

THE FEAST

Use the following notes and space provided during our feast teaching time. Feel free to add your own notes as you watch.

We eat the Word of God. It is sweeter than honey (Ps. 19:10).

We do not scrounge, strive, or strain to feed ourselves the Word of God. We posture ourselves to receive from God (Ps. 81:10).

We tend to stare at our lives and glance at God. We want to stare at God and glance at our lives.

The right hand in the biblical world was the hand of favor, honor, blessing, and sonship (Ps. 110:1).

We want to be a “right-hand people,” who bless and honor others.

Western learning is different from Middle Eastern learning. Most of the Bible was written by Middle Easterners in a Middle Eastern context. In our time together, we want to learn to read the Bible through a Middle Eastern lens.

WESTERN LENS	MIDDLE EASTERN LENS
Form	Function
How? <i>How did it happen?</i>	Why? <i>Why would God do that?</i>
Understand → Believe	Believe → Understand
Law, Rule, Principle	Story, Narrative
What does it teach me about <i>me</i> ?	What does it teach me about <i>God</i> ?
Dig deep, get down in it ... (Analysis—pick it apart)	Read through it ... (Synthesis—bring it together)
Study to acquire <i>knowledge</i>	Posture to be <i>fed</i>

Reading the Bible through a Middle Eastern lens *adds* to our understanding of what the biblical authors and people featured in the Bible meant by what they *said* and *did*.

We want to live like rivers, not lakes. We want the Word to travel to us, through us, to others.

We have truly learned a thing when we can give it away.

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Remember, Middle Easterners primarily wrote the Bible in a Middle Eastern context.

Every culture has idioms—sayings, phrases—that are widely understood among its people.

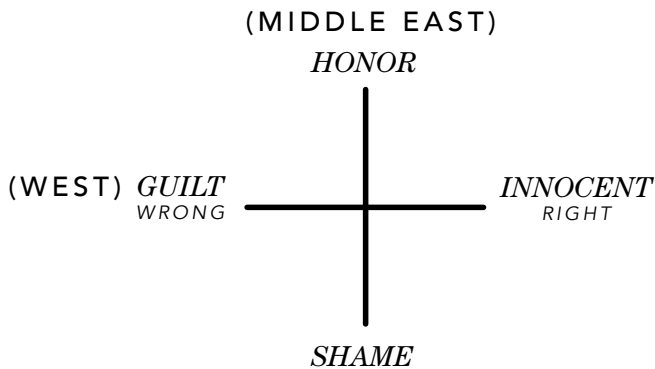
The Bible has **Jewish idioms**—sayings, phrases—that Jewish people would have readily known and understood.

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As a Western culture, we are more Athens and Rome than we are Jerusalem. We are more Greco-Roman than we are Semitic or Jewish. Consequently, we tend to want to understand before we believe. But the Middle Eastern way is to believe God, to take Him at His Word, with the idea that understanding will come out of our belief.

Woman had a very good beginning within Israel's history. Women like Eve, Miriam, Deborah, Jael, Abigail, Esther, and Ruth were held in honor and given respect.

Through influential teachings and teachers during the Intertestamental Period, women lost much of their social standing. Instead of being held in honor, women were denigrated to a place of shame.



Pious, virtuous Jewish men who stood up against the invasion of Hellenism and “Vegas” took it too far.

Jesus was born into a world where *Ben Sira* theology had been spreading and growing for approximately two hundred years.¹

Jesus brought *justice* and *righteousness* to women in the first-century world. He generously lifted them up out of their shame and restored their honor.

Jesus did not come to turn things upside down. Jesus came to turn things right side up.

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Jesus entered the first-century world and practiced both compassion and empathy. He showed both toward the women with whom He interacted in His life and ministry.

COMPASSION

cum = with²

pathos = pain⁴

EMPATHY

em = in³

pathos = pain

He was not afraid to sit with women who were in pain. He was not afraid to enter into their pain with them.

One overarching statement precedes the seven “I Am” statements in the Gospel of John. The seven “I Am” statements hang on this one statement. In other words, the seven “I Am” statements can be true because this first statement is true.

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There are two kinds of water in the Middle East: dead water and living water. Dead water is still water; like water in a cistern, it doesn't move. Living water is moving water, like water in wells, rivers, and streams. In the first-century world, people preferred to be baptized in living water.⁵

The Jewish/Samaritan schism was approximately seven hundred years old when Jesus came on the scene. Jews and Samaritans worshiped at two separate temples and used different canons of Scripture.

The Middle East, both then and now, has three primary cultural norms:

- Honor/Shame
- Hospitality
- Communal living (we, not me)⁶

Jews living in Galilee sometimes traveled through Samaria to get to Judea. Historically, this route was difficult to traverse since Jews and Samaritans were at odds; however, we see it became an opportunity for Jesus to bring *mishpat* and *tzedakah* to a Samaritan woman.

Jesus named her shame, not her sin. He named her pain and sat with her in it. He started generously lifting her up. He sat at a well and waited for her. He reached out to her and spoke first—He bridged the gap. He asked if He could drink after her, treating her as clean, not unclean. He started talking about living water with her while sitting at a well, a source of living water. He respected her by talking theology of worship with her. She was the first person whom He told He was the Messiah. She became the missionary—a witness—to her community.

The Samaritan woman will forever hold the honor of being the first person Jesus explicitly told He was the Messiah, the Christ.

WHY TRAVEL THROUGH SAMARIA?

In John 4:4 we read that Jesus “had to go through Samaria.”

History tells us many Galilean Jews avoided Samaria altogether on their way to Jerusalem, even traveling longer and going out of their way to circumvent the region where Samaritans lived.⁷

So what might be going on in this John 4 passage?

Why might Jesus have “had to go through Samaria”?

I think Jesus *chose* to go through Samaria because He wanted to bring restoration to that deep and ancient seven-hundred-year-old schism between the Jews and Samaritans.

After the moment in John 4 with Jesus and the Samaritan woman at the well, we might imagine Him and His disciples stopping and staying in ancient Sychar when they would pass through the area. Perhaps Jesus and His disciples became really good friends with this woman and the Samaritans in her village. Perhaps Jesus brought peace to ancient Sychar through His interaction with this woman.

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The *parashah* is the weekly portion of the Torah used in Jewish liturgy; it's given in Shabbat services on Saturdays.¹

Jesus meets us right where we are, but He never leaves us there. Last week, Jesus met the Samaritan woman at Jacob's well. This week, we'll see Him meet a woman as she sat against a wall, in a lower social position, at a meal. The Samaritan woman left the well and was never the same. Jesus pulled this woman off the wall, generously lifted her up, and sent her away in peace.

The Middle East, both then and now, has three primary cultural norms:

- Honor/Shame
- Hospitality
- Communal living (we, not me)²

Refusing someone's hospitality was very shameful in the biblical world.

Table fellowship was and is very important in the Middle East. It's one of the highest forms of social affiliation.

In Jesus' world, the basic norms of hospitality to be provided by a host were:

- A kiss of welcome
- Washing the guest's feet with water
- Olive oil for the guest's hands (soap)
- Anointing the head of honored guests with special oils
- Outcasts, sinners, and the poor would sit away from the table, behind the guests, against the wall, and be fed after a meal was served.³

A woman's hair was very important in the biblical world, and it still is in the Middle East today. A woman's hair is her glory.

Jewish people read the Scriptures and seek to embody them, not just learn them intellectually. They want to walk scriptural truths out in their everyday lives. A *lachrymatory* (think lacrimal duct in your eye) is a tear jar or tear vase. The significance behind the use of tear jars in Jewish tradition is rooted in Psalm 56:8.

The psalms were written one thousand years before the time of Jesus. For thousands of years, Jewish women have had tear jars; they even pass them down from one generation to the next. These women collect their tears in observance of Psalm 56:8. A tear jar represents the collective, sum total of a woman's grief and sorrow.

parabolē—parable⁴

parallēlos—parallel⁵

A parable is a story told in the parallel. It often compares or contrasts several different things. The point of a parable is to drive you to a decision.

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“We write our afflictions on marble, our mercies upon sand.”¹

—Charles Spurgeon

In Jesus’ world, rabbis and Pharisees often used parables as their primary teaching method. They would share their theologies not in terms of academic teaching—what we might think of as systematic theology—but through stories. Approximately one-third of Jesus’ recorded words in the Gospels are in parabolic form.²

parabolē—parable
parallēlos—parallel

A parable is a story told in the parallel. It often compares and contrasts different things. The point of a parable is to drive you to a decision.

Parables were very common in Jesus' day. However, rabbis and Pharisees rarely used women as the subject matter of their parables or stories. Women were considered too lowly to communicate divine things. Parables and stories were almost always told in the masculine.

Jesus was extremely unique in that He often included women in His stories, parables, and ministry. In the Gospel of Luke, we see twenty-seven pairings of spiritual teachings and Jesus' actions. (See chart on pp. 91–93.)³ It was not unusual for Jesus to share two stories or parables: one featuring a man, the other featuring a woman. With Jesus, women found their place in the story over and over again. Jesus brought a generous justice to women everywhere in the very way He shaped, formed, and taught His parables. When Jesus wanted to teach a parable about praying with persistence, He could have used several historical and biblically important characters, for example:

- Abraham praying and contending for Sodom and Gomorrah (Gen. 18).
- Jacob wrestling with the angel of the Lord at the river Jabbok (Gen. 32).
- Moses praying for God's anger to turn from the idolatrous Israelites (Ex. 32).
- Hannah praying for a child during her years of barrenness (1 Sam. 1).

Instead, Jesus cast a widow woman as the main character of His parable (Luke 18:1-8). This widow began the story at the bottom, powerless against an unrighteous judge. But she ended the story on top, having bent the will of the unrighteous judge with her *chutzpah* (persistence in coming to him over and over again).⁴

Journaling is a great way to record our very own God stories. Remembering is a spiritual practice in the Middle East. It's good to take time to write down, remember, and celebrate God's activity in our lives.

In our biblical feast two weeks ago, we saw Jesus meet the Samaritan woman at Jacob's well. In last week's feast, He pulled a woman off the wall, honored her publicly, and sent her away in peace. In this week's feast, Jesus used not just any woman, but a widow woman, to teach His disciples "they should always pray and not give up" (Luke 18:1).

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Three weeks ago, we feasted on the story of Jesus meeting the Samaritan woman at Jacob's well. Two weeks ago, we saw Him pull the woman off the wall at Simon the Pharisee's home, honoring her publicly and sending her away in peace. Last week, we rejoiced as we saw Jesus create and shape a parable about a widow upending an unjust judge with her persistence, bending his will until he granted her request. This type of teaching was highly unusual since rabbis and religious leaders didn't usually include women as the subject matter of their stories and parables.

This week, we're going to discuss what Jesus did with a sinful woman, a woman caught in the act of adultery.

Several early manuscripts and many other ancient witnesses do not include the text of John 7:53–8:11.

In Deuteronomy 16 the Lord commanded three annual pilgrimage festivals. They are also called *foot festivals*. Jews from around the world came to Jerusalem three times a year for these celebrations. The festivals are called Passover (in the spring), the Feast of Weeks or Pentecost (in the spring), and the Feast of Tabernacles (in the fall).¹ These seven-day celebrations in Jerusalem commemorated God’s faithfulness in the lives of His people.

This week’s story happened on the eighth day, the day after the seven-day Festival of Tabernacles ended. The eighth day was designated as a “sabbath” (Lev. 23:36). After seven days of celebrating God’s faithfulness, you need to *rest*.

Mishnah on Sabbath:

- Writing that leaves a permanent mark (ink on papyrus, etc.) was work.
- Writing with your finger in dust, sand, or dirt (blows away) was accepted.²

Jesus was known as a Galilean Rabbi, or a Rabbi of the North.³ Most of His earthly ministry happened in the northern district of Galilee. This week’s story happened down south, in the district of Judea. It happened *in* Jerusalem, *at* the temple after the fall Festival of Tabernacles—a highly public moment with everyone there in the temple, including Jews from around the world.

The Pharisees brought in a woman caught in adultery. Where was the man? They were not honestly concerned with the Law being broken, or they would have brought the man involved in the adultery too. They were trying to trap Jesus in a public moment with lots of people around. The *first* time Jesus wrote in the sand (honoring Sabbath regulations about writing), scholars believe He most likely wrote Leviticus 20:10 in response to their question about the Law of Moses concerning adultery.⁴ Jesus’ next words were about who would stone the

SABBATH

Many of us understand the idea of Sabbath in the context of a day of rest, set aside to worship God. And Sabbath is anchored in the God-given gift of rest. But it’s more than rest—it’s centered in a restful celebration of restoration.

The creation account in Genesis 1 and 2 shows the Lord ordering, organizing, and putting things in their right places. The creation account is a restorative creation; the Lord was creating and shaping things in *shalom*. Throughout Jesus’ earthly ministry, He celebrates Sabbath by bringing restoration. He loves to heal on the Sabbath. In doing so, He is not acting contrary to God’s Sabbath command. He is actually mirroring His Father’s character, being like His Father, setting things right—the way they were meant to be.

woman—the penalty for adultery in the Law of Moses. Jesus said the ones among them without sin should be first to throw a stone at her.

The *second* time Jesus wrote in the sand (honoring Sabbath regulations about writing), scholars believe He may have begun writing the names of the Pharisees standing around Him in the sand, in reference to Jeremiah 17:13—a passage about dishonest shepherds not leading the people of Israel well.⁵ In other words, these men were *not* without sin. Instead, they had forsaken the Lord; they were sinful.

“LORD, you are the hope of Israel; all who forsake you will be put to shame. Those who turn away from you will be written in the dust because they have forsaken the LORD, the spring of living water.”

JEREMIAH 17:13

When Jesus started writing their names, the religious leaders began walking away. Jesus had shifted their wrath off of the woman and onto Himself. The Pharisees started out mad at her, and they walked away mad at Him for calling them out. Once they had all walked away, only Jesus and the woman were there. In my opinion, whether she knew it or not, this was actually the scariest moment for the woman. Jesus was sinless. He was the only one who could have justly thrown the stone if He chose to do so.

Jesus told the woman He would not condemn her.

Jesus atoned for (covered) her sin, her shame, and generously lifted her up. He literally saved her life from the religious leaders who would certainly have stoned her to death if it were left up to them.

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The Greeks loved knowledge. The Romans loved power. The Jewish people have always loved the light. The Jewish people pore over the Scriptures again and again. Study is one of the highest forms of worship in Judaism. When you finish the Scriptures, you start over again. The Scriptures meet us right where we are every single time.

Jesus meets us right where we are, but He never leaves us there.

Notice the movement in these stories. No woman was even remotely the same after her interaction with Jesus.

Jesus did not come to turn things upside down. He came to turn things right side up—over and over again. And He's still doing it today!

Jesus met the Samaritan woman at Jacob's well. He met the woman as she sat against a wall at a meal. Jesus told stories and parables that included women, even teaching one parable where a lowly widow upended an unjust judge with her persistence. The woman caught in adultery was brought to him on the Southern Steps at the temple in Jerusalem with *everyone* looking on.

The Samaritan woman left the well and was never the same. She became the missionary for her entire village—telling them she had met the Messiah. The woman was pulled off the wall, generously lifted up, and sent away in peace. With Jesus, it was important to include women in the story. With Jesus, widows could upend unjust judges with their persistence.

GOD MEETS US WHERE WE ARE, BUT HE NEVER LEAVES US THERE.

Over and over in the Bible, we see God meeting people right where they were but never leaving them there. When God intervenes in a human life, there is change, transformation, and an invitation to journey together through life. We see God acting in this way in both Marys' stories this week. Young Mary was minding her own business when the angel showed up and announced she would birth the Messiah. Her life was never the same. Our other Mary, if she was the one against the wall in Luke 7, met Jesus when sitting against the wall and would eventually become Jesus' friend and ultimately a *talmid* (disciple) who sat at His feet.

Jesus meets us where we are, and He takes us somewhere. He faithfully shepherds us to the very end of our lives.

The woman caught in adultery was covered, generously lifted up, and sent away with the command to turn from sin and back to *shalom*.

The Middle East, both then and now, has three primary cultural norms:

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- Communal (we, not me)²

When the Lord is dealing out kingdom adventures, some of them are coming to girls, to women, to us!

One of the hardest yeses in the Bible belonged to a young girl—Mary (Miriam). In Jesus' day, young premenstrual girls were betrothed to eighteen-year-old boys. twelve-year-olds were marrying eighteen-year-olds. Betrothal usually lasted for one year.³ We can imagine Mary as eleven or twelve years old when Gabriel visited her. She was betrothed, not yet married. She was probably premenstrual.⁴ The adventure of birthing and being the mother of the Messiah came to a young girl. She had no idea what it would cost her. She knew it could cost her very life in an honor/shame culture. This might give insight as to why she “hurried” from Galilee all the way down to Judea.

One of the most unique yeses in the Bible belonged to another Mary (Miriam)—Mary the sister of Lazarus and Martha. She very well might have been the woman against the wall in our Luke 7 story. She might have been the one to bring the alabaster jar and tear jar to Simon's home.

Now a man named Lazarus was sick. He was from Bethany, the village of Mary and her sister Martha. (This Mary, whose brother Lazarus now lay sick, was the same one who poured perfume on the Lord and wiped his feet with her hair.)

JOHN 11:1-2

If she *is* the same woman, we see how far Jesus can take a person—from a low cultural place to Jesus' close friend!

Two Jewish Idioms within Discipleship in the First Century:

“Walking in the dust”⁵

“Sitting at the feet”⁶

“Let your house be a meeting place for the rabbis, and cover yourself in the dust of their feet, and drink in their words thirstily.”⁷

—Attributed to Yose ben Yoezer,
(second century BC)

When a rabbi came to your house, he would teach. He would sit (a posture of authority in Judaism), and his disciples would sit around him.

The disciple (*talmid*) relationship with a rabbi was very important in the first-century world of Jesus.

Talmidim didn’t just want to know what their rabbi knew—they wanted to be like him. A disciple followed so closely to the rabbi that the dust of his feet got on him or her. A disciple didn’t want any of the rabbi’s words to “fall to the ground.”

“Sitting at the feet” of a rabbi was a formal term in the first century. Recognized disciples (*talmidim*) “sat at the feet” of their rabbis. Remember, Paul “sat at the feet” of Gamaliel, the grandson of the infamous Hillel (Acts 22:3). This means he was a formal disciple of Gamaliel.

In Luke 10, Jesus was visiting Lazarus, Martha, and Mary. He started teaching. Mary “sat at the Lord’s feet” (v. 39) learning, asking questions, interacting with the others. This passage seems to imply that Jesus had female followers.
