

John 8:12-16

12 Again Jesus spoke to them, saying, "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness but will have the light of life." 13 Then the Pharisees said to him, "You are testifying on your own behalf; your testimony is not valid." 14 Jesus answered, "Even if I testify on my own behalf, my testimony is valid because I know where I have come from and where I am going, but you do not know where I come from or where I am going. 15 You judge by human standards; I judge no one. 16 Yet even if I do judge, my judgment is valid; for it is not I alone who judge, but I and the Father who sent me.

Today's Scripture picks up where we left off last week. Jesus is engaged in an open conflict with the religious leaders. The easiest thing for him would be to avoid them altogether and just leave the area. The other gospels are clear. That is exactly what he did because his time had not come. The Gospel of John shows Jesus in Jerusalem much more than the other Gospels. He is at the temple educating people and calling out the hypocrisy of the religious leaders. This becomes the catalyst for the hostility against him.

I'm going to explain a concept that I introduced last week called a challenge to honor. In the culture of that society, things were much different back then compared to today. It was a patriarchal culture; a man's world, dominated by men. The men controlled everything and the women virtually had no rights. The people tolerated this because of the worldview of the culture. It was what they knew and accepted, even when it was unjustified, because they knew no other way. Within this system power was fueled by public opinion and impressionism. All social power, and all political power, comes from the people. I will repeat this for emphasis. All power comes from the people. Power comes from whatever you can take from the people by force, manipulation, deception, and fear. Power also comes from whatever the people are willing to grant to you as deemed acceptable through norms and social expectations. So, the religious leaders put a very high value on public opinion and impressionism. They made a public display of their social status; they took the seats of honor, had flamboyant prayers, and dressed for show. It worked for them because of the worldview of the culture. It was the system that the people knew, were used to, and support. Even when it was not in their own best interest, they still support it because it was their worldview.

In regards to Jesus, the religious leaders had three major concerns. One concern was that he claimed to be the Son of God. In that culture the top of the social status belonged to the king and the chief priest. Next were the successors to the king and the chief priest - son of the king, son of the chief priest, and the high priests. So, when Jesus claimed to be the Son of God, it was a challenge to their honor and a threat to their social status. To put this in perspective, the Son of God trumps everyone else. The social status of the Son of God is above the high priest. This is a very serious concern for the religious leaders. It is a threat to their social status and power. They cannot tolerate it. So, they try to stop Jesus. But they can't stop him. So, they plot to kill Jesus. Another major concern is that Jesus calls out their hypocrisy. They had a strict observance of law yet they did not follow all of the law. They did not care for humanity. There are several places in Old Testament scripture that calls for care of the underprivileged. The widows, orphans, and immigrants, were all being neglected by the religious leaders. When Jesus called out their hypocrisy it created hostility because instead of repenting and changing, they wanted to maintain their status quo and keep their power. The other major concern was the popularity of Jesus. None

of this would matter if Jesus was not popular. The divine status as the Son of God would not matter to them if no one listened. His divine status was a threat to them because the crowds came to him. Calling out their hypocrisy would not matter if no one was listening. He was a threat to them when he criticized their hypocrisy because large crowds were listening. In this patriarchal society, where status was fueled by public opinion and impressionism, the popularity of Jesus was a big threat because it held power. The three concerns compound together to create a dangerous threat to the religious leaders which resulted in conflict.

The conflict is played out on two fronts; overtly and covertly. The scriptures reveal both; what Jesus faces in the public arena and the secrecy - the plot to kill Jesus, the conspiracy, and the illegal activities. The Scripture takes place immediately after the religious leaders are unable to trap Jesus with a woman caught in adultery. Jesus is allowed to continue to teach because they can't stop him. So, they make a charge against him that his claim to divinity is not valid. Jesus does not argue with them. Jesus counters with a lesson. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness. Here is a lesson for us on the necessity of following Jesus. We are to follow Jesus words and actions. I preach it over and over again. It is taught many times in many places in the Bible. It is vital to faith formation. It is also a lesson to the religious leaders who are engaged in illegal and secretive activities to try to stop Jesus. There is no walking in darkness for the followers of Jesus. The other lesson from Jesus in today's Scripture is on judging. Jesus counters the challenge of the religious leaders with a valuable lesson on judging others. Judgment is on no one. We are offered salvation by grace. What makes it so valuable is that this free gift comes to us directly from God through the Son of God.