



**John 8:1-11**  
***Caught in Their Own Net***

NKJ John 8:1 But Jesus went to the Mount of Olives.

2 Now early in the morning He came again into the temple, and all the people came to Him; and He sat down and taught them.

3 Then the scribes and Pharisees brought to Him a woman caught in adultery. And when they had set her in the midst,

4 they said to Him, "Teacher, this woman was caught in adultery, in the very act.

5 "Now Moses, in the law, commanded us that such should be stoned. But what do You say?"

6 This they said, testing Him, that they might have something of which to accuse Him. But Jesus stooped down and wrote on the ground with His finger, as though He did not hear.

7 So when they continued asking Him, He raised Himself up and said to them, "He who is without sin among you, let him throw a stone at her first."

8 And again He stooped down and wrote on the ground.

9 Then those who heard it, being convicted by their conscience, went out one by one, beginning with the oldest even to the last. And Jesus was left alone, and the woman standing in the midst.

10 When Jesus had raised Himself up and saw no one but the woman, He said to her, "Woman, where are those accusers of yours? Has no one condemned you?"

11 She said, "No one, Lord." And Jesus said to her, "Neither do I condemn you; go and sin no more."

**Introduction:** I don't often do an introduction to a sermon where I talk about the history of the text itself, but here I feel I must if only because a lot of modern Bible translations like the NIV and the ESV actually put John 7:53 through 8:11 in brackets and include a warning that it doesn't occur in the earliest manuscripts. This is the most disputed passage in the entire New Testament and that isn't a new or a liberal argument, its been argued over in the church for almost two millennia. That is because the earliest copies we have of John don't include it, and some other copies place it elsewhere, and many of the Greek fathers rejected it and didn't comment on it - they go immediately from John 7:52 to John 8:12. On the other hand a the Latin Fathers did comment on it and treat it as authentic including Jerome and Augustine. The church historian Eusebius tells us that Pappias who was one of John's students spoke on it, and he most likely heard of it directly from John. So where do I stand, I agree with men like Calvin that even if it doesn't belong exactly here in John, it is a true authentic and inspired testimony of an event in the life of Christ, that it belongs in the bible, and that it should be preached on. Which is what I'm going to do.

**Sermon:** At this point in his ministry Jesus is camping with his disciples on the Mt. of Olives, which is directly across the Kidron valley from the Temple. In fact you can see the Temple Mount perfectly from there. In the mornings he would go up to Temple and teach the people who had gathered there. In those days, as the text indicates, the teacher sat and the listeners stood. I love Spurgeon's comment to his congregation about that. He said "*we may have to try that plan one of these days; it might be better for me and also for you. There might be less drowsiness, perhaps, if the congregation had to stand to listen to the preacher's message.*"

Anyway, the Pharisees and rulers haven't given up on their plans to arrest and kill Jesus. But it may just be that they were stung enough by the comment of Nicodemus in John 7:51 "***Does our law judge a man before it hears him and knows what he is doing?***" and the reaction of Temple Police that they realize that just accusing him vaguely of being a deceiver won't be enough. Before they can take him, they'll need a specific offense they can point to along with witnesses. So that morning the Scribes and Pharisees come to Him to do just that. Now this is the only place in John where Scribes are mentioned, so Kids Scribe means literally someone who knows how to write, and at this time that was a very important skill because many if not most of the people couldn't read and write. So if you needed something like a contract or a will written you needed a scribe. And they needed also to be experts in the Rabbinical Law to do that. They ended up doing a host of different things, dropping up contracts, deciding cases, giving expert opinions, and so on. They were the Lawyers of their time.

Now we are told what this woman did, but we aren't told anything else about this woman. They bring her to Jesus as if they want Him to act as a Rabbi and decide what they should do with her. But what is clear is that it is Jesus, and not the woman who is the one on trial, she is just a pawn, completely depersonalized and used by the scribes and Pharisees. We talked last week of the fact that some of the manifestations of spiritual pride were seeing the sins of others but not your own, ministering in a harsh and censorious spirit, and neglecting others. To them this woman was just a worthless sinner another one of the "accursed crowd who knew not the law" as they put it in John 7:48 she was worthy of nothing but the contempt and condemnation of righteous religious law-keepers like themselves. Her value is as a tool to get rid of Jesus.

Jesus as we shall see, treat her totally differently he treats her with compassion. This is actually Christ's second encounter with an adulteress in the book of John, the first was with the Samaritan woman at the well in John 4. Jesus had Himself said to her "you have had five husbands, and the one whom you now have is not your husband" but like that woman, his emphasis is on her salvation. As Christ will testify in chapter 12, ***I did not come to judge the world but to save the world.***

Now you should be immediately struck by an odd detail, namely there are many sins you can commit without the help of others, but being caught in the act of adultery is not one of them. *So where was the man?* The law of God actually prescribed death for both of them in Lev. 20 and Deut 22, but for one reason or another they had decided not to charge *him*.

If this whole situation was to test Him, then they had plotted together in advance saying "***here's the dilemma we'll put before him, either way he answers, he's sunk.***" By their reasoning, he can't possibly get out of this. If Jesus says, "let her go," they can accuse Him of breaking the Law of Moses but if He says "stone her" they can get Him in trouble with the Roman authorities, because they alone had the power to actually put people to death. That is why in order to kill Jesus, the Sanhedrin will have to drag Him before Pontius Pilate and get Him to sentenced to death under Roman law. So its Heads We Win, Tails He Loses. But to spring their "foolproof" trap, they needed a woman caught in the *act* of adultery. Now it's possible that they came up with the scenario and then waited for an opportunity to spring it, which is bad enough, but its even more likely that they did all they could to set it up. The absence of the man in this scenario makes that all the more likely. Either way, their hypocrisy and duplicity is just repulsive.

So if I were to ask you what the most despicable sin in these verses is, I hope you wouldn't answer "the woman's adultery" – that's bad, no doubt about it. But it pales in comparison to the diabolical

plotting of the Pharisees. She committed a sin in which a man debases himself and acts like a beast, they committed a sin where they acted like the devil himself, hypocritically plotting to deceitfully entrap the Son of God.

That is why C.S. Lewis was right when he said that ***“If anyone thinks that Christians regard unchastity (sexual sin) as the supreme vice, he is quite wrong. The sins of the flesh are bad, but they are the least bad of all sins. All the worst pleasures are purely spiritual. The pleasure of putting other people in the wrong, of bossing and patronizing and spoiling sport, and backbiting; the pleasures of power, of hatred. For there are two things inside me...they are the animal self and the diabolical self; and the diabolical self is the worst of the two. That is why a cold self-righteous prig who goes regularly to church may be far nearer to hell than a prostitute. But of course it is better to be neither!”***

So they triumphantly present her, and what does Jesus initially do? He ignores them and writes in the dirt. A lot of useless speculation has gone on about what he is writing in the dirt, but I tend to think that the what is less important than the that. They think of themselves as incredibly important, but he shows them that they are less important than doodling in the dirt. Which no doubt infuriates them. Incidentally gentlemen if you ever want to spend around 24hrs in the doghouse, do essentially the same thing when your wife is trying to bring something important to your attention.

They get louder, and eventually Jesus answers them with one line, ***“He who is without sin among you, let him throw a stone at her first”*** and goes back to writing on the ground, and in that instance, the trap, the net they’d laid for him closes around them.

RC Sproul once conjectured that that second time He stooped down and wrote it was simply the names of women, Suzie, Abigail, and the Pharisees read those names, swallowed hard and slunk away.

The evil plotting of the unrighteous against Christ and His Kingdom is so often their undoing and works directly opposite to their intention.

***Psalm 35:7 For without cause they have hidden their net for me in a pit, Which they have dug without cause for my life.***

***8 Let destruction come upon him unexpectedly, And let his net that he has hidden catch himself; Into that very destruction let him fall.***

Saul persecutes the church in Jerusalem and the believers are forced to flee, but as they go everywhere they go preaching the word, and instead of shrinking the church grows.

***Psalm 57:6 They have prepared a net for my steps; My soul is bowed down; They have dug a pit before me; Into the midst of it they themselves have fallen. Selah***

Christ’s words convict them of their own unrighteousness, even in the setting up of this wicked scenario, and not one of them can stay. But some have speculated that this means that no one can ever reprove sin, or judge a case, because aren’t we all sinners? Calvin rightly points out that isn’t what Jesus is doing, he writes ***“this is not an absolute and unlimited prohibition, by which Christ forbids sinners to do their duty in correcting the sins of others; but by this word he only reproves hypocrites, who mildly flatter themselves and their vices, but are excessively severe, and even act the part of felons, in censuring others. No man, therefore, shall be prevented by his own sins from correcting***

*the sins of others, and even from punishing them, when it may be found necessary, provided that both in himself and in others he hate what ought to be condemned; and in addition to all this, every man ought to begin by interrogating his own conscience, and by acting both as witness and judge against himself, before he come to others. In this manner shall we, without hating men, make war with sins."*

The accusers fade away, and without charges or witnesses, there is no longer a charge or a case. Now just because there was no case and legal punishment, doesn't for a second mean that there was no guilt. this doesn't mean the woman wasn't guilty. His very words, go and sin no more imply that.

But how utterly different was the spirit with which Christ treated this guilty woman. He loves her! Christ's love for her was not based on her good works, or anything in her at all, she had broken the law, she had debased her own person. She had violated the sanctity of marriage, that great gift of God, and yet Christ the love of Christ to sinners is such that he offers her grace, and mercy.

The forgiveness that Christ gave her was no cheap grace – the law required that the person guilty of the sin of adultery die for that sin, and in just a few weeks the required payment would be made. But not by the woman, Christ Himself bearing her sin, would pay the price of her adultery on the cross. His last word recorded by John? τετέλεσται a word translated "**It is finished!**" in the NKJV – but also the word a merchant or tax collector would write over an account that had been **PAID IN FULL**.

Her sins no doubt had convicted her conscience as well, but unlike the Pharisees who when their dark hearts are exposed, slink away from the light, in essence running from God, she runs to God staying with Christ, and her faith in the one she calls not Rabbi but *kurie* – that is LORD making the good confession, forgives her and sends her off to live not an easy life, her relatives ashamed, her neighbors still talking about her, her spouse probably putting her out – not an easy life, but a new life of holiness and an eternal life.

Now I hope it is not the case, but some of you may still be thinking to yourself, “Well *I* don't have an acts of adultery to repent of.” Well and good. But does Jesus say to her, go now and don't commit *adultery* anymore? No, He says go now and *sin* no more. So let me simply ask you, would you have been qualified to throw the first stone had you been there? There are only two groups in the church, repentant sinners or Pharisees. Either you stand in exactly the position as this woman, sinful but repentant believing and forgiven or you stand in the same place as the Pharisees. Presumptuously thinking you have no sins to repent of, and are just fine with God unlike the accursed mob out there who know not the law. I don't know about you friends, but I'm not really different from this woman, different day, different sins, same problem. I'll take my stand where she was before Christ, I hope you will as well. And having received the same forgiveness she did, I hope you too will go and sin no more. And that includes treating others overtaken in sin, the way Christ treated them, not the way the Pharisees did!