

THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO JOHN

22. Jesus and the Woman Caught in Adultery

John 7:53-8:11

Setting the Stage

This morning we are going to look at another amazing moment in which we see God incarnate on mission! We're going to see Him deal with the most powerful men in the religious life of Israel who were openly hostile to Him — Who in this moment tried to eviscerate Jesus on the horns of a trilemma.

But most importantly, John shows us how God incarnate dealt with one broken, sinful person — a woman who was caught in the very act of adultery.

HOLY SPIRIT — please shine into our hearts the light of the knowledge of the glory of God's justice, mercy, grace and compassion in the face of Jesus!

Before we get started we need to do address an obvious concern. I'm only going to spend a few minutes on it so we can get spend this morning getting to the heart of what was really happening in this pericope.

Most of your Bibles will include a note that says something to this effect: *"The earliest manuscripts do not include 7:53–8:11."* For those who hold that the Bible is the inspired, inerrant Word of God that note can be disconcerting.

Richard Bauckham gives us some perspective — (Jesus) *lived in the Middle East, and in the first few centuries of Christianity the faith spread in all directions – not only to Greece and Rome, France and Spain, but also to Egypt, North Africa, and Ethiopia, to Turkey and Armenia, to Iraq, Persia, and India.*¹

As the good news about Jesus caught on, the Gospel accounts of his life were copied and distributed. As a result, there are thousands of copies of all or parts of the Gospels penned at different times and in different places. That's huge stuff! It means that we can compare copies made in one place with copies made independently in another and identify "variants" in the manuscripts — something

¹ Bauckham, Richard. Jesus: A Very Short Introduction (Very Short Introductions) (p. 1). OUP Oxford. Kindle Edition.

written in one copy but not another; perhaps a different verb used in one than in others. But there are a handful of places where it's genuinely hard to tell what the older manuscripts said. When that happens, our modern Bibles make a note of it.

The text we're looking at this morning is one of those passages. There are some 900 manuscripts that do contain these verses, but the earliest extant copies of John's Gospel don't include this story.

The New Bible Commentary — *There are a few (manuscripts) place it at the end of the gospel, and a few others manuscripts locate it in Luke's account after Lk. 21:38. At the same time it has ancient attestation, and there is no reason to suppose that it does not represent genuine tradition.*²

D.A. Carson — 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.³

HERE'S THE POINT — *Nothing* that Christians believe about Jesus stands or falls on this text. But its portrayal of Jesus is utterly consistent with the picture that the Gospel authors paint.

I'll close with these words from F.B. Meyer who pastored and preached in London in the 19th century.

F.B. Meyer — *It reveals in our Saviour's character a wisdom so profound, a tenderness to sinners so delicate, a hatred of sin so intense, an insight into human hearts so searching, that it is impossible to suppose the mind of man could have conceived, or the hand of man invented, this most pathetic (as in pathos) story.*

Now, let's turn our attention to the moment.

² Guthrie, D. (1994). John. In D. A. Carson, R. T. France, J. A. Motyer, & G. J. Wenham (Eds.), *New Bible commentary: 21st century edition* (4th ed., p. 1042). Inter-Varsity Press.

³ Carson, D. A. (1991). The Gospel according to John (p. 333). Inter-Varsity Press; W.B. Eerdmans.

In the first 2 verses of Chapter 8 we find Jesus going to the temple early in the morning and *All the people came to him, and he sat down and taught them.* This should sound familiar to those who were with us when we were studying through the Gospel according to Mark. What we find here in John 8 is what we see happening in the week leading up to the arrest and crucifixion of Jesus.

So — it's early. Crowds were there to be near Him and hear Him.

Suddenly there was a disturbance — the Scribes (the teachers of the law) and Pharisees show up dragging a woman right through the crowd.

³... and placing her in the midst ⁴ they said to him, "Teacher, this woman has been caught in the act of adultery. ⁵Now in the Law Moses commanded us to stone such women. So what do you say?" ⁶This they said to test him, that they might have some charge to bring against him. Jesus bent down and wrote with his finger on the ground. ⁷And as they continued to ask him, he stood up and said to them, "Let him who is without sin among you be the first to throw a stone at her." ⁸And once more he bent down and wrote on the ground. ⁹But when they heard it, they went away one by one, beginning with the older ones, and Jesus was left alone with the woman standing before him. ¹⁰Jesus stood up and said to her, "Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?" ¹¹She said, "No one, Lord." And Jesus said, "Neither do I condemn you; go, and from now on sin no more."

In order for us to get the full impact of what was going on in all of this we need to understand that in the Old Testament adultery was a capital offense. The crowd in **John 8** understood that in the eyes of God adultery is as grievous as premeditated murder!

QUESTION (It's good to ask questions as you read the Scriptures) No matter *where* this moment fits in the timeline of the ministry of Jesus — WHY are these men bringing this woman before Jesus?

REMEMBER the events of **Chapter 7**. Jesus had disrupted the last day, the great day of the Feasts of Booths.

John 7:37-38; 40-41 On the last day of the feast, the great day, Jesus stood up and cried out, "If anyone thirsts, let him come to me and drink. ³⁸Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, 'Out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.'" ⁴⁰When they heard these words, some of the people said, "This really is the Prophet." ⁴¹Others said, "This is the Christ."

One would think that the men who had devoted themselves to the study of the Scriptures would have jumped in and joined the chorus!! But these guys were not the least bit thrilled with the prospect of Jesus being the prophet promised by Moses! They're not the least bit happy at all about the possibility that Jesus is the one promised by the prophet Isaiah (Isaiah 9:7) — the heir to the throne of David — whose throne would be rooted in righteousness and justice — who would right every wrong — who would rule and reign forever

If Jesus is THAT guy — they won't just be out of a job — they will be the object of his righteous judgment.

That's why they sent the temple police to take him and to incarcerate him.

John 7:45-49 The officers then came to the chief priests and Pharisees, who said to them, "Why did you not bring him?" ⁴⁶The officers answered, "No one ever spoke like this man!" ⁴⁷The Pharisees answered them, "Have you also been deceived? ⁴⁸Have any of the authorities or the Pharisees believed in him? ⁴⁹But this crowd that does not know the law is accursed."

They go home and come back the next day with a fresh plan to trap Jesus — one they thought to be inescapable!

They just happen to catch this woman in the very act of adultery. They bring her to Jesus and say —

John 8:5–6 (ESV) ⁵Now in the Law, Moses commanded us to stone such women. So what do you say?" ⁶This they said to test him, that they might have some charge to bring against him.

They believe they have Jesus about ready to be eviscerated on the horns of three-fold dilemma.

1.) The people revered Moses. He was their great prophet and law-giver. The people revered the law of God — and so had Jesus. Jesus said, *"I'm not come to destroy the law, but to fulfill the law."* If Jesus says, *"Don't stone her,"* (by the way, they had rocks in hand) they would've said, *"This guy is not of God, for He defies Moses' law, and we all know that God gave Moses the law."*

2.) If Jesus says — *You're right, that's what the law says, stone her!* — Jesus will destroy His reputation as the prophet from Galilee who is the friend of tax collectors and sinners. The Gospels tell us that the common people heard him gladly. He ate with prostitutes and sinners — they were comfortable in His presence. He had told the people that His Father had sent Him into the world — not to condemn the world, but that the world might be saved through Him.

3.) More than that — Rome had taken from Israel the right to exercise the death sentence. In **John 18** these same men are going to bring Jesus to Pilate.

John 18:31 Pilate said to them, "Take him yourselves and judge him by your own law." The Jews said to him, "It is not lawful for us to put anyone to death."

If Jesus said "Stone her" Jesus would become an enemy of Caesar

It would appear that they had Jesus coming and going!

THE RESPONSE OF JESUS

I love what Jesus does.

John 8:6 (ESV) ⁶... Jesus bent down and wrote with his finger on the ground.

He ignores them and begins to write in the dirt! As far as I can recall it's the **only thing** we're told that Jesus **ever wrote** — and we're not told what He wrote! There's been tons of speculation on what He wrote.

There is a Biblical reference that can help us here.

Deuteronomy 9:10 And the Lord gave me the two tablets of stone written with the finger of God,

I believe we have the same thing going on here.

John 8:6Jesus bent down and wrote with his finger on the ground.

I believe that Jesus is doing what He did in **Deuteronomy 9** — With His finger He is writing the law in the ground. Perhaps Jesus wrote the first line of the Tenth Commandment,

Exodus 20:17 “.....you shall not covet your neighbor’s wife.

After all — If you have a bunch of heterosexual guys looking through a window, watching a naked woman have sex, there are going to be lust issues.

Perhaps Jesus wrote with His finger the Seventh Commandment,

Exodus 20:14 “You shall not commit adultery

⁷And as they continued to ask him, he stood up and said to them, “Let him who is without sin among you be the first to throw a stone at her.”

Then He stands up and tells them — *okay, fine, we will impose Old Testament law and we will put her to death.* According to the Old Testament someone needed to step forward to cast the first stone. The Old Testament mandated that that the accuser had to be the first one to impose the penalty (**Deuteronomy 17:7**). So, if you wanted someone put to death — and you brought the accusation — you had to throw the first stone. But you had to be very careful because if your accusation was proven false they impose upon you the same penalty you had sought against them (**Deuteronomy 19:19**). So, you didn’t mess around with this.

“Let him who is without sin among you be the first to throw a stone at her.”

Jesus is not saying that you must be perfect to bring judgment upon people for their sin. In **1 Corinthians 5** Paul tells us that we should judge those who are in the household of God. Jesus had just said in the last chapter *Do not judge by appearances, but judge with right judgment (John 7:24)*. In order to judge rightly Jesus said that we should be taking care of the things in our own life that **render us incapable** of rightly dealing with sin in anyone else’s life.

Matthew 7:3-5 Why do you see the speck that is in your brother’s eye, but do not notice the log that is in your own eye? ⁴Or how can you say to your brother, ‘Let me take the speck out of your eye,’ when there is the log in your own eye? ⁵You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your brother’s eye.

So — Jesus **is not** saying you must be perfect to point out sin in the life of another person. Otherwise no one would be able to point out sin in anyone’s life because no one is perfect.

He **is saying** that these men were the quintessential hypocrites.

A GLARING ABSENCE

QUESTION — Have you noticed something missing in all of this? Where is the guy involved in this act of adultery? *Hey Jesus, we caught this woman committing adultery **all by herself** — and we would like you to punish her.* By definition, adultery requires someone else to be there. The question is where is the guy? They didn’t bring the man — which leads us to believe that this was a set up from the get-go.

⁸And once more he bent down and wrote on the ground. ⁹But when they heard it, they went away one by one, beginning with the older ones, and Jesus was left alone with the woman standing before him.

Now there is only one man that is remaining with this convicted woman — Jesus.

HUGE QUESTION: Could Jesus have put her to death? Does Jesus **have a right** to put her to death? He does. Jesus is the sinless Son of God, God incarnate. It is His glory that has been robbed by her sin. It is His law that she has broken. But Jesus doesn't carry out the death penalty. We will get to that in a moment.

DON'T MISS THIS — Jesus is the only man in the story that does not take advantage of, or abuse this woman. Men had used her for sex. The religious leaders used her as a piece of evidence in their attempt to take down Jesus. EVERY OTHER MAN involved is seeking to rob this woman of her dignity and use her for selfish gain. Jesus is the only exception.

Having said all of that — we can't make this woman out to be a complete victim. Yes — She was set up, but she willingly committed adultery. In fact, adultery was pattern of conduct for this woman. Jesus is going to tell her to **stop living the way** she had been living. She had played a role in destroying marriages and families. Now she's simply been caught doing it. It would appear that the reason she is in this scene is because someone knew they could catch her committing adultery. We can't look at her and say — *She's a victim, Jesus is just giving a victim a break* — and **THAT is the big lesson here!**

Again — this is another of those Gospel of John moments: God incarnate speaking to just one person.

¹⁰Jesus stood up and said to her, “Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?” ¹¹She said, “No one, Lord.” And Jesus said, “Neither do I condemn you; go, and from now on sin no more.”]

WHAT REALLY HAPPENED

DON'T MISS THIS — Jesus looks upon her with compassion. Jesus forgives her for her sin. But it is here that MANY misunderstand what Jesus really did and why Jesus could do it. Jesus does not merely let her off the hook.

In this moment we find the answer to the great theological dilemma of many a man and woman — *How does God harmonize His justice with His mercy? If God is a God of righteousness and a God of justice and a God of judgment by His holy nature, she must die. If God is a God of love and of grace and of kindness and of mercy and forgiveness, she must live.*

How could Jesus let her go on her way and not invoke the Old Testament penalty of death? How could Jesus let her go without violating Old Testament law?

The answer is this — The penalty of death will be exacted! Paul tells us that *the wage of sin is death*. Death is the consequence of sin. There is spiritual death — Cessation of life with God; there is physical death — Cessation of biological life. Jesus can forgive this woman because Jesus is going to DIE in her place for her sin.

Hebrews 2:9 But we see him who for a little while was made lower than the angels, namely Jesus, crowned with glory and honor because of the suffering of death, so that by the grace of God he might taste death for everyone.

From this moment forward Jesus will continue to live a sinless life to the glory and honor of the Father, and then He will be nailed to a cross. The apostle Paul tells us what happened on that cross.

2 Corinthians 5:21 For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

There was a great exchange that transpired on the cross.

Rebecca McLaughlin — *Jesus does not minimize our guilt. He takes it from us.*⁴

You have heard it said — *Jesus died for your sin*. That is not cliché. That means that every time you have told a lie, every time you have had sex outside of marriage, every time you have lusted in your heart, every time you have been greedy or covetous or gluttonous, every time you have done anything that is an offense and a transgression against God — Jesus paid the penalty in your place.

⁴ McLaughlin, Rebecca. *Jesus through the Eyes of Women: How the First Female Disciples Help Us Know and Love the Lord* (p. 114). The Gospel Coalition. Kindle Edition.

DON'T MISS THIS — As Jesus hangs on the cross suffering, beaten, broken, bleeding and dying, it's because that woman went to bed with that man. That's why Jesus was there on the cross. And Jesus will pay in His own body and with His own blood for her sin. And so the Old Testament will be upheld. Her sin will be punished with death — But not her own death. Jesus is punished in her place — Like the innocent lamb being sacrificed in the Old Testament.

THAT is why Jesus can forgive her. THAT is why Jesus can give her the opportunity to leave her life of sin and live in the newness of a redeemed life.

¹⁰Jesus stood up and said to her, “Woman.....”

JESUS IS SO RADICAL!! Look at how Jesus refers to her. He does not call her a whore. He does not call her a slut. He does not call her a prostitute. He does not call her a home wrecker. He calls her *Woman*. It is a term of respect. THAT is the very same term that he used in **John 2** to refer to his own mother. He would use it again speaking from the cross in **John 19**. Don't you love that? He speaks to her with dignity. He speaks to her with honor and grace and love because He saw her as no man could. He formed her in her mom's womb. He looked at her and saw her as made in the image of God. He knew her as no man ever knew her. He knew all He had created her to be — and all she would be because of His relentless, redeeming love. He knew how that image of God was distorted and defaced one sin at a time (We all have our own story). She was a woman that so badly needed a Savior! And Jesus knew that. And I can't even begin to imagine the tone of His voice when He said, *“Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?”* This may have been the first time in a great number of years that any man has spoken to her in a tone of love with dignity and with affection, not seeking to manipulate her in order to use her body. PROFOUND dignity.

REMEMBER — John is showing us GOD ON MISSION. How do we look at those most obviously broken? FIRST — Do we even want to look at them. And when we do look at them — what do we think about them? Think about the crowd who had come to see and hear from Jesus — Suddenly this woman is dragged in

before them. We can't begin to imagine what she would have look — but she was probably at best covered with a sheet. Maybe some of the people in that crowd recognized her and knew exactly what kind of a person she was. Were they thinking: She deserves this? Were they indifferent to her. Or did they think she was an inconvenience — a broken person who intruding upon their “Jesus” moment? Do we look at such people as a human created in the image of God — broken by sin — needing to be rescued by Jesus — just like we needed to be rescued.

GUYS — We are sent into the mission of Jesus He wants the rivers of living water to overflow from our lives on to them. We have been called to be the agents of His matchless mercy. We get to tell them about the Jesus of John 8

Jesus does not wink at her sin. He addresses it.

11 And Jesus said, “Neither do I condemn you; go, and from now on sin no more.”

Look carefully at this. He didn't say — *go and sin no more and I won't condemn you*. That is legalism — not grace.

Jesus said — *Neither do I condemn you; go and be continuing in sin as a lifestyle no longer*. Those are the tenses. *I don't condemn —so now leave your life of sin and go live like a dignified, forgiven, cleansed woman. Go live that life.*

Every man and woman who has ever known what it is to look with the eye of faith into the eyes of Jesus and hear with your heart the tone of His voice saying — *I'm not going to bring judgment on you, I'm not going to condemn you, don't live this way anymore* — they have walked away empowered and changed. You're no longer spending your time trying to sin and not get caught. Your spending your time trying to live for Jesus!

Did she cry? Did she fall at his feet? I love the Depiction of her in The Passion of the Christ.

I love what one author said — *The tears would come, but they would come later, years afterwards as she watched her husband go out the door to work, as she looked in the face of her children, as over and over again she heard his voice, neither do I condemn you. Don't live this way anymore.*

CLOSING

As we take time to respond to the Word — please stop and think of how Jesus changes the lives of ALL who would come to Him. Think of the great forgiveness He extends to us. I think of the great forgiveness Jesus has extended to me. I would have never met Valerie, our lives would have never crossed paths, if Jesus hadn't saved us. I would have never looked in the face of any of my kids if Jesus hadn't said to me — *Neither do I condemn thee*. I would have never known any of the guys on staff here. ALL of that is given as a gift because of Jesus Christ.

As we take time to respond to the Word — If you have been judgmental and casting stones, get things in perspective.

As we take time to respond to the Word — If you've been living in sexual sin, pornography, look, those are serious issues. The Lord doesn't remove the seriousness of them, but He holds before us the emblems of the vicarious power of His redemption.

For those who don't know Jesus — The Bible holds in front of us the fact that through Jesus Christ you can be forgiven. It doesn't matter what you've done today. Adultery was a capital crime. Jesus said — *I don't condemn you, but don't live this way anymore*. You can come to him today.

If you don't know Jesus — you have to understand that religious organizations are never going to do anything for you. It is Jesus who forgives — and he forgives so powerfully and so thoroughly that religious organizations — self-righteous people — stumble at it. No strings attached. If your heart is genuine He forgives.