

December 14, 2014  
Sunday Morning Service  
Series: John  
Community Baptist Church  
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Greer, SC 29650  
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*To Ponder . . .*

Questions to ponder as you prepare to hear from John 7:53-8:11.

1. Generally speaking, do the older or the younger copied Greek manuscripts contain this story?
2. What are the negative ramifications if this story was not actually part of John's original writing?
3. Do you believe this woman was saved by faith in Jesus?
4. What sin is Jesus not able to forgive?
5. Why did Jesus tell the woman not to sin any more?

**YOU ARE FORGIVEN – STOP SINNING**  
**John 7:53-8:11**

If you look carefully at our text in your English translation of the Bible, you might notice some kind of notation in the margin or at the bottom of the page that says something like, “The earliest manuscripts do not include 7:53-8:11.”

You might react to that statement with fear or disappointment or agitation. Do you think that it was not very nice for the people who published your Bible to foster doubt in your mind about the veracity of your Bible? Would you rather that the translators and publishers be honest or nice? Let's take a few minutes to understand why this accurate and honest observation should not cause the follower of Christ to doubt if we have an accurate copy of the Scripture to read.

In the beginning of the Bible, God the Holy Spirit picked particular men to be writers of the Scripture. He inspired these men (breathing out God's words and character to the writers, 2 Tim. 3:16). He bore them along as they wrote (2 Peter 2:20). We do not fully understand all the details of this inspiring or how it actually happened. But we believe that each of the writers of each of the sixty-six books of the Bible wrote down what God led them to write, even while God allowed each writers' personality to come out in the record.

There is not a lot of debate about the Old Testament. Since it was already around at the time of Jesus and the apostles, and, since they quoted from it profusely, most Christians agree as to its veracity.

However, when we come to the New Testament, there is reason for disagreement. Each of the writers of the New Testament—like Mark, Matthew, Luke, John, Paul, Peter, James and so forth— wrote their Gospel account or letters or history. After they sent these to the intended recipients, someone, somewhere had the original. Because it was inspired Scripture, God prompted other people to make copies of the writings. This practice no doubt began very shortly after the intended readers received the original letter or account.

In that process, for example, there would have been sincere scribes who copied John's account of Jesus' life over and over so that other Christians would have the same privilege we have of reading it and meditating on the truth. No, they did not have nice, efficient copy machines like we have, or even rugged, cumbersome presses like the Gutenberg. They made copies by hand, writing carefully on pieces of animal skins or a paper-like material made from reeds called papyrus. This went on year after year, century after century just as surely as publishers continue to crank out copies of the Bible year after year in our era.

Early in the history of the Church, the center of activity moved from Jerusalem to Alexandria, Egypt. Tradition holds that Mark went to that city in AD 45 to plant the first church. Some of the most notable early church fathers were from Alexandria. Also, the oldest copies and fragments of the New Testament Greek texts (the copies of the originals) have been found in this arid, desert area.

At the same time Antioch, an ancient city in Turkey, also became one of the significant centers of the Christian Church. Of

course, in the same broader vicinity, Rome became a very important center for the Church. As the Roman empire was winding down, the capital was moved from Rome to Constantinople and the leaders of the Church followed.

This is where a division developed within the visible church. Of course, by that time the visible church was probably not an accurate reflection of the true Church, the body of born again believers. Be that as it may, we can only imagine how many copies of the Scripture were written during these years. And with two major centers being the places from which most of the scribes did their copying, we can understand how differences would creep into the copies. In both Alexandria and Constantinople, the scribes wrote what they thought was the authentic Scripture. But sometimes a scribe in the past had written a thought or an explanation in the margin of his text. Then when a scribe 200 years later saw it, he mistakenly assumed that it was supposed to be part of the text, maybe information that had been left out and appended later. Also, there were times when the teaching of the bishops, pastors, and priests overshadowed the simple statement and meaning of the original text. So variants were included in the copies that added to or took away from the original words.

It is not surprising then that the Eastern (Constantinople or Byzantine as it came to be known) and Western families of the Church produced Greek manuscripts that evidenced some differences. Nearly all of these differences are minor and not one of them effects a major doctrine of the Bible. If we were to write down all of the differences between the families, they would barely fill up one page of the typical Greek New Testament.

The Western or Alexandrian family of textual evidence are the oldest copies available to us. Probably this is due to the fact that they were kept in the dry, arid region of north Africa. The earliest of those pieces of evidence come from John's gospel and date back to the year 125 – just about thirty years after John wrote. The Eastern or Byzantine family of textual evidence is much more plentiful, primarily because Rome and the area around Turkey was the center of the visible church for many years (350-present). Most of that manuscript evidence was copied in the years 700-1200.

At various points in history, scholars have compiled Greek texts of the New Testament based on these various families. The Received

Text, compiled by a catholic scholar named Erasmus in 1516, was written based on the more numerous, but younger copies of the Greek manuscripts. It is the basis for the King James translation. The Westcott and Hort text, published in 1881 was compiled from the older, but fewer copies from the Western family of manuscripts. This text is essentially, though not completely, the basis for English translations like the NAS and the ESV which I use.

And that is why you very possibly have a note about this story being included or excluded from your Bible. Very quickly let's consider the arguments for and against including this story in the Gospel of John. Some of the reasons given for why the story is not part of John's original writing are:

1. It is not found in the oldest and most accurate manuscripts.
2. It is not found in many of the oldest translations of the Greek text such as the Lectionaries, Syriac. and Coptic.
3. Early church fathers such as Origen, Cyril, Chrysostom, Tertullian, and Cyprian (AD 222-386) do not refer to it.
4. In the Greek syntax, it differs from the style consistent throughout John's Gospel using words and forms of expression that are not found in any of his other writings.
5. Many of the copied manuscripts that include the story place it in various locations throughout the Gospels (John 7:44 or 7:36 or 21:25 or after Luke 21:38). In fact, the Greek sounds more like Luke's writing than John's.

Some of the reasons given for why the story should be considered part of original writing are:

1. It is found in nearly all of the younger manuscripts, especially the ones dating from 1,000 to 1,600.
2. It is found in the Latin Vulgate, Arabic, and Persian translations of the Greek texts.
3. It is commented on by Augustine (AD 420) and in *the Apostolic Constitutions* (AD 380).

Since there is debate about the veracity of this story, why do we bother to take time to consider it? Actually some commentators skip over this text without as much as a mention or explanation. I believe it is important for us to consider what the story teaches first, because it fits John's explanation that not everything Jesus did or said was recorded. *Now there are also many other things that Jesus did. Were*

*every one of them to be written, I suppose that the world itself could not contain the books that would be written (John 21:25).* Was this one of the many things Jesus did that was not recorded? It is altogether possible that this event occurred and was part of oral tradition.

Second, we will consider this story because it is consistent with the rest of the examples of Jesus' ministry. He said He came to seek the lost, sick sinners. He taught, *For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost (Luke 19:10).* He showed great compassion for repentant sinners, but at the same time Jesus often uncovered the Pharisees' hypocrisy. All of that happens in this story.

So, do I think that John recorded this event and included it when he wrote the Gospel? No, I am not convinced he did. But at the same time, everything about the story sounds like Jesus. Again, I am of the opinion that this confrontation actually occurred and that it became part of oral tradition. I wonder if maybe Luke wrote about it to someone, but not as part of his Gospel. I also wonder if it didn't take place during the Passion week as one of the final battles between Jesus and the scribes and Pharisees.

### **Jesus was Teaching at the Temple (7:53-8:2).**

In the context, which is all about the Feast of Tabernacles, the feast was over. On the last day of the feast, Jesus had invited spiritually thirsty people to come to Him to find satisfaction (7:37). That is where the questionable part of the text comes up. The last verse of chapter seven states that everyone except Jesus went home (7:53). All the people went to their own houses. It just makes sense that the people who lived in the area walked home. But there were a lot of visitors who came to the feast from distant towns. Yes, those visitors from afar would have headed for home also.

Jesus, on the other hand, went to the Mount of Olives (7:53b). We cannot say for sure if He went there to pray or to sleep in the open. Or it is entirely possible that He went up the Mount of Olives and just over the ridge to the village of Bethany.

All-in-all this story already sounds like material we are familiar with from a later setting (months after the Feast of Tabernacles). We know from the Gospel accounts that Jesus was staying nearby during

the week of Passover. In fact, that week before the important feast, Jesus arrived to stay with friends in Bethany. *Six days before the Passover, Jesus therefore came to Bethany, where Lazarus was, whom Jesus had raised from the dead (John 12:1).* We know that on Sunday of that Passover week, Jesus rode into Jerusalem to the shouts and praises of His disciples. We also know that He walked into His Father's house (the temple) and threw out all the merchants and thieves.

Then, after the triumphal entry into Jerusalem and the cleansing of the temple, Jesus returned to Bethany, where He slept, only to return to the city each day. *And leaving them, He went out of the city to Bethany and lodged there. In the morning, as He was returning to the city, He became hungry (Matthew 21:17-18).* Each day He went to the city to teach. *And every day he was teaching in the temple, but at night he went out and lodged on the mount called Olivet. And early in the morning all the people came to him in the temple to hear him (Luke 21:37-38).* It is possible that the phrase, "lodged on the mount called Olivet," refers to His retreat to Lazarus' house in Bethany which was just over the ridge.

With that bit of background in hand, we are aware that the people found Jesus at the temple teaching each day during Passover. So our text explains that *early in the morning He came again to the temple. All the people came to Him, and He sat down and taught them (v.2).* It is telling for us to note that in the context of the Passover Feast Luke wrote, *And He was teaching daily in the temple. The chief priests and the scribes and the principal men of the people were seeking to destroy Him (Luke 19:47).* He also wrote, *One day, as Jesus was teaching the people in the temple and preaching the gospel, the chief priests and the scribes with the elders came up and said to him, "Tell us by what authority you do these things, or who it is that gave you this authority" (Luke 20:1-2).* Those words certainly ring in concert with this story about the woman and the hypocrites.

### **Hypocrites Tried to Trap the Teacher (vv.4-9).**

Some very important, very influential leaders thought they had an air-tight case against this Teacher from Galilee (vv.4-6). They

walked up to Him with a woman who had been caught in the act. *The scribes and the Pharisees brought a woman who had been caught in adultery, and placing her in the midst (v.3)*. It is clear that John never mentioned the “scribes and the Pharisees” together like this in his Gospel account. However, Matthew, Mark, and Luke regularly picture the group hanging out together. In fact, it probably does not refer to two separate groups. The term Pharisees speaks of a religious sect, a certain creed that is followed, somewhat like Baptist, Methodist, and Lutheran identify various creeds within Christendom. Pharisee would generally be compared to Sadducee. The scribes, on the other hand, were the teachers, law writers, lawyers (regarding their religious laws), and theologians of Israel. Most of them were of the Pharisee group.

This group of religious leaders, lawyers, and teachers brought a woman to Jesus while He was teaching in the temple courtyard. They pointed out that someone, or more likely some delegation, had caught this horrible woman in the act of adultery. *They said to him, “Teacher, this woman has been caught in the act of adultery” (v.4)*. Most certainly she really was caught sinning. No one can argue against that because no part of the story indicates that she was innocent. Nor did she plead innocent.

The woman was clearly exposed as a sinner just like the Bible clearly exposes each one of us as sinners. Isn't it interesting how we tend to categorize sins? Sexual sins, theft, murder, and the like are the bad sins. We are pleased that we are not guilty of such atrocities even while we engage in idolatry, deceit, pride, and hatred. The lesser sins caused Christ's crucifixion as much as the “greater” sins. Any breach of God's law, no matter how small, is sufficient to have us condemned to hell forever. Some commentators believe that the religious leaders set the woman up. That is, they think the leaders hired a worthless fellow to tempt the woman, and then when she conceded they walked in on the couple just as they had planned. That rather looks like the case since the other party in the adultery, the man, was nowhere to be found.

If that is what the religious leaders did, they were very much like their foremother Jezebel who hired such worthless fellows to slander Naboth so that he was executed (1 Kings 21). They were very

much like the Accuser of the Brethren who tempts Christians to sin, and, when we do, he runs to God and whines about God being unjust. What does God say to Satan when he accuses you and me of sin? Hang on to that question for a minute and we will answer it later.

Everyone knew that God's law was clear on this matter of adultery. The law God gave through Moses did require that offenders in this sin should be stoned. They reminded Jesus, *Now in the Law Moses commanded us to stone such women. So what do You say?” (v.5)*. Okay, that is true. And yet we know that King David was not stoned. Was it because he was the king? As far as the records show, no Israelite in Jerusalem had been stoned for this sin. Of course, the Jewish leaders stoned people for preaching Jesus Christ (i.e. Stephen, Paul at Lystra), but not for committing adultery.

So if this was not a common practice, what difference does it make to the lawyers and teachers what Jesus thinks about it? They asked Jesus' opinion because they were trying to trap Him. *This they said to test him, that they might have some charge to bring against him (v.6a)*. He was not only an Israelite, but because of His teaching and miracles, He was a significant leader in Israel. At times He was wildly popular. If these lawyers could offer indisputable proof that Jesus set aside “God's law,” they would be able to justify having Him killed. To that end, they placed the woman in the center of the crowd so that all the people would be witnesses when Jesus set aside God's law. In other words, both Jesus and the scribes understood that this was a crucial moment in Jesus' ministry. Was it time, according to the Father's plan, for the Son to be crucified? Not yet. So what do you think will happen?

Seeming to ignore the scribes' accusation against the woman *Jesus bent down and wrote with his finger on the ground (v.6b)*. The obvious question is, “What did Jesus write?” Some believe He simply but into practice 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 (Jeremiah 17:13)*. Or was He writing, *You shall not spread a false report. You shall not join hands with a wicked man to be a malicious witness (Exodus 23:1)*. Or, *Keep far from a false charge, and do not kill the innocent and righteous, for I*

*will not acquit the wicked (Exodus 23:7).* If the leaders had set the woman up, this was essentially a false charge.

I like to think that whatever Jesus wrote was from the law of God, which is not to be confused with the traditions of the scribes and Pharisees. The most common interpretation is that Jesus was writing down the sins of the accusers, which would have been an appeal to God's law. The amazing thing we see as the story progresses is that the lawyers didn't seem to realize their airtight case was leaking.

Those leaders thought they had an airtight case against Him, but Jesus had a tighter case. Who hasn't broken God's law? *And 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" (v.7).* Jesus did not flippantly or lightly excuse the adulteress's sin. That is how a lot of religious folks respond today. They are not willing to confront sin in a brother or even in their children because they are guilty of worse sin. Jesus who never sinned did not view the sins of others lightly.

Rather Jesus simply quoted God's law. He reminded the accusers that *the hand of the witnesses shall be first against him to put him to death, and afterward the hand of all the people. So you shall purge the evil from your midst (Deuteronomy 17:7).* They were the witnesses and they needed to do the stoning. The law implied that the people throwing the stones could not have also been guilty of the crime. Jesus simply revealed that those men especially were not qualified to execute a person for breaking God's law. This would be especially obvious if He had been writing a list of their sins on the ground.

The story reminds us that conviction of sin leaves everyone guilty. *And once more he bent down and wrote on the ground (v.8).* Jesus was in complete control of the situation. He did not have to raise His voice in defense of Himself or the woman. No doubt He was indignant about the hypocrites' sin. But He simply continued to write something on the ground that was very convicting. Whatever the case, the accusers walked away quietly. *But 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 (v.9).* When the hypocrites were reminded that they had better be free from sin before they throw a stone, they knew they had lost their case.

What do we learn? Christians need to be very careful to carry out their responsibility regarding the sins of others. We cannot ignore sin if we really love Jesus Christ who was crucified for sin. We cannot tolerate, embrace, or pass off sin lightly if we really love God with all our hearts. But we must understand our limitations. We are responsible to uncover sin. Paul wrote, *Take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness, but instead expose them (Ephesians 5:11).* Our uncovering is most effective within the sphere of our influence. That would typically be in our family, our church, our neighborhood, or our community. When we do uncover sin, it is still not our duty to condemn the sinner. Our obligation is to show them error, show them the forgiveness of God, attempt to bring them into right fellowship with God.

The scribes and Pharisees proudly considered themselves to be the authority of right and wrong and, therefore, wrongly assumed they were justified to exact punishment. God has relegated punishment for sin to a select group of people—parents, governing authorities, and Himself.

### **The Teacher is the Redeemer (vv.10-11).**

No one condemned the sinful woman. Jesus looked at the woman and asked her to face reality. *Jesus stood up and said to her, "Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?" (v.10).* Jesus challenged the woman to consider the situation. He loves to help us see the truth that condemnation is gone.

The sinner admitted the truth. *She said, "No one, Lord" (v.11a).* She realized that though she could have been executed for her sin, the accusers were gone. This is what the sinner sees when he or she looks around after forgiveness. The albatross of sin that once hung around the sinner's neck is gone. The reason for condemnation has disappeared. The Accuser of the brethren is silenced. Why or how?

The Redeemer forgave sin. Jesus the Savior and Redeemer chose not to condemn. *And Jesus said, "Neither do I condemn you" (v.11b).* Jesus was fully justified to dismiss her condemnation because He came to pay the price for her sin. He does not carelessly, though with compassion and emotion, dismiss the guilt that rightly condemns us. He appeals to justice. Justice demands that our sins be

paid for. He Himself paid the demand. Now He justly dismisses the guilt of the confessed sinner. When Satan accuses me to God, God replies, “That debt was already paid by My Son.”

In response, our Redeemer expects humble dependance. He told the forgiven sinner, *Go, and from now on sin no more (v.11c)*. This statement reveals a relationship between the forgiven and the Forgiver. Because Jesus paid for her sins, she needed to guard against sinning. Was the woman sinless from that point on? Not hardly! But she needed to depend on the work of the Holy Spirit to guide her away from sin. So, too, when we experience Christ’s removal of our guilt for sin, we ought to rightly lean on Him for strength and conviction to outgrow the desires of our flesh.