

## **Class Presentation**

Gospel of John 8:12-20

Reader Alexander Vallens

Johannine Writings

Dr. Mary Ford

28 October, 2004

- (a) **Jesus comes out of hiding** from the **Jews seeking to kill him** (7:1-36).
- (b) Living **water** and the **Spirit** (7:37-44).
- (c) The Jewish leaders fail to arrest Jesus (7:45-52).
- (b') The **light** of the world and the **Father** (8:12-20).
- (a') **Jesus again hides himself** from the **Jews seeking to kill him** (8:21-59).

After the interlude in 7:45-52 (plotting by chief priests and Pharisees against Jesus), Jesus continues speaking in the vein of 7:37-44, the (b) section, only this time instead of speaking about himself as the source of living water (7:38), he speaks about himself as the light of the world and the source of the light of life. Both sections (b) and (b') begin with and oracular sayings (7:37 and 8:12), continue with a debate (between different people in the crowd in 7:40-42 and between Jesus and the Pharisees in 8:13-19), and end with a remark about the Jews' inability to arrest Jesus (7:44 and 8:20). Where the (b) section dealt with Jesus and the Spirit, the (b') section deals with Jesus and the Father, thus leading the reader back to the central subject of the whole sequence—the divine origin and identity of Jesus—and to the trinitarian relationships between Jesus and the Spirit and Jesus and the Father. -Ellis

The Johannine motif of light and darkness, with which [this] section opens, ties in several thematic strands in John's Gospel. First, one is reminded of the Word's participation in creation. Second, John uses the contrast between literal light and darkness to illustrate the *moral* contrast between the spiritual life and spiritual death: "to walk in darkness" means to fail to see the moral implications of one's sin, while "to walk in the light" connotes life lived in full view of the reality of one's own sinfulness and need for salvation. Third, John uses the symbolism of the Feast of Tabernacles, in particular torchlighting ceremonies, to point out how Jesus fulfills the essence of various Jewish festivals. Fourth, light symbolism provides continuity between Jesus' appearance at the Feast and his healing of the man born blind in chapter 9, [as well as] in the context of the raising of Lazarus, reiterating that Jesus is the light of life. -Köstenberger (EBS, Encntrng. Bbl. Srs.)

8:12- We note immediately that the declaration, "I am the Light of the World..." is one of the *εγω ειμι* sayings of the Gospel; Jesus is Light of the World, as he is the Bread of Life, the Door, the Good Shepherd, etc. -Murray (Word)

The expression "Light of the world" suggests that Jesus is making a play on words by alluding to another of the rites of the feast of Tabernacles—the rite of nightly illumination of the court of women. Implied is Jesus' replacement of the authority of Mosaic law. -Ellis

In the OT God is His people's light (Ps. 27:1); in the light of his presence they enjoy grace and peace (Num, 6:24-26). The Servant of the Lord is appointed as a light to the nations, that God's salvation may extend to the end of the earth (Isa. 49:6). The word or law of God is also described as a light to guide the path of the obedient (Ps. 119:105; Prov. 6:23). So Jesus, as the Son of the Father, the Servant of the Lord and the Word incarnate, embodies this OT language. -Bruce

Not "of Galilee," not of Palestine, nor of Judea. What then say the Jews? -St. John Chrys.

8:13- Alas ! for their folly, He continually referred them to the Scriptures, and now they say, "Thou bearest record of thyself." What was the record He bare? "I am the light of the world." A great thing to say, great of a truth, but it did not greatly amaze them, because He did not now make Himself equal to the Father, nor assert that He was His Son, not that He was God, but for a while called Himself "a light." -St. John Chrysostom

The Pharisees object that Jesus is bearing witness to himself; in view of Deut 19:15, that is not allowed in Jewish law. Hence Jesus' testimony is invalid (*Mishnah Kethuboth* 2:9: "No man is authenticated through his own testimony.... No man can bear testimony on his own behalf"). -Word

The Pharisees' objection harks back to Jesus' own words in John 5:31, "If I bear witness about myself, my witness is not true." Ostensibly, their present objection had a point. -Brc

8:14- [Jesus'] testimony concerning himself is valid, because he knows his origin and his destiny, whereas his opponents do not. His origin and destiny, of course, are in God, from whom he comes and to whom he goes, who moreover is *with him*. The testimony of Jesus therefore is grounded in his unity with the Father, from whom his revelation is derived. This has the consequence of identifying the revelation of God with the (self-) testimony of Jesus. (Note: In 5:31 Jesus proceeds on the testimony of "Another," i.e., God, given through varied means. Here he makes a different use of that law, to affirm that his own testimony was not simply his own but was from God, in God, and with God, hence "valid"!)-Word

[Jesus] saith, "Though I bear record of Myself, My record is true, for I know whence I come." What is this? "I am of God, am God, the Son of God, and God Himself is a faithful witness unto Himself, but ye know Him not; ye willingly err, knowing ye pretend not to know, but say all that ye say according to mere human imagination, choosing to understand nothing beyond what is seen." -St. John Chrysostom

8:15- **I judge no one.** There might seem to be a contradiction here with 5:27, where Jesus says, "The Father has given him [the Son] authority to execute judgment," but in Johannine terms there is really no contradiction, since each person actually judges (pronounces judgment on) himself or herself according to whether he or she believes or does not believe in Jesus. Moreover, in the immediate context, there is a contrast between Jesus and the Pharisees. The Pharisees "judge according to the flesh"; Jesus judges no one according to appearances. -Ellis

8:16- "And yet if I judge, My judgment is true." What He saith, is of this kind; "Ye judge unjustly." "And if," saith some one, "we judge unjustly, why dost Thou not rebuke us? why dost Thou not punish us? why dost Thou not condemn us?" "Because," He saith, "I came not for this." This is the meaning of, "I judge no man; yet if I judge, My judgment is true." "For had I been willing to judge, ye would have been among the condemned. And this I

say, not judging you. Yet neither do I tell you that I say it, not judging you, as though I were not confident that had I judged you, I should have convicted you; since if I had judged you, I must justly have condemned you. But now the time of judgment is not yet."  
-St. John Chrysostom

8:17-8- In light of the [previous] utterances, the adducing of the law of two witnesses in Deut 19:15 must be viewed as "an analogical mode of speech." For the Father who "sent" Jesus is "with" him, not to declare publicly his agreement with what Jesus independently says, but to reveal to him what to say, alike in judgment and testimony. Two complimentary ideas are presented here: on the one hand the unity of the Father and the Son in the testimony and judgment declared by the Son and on the other hand their distinction. -Wrd

"I am One who bears witness..."

"It is written in your Law, that the testimony of two men is true." What would the heretics say here? (They would say,) "How is he better than man, if we take what he hath said simply? For this rule is laid down in the case of men, because no man by himself is trustworthy. But in the case of God, how can one endure such a mode of speaking? How then is the word 'two' used? Is it because they are two, or because being men they are therefore two? If it is because they are two, why did he not betake himself to John, and say, I bear witness of myself, and John beareth witness of me? Wherefore not to the angels? Wherefore not to the prophets? For he might have found ten thousand other testimonies." But he desireth to show not this only that there are Two, but also that they are of the same Substance. -St. John Chrysostom (extends through v. 19)

8:19- Since they are incapable of recognizing in Jesus the one sent of God, it is deduced that they know neither him nor the Father. -Word

[The Pharisees'] question implies that they expect Jesus to point out his Father, as if he were a visible being. The use of misunderstanding here, as in the case of Nicodemus' misunderstanding of Jesus' words about being born anew (3:5), sets the stage for further and deeper theological teaching. In this instance, it sets the stage for the climax of Jesus' discussion with the Pharisees—a discussion that deals with Jesus' origin from God (8:21-23, 42), equality with God (8:24-30), and pre-existence (8:56-58). -Ellis

8:20- The 'treasury' was that part of the Court of Women where thirteen-trumped shaped containers were placed for the reception of various dues, six of them being for voluntary offerings. It was in this neighborhood, 'opposite the treasury', that Jesus sat on the occasion during Holy Week when he saw the widow put her two 'mites' into one of the containers (Mark 12:41-44). -Bruce

The Jews cannot arrest Jesus because his hour, the hour of his death, is determined not by humans but by God. -Ellis

## Bibliography

Beasley-Murray, George R. *Word Biblical Commentary*, vol. 36. Waco, TX: Word Books, 1987.

Brown, Raymond E. *Gospel According to John*, in *The Anchor Bible*. Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Co., 1966.

Bruce, F. F. *The Gospel of John: Introduction, Exposition and Notes*. Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1983.

Ellis, Peter F. *The Genius of John: A Composition-Critical Commentary on the Fourth Gospel*. Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1984.

Köstenberger, Andreas I. *Encountering John: The Gospel in Historical, Literary, and Theological Perspective*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 1999.

Manley, Johanna, ed. *The Bible and the Holy Fathers for Orthodox*. Crestwood, NY: Monastery Books, 1984.

*The Orthodox Study Bible: New Testament and Psalms*. Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1993.

Schaff, Philip, ed. and trans. *Chrysostom: Homilies on the Gospel of Saint John and the Epistle to the Hebrews*, vol. XIV of *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, First Series*. Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1999.