equality with God Himself. Other texts use the light metaphor to show Jesus’ divine identity. John 1:1–5 reveals Jesus as God incarnate and the light that shines in the darkness. Mark 9:2–8 describes the transfiguration, the point at which our Lord’s divine glory shone through His humanity in the brightest light imaginable.

On the other hand, Scripture often uses the metaphor of darkness to illustrate spiritual blindness (Ps. 107:10–11; John 3:19). Consequently, when Jesus says that those who follow Him will not walk in darkness, He reveals Himself as the only light by which we can truly see God’s truth. The glory of God in Christ Jesus overcomes the darkness of sin and death (John 1:5). Some receive this Light gladly. Others see that Jesus is the Light of the World but then reject Him anyway. They do not follow Him, preferring their own positions of power and authority. The Pharisees were one group who remained spiritually blind, willfully rejecting the witnesses to Christ prescribed in the law of Moses (8:12–30). Eternal death is the fate for all who persist in such rejection.

Coram Deo

Many people in our relativistic age claim that there are many lights that can illumine the path out of spiritual darkness. Eastern religions, in fact, often speak of people as receiving illumination from Buddha or another respected figure. But Jesus is the only light who can show us the way back to our Creator. We dare not trust any other light than the Light of the World. If we trust only in Him, we will have all of the light we will ever need for salvation.

Passages for Further Study

Ezekiel 43:1–3

1 John 1:5–7

From Ligonier Ministries and R.C. Sproul. © Tabletalk magazine. Website: www.ligonier.org/tabletalk. Email: tabletalk@ligonier.org. Toll free: 1-800-435-4343.

<https://www.ligonier.org/learn/devotionals/light-of-the-world/>

Children of the Devil

“You are of your father the devil, and your will is to do your father’s desires. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks out of his own character, for he is a liar and the father of lies. But because I tell the truth, you do not believe me” (vv. 44–45).

- John 8:41–47

First-century Jews took great pride in being descendants of Abraham, whom God chose to be His agent of blessing to the world and who was even called the “friend of God” (Gen. 12:1–3; James 2:23). But as we see in the New Testament, many of them believed that mere physical descent was sufficient to make them children of the patriarch (Luke 3:7–9). Scripture, however, tells us that the true children of Abraham and the inheritors of his blessing are those who do what Abraham did, namely, rest on the promises of God alone. To be a true child of Abraham is to share his spiritual condition, to trust in Jesus as Messiah. Physical descent from Abraham without faith in Christ doesn’t make one a child of Abraham, while sharing his faith without being descended from him makes one the patriarch’s true child (Gal. 3:1–14).

The Jews whom Jesus confronted after He declared Himself the light of the world apparently understood that Jesus was speaking of a spiritual sonship of Abraham when He rejected their claim to be Abraham’s children (John 8:39–40). We see evidence of this in today’s passage. The Jews claimed not to be illegitimate spiritual children but rather to be children of God (v. 41). On the surface, they had some scriptural justification for this, for Israel is called the son of God in the Old Testament (Hos. 11:1). But again, this reflects an idea that physical descent and Jewish blood is sufficient to make a person spiritually sound, to make him a child of God spiritually.

No one is more qualified to identify the true children of God than Jesus, who is the Son of God by nature. And as we see in John 8:42–47, Jesus rejected their claims of sonship. He rejected their claims because they rejected Him, for the mark of a true child of God is embracing Christ by faith. Those who do not do so reject the truth of God Himself. They show that their true Father is the devil, the liar who perverts truth and is a murderer (v. 44). Satan was the agent who tempted Adam and Eve, resulting in their spiritual death, and hence he is a spiritual murderer. And every descendant of Adam who rejects the truth of God revealed in Christ Jesus our Lord shows that they share the devil’s fallen nature (v. 47). To be outside of Christ is to be of the devil, to be in bondage to sin. It is to have the character of one opposed to the Lord. As Dr. R.C. Sproul writes in his commentary John: “Sin is not simply making bad choices or mistakes. Sin is having the desire in our hearts to do the will of the enemy.”

Coram Deo

John Calvin comments, “There is no piety and no fear of God where Christ is rejected.” No matter how outwardly pious a person may seem, he is a child of the devil if he rejects Christ. Our response should be not to hate that person but to pray for him and to plead with him to believe in Christ so that he will become a child of God.

Passages for Further Study

Exodus 4:22

Psalm 1

Romans 5:12–21

1 John 3:8–10

From Ligonier Ministries and R.C. Sproul. © Tabletalk magazine. Website: www.ligonier.org/tabletalk. Email: tabletalk@ligonier.org. Toll free: 1-800-435-4343.

<https://www.ligonier.org/learn/devotionals/children-of-the-devil/>

Before Abraham Was

“Your father Abraham rejoiced that he would see my day. He saw it and was glad.’ So the Jews said to him, ‘You are not yet fifty years old, and have you seen Abraham?’ Jesus said to them, ‘Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I am’ ” (vv. 56–58).

- John 8:48–59

Questions about whether Jesus ever identified Himself as God continue to be raised in our day. The surest way to answer these questions is to look at the words of Jesus Himself. Today’s passage gives perhaps the clearest answer, as it is the most explicit claim to deity that our Lord ever made. In saying, “Before Abraham was, I am” (John 8:58), Christ asserted that He is Yahweh, the one true creator God and covenant Lord of Israel.

Jesus made this statement in the midst of an argument with the Pharisees. He had asserted that freedom is only for those who abide in His teaching, the implication being that the Pharisees were not free because they rejected Him (vv. 31–32). Jesus was talking about spiritual freedom, for He had been talking about sin and death in the same argument (see v. 21). But the Pharisees misunderstood Him to be speaking of physical bondage, and they claimed to be Abraham’s descendants who had never been owned by another nation or person (v. 33). So, Jesus clarified that He was talking about slavery to sin, and the Pharisees picked up the implication that He believed they were sinners. That is why they reasserted their relationship to Abraham, for according to the Pharisees, only Gentiles and perhaps many common Jews were properly called sinners (vv. 34–39a).

Christ never denied the Pharisees’ physical ancestry (v. 37), but He refuted their claimed spiritual heritage. They could not be Abraham’s true sons because they did not do Abraham’s works. Instead of trusting the Lord and obeying His Word as Abraham did, they tried to kill the very Word of God Himself. That meant only one thing—spiritually, the Pharisees were really the devil’s children (v. 39b–47).

The Pharisees became incensed at such a charge, and accused Jesus of being demon possessed. But Jesus pointed out that this was impossible for the One who is the source of life (v. 48–51). At that point, the Pharisees demanded to know who they were really talking to, and Jesus said that He is greater than Abraham, and that Abraham wanted to see Christ and rejoiced when He did (vv. 52–57). The proof for this claim is found in this statement of Jesus: “Before Abraham was, I am” (v. 58). The Pharisees’ attempt to stone Him proves they understood Jesus was claiming to be the very God who revealed Himself to Abraham and to

Moses (Ex. 3:14). Were that a false claim, the Pharisees would have been just; but Christ proved the truth of His claim by doing what only God can do (Mark 2:1–12).

Coram Deo

Many people think that they are truly free when they can do whatever they want to do—even sin. Yet Scripture repeatedly tells us that true freedom is found in desiring and being able to do what is pleasing to God. Only those who abide in the teaching of Jesus—who rest on Him by faith alone and follow Him—have the freedom needed to love and do what the Lord commands. Let us pray for our friends and family who are slaves to sin that God would grant them true freedom in Christ.

Passages for Further Study

Exodus 3:1–14

Isaiah 45:18

John 1:1–18

Revelation 22:12–13

From Ligonier Ministries and R.C. Sproul. © Tabletalk magazine. Website: www.ligonier.org/tabletalk. Email: tabletalk@ligonier.org. Toll free: 1-800-435-4343.

<https://www.ligonier.org/learn/devotionals/abraham-was/>