

Summary 8:1-11

In this chapter, we have the famous scene where an adulterous woman is brought before Jesus. Those who brought the woman did not care about upholding justice. What they cared about most was trying to ensnare Jesus. Thus, this passage finds a close parallel in Mark 12, where the religious leaders tried to trap Jesus using the topic of taxes. And, like his response to the Pharisees in that passage, Jesus will respond with another quick but sharp saying that not only cuts to the heart of the matter but leaves everyone in stunned silence.

Exegesis

Vs. 1-2 – This is the first and only time that John mentions the Mount of Olives while the Synoptics mention it frequently (cf. Mat. 21:1; 24:3; Mar. 11:1; Lu. 21:37, etc.). Thus, it seems to have been one of Jesus' favorite places to visit.¹ What's more, not only did Jesus make it part of his routine to visit the Mount of Olives, it was also his habit to teach in the morning at the temple, as is indicated by the term "again." Far from being evasive and hard to find, as he was in chapter 7, it appears that at least here in chapter 8, Jesus would make his schedule so predictable that "all the people came unto him" to hear what the Lord would say. Even his enemies, as we'll soon see, knew exactly where to find him.

Vs. 3-6a – Enter Jesus' primary antagonists, the scribes and Pharisees. While the Pharisees are mentioned quite a bit in John's account, this is the first and only time he mentions the "scribes." It makes sense that they are mentioned here as the issue at the heart of this scene revolved around how to interrupt a particular passage. And scriptural interpretation was a practice that the scribes were considered experts in.² Apparently, they too knew Jesus' schedule. And what time to discredit Jesus than when he's surrounded by people? John connects the dots for the reader when he says that they were looking for a way to "accuse" him. And while the tactics of the religious leaders varied, this time, they were both creative and cruel. Not only did they bring an adulterous woman before Jesus, but they had also caught this woman in the very act of adultery.

At once, we are struck with several questions. How was it that they were able to catch her, as they admitted, "in the very act"? They were either fortunate to happen upon such a private

¹ Morris, Leon, *The Gospel According to John*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament, Revised Edition, (Grand Rapids; Eerdmans Publishing, 1995), p. 780.

² Kruse, Colin G., *John*, The Tyndale New Testament Commentary, Revised Edition, (Downers Grove, ILL; InterVarsity Press Academic, 2017), p. 226.

exchange or, perhaps, the couple had been doing the act where anyone could see. Speaking of which, should there not have been two people brought before Jesus rather than one? Where was the man? Did he get away? And, lastly, given the subject matter, wouldn't it have been better to discuss this situation in private instead of parading her before all? These lingering questions imply that this "tempting" by the scribes and Pharisees was premeditated.³ For instance, if this whole scene had been engineered, whoever was with the woman might've made provision for himself to escape. Hence, this would explain his absence. No matter how you look at this, the scribes and Pharisees are as much in the wrong as the woman.

The question they then posed to Jesus was about whether or not the woman should be stoned. To do so, they appealed to passages such as Leviticus 20:10 and Deuteronomy 22:22-24 when they suggested capital punishment. Interestingly, according to Jewish tradition, a man was only guilty of adultery if he had sexual relations with a married or betrothed woman, whereas a woman could be guilty of adultery if she were to have sex with anyone other than her husband.⁴ In fact, this double standard is best seen in how the very passages these religious leaders invoked also condemned the man right along with the woman.⁵ What's more, they were very clearly twisting the Scriptures. If one were to read the passages mentioned, you'd notice that stoning was only permitted when the woman was still a virgin and engaged to be married. So, while technically, yes, stoning was a sanctioned form of punishment for adultery, it was only allowed under particular circumstances, and both parties were guilty, not just the woman. Thus, even by the very texts they had cited, the Pharisees and scribes were well beyond the bounds of the law. What's more, there is very little evidence to suggest that a first-century Palestinian court ever meted out such an extreme punishment for adultery.⁶

Setting aside the religious leader's poor exegesis, the test, as we said before, was a clever one (cf. Mr. 12:13-17). If Jesus answered in the affirmative, he would be advocating for something that directly contradicted Roman law. After all, the Jews were not permitted to execute whomever they wanted (cf. Jn. 18:31). Hence, had Jesus supported the stoning, the Jews would have had a way to get the Romans authorities involved.⁷ They might even get them to do their dirty work for them. And, as we know, this tactic eventually worked. However, if Jesus answered in the negative, he would've been seen, at least initially, as going against the

³ Keener, Craig S., *The Gospel of John: A Commentary*, Volume 1 (Grand Rapids; Baker Academic, 2012), 1:736.

⁴ Morris (1995), p. 782.

⁵ Kruse (2017), p. 227.

⁶ Carson, D.A., *The Gospel According to John*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary, (Leicester, England; Apollos, 1991), p. 335.

⁷ Keener (2012), 1:737.

Scriptures. The religious leaders would've used this opportunity to discredit him before the crowd gathered around him. Lastly, Jesus could've simply refused to answer. He was under no obligation to weigh in here. But that would've left the woman in the hands of powerful men with dubious morals. Not to mention the fact that they were also filled with murderous intent. Needless to say, this would've likely spelled trouble for the woman had Jesus done nothing at all.

Vs. 6b-7 – And how does Jesus respond to what appears to be an impossible situation? He "stooped down" and began writing in the dirt. Sadly, we're not told what Jesus wrote, but John does tell us the impression this gave to the scribes, Pharisees, and all who saw it; he explains that it was as if Jesus "heard them not." In other words, the Lord was very clearly ignoring them. This action alone neither affirmed nor denied the point of their question; instead, Jesus averting his gaze and scribbling in the ground condemned the whole situation. Clearly, adultery was wrong. Jesus will point this out later. However, the actions of the scribes and Pharisees were also wrong. They were not looking to uphold justice. The woman wasn't even on trial here; Jesus was.⁸ And so, Jesus would instead look at the dust than at those who stood before him.

Undeterred by Jesus' obvious disapproval of the entire proceeding, the scribes and Pharisees pressed him further to answer. They would not leave the matter unsettled. In fact, they end up pestering Jesus so much that the Lord finally gives them an answer: "He that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone at her." Essentially, Jesus was saying, "If you wish for me to pronounce judgment right here and now, so too will we have the execution right here and now." What's more, according to the OT, it was primarily the responsibilities of those who've witnessed the act firsthand to be among the first to cast stones (vs. Deut. 17:7).⁹ In no way could the Jews claim Jesus was denying scripture. He just invited them to throw stones. But the qualification he puts on the stone thrower was that the person be "without sin." If such an extreme action be taken against someone, those who look to set the executioner's axe into motion must be above reproach. Not only that, but the accusation must be verified beyond all reasonable doubt. This is not to say that Jesus was requiring that officers of the law be literally sinless.¹⁰ Indeed, if that were the case, no one would be qualified to enforce the law. Instead, both the proceedings and the prosecutors must be scrupulous and irreproachable in their

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Morris (1995), p. 784.

¹⁰ Carson (1991), p. 336.

enforcement of the law. And, as we've already shown, there are so many holes in their arguments that no one, except Jesus, could rightfully detain this woman, let alone stone her.

Vs. 8-9 – Having said his peace, Jesus again "stooped down" and began writing on the ground. And far from pressing him once again, everyone began to leave. In fact, John tells us that the exodus started with the "eldest," that is, the elders (**πρεσβύτερος**, *pres-boo'-ter-os*). This term wasn't only a word that designated someone's age; it also referred to those who were on the Jewish council and would've likely adjudicated such matters as the one that was brought before Jesus (cf. Mat. 21:23; Ac. 4:8; 6:12). Hence, John's point is that the judges, lawyers, scribes, and Pharisees—i.e., those who would've realized the implications of Jesus' words the quickest—were among the first to leave. They knew, before anyone else, that this whole trial had been a complete sham. The woman was guilty. No one would deny that, not even the woman. But the way in which due process had been utterly disregarded left the elders only one option: escape. And soon, once realization dawned on everyone else, only Jesus and the adulterous woman were left remaining.

What's more, while John does not record it, Jesus equated lust with adultery in his famous Sermon on the Mount (cf. Mat. 5:28). Perhaps, those who left were reminded about their own wandering thought life. That, even though they might not sleep around, in the eyes of God, they were just as guilty of infidelity as this woman was. Their own "conscience" not only convicted them of their hypocrisy but it also convinced them to leave. "Those who had come to shame Jesus now leave in shame."¹¹

Vs. 10-11 – Interestingly, rather than refer to her as "adulteress" (**μοιχαλίσ**, *moichalis*; cf. Rom. 7:3), Jesus calls her "woman." Notice, this is not a harsh form of address. In fact, it is the same term that Jesus used when referencing his own mother (cf. Jn. 2:4; 4:21; 19:26; 20:13). What's more, this is the first time that the woman was even addressed in the entire episode.¹² And rather than heap even more condemnation on her, as the others had done, the Lord speaks to her as a person without explicitly referencing her sin.

Curiously, we notice that he asks her a couple of questions; first, Jesus says, "Where did your accusers go?" and then, "Has no one condemned you?" Obviously, he already knows the answer to these questions. But he wants the woman to acknowledge the truth of them—i.e., her accusers have abandoned their claim on her. She replies, "No man, Lord." Which, technically, wasn't true. Yes, those who had dragged her before the Lord were gone, but Jesus was still there. He has yet to indicate what he will do. This is why Jesus immediately says,

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Kruse (2017), p. 229.

“Neither do I condemn thee: go, and sin no more.” In saying this, Jesus makes it very clear that if he wanted to, he could've condemned her. After all, the Lord knows her better than those who had accused her. Yet, rather than *exact*ing judgment, which would've been his right, Jesus *exerc*ises grace. But he doesn't simply let her off the hook; he also commands that she abandon her sinful ways. This is meant, of course, to be about the sin of adultery. However, given the fact that Jesus speaks in such broad terms, it is more likely that he wants the woman to have a complete life change.

Now, the significance of Jesus' response is extraordinary for several reasons. First, he let the scribes and Pharisees go. Today, if a lawyer did what those religious leaders had done, they would rightfully be disbarred, and their law practice stripped away. What's more, Jesus did not affirm the woman's lifestyle. "Jesus refused to condemn the woman, [but] he did not condone her sin."¹³ Having sex outside the confines of marriage is, without a doubt, wrong. Jesus' words maintained the integrity of the Scriptures. Yet, remarkably, though she was in the wrong and Jesus was in the right, Jesus stayed her execution. How could he do that? Was it even right for Jesus to do that? Only through the lens of the cross can we say that Jesus' actions make sense. He alone has the power and right to forgive sins (cf. Mat. 9:1-8). Moreover, her sin of adultery was, eventually, paid for in blood. It's just that the woman wasn't the one who paid that price. Jesus paid it for her. He showed leniency that day because he knew that his sacrifice would be sufficient to cover a multitude of sins—i.e., the sins of an adulterous woman and even those of the duplicitous men who tried to use her for their own degenerate schemes.

The message of the Gospel is about how Jesus came to save the world, not condemn it (cf. Jn 3:17). The world was already condemned. These men were standing before Judge Jesus as sinners. They too deserved to be stoned. This is why they went away. But when a sinner is brought before Jesus and does not deny their sin, Jesus forgives. Interestingly, most left the temple that day with a guilty conscience. The one exception was the adulterous woman.¹⁴ She left that day a forgiven woman.

¹³ Kruse (2017), p. 229.

¹⁴ Phillips, John, *Exploring the Gospel of John*, The John Phillips Commentary Series, (Grand Rapids; Kregal Publications, 1989), p. 160.

VIDEO DESCRIPTION

Wednesday Night Live | John | Week 2

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