
John 8:1-11

Jesus returned to the Mount of Olives, but early the next morning he was back again at the Temple. A crowd soon gathered, and he sat down and taught them. As 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. "Teacher," they said to Jesus, "this woman was caught in the act of adultery. The law of Moses says to stone her. What do you say?"

They 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. They 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!" Then he stooped down again and wrote in the dust.

When 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. Then Jesus stood up again and said to the woman, "Where are your accusers? Didn't even one of them condemn you?" "No, Lord," she said. And Jesus said, "Neither do I. Go and sin no more."

Before we get into this study, if you have read ahead you will probably notice that there is an asterisk next to this passage as the 4 most ancient manuscripts don't include this text. 2 of them do have a gap in this place as to indicate that something needed to be inserted, but still it is not there. Therefore, this section is generally considered to not have been written by the Apostle John but was later included in this text because of the unique way that it fits into the flow of John's teaching. Now, in the manuscripts where it does appear it always appears in John's gospel as

part of the teachings surrounding the feast of tabernacles. In addition, this passage has been accepted by most Bible translators as being not only historically accurate but carrying with it canonical authority—or the authority of the inspired scripture. This narrative is considered to bear all the required stamps for Biblical inclusion: originality, truth, purity, and even the grandiose way it cuts across the religious legalism of the day.

With that said, what we have been dealing with during this visit to Jerusalem is the contrast between Jesus' legitimate authority and the illegitimate authority of the religious leaders. They are blind and absolutely refuse to see the light that is blaring in their faces. The funny thing is that Jesus is always found just teaching a group of people in the Temple and they are the ones who come and start harassing Him. And it seems they never learn the lesson. Each time they confront Jesus they walk away in shame absolutely humiliated by Jesus' spotlight of truth which always reveals the true condition of their hearts. Worse yet, they always confront Jesus in public so their hearts are laid bare for everyone to see.

But their pride, their reputations, and their careers are on the line, and they have become absolutely fixated with disparaging Jesus and trying to bring a claim of illegitimacy over His life and ministry. They are the “pack” that is in control, they have the positions, they have the titles, they have the authority, but what is freaking them out is that Jesus has the crowd. The people keep coming to listen to Jesus teach and His message and their response is perceived as a threat to their entire way of life.

They want the “ignorant fools” in the crowd, “who do not really know anything about God,” to just follow them because they are the ones with positional authority. What a joke! Those in the crowd can clearly see that God is in their midst. For as they said: no one can perform the kind of supernatural miracles that

Jesus performed if God was not at the center of it all. They are also astounded by the truths that Jesus is teaching them, and they are starting to believe that He must be the Messiah!

These religious leaders on the other hand do not care about the truth. They do not truly seek God or even care about His will. In fact, they use God and the Law of God to serve their own purposes, all the while robed in the raiment and draping of a true priest. Even when one of their own, Nicodemus, tried to gently remind them that they were not keeping the law, the pack turned on him, smacked him down, and silenced him. Their behavior is embarrassing and shameful.

But they don't care. They are fixated on their agenda. They have to find a way to bring a claim of illegitimacy against Jesus; so they conspire together with the Scribes in order to trap Jesus. They actually go out of their way to set up this scenario just to try and bring accusation against Him. What amazes me is that their hearts are really that hard; they are able to somehow justify what they are doing and seem to have no real internal struggle. It does not matter who they hurt and whose lives they use, they just want Jesus to go down and get out of their way forever. They are sick of having His spotlight of truth reveal their illegitimacy. And instead of humbling themselves and repenting, they just try harder to turn off the light.

Now there are some things that you have to understand about this text and the cultural background in order to understand how ridiculous this set up is. First of all, adultery was common place at this time, so common that they had to cease to put the law in force against it. It was a crime that was just not prosecuted. In fact, the waters of jealousy mentioned in *Numbers 5:11-41* were no longer drunk because the men were afraid that it would not work on their wives because their own guilt was so widespread. If you have not read this part of *Numbers*, the law

provided for a process whereby a man could determine if his wife had been unfaithful. He brought her to the priest and she would be made to drink water mixed with some dust from the temple floor and if she was guilty we are told that her thighs would wither and her abdomen would swell. But again, this practice had stopped because it seems that everyone was guilty and the men were afraid that even if their wives had cheated the curse would not work because of the personal guilt they brought to the proceedings. So the fact that these religious leaders all of a sudden wanted to make an issue of this woman having been “caught in the act,” as if they really cared about the law, is completely disingenuous.

Second, in addition to widespread sexual immorality, the law required that if a couple is accused of adultery that both parties were to be arrested, tried, and if found guilty put to death. But where is the man? After all, if she was “caught in the act” she could not have been alone and it would not have been too hard to have subdued some naked man. The Law required that both parties were to be judged. So why did they not bring him to Jesus? Why do you think they were protecting the man? It is likely that the entire thing was a set up. They probably cut a deal with this man in advance and said they would not touch him if he seduced this woman so they can use her for their purposes. Come on? They just “happened” to catch them in the act? Not likely. They would have had to invade some serious privacy. It was a set up and the woman was the bait.

Third, notice that this plan of conspiracy was wrought with hypocrisy and illegitimacy from the beginning. The Pharisees brought along with them the Scribes, or the experts in the law. The Scribes were the professional lawyers. They were scriptuaries who explained and copied the law and, as such, could make enforceable judgments on the basis of the law. Some were priests, some were Sadducees but most were Pharisees. They were truly the elite. The title of Rabbi, or

great one, was reserved for them alone. Now, the reason I say this plan was wrought with hypocrisy and illegitimacy is that bringing the Scribes was just an intimidation technique. They came to judge whether Jesus would handle the situation according to the law; yet, the entire set up was in itself a violation of the law. Hello! Where was the man? Why were the lawyers not insisting that he be present? Why were they not insisting on the “waters of jealousy?”

Now I want you to picture the scene. Jesus is teaching this group of people in the Temple and all of a sudden this pack of Pharisees and Scribes break through the crowd and throw this woman in front of the crowd and demand an answer from Jesus as to what should be done with this woman. The Law of Moses said she should be stoned, but they wanted Jesus judgment. But what does this have to do with Jesus? They had courts? They had a legal system for dealing with this. They had the experts in the law by their side, they knew what to do. Why did they not just ask the scribes to adjudicate this great sin? This whole scene just drips with guile and rottenness.

So Jesus is forced into this horrible situation; and the crowd was now fixated on what He was going to do. It’s like some horrific playground scene where the bully comes along and just starts shoving some kid in the chest daring him to fight. Then when the kid does not throw a swing the bully keeps pushing him around. Notice that Jesus did not respond, but they kept demanding an answer and everyone was watching.

So what was the play here? This was really a multi layered strategy to trap Jesus. They tried to put Him in a catch 22 where he was damned if He did and damned if He didn’t. These guys were wily and they knew exactly what they were doing. If Jesus said that she should indeed be stoned, He ran the risk of them turning Him into the Romans claiming that Jesus tried to exercise the power of life and death

for a violation of the civil law, something only the Romans could exercise. You see, the legal autonomy to exercise capital punishment for a law breaker was formally stripped from the Jews somewhere between 40 and 50 years before Jerusalem was destroyed in 70 A.D. fulfilling a prophecy from *Genesis 49:10* that declared that the scepter would not depart Judah nor the ruler's staff from between his feet until the Messiah came. The true symbol of authority of any government is the power of life and death—the ability to enforce the rules of the land. This scepter was removed during the time that the Messiah walked the land.

Now, although the power had technically been lost, we know that the Romans gave great leniency to the Jews in certain religious or ecclesiastical matters to still exercise this power. We see this in the stoning of Stephen in *Acts 7*. This is also seen in Jesus' own trial. When the Jews first brought Jesus to Pilate He told them to go handle the matter themselves. He even told them to crucify Him themselves (*John 18:31; 19:6*). Pilate thought they were just upset over matters of their own law. But the religious leaders cleverly brought a claim of sedition against Jesus in order to invoke the power of the Roman government (which as another clever move in order to keep the crowds who followed Jesus at bay).

But this issue of adultery was not just an ecclesiastical matter of the Law of Moses, but a Roman civil matter. Under Roman law, adultery was generally a penal matter and great punishment was inflicted on the parties, but not death. It was not a capital crime (with the exception, of course, that the husband did have the right to personally kill his wife if she was caught in the act). But do you see the set up? If Jesus rendered a verdict of guilty and said that she must be killed according to the Law of Moses, they would turn Him in to Romans as being a lawbreaker of the Roman civil law.

However, if Jesus said that she was not to be killed, they would have accused Him of being soft on sin and one who disregarded the holy Law of God. As such, he could not be the Prophet, He could not be the Messiah, and could not have come from God who Himself gave the Law.

So that was the trap; that was the dynamic that they had thrown Jesus into. One way He was in trouble with the Romans and the other way He would lose His followers. Jesus just bends down and writes in the dust. They demand an answer to their question and He just wrote on the ground. I can imagine that right at this moment Jesus was having some serious dialogue with His Father asking Him what His wisdom dictated in this situation. I say that because later on in the text, which we will get to next week, Jesus told these same religious leaders: "I say only what I have heard from the one who sent me and he is true" (*John 8:26*).

Finally, Jesus stands and says something no one could have imagined. "All right, but let the one who has never sinned throw the first stone!" and then He just stooped back down and continued to write in the dust. The reaction to this was amazing, these self righteous leaders just backed off, starting from the oldest to the youngest, and no one threw a single stone. The reason I say this was so startling is that Jesus did not use the normal Greek word for sin, "harmartia," but the word "anamarteetos" which seems to imply that Jesus was not just stating the obvious that everyone is guilty of sin, so what man can judge; but that who of you is without a similar sin or a sin of the same nature of the accused, let that person be the one to throw the stone. He whose conscience is really clean in these matters of the 7th commandment, go ahead and throw "the" stone of judgment referred to in *Deuteronomy 17:7* – the stone of cleansing to purge evil from the nation of Israel.

In other words, you who are legitimate, you who can really make such a claim of innocence and purity, you who really desire the cleansing of Israel, go for it.

With this statement Jesus covered not only those who actually violated the 7th commandment (of which there were many), but also those who had lusted after a woman in this way; those whose minds had been defiled with sexual immorality. There was no out with this statement; all were guilty and everyone knew it. Once again, they had to retreat and shuffle away with their robes down at their ankles.

Wow, I am always astounded by the mind of God and His wisdom. Who could have come up with such an answer? It was simply brilliant! That is why in **John 5:30** Jesus said He never did anything without consulting His Father; nothing at all! He lived and walked in the wisdom which God continually gave Him. He always sought this wisdom and always applied this wisdom. This is the same kind of wisdom that we all need in order to navigate the “set ups” which the enemy thrusts us into. Amazingly enough, it is the kind of wisdom that is available to each of us if we live in absolute dependence upon God, always consulting with Him and always only saying what He wants us to say.

Every time I read the opening section of **1 Corinthians** I am a little set back by the confidence of Paul when he speaks of this reality in his life. Paul says: “No, the wisdom we speak of is the secret wisdom of God...But we know these things because God has revealed them to us by his Spirit, and his Spirit searches out everything and shows us even God’s deep secrets (**1 Corinthians 2:7,10**). This is amazing and it is ours for the seeking. **Proverbs 1-3** shows us the way; I encourage you to go study it and discover how this wisdom can be yours.

Now, a lot has been said about Jesus writing on the ground. People have speculated that Jesus might have been writing down people’s sins and that is why they got freaked out. I am not sure if we should make too much of what He might have wrote versus the fact that it is pointed out twice that He wrote something. As we know in the gospel of John those little details are always significant. But

honestly, I have not yet been able to fully connect the dots. But there is an interesting verse in Jeremiah that actually connects Jesus' comments of being the source of living water (which we studied in last weeks' text) and His stooping and writing on the ground.

Jeremiah 17:13

O Lord, the hope of Israel, all who forsake you shall be put to shame; those who turn away from you shall be written in the earth, for they have forsaken the Lord, the fountain of living water.

So maybe He was writing their names along with dates and places knowing that the Scribes and Pharisees would have remembered this verse and that is why they just quietly slipped away. But what I find most interesting is that when they set this woman down in front of Jesus, He stoops down to the ground. He purposely takes a position of servitude, as one who was humbling Himself and not a position of judgment. If you have ever been in a court room you will notice that the judge's seat is always elevated above all others in the room. Even when the judge walks into the court room he stands on a platform and literally looks down on all others. Those in judgment always sit above those being judged as a way to say that they have the power and the right to judge because they sit above the baser parts of humanity, which signifies that they have the moral authority to adjudicate such matters.

But Jesus takes a different position. He stoops down to the ground and His hands are in the dirt or the dust on the Temple floor as if to say that He is not the one who is going to judge (which He actually says in *verse 15*) but He is the one

who is going to be condemned and the dirt of the world, the sin of man, will be on His hands.

Wow, this is a powerful picture and stands in stark contrast to the religious leaders who marched into this area of the Temple in their little pack acting all arrogant and appalled at this sinner. But Jesus communicates no such attitude. Imagine, He had just communicated to everyone that He was God (in *Chapter 7:28* and *33* He said He was going to return to the one who sent Him—the one who is true for He came down from heaven and will soon return, and in *verse 38* He said that He was the source of living water or the fountain spring of the Holy Spirit); and, yet, we find God in the flesh stooping down to all humanity taking the position of the accused.

He then stands up, not so much in judgment, but His position now demonstrates that He is ready to speak and what He says will be authoritative. He communicates that every person who was holding a stone is themselves guilty and deserving of the stone of judgment—deserving of death. And then, as if to communicate that He is the one who will take the stone on their behalf, He once again, in the humility of servitude, stoops down and writes in the ground. The people probably did not comprehend the deep meaning of Jesus' actions, but they sure seemed to understand that the spot light of truth had been turned their way and it was exposing all things for what they truly were; and they had no place to hide. They realized that He spoke the truth and it was indeed authoritative and as such that they had no position, no power, and no authority to levy judgment. All they could do is drop their stones and slip away, one by one.

Then after they left, He stood up again taking a position of authority and with dirt on His hands, spoke a prophetic truth that would echo through eternity. He asked: "Where are your accusers? Didn't even one of them condemn you? She said

“No, Lord.” And Jesus said: “Neither do I. Go and sin no more.” This was a prophetic statement that spoke not only to this woman but speaks to you and me as well.

If you call on the name of the Lord, if you let God stoop down as a man and humble Himself to be your sacrifice for sin, if you let His hands be covered in the dirt of your sin, if you let Him take the stone for you, then neither He nor any man will ever condemn you. You will be free in deed. Men may try and accuse you, but it does not matter, He stooped down for you. Now because of what He has done, you can actually go and sin no more; you can actually live free from the bondage of sin. It is really possible! You can live as a person who is truly born of the Spirit.

John 8:12-20

Jesus spoke to the people once more and said, "I am the light of the world. If you follow me, you won't have to walk in darkness, because you will have the light that leads to life." The Pharisees replied, "You are making those claims about yourself! Such testimony is not valid."

Jesus told them, "These claims are valid even though I make them about myself. For I know where I came from and where I am going, but you don't know this about me. You judge me by human standards, but I do not judge anyone. And if I did, my judgment would be correct in every respect because I am not alone. The Father who sent me is with me. Your own law says that if two people agree about something, their witness is accepted as fact. I am one witness, and my Father who sent me is the other."

"Where is your father?" they asked. Jesus answered, "Since you don't know who I am, you don't know who my Father is. If you knew me, you would also know

my Father." Jesus made these statements while he was teaching in the section of the Temple known as the Treasury. But he was not arrested, because his time had not yet come.

Let's start with this statement "I am the light of the world." There is so much to be said about this one little phrase alone for it has so much meaning. First, it is likely a direct reference to the lights celebrating the feast of tabernacles. According to the Mishna at the Temple, "there were four golden menorahs with four golden bowls at the top of each, and four ladders each leading to a bowl. Four strong young men would climb up with pitchers each holding 9 liters of oil which they would pour into the bowls. From the worn-out drawers and girdles of the men they made wicks, and with them they lit the menorahs; and there was not a courtyard in Jerusalem that was not lit up by the light. It was even said that these lamps could be seen for miles and miles outside of Jerusalem. Everyone would dance around [the menorahs] with lit torches in their hands, singing songs and praises, while the Levites played harps, lyres, cymbals, trumpets and innumerable other musical instruments...." (Sukkah 5:2-4).

This was done as a reminder of the pillar of fire which guided their ancestors through the wilderness journey and is the third reference Jesus makes to those times (first the manna, then the water from the rock, and now the pillar of fire). The imagery is clear. Jesus is the one who will guide us safely through this journey here on earth. He will illuminate our steps and show us the way to walk to our "promised land." We won't be stumbling in the darkness for His light will lead us to life. Therefore, we can dance and celebrate knowing that our future, our destiny, and each and every step of our lives are His to direct and not ours to guess. There is safety and comfort following only His light.

Second, it is a reference for the sake of the Rabbis who were present who claim that the Divine Being is the light of *Genesis 1* that pierced the darkness and is the source of truth, purity, and all that is holy. This notion of the light was a clear Messianic reference in *Isaiah 42:6* and *Malachi 4:2*. Notice that Jesus also once again invokes the language of deity and says that He is the “I AM” and as such is the light of the world. If you come to Him He will dispel the darkness in your heart and give you a reason to dance.

Third, I believe Jesus is also making a direct refutation to the claim that He is illegitimate because He comes from Galilee. Remember; when they silenced Nicodemus they said that nowhere in the scriptures does it declare that a prophet comes from Galilee. We finished with this verse last week from *Isaiah 9:1-2*: “The land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, by the way of the sea, beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles—the people who were sitting in darkness saw a great light, and those who were sitting in the land of the shadow of death, upon them a light dawned.” These so called religious leaders were flat out in error and they did not know the scriptures. Jesus is that great light of Galilee!

The Pharisees then tried to use Jesus own words against Him. In *John 5:31* Jesus said: “If I were to testify on my own behalf my testimony would not be valid.” So they pull out that comment and said that by His own admission He makes false claims because no one testifies with Him (which is another allusion to the Law which required that if anyone was to be convicted of any sin or offense it must be at the hands of two to three witnesses, *Deuteronomy 19:15*). Now clearly they were not applying the letter of the law but the principle of the law. Jesus however just kind of blows that away and says that even if He were to testify on His own it would still be legitimate because He comes from Heaven and His judgment therefore is always true.

Then He points two key things about judgment. First, because they do not have the light of God they will always stumble in the darkness; thus, their judgment will always be clouded by their flesh, their sinful nature—or in the Greek their “sarx” (the New Living translated this word as “human limitations”). This is the same word Paul always used when referencing our sinful nature; and this word “sarx” or “flesh” is distinct from the word “sooma” which is the Greek word used when Paul makes reference to our physical bodies. This is another reminder of why we so desperately need the wisdom of God for all parts of our life, for we run the risk of making decisions and judgments by our old sinful nature.

Second, it is critical to note that Jesus did not come to earth to be its judge; rather, He stooped down from Heaven in order to be judged. That is awesome, but that is not how it is always going to be. The Bible speaks of a day when Jesus will return to earth; but this time as the judge, the jury, and the executioner of all those who live in darkness. Believe you me, that is not a day you want to be around for. I encourage you, let Jesus be the one who is judged for your sin; let Him be your Savior.

Jesus then turns the tables on them once again and makes reference to the Law and the fact that His Father is His witness, one they do not know; thus, His testimony is valid under any examination. They therefore insist on knowing who His Father is and Jesus never answers their question. He just says that since they don't know Him they don't know the Father. Aside from the fact that they are fools for continuing to try and match wits with Jesus, this statement cuts across every religion and philosophy which believes that they have a pathway to God. According to Jesus they simply don't. If they do not know the Son, they cannot know the Father. In the book of 1 John, the Apostle builds on this statement.

1 John 5:9-12

Since we believe human testimony, surely we can believe the greater testimony that comes from God. And God has testified about his Son. All who believe in the Son of God know in their hearts that this testimony is true. Those who don't believe this are actually calling God a liar because they don't believe what God has testified about his Son. And this is what God has testified: He has given us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. Whoever has the Son has life; whoever does not have God's Son does not have life.

This is an unbending truth. It does not matter who you are, what position you hold, what title you claim, or what path you carve out for your life, if you don't approach the Father through the Son, you will never reach Him. In fact, you will live forever in darkness.

John then tells us that this event took place in the section of the Temple known as the treasury, which was located in the Court of Women. This makes a lot of sense and explains why many are comfortable inserting the text about the adulteress right where it is found in our Bibles. She was brought to Jesus at this location because she would not have been allowed into any other part of the Temple.

John then closes this section with a statement of the absolute sovereignty of God. Nothing could happen to Jesus until the time appointed by the Father. No matter how mad they got at Him, they could not arrest Him or do any harm until the time that had been appointed by the Father. The implication is that, in the same way, if you are a child of God, nothing has happened or can happen to you unless it has been appointed by the Father.

This is a difficult truth because of the implications. We don't like to think that God is responsible for the bad or terrible things that has happen in our lives and we only want to give Him credit for what we consider to be the good things, or the blessings. Well, that theology is in error. He is absolutely sovereign and nothing happens to a child of God absent His assent. When you can really wrap your mind around this truth it is so freeing and comforting. If you are willing to align your beliefs with the truth, you will start to understand how God truly does work all things out for our good in order to conform us into the image of His Son and into living instruments that reflect His glory. It is an amazing and powerful truth that brings life. Don't run from it; embrace it.

Let's Pray.