

# NEW TESTAMENT BIBLICAL LITERACY

## *Lesson 17*

### John – Part Seven A Clean-up Lesson

#### **I. BACKGROUND**

As we have covered the gospel of John, we have failed to cover several areas that did not make a whole class within themselves. We hope to cover those areas today. Also, we have left out a lesson from the Gospel of Mark that will fit in nicely with one area we cover today.

#### **II. UNCOVERED MIRACLES**

When we taught on the miracles of John, we left out two of the miracles: Healing a man born blind and the resurrection of Lazarus. Those we will cover first.

##### *A. MIRACLE SIX – Healing a Blind Man*

John 9 recounts a sixth miracle of Jesus healing a blind man. There was a man born blind who supported himself by begging. Jesus and his disciples saw the man and the disciples asked Jesus who sinned, the man or his parents causing the blindness in the man. Many Jews at the time believed that sin was the only cause of suffering. In fact, they believed that people with deformity could have resulted from either the baby sinning in utero or the parents sinning in the birth of the child. Those who held such beliefs should have attended our Biblical Literacy class on the results of the fall covered in early Genesis!

Jesus explained to his disciples that the blindness was not the result of sin from either the man or his parents. This sin would show the work of God in the man's life. Jesus then spit in the mud, formed a mud cake, placed it on the man's eyes and sent the man to wash in the pool of Siloam. The man went, washed, and received his sight.

Jesus performed this miracle on the Sabbath. While there might have been some dispute over the mere healing on a Sabbath, there

was no question that the process of spitting in the dirt and making a mud cake was “work” in violation of Jewish Sabbath law.

When the Pharisees discovered that Jesus had done this miracle on the Sabbath, they were divided in their opinions. Some thought Jesus could never be from God because of such blatant sin. Others did not understand how a sinner could perform such great feats. The Pharisees asked the healed man his thoughts, and the man proclaimed Jesus as a prophet.

Disbelieving that the man was actually born blind, the Pharisees brought the man’s parents in for questioning. The parents confirmed that he man was their son and that he had indeed been born blind. But, they would not comment on how the man was healed out of fear that acknowledging Jesus as Messiah was basis for expulsion from the synagogue.

The Pharisees again asked the man about his perception of Jesus and the man was a bit flippant. The man asked why the Pharisees wanted to hear the story again. Did they also want to be disciples of Jesus? The man confounds the Pharisees with a bit of logic (not necessarily great theology)<sup>1</sup> good enough to frustrate the Pharisees who kick the man out of the synagogue.

Jesus heard that the man had been thrown out of the synagogue and went to find the man. The man did not recognize Jesus for he had never seen Jesus before. As their conversation unfolded, the man worshipped Jesus in belief. To the Pharisees, Jesus makes the point that even though they could see, they were blind to Jesus’ identity. In that, the Pharisees had no excuse.

#### *B. MIRACLE SEVEN – The Resurrection of Lazarus*

In John 11, we read the seventh and final miracle John provides before the death and resurrection of Jesus. It is the death and resurrection of Lazarus, the brother of Mary and Martha. These siblings were from Bethany and were very close to Jesus. When Lazarus was very ill, the sisters sent for Jesus to come and heal him.

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<sup>1</sup> The man says, “we know that God does not listen to sinners” (9:31). This is sometime quoted as gospel truth in sermons and lessons. Unfortunately, the gospel truth is that the man SAID those words. That does not mean that those words are true. In fact, we know that God DOES listen to sinners. The only non-sinner to pray to God has been Jesus himself!

Upon hearing of Lazarus's sickness, Jesus declared that death would not be the end of the story on his illness.

Jesus did not leave immediately to heal Lazarus, but Jesus waited two more days. Jesus explained to the disciples that Lazarus had "fallen asleep" and Jesus was going to "wake him up" (11:11). The disciples misunderstood Jesus and actually thought Lazarus would be getting better on his own since he was sleeping. Jesus was then more blunt with the disciples and explained that Lazarus was dead.

By the time Jesus arrived in Bethany, Lazarus had been in the tomb for four days. Martha met Jesus on the road and told him so. Martha noted that had Jesus been there earlier, Lazarus would not have died. Even still, Martha knew Jesus could do anything he wished with Lazarus.

Jesus told Martha, "I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies; and whoever lives and believes in me will never die." Jesus then asked whether Martha believed this. Martha responded unequivocally, "I believe that you are the Messiah, the Son of God who was to come into the world" (11:25-27).

Mary hears that Jesus is near and goes out to meet him. A number of those there to comfort and grieve with the family follow Mary and witness her encounter with Jesus. When Mary arrives, she is weeping. Upon realizing her pain, Jesus weeps as well.<sup>2</sup> While the Jews had varying reactions to Jesus, Jesus himself sought out the cave where Lazarus was laid. The tomb had a stone rolled across the face which Jesus ordered moved. Jesus had this done in spite of Mary's concerns the odor would be great from four days of decay.

Jesus stood before the cave and called loudly, "Lazarus, come out!" Lazarus then came forth, still wrapped in his burial clothes. Jesus ordered the burial clothes removed.

This death and resurrection account closely relates the ministry of Jesus to all of us. He finds us dead in our trespasses and calls us forth to a new creation – a new life. Of course, many of us never heed the follow-up command to the resurrection story where Jesus orders the removal of the grave clothes. Many of us chose to walk

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<sup>2</sup> This is the shortest verse in the Bible, 11:35 "Jesus wept."

around post-salvation still wearing the clothes of sinful people steeped in the death that was once ours. Much the pity!

John notes that after the events of Lazarus, the Jewish leaders were in a real dilemma on what to do with Jesus. They were worried that the commoners would proclaim Jesus king and cause the Romans to come destroy Jerusalem and the Jewish nation as traitors. This precipitated Caiaphas, the High Priest, to unknowingly prophesying the death of Jesus that year.

Caiaphas believed he was making a good suggestion that enough was enough and they just needed to put Jesus to death. With that in mind, Caiaphas said, “It is better for you that one man die for the people than that the whole nation perish.” (11:50). John lets us know that the prophecy was real. Jesus did in fact die so that many would live.

Next, we will cover a portion of John and a portion of Mark that are noteworthy because of questions about whether they were originally in the written copies of the respective gospels.

### **III. JOHN 7:53 – 8:11: THE WOMAN CAUGHT IN ADULTERY**

We need to focus on two different angles of this passage. First, we address why there are questions about its status as scripture. Second, we need to understand the point of the story as it is included in the Bible.

#### *A. Status*

As you read the New International Study Bible, there is an insert that says:

The earliest manuscripts and many other ancient witnesses do not have John 7:53-8:11

What do we make of this? First, we need to understand the facts. The oldest and most reliable New Testament manuscripts that contain a majority of scripture date from the 300’s (4<sup>th</sup> century). One is called Codex Vaticanus and is designated by the capital letter “B.” The second is called Codex Sinaiticus and is designated by the Hebrew *Aleph* (א). Aleph is the most important to scholars when working through the process of determining what the original

scriptures said. Neither of these important, early primary manuscripts contains this section of John.

If we look at the manuscripts we have from the 400's, the passage is also missing from the primary texts. This is consistent throughout most of the Greek manuscripts until the eighth century save that of "Codex Bezae" (abbreviated as "D") which dates from the 5<sup>th</sup> century but which has a number of textual peculiarities. The passage is also not found in the early Bible translations of the Old Syriac, The Peshitta, and other early translations.

No Greek Father, save Augustine in the 4<sup>th</sup> century, comments on the passage until the 12<sup>th</sup> century (Euthymius Zigabenus!).

That being said, Augustine does reference it as written by John in the fourth century. Augustine felt that some had removed it from their Bibles lest it give wife's undue license in behavior!

One last note is that as placed in the gospel, the story serves as an interruption to the narrative of Jesus at the Feast of Tabernacles recounted in John 7 and into the rest of 8.

While most scholars agree that the passage as placed in our Bibles was not in John's original text, it does not mean that it has no place in our study and consideration. First, we must recognize that its presence and character are sensibly consistent with the character and life of Jesus. The story does not form the basis of doctrine or dogma, but certainly reflects Christ's principles of forgiveness, trepidation of human's judging humans, and responses to the entrapments of the religious leaders. Second, we see here a story that easily, indeed most scholars think likely, was an accurate recording of an event in the life of Christ.

#### *B. Story*

So what do we make of the story? The story itself has a woman caught in adultery brought before Jesus. The accusers/witnesses attempt to use this woman and her sin to entrap Jesus. They make the woman stand before Jesus and others, they trumpet her sin, and quiz Jesus on whether he agrees with the Law of Moses that the woman should be stoned as a result of the sin.

Jesus kneels in the sand and begins to write with his finger. The text does not tell us why Jesus wrote or what Jesus wrote, merely that He wrote with his finger. Whether Jesus wrote or doodled is not the point being made. The point reminds the readers of two other times where there was divine writing in the Bible. The first was where God wrote the commandments on stone for Moses. These were the very commandments that forbade adultery. The second was the writing on the wall recorded in Daniel. Both times, the hand of God was writing as it was with Jesus here. What was written was irrelevant to us. That Jesus was writing is the key. The folks quoting Jesus the law were speaking to the one who wrote the law to start with!

Eventually, Jesus gets up and invites the one without sin to cast the first stone. Jesus then returns to writing. The folks leave oldest to youngest leaving Jesus with the woman. Jesus asks where the accusers are, and the woman says they have gone home. Jesus – the ONLY ONE there without sin who could have legitimately cast the stones – tells the woman to go on and leave her life of sin.

#### **IV. MARK 16:9-20**

In addition to this text in John, it is a good time to look back at the ending of the gospel of Mark 16:9-20. Again, this is a passage that carries an insert in the N.I.V. that reads:

The earliest manuscripts and some other ancient witnesses do not have Mark 16:9-20.

As before, let us first understand the facts. There are four different endings to Mark that are present in the manuscripts. Of these, two have no support in the scholarly community as being original. That leaves two that merit closer examination for us. The oldest manuscripts end the gospel of Mark with verse 8 (including B and ℵ); more recent manuscripts add the verses 9–20. While most scholars (including some outstanding conservative scholars) recognize that the addition of verses 9 through 20 is not original, these scholars also believe that the original did not end with verse 8. To end the gospel with verse 8 would have indeed been awkward. Most recognize that whatever ending was originally there has been lost with time.

In addition to the lack of the earliest support for the longer ending of Mark, there is significant internal evidence that the passage may not have been in the original. Eleven of the key words in this passage are not found

anywhere else in the gospel of Mark. Two of the references to the disciples use a word and a phrase not found anywhere else in the Bible. There are some other issues with the writing style that make the passage of questionable authenticity.

My urging on this passage would be to not build any measure of theology off of its statements. Outside of some groups that have used it to justify a certain view of baptism, other groups who have used it to justify snake handling, and others to justify poison drinking or tongue speaking, there is nothing of theological import in the passage.

## **V. POINTS FOR HOME**

1. Jesus is Messiah.
2. Jesus cares for us.
3. Jesus weeps with us.
4. Jesus dies for us.
5. Jesus forgives us.
6. We can trust his word.