

BEHOLD THE LAMB: SESSION 8

Before Abraham Was, I AM

John 7-8 · A Catholic Journey Through the Gospel of John

Part 1: Leader Preparation Guide

Session Overview

Discovery Aim: Participants discover that the Feast of Tabernacles, with its water-drawing ceremony and its blazing candelabras, is the stage set on which Jesus makes his two great claims of these chapters, living water and light of the world, and that the whole crescendo resolves into three syllables that get stones picked up: before Abraham was, I AM. They also discover, at last, what has been restraining the death plot: his hour had not yet come.

Catholic Touchstone: The divine name. The Catechism teaches that Jesus reveals that he himself bears the name I AM (CCC 211), the name given to Moses at the burning bush, and that believing he is I AM is, in his own words, a matter of life and death (8:24; CCC 590). Tonight the tally line the group opened at a Samaritan well reaches its summit.

What You Need to Know

Everything in these two chapters happens at one feast, and the feast is doing half the preaching, so learn its liturgy before you walk in. Tabernacles, *Sukkoth*, was the joyful autumn feast commanded in Leviticus 23:33-43: seven days living in booths to remember the wilderness years, when Israel had no house, no cistern, and no lamp, and God supplied water from the rock and light from the pillar of fire. Second Temple practice built two great ceremonies on those memories. Each morning of the feast, a priest led a procession to the Pool of Siloam, drew water in a golden pitcher, and poured it out at the altar while, as later tradition describes the rite, Isaiah 12:3 was sung, with joy you will draw water from the wells of salvation, praying for the autumn rains and for the prophesied rivers of the age to come, when living waters shall flow out from Jerusalem (Zechariah 14:8). And each evening, four towering golden candelabras were lit in the Court of the Women, by the temple treasury, and the rabbis said there was no courtyard in Jerusalem that did not glow with their light, the pillar of fire remembered in flame. Hold both ceremonies in your hand, because Jesus is about to stand up in the middle of each one and claim to be what it was asking for.

Chapter 7 opens with Jesus' own brothers, his kinsmen, goading him in unbelief and Jesus going up to the feast quietly, on his own clock: my time has not yet come. The crowds spend the whole feast split, and John keeps count of the fractures: some said he is a good man, others said no, he is leading the people astray (7:12); can this be the Christ? (7:26); this is really the prophet, this is the Christ, but can the Christ come from Galilee? (7:40-41). Note the pattern for your group: nobody at this feast manages to stay neutral about Jesus, and the middle keeps collapsing. Then, at 7:30, the sentence your board has been waiting for since Session 6: they sought to arrest him; but no one laid hands on him, because his hour had not yet come. There it is. The death plot opened at 5:18 and has been straining forward ever since, and tonight the group discovers what the restraint is called. It happens again at 8:20, word for word, in the treasury itself, with the authorities standing right there. Make the board moment count: draw the line connecting the death plot to the Hour. The plot cannot fire until the Hour permits, which

means the cross, when it comes, will not be an accident that catches Jesus out; it will be an appointment he keeps.

Then the water cry. On the last day of the feast, the great day, with the week's water rite either at its height or just ended, since the sources leave open whether John's great day is the seventh day of the pouring or the eighth, Jesus stood up and proclaimed, if any one thirst, let him come to me and drink (7:37). Either way the cry lands on the ceremony, as a climax or as the filling of its absence. For seven days Jerusalem had watched water poured out at the altar while singing about wells of salvation; on the great day a Galilean stands up in the crowd and announces that the well is a person. And John steps forward with the gloss that resolves one of our oldest threads: now this he said about the Spirit, which those who believed in him were to receive; for as yet the Spirit had not been given, because Jesus was not yet glorified (7:39). The living water promised to the Samaritan woman is named at last: the Holy Spirit. But notice the hinge John hangs it on: not yet given, because not yet glorified. The water waits on the glory, and in this Gospel, as your lifted up line already whispers, the glory begins at the cross; John will not let it be separated from the rising and the return to the Father, but the lifting up is where it starts. A textual note for your preparation: verse 38 can be punctuated so that the rivers flow from the believer's heart or from Christ's; both readings are ancient, and the Church's devotion has long heard the second alongside the first, for reasons a certain soldier's spear will make plain in Session 13. Hold it with open hands and say nothing forward-looking.

The chapter ends with two gifts. Nicodemus resurfaces (7:50-52), the man from the night, now speaking up in the council for due process: does our law judge a man without first giving him a hearing? It costs him a sneer, are you from Galilee too? Your group was told in Session 4 to keep watching this man; let them enjoy the sighting. He is moving, slowly, from night toward day, and his arc has one scene left. And the experts hand us an irony: search, and you will see that no prophet is to rise from Galilee (7:52). Their searching is as sloppy as it is confident: Jonah came from Gath-hepher, in what became Galilee, from Gath-hepher (2 Kings 14:25), and not one of them asks where this Nazarene was actually born. The same men who search the Scriptures (5:39) cannot be bothered to search a birth record. Diligence in the text without willingness toward the person: chapter 5's diagnosis, walking around at a feast.

The woman caught in adultery (7:53-8:11) needs honest handling on two fronts, and your group can bear both. Textually: the passage is absent from the earliest Greek manuscripts, and the RSV2CE, like most modern Bibles, prints it with a footnote saying so; it may well have circulated as a cherished independent memory before finding this home before finding its home here. Canonically: the Church receives it without hesitation as inspired Scripture, part of the canon affirmed at Trent with all its parts; a passage's travel history is not a verdict on its truth. Then teach the scene itself, which is a perfect trap perfectly escaped: Moses commanded stoning, capital execution, as John presents it (18:31), lay with Rome; condemn her and lose the crowd and break Roman law, release her and break Moses. Jesus writes on the ground, the only time Scripture shows him writing, and no one knows what; then one sentence, let him who is without sin among you be the first to throw a stone at her, and the accusers drain away, eldest first, the ones with the longest memories. Augustine's summary of the final tableau has never been bettered: two were left, the wretched woman and Mercy. And the last exchange holds the full Catholic balance in two clauses that must never be separated: neither do I condemn you, mercy without condition, and, go, and do not sin again, mercy with direction. Absolution and amendment: every confessional in the world runs on this verse.

Chapter 8 then rises in three steps to the summit. Step one: I am the light of the world (8:12), spoken in the treasury (8:20), which is to say in the Court of the Women, in the very court of the great candelabras, as tradition stages it of the feast, or beside their cold stands if the feast had just ended:

either way, the second predicate I AM lands on the second ceremony. Step two: the absolute uses begin. You will die in your sins unless you believe that I am he (RSV2CE; the Greek a bare egō eimi) (8:24): no predicate, nothing to complete the sentence, and believing it is life or death. When you have lifted up the Son of Man, then you will know that I am he (8:28): the second lifted up saying, and it fuses with the Name; the cross will be the demonstration of the I AM. Two of your board's longest lines cross here; draw the intersection. Step three: the summit. Your father Abraham rejoiced that he was to see my day; he saw it and was glad... Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I AM (8:56-58). The Greek is a deliberate collision of verbs: *prin Abraam genesthai, egō eimi*, before Abraham came to be, I AM. Not I was, which would claim mere priority; the timeless present against the creature's becoming, the same deep contrast the group met in the Prologue, being against becoming in Session 1, where created things were made and the Word simply was. And now, at last, deploy the text you have held in reserve since the well: Exodus 3:14. The steelman gets its full hearing first; the press is where Moses' bush finally burns for your group. They took up stones: Leviticus 24:16 prescribed stoning for blaspheming the Name, and these hearers, steeped in their Scriptures and their languages and whose theology was professional, reached for rocks, not rebuttals. As at 5:18, John records no correction of their reading, because they heard a divine claim, and the narrative lets their hearing stand. Jesus hid himself and left the temple: the Hour, still, had not yet come.

Old Testament Roots and Fulfillment

- **Leviticus 23:33-43.** The institution of Tabernacles: booths, memory of the wilderness, the feast of joy. Leader background for the stage set.
- **Isaiah 12:3 and Zechariah 14:8.** Wells of salvation, and living waters flowing out from Jerusalem: the songs and hopes of the water ceremony. Leader reads Isaiah 12:3 aloud at the water cry.
- **Exodus 13:21.** The pillar of fire: the memory behind the candelabras and the claim behind the light of the world. Leader background.
- **Exodus 3:13-15.** I AM WHO I AM; say this to the people of Israel, I AM has sent me to you. THE live discovery of the study's I AM thread, held since Session 5 and deployed tonight.
- **Isaiah 43:10-13.** That you may know and believe me and understand that I am He; the Greek Old Testament renders it egō eimi, God's exclusive self-declaration. Live discovery inside the steelman press.
- **Leviticus 24:16.** Stoning as the penalty for blaspheming the Name: why the stones at 8:59 are an act of interpretation. Quick reference.
- **2 Kings 14:25.** Jonah, from Gath-hepher in Galilee: the fact the experts' search missed. One-line irony.

Voices of the Church

VOICES OF THE CHURCH: St. Augustine of Hippo (354-430), Doctor of the Church, Tractates on the Gospel of John, Tractate 33

On the woman caught in adultery, Augustine compresses the final tableau into four Latin words the Church has never forgotten: *relicti sunt duo, misera et misericordia*, two were left, the wretched woman and Mercy. The accusers, he notes, were not refuted; they were remembered to themselves, and they left eldest first. And he will not let mercy be softened into permission: the Lord condemned the sin, not the sinner, for he did not say, go and sin, but go, and sin no more. Mercy

meets us where we are and refuses to leave us there.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH: St. Hilary of Poitiers (c. 310-367), Doctor of the Church, On the Trinity, Book 1

Hilary tells us his own conversion turned on the divine name. Searching the philosophers for what God is, he opened Moses and was stopped cold by the words from the bush: I AM WHO I AM. No definition, he marveled, could be more worthy of God than being itself, absolute, unbegun, unending. And then he opened John and found the same eternity speaking in time: in the beginning was the Word. What the bush declared and the Prologue confessed, Jesus speaks in the first person at 8:58, and Hilary spent his life and his exile defending the identity.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH: St. John Chrysostom (c. 347-407), Doctor of the Church, Homilies on the Gospel of John, Homily 55

Chrysostom fastens on the verbs of 8:58. Jesus did not say, before Abraham was, I was, which would merely outrank the patriarch; he said I AM, and Chrysostom hears the deliberate echo: as the Father uses the name I AM, so does Christ, for it signifies continuous being, exempt from all time. That, Chrysostom says, is why they took up stones: they heard not a claim of age but a claim of the Name, and, unwilling to worship, they reached for the penalty instead.

Catechism Connection

- **CCC 206-207.** The mystery of the divine name revealed at the bush: I AM WHO I AM, the name that is not a definition to master but a God who is faithfully, mysteriously present.
- **CCC 211.** The Catechism's own reading of tonight: Jesus reveals that he himself bears the divine name, citing when you have lifted up the Son of Man, then you will realize that I AM.
- **CCC 590.** Jesus asked his hearers to believe that I am he (RSV2CE; the Greek *a bare egō eimi*), on pain of dying in their sins; only a divine identity can justify so absolute a demand.
- **CCC 748.** Christ is the light of humanity: the opening words of the Council's great constitution on the Church, which exists only to reflect his light, as the moon reflects the sun.
- **CCC 1846-1848.** The Gospel is the revelation of God's mercy to sinners, and grace must uncover sin in order to convert the heart: the anatomy of neither do I condemn you; go, and do not sin again.

Thread Watch

THREAD WATCH

The Hour (mechanism REVEALED). Twice tonight, 7:30 and 8:20: no one laid hands on him, because his hour had not yet come. The group discovers what restrains the death plot. Draw the connecting line on the board between the two threads, and name the implication aloud once: the cross will be kept like an appointment, not suffered like an ambush. Resolve nothing further.

I AM (CRESCENDO). Four entries in one night: light of the world (8:12, second predicate), and the absolute uses at 8:24, 8:28, and the summit at 8:58, with Exodus 3:14 and Isaiah 43:10 finally deployed. The Baptist's I am not is now fully paid. The line is not finished; there are more predicates

ahead, and one absolute use in a garden that will knock soldiers down. Say nothing of it.

Lifted up. Second saying, 8:28, and it fuses with the Name: when you have lifted up the Son of Man, then you will know that I am he. Mark the intersection of the two lines. One saying remains.

Living water (NAMED). John's gloss at 7:39 names the water as the Holy Spirit, resolving the promise of chapter 4, and hangs the gift on a hinge: not yet given, because Jesus was not yet glorified. The hinge connects this line to the Hour and the lifting up. Note the connection without explaining it.

Light and darkness. Major advance at 8:12 under the feast's candelabras. Next session is the thread's masterpiece; end tonight with the line glowing.

Nicodemus. Second sighting (7:50-52), speaking up at cost. The group was told to watch him; reward the watchers. One scene remains, and it is leader knowledge only.

The seven signs tally. No new signs tonight; two chapters of words at a feast. Tell the group the drought ends next week, spectacularly.

Session Goals

1. Participants can describe the two ceremonies of Tabernacles and map Jesus' water and light claims onto them.
2. Participants discover at 7:30 and 8:20 that the Hour is the restraint on the death plot, and can state what that means about the cross.
3. Participants can hold the textual honesty and the canonical confidence of the adulteress passage together, and can recite its two inseparable clauses.
4. Participants hear the strongest case that *egō eimi* is ordinary Greek, and weigh it against the tense collision of 8:58, Exodus 3, Isaiah 43, and the stones.
5. Participants can explain why the audience reached for rocks, and why John, as at 5:18, records no correction of their reading.

Time Note (90 minutes)

Opening prayer and Win, 12 minutes. Build, 60 minutes; two chapters have earned it. Send, Live It This Week, and closing prayer, 18 minutes. If running long, the pre-chosen cuts are, in order: Build question 1's discussion portion (teach the feast in three minutes of straight narration and move), the Jonah irony in question 4 (one sentence), and the Dig Deeper on the freedom saying. Do not cut: the 7:30 Hour discovery, the water cry with John's gloss, the adulteress, or anything from 8:24 to the end. The last twenty minutes of Build belong to the Name; guard them like the treasury.

Part 2: Discussion Guide

Opening Prayer

Leader prays aloud: Father, at the feast of booths your people remembered the wilderness, when they had no roof, no well, and no lamp but you. We come to you the same way tonight. Jesus, light of the world, fountain of living water, speak your Name over us, and let us never hear it without wonder. Amen.

Win (open the conversation)

1. Have you ever been somewhere, a festival, a stadium, a vigil, where the atmosphere itself made everything said and done feel ten times bigger? What made it work?
2. What is the boldest true thing you have ever heard someone say out loud, knowing what it would cost them?

Transition: Tonight covers two chapters and one feast, and the feast is half the sermon. Before we read, you need to see the stage.

Build (inductive discovery)

Question 1. Leader teaches for three minutes, then asks. The setting is Tabernacles: a week in booths remembering the wilderness, when Israel had no house, no well, no lamp, and God gave water from the rock and fire in the pillar. Two ceremonies dominated the feast: every morning, water carried from the Pool of Siloam in a golden pitcher and poured out at the altar while the people sang, with joy you will draw water from the wells of salvation; every evening, four giant golden candelabras blazing in the temple courts, said to light every courtyard in Jerusalem. Now read John 7:1-13. The crowds spend the feast arguing about Jesus. List the verdicts you hear in verse 12, and notice what verdict is missing.

ANSWER: share after the discussion

He is a good man; no, he is leading the people astray. Later the feast adds: this is the prophet, this is the Christ, can the Christ come from Galilee? The missing verdict is the modern favorite: he is fine, it does not matter, no opinion required. Nobody at Tabernacles manages neutrality; the middle keeps collapsing, and John counts the fractures on purpose. And hold the two ceremonies in your hand all night: water and light. Watch what Jesus does with each.

Question 2. Read 7:25-32. The authorities finally move: they sought to arrest him. Read verse 30 aloud, slowly, twice. Since Session 6 our board has carried a death plot straining forward. What has been holding it back, and what is the restraint called? What does this mean about how the story is going to end?

ANSWER: share after the discussion

No one laid hands on him, because his hour had not yet come. There it is: the restraint on the death plot has a name, and it is the phrase the board has carried since a wedding in Cana. Draw the line connecting the two threads and let the group feel the architecture snap together. And say the implication once, plainly: the plot cannot fire until the Hour permits. Whatever happens at the end of this Gospel will not be an ambush that catches Jesus out; it will be an appointment he keeps, at a

time already set. It happens again, word for word, at 8:20, with the authorities standing in the same room as him. Twice in one feast, the trap closes on air.

Question 3. Read 7:37-39. Picture the staging: seven mornings of golden pitchers and poured water and Isaiah's song about wells of salvation, and then, on the last day, the great day, a Galilean stands up in the crowd and shouts. What does he claim? And read John's explanation in verse 39 with our board in view: which of our oldest threads just got named, and what strange condition does John attach to the gift?

ANSWER: share after the discussion

If any one thirst, let him come to me and drink: the well the ceremony was singing about is a person, standing in the crowd. Leader, read Isaiah 12:3 aloud here. And verse 39 resolves a thread the board has carried since a well in Samaria: the living water is the Holy Spirit, named at last. But John hangs the gift on a hinge: as yet the Spirit had not been given, because Jesus was not yet glorified. The water waits on the glory. File the hinge next to the lifted up line and say nothing more; the group does not yet know what this Gospel means by glorified, and they should be allowed to find out the hard way.

Question 4. Read 7:40-52. More fractures, officers coming back empty-handed and starstruck (no man ever spoke like this man!), and then a familiar face. Who speaks up in the council, what does he risk by it, and where have we met him? And savor the experts' parting shot in verse 52: search, and you will see that no prophet is to rise from Galilee. What is wrong with their search?

ANSWER: share after the discussion

Nicodemus, the man who came by night in chapter 3, now speaking up in daylight company: does our law judge a man without first giving him a hearing? It earns him contempt, are you from Galilee too?, which in that room was an insult. The group was told to keep watching him; here he is, moving, slowly, from night toward voice. As for the experts: their search is as sloppy as it is smug. Jonah came from Gath-hepher, in what became Galilee, from Gath-hepher (2 Kings 14:25), and not one of these scholars asks the obvious question about where this Nazarene was actually born. The same men who search the Scriptures (5:39) cannot be bothered to search a birth record. Diligence without willingness: chapter 5's diagnosis, out for a walk at a feast.

Question 5. Read 7:53-8:11. Two honest notes before discussing: your Bible probably footnotes this passage as absent from the earliest manuscripts, and it is; it seems to have traveled on its own as a cherished apostolic memory before settling here. And the Church receives it, without hesitation, as inspired canonical Scripture; a passage's travel history is not a verdict on its truth. Now the scene: why is the question a perfect trap? What does Jesus' one sentence do to the accusers? And weigh the final exchange: what two things does Jesus say to her, and what happens if you keep only one of them?

ANSWER: share after the discussion

The trap: Moses commanded stoning for adultery, and capital execution, as John presents it (18:31), lay with Rome; condemn her and he breaks Roman law and his own reputation for mercy, release her and he breaks Moses. There is no safe answer, which is the design. Jesus stoops and writes on the ground, the only time Scripture shows him writing, and no one knows what; then: let him who is without sin among you be the first to throw a stone at her. He does not deny the Law; he appoints

qualified executioners, and the court adjourns itself, eldest first, the longest memories leaving soonest. Augustine's four words: two were left, the wretched woman and Mercy. And the ending holds the entire Catholic doctrine of mercy in two clauses that must never be separated: neither do I condemn you, and, go, and do not sin again. Keep only the first and mercy curdles into permission; keep only the second and the Law returns with stones in its hand. Absolution and amendment, mercy and direction: every confessional on earth runs on this verse, and the sinners in the room, all of us, should hear it as addressed personally.

Question 6. Read 8:12-20. I am the light of the world. Two observations to make: first, verse 20 tells us where he said it; what stood in that courtyard during this feast? Second, for the board: what kind of I AM is this, and what does verse 20 repeat that we heard at 7:30?

ANSWER: share after the discussion

He spoke in the treasury, which stood in the Court of the Women, exactly where the four great candelabras of the feast blazed each evening, the remembered pillar of fire. Under that light, or beside its cold stands, he says: I am the light of the world; he who follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life. Second ceremony, second claim: first the water, now the fire. Log the second predicate I AM on the board. And verse 20 closes with the shield again, word for word: no one arrested him, because his hour had not yet come. In the treasury, surrounded by authorities, untouchable, until the appointment.

Question 7. Read 8:21-30, and listen for two sentences that our board is about to feast on. Verse 24: what must they believe, on pain of what, and notice, believe that he is what, exactly? The sentence has no ending. And verse 28: which two of our threads just crossed?

ANSWER: share after the discussion

You will die in your sins unless you believe that I am he (RSV2CE; the Greek a bare egō eimi): egō eimi, absolute, no predicate, nothing completing the thought. Translators patch it (that I am he), but the Greek just stops, and believing it is declared a matter of eternal life or death, which is an insane demand unless the unfinished sentence is a Name. And verse 28: when you have lifted up the Son of Man, then you will know that I am he. The second lifted up saying, fused with the Name: the cross itself will be the demonstration of who he is. Two of the board's longest lines cross here; draw the intersection and let it stand without commentary. The chapter is climbing; one step remains.

Question 8. Read 8:48-59, and slow down at the last exchange. They ask how a man not yet fifty can have seen Abraham. Listen to the exact verbs of the answer: before Abraham was, I AM. What two verbs collide in that sentence, and where did this study first teach us to notice exactly that grammar? And what do the hearers do next, and what does their reaction tell us about what they heard?

ANSWER: share after the discussion

The Greek collides on purpose: prin Abraam genesthai, egō eimi, before Abraham came to be, I AM. Not I was, which would merely outrank the patriarch. Becoming against being, the creature's genesthai against the timeless present, and the group has met this grammar before, in Session 1, in the Prologue: all things were made, but the Word simply was. Verse 58 is the Prologue spoken in the

first person, out loud, at a feast, to armed theologians. And their reaction is itself exegesis: they took up stones to throw at him, the Leviticus 24:16 penalty for blaspheming the Name. These hearers were at home in the Scriptures and in the languages of their own world, and their theology was professional, and they reached for rocks, not rebuttals. Note, as at 5:18, what John does not do: he does not say they misunderstood. Hold everyone right here; before we answer what this sentence means, we owe the other reading its full strength.

Steelman: Is I AM Just Ordinary Greek?

BUILD THE STEELMAN FIRST: present this at full strength

Skeptical scholars, Unitarians, and Jehovah's Witnesses press a genuinely serious objection here, and it deserves its full weight. *Egō eimi*, the argument runs, is perfectly ordinary Greek for it is I or I am he. It is not automatically the divine name: next week, in fact, a healed beggar will use the identical two words about himself (9:9, I am the man), and nobody will accuse him of claiming deity. So at 8:58 Jesus may be claiming something remarkable, pre-existence, priority over Abraham, the way the Baptist said he was before me, and even messianic pre-existence was thinkable in some Jewish speculation without any claim to be the God of Israel. On this reading, before Abraham was, I am means I existed before Abraham did: an astonishing claim, but a claim of age and rank, not of the Name. The crowd's stones prove only that they thought him arrogant or blasphemous in a broad sense, and Catholic apologists, the argument concludes, have loaded two ordinary Greek words with a burning bush they cannot carry. State it fairly; the 9:9 usage is real, and the grammar point is honest.

Question 9 (press from the text, live discovery). Three probes, and two of them are lookups. First, the grammar the steelman skips: if Jesus meant only I existed before Abraham, what tense would the sentence use, and what tense does it use? Second: send half the group to Exodus 3:13-15, the text this study has kept in reserve for four sessions, and read God's answer to Moses aloud. Send the other half to Isaiah 43:10-13 and read God's courtroom speech: that you may know and believe me and understand that I am He. Third: weigh the audience. Who stood closer to that language and those Scriptures, we or they, and what did they reach for?

ANSWER: share after the discussion

First, the tense: mere priority says I was, and Greek says it easily; the Baptist said exactly that (he was before me, 1:30). Jesus refuses the past tense: before Abraham came to be, I AM, the timeless present set against the creature's becoming, a sentence that is a deliberate clash of tenses, ordinary grammar carrying extraordinary freight. Second, the discoveries: at the bush, God names Himself I AM WHO I AM; say this to the people of Israel, I AM has sent me to you. And in Isaiah's courtroom, the Greek Old Testament that John's readers used renders God's refrain with the very words *egō eimi*: that you may know and believe me and understand that I AM. Absolute, predicate-less *egō eimi* was the Greek Bible's signature for the self-declaration of the God of Israel, and Jesus has now used it that way at 8:24, 8:28, and 8:58, in a Gospel whose first sentence called him God. Third, the 9:9 point actually sharpens ours: John knows the ordinary usage perfectly well and shows us a beggar using it, which is precisely how we know the marked usages are marked; a healed man saying I am the man has an antecedent in plain view (the dialogue supplies the man), while 8:58

has nothing to complete it except Exodus and Isaiah. And the audience: hearers at home in the language and the Scriptures of that world, professional theologians, who heard the sentence in real time and reached for the Leviticus 24 penalty for blaspheming the Name. They stood far closer to that sentence than we do, and their verdict was stones. The Catechism states the Church's reading without a tremor: Jesus reveals that he himself bears the divine name (CCC 211). The tally line that opened at a Samaritan well has reached the bush, and the bush is burning.

DIG DEEPER

The truth will make you free. If the group has energy, read 8:31-36. The crowd bristles, we are descendants of Abraham, and have never been in bondage to any one, a startling claim from a people who had been slaves in Egypt, exiles in Babylon, and were currently occupied by Rome. Denial is the first symptom. Jesus relocates the slavery: every one who commits sin is a slave to sin, and only the Son can emancipate: if the Son makes you free, you will be free indeed. Freedom in this Gospel is not the absence of a master; it is having the right one.

Synthesis question. The feast handed him its two ceremonies, and he stood up in the middle of each. Put the whole night in three claims: what did he claim by the water, what did he claim by the light, and what did he claim by the Name? And the question John has been building for eight chapters: the crowd split three ways all week; what keeps their question from staying safely theirs?

ANSWER: share after the discussion

By the water: the wells of salvation the feast sang about are a person, and the rivers of the age to come are the Spirit he will pour out. By the light: the pillar of fire that led the wilderness camp burns now at head height, and following him is how you stop walking in darkness. By the Name: before Abraham came to be, I AM, the sentence of the bush, spoken in the first person by a Galilean at a feast. Every verdict at Tabernacles, good man, deceiver, prophet, Christ, blasphemer, was an answer to a question nobody could put down, and the question does not stay in the first century: the light of the world does not offer commentary from a distance, and the middle is still collapsing. Sooner or later everyone at this table either reaches for stones or falls on their knees; the one thing 8:58 forbids is a shrug.

Send

1. Every one who commits sin is a slave to sin (8:34). No confessions required out loud, but honestly: where in your life are you still calling a chain a choice?
2. Neither do I condemn you; go, and do not sin again. Which half of that sentence do you find harder to accept for yourself, and which half do you find harder to extend to others?

Live It This Week

- **Pray the Name.** Once a day this week, pray the ancient Jesus Prayer slowly, five times: Lord Jesus Christ, Son of the living God, have mercy on me, a sinner. You now know what weight the Name in that sentence carries; pray it like you know.

- **Light one flame.** Light a candle once this week, at church or at home, and pray John 8:12 over one dark situation you carry: I am the light of the world; he who follows me will not walk in darkness. Leave the candle burning a while; let the feast's ceremony become your prayer.
- **Drop one stone.** Name, privately, one person you have been condemning in your heart. Every day this week, pray for them by name, and end with the Lord's sentence about yourself: neither do I condemn you. Stones get heavy; set yours down.

Closing Prayer

Leader prays aloud: Lord Jesus Christ, light of the world, fountain of living water, I AM before Abraham was: we have heard your Name tonight and we do not shrug. We bring you our chains that we have been calling choices, our stones that we have been calling justice, our thirst that we have been watering from broken wells. Say over each of us what you said to her: neither do I condemn you; go, and do not sin again. And keep us near you until your Hour. Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit, as it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, world without end. Amen.

Scripture Memory Verse

MEMORIZE THIS WEEK: John 8:12

Again Jesus spoke to them, saying, I am the light of the world; he who follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life. (RSV2CE)

Part 3: Leader Reference Card

Every passage used or referenced in Session 8, in order of appearance. Flag these in your Bible before the session.

- **Leviticus 23:33-43** · leader background, the institution of Tabernacles
- **John 7:1-13** · opening reading, the brothers, the secret ascent, the fractured verdicts
- **John 7:25-32** · the failed arrest; verse 30, the Hour as shield; the board moment
- **John 7:37-39** · the water cry on the great day; John's gloss naming the Spirit; not yet glorified
- **Isaiah 12:3 and Zechariah 14:8** · leader reads Isaiah 12:3 aloud; the water ceremony's songs
- **John 7:40-52** · the fractures, Nicodemus' second appearance, the experts' sloppy search
- **2 Kings 14:25** · one-line irony, Jonah of Gath-hepher in Galilee
- **John 7:53-8:11** · the woman caught in adultery; textual footnote honesty, canonical confidence, the two inseparable clauses
- **John 8:12-20** · light of the world in the treasury; second predicate I AM; the Hour shield repeats (8:20)
- **Exodus 13:21** · leader background, the pillar of fire behind the candelabras
- **John 8:21-30** · unless you believe that I am he (RSV2CE; the Greek a bare egō eimi) (8:24); the second lifted up saying fused with the Name (8:28)
- **John 8:31-36** · Dig Deeper, the truth will make you free, slavery to sin
- **John 8:48-59** · the summit: Abraham rejoiced, before Abraham was I AM, the stones, the hidden exit
- **Exodus 3:13-15** · live discovery, I AM WHO I AM; the reserve text deployed at last
- **Isaiah 43:10-13** · live discovery, the courtroom egō eimi of the Greek Old Testament
- **Leviticus 24:16** · quick reference, stoning for blasphemy of the Name
- **John 9:9** · steelman reference, the beggar's ordinary egō eimi; handled in the press
- **CCC 206-207, 211, 590, 748, 1846-1848** · Catechism connections