

SM035 The Man with Mud in His Eyes

The Feast of Tabernacles was in full swing and if anyone wondered if there would be drama at this feast because of Jesus, they were not disappointed. He taught the people. He brought deliverance to the people. Who can forget the woman who was caught in the very act of adultery and thrown at his feet. While not denying that her adultery was wrong, Jesus had refused to condemn her for God had not sent Jesus into the world to condemn the world but he sent Jesus to save the world from its many sins.

And then, on the last, great day of the Feast, during the Water Ceremony, Jesus stood in the midst of everyone and proclaimed that if anyone was thirsty they should come to him and drink and that if anyone did, they would find a fountain of life bubbling up within them and overflowing!

The Feast of Tabernacles was such a festive occasion for the nation with people living in the city and in the surrounding area in little, temporary shelters. It was like a national camp out! And how the people loved the Ceremony of Waters where the priests would go through elaborate rituals as many would sing and dance. It was also a festive occasion because of the Ceremony of Light.

In the ancient world, as it still is in many places on our planet today, people carefully observed the relationship of light and darkness. They would meticulously mark the length of the days and of the nights and would pay special attention to the spring and fall equinoxes and the solstices.

The Feast of Tabernacles occurred during the Fall equinox when the days and nights were of equal length and then the nights would grow longer. The ancient people of God would recognize this “dying of the sun” for a season and the lengthening of the dark nights and to observe this celestial phenomenon they created the Ceremony of Light.

It all began in the Court where only men were allowed. The priests had taken some of their old, worn out garments, torn pieces off of them, and shaped them into giant wicks. They then took four large stands that were capable of holding four large bowls full of olive oil. These stands with their bowls of oil were placed in the court of the women and the wicks placed in them. All they needed was for the sun to set, for the darkness to come, and then they would light the world as they sang and played their instruments.

All was now ready. The sun was setting and darkness had come to the inner court where only the men were allowed. The priests, the Levites, and men from every tribe of the Jewish people had gathered for their great celebration of light triumphing over darkness. Finally, it was time. At a signal, some priests walked through the gates that separated the men’s court from the court of the women. They carried torches and when they went into the Court of the Women how those torches illumined everything. But that small light would be nothing compared to the light that was coming.

The priests ascended the steps and at a signal they started lighting the giant wicks in the giant bowls of oil. First one, then two, then many wicks were lit. Finally, they were all on fire and the Court of the women filled with brilliant light that danced off the limestone walls of the Temple. Everyone in the city

and the surrounding areas could see the brilliant light coming from the temple and anyone who saw would have their hearts ravished as the light of the temple overcame the darkness of the world.

Then the singing began. Choirs of Levites began singing their praises to God. Other men began to sing and dance and the gates swung open completely allowing the men to enter into the Court of Women. Priests with shofars came to the steps that would descend to the Court of the Women. They took one step down and blew their trumpets loudly. The people shouted with joy for their God was the God of all the earth and they knew they were worshipping him. At each step down into the Courts, the priests would stop and blow their trumpets again until finally they were all standing beneath the giant bowls of oil that were brightly lit and proclaiming the light of God for the world.

The priests walked to the East Gate, then turned and faced west, and made their great confession of repentance and faith, "Our fathers when they were in this place turned their backs to the Temple of the Lord and their faces toward the east, and they worshipped the sun toward the east. But as for us, our eyes are turned toward the Lord."

The people rejoiced at their confession of faith in the true God. They sang. They danced. All were filled with delight, but then a voice, a solitary voice began to rise above the din and as the voice grew louder the people quieted down and listened in awe as one man spoke.

"I am the light of the world. He who follows me shall not walk in darkness but will have the light of life." It was Jesus and he had been in the court watching the proceedings but now he was walking through the court and with each proclamation was asserting his claim to be the hope of Israel and the world.

"I am the light of the world. Follow me and you will not walk in darkness. Follow me and you will have the light of life. I am the light of the world."

As Jesus walked through the court making his claim many began to walk behind him and beside him as he sought to draw people to himself as the true light. But the religious leaders would not stand for that and so they stopped him and said, "Your testimony about yourself is not true."

But Jesus said, "My testimony about myself is true. I know where I have come from. I know where I am going. But you do not know this. You are always judging things superficially. You never get to the heart of the matter. You never see what is really important. This is because you are of this world and its darkness. But I am from God and if you do not believe this you will die in your sins."

"What do you mean you are from above, from God? Who are you claiming to be?"

"What have I been saying to you from the beginning? I am from God and I am speaking the things he gave me to speak. This is what I speak in the world. A day is coming when you will lift me up. Then, in that day you will know who I am and that I have come from God in heaven and I speak only those things which he taught me to speak. He is with me and I do the things that are pleasing to him.

"I know that many of you now believe in me. Continue in my word. Continue in what I say and then you will truly be my disciples. Then, you will know the full truth and the truth will set you free."

But the religious leaders did not like what he was saying and they said, "We are the sons of Abraham and are already free. We don't need the freedom that you say that you bring. We are no one's slave!"

But Jesus looked upon them sadly and said, "Truly, truly I say to you. Whoever commits sin is the slave of sin. I have come to set you free from sin and if I set you free, then you will be truly free! I know that you are descended from Abraham. Yet, here you are seeking to kill me, and I have come from God in heaven! I am speaking the things that I have heard from my Father. You are speaking the things you have heard from your father."

"Abraham is our father!"

"If you are the sons of Abraham, then live like Abraham. But obviously you are not the sons of Abraham because Abraham loved God and here you are trying to kill me and I have come from God. Abraham would never have done this."

But the religious leaders were more enraged and they said, "God is our father,"

But Jesus said, "Your father is the devil and you want to do the desires of your father. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth because there is no truth in him. Whenever he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own nature, for he is a liar and the father of lies. But because I speak the truth, you do not believe Me because you and I have different fathers. Which one of you convicts Me of sin? If I speak truth, why do you not believe Me? He who is of God hears the words of God; for this reason you do not hear them, because you are not of God."

But the Pharisees were not about to give in so easily to Jesus' strong words and so they said, "Didn't we say correctly that you are some half-breed, religiously mixed up, demon possessed man!"

But Jesus said, "I am from God and I do not have an evil spirit. I honor My Father, and you dishonor Me. But I do not seek My glory; there is One who seeks and judges. Truly, truly, I say to you, if anyone keeps My word he will never see death."

The religious leaders said to Him, "Now we know that You have a demon. Abraham died, and the prophets also; and You say, 'If anyone keeps My word, he will never die.' Surely You are not greater than our father Abraham, who died? The prophets died too; whom do You make Yourself out to be?"

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'; and you have not come to know Him, but I know Him; and if I say that I do not know Him, I will be a liar like you, but I do know Him and keep His word. Your father Abraham rejoiced to see me, and he saw it and was glad."

The religious leaders said, "What do you mean Abraham saw you? Abraham lived 2000 years ago. You are not yet fifty years old, and have You seen Abraham?"

Jesus said to them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was born, I am."

The people were stunned. Jesus had used the sacred name of God – the name that God used when he revealed himself to Moses as the great “I am.” There was no mistaking it. Jesus had claimed to be the God of all creation. The God who gives light. The God who banishes the darkness. He had said he was the light of the world and now he was saying that he was the great I am.

Interlude

Jesus and his disciples walked out of the temple area and down toward the southern part of the city of Jerusalem. The temple was still brilliantly lit from the Ceremony of Light but Jesus was concerned about the darkness that dwelt within the heart of so many.

Soon, they passed by a man who was softly saying, “Alms for the poor. Alms for the blind. I am a poor blind man. Alms for the poor. Alms for the blind. I am a poor, blind man.”

They all stopped and listened for a moment and one of the disciples said, “Jesus, what sin caused this man to be born this way? Was it his sin? Was it his parents’ sin?”

And Jesus said, “It was neither him nor his parents. But it was so that the works of God might be shown in him.” And then, as Jesus said that, the light from the Temple Ceremony which was now completed, began to go out. The city began to be engulfed in the darkness of evening again, and Jesus walked toward the man and said, “We must work the works of God as long as God gives us opportunity. Night is coming when no man can work. While I am in the world, I am the light of the world.”

He then knelt down by the man while the disciples watched. He put his face close to the ground and began spitting into the dirt. What was he doing? Jesus was making mud with his spittle. He scooped up some of the mud he had made and began applying it to the man’s eyes. The man resisted at first. Who was doing this to him? Was someone trying to hurt him? Was someone making fun of him? But as the mud from Jesus’ saliva penetrated into his eyes, the man began to feel a softness and warmth and power surge into his body and when Jesus said, “Take him to the pool of Siloam and wash him,” the man with mud in his eyes did not resist.

The pool of Siloam was a small pool used for ritual baths on the southern slopes of the city of Jerusalem. From ancient times it had been an important part of the city but now its importance would forever be marked by what was about to take place.

The disciples took the man with the mud in his eyes to the pool and helped him reach its edge. “Here you are friend. Do as he says. Wash the mud from those blind eyes.”

And as the man stooped down he was saying, “I don’t know why he did this to me. Who do you say did this to me? Jesus?” And as he washed he continued speaking. “Why would he put mud in my blind ... in my ... my eyes? I can see. I can see. Jesus has healed me. I can see.”

The disciples laughed and rejoiced as the once blind man continued to shout out to others, “I can see! I can see!”

The news spread and the man went home to his family. They were astonished as he greeted them with joy and as his eyes were clear and he could see everything. His family took him from house to house and showed him to his neighbors and they marveled that the one who used to sit and beg for money was now able to see and they asked, "How did this happen?"

And the man said, "The man who is called Jesus made clay from the dust of the earth, he put it on my eyes and told me to go to pool of Siloam and wash, so I went to the pool and washed the mud off and when I did, I could see!"

But some of the neighbors were deeply suspicious of Jesus and they said, "Where is this Jesus? Where is this man who did this to you? And when did he do it?"

And the man said, "I don't know. When I went back to the place where I have begged for years, he was gone. But as for when he did it, it was the Sabbath."

And so they said, "The Sabbath? Our day of rest? Jesus did this to you on the Sabbath? We better go talk to our leaders about this and report to them what has happened," and so they, along with the man, went to the religious leaders.

And they said, "Tell us what happened," and the man who could now see said, "The man who is called Jesus made mud from the dust of the earth, he put it on my eyes and told me to go to pool of Siloam and wash, so I went to the pool and washed the mud off and when I did, I could see!"

Jesus! Again it was Jesus! He had spoiled their Water Ceremony at the Feast of Tabernacles by telling everyone to come to him and drink. He had spoiled their Light Ceremony by claiming to be the light of the world. Now he was healing on the Sabbath again and this was work. He made clay. He told the man to wash. He was flouting their laws and the leaders said, "This is more proof! Jesus is not from God. He makes outrageous claims for himself and he does not keep the Sabbath but he works on the Sabbath and tells others to work."

But some said, "Wait. How can a man who sins as you say he sins, how can a man perform such miracles?" And so an argument erupted and back and forth they went – some for Jesus, some against Jesus. Finally, one of the leaders turned to the man who was blind but who now could see and said to him, "What do you say about him since he gave you sight."

And the poor once-blind man said, "I think he is a prophet."

Some of the leaders said, "I don't believe this. I think this is a setup. I'm not even sure this man was ever blind." And others said, "Let's ask his family," and when the family was brought in they asked, "Is this your son?"

The parents were very afraid because they had heard stories of what these religious leaders could do to people. And so they feebly answered, "Yes, this is our son."

"And you say he was born blind?"

“Yes, he was born blind. It has been a great grief to us.”

“Well, if he was born blind, how is it that he now sees?”

And although the parents knew their son’s story and that Jesus had healed him, they greatly feared the religious leaders and knew that the leaders were against Jesus and they said, “how he now sees, we do not know; or who opened his eyes, we do not know. Ask him; he is of age, he will speak for himself.”

And so the leaders called in the man again and said, “God has healed you so give glory to him. This man Jesus is a sinner.”

But the man said, “Whether he is a sinner or not, I don’t know. One thing I do know. I was blind. But now, I see.”

“What did he do to you? How did he open your eyes?”

And the man who had been blind started laughing at them and their refusal to believe what was right in front of them and said, “I told you already and you did not listen; why do you want to hear it again? You do not want to become His disciples too, do you?”

“You are His disciple, but we are disciples of Moses. We know that God has spoken to Moses, but as for this man, we do not know where He is from.”

The man who had been blind answered and said to them, “Well, here is an amazing thing, that you do not know where He is from, and yet He opened my eyes. We know that God does not hear the prayers of sinners; but if anyone fears God and does His will, God hears him. Since the beginning of time it has never been heard that anyone opened the eyes of a person born blind. If this man were not from God, He could do nothing.”

But the religious leaders had heard enough and they said, “You were born entirely in sins, and are you teaching us?” So they put him out and told him he could never come to the synagogue again to worship.

And when Jesus heard that they had done this to the man that he had healed, he came to the man. His disciples and a crowd of people including the religious leaders who were keeping a close eye on Jesus came also and they heard Jesus say to man who could now see, “Do you believe in the One who has healed you?”

And the man who was blind, did not know that he was speaking with Jesus for Jesus had sent him away to the pool of Siloam to wash his eyes and when he was healed Jesus was already gone. He had heard his voice and felt his touch but he had never laid eyes on him.

And so Jesus asked, “Do you believe in the One who has healed you,” the man said, “Who is he, sir, that I may believe.”

And Jesus said, “He is the one who is talking with you. I am Jesus. I am the one who has healed you.”

And the man said, “Lord, I believe.” And he worshiped Him.

As the man fell to his knees and worshipped him, Jesus turned to the religious leaders, looked at them with a mixture of anger and sorrow and said, "For judgment I came into this world, so that those who do not see may see, and that those who see may become blind."

The religious leaders said to Him, "You are not talking about us are you? We are not blind too, are we?"

Jesus said to them, "If you were blind and needy and humble, you would have no sin because I would have healed you. But you are proud and think you know and see everything. And for this reason you are blind and do not see the light standing in front of you, and your sins are not forgiven."