

BRMC SMALL GROUP STUDY

JESUS, OUR LIGHT IN THE DARKNESS; A LAMP IN EVERY HOME

LEADER'S GUIDE

Please note that this study guide accompanies the pulpit sermon by Rev Wendy Watson on 3 and 10 January 2021. The suggestions below are not model answers but to help guide your study.

SCRIPTURE PASSAGE: John 7:53 - 8:12

CONTEXT:

On the occasion of Vision Sunday at the start of 2021, our interim Pastor-in-Charge (PIC) set out the church's vision for 2021 over two Sundays. PIC set out the vision
"JESUS, Our Light in the Darkness; A Lamp in Every Home"

This vision flows from a conviction that Jesus is reminding us to follow Him closely so that we will not walk in darkness, but experience the light of His presence in our lives.

"I am the light of the world", Jesus says, "if you follow me, you will not walk in darkness but will have the Light of life" (John 8:12).

The sermon presents us with the opportunity to consider:

1. Jesus our Light in the darkness, ever-present in our midst; and
2. A lamp for us in each of our homes.

CORE QUESTIONS

1. With reference to Pastor Wendy's sermons, what was the significance of God's light to the Jews as they celebrated the Festival of Booths?
 - In Leviticus 23:33-44, God instituted the Festival of Tabernacles or Booths and explained that the Israelites were to live in temporary shelters (booths) so that their descendants will know that God had caused them to live in

What is the Festival of Booths?

Also referred to as the Festival of Tabernacles. In a nutshell, it's a big harvest thanksgiving where the people come together to rejoice and thank God for the crops and produce of the land that He's blessed them with.

And the farmers come from all directions, they bring baskets of fruit and vegetables into the temple – there's a lot of singing and dancing, offering of sacrifices, and two particular rituals – that of the pouring of water and the lighting of huge lamps at night. The Jews were to live in huts, or little booths called 'sukkah' in Hebrew. Thus, the name – "Festival of Booths". It's a seven-day festival with an additional special day tagged on at the end – and it's probably on this very last day, just as the festival is concluding, that Jesus declares – "I am the light of the world".

-Rev Wendy Watson (sermon on 3 Jan 2021)

For more information on the Feast of Tabernacles please refer to John Gill's Exposition of the Bible: John 7:2
<<https://www.biblestudytools.com/commentaries/gills-exposition-of-the-bible/john-7-2.html>>

temporary shelters when He brought them out of Egypt.

- For more information and views on the Feast of Tabernacles, please see the commentary by John Gill (box).
2. Our lives can sometimes be more dark than light. The rain comes in from time to time, and life can be difficult, uncomfortable, and messy. We struggle to make sense of things. Remembering God's provision of light during the Festival of Booths, how can we find encouragement in God's provision and presence?
- Right in the midst of their journey in the wilderness, the children of Israel were accompanied by a very present God who lighted their way in the darkness with a pillar of fire, and who unceasingly supplied all their needs. Therefore, in our discomfort, difficulties, and ... sin, God wants us to know that He's there for us. Just as His glorious presence was in the temple, right in the midst of all these dark *sukkahs* or shelters, He was accessible to them.
 - For us today, we have it even better - we have Immanuel, God with us, immediately accessible to each one of us, and not just in a physical building.
3. In John 7:53 to 8:11, the story is told of a woman caught in adultery, who was brought to Jesus while He was teaching at the temple courts. How does this story enhance the distinction between the darkness in the human heart and the light of Jesus?
- The story of the woman caught in adultery, is used by John to make a very strong point and highlight a clear distinction - our human darkness juxtaposed with the light of Jesus.
 - The human darkness can be seen in the ruthless way that the teachers of the law and the Pharisees had brought out a woman - a woman condemned to be stoned to death - to be a pawn to test Jesus and accuse Him.
 - On the other hand, we may see the light revealed when:
 - a. Jesus rescued her, and set her free, literally giving her life back to her.
 - b. Jesus did not condemn her, yet did not also accept what she had done.
 - c. Jesus gave her a new chance, an opportunity to go and leave her sin (and walk in the light).
 - It is possible that Jesus performed this rescue by simply revealing the sin that lurked within the conscience of her accusers.

John Wesley in his Explanatory Notes on John 8:6 wrote:

"Jesus stooping down, wrote with his finger on the ground — God wrote once in the Old Testament; Christ once in the New: perhaps the words which he afterward spoke, when they continued asking him. By this silent action, he, 1, fixed their wandering, hurrying thoughts, in order to awaken their consciences: and, 2, signified that he was not then come to condemn but to save the world."

<https://www.christianity.com/bible/commentary.php?com=wes&b=43&c=8>

There is a note in my Bible which says many early manuscripts and ancient authorities do not contain John 7:53–8:11. What does this mean?

This means that this passage is likely not part of the earliest written text of John's Gospel. This does not mean it is "fake" or "unreliable", for, as eminent and faithful scholars note below, there is no reason to think this event did not occur in the life of Jesus. After all, John's Gospel itself acknowledges that many of Jesus' activities were not committed to writing (see John 21:25), and a comparative reading of the Synoptic Gospels (Matthew, Mark, and Luke) clearly shows that each divinely-inspired author was not seeking to write an exhaustive biography about Jesus, but selected only pertinent material in their individual retellings of the good news of Jesus Christ.

"These verses are present in most of the medieval Greek miniscule manuscripts, but they are absent from virtually all early Greek manuscripts that have come down to us [...] All the early church Fathers omit this narrative: in commenting on John, they pass immediately from 7:52 to 8:12. [...] Moreover, a number of (later) manuscripts that include the narrative mark it off with asterisks or obeli, indicating hesitation as to its authenticity, while those that do include it display a rather high frequency of textual variants. Although most of the manuscripts that include the story place it here (i.e. at 7:53–8:11), some place it instead after Luke 21:38, and other witnesses variously place it after John 7:44, John 7:36 or John 21:25.³ The diversity of placement confirms the inauthenticity of the verses. Finally, even if someone should decide that the material is authentic, it would be very difficult to justify the view that the material is authentically Johannine: there are numerous expressions and constructions that are found nowhere in John, but which are characteristic of the Synoptic Gospels, Luke in particular.

On the other hand, there is little reason for doubting that the event here described occurred, even if in its written form it did not in the beginning belong to the canonical books. Similar stories are found in other sources. [...] The narrative before us also has a number of parallels with stories in the Synoptic Gospels. The reason for its insertion here may have been to illustrate 7:24 and 8:15 or, conceivably, the Jews' sinfulness over against Jesus' sinlessness (8:21, 24, 46)."

- D. A. Carson, *The Gospel according to John*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (InterVarsity Press, 1991), 333–334.

"While the story as found in John 7:53–8:11 has undoubtedly been redacted and shaped in the process of transmission, there are no decisive arguments that tell against the likelihood that its essential features reflect an incident in the life of Jesus. [...] In short, in negotiating the test to which he has been put, Jesus as God's agent exercises divine prerogatives in the midst of human ambiguities in such a way as to give both the accusers and the accused the chance to break from their past ways. It is not surprising that, despite its disputed status, this intriguing story has continued to function as a compelling witness to Jesus."

- Andrew T. Lincoln, *The Gospel according to Saint John*, Black's New Testament Commentary (London: Continuum, 2005), 534–536.

REFLECTION, APPLICATION, PRAYER

4. In her two-part message (3 and 10 Jan 2021), Rev Wendy Watson shared that Jesus is our light in the darkness; a lamp in every home.
 - a. What are some specific occasions where Jesus has been your light in the darkness? Are there areas of your life where do you need to experience Jesus as your light in the year ahead?
 - The darkness may be of our circumstances (such as the pandemic, financial uncertainty, broken families) or the darkness that might be within us (such as

sin, a waning commitment to God, loss of faith). In the midst of this, how might we hang on to the truth that Jesus is the light of the world? How might we encourage one another of this truth?

- This is an opportunity for members in your group to share their testimonies of how Jesus was a light during their dark periods; or it could also be an opportunity to share about current experience of darkness, whether in circumstance or darkness within.

b. How do you envisage Jesus being a lamp in every home? What do you think this might mean for you and your household?

- This is a question for reflection, perhaps spend just 1 or 2 minutes sharing on what a lamp might do in the physical and then in the spiritual.
- Some suggestions to initiate discussion: God's word is described as a lamp (Psalm 119:105); Jesus describes us as being light of the world, a lamp that is not hidden (Matthew 5:14); In the parable of the 10 virgins, the lamp is used as a picture of active and alert waiting for the Lord (Matthew 25:1-13).
- Although members of your group may come from homes where they are the only Christian, this is nevertheless an opportunity for them to reflect on what it means for them, as the sole believer, to be that lamp or to bring Jesus the lamp into their household.

5. The Festival of Booths reminds us of two realities: First, God generously supplies our needs, as He provided for the Israelites in the wilderness. Let us be alert and mindful not to be quick to complain ("this is only a 3-star *sukkah*, I want a 5-star one!") as the Israelites did, but to be thankful for God's good gifts, big and small.

Second, the Feast of Booths underscores a deeper reality: we are simply pilgrims on a journey. While we are thankful for the gifts we have been blessed with in this life, our eyes and hearts are fixed not on the gifts, but on the Giver.

- a. Would you consider building a spiritual habit of saying grace daily? Commit to setting aside a time each day to thank God not just for the food and water He's blessed you with, but also for His provision of other material and immaterial blessings, whether big or small. In that time, ask God also to continually direct your heart to love Him above all else, in order that you might rightly delight not only in God's good gifts, but also in God the Giver.

b. Follow the pulpit very closely and use the Small Group study guides. If you are not in a small group, perhaps consider doing reflections, discussion and prayer as a family? Or get a friend or friends to do it together with you? If you are the head of the household, would you consider discussing the study guide questions with your family once a week?

6. Are there areas of darkness you are aware of in your life? Write a personal prayer to God, asking for his light to radiate through and outshine every shadow. This is between you and God, and you don't need to share it with your group unless you are absolutely comfortable.

7. Let us look and pray expectantly for God to be present as a shining lamp in our homes and households this year. Write down a prayer for your family for the coming year. Share this with one or two others and make a commitment to pray for each other over the next year. (It should be mutually agreed from the start that these are shared in confidence and not to be divulged to others.)

Want to join a small group?

BRMC has quite a number of Small Groups that meet regularly for worship, prayer and the study of God's Word along with deep and enjoyable fellowship. These groups provide an environment where real life is shared while providing and receiving care and encouragement for each other. The small groups also help fellow believers develop spiritual maturity as they engage the Bible with the realities of personal challenges and struggles.

In response to different needs, we have Youth Groups, Young Adults Groups, Mandarin Groups, Inter-Generational Groups and Adult Groups of varying ages. For more information, please visit our website: <<http://www.brmc.org.sg/category/ministries/small-groups>>

Registration form:

<<https://brmcsg.churchcenter.com/people/forms/97050>>

How to Pray: A Simple Guide for Normal People by Pete Greig

[This](#) book is available on Amazon Singapore and Singapore Kinokuniya.

It is designed to be used together with *The Prayer Course* (a free video curriculum associated with the Alpha course), making it useful for personal and group or church-wide reading. More information is available from this link: <<https://prayercourse.org/toolshed/>>