

John 8:1-30

Caught in the Act

Verses 1-11

What is the motive of these men, the teachers of the law and Pharisees, who brought the adulteress to Jesus? To trap Jesus so they could have a basis for accusing/condemning Him.

Are they interested in this woman, in her sin, or in her execution under the law? No, she is a pawn in their hands to try and trap Jesus. She is being used as a tool for their self-serving purposes. They appear to have wanted Jesus' execution more than the woman's. They think they have Jesus between a rock and a hard place.

In the minds of the Jews, Jesus is caught between the following options. They are thinking win/win situation for themselves.

- **Option #1 - If Jesus says to execute her, how would the Jews win?** Jesus will be seen as harsh and acting against His stated purpose of seeking and saving sinners—not judging them. He won't be seen as compassionate, forgiving, and gracious. He will alienate the Jews and lose face in the eyes of the commoner. Also, He would break Roman law, because the Romans had taken away the right of Jews to officially execute people for religious offenses. This is probably not the option they figure He will take. They really want Him to take option 2.
- **Option #2 - If Jesus says to let her go, how do the Jews win?** Jesus would break the Mosaic Law requiring execution for adultery. What our Lord's adversaries most want is for Him to refuse to acknowledge that this woman is a sinner, deserving of death. Such an action will condemn Him, undermine His credibility and His ministry. His enemies would win.

What is not quite right about this incident? What element is missing? The male adulterer. Since the woman is taken in the very act there should be two sinners, not one, before Jesus. All the more reason to question the motives of the Scribes and Pharisees. The Mosaic Law requires that both parties involved in adultery suffer stoning. Jesus does not challenge the Scribes and Pharisees' charge or try to prove it unjust.

How does Jesus end up answering their question? It is as though He says, "You're absolutely right. A woman who is caught in the very act of adultery is condemned to death under the law. She should be stoned, here and now. So which one of you sinless men..." Instead of passing judgment on the woman, Jesus passed judgment on her judges.

What did He write on the ground? We don't know. The Scriptures don't tell us.

What is the point of writing on the ground? What message does it send? Perhaps our Lord ignores His adversaries, responding to their challenge by His silence. How badly His opponents misinterpret this silence! They think His silence is because they have Him stumped. By doing nothing, Jesus shows how unworthy they are of being heard. Imagine the offense of having Jesus refuse to look at His adversaries, appearing not to hear them, and instead occupying Himself by writing (or drawing) in the dirt! Or what He was writing in the dirt might be so convicting that the men willingly slipped away quietly.

How does Jesus deal with the woman? Does He excuse her sin? Our Lord does not deny this woman's guilt. As an adulteress, she is condemned by the law, and she does deserve to die. (He does not deal with the matter of the other guilty party here, as this is a setup.) Jesus does not plead for mercy on her behalf. He even agrees to an execution. There is just one problem—who will be the first to cast a stone?

Why do they shrink away? Probably out of conviction or guilt—or due to their failure to prove Jesus a law-breaker. It is safe to say this is a heart issue. Jesus' reply put the dilemma back on His accusers' shoulders. If they proceed to stone the woman, they are claiming that they have not sinned. If they do not stone her, they are admitting that they have sinned. Jesus now takes the place of the woman's defense attorney as well as her judge. They end up making a public declaration of their own guilt and dropping their charge against the woman. Once again they are whipped by the Master!

How does this story end? There is no condemnation. If there are no witnesses, there can be no condemnation or execution. She is told to abandon her life of sin. She is a free woman. She is not an innocent woman, as seen from our Lord's words to her. Jesus will not condemn her, either. He does not tell her that her sins are forgiven but He does tell her to go, and from then on to give up her sin. He gave her mercy and time to change her ways. Thus He was not "easy on sin." The ultimate reason He could exempt her from condemnation is that He would take her condemnation on Himself and die in her place.

Application: How does this encounter with the adulteress apply to us? We mustn't excuse wrong behavior or be soft on sin. At the same time we need to extend grace to people. We're expected to judge the rightness or wrongness of their behavior on basis of what Scriptures tell us. But we're not to judge a person's heart, eternal destiny, relationship with God, or motives.

Verses 12-30

In verse 12 Jesus states, “I am the light of the world.” This is the second “I am” statement in the Gospel of John.

The light metaphor is easy to trace back to ancient times in Israel’s history. The Jews associate light with God’s presence. He created light on the first day. He led the Israelites out of bondage by the light of the pillar of fire.

How is Jesus the light of the world? He illuminates the darkness. He exposes what is in the darkness—sin, evil, ignorance, unbelief. When people can see their sin, they can see their need for a savior. Note that Jesus said *the* light. Not *a* light, not one of many. He is the only true light. “In him was life, and that life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, but the darkness has not understood it” (John 1:4-5).

Verse 13 Why is His testimony declared not valid by the Pharisees? Under the law, a man cannot be a witness for himself because of his own interests in the case. The Mosaic Law required at least two witnesses to guard against only one witness giving biased testimony. If there is no other witness, your word is no better than anyone else’s.

How does Jesus answer that accusation? Jesus points out that He is qualified to give testimony about Himself because He knows His own origin and destiny. He essentially says, “My testimony is valid because I’m God. You’re absolutely right about the law. But I’ve got a witness.” His critics know neither of these things.

Verses 19-30 deal with the theme of fatherhood. How would you describe the relationship between Jesus and His Father? Intimate. Equal. Submissive. Constant connection. Dependent on the Father. Jesus’ sole motivation is to glorify, please, and honor His Father. A repeated theme in the book of John is the unity of our Lord Jesus and the Father. Jesus does not act or speak on His own initiative. He speaks and He does what is pleasing to the Father.

Application: How does that apply to us? Jesus once again serves as a model for us. We should ask ourselves questions like: Is my life in lock-step with God? If not, what’s getting in my way? Are my motives pure? Am I totally dependent on God?

When Jesus said He was going away, what was He speaking of? His death, resurrection, and ascension into heaven. These Jews cannot come there because they have rejected Jesus.

Who are those who will die in their sins as stated in verses 21 and 24? Those who refuse to accept/believe in Jesus.

Application: Men are blind to the “light” of the gospel. Our task is to proclaim the truth and to pray that God will open blind eyes and hearts to see the truth and respond to it in faith. As we seek to share our faith with others, we will not argue them into the kingdom of God solely with our intellect. They too have a heart issue.

Verse 28 How will they know He is the Messiah? The crucifixion, bodily resurrection, and ascension of Christ will convince many unbelievers of His true identity. The crucifixion will be the heart of the apostles’ message. “But we preach Christ crucified: a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles” (1 Corinthians 1:23).

Verse 29 Jesus always does the will of the Father because He knows the will of the Father.

Application: How can we know the will of the Father? The will of God is not a roadmap for the future. It lies in a relationship. It is stamped all over Bible. God’s commands are clear and are indicators of His desire for our lives.

- “Be joyful always; pray continually; give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus” (1 Thessalonians 5:16-18).
- “Seek first the kingdom of God” (Matthew 6:33).

How does the crowd react? Many put their faith in Him. God opens their minds to receive/understand the words of Jesus.

MEMORIZE: John 8:12