

## SIXTH LESSON

### THE GOSPEL OF JOHN (CHAPTERS 7-9)

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Jesus and the Jewish Feasts

The feast of Tabernacles

Why festivals are important in life? Benefits of festivals?

The Major festivals of Christianity during the year.

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### CHAPTER 8: JESUS AT THE TABERNACLE FEAST

Jesus and the Jewish Feasts: In John chapters 5-10, we find references to Jewish feasts. Feast of the Jews in 5, Feast of the Passover in 6, Feast of booths (Tabernacle) in 9, Feast of Hanukkah in 10. John mentions those feasts to convince the Jewish audience that He is the fulfillment of the OT feasts' intent.

The Feasts: Besides enjoying one Sabbath day of rest each week, the Israelites also enjoyed 19 days when national holidays were celebrated

1. Passover (1 Day) Leviticus 23:5 says that this feast was to celebrate their deliverance from Egypt by God's mighty power.
2. Unleavened Bread (7 Days) Leviticus 23:6-8 reminded the people that they were leaving the old life behind and entering a new of living
3. First Fruits (1 Day) Leviticus 23: 9-14 reminded the people how God provided for them
4. Pentecost (1 Day) Leviticus 23: 15-22 showed Joy and Thanksgiving over the bountiful harvest
5. Trumpets (1 Day) Leviticus 23:23-25 expressed joy and thanksgiving to God
6. Day of Atonement (1 Day) Leviticus 23:26-32 restored fellowship with God
7. Tabernacles (7 Days) Leviticus 23:33-43 renewed Israel's commitment to God and trust in his guidance and protection.

What is the feast of Tabernacle? (Lev 23:33-36) The Israelites in the OT celebrated the feast of Tabernacles in the seventh month. This feast occurred in October about six months after the Passover celebration. During this feast, the people lived in temporary dwellings (tents or booths, made of branches) in order to remember God's protection for their ancestors. They remembered how their ancestors wandered in the desert before entering the Promised Land. They remembered their ancestor's wanderings in the desert and staying in the tents. The purpose of this annual feast was to thank God and renew their commitment to God and their trust in his guidance and protection. This was a time to remember their origins, where they came from. It is helpful to remember our beginning in order to appreciate where we are today. Thinking back on our life to see where God has led us makes us grateful and humble and human. There are many types of festivals such as Religious, cultural, national and Seasonal. They all serve the purpose of bringing happiness to our lives, and strengthen our sense of community. National Festivals: They connect us as a people of a nation.

Why festivals are important? Life is all about both happiness as human beings both inner and external. Social interaction with our fellow beings not only brings happiness but helps us to grow in our capacity to learn new things and familiarize ourselves with cultures and peoples. We are dependent on social heritage which is a mixture of customs, traditions, moral values, attitudes, festivals, folklore, beliefs and ideals. They not only help us who we are but bind us to pass it on from one generation to another. In our world of chaos and stress, happiness is overshadowed by negativity and insecurity and so the need for something that could bring positivity, renewal, overall growth has been felt time and again. Thus, festivals have come into existence that give us the opportunity to forget all our worries and celebrate the positive side of life, even if it is for a few days. They help us in our emotional growth as stress relievers and lower our negativity. They also provide an opportunity to reduce friction and brings estranged friends and relatives together in a bond of love. Nothing brings people together like festivals do. They play a pivotal role in nation-building; bringing people from every religious, economic and social background together. If we look at the fascinating journey of human evolution, we understand that human beings do not invent or create something unless it is required. The Bible has a very clear written history about the origin of various religious festivals. Agriculture, in addition to religion, has significantly contributed to the tradition of festivals. Events of historical significance such as thanksgiving day, military victories or other nation-building events also provide the impetus for festivals.

What are the benefits of the festivals? They Keep us closer to our religion and tradition. They promote harmony in families and communities. They carry the message of the past generations to the present and future. They help us to know various different religions and create relationship

among various religions and at the same time preserving our own culture and heritage. In addition to the Biblical Sabbath Day, Jesus observed the Biblical festivals recorded in the OT. John 7 records him teaching at the temple during the feast of Tabernacles. All four gospels record Jesus' final moments starting after the celebration of the feast of Passover with his disciples. The church he founded was started on the feast of Pentecost (Acts 2:1-4). After his death and resurrection, the apostles continued to keep these biblical feasts (Acts 18:21/ 20:6/ 1 Cor 16:8) Since Jesus, the apostles and the early church observed these biblical feasts, we observe these feasts and other feasts we don't observe in our liturgical calendar because Jesus is the fulfillment of all the Biblical celebrations and by celebrating his life (Christmas and Easter) we fulfill all the OT celebrations because Jesus is the center and fulfillment of all the OT prophecies and festivals. We are not under the OT Law but under Christ who is our Law Giver and savior. So, He becomes our focus and his words become our gospel.

### The Major Festivals of Christianity during the year

Advent Season (Mid Nov /Dec) The Christian year begins with a period of preparation for Christmas. It is a season of expectation.

Christmas [25 Dec - Jan 6] is the celebration of Jesus' birth (Nativity/incarnation). The festival lasts twelve days and ends with the EPIPHANY [Jan. 6], the manifestation of God in Jesus, which celebrates Jesus' baptism, the visit of the Magi [symbolic of Gentiles] to the infant Jesus.

Lent [March-April] Forty-day preparation for Easter. It corresponds to the 40 days Jesus spent fasting before beginning his ministry. This penitential season ends with: HOLY WEEK begins with Palm Sunday, commemorating Jesus' entry into Jerusalem. Holy (MAUNDY) Thursday commemorates the Last Supper and the institution of the Eucharist in Catholic, Orthodox and some Protestant churches. Good Friday is the solemn memorial of Jesus' death by crucifixion.

Easter Sunday [April] The greatest of Christian festivals celebrates the Resurrection. [Every Sunday is also a commemoration of the Resurrection.]

Ascension Thursday [May] Forty days after Easter, this festival celebrates Jesus' ascension to heaven.

Pentecost Sunday [May/June] Ten days after the Ascension [50 after Easter], this festival celebrates the gift of the Holy Spirit to the apostles and other disciples. It marks the birth of the Church.

Jesus encounters conflict with the religious leaders: Jesus experienced hatred of the world. Because the world hated, we who follow him can expect that many people will hate us as well. Jesus came with the greatest gift: Salvation for the humanity. The religious leaders hated him and rejected his gift of salvation no matter what he said and did. The more Jesus taught and worked publicly, the more these leaders caused trouble for him and his followers. So it was necessary for Jesus to teach and work as quietly as possible because they threatened anyone who might publicly support him. Excommunication from the synagogue was one of the reprisals for believing in Jesus (9:22) They were afraid of acknowledging Jesus in public for the fear of the Jews. Jesus says that he will acknowledge us before God if we acknowledge him before others (Mt 10:32). Be courageous and speak up for Christ.

## CHAPTER 8 THE WOMAN CAUGHT IN ADULTERY

The context of the gospel: This incident took place in Jerusalem Temple area when Jesus was teaching. His opponents brought forward a woman caught in the act of adultery. The Mosaic penalty for such an offense was death by stoning (Lev 20:10/ Deut 22:22) The Jewish civil and criminal code considered idolatry, murder and adultery as three grave sins and those who commit these sins were punishable by death. His opponents wanted to use the occasion of adulterous woman to embarrass Jesus, because he had the reputation of proclaiming God's mercy toward sinners. If Jesus insisted on Mosaic Law of stoning the adulterous woman, his reputation as a prophet of God's mercy would be questioned. If he consented to her death by stoning, then he would be violating the Roman law which forbade killing by private citizens. If he sided with the adulterous woman, he would be charged of ignoring God's law and God's justice, given through Moses. It was indeed a cunning trap they had set for Jesus. How did Jesus act on that occasion? Very interesting and insightful to see his divine wisdom at that moment.

Jesus' Wise Judgment: Initially, Jesus seems to have no interest in this case by simply writing on the ground. what did he write? The popular interpretation is that he wrote the names and the sins of all who accused her starting from the oldest to the youngest and their sins. It is also said that he was writing the 10 commandments on the ground, a sort of examination of conscience for the accusers. Some say that he was ignoring the accusers by simply writing something on the ground. So they were so amazed at His supernatural knowledge that they dropped their killing plan stood stunned and silenced. Here, the evangelist John makes Jesus as the supreme judge, judging the accusers as sinners and sending the accused woman as a freed person by saying "Let the one among you who is sinless be the first to throw a stone at her." When Jesus said that only someone who had not sinned should throw the first stone, the leaders slipped quietly away from

oldest to the youngest. St. Augustine puts Jesus' stand as follows: "Let this woman be punished, but not by sinners; let the law be applied, but not by its transgressors." Thus Jesus very cleverly escaped from their trap and left the judgment to the consciences of the accusers. The accusers were reduced to silence and shame. According to Jewish custom, the eldest had the right to stone at people first. Jesus made the eldest ones to leave the place first and then the youngsters because evidently the older men were more aware of their sins than the younger. In this episode Jesus shows himself as a righteous, courageous and above all merciful judge.

Every saint has a past and every sinner has a future: 'You shall not commit adultery' is the 6th commandment. Jesus knew that the accused woman had violated this commandment and therefore he gave her a strong warning "Go, and from now on, do not sin anymore". Jesus didn't condemn the woman accused of adultery, but neither did he ignore or condone her sin. Jesus called her to leave her life of sin. Jesus called her a sinner without any compromise but by forgiving her sins, he showed the sinner the respect she deserved as a human being and treated her with compassion. Jesus is thus portrayed as a living expression of the divine mercy, a wise and kind judge, more concerned with forgiveness and rehabilitation than with punishment and death.

Who am I to judge? Before Judging others, we have to check ourselves whether we are worthy to judge others. Psalm 130:3 reads "If a man commits adultery with his neighbor's wife both the adulterer and the adulteress shall be put to death". We have no right to judge others because we commit often the same faults we condemn. our judgements may not be right always because we are often partial and prejudiced in our judgment and we may not know the circumstances which have led someone to sin. In our assessment about people, we can easily go wrong because we go by external appearances. Unfortunately appearances do not always reveal the reality of people. Sometimes we justify saying that we know everything of everyone. We must know the limitations of our knowledge. Because our knowledge is subjective, our minds may not really grasp the truth. Therefore we may not have absolute knowledge about persons and events. Only God can see the inside of a person and judge him accurately. Hence it is wise to leave the judgment to the just and merciful God who can read people's hearts. St. Mother Teresa of Calcutta says "If you judge people, you have no time to love them"

8:24 you will indeed die in your sins: People will indeed die in their sins if they reject Christ because they are rejecting the only way to be rescued from sin.

8:32 you will know the truth and the truth will set you free: Jesus is the Truth, Way and Life (Jn 14:6) Jesus is the truth that set us free. He is the source of truth, the perfect standard of what is right. He frees us from the consequences of sin, from self deception. He shows us clearly the way to eternal life with God. He does not give us freedom to do what we want, but freedom to follow

God. Christian freedom is to do what is right. Prejudice can blind us to truth. The Holy Spirit is the source for truth. Pilate was cynical. He thought all truth was relative. To many government officials, truth was whether the majority of the people agreed with or whatever help them to advance their own personal power and political goals. When there is no basis for truth, there is no basis for moral right and wrong. Pilate had no doubt about Jesus' innocence. Three times he declared Jesus not guilty. But his fear of the Jews and their pressure made him issue an order to crucify Jesus. Pilate went against what he knew was right and true. When we resist the truth for our own ego and selfishness, we lose our purpose and direction in life. We become cause for our and others' fall. In 2 Thessalonians 2:13-16 St. Paul encourages them to remain strong and firm and hold on to truth of Christ in the midst of pressures, persecutions, false teaching. Let us hold on to the truth of Christ. In Jesus and his word, we have a standard for truth and for our moral behavior.

Leaders of Israel were the followers of satan: Jesus made a difference between hereditary children and true children. The religious leaders were hereditary children of Abraham and therefore claimed to be children of God. But their actions showed them to be true children of Satan for they lived under satan's guidance. True children of Abraham are faithful followers of Jesus and they would not act as the religious leaders did. The religious leaders were not able to understand because they refused to listen. Satan used their stubbornness, pride, and prejudices to keep them from believing in Jesus. The attitudes and actions of these leaders clearly identified them as followers of Satan. Their hatred of truth, their lies, and their murderous intentions indicated how much control the devil had over them.

8:58 "Before Abraham was born, I am" - This is one of the most powerful statements uttered by Jesus. When he said that he existed before Abraham was born, he undeniably proclaimed his divinity. Not only did he say that he existed before Abraham, he also applied God's holy name "I am" (Ex 3:14). In accordance with the law given in Leviticus 24:16, the religious leaders were ready to stone Jesus for claiming to be God. They well understood what Jesus was claiming. Because they did not believe he was God, they charged him with blasphemy. In fact they were blasphemers, cursing and attacking the very God they claimed to serve.

#### CHAPTER 9: THE HEALING OF THE BLIND MAN AT THE POOL OF SILOAM

The pool of Siloam was built by Hezekiah (2 Kgs 20:20/ 2 Chro 32:30). His workers constructed an underground tunnel from a spring outside the city walls to carry water into the city. Thus the people could always get water without fear of being attacked. This was especially important during times of siege. when the blind washed in the pool of Siloam at the command of Jesus, his blindness was gone and restored sight (healing power of water). When the pharisees conducted

investigations and debated about Jesus, people were being healed and lives were being changed. The pharisees' skepticism was not based on insufficient evidence, but on jealousy of Jesus' popularity and influence on the people.

The Jewish Sabbath, Saturday, was the weekly holy day of rest. The Pharisees had made a long list of specific do's and don't's regarding the Sabbath. Kneading the clay and healing the man were considered work and therefore were forbidden. Jesus may have purposely made the clay in order to emphasize his teaching about the Sabbath - that it is right to care for others' needs even if it involves working on a day of rest. The man who had been blind was questioned about his healing. He did not know how and why he was healed but he knew that his life had been miraculously changed and he was not afraid to tell the truth. Share Christ if you have details. If not, don't worry. Just tell them how he changed your life and this is how we become instruments to bring people to Christ and Christ to people. The man's new faith was severely tested by some of the authorities. He was cursed and evicted from the synagogue. Persecution may come when we love and follow Jesus. We may lose friends and family members who are nominal christians. We may lose even our life as many suffer for their faith in Christ. But no one can take away the eternal life that Jesus gives us. After he gained his physical sight, he gained spiritual sight as he recognized Jesus as the prophet (9:17) and then as the Lord. He grew in the grace and knowledge of Jesus as his savior. The fun part of the gospel is the last verse in which Jesus called the Pharisees as blind people. They were shocked when they were called spiritually blind people by Jesus. The physical blindness can be healed but the spiritual blindness cannot be healed. The Pharisees themselves see, the blind man witnesses, his parents witness. In spite of all these proofs, they were blind spiritually. They had eyes to see but do not see, ears to hear but do not hear for they are a rebellious people (Eze 12:2). When the eye of the blind man was opened, the eyes of the Pharisees closed. We can enter the kingdom of God if we are physically blind and very hard if we are spiritually blind. In front of the previously blind man, the Pharisees become blind people because of their arrogance and hard heartedness. (For those who believe, no proof is necessary. For those who don't believe, no proof is possible" - Stuart Chase).

9: 2 "Rabbi, Who sinned this man or his parents that he was born blind?"

Is calamity or sin the result of sin? A common belief in Jewish culture was that calamity and suffering was the result of some great sin. But Christ used this man's suffering (a man born blind from birth) to teach about faith and to glorify God. We live in a fallen world where good behavior is not always regarded and bad behavior not always punished. Therefore innocent people sometimes suffer. If God took our suffering away whenever we asked, we would follow him for comfort and convenience, not out of love and devotion. Regardless of the reasons for our suffering, Jesus has the power to help us deal with it. When we suffer from a disease, tragedy or

disability, let us try not to ask, “why did this happen to me?” or “What did I do wrong?”. Instead we need to ask God to give us strength for the trial and a clearer perspective on what is happening.

Does God rejoice in our suffering? Absolutely no. We are His children. How can He do that? The Bible has many instances wherein we see God showing His compassion and empathy with the suffering Israelites. When they were slaves in Egypt and cried out to him, He heard their cry and came down to deliver them (Ex 3:7-8). In the book of Isaiah, He says repeatedly not to be afraid (Is 41:10/ 43:2/ Ps 91). IS OUR GOD A PUNISHING GOD? Yes but for our own good. God punishes people for their sins through natural disasters. God rained fire and brimstone upon Sodom and Gomorrah because of their inhabitants’ resistance to renounce sins (Gen. 19:24-25). He sent venomous snakes to afflict Israel when they became impatient and spoke against God in the desert (Num. 21:6). The people of Egypt were silenced by God’s sending plagues after plagues for their idolatry and cruel treatment to His chosen people (Ex 7-10). The creation is His and therefore nothing happens without His knowledge and approval. Either He permits calamities to happen or when it happens, he does not stop it. We can easily surmise saying God causes sickness or death not necessarily as a punishment but a chastisement or pruning for our sinful behavior. The scripture says, “He who spares the rod spoils the child” (Prov 13:24). The Father loves his children. When they misbehave, He confronts, corrects and disciplines them. The Father’s disciplinary action here is not a punishment but a caution and correction for their own good like a knife in a doctor’s hand which causes pain but finally the patient is saved.

Why tragedies in life? Jesus teaches this truth through two tragedies which caused many deaths. A building collapsed in Siloam and many died (Luke 13:2-5). A man was born blind from birth (John 9:3) and Jesus says that it was not due to his sin that he was born blind. In both the cases, the victims were totally ignorant. When a fatalistic question was posed to Jesus saying that they died because they were sinful people, Jesus corrected their wrong view saying that this unfortunate thing happened to them so that the works of God will be made visible through them. What are the works of God? Their suffering is not a disaster but an opportunity for greater things to happen in their life and in the lives of the people who come in contact with them. Greater things are already happening and it will happen in the future too since the people have learnt experience from this pandemic. The point Jesus makes here is that their deaths were not due to their sins. He does not treat us according to our sins (Ps 103:10). Therefore this pandemic should not be seen as a punishment for sin. In fact, God usually allows the world to unfold according to the laws He built into it. We live in a world, governed by natural laws and therefore we should start with the presumption that any natural evil, whether personal and communal, is a byproduct of those laws and not necessarily a punishment from God for the sins of the humanity.

Anecdote: John lost his sight in a chemical explosion at the age of thirteen. Everything looked dark in his life both inside and outside. In his deep loneliness, He hated God and everyone, spending his life in his small room. One day his father entered his room and said, 'John, winter is coming and I want you to fix the storm windows before I return'. After saying this, he turned and walked out of the room and slammed the door. John got so angry and he was boiling in his inside saying. "I am blind. How can I do this? However he moved to the garage, found the windows and a ladder, located the necessary tools, and started fixing the storm windows. To his surprise, He fixed the storm windows. Only later he found out that his father was just standing five feet away from him seeing how he was fixing the storm windows. He never left his son alone. This is the message that we get from this episode of the blind man. He felt the closeness and warmth of Jesus in his dark moments. The Lord is present in our life, especially in our difficult moments, checking on us how we handle the situation and when we fail, he comes to us and helps us because he is present in our life and we need to realize his nearness like the blind man