

John 8:1-11

Jesus returned to the Mount of Olives, ²but early the next morning he was back again at the Temple. A crowd soon gathered, and he sat down and taught them. ³As he was speaking, the teachers of religious law and the Pharisees brought a woman who had been caught in the act of adultery. They put her in front of the crowd.

⁴“Teacher,” they said to Jesus, “this woman was caught in the act of adultery. ⁵The law of Moses says to stone her. What do you say?”

⁶They were trying to trap him into saying something they could use against him, but Jesus stooped down and wrote in the dust with his finger. ⁷They kept demanding an answer, so he stood up again and said, “All right, but let the one who has never sinned throw the first stone!” ⁸Then he stooped down again and wrote in the dust.

⁹When the accusers heard this, they slipped away one by one, beginning with the oldest, until only Jesus was left in the middle of the crowd with the woman. ¹⁰Then Jesus stood up again and said to the woman, “Where are your accusers? Didn’t even one of them condemn you?”

¹¹“No, Lord,” she said.

And Jesus said, “Neither do I. Go and sin no more.”

Background

John 7:53–8:11 is not found in some of the earliest manuscripts of the Gospel of John. (Manuscripts are hand-written copies made before the printing press.) While most Greek manuscripts **do** include these verses, the very earliest ones do not. Some manuscripts also contain the story but place it in different locations within the Gospel of John.

Verses 6 and 8 mention Jesus writing on the ground. This is the only time in the Gospels we see Him writing. We don’t know what He wrote, but many have speculated. Perhaps He wrote part of the Law, the name of the guilty man, the sins of the accusers, or even His own words from verse 7. Maybe He just wrote on the ground to avoid eye contact with the disheveled woman. These are all interesting ideas, but ultimately speculative.

Teaching Points

1. God knows how to bring conviction to self-righteous people.

The self-righteous scribes and Pharisees may have staged the whole event. It’s unlikely they “just happened” to catch the woman in adultery. And where was the man? According to the Law

(Leviticus 20; Deuteronomy 22), both parties were to be punished. Letting the man go exposed a double standard.

They thought they had trapped Jesus. If He said, “Yes, stone her,” He’d lose His reputation for compassion. Under Roman rule, Jews also weren’t allowed to carry out the death penalty, so they would have reported Him for overstepping authority. On the other hand, if Jesus didn’t call for the death penalty, they would accuse Him of breaking the Mosaic Law.

When they kept pressing Him, He gave a powerful response: “*Let the one who has never sinned throw the first stone!*” (v7). One by one, they left, starting with the oldest, perhaps because he had the most to hide. God knows how to convict the self-righteous, both then and today.

2. God does not condone sin, but He forgives sin.

After the accusers left without condemning her, Jesus said, “*Neither do I [condemn you]. Go and sin no more.*” Jesus didn’t minimize her sin or lower God’s standards. He forgave her but also called her to repentance. God doesn’t condone sin but forgives it. We may try to justify our actions by saying things like, “It’s not that bad” or, “Everyone’s doing it these days.” However, God’s standards remain holy. The good news is that if you confess and believe in Jesus, He will forgive you!

Application

1. Let’s not hide behind “bigger sinners.”

The scribes and Pharisees despised “obvious sinners” to feel righteous. We can be guilty of this too, such as ignoring materialism by blending into a wealthy, materialistic church. Feeling uncomfortable around truly godly people can actually be good. It reveals our true selves instead of comparing ourselves to “worse sinners.”

2. Let’s be characterized by a forgiving spirit.

Sometimes we’re placed in positions where we must judge wrongdoing—whether as parents, teachers, church leaders, or ministry heads. In these situations, we don’t ignore or redefine sin, lower God’s standards, or dismiss justice. Instead, we follow the example of Jesus and confront wrongdoing with a spirit of forgiveness. Discipline may be necessary, but it should be guided by love and grace. This also applies to forgiveness and love toward other believers, letting go of long-held grudges. Let’s be known for a forgiving spirit!