

“[[They went each to his own house, but Jesus went to the Mount of Olives. Early in the morning he came again to the temple. All the people came to him, and he sat down and taught them. The scribes and the Pharisees brought a woman who had been caught in adultery, and placing her in the midst they said to him, “Teacher, this woman has been caught in the act of adultery. Now in the Law Moses commanded us to stone such women. So what do you say?” This they said to test him, that they might have some charge to bring against him. Jesus bent down and wrote with his finger on the ground. And as they continued to ask him, he stood up and said to them, “Let him who is without sin among you be the first to throw a stone at her.” And once more he bent down and wrote on the ground. But when they heard it, they went away one by one, beginning with the older ones, and Jesus was left alone with the woman standing before him. Jesus stood up and said to her, “Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?” She said, “No one, Lord.” And Jesus said, “Neither do I condemn you; go, and from now on sin no more.”]]” (John 7:53–8:11, ESV)

This passage provides a good opportunity to briefly discuss the important question of how we got our New Testament and how we know that it has been reliably transmitted to us.

Texts and Traditions

Original documents

Copying and distribution

Textual Traditions

Manuscripts and Variants

Nearly 6000 greek manuscripts of various types and levels of completeness are available, with an additional 19,000 documents in latin and other ancient language translations. In addition to those, there are nearly 36,000 quotes from the early church fathers, which alone is sufficient to reconstruct the entire New Testament, minus 11 verses.

As a result of all of these witnesses, there are quite a few variations in the text - somewhere in the ballpark of 200,000 of them. Most of these are misspellings or changes in word order that don't affect the meaning of the passage. Many others may be a significant variation but there are enough other witnesses to make it clear what the original verse was and how this one came to be different. A whole science has developed around analyzing these variants and determining which one is most likely the original. As a result, there is a substantial agreement on roughly 99% of the verses in the NT. The verses that remain in dispute do not impact any major doctrines of the faith.

A Multitude of Witnesses

This reality surrounding the NT leads to a curious outcome - the witness to the validity NT documents is extremely strong. Very few today are willing to seriously contest that the Gospel of Matthew we have (taking into account the variants, and excepting those disputed verses) is the same document as the original recorded document. They may

contest many things, such as who originally wrote it or what was originally meant, but not that it says what it says.

Similarly, this reality leaves any theory of a Vatican conspiracy or Constantinian corruption of the Scriptures as historically impossible. The multiple streams of transmission across several geographic regions by conflicting parties renders any such operation unworkable.

The Issue in John 7:53-8:11

The account of the woman caught in adultery is one of those suspect passages. In the case of these verse (7:53-8:11), the evidence is overwhelmingly in favor of this not being a part of the original gospel and that is the near unanimous consensus of even the most conservative scholars. Most of the early manuscripts don't include it. Some texts that do include it place it elsewhere, such as after 7:36, at the end of John 21:25, and one even puts it in Luke 21. The vocabulary and grammar of the passage are not consistent with the rest of John, and the account of the feast of tabernacles in chapter 7 and 8 go fine without it.

With that said, most scholars also admit that this account has great antiquity, is consistent with the theology of the NT, and is very likely an authentic story in the life of Jesus. We can read it as such, but it would not be wise to assign it the canonical authority that we do the other texts of the NT.

12 Again 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."

What does it mean to "walk in darkness"? How is Jesus like light? (v. 12)

As Israel wandered through the wilderness, they were guided by the light of the LORD - a pillar of fire by night and a pillar of cloud by day. He led them day or night. This same cloud separated the Egyptians from the Israelites, providing light through the darkest night as they passed through the Red Sea. (C.f. Exodus 13)

It was Jesus who provided that light then (c.f. Exodus 14; Isa. 63; Mal. 3; Jud. 4), and he continues to do so now - he is the light for the whole world. Though the world is covered in darkness (Isa. 9:1-2), those who follow him walk about as if it were noon day. They carry that light within themselves. He is the fountain of life, and in his light we see light (Psa. 36:9). All that is true in this world, is true in him. The sin and evil that so easily trips up and ensnares in the dark is made plain and exposed in his light.

He has come to be a light to Israel, and a light to the nations - to the Gentiles, to bring God's salvation to the ends of the earth. (Isa. 42:6; Isa. 49). As his light shines, the

blind will see, the prisoner in the dark dungeon will be set free, and the Holy One of Israel will be revered by every tribe, tongue and nation.

As we walk in his light, his light dwells in us and shines through us. Those who follow Jesus walk about this world as candles bringing light into the darkness - it is through us that his salvation extends to the ends of the earth (Matt. 5; Acts 26).

“All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation; that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation.” (2 Corinthians 5:18–19, ESV)

When that great day comes, when creation is restored and Christ has put all his enemies under his feet, the light of the Lamb will be all that is needed to illumine the world (Revelation 22:5).

How has Christ been a "light" to you?

13 So the Pharisees said to him, “You are bearing witness about yourself; your testimony is not true.” **14** Jesus answered, “Even if I do bear witness about myself, my testimony is true, for I know where I came from and where I am going, but you do not know where I come from or where I am going. **15** You judge according to the flesh; I judge no one. **16** Yet even if I do judge, my judgment is true, for it is not I alone who judge, but I and the Father who sent me. **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.

- Again in this section, we have a series of dialogues and misunderstandings, with Jesus using it as an opportunity to reveal more about who he is.
- The Pharisees claim that Jesus' statement about the light is testifying about himself, and using his own words against him, they say his testimony is not true.
- Jesus claims that even if he does testify concerning himself, his testimony is true because he comes from the Father and is going to the Father.
- What does he mean "I judge no one. Yet even if I do judge, my judgment is true...?"
- Regardless, his testimony is not singular, but he testifies concerning himself and the Father testifies concerning him. The Pharisees are ignorant of both.

21 So he said to them again, “I am going away, and you will seek me, and you will

die in your sin. Where I am going, you cannot come.”²² So the Jews said, “Will he kill himself, since he says, ‘Where I am going, you cannot come’?”²³ He said to them, “You are from below; I am from above. You are of this world; I am not of this world.”²⁴ I told you that you would die in your sins, for unless you believe that I am he you will die in your sins.”²⁵ So they said to him, “Who are you?” Jesus said to them, “Just what I have been telling you from the beginning.”²⁶ I have much to say about you and much to judge, but he who sent me is true, and I declare to the world what I have heard from him.”²⁷ They did not understand that he had been speaking to them about the Father.²⁸ So Jesus said to them, “When you have lifted up the Son of Man, then you will know that I am he, and that I do nothing on my own authority, but speak just as the Father taught me.”²⁹ And he who sent me is with me. He has not left me alone, for I always do the things that are pleasing to him.”

- Jesus says they cannot follow him to the Father, and they will die in their sins unless they believe that he is "I AM"...they misunderstand this and say, "You are who?"
- Once they have crucified him, they they will know that he is the Lord and speaks comes in the authority of the Father.

³⁰ As he was saying these things, many believed in him.³¹ So Jesus said to the Jews who had believed him, “If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples,³² and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.”³³ They answered him, “We are offspring of Abraham and have never been enslaved to anyone. How is it that you say, ‘You will become free’?”³⁴ Jesus answered them, “Truly, truly, I say to you, everyone who practices sin is a slave to sin.”³⁵ The slave does not remain in the house forever; the son remains forever.³⁶ So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed.³⁷ I know that you are offspring of Abraham; yet you seek to kill me because my word finds no place in you.”³⁸ I speak of what I have seen with my Father, and you do what you have heard from your father.”³⁹ They answered him, “Abraham is our father.” Jesus said to them, “If you were Abraham’s children, you would be doing the works Abraham did,⁴⁰ but now you seek to kill me, a man who has told you the truth that I heard from God. This is not what Abraham did.”⁴¹ You are doing the works your father did.” They said to him, “We were not born of sexual immorality. We have one Father—even God.”⁴² Jesus said to them, “If God were your Father, you would love me, for I came from God and I am here. I came not of my own accord, but he sent me.”⁴³ Why do you

not understand what I say? It is because you cannot bear to hear my word. ⁴⁴ 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. ⁴⁵ But because I tell the truth, you do not believe me. ⁴⁶ Which one of you convicts me of sin? If I tell the truth, why do you not believe me? ⁴⁷ Whoever is of God hears the words of God. The reason why you do not hear them is that you are not of God." ⁴⁸ The Jews answered him, "Are we not right in saying that you are a Samaritan and have a demon?" ⁴⁹ Jesus answered, "I do not have a demon, but I honor my Father, and you dishonor me. ⁵⁰ Yet I do not seek my own glory; there is One who seeks it, and he is the judge. ⁵¹ Truly, truly, I say to you, if anyone keeps my word, he will never see death." ⁵² The Jews said to him, "Now we know that you have a demon! Abraham died, as did the prophets, yet you say, 'If anyone keeps my word, he will never taste death.' ⁵³ Are you greater than our father Abraham, who died? And the prophets died! Who do you make yourself out to be?" ⁵⁴ Jesus answered, "If I glorify myself, my glory is nothing. It is my Father who glorifies me, of whom you say, 'He is our God.' ⁵⁵ But you have not known him. I know him. If I were to say that I do not know him, I would be a liar like you, but I do know him and I keep his word. ⁵⁶ Your father Abraham rejoiced that he would see my day. He saw it and was glad." ⁵⁷ So the Jews said to him, "You are not yet fifty years old, and have you seen Abraham?" ⁵⁸ Jesus said to them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I am." ⁵⁹ So they picked up stones to throw at him, but Jesus hid himself and went out of the temple.

- During his exchange with the Pharisees, many of the crowd come to believe in him. Jesus offers this encouragement - his disciples will abide in his word, they will know the truth, and they will be truly set free.
- The ensuing exchange reveals their true heart. Jesus describes them as:
 - they are still slaves of sin (vv. 32, 34);
 - they reject Jesus' word (vv. 37, 43, 45-46);
 - they are ready to kill him (vv. 37, 40, 59);
 - they are not the spiritual heirs of Abraham, but are sons of the devil (vv. 38-44);
 - they do not love Jesus (v. 42);
 - and they do not belong to God or know Him (vv. 47, 55)
- **In what sense can we say that they believed in him? How do we reconcile the two?**
- **What is the evidence that one is a disciple of Jesus Christ? (v. 31; see Hebrews 3:14; 2 John 1:8-9)**
- Rather, than seeing this as the encouragement it is, these Jews take offense at

this insinuation that they are in bondage in any way under than national oppression - 'We are children of Abraham, we are children of the covenant, we've never been in bondage to anyone.'

- Freedom vs. Slavery in America today
- He points out their slavery to sin, and says that though they are physical descendants of Abraham, they are not truly Abraham's seed in the promised sense, because otherwise they would believe. He says they do the works of their true Father.
- **What makes a person a true son (or daughter) of Abraham? (see Romans 2:28-29; 4:16-17; 9:6-8)**
- **What does it mean to be a "slave to sin"? What kind of freedom is Jesus promising?**
- Things continue to escalate, with the crowd denying that *they* were not born of sexual immorality, which may be a subtle dig at the circumstances surrounding Jesus' birth.
- The crowd then claims God as Father, which Jesus won't allow - if God were their Father they would welcome him because he came from God. Instead, they are children of the devil. It is for this reason that they cannot hear the truth - they must be born of God to hear it.
- He says, if anyone keeps my word he will never see death. Their response, "Abraham died, the prophets died, are you greater than them?" He answers, "Abraham rejoiced when he saw my day"
- This sets up the most significant and direct claim made by Jesus yet, Before Abraham existed, Jesus existed as the I AM. The crowd, who has misunderstood throughout the whole discussion finally gets it and their response is murderous.

In many ways, this passage is an echo of what we saw in John 1:

- The Word was God
- His life was the light of the world
- The light shined in the darkness but the darkness could not overcome/ comprehend it.
- He came to his own, but his own did not receive him.
- Those who receive him are born of God
- The Word became flesh and dwelt among us.
- We beheld the glory of the only Son from the Father.