

INTRODUCTION

When we come to John 8, most of you see a footnote stating that this section doesn't appear in all of the oldest manuscripts of the New Testament. Let me take about three minutes to explain this. The respected New Testament scholar, Dr. Warren Wiersbe, wrote: “In the footnote you see that this passage isn't found in some of the ancient manuscripts. Where it is found, it isn't always in this location in John. It appears in some manuscripts of Luke. A majority of New Testament scholars agree that this encounter occurred and is a part of inspired scripture.” In other words, this story of Jesus was accepted from the beginning, but it appeared in different locations in the Gospels. When it comes to manuscript evidence, no ancient document has as much literary support as the New Testament. For instance, when you read the words of Plato, there are only about 200 manuscripts to consult. There are no originals. When it comes to the New Testament, there are no originals either, but we have a whopping 6,000 manuscripts to study and compare.

The early church fathers, especially St. Augustine, preached on this passage many times. From sixteen hundred years ago he gives us his clue why this story wasn't copied in all the manuscripts. “Some of little faith, I suppose from a fear lest their wives should gain impunity in sin, removed from their manuscripts the Lord's act of indulgence to the adulteress.” Augustine (circa 400 A.D.)

If you want to learn more about how we got our Bible from so many different manuscripts, a good friend of mine, Matt Whitman, has put together an informative short video about it. It's called “No Originals? The Bible is a Copy.”

Now let's read about this personal encounter of Jesus starting in John 7:53-8:11. Then each one went to his house. But Jesus went to the Mount of Olives. At dawn he went to the temple again, and all the people were coming to him. He sat down and began to teach them.

Then the scribes and the Pharisees brought a woman caught in adultery, making her stand in the center. “Teacher,” they said to him, “this woman was caught in the act of committing adultery. In the law Moses commanded us to stone such women. So what do you say?” They asked this to trap him, in order that they might have evidence to accuse him.

Jesus stooped down and started writing on the ground with his finger. When they persisted in questioning him, he stood up and said to them, “The one without sin among you should be the first to throw a stone at her.” Then he stooped down again and continued writing on the ground. When they heard this, they left one by one, starting with the older men. Only he was left, with the woman in the center. When Jesus stood up, he said to her, “Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?”

“No one, Lord,” she answered. “Neither do I condemn you,” said Jesus. “Go, and from now on do not sin anymore.”

This is one of the most powerful personal encounters Jesus ever had. There are some encounters Jesus initiated, like asking the woman at the well for water. There are other encounters when a person sought out Jesus, like Nicodemus approaching Jesus at night to talk about eternal life. But in this encounter, a woman is brought to Jesus against her will by an angry mob. Let’s talk about what happened that morning and then we’ll draw some personal lessons. I can describe this encounter in three scenes.

SCENE 1: JESUS WAS ATTACKED BY HIS ENEMIES SO THEY COULD TRAP HIM.

So try to imagine this. It’s early in the morning, just after dawn. Jesus has walked the quarter mile from the Mt. of Olives where He had probably camped out with the disciples. He is back in the Temple Courts getting ready to teach. Suddenly, there is angry shouting as a mob of religious leaders approach Him. In the middle of the mob is a partially clothed woman desperately trying to cover her nakedness. Her face is a mask of shock, fear, and shame.

One of the men toss the woman before Jesus and yells, “This woman was caught in the very act of adultery, the Law of Moses says she must be stoned. What do you say?”

He was correct. Even though these religious leaders were so evil that Jesus called them a bunch of rattlesnakes, they knew the Bible. Moses had written in Leviticus 20 that stoning was the punishment for adultery. But Moses had written that BOTH partners were to be stoned. Where is the man in this scenario? Remember this is the same group of enemies who tried to have Jesus arrested in chapter 7. Some have suggested these religious leaders set up this poor woman and paid off a man to have sexual relations with her so they could be caught. He was offered immunity as they grabbed the guilty woman to take her to Jesus.

These men didn’t care about the law of God and they certainly didn’t care for this woman. All they wanted to do was trap Jesus. And they were sure they had impaled Jesus in the horns of a dilemma.

If Jesus said, “Don’t stone her.” They would say, “This can’t be the Messiah because he breaks the Law of Moses.” On the other hand, if Jesus had said, “Stone her,” then He would be breaking the Roman law because only the Romans could carry out capital punishment. They alone could execute someone.

So these religious evildoers cackled with delight because they were certain they had trapped Jesus: He had no way of escape. But they didn’t realize they were dealing with God in the flesh with unlimited knowledge and wisdom.

SCENE 2: JESUS JUDGED THE JUDGES.

The first thing I appreciate about Jesus is that He didn’t answer them quickly. He first refused to say anything. That’s a sign of wisdom. Whenever you’re facing a difficult question, be careful to think twice, or three times before you speak.

Jesus didn't look at the accusers. Instead he stooped down and starting writing in the dirt. By the way, this is the only account of Jesus writing something.

What did He write? We don't know. It wasn't recorded. But whatever He wrote had a huge impact on the blood-thirsty mob.

Some say He was just doodling, buying time. That's a possibility. But there's a verse from Deuteronomy 9:10 that speaks about the finger of God writing Moses said, “On the day of the assembly the Lord gave me the two stone tablets, inscribed by God's finger.” So Jesus could have been writing out the Ten Commandments in front of those men; adultery would have been one, but there were nine others that could apply to those rock-throwers.

Or here's an interesting possibility. Maybe he was writing the names of each of those men. That's a prophesy from Jeremiah 1:13 where God says, “All who turn away from me will be written in the dirt, for they have abandoned the Lord, the fountain of living water.” (Jeremiah 1:13). That would have opened their eyes. What if Jesus had written each of their names in front of them. “How does this rabbi know my name?” Friend, Jesus knows everyone's name.

Then, Jesus glanced up at the rock-throwers and says, “Go ahead. Stone her. But the one who is without sin should cast the first stone.” Then He bent down and continued to write in the dirt.

So what did He write the second time? Of course we don't know. Some have suggested that maybe at this point Jesus didn't write the names of the accusers, but instead maybe he began to write the names of the girlfriends of these married men. Oops. Whatever Jesus wrote. It worked. While His head was still down, he heard the sound, “Thud, thud, thud thud thud,” The men dropped their stones, beginning with the oldest ... hmmm. Think about that, and we'll circle back to that in a minute.

SCENE 3: JESUS TRANSFORMED A SINFUL WOMAN.

Just imagine for a moment that you are this woman. Everyone's had a bad day, but this had to be the worst. She was involved in sexual relations with a man. And in the middle of it, strange men with rough hands rush into her room and drag her out to kill her. She is brutally tossed before Jesus and men with stones in their hands demand that she be killed. She knows the penalty for adultery, so she fully expected to die that day.

Can't you see her cowering there in pool of tears and shame? She has heard the anger in the voices of the men who plan to stone her to death. She heard the conversation that Jesus had with the mob. Finally, it grows quiet. She looks up and she only sees Jesus. That's where misery and mercy met. Jesus faced her, forgave her, and freed her.

First Jesus faced her. As their eyes met, Jesus asked her, “Ma'am where are those that accuse you? Has no one condemned you?” she said, “No one, sir.”

Then Jesus forgave her. He said, “I don’t condemn you either.” Jesus didn’t condone her sin. Nor did He condemn her sin. He cleansed her of her sin. Think about it. There was only one man there qualified to throw a stone at her. He was the sinless savior. But Jesus didn’t come into the world to condemn world, but to save the world.

Then Jesus freed her. He gave her a new purpose for life. He said, “Go now, and don’t live this life of sin anymore.” He had a new plan for her. His plan was not to harm her, but to give her a hope and a future.

And what had started as the worst day of her life turned into the very best day of her life! And there comes a time when each one of us must come face to face with Jesus and receive His forgiveness. And He frees us to live of life full of purpose. Notice three life lessons from this great encounter where misery and mercy met.

1. Life Lesson: Are you holding any rocks of criticism that you need to drop?

I was once asked to name my favorite rock group and I named the Beatles. If someone asked me to name my least favorite rock group, I would name the people in church who go around with rocks in their hands ready to fling them at everyone and everything they don’t like. That’s a dangerous rock group. Are you in that group? Remember, these were religious people.

Have you ever found yourself in the sandals of the self-righteous? You see someone do something that creates in you a sense of moral and righteous indignation. And you want to do something about it. It just lights a fire in you and you burn with anger until all you want to do is wind up and throw that rock of criticism.

There is someone in the Bible who is called the accuser—and he’s the devil. He accuses the righteous day and night. He has lots of rock-throwers to use for his accusations. Today, so many people are angry and they are hurling verbal and written stones.

Social media has removed the filters of decency so that people say the cruelest things. Bullies can hide in the privacy of their room and toss stones at people who are struggling with shame and other issues. There are accounts of people taking their own lives because of social media stone throwers.

A few years ago, I wrote a weekly blog. But I had to disable the comments function because I was getting some of the harshest, most vulgar comments you can imagine.

There are millions of people whose hands are full of rocks. These were religious leaders ready to stone this woman to death. And there are many people today who have been stoned and wounded by self-righteous people in the church. Much pain and damage has been caused in the name of religion.

What’s that in your hand today? Is it a rock and you find yourself being obsessed with a sense of always being cynical and hyper-critical? You can’t have an open hand of grace as long as

you're holding on to a rock in your fist. The message the Holy Spirit has for some of you today is to drop your rocks.

In Matthew 7 Jesus said, "Why do you look at the speck in your brother's eye when you have a log in your eye? First, get rid of the log in your eye, then you can help your brother with the speck in his eye."

Do you have some rocks you need to drop today?

2. Life Lesson: Need forgiveness? Jesus offers to remove your sin.

So in this encounter, who needed forgiveness? Of course, we would all say that the woman needed forgiveness. But the truth is that all of those accusing her also needed forgiveness. What Jesus wrote and what He said brought them under the conviction of their personal sin. Jesus invited the first one without sin to throw the first stone. Put yourself in their sandals for a minute. Each one thought, "Well, that's not me." And I believe that's why the older men dropped their rocks first. The older we get, the more we realize our need for grace and forgiveness.

Hopefully, with age comes wisdom. That's not always the case. But it generally works. I heard story about two women who appeared in court each accusing the other of trouble they had with each other in the apartment complex they shared. The women were arguing loudly and interrupting each other. The judge banged his gavel down and said, "We are going to talk about this in an orderly fashion. I can't listen to you both talk at once. So I'll hear the testimony of the oldest first." There was silence, and the case was dismissed because of lack of evidence.

What Jesus said to the woman was an act of grace. He told her He didn't condemn her; then He told her not to sin anymore. Her pardon wasn't dependent on her behavior. Her pardon was her motivation to change her behavior. That's grace. And Grace is just the opposite of legalism.

LEGALISM says: "Sin no more and I won't condemn you." GRACE says: "I don't condemn you; sin no more."

I came across an article that contained a letter written by a man who is currently serving time in a California prison for murder. He was addicted to drugs and was selling drugs. The saddest thing to me is that he is the son of a California pastor. In commenting on the encounter that Jesus had with this woman he compared it to his bad experience with church. He wrote: "Jesus first said to the woman, 'I love you.' Then he told her to change. Churches do the opposite. They say, "Change, and then we'll love you."

This miserable woman need the mercy of Jesus. And we are all miserable sinners in need of His mercy. I read that once Lady Astor showed Winston Churchill a portrait of herself. She said, "It's not a good likeness. It doesn't do justice to my beauty." Mr. Churchill looked at it and said, "Madam, you don't need justice, you need mercy!" We all need mercy.

3. Life Lesson: Jesus doesn't excuse your sin; He went to the cross to pay for it.

Jesus told this woman that He didn't condemn her. He forgave her. But it wasn't as if Jesus could just flip His hand and say, “Oh, it's okay. No foul. No harm.” When He forgave this woman, He was only a few weeks away from being nailed to a cross. This woman didn't have to be penalized for her sin because Jesus was going to take her penalty on the cross. He removed her sorrow and shame that day. And on the cross, He experienced her sorrow and shame. And Jesus experienced the guilt, shame and sorrow of all of sinners of all time. The Bible says that He bore our sins in His body on the tree.

The Bible says, “He made the one who did not know sin (JESUS) to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.” (2 Corinthians 5:21)

CONCLUSION

There are two great take-aways from this story: We see (1) The forgiving heart of Jesus. And (2) The danger of a judgmental spirit. All of us are like this woman. We are truly guilty of sin in the eyes of a Holy God. We've been caught red-handed at sin by God's justice. We all deserve death. We are helpless and unable to change. We are doomed and damned unless someone steps in to help. In order to have our sins forgiven we must come before Jesus and admit our guilt and accept His cleansing. And we need to drop our rocks.

Decades ago I preached this message in a church I served in Alabama. The next week, a church member came to my office to give me a gift. It was a rock on which he had written: “LET HIM WHO IS WITHOUT SIN CAST THE FIRST STONE.” This man owned some rural property and he told me about a neighboring farmer who had been cutting down some trees that he thought was on his land. He said he was getting angrier by the week and he was getting ready to confront the man with a bag full of verbal stones. After hearing my message, he told me that his neighbor wasn't a Christian and he wanted to show him the love of God, so he decided he could overlook a few trees for the sake of building a friendship to share Christ with the farmer. Then he gave me that stone and said, “Preacher, like those fellas dropped their rocks that day, I'm dropping my rock in your hand.”

But that's not the end of the story. Decades later, I had this stone sitting on a table in my office when my office was over in the old Chapel building. A man came to see me. I didn't recognize the man, but it was obvious to me he was visibly upset. Without any kind of niceties or small talk he just launched into something like this, “Preacher you have a member of your church who has been doing some things I don't like. He did me wrong in a business deal, and I want you to talk to him about it. So what are you going to do?”

Like Jesus, I didn't answer quickly. I didn't doodle in the dirt, but I did take a few minutes to breathe a prayer asking for wisdom. I looked up to speak and he had picked up this rock from the table beside where he was sitting. He said, “What is this?”

I reminded him of the story of John 8 and then I told him the story of the man who gave me that rock many years ago. When I had finished, the man sat there looking at the rock in his hand. He put it back on the table. He was silent for a few minutes then he said, “Pastor, I think I’m through here. I’m sorry I bothered you. I just think I need to change my attitude.”

Do you need to drop some rocks today? Let them go and receive God’s grace and mercy. Do you need the forgiveness of the Savior? Are you miserable in your sin? Come to Jesus today—that’s where misery meets mercy.

OUTLINE

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SCENE 2: JESUS JUDGED THE JUDGES.

What did He write?

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"All who turn away from me will be written in the dirt, for they have abandoned the Lord, the fountain of living water." *Jeremiah 1:13*

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Life Lessons:

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2. Need forgiveness? Jesus offers to remove your sin.

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For the Joy...
Pastor David Dykes



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