

10. ACT IV : JESUS THE LIFE-GIVING LIGHT OF THE WORLD

John 7:1 - 8:59



Jesus Light of the World, Divine Kingdom TV Ministry, Pastor Ian Ndlovu

Scene 1 : Jesus goes to the Festival of Booths (7:1-13)

High Point of the New Year Festival in autumn month of **Tishri**

- New Year (Rosh Hashanah) New Moon on 1st
(creation: water and light; Torah; Temple)
- 10 days of Teshuvah (Repentance)
(prayer, fasting, almsgiving)
- *Yom Kippur (on the 10th day)
- 14-15th (full moon) Festival of Booths (for 8 days)
(tents set up around Jerusalem by pilgrims)
- last day: Day of Rejoicing in the Torah

It is against the background of these High Days of Jewish ritual festivity that we are to read these reflections of John. So often in our religious festivities we are blinded by the dazzling but superficial light of ceremony. John wants to open our eyes to the invisible. He invites us to contemplate Jesus in the context of community festivities in order to show us that true religion consists in communion with God, a communion lived perfectly by Jesus and into which Jesus invites us all. John is calling his own community to repentance, to decide for Jesus before it is too late.

Jesus, and not the Law, is the source of 'living water' (7:38). He and not the temple (lit up for the festival) is the 'light of the world' (8:12). In Jesus God is making all things new. He is the new creation. In him God is fulfilling his promise to make a new covenant with the people. Jesus is the new temple. He is taking away the sins of the world. In him has come the reign of God's love.

John 7:1-7

After this Jesus went about in Galilee. He did not wish to go about in Judea because the Jews were looking for an opportunity to kill him (see 5:16, 18). The Jewish festival of Booths was near. So his brothers said to him, “Leave here and go to Judea so that your disciples also may see the works you are doing; for no one who wants to be widely known acts in secret. If you do these things, show yourself to the world.” (For not even his brothers believed in him.) Jesus said to them, “My time has not yet come, but your time is always here. The world cannot hate you, but it hates me because I testify against it that its works are evil.

A deeply tragic note is struck when for the first time Jesus speaks of the hatred which the world has for him – a hatred experienced also by John’s community (see 1John 3:13). This is the world whose sin he has come to take away (1:29), the world he was sent to save (3:17; 4:42), the world to whom he offers life (6:33,51). This is the world that God loves so much (3:16).

John 7:8-13

“Go to the festival yourselves. I am not going to this festival, for my time has not yet fully come.” After saying this, he remained in Galilee. But after his brothers had gone to the festival, then he also went, not publicly but as it were in secret. The Jews were looking for him at the festival and saying, “Where is he?” And there was considerable complaining about him among the crowds. While some were saying, “He is a good man,” others were saying, “No, he is deceiving the crowd.” Yet no one would speak openly about him for fear of the Jews.

Scene 2 : During the Festival (7:14-24)

John 7:14-20

About the middle of the festival Jesus went up into the temple and began to teach. The Jews were astonished at it, saying, “How does this man have such learning, when he has never been taught?” Then Jesus answered them, “My teaching is not mine but his who sent me. Anyone who resolves to do the will of God will know whether the teaching is from God or whether I am speaking on my own. Those who speak on their own seek their own glory; but the one who seeks the glory of him who sent him is true, and there is nothing false in him. Did not Moses give you the law? Yet none of you keeps the law. Why are you looking for an opportunity to kill me?” The crowd answered, “You have a demon (δαιμόνιον)! Who is trying to kill you?”

John 7:21-24

Jesus answered them, “I performed one work, and all of you are astonished. Moses gave you circumcision (it is, of course, not from Moses, but from the patriarchs), and you circumcise a man on the sabbath. If a man receives circumcision on the sabbath in order that the law of Moses may not be broken, are you angry with me because I healed a man’s whole body on the sabbath? Do not judge by appearances, but judge with right judgment.”

On an earlier occasion at the pool of Beth-zatha, Jesus was accused of breaking the Law (5:10). He defended his action then, claiming that he was continuing God’s action in the world (5:17), and that in doing so he was carrying out his Father’s will (5:19). Here Jesus refers back to that incident and argues that if they are willing to circumcise a man on the Sabbath in order to make him a member of God’s chosen people. how can they object to Jesus when he offers healing on the Sabbath?

Scene 3 : Later during the Festival (7:25-36)

John 7:25-30

Now some of the people of Jerusalem were saying, “Is not this the man whom they are trying to kill? And here he is, speaking openly, but they say nothing to him! Can it be that the authorities really know that this is the Messiah? Yet we know where this man is from; but when the Messiah comes, no one will know where he is from.” Jesus cried out as he was teaching in the temple, “You know me, and you know where I am from. I have not come on my own. But the one who sent me is true, and you do not know him. I know him, because I am from him, and he sent me.” Then they tried to arrest him, but no one laid hands on him, because **his hour had not yet come.**

John 7:31-36

Yet many in the crowd believed in him and were saying, “When the Messiah comes, will he do more signs than this man has done?” The Pharisees heard the crowd muttering such things about him, and the chief priests and Pharisees sent temple police to arrest him. Jesus then said, “I will be with you a little while longer, and then I am going to him who sent me. You will search for me, but you will not find me; and where I am, you cannot come.” The Jews said to one another, “Where does this man intend to go that we will not find him? Does he intend to go to the Dispersion among the Greeks and teach the Greeks? What does he mean by saying, ‘You will search for me and you will not find me’ and ‘Where I am, you cannot come’?”

Scene 4 : The Last Day of the Festival (7:37-52)

It is the day of rejoicing in the Torah. Women are bringing water to the temple from the pool of Siloam. They are chanting the words of Isaiah: ‘With joy you will draw water from the wells of salvation’ (Isaiah 12:3). The priests are pouring the water over the altar and it is flowing through the temple precincts, bringing cleansing and life to the city.

John 7:37-39

On the last day of the festival, the great day, while Jesus was standing there, he cried out, “Let anyone who is thirsty come to me, and let the one who believes in me drink. As the scripture has said, ‘Out of his (the believer? Jesus?) inner being (κοιλία) shall flow rivers of living water.’” He said this about the Spirit, which believers in him were to receive; for as yet there was no Spirit, because Jesus was not yet glorified.

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The Spirit for which the prophets had longed, the Messianic gift, could come only from the heart of the Word-made-flesh. Jesus was always sharing with others his Spirit, his communion with God. The gift of the fullness of the Spirit, however, has to await Jesus' hour of glory. It is poured out from the heart of the glorified Jesus after he has experienced the fullness of communion with God (20:22).

Paul assures us that 'hope does not disappoint us, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us' (Romans 5:5).

John 7:45-46

The temple police (see 7:32) went back to the chief priests and Pharisees, who asked them, “Why did you not arrest him?” The police answered, “Never has anyone spoken like this!” Then the Pharisees replied, “Surely you have not been deceived too, have you? Has any one of the authorities or of the Pharisees believed in him? But this crowd, which does not know the law – they are accursed” (Deuteronomy 27:26).

Nicodemus, who had gone to Jesus before, and who was one of them, asked, “Our law does not judge people without first giving them a hearing to find out what they are doing, does it?” They replied, “Surely you are not also from Galilee, are you? Search and you will see that no prophet is to arise from Galilee.”

The woman caught in adultery (John 7:53 - 8:11)

Missing from the best Greek manuscripts. Inserted at end of 3rd century: illustrates a central theme of John's Gospel – Judgment. This scene illustrates Jesus' assertion: 'I judge no one' (8:15).

John 7:53 - 8:6

Then each of them went home, while Jesus went to the Mount of Olives (the location of the last judgment, Zechariah 14:3-4). Early in the morning he came again to the temple. All the people came to him and he sat down and began to teach them. The scribes (mentioned only here) and the Pharisees brought a woman who had been caught in adultery; and making her stand before all of them, they said to him, "Teacher, this woman was caught in the very act of committing adultery. In the law Moses commanded us to stone such women (Leviticus 20:10; Deuteronomy 22:21; Ezekiel 16:38-40). What do you say?" They said this to test him, so that they might have some charge to bring against him.

John 8:6-11

Jesus bent down and wrote with his finger on the ground. When they kept on questioning him, he straightened up and said to them, “Let anyone among you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her.” And once again he bent down and wrote on the ground. When they heard it, they went away, one by one, beginning with the elders; and Jesus was left alone with the woman standing before him. Jesus straightened up and said to her, “Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?” She said, “No one, sir.” And Jesus said, “Neither do I condemn you. Go your way, and from now on do not sin again.”



Ettore Masina, Jesus of Nazareth, Libreria Borgo, Rome, 1977.

‘The Lord does not deal with us according to our sins,
nor repay us according to our iniquities.
For as the heavens are high above the earth,
so great is his steadfast love toward those who fear him;
as far as the east is from the west,
so far he removes our transgressions from us.
As a father has compassion for his children,
so the Lord has compassion for those who fear him.
For he knows how we were made;
he remembers that we are dust’ (Psalm 103:10-14).

When we speak of God as judge and as punishing, we are saying that God cannot pretend that things are other than they really are. We stand judged by what we do and evil has its effects that cannot just be wished away. These effects are the punishment which we bring on ourselves when we sin. They also add to the sludge of sin that pollutes the environment in which others have to live.

Scene 5. At the Temple Treasury (8:12-59)

John 8:12

Again Jesus spoke to them, saying, “I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness but will have the light of life.”

In Scene Four Jesus offered himself as the source of life-giving water. Here he offers himself as the source of life-giving light. We recall the words of the Psalmist: ‘You give them drink from the river of your delights. For with you is the fountain of life; in your light we see light’ (Psalm 36:8-9). Water and light feature strongly in the cult associated with the festival of Booths.

‘What has come into being in him was life, and the life was the light of all people’ (John 1:4). Jesus fulfils the promise expressed by Isaiah: ‘The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who lived in a land of deep darkness – on them light has shone’ (Isaiah 9:2; quoted Matthew 4:16).

Jesus is not simply claiming to be ‘the light of the world’. He is also inviting us to come to him and to walk in his light: ‘**Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness but will have the light of life**’.

Commenting on this verse, Augustine quotes from Paul a passage which was significant in his own conversion: ‘The night is far gone, the day is near. Let us then lay aside the works of darkness and put on the armour of light; let us live honourably as in the day, not in revelling and drunkenness, not in debauchery and licentiousness, not in quarrelling and jealousy. Instead, put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires’ (Romans 13:12-14).

John 8:13-20

Then the Pharisees said to him, “You are testifying on your own behalf; your testimony is not valid.” (compare John 5:31-39). Jesus answered, “Even if I testify on my own behalf, my testimony is true (ἀληθής) because I know where I have come from and where I am going, but you do not know where I come from or where I am going. You judge by human standards; I judge no one. Yet even if I do judge, my judgment is true (ἀληθινός); for it is not I alone who judge, but I and the Father who sent me. In your law it is written that the testimony of two witnesses is valid. I testify on my own behalf, and the Father who sent me testifies on my behalf.” Then they said to him, “Where is your Father?” Jesus answered, “You know neither me nor my Father. If you knew me, you would know my Father also.” He spoke these words while he was teaching in the treasury of the temple, but no one arrested him, because his hour had not yet come (contrast John 2:4).

John 8:21-26

Again he said to them, “I am going away, and you will search for me, but you will die in your sin. Where I am going, you cannot come.” Then the Jews said, “Is he going to kill himself? Is that what he means by saying, ‘Where I am going, you cannot come’?” He said to them, “You are from below, I am from above (see John 3:31); you are of this I told you that you would die in your sins, for you will die in your sins unless you believe that I AM.” (ἐγώ εἰμι).

They said to him, “Who are you?” Jesus said to them, “Why do I speak to you at all? I have much to say about you and much to condemn; but the one who sent me is true, and I declare to the world what I have heard from him.”

John 8:27-32

They did not understand that he was speaking to them about the Father. Jesus said, ‘When you have lifted up the Son of Man (see 3:14-15), then you will realise that I AM (ἐγώ εἰμι), and that I do nothing on my own, but I speak these things as the Father instructed me. And the one who sent me is with me; he has not left me alone, for I always do what is pleasing to him.’ As he was saying these things, many believed in him. Then Jesus said to the Jews who had believed in him (see 2:23-25), “If you continue in my word, you are truly my disciples; and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free.”

John 8:33

They answered, “We are descendants of Abraham and have never been slaves to anyone. What do you mean by saying, ‘You will be made free’?”

In the Prologue John has already made it clear that to be a child of God is not a matter of physical descent. It is a matter of welcoming and believing in God’s word (1:12-13).

John 8:34-36

Jesus answered them, “Very truly, I tell you, everyone who commits sin is a slave to sin. The slave does not have a permanent place in the household; the son has a place there forever. So if the Son makes you free, you will be free indeed.

As Paul says to the Christians of Galatia who were tempted to revert to Judaism: ‘For freedom Christ has set us free. Stand firm, therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery’ (Galatians 5:1).

John 8:37-41

I know that you are descendants of Abraham; yet you look for an opportunity to kill me, because there is no place in you for my word. I declare what I have seen in the Father's presence; as for you, you should do what you have heard from the Father." They answered him, "Abraham is our father." Jesus said to them, "If you were Abraham's children, you would be doing what Abraham did, but now you are trying to kill me, a man who has told you the truth that I heard from God. This is not what Abraham did. You are indeed doing what your father does."

John 8:41-43

They said to him, “We are not illegitimate children; we have one father, God himself.” Jesus said to them, “If God were your Father, you would love me, for I came from God and now I am here. I did not come on my own, but he sent me. Why do you not understand what I say? It is because you cannot accept my word.

John 8:44-48

You are from your father the devil, and you choose to do your father's desires. He was a murderer from the beginning (Genesis 4:7) and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks according to his own nature, for he is a liar and the father of lies. But because I tell the truth (7:18), you do not believe me. Which of you convicts me of sin? If I tell the truth, why do you not believe me? Whoever is from God hears the words of God. The reason you do not hear them is that you are not from God. The Jews answered, "Are we not right in saying that you are a Samaritan and have a demon?"

John 8:49-52

Jesus answered, “I do not have a demon; I honour my Father, and you dishonour me. Yet I do not seek my own glory; there is one who seeks it and he is the judge. Very truly, I tell you, whoever keeps my word will never see death.” The Jews said to him, “Now we know that you have a demon. Abraham died, and so did the prophets; yet you say, ‘Whoever keeps my word will never taste death.’ Are you greater than our father Abraham, who died? The prophets also died. Who do you claim to be?”

John 8:54-58

Jesus answered, “If I glorify myself, my glory is nothing. It is my Father who glorifies me, he of whom you say, ‘He is our God,’ though you do not know him. But I know him; if I would say that I do not know him, I would be a liar like you. But I do know him and I keep his word. Your ancestor Abraham rejoiced that he would see my day; he saw it and was glad.” Then the Jews said to him, “You are not yet fifty years old, and have you seen Abraham?” Jesus said to them, “Very truly, I tell you, before Abraham was I AM (ἐγὼ εἰμὶ).”

Abraham, the one whom they claim as their father, rejoiced when his wife conceived, for God was keeping his promise (Genesis 17:17). Jesus is the fulfilment of that promise (compare 5:46 in relation to Moses). In this sense, as we read in the Letter to the Hebrews: ‘from a distance our ancestors saw and greeted God’s promises’(Hebrews 11:13). Those seeking Jesus’ life should be sharing in Abraham’s joy and not trying to kill him.

John 8:59

They picked up stones to throw at him, but Jesus hid himself and went out of the temple.

The religious leaders find his claim blasphemous and proceed to carry out the punishment required by law: ‘One who blasphemes the name of the Lord shall be put to death; the whole congregation shall stone the blasphemer’ (Leviticus 24:16). Jesus’ withdrawal emphasises the tragedy. At the time of the Exile, the Lord departed from the temple (see Ezekiel 10:4,18; 11:23). Now the light of the world (8:12) goes out of the temple. The religious leaders stayed behind with their theology, their images of God, and the security afforded them by their position, their power and their prestige. In refusing to follow Jesus, they refused to leave their father and their father’s house and move on to the promised land. They are not true children of Abraham (see Genesis 12:1).

The dispute against the background of the feast of Booths is full of tragic contrasts. On the one side stands the temple, light streaming from it and water flowing from the right side of the altar. Over against this stands Jesus calling the people to come to him for water (7:37-38) and light (8:12). At every turn we are reminded of the fact that while Jesus is offering life, his own life is in danger (7:1,13,19,25,30,32; 8:37,40,59). The religious authorities reject Jesus' claims, while Jesus exposes them to the people as false leaders. The dominant theme is the manifestation and rejection of the Word as life and light. The temple authorities are obstinate in rejecting Jesus. In refusing to allow God's word to penetrate their hardened hearts, they choose darkness rather than light. Their 'deeds are evil' (3:19).

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