

John 8:2-11

- Jesus and the adulteress -

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Context

- ❖ This dramatic story is part of the Gospel of John. The Pharisees and scribes (teachers of the law) bring a woman caught in adultery before Jesus and the people. They ask Jesus a question concerning the law of Moses. That should remind us of John 1:17-18 and 5:46:
 - “For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. No one has ever seen God, but God the One and Only, who is at the Father’s side, has made him known” (John 1:17-18).
 - “If you believed Moses, you would believe me, for he wrote about me” (John 5:46).
- ❖ Within the Gospel of John there are more references to Moses and the first five books of the Old Testament, which are also called Moses and in modern times the Pentateuch. A central passage is Deuteronomy 18:15-18:
 - “The LORD your God will raise up for you a prophet like me (Moses) from among your own brothers. You must listen to him. (...) I will raise up for them a prophet like you from among their brothers; I will put my words in his mouth, and he will tell them everything I command him.”
 - This makes clear that Jesus is not opposing Moses, but fulfilling Moses, as he said in the Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 5-7): “Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them” (Matt. 5:17).
- ❖ What does John mean by: the law was given through Moses? This is a historical reference to the giving of the law at the Mount Sinai.

- What it means: “grace and truth came through Jesus Christ” is shown in this story. This story is “grace and truth” in action.

Form and structure

- ❖ Vs. 2: Initial setting. Jesus teaches the people in the temple.

The scribes and the Pharisees versus Jesus

- ❖ Vs. 3-6: The scribes and the Pharisees come to Jesus to test him.
 - Vs. 6: The initial reaction of Jesus – ignoring them, creating tension.
- ❖ Vs. 7: The scribes and the Pharisees keep trying to test Jesus.
 - Vs. 7-8: The second reaction of Jesus – “inviting them to act according the law” – to test the scribes and the Pharisees.
- ❖ Vs. 9: The scribes and the Pharisees and all the other people leave Jesus and the woman, one by one.

Jesus and the woman alone

- ❖ Vs. 10: Jesus speaks to the woman.
 - Vs. 11: The woman answers Jesus.
- ❖ Vs. 11: Jesus lets her go in peace.

Technical notes

- ❖ There is much discussion about this passage and its exact location in the Greek text of the Gospel of John. This discussion is not that important for the exposition.
- ❖ “Woman” (vs. 10) could be better translated as “miss”.
- ❖ It should be noted that in vs. 4 and in vs. 9 John repeats the words “in the midst”.

Greek (NA-27)	NIV84	NRSV	ESV	KJV
Vs. 4: ἐν μέσῳ	“before the group”	“before the group”	“in the midst”	“in the midst”
Vs. 9: ἐν μέσῳ	“still (standing) there”	“(standing) before him”	“(standing) before him”	“in the midst”

- All translations are correct. But John is less interested in the location of the woman before the group or before Jesus; he wants to focus on the woman. She is standing in the midst of everybody. All the people are looking at her. What will they do with her?

And when all have left, she is still standing there in the midst. What will Jesus do with her? To achieve this focus, these words “in the midst” should be read with some emphasis. See exposition.

- ❖ It is helpful to make an outline of this story and to read it aloud and give it the right emphasis. The listener will be moved by the tension which this story creates, and by the implied emotions. This is an example of an outline, with some remarks for reading aloud.

John 8:2-11 (NIV84)

At dawn he appeared again in the temple courts, where all the people gathered around him, and he sat down to teach them. (*Introducing the scene. Pause here for a moment, because the next moment there will be some stirring among the people.*)

The teachers of the law and the Pharisees brought in a woman caught in adultery. They made her stand before the group and said to Jesus,

“**Teacher** (*emphasis*) this woman was caught in the act of adultery. In the Law Moses commanded us **to stone** (*emphasis*) such women (*contempt*). **Now what do you say** (*emphasis*)?”

They were using this question as a trap, in order to have a basis for accusing him.

But Jesus bent down and started to write on the ground with his finger. (*Pause here for a moment, because Jesus says nothing. He is ignoring them, creating tension.*)

When they kept on questioning him, he straightened up and said to them, “**If any one of you is without sin, let him be the first to throw a stone at her.**” (*emphasis*)

Again he stooped down and wrote on the ground. (*Pause here for a moment, because what Jesus said was shocking to them.*)

At this, those who heard began to go away one at a time, (*pause for a moment, so they can go away one at a time*)

the older ones first, until only Jesus was left, with the woman still standing there.

Jesus straightened up and asked her, “Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?” (*A polite “woman” and friendly question.*)

“No one, sir,” she said. (*A bit timid answer, she was still in some kind of shock.*)

“Then neither do I condemn you,” Jesus declared. “Go now and leave your life of sin.” (*Resolute and straightforward.*)

Exposition

Verse 2

- ❖ The tensions around Jesus are increasing.
 - “On hearing his words, some of the people said, ‘Surely this man is the Prophet.’ Others said, ‘He is the Christ.’ Still others asked, ‘How can the Christ come from Galilee? Does not the Scripture say that the Christ will come from David’s family and from Bethlehem, the town where David lived?’ Thus the people were divided because of Jesus.” (John 7:40-43).
 - In John 7:49 the Pharisees said: “But this mob that knows nothing of the law—there is a curse on them.” Therefore the Pharisees wanted to convince this mob that Jesus was not the Messiah. That he was not the one promised by Moses (Deut. 18:15-18), because some people overtly said: “When the Christ comes, will he do more miraculous signs than this man?” (John 7:31). The Pharisees were becoming nervous about Jesus and his teachings.
- ❖ But at dawn Jesus is in the temple courts again and many people are listening to him.

Verse 3-6

- ❖ How can the Pharisees convince the mob, the people of Jerusalem, that Jesus is not the Prophet, that he is not the Christ, whom they expected?
 - Put him to the test. Confront him with an actual situation and not with a theoretical question. They bring an actual case in front of the people and of Jesus: “a woman caught in adultery.” There are witnesses.
 - There are always two people involved in adultery. Is this again an example of the inferior position of women in those days? (See also Matt. 19:3.) The Pharisees are not interested in the fate of this woman, they are abusing her to test Jesus. “In the Law Moses commanded us to stone such women. Now what do you say?” (Lev. 20:10, Deut. 22:21–24).
 - What are the possible options for Jesus?
 - If he disagrees with Moses, then the Pharisees will have a basis for accusing him in front of the people and the Jewish religious leaders.
 - If he confirms what Moses said, then the life of this woman would be somehow at risk and also his own mission: “For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world (this woman), but to save the world (her) through him” (John 3:17).
 - There is no middle ground.
- ❖ Jesus doesn’t answer his opponents. He ignores them. “He bent down and started to write on the ground with his finger.” It is not important to know what he wrote. If it was important, John would have told us.

- He doesn't want to be forced into this dilemma. He increases the tension among the people and Pharisees.
- Note that the life of the woman in the midst is not at risk. The situation doesn't get out of hand. Jesus is in control.

Verse 7-9

- ❖ The Pharisees are becoming impatient. "They kept on questioning him." Jesus uses his time wisely. Then he straightens up. This body language is important. First he was sitting, teaching the people. Then he bowed down, looking at the ground, writing in the sand, ignoring the Pharisees. Now he stands up and he can look the Pharisees in the eye.
 - "If any one of you is without sin, let him be the first to throw a stone at her" (vs. 7). This must have shocked them.
 - Firstly, Jesus is confirming Moses. They never expected this answer.
 - Secondly, he forces the Pharisees to show their cards. What are your motives? Why do you ask me this question? "If any one of you is without sin," doesn't mean sinless. Nobody is sinless. No judge could pass sentence on a suspect if he ought to be "without sin." Jesus means: "Be honest." "Do you want to stone her yourself?" He is confronting them with their own motives.
- ❖ And again he is using time, waiting to see what they are going to do. At the same time he knows the life of this woman is not at risk.
 - But try to image the feelings of this woman. She is facing the possibility of death. We know the outcome, the end of the story. She does not know it yet! Jesus knows.
- ❖ The Pharisees and all the others leave one by one. Jesus confronted them with themselves. He knew their hearts and minds. He is exposing them.

Verse 10-11

- ❖ After all have left, there is the woman still standing "in the midst."
- ❖ Jesus is polite when he says: "woman" or better "miss" (see technical notes). He doesn't show any contempt for this woman, as did the Pharisees when they were pushing her forward "in the midst" and talking about "such women" (vs. 5).
 - Jesus is affirming John 3:17: "For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world (this woman), but to save the world (her) through him".
- ❖ She can go home now: "and leave your life of sin." There is no need for her to ask forgiveness. Jesus knows that she has been taught her lesson. And, what is important, she had an encounter with the Prophet, the Christ. She had an encounter with the Lord (cf. John 14:8-9).
- ❖ Finally, it is shocking to see that this woman is the only one to experience the saving Gospel. All the other people have gone home or away already.

Application

- ❖ It is important to know and show the wisdom, the righteousness and mercy of Jesus, which are exemplified by this story full of tension and emotion.
- ❖ A theoretical situation differs from an actual situation. A theoretical situation can be discussed. One can reach a conclusion or the participants can agree to disagree. An actual situation is different. A conclusion has consequences for all involved. A solution is needed.
 - Questions concerning homosexuality can be discussed theoretically. But when homosexuals are involved, the discussion should be different, compassionate, merciful.
 - This should always be the case when meeting people who wrestle with their sins.
- ❖ Sometimes one might ask another person: “Who is Jesus for you?” “How do you feel about Jesus?” But is far better to look in the mirror of the gospel and have a look at yourself.
- ❖ “If any one of you is without sin, let him be the first to throw a stone” (vs. 7). These words are sometimes misused by someone who is criticized because of sin. “Look at yourself, don’t criticize me.” At the same time people can throw many spiritual stones criticising and condemning others. Therefore, it is very important to examine your own motives if you criticize somebody else.

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