

John 8 - The Adulterous Woman

- Thank you for welcoming me back to Colorado and for the opportunity to preach God's word
 - I've stepped into the pulpit for Brian on a few occasions times over the past years
 - His congregations are always so receptive of the word
 - And they have high expectations that their teacher will deal with the text properly
 - They also
 - I am a pastor from Texas
 - I am also the director of Verse By Verse Ministry...
- Today, I want to explore a well-known passage from John's gospel, so turn with me to chapter 8
 - We will study the account of the adulterous woman in John 8:1-11
- The opening verses of John's eighth chapter are actually a matter of some controversy, as you may know
 - Many Biblical scholars have concluded that the story of the adulterous woman that opens John's eighth chapter was not originally written by John
 - Specifically, the John 7:53 to John 8:11 appear to have been added several centuries after John wrote His Gospel
 - Most English translations today acknowledge this view by enclosing this section in brackets to indicate its suspect origins
 - There are several clues that lead scholars to this conclusion
 - First, the vast majority of original manuscripts of John's Gospel lack this passage
 - In fact, the passage didn't begin to appear in manuscripts of John's Gospel until about sixth century
 - That was long after the New Testament canon was officially established in the fourth century

- Also, the style of writing in this passage differs greatly from John's normal style
 - It reads much more like one of the synoptic Gospel writers
- And it's placement at this point in John's eighth chapter makes for an awkward interruption in John's narrative
 - If you jump from John 7:52 directly to John 8:12, the narrative flows seamlessly,
 - That suggests the verses between were inserted later
- So the best conclusion we can draw is this passage was not something John originally wrote
- So should we still study this passage? Absolutely!
 - I'm not suggesting that this story isn't inspired Scripture or that it didn't happen
 - Like most scholars, I don't believe there is any reason to doubt this story's authenticity
 - Personally, I believe Luke wrote this account as part of his Gospel, under the inspiration of the Spirit
 - The writing style matches his style closely, and it features a woman in distress, which is a favorite theme of Luke
 - And the events would fit very nicely into the narrative of Luke's chapter 22
 - So why would a scribe or copyist move this story out of its proper place in Luke and into John's gospel?
 - In a word: convenience
 - When the Biblical canon was set, chapter and verse annotations were added to each book of Scripture
 - Later, scribes endeavored to record entire books or at least complete chapters of Scripture on single scrolls
 - Luke's Gospel was assigned some of the longest chapters in the NT, while John's Gospel was assigned some of the shortest

- Since Scripture was written on parchment scrolls that came in fixed lengths, a copyist may have been running short on parchment in Luke's 22nd chapter
 - So he decided to trim Luke's chapter slightly to make it fit
 - But not wanting to eliminate the material altogether, the copyist simply added it to one of John's shorter chapters
- I reviewed this background on our passage for this evening to leave you with greater confidence in the authenticity and trustworthiness of our Scriptures
 - Many unbelieving critics, who because they lack the Spirit also lack the ability to understand the truth of Scripture, see these textual issues as evidence that the Scripture cannot be trusted
 - They scoff at the notion that we can place our trust in what the Bible says because they claim we can't be sure we have received the texts in an authentic, unadulterated form
 - Consequently, they dismiss all Scripture as untrustworthy and useless for serious study
 - The truth is very much the opposite
 - In reality, these idiosyncrasies in Scripture are proof of how trustworthy God's word truly is
 - And I'll give you two brief reasons why this is so
 - First, the Lord has carefully preserved a tremendous number of manuscript copies of His word over the centuries
 - The surviving record of ancient Biblical texts is simply unparalleled among ancient literature
 - For example, the world today still has over 24,000 surviving ancient manuscripts of New Testament writings
 - By contrast, we have only 643 manuscript copies of all the works of Homer
 - We have only 49 copies of all the manuscripts of Aristotle
 - And in all the world, only 7 copies of all of Plato's work exist in original manuscript form

- Yet the world wastes no time debating whether the writing of these ancient Greek authors can be trusted or are worthy of serious study
 - On the contrary, literary scholars in universities the world over devote entire careers to studying the Greek classics without a moment's concern about the authenticity of the texts
 - Despite so few surviving copies
 - Yet when it comes to Scripture - which has far, far better documentation and a far, far more important message - the critics charge that we can't trust that Scripture was preserved correctly
- So the very reason we can stand here today and recognize that the material in John 8 was likely moved from one Gospel to another is because we can compare the many original surviving manuscripts with later copies and see the changes
 - God has ensured we would see the circumstances accurately
 - And yet despite the copyist changes, God ensured we would still we have this story preserved in Scripture so we can gain the value of its instruction
- Secondly, every believer in the Gospel of Jesus Christ has been given the gift of the Holy Spirit, Whom Jesus called the Helper
 - The Helper who lives in us testifies in our spirit that what we study is true and has been delivered from God to us for our edification
 - This is a testimony of authenticity that only a believer can experience
 - And when you study Scripture, it rings true in your heart like no other instruction ever could
 - And you know you are seeing the wisdom of God revealed to your heart

[2Tim. 3:14](#) You, however, continue in the things you have learned and become convinced of, knowing from whom you have learned them,

[2Tim. 3:15](#) and that from childhood you have known the sacred writings which are able to give you the wisdom that leads to salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus.

[2Tim. 3:16](#) All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness;

[2Tim. 3:17](#) so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work.

- Don't let the speculation and criticism of fools steal away your confidence in God's word
 - Remember, these critics are not protesting against the inaccuracy of Scripture; they are rebelling against the truth of God's word
 - They eagerly seek to discredit the word of God simple because it bears a truth that pierces the heart, a reality that proves its authenticity better than any argument I could make
 - But by this same word, some of these critics may yet be saved, like Saul becoming Paul
 - So we continue to preach it and believe it so that Christ may be glorified and His kingdom built by His word
- Turning to our passage, let's read it straight through

[John 8:2](#) Early in the morning He came again into the temple, and all the people were coming to Him; and He sat down and began to teach them.

[John 8:3](#) The scribes and the Pharisees brought a woman caught in adultery, and having set her in the center of the court,

[John 8:4](#) they said to Him, "Teacher, this woman has been caught in adultery, in the very act.

[John 8:5](#) "Now in the Law Moses commanded us to stone such women; what then do You say?"

[John 8:6](#) They were saying this, testing Him, so that they might have grounds for accusing Him. But Jesus stooped down and with His finger wrote on the ground.

[John 8:7](#) But when they persisted in asking Him, He straightened up, and said to them, "He who is without sin among you, let him be the first to throw a stone at her."

[John 8:8](#) Again He stooped down and wrote on the ground.

[John 8:9](#) When they heard it, they began to go out one by one, beginning with the older ones, and He was left alone, and the woman, where she was, in the center of the court.

[John 8:10](#) Straightening up, Jesus said to her, "Woman, where are they? Did no one condemn you?"

[John 8:11](#) She said, "No one, Lord." And Jesus said, "I do not condemn you, either. Go. From now on sin no more."]

- At the beginning of the passage, we find Jesus in the Temple teaching
 - And as Jesus was teaching, the Pharisees and the scribes have conspired together to trap Jesus
 - You might recognize this pattern from the synoptic Gospels
 - The Jewish leaders, who were unbelievers and frauds masquerading as men of God, are frequently shown devising ways to discredit or accuse Jesus
 - They contrived situations that placed Jesus in a dilemma from which there was no easy escape
 - They expected Jesus to either look foolish before the crowds in struggling to avoid the trap
 - Or He would be forced into committing a violation of Roman law
 - Either way, the leaders could neutralize Jesus as a threat to their authority
 - On this occasion, they bring a woman accused of adultery and set her in front of Jesus as He taught the crowd
- The leaders chose this moment for their trap for good reason
 - Jesus was sitting in the large open court of the Temple, a place filled with many Jews on this week of Passover
 - Whatever happened to Jesus during this confrontation, it would be witnessed by literally hundreds if not thousands of His followers
 - So the Pharisees chose this setting to inflict the maximum potential damage to Jesus' reputation among His followers
 - Secondly, the temple grounds was the one place in Jewish society where the Jewish people had some latitude to exercise their own law free from Roman interference
 - In Jesus day, the Jewish people were an occupied nation, under Roman rule and oppression
 - Though the Jews had a Law of their own, they were not permitted to exercise self-rule, especially in the area of criminal justice

- For example, Jewish authorities could conduct trials according to their own Law, but they could not carry out sentencing without Roman permission and Roman supervision
 - But inside the Temple grounds, Jewish leaders had greater freedom and latitude because the Romans would not enter the Jewish courts of the Temple
 - This was probably the one place and time of year when Jewish leaders might carry out an execution under Jewish law without Roman interference
 - So against this backdrop, the Pharisees ask Jesus to render judgment in the case of this adulteress
 - They claim this woman was caught in the very act of adultery and that such a crime was punishable by stoning, according to the Law of Moses
 - If Jesus agreed with their assessment, then almost certainly the Pharisees would have called upon the crowd to stone the woman on the spot
 - This is the challenge they have placed before Jesus: they dare Him to condemn this woman to death
- Before we look at Jesus' response, we need to recognize that the Pharisees were playing fast and loose with the language of the Law
 - Let's look at the Law concerning adultery in the Law

[Lev. 20:10](#) If there is a man who commits adultery with another man's wife, one who commits adultery with his friend's wife, the adulterer and the adulteress shall surely be put to death.

- The penalty for adultery was death under Moses, but it was to be death for both the man and woman
 - So we ask where's the man?
 - The Pharisees] claim they caught her in the act, which means they would have caught a man in the act too
 - And if this offense was serious enough to warrant dragging this woman all the way into the Temple grounds and before Jesus, then we should have expected the man to receive the same treatment, shouldn't we?

- So why didn't they apprehend both man and woman and bring them both before Jesus?
- The likely reason is this woman was a pawn the Pharisees wanted to use in their struggle against Jesus
 - She was probably a well-known harlot, and on this day the Pharisees decided to make an example of her to trap Jesus
 - They had no sincere interest in prosecuting justice
 - In fact, were it not for their desire to trap Jesus, the Pharisees would never have bothered to take this woman to Jesus
 - They didn't need Jesus' approval to execute justice in her case
 - So everything about this situation reeks of manipulation by the Pharisees for simply one purpose: to discredit Jesus
- Secondly, the Pharisees misstated the penalty in the Law concerning adultery
 - The Law says that adulterers in the nation of Israel deserve death
 - But it doesn't say that they must be stoned specifically
 - In fact, historically the method of execution for this offense had been handled in various ways
 - For the longest time, it was strangling
 - Later in the time of Ezekiel, it was became striping the offenders naked in public, stoning them by a crowd and then cut the bodies to pieces with a sword
 - And if the adulteress happened to be a daughter of a priest, she was burned to death
 - These penalties were so severe because the crime of adultery - particularly among the priesthood - put the purity of the tribes bloodline at great risk
 - By Jesus' day, stoning was again an approved method, but it would not have been conducted by crowds in the street
 - It would have been conducted in an official manner only after a proper trial

- These men are calling for immediate, vigilante justice against the woman, which violated due process in the Jewish justice system
- Putting all this together, we gain a clear picture of what the Pharisees wanted to accomplish in this trap
 - They brought a sympathetic defendant before Jesus in a very public place with a serious accusation
 - They demand Jesus render immediate judgment, and set the requirement that a guilty verdict must result in an immediate sentence of death by stoning
 - This was a contrived and unreasonable demand, but it left Jesus with two equally dangerous options
 - On the one hand, Jesus could agree with the verdict, but that would leave Jesus with the woman's blood on His hands,
 - The crowd must have recognized the Pharisee's were acting in cruel and underhanded ways concerning this woman
 - So they would have been sympathetic toward her
 - And they would have expected Jesus to defend the woman against this kangaroo court injustice
 - Moreover, they knew Jesus to be a rabbi that taught of mercy and forgiveness and fairness and justice
 - And the crowds generally hated the Pharisees for their harsh enforcement of the Law and their self-righteous hypocrisy
 - Furthermore, had Jesus agreed to the stoning, the Pharisees could have turned him over to the Romans for ordering an illegal execution
 - So if Jesus had agreed with these men and permitted them to kill this woman, Jesus' reputation with the crowds would have been seriously damaged and he would have been wanted by the Roman authorities
 - On the other hand, if Jesus had reversed the Pharisee's decision to stone the woman, Jesus Himself could be accused as a law breaker

- Heb 10:28 reminds us that anyone who sets aside the Law of Moses is due the punished of death
- To state that the woman should receive death would be contradicting the word of God, which requires that adultery receive death
- So how does Jesus escape this trap?
- In v.6 we're told Jesus says...nothing. He just stoops down and begins to write in the ground
 - If we're going to fully appreciate what's happening here, we need to put ourselves in this crowd, seated on the ground in the Temple court witnessing this scene from maybe 30-40 feet away
 - From our seated position we see Jesus standing at the center of a large crowd seated around Him
 - Suddenly, a group of Pharisees and scribes work their way through the crowds dragging this woman by the arm until they stand directly next to Jesus
 - You hear their accusation and their challenge to Jesus, and you wait to hear what Jesus will say in response
 - You can sense this is a trap and you're secretly rooting for Jesus to embarrass the Pharisees
 - You wonder what He will do
 - All all eyes are fixed on Jesus standing next to the brood of Pharisees amidst this sea of onlookers
 - Then at the climatic moment, Jesus simply stoops down to draw on the ground, disappearing out of view
 - One moment we're watching a confrontation between Jesus and the Pharisees
 - The next minute, the Pharisees are left alone with this woman, standing by themselves looking a bit foolish
 - The visual impact is clear
 - Jesus has removed Himself verbally and visually from the conversation

- More importantly, He has refrained from judging this woman
- He leaves only the Pharisees standing in the middle of the crowd, isolated in their judgment of this woman
- While stooped down, we're told Jesus occupies Himself with something a child might do while bored: he draws or writes in the dirt
 - How might something like this happen in our day and culture?
 - We probably wouldn't stoop and draw on the ground
 - Instead, we would pull out our iPhones and check our email or play Angry Birds...we would check out of the conversation
- So we see Jesus disappear and we're left with only the chagrined Pharisees standing in the middle of the crowd looking a bit foolish
 - Naturally, the Pharisees are made uncomfortable by Jesus' maneuver
 - They must have recognized Jesus was trying to avoid giving an answer to their question
 - So the writer tells us that the Pharisees persisted in asking Jesus
 - At this point, Jesus straightens up, coming back into view for just a few moments
 - He presents the Pharisees with a simple but remarkable test for how they may proceed if they are to judge this woman
 - He says the one among them who has no sin may cast the first stone at her
 - Then Jesus returns to His low position near the ground leaving the Pharisees standing alone again
 - If the scene wasn't so dramatic and the stakes so high, I think we might have heard some snickering in the crowd
 - Jesus has managed to make these men look foolish while distancing Himself from their foolish antics
 - And now He has turned the tables and placed the Pharisees in a trap of His own making

- Before I go any further in the story, I'm sure you expecting me to address one of the most hotly debated questions among Bible students...what did Jesus write in the ground?
 - Before we start making guesses, let's acknowledge an important fact
 - The Gospel writer didn't think it important to include this detail in the account
 - He gives no attention to it whatsoever
 - So if that detail were important to the story, wouldn't we expect that the writer would have included that detail?
 - And since he didn't, may I suggest we look elsewhere to find the significance of this account?
 - Secondly, any suggestion of what Jesus wrote must be pure guesswork
 - It may make for an entertaining exercise, what does such speculation profit us as Bible students?
 - For example, some have speculated He wrote the Ten Commandments or a list of the Pharisees sins
 - But frankly, there probably wasn't enough time for Him to write such an exhaustive document in dirt
 - It's a good illustration of how pointless speculation over God's word can often lead us away from the what's truly meaningful

1Tim. 6:4 he is conceited and understands nothing; but he has a morbid interest in controversial questions and disputes about words, out of which arise envy, strife, abusive language, evil suspicions,

- Personally, I don't not believe there was any significance to Jesus' writing - He was probably just drawing pictures
 - His purpose was simply to disengage from the Pharisees and avoid their question
 - He wanted to separate Himself visually from the Pharisees leaving them to stand alone in judgment over this woman
- In other words, Jesus stooped low to the ground to make clear that only the Pharisees were standing in judgment over her

- The Pharisees were her only judges
- The true point of this story is contained in Jesus' words in v.7
 - At the moment when Jesus straightens back up and reinserts Himself into the conversation, He presents a compelling requirement for judging this woman
 - He says only those without sin may render judgment against her
 - Jesus doesn't deny their accusations or insist the woman wasn't guilty - undoubtedly, she was an adulteress and everyone knew it
 - Nevertheless, Jesus establishes an impossible standard for rendering judgment in this case: sinlessness
 - Why did Jesus raise the bar so high in this woman's case?
- The reason is simple: the Pharisees were the legal authorities in Israel, but they had delegated their authority to Jesus to render judgment over this woman
 - Therefore according to Jewish tradition and law, if this woman were to be judged at all, that judgment must come from Jesus
 - But we must remember who Jesus truly is
 - He's not simply another rabbi making a determination in some run-of-the-mill criminal case
 - Jesus is THE judge, of all creation, for for all eternity
 - When Jesus renders judgment for sin, it carries eternal consequences
 - So if Jesus were to render a judgment concerning this woman's sin, He would be rendering an eternal judgment on her soul - as the Judge of all Creation, He can do no less
 - As Paul declared:

[Acts 17:30](#) "Therefore having overlooked the times of ignorance, God is now declaring to men that all people everywhere should repent, [Acts 17:31](#) because He has fixed a day in which He will judge the world in righteousness through a Man whom He has appointed, having furnished proof to all men by raising Him from the dead."

- Jesus has been appointed as judge of the world, but He is not to render His judgment until His appointed day
 - Jesus has received His authority to judge from the Father, and He will only render judgment in accordance with His Father's desires
- As Jesus Himself explains just a few verses later in this chapter

[John 8:15](#) "You judge according to the flesh; I am not judging anyone.

[John 8:16](#) "But even if I do judge, My judgment is true; for I am not alone in it, but I and the Father who sent Me.

- Simply put, the Pharisees have asked Jesus to do something that Jesus cannot do
 - They ask Him to be this woman's judge, but Jesus came to earth not to render judgment for sin but to offer salvation to sinners
- Had Jesus elected to bring judgment to the world, then who could possible stand?
 - Before His atoning work on the cross, there could be no hope of anyone surviving Christ's judgment because all men stand guilty of sin
 - Therefore, it's the supreme example of God's mercy and grace that He sent His Son into the world with a mission that precluded any judgment

[John 12:47](#) "If anyone hears My sayings and does not keep them, I do not **judge** him; for I did not come to **judge** the world, but to save the world.

[John 12:48](#) "He who rejects Me and does not receive My sayings, has one who judges him; the word I spoke is what will **judge** him at the last day.

- But notice Jesus adds that on the last day, Jesus will become the world's judge
 - And when that last day comes, He will render perfect justice bringing every sinner who has not received His gift of mercy by grace to account for their sin
- But fortunately for us and for this woman, that day has not yet arrived
 - And in the meantime, Jesus cannot pass judgment, not even in a earthly sense

- Since Jesus deferred to judge, He puts the right to judge back into the hands of the Pharisees, but it comes with a condition
 - Jesus earned His right to judge the world because He is sinless, having obeyed the Father perfectly and having earned the right to judge
 - Jesus is uniquely qualified to serve as judge
 - Therefore, Jesus demands that if these men would presume to take His place as judge, then they must first pass the same test Jesus passed
 - Only the one without sin shall be qualified to begin the judgment of this woman
 - Sinless is not ordinarily a requirement for passing judgment under the law
 - Imperfect human judges are called upon to bring judgment against lawbreaker everyday
 - But because the Pharisees elected to delegate this particular matter before Jesus, having called Him Teacher and asking Him to render a judgment, they have allowed Him to define the terms of the judgment
 - And they committed themselves to whatever course of action Jesus prescribed
 - Otherwise, if they seek Jesus' opinion but then ignore it, they will be shown to be hypocrites and schemers
 - So now the Pharisees find themselves in a trap
 - If they choose to stone the woman, they will be mocked by the crowd - and perhaps even charged with blasphemy - for daring to consider themselves sinless
 - Not can they reject Jesus' condition, since they sought Him out publicly and gave Him permission to decide the matter
 - So beginning with the oldest, that is to say the wisest, of the group, one by one they depart, leaving only the woman
- So as the scene comes to an end, only the woman remains with Jesus
 - Jesus asks her who judges you? She says no one, Lord

- And so Jesus responds, neither do I. Go and sin no more
 - This is the same message the Savior is giving to you from the pages of Scripture tonight
 - No man in this world judges you, for no one is qualified to render that judgment according to God's standard
 - And neither is Jesus passing judgment on your sin
 - If you are a believer, having placed your trust in Christ for your salvation, then know for sure that no one stands in judgment over you
 - Not a man, not a woman, not the enemy, not even the Lord your God stands in judgment over you
 - Your sins have been washed away by the atoning blood of Christ
 - The Lord place only one expectation on you: go and sin no more
 - If you have yet to know Jesus as your Savior, then you will be pleased to know that this is still a time of grace and mercy
 - You may have ignored His commandments, you may have spoken words against Jesus
 - But He tells us that these things may be forgiven during this time of grace, by our faith in Him as our Savior and stoning sacrifice
 - So if you have never placed your trust in Christ, you still have time and opportunity
 - Your sins will not be held against you in the day of judgment if you have accepted the gift of mercy the Lord offers you now
- But this time of mercy and forgiveness will not last forever
 - Sooner or later, the last day will arrive and Jesus will assume His role as judge
 - And the Lord's judgment will be strict and inescapable
 - How much better is to bow your knee to Him now, while His grace and mercy are still available
 - Then to wait for the moment of your conviction on the judgment day
 - When every tongue will confess and every knee will bow