



Sunday, April 19, 2026

John 7:53-8:11

If you have your Bibles with you this morning, I'd like to invite you to turn with me to John 8 where we will be reading from verse 1-11. We'll actually be starting from the last verse in chapter 7 though. And if you're able to, please stand for the reading of the Word of the Lord:

John 7:53 - 8:1-11

'[53 Then each one went to his house.

1 But Jesus went to the Mount of Olives.

2 At dawn he went to the temple again, and all the people were coming to him. He sat down and began to teach them.

3 Then the scribes and the Pharisees brought a woman caught in adultery, making her stand in the center. 4 "Teacher," they said to him, "this woman was caught in the act of committing adultery. 5 In the law Moses commanded us to stone such women. So what do you say?" 6 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. 7 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." 8 Then he stooped down again and continued writing on the ground. 9 When they heard this, they left one by one, starting with the older men. Only he was left, with the woman in the center. 10 When Jesus stood up, he said to her, "Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?"

11 "No one, Lord," she answered.

"Neither do I condemn you," said Jesus. "Go, and from now on do not sin anymore."]

Now, I'm not sure if any of you noticed this, but in your Bible this entire passage may be bracketed, with a footnote at the bottom of the page. The basic reason for this is that theologians don't think that John himself actually wrote this section. We do know, however, that this is a historic and biblically accurate account, and fits beautifully within the book of John - especially as it relates to the authority of Jesus that chapter 7 emphasizes. So, even if it may not have originally been written by John in this exact spot, it's easy to see why it was included here as this encounter gives us a powerful and trustworthy picture of who Jesus is - full of both grace and truth.

Now, as we study the text today, you're going to see that this story is not without its fair share of complexities. In fact, it tends to raise more questions than it provides answers for. It's one of those passages that often leads to conjecture and speculation. And so without drifting too far in that direction this morning, I'd like to take a few moments to focus on what Jesus is actually doing here, and what He is revealing to us about who He is, and how He meets us where we're at and takes us where He wants us to go.

So the story opens up with Jesus at the temple in Jerusalem - and notice - just like in Chapter 7, He's not there to perform miracles, instead, He's teaching.

Naturally, a crowd begins to form around him, and, almost immediately, the scribes and Pharisees come traipsing in with a young woman who they throw in the center of the teaching square so that all eyes are now on her. They tell Jesus and the crowd that has gathered that they have just caught her in the act of adultery and declare to Jesus that according to the Law, she must be stoned.

Now, it's clear to Jesus and perhaps even many of those gathered around him that this is a set up but unlike their other unsuccessful attempts, the religious leaders in this story seem quite confident that they have Jesus exactly where they want him to be. They know a little bit about Jesus at this point and they know that He's not going to allow them to stone the girl, but if He doesn't stone her, He would be breaking the Law, and if He is breaking the Law, then how could He be the Messiah since the Messiah came to fulfil the law, not to break the law. So again, in their minds, they've got Him right where they want Him.

But the details in this story are where things begin to shift, because the claims being made by the scribes and Pharisees actually raise some important questions. The fact that they insist this woman must be stoned tells us something about how they are interpreting the Law in this moment.

If you go back to Deuteronomy 22, we read that when a married couple is caught in adultery both

parties are sentenced to death, but the method isn't specified. However, in verse 23, when a woman who is engaged is caught in adultery, the law explicitly calls for stoning.

So when the scribes and Pharisees demand stoning, this strongly suggests that the woman is not yet married but engaged. And in first century culture, this likely meant she was quite young, possibly even a teenager.

Now here's where it gets even more interesting. According to the law, adultery was incredibly difficult to prove. Circumstantial evidence simply wasn't enough. It wasn't enough to suspect or assume - the individuals would have had to be caught in the act. And not only that, there had to be multiple witnesses to confirm it.

Which raises the question, how did this even happen?

Like, how did a group of Pharisees and scribes just happen to be present in the exact spot, at the exact moment this act was taking place?

Think about it, this wasn't something you just happened to stumble upon casually was it? This required precision and planning.

This was a set up.

And while we may not know every detail of how it all unfolded, what is clear is that this woman - not the man - has been brought forward. Which naturally can lead us to believe that the man was a part of this plot as well. A deceptive plot that was designed and orchestrated to use this young woman not to face judgment as a sinner but to be manipulated as a tool to trap Jesus.

So here we are - Jesus is now face to face with a woman whom the Law says should be stoned to death. The scribes and the Pharisees think they've finally trapped Him. From their perspective, there's no way out. Check mate! Either He compromises the Law, or He contradicts His own message. And if He breaks the Law, how could He possibly be the Messiah - the One who came not to abolish the Law, but to fulfill it?

Notice that Jesus does not say a word. He does not engage their ploy at this point. Instead, He bends down and starts to write something in the sand with His finger. This act alone is fascinating, because there are only two other times in Scripture where we see the finger of God mentioned like

this. The first is when the Law was written on tablets of stone and given to Moses in the wilderness. The second is in the book of Book of Daniel, when God pronounces judgment on King Belshazzar and writes that judgment on the wall with His finger.

The significance in our story is a little different although deeply connected. In both of those moments, the finger of God is a clear expression of His decisive authority. So, by Jesus using His finger to write in the sand, He is intentionally drawing on that imagery -quietly declaring His decisive authority as God.

But that's not all He's doing. Keep in mind that as we continue reading over the next few chapters - specifically in Chapter 9 - the context suggests that all of this is actually happening on the Sabbath. And according to Jewish teaching, writing was forbidden on the Sabbath unless it left no lasting mark. Which writing in the dust or sand would be permitted because it did not leave a lasting impression.

So - at this point in the story - without even knowing what Jesus wrote, this simple act of writing in the sand with His finger was His way of quietly demonstrating that He carries the authority of God - because He is God. And while they are trying to trick Him into breaking the Law...He is actually the only One in the entire scene who is keeping the Law.

You see...He knows...

He knows that this was all a set up from the beginning but just like we learned last week, no man could catch Him or trap Him - not because of inability but because of authority. He alone has authority over the past, present and the future. And only when the time was right, would He submit His own life - not to be taken - but to be given - as a sacrifice poured out for humanity.

So it stands to reason that whatever was written in the sand had to have been something so significant - something weighty enough to stop them in their tracks. Some have suggested that Jesus wrote their most intimate secrets. Or that He wrote their most recent sins or even wrote down their names. Others have suggested that He wrote the man's name as a way of showing the scribes and pharisees that He knows this is a trap. And still others suggest that He wrote part of the Law. But the truth is, we don't know...and maybe, just maybe, we're not supposed to know.

So, while many focus on what Jesus wrote, I wonder if the point isn't the writing at all - but the words that Jesus actually speaks. Think about it - after all - everything about the previous chapter

reminds us that His power is revealed through His words. When Jesus is finished writing in the sand, He stands up, looks at them directly and now speaks,

‘Let he who is without sin, cast the first stone.’

And notice the text. It’s immediately after He has spoken this that it says:

John 8:9a

‘When they heard this, they left one by one...’

You see, we often look at that line and think that Jesus is referring to sin in general, but if you look at the moment carefully, everything that Jesus has been doing here, has been rooted in the same Law that they were trying to use against Him.

In passages found in both Deuteronomy and Leviticus, the law states that the witnesses to a crime were required to be the first ones to cast the stones - as long as they were not complicit in the offense. If they were and they threw even one stone, they themselves would be found guilty under the same Law and possibly even subject to its judgement.

So when Jesus says, ‘Let he who is without sin, cast the first stone,’ He was pointing them back to this exact section of the law knowing that if they threw even one stone at this woman, they would be condemning themselves because they were complicit.

So you see, the point isn’t necessarily what was written in the sand, it’s the words of Jesus as they brought conviction and truth. They were trying to trap Jesus, and in the end they were the ones that had become trapped themselves.

And so naturally, they have no choice, but to stand up, drop the stones and walk away because they are no longer the ones doing the judging - they are now the ones being judged.

And it is here - in this moment - that Jesus turns to the woman. And I can only imagine what this scene would have looked like...she’s broken. Maybe trembling. Possibly with tears streaming down her face. And Jesus looks at her and asks,

‘Where are they? Has no one condemned you?’

And she says, ‘No one, Lord.’

And Jesus responds, 'Then neither do I condemn you. Go - and sin no more.'

What love.

What grace.

What a Saviour.

And maybe that's the point. In a story filled with unknowns - the missing man, the unwritten words, the unanswered questions - perhaps the reason we aren't given all the details is because we are meant to see something far greater.

That no sin is too great. No burden too shameful. No sinner is too far gone.

And that the same love and grace poured out on this woman is available to you and to me today. To bring freedom. To give peace. To offer forgiveness.

And to call us - to go, and sin no more. To turn from our wicked ways and turn into His loving arms.

Closing blessing:

May the Lord Bless you and Keep you

May He cause His face to Shine upon you

May He be gracious towards you

Lifting up His countenance before you

And may He give you peace

In Jesus name, Amen.

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