

February 18: John 8

Chapter 8 – Begins and ends with attempted stoning

Vs. 1-11, This famous story from the gospel of John was almost certainly a later addition to the gospel, not originally written by John himself. Though a later addition, it seems to be based on an older oral tradition from the apostolic tradition. One of the ways we know this story was not written by John is that John never speaks of the “scribes”, this is the only passage where the scribes are mentioned as part of the opposition to Jesus in John’s gospel. When we read this famous story a few questions are raised: 1. Where is the man who was part of the act of adultery? According to the law, he too was supposed to be stoned. 2. What exactly did Jesus write on the ground with his finger? The woman is brought before Jesus as a trap –if Jesus overlooks her sin, then he is guilty of disobeying the law as well, but agreeing to have the woman stoned will damage his popularity with the masses (and it’s not exactly in line with his gracious and merciful character). Because Jesus says “let anyone among you who is without sin cast the first stone” it is believed that he wrote down all the secret sins of those who had come to condemn her. Typically the witnesses of the sinful event were to be the first ones to throw stones. Those who convicted her went away from oldest to youngest –is this because the elders had lived longer and therefore had more sins written down on the ground? When everyone had left, Jesus shows her mercy –he does not carry out the punishment that she deserves according to the law. But he does tell her to sin no more.

Vs. 12-38, They are still celebrating the 7 day festival of booths, both water and light are important images from this festival. Jesus names himself as the light which leads through the darkness of this life. His opponents again accuse him of an invalid argument because he doesn’t have anyone else to back up his claims. Witness testimony was critically important to Judaism when judging what is fact and what is fiction. His opponents viewed Jesus as just spouting a bunch of semi-blasphemous nonsense with no one to support his claims as true. Jesus again argues that God, the Father, is the one who testifies on his behalf by granting him the ability to perform signs. Jesus accuses his opponents of not knowing the Father because they do not recognize the Father’s presence with the Son. Again and again there is confusion about what Jesus is saying. When Jesus alludes to his glorification (death and resurrection), they question if he’s going to kill himself. This seems a strange leap, given how many of them are actively seeking to have Jesus killed at this point. Vs. 25 Jesus gets frustrated with them because they still don’t understand what he is saying or who he is. Vs. 29, the tone of this passage shifts. Many who are listening do come to believe in him, and so beginning in vs. 31 he instructs them as disciples. But this is short lived. Jesus tells them that the truth will make them free, and they say that they’ve never been slaves to anyone (FALSE: what about those 400 years in Egypt?). Jesus describes sin as spiritual slavery, a slavery from which he is able to grant true freedom. Jesus accuses them of not being true descendants of Abraham because they look for ways to kill him.

Vs. 39-56, This passage reveals the animosity between Christians and the synagogue community at the writing of John's gospel. This is a harsh exchange between Jesus and "the Jews" (that is, those in power compared to the followers of Jesus). John compares the Jewish authorities' threats against Jesus to the way they threaten his contemporary Christian brothers and sisters. Jesus rejects the claim that his opponents are descendants of Abraham (for Abraham believed God's word and it was reckoned unto him as righteousness), and instead says that they are descendants of the devil because of the lies they speak about him! Wow. There's no getting around the anti-semitic damage this particular passage has done. Of course, Jews are God's beloved people and not descendants of the devil. Jesus was human and got angry at those who opposed him and sought to kill him. That being said, I wish he'd never said this. Vs. 58, this verse is Jesus calling himself by God's sacred personal name "I am." This is blasphemy of the highest degree, which is why his opponents now try to publicly stone him, but just as he entered the temple in secret he now manages to exit the temple in secret and avoid stoning.