

“You will die in your selfishness.” There we were in the temple during the Feast of Tents. Jesus was standing right in the middle of the authorities that wanted to **arrest** him and they were doing **nothing**. The crowds were **arguing** with each other over whether Jesus was from the Creator or from Satan. The authorities were **arguing** with each other and with their soldiers over why no one had arrested Jesus. Jesus had healed a man on the Sabbath and they wanted to **kill** him for breaking the Law of Moses. There was anger, fighting, and division all around us, nobody could agree on anything. And there we stood with Jesus, who was like a beacon of **peace** and **calm** in the midst of the storm. After a time of quietly observing all the fighting and arguing, Jesus spoke, **“I am the light of the cosmos! Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness but will walk in the light of life!”** As their attention now shifted back to Jesus directly, the authorities were beside themselves, saying, **“You are just saying whatever you want about yourself! What you say is not true!”** Jesus responded to them, **“You judge according to the flesh. I am judging no one.”** The authorities were using their **“flesh”** to assess Jesus and what he was doing. And to their eyes, he looked like an **insane** man making **crazy** claims. But Jesus was operating in a realm far beyond the realm of the **“flesh.”** Jesus told them, **“My Father testifies about me.”** Still looking with the eyes of the **“flesh”** and thinking Jesus was absolutely **crazy**, they responded, **“Where is your father??”** They didn’t see Joseph anywhere in the temple, backing up Jesus’s claims. Jesus said to them, **“You do not know my Father.”** Jesus was saying that these religious leaders did not even **“know”** the Creator. They wanted to arrest Jesus even more than before, but still **nobody** touched him.

Jesus said to them, **“I am going away and you will die in your selfishness. Where I am going, you cannot follow.”** This was now the second time Jesus had told all of us he was **“going away.”** The authorities said to themselves, **“Where is he going that we cannot follow? Is he going to kill himself?!”** Jesus said, **“You are from below, I am from above.”** When he had talked with Nicodemus, Jesus had said, **“You must be born from above.”** Jesus was saying his source, origin, and birth was from **“above,”** from the Creator, from the Father—and he was going back there. These authorities, on the other hand, were from **“below,”** from the flesh, from Satan. Because they were following their **“flesh”** they were only concerned about themselves—they were selfish, self-centered, and self-focused in everything. Jesus said to them again, **“If you are not faithful to me, then you will die in your selfishness.”** Like he had told Nicodemus, Jesus had come to give us a second birth, a birth **“from above,”** to set us free from our fleshly selfishness. Jesus said, **“If you remain in my word, then you will know the truth and the truth will set you free.”**

The authorities were angry, saying, **“We are Abraham’s children, we have never been slaves!”** We almost choked with suppressed laughter when we heard these words. Every single year at the Passover Feast, we remembered as a people that we had been **“slaves”** in Egypt for 430 years. Yet here these men stood, saying our people had **“never been slaves.”** It was comical and ridiculous how they would say **anything**, no matter how false and untrue, just to contradict Jesus. Jesus said to them, **“Everyone who is selfish, is a slave to selfishness.”** Jesus didn’t even care about the fact that our people had once been **“slaves”** in Egypt. Nor did Jesus care that we were currently **“slaves”** to the Roman Empire—Rome appointed the high priest, controlled what happened in the temple, and occupied all of Jerusalem and Israel. Jesus was talking about a much deeper and profound slavery. These men were **“slaves”** to their flesh, to their egos, to every selfish desire of their hearts. Then Jesus told us that there was only one way to break free from selfishness, **“If the Creator’s Son sets you free, then you will be free.”** Jesus was inviting all of us to be set **“free”** from our selfishness before it was too late. Jesus was our one chance at true freedom and true life. If we rejected Jesus and his word and his truth, then as he told us, we would **“die in our selfishness.”**

Jesus turned to the crowds and said, **“You seek to kill me because there is no room for my word within you. You do the things you have heard from your father.”** The authorities responded, **“Our father is Abraham!”** Jesus said to them, **“If Abraham was your father then you would live like him.”** Even though it seemed impossible, they became even more angry, yelling, **“The Creator is our father!”** Jesus looked at them and said, **“If the Creator was your Father, then you would love me.”** Then Jesus said out loud what he had been hinting at all along, **“Your father is the Devil and you do what he desires. He was a killer and a liar from the beginning.”** We saw their jaws drop open and their eyes widen in fury—they could not believe Jesus had just said that to them. Jesus went on calmly, **“The one from the Creator, listens to the Creator. You do not listen because you are not from the Creator.”** They could think of nothing else to say in their anger, other than, **“You have a demon!”** Then they all began to pick up whatever **stones** they could find so they could throw them at Jesus and kill him.

As they grabbed for stones to throw, we were reminded of the time the Pharisees had brought Jesus a woman they had caught in the act of adultery. They had said to Jesus, **“The Law of Moses commands that she is to be stoned to death. What do you say?”** Jesus just ignored them and bent down to write on the earth with his finger. But they wouldn’t leave him alone and kept asking Jesus what should be done. Jesus then said, **“Whoever is without selfishness should throw the first stone.”** Then Jesus went back to writing on the earth. Then those ready to stone her started dropping their stones and walking away, starting with the oldest ones first. When the whole crowd was gone, Jesus said to the woman, **“Where are they? Has no one condemned you?”** The adulterous woman said, **“No one.”** Then Jesus said, **“Then neither do I condemn you. Go and stop being selfish.”** And now, these very same authorities, who had put down their stones with that woman, were ready to throw stones at Jesus. But Jesus just slowly turned and walked out of the temple and no one was brave enough to throw the first stone.

“You will die in your selfishness.” The authorities were rejecting Jesus over and over. He kept giving them opportunities to **repent**, but they refused. Their hearts were too full of themselves, too full of the desires of the **“flesh,”** too full of the messages of the world, too full of the ways of Satan. There was **“no room within them”** for Jesus’s word. And their **“selfishness”** was going to destroy them. Jesus said to them, **“I am judging no one,”** because he didn’t need to—they were already judging themselves through their own actions and judgments. Once they threw that first stone at Jesus it would be all over. Their own **“judgment”** of Jesus, would judge them and destroy them.

“You will die in your selfishness.” Our own **“selfish”** actions bring judgment upon ourselves—our own judgments judge us. We condemn and destroy ourselves by how we treat others. We throw **“stones”** of deception and violence at others and those very stones we throw end up hurting and destroying ourselves. Jesus is the **“light of the cosmos”** and he reveals that we have been following Satan and have been born **“from below.”** Jesus shines the **“light”** on us, revealing our own self-destruction selfishness. **“You will die in your selfishness.”** Is there **“room within”** you for Jesus’s word or are you so full of yourself that Jesus’s word cannot find any space within you? Do not **“throw stones”** at others. Do not **“judge”** others. Empty yourself of your selfishness so there is **“room within”** you for Jesus’s word. His word alone can **“free”** you from your slavery to yourself, your slavery to selfishness. Your selfishness will kill you if you keep following it and listening to it. It will be your undoing, it will be your judgment. **“You will die in your selfishness”** unless you lay down the stones you are throwing at others and follow Jesus. Jesus is the **“light of the cosmos”** and his word alone can **“set you free.”** Amen.