

## The Trap is Laid! John 7:53-8:11

As we look to this passage of Scripture you will notice that if you are reading it in the ESV that there are brackets around the text. And the brackets are indicating that this text is included in the Gospel of John but with a caution. This episode in the life of Jesus is very well known and often alluded to, but one of the things not so well known about this text is that the earliest manuscripts, which are the closest to the original do not have this passage in it, and may not have been part of the original Gospel of John. It certainly does not change the message whether it is included or not. Some of the language that is used also is not found elsewhere in John. Many think that it was an oral episode that was passed down until someone finally wrote it down and it found its way into the gospel.

Still others think it is part of the original. After the early manuscripts you have sixteen hundred years of manuscripts where it is included. Still others think that this was an apostolic writing that is not part of the Gospel but has all the marks of inspiration. And it is impossible to really tell if this incident was added later or not so I have to preach this passage. I do believe that this passage is scripture here. And it is amazing how this episode goes along with everything that we have seen thus far in the Gospel of John. You have immorality, hypocrisy, but you also have grace. The central figure is also Jesus Christ.

After the soldiers failed to arrest Jesus Christ the religious leaders tried to trap Jesus in a diabolical plan that would turn the people against him. Again, as you look at this group of people they were not interested in truth but how to destroy Jesus and his reputation before the people or get him arrested. And one commentator calls it one of the most despicable acts that is done in the gospels by these men. And you look at the nature of sin, and we can be blown away by the nature of sin. And we are even horrified by some of the acts of sin throughout the Scriptures. Whether it is Lot's daughters getting their father drunk and lying with him, or Herod the Great killing all the babies two years and under in order to protect his crown. It stuns us to see the level of sin. And the incredible thing is the Bible describes a world that we can recognize. It is not a sanitized world free from the use and abuse and treachery of individuals. We recognize that world of sin.

And we ask in this passage what is the greatest sin that we see here? And the answer that comes quickly to mind is that of adultery. Adultery destroys so many lives and families. It deceives others and uses others in the name of love, but it is all about self. And adultery has been alive and well in all corners of human life even among the people of God. David is just one example. But as awful and damaging a sin as adultery is, that is not the most despicable sin in this passage, but the most reprehensible sin is that the religious leaders would use the sin and even the death of this woman caught in this sin to bring down Jesus - to trap him so that they could condemn him. It really has nothing to do with this woman. She is just a tool they can use against Jesus, not someone made in the image of God to care for or be concerned for.

And anger and pride will lead the human heart to do things that they thought they would never do. And be aware of what is lurking in your heart because pride and arrogance will cause you to be against individuals and not for them. And it is amazing

to look at the passage because in the midst of such hostility and evil we see not only the grace of Christ but the absolute wisdom who cares for individuals whether it is the self righteous Pharisee Nicodemus, or the sinful and immoral woman at the well. And it is an incredibly comforting passage to see how his grace triumphs over the wicked schemes of man. So as we look at this passage I want us to see three points: the trap, the answer, and then I want us to see the grace given. I hope we will grow in our love for our Lord and Saviour through this passage.

1. We see the trap against Jesus. Vv1-6.

It is amazing to look at the wicked schemes of others, and also the thought and effort that is put into the demise of others. God has given each individual a mind, and it is so sad what people devise what that God-given gift. When someone is against you they are actively against you. It is incredible how they can even take your acts of mercy and use it against you, or take the right things that you try to do, and make it seem evil in the sight of others. The question is not whether we will be opposed and maligned but how will we respond? We realize that as people opposed Christ they will oppose those who love him and proclaim him. People will try to trap us in words and actions.

We see in this passage that as other people went home, Jesus went up to the Mount of Olives. The great Creator has no home and no place to lie his head. But in the morning he comes and goes to the Temple to teach the people. And this is one of the primary activities that the religious leaders hated Jesus doing. In their estimation he had no right. And this is where the religious leaders enter the picture. Look at verse 3, **“The scribes and the Pharisees brought a woman who had been caught in adultery, and placing her in the midst.”** Notice that this woman was caught in the act of adultery. It was not enough to make an accusation but an individual had to be caught in the act of adultery. And then Law of God was very specific of what should be done with a person who was caught in this sin, and that was they were to be put to death. Sin is no light matter. It deserves death before God. Deut. 22:22 says, **“If a man is found lying with the wife of another man, both of them shall die, the man who lay with the woman, and the woman. So you shall purge the evil from Israel.”** It is also amazing that they bring the woman and not the man before Jesus. This has been the case throughout history that women many times are used and abused, and treated with more disdain and malice than men. That kind of chauvinism is so easy to focus on the sin of the woman. And here is another case. This woman is only a tool to bring down Jesus. There is really no care for her by the scribes and Pharisees.

Now look how the narrative continues, **“they said to him, ‘Teacher, this woman has been caught in the act of adultery. Now in the Law, Moses commanded us to stone such women. So what do you say?’”** So here is Jesus preaching publicly and they bring this woman to him, and they indicate the offence and even what the Law of Moses says. Stoning was the prescribed means that the community exacted justice but is not in the Law as far as adultery. But they knew her guilt and they knew what the Law said so why did they bring the woman to Jesus? There was no need of the question posed to Jesus as far as what to do. So why did they ask him? And verse 6 indicates why, **“This they said to test him, that they might have some charge to bring against him. Jesus bent down and wrote with his finger on the ground.”**

And what a diabolical plot. Again, the woman is just a tool or commodity to discredit Jesus and bring him down. Think of the options that face Jesus in this situation because the religious leaders were aware of them. If he highlights grace and forgiveness which has been a major teaching throughout this gospel we could say that he cares little for the Law of God, and the holiness of God. God is the one who defines holiness, and he burns against sin every day because it is against his honour and worth. Sin is personal before God. It is not something that is light. They could say, Jesus is not a God-lover and not a holy person could be the accusation. And this brings out the problem because Jesus has been healing many individuals and has been compassionately ministering to the masses, but how can Jesus be compassionate and at the same time be just. Or as Paul put it, how can God be just and the justifier of all who believe in Jesus?

The other thing that Jesus could do, is call for the witnesses and then call for the punishment of this woman, which would be death. Can you imagine Jesus actually saying something like that: "This woman is guilty, let's gather stones and fulfill the law of Moses."? This is the same one who says in Matt. 11:28, **"Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest."** Think of it: what sinner would ever come to Jesus is if what they would get is pure justice for their sins. A.W. Pink describes the problem so well, **"The problem presented to Christ by His enemies was no mere local one. So far as human reason can perceive it was the profoundest moral problem which ever could or can confront God Himself. That problem was how justice and mercy could be harmonized.... How can mercy be exercised when the sword of justice bars her way? How can grace flow forth except by slighting holiness?"** So that is the problem facing Jesus, And it really is the problem for all humanity.

2. We need to see the answer given. Vv. 7-9.

The God of glory now speaks, and when he speaks it brings a keen conviction of sin. But before we get to that, we see twice that Jesus is stooped over writing, almost it seems like he is ignoring them. They continued to press him for an answer, and he keeps writing in the sand. And there has been great speculation about what Jesus wrote in the sand. Some say that he was just biding time and thinking about how to answer them. Some say that he was writing out the Old Testament Law and the penalty against false witnesses, or maybe even the Ten Commandments, or maybe something against hypocrisy. The truth is we do not know, and there is no possibility of knowing by just looking at the text. There is not even any suggestion that those who were around him were reading what he was writing.

So look at verse 7, **"And as they continued to ask him, he stood up and said to them, 'Let him who is without sin among you be the first to throw a stone at her.'"** Now let me say that the Law prescribed that one who happened to be a witness could not be guilty or implicit in the crime or the infraction that took place. The witnesses to the infraction were the first ones to cast stones, followed by the rest of the community. It is not saying that we can never judge in a court of Law, and it is never saying that we cannot help those who are struggling with sin or even execute what is known as church discipline.

But Jesus' words have power and what they do is they cut right through the devious plot and hearts of why they brought the woman to Jesus in the first place. It was not because they cared for justice or righteousness. If they had cared about justice then they would have brought this woman before the Sanhedrin and not Jesus. And by Jesus saying these words, he is exposing their hypocrisy. He is going right to the inner depths of their hearts, because that is what the Word of God does, and Jesus speaking these words - speaks them with power. Heb. 4:12-13 says, **"For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart. And no creature is hidden from his sight, but all are naked and exposed to the eyes of him to whom we must give account."** There is such a strength in these words that it is impossible for them not to be convicted.

So look at the response here, **"But when they heard it, they went away one by one, beginning with the older ones, and Jesus was left alone with the woman standing before him."** I do think it is amazing that the temple guards go to arrest Jesus and they come back empty handed and look at the reason they give in John 7:46, **"The officers answered, 'No one ever spoke like this man!'"** And here it is the same way with the scribes and Pharisees. They begin to leave, one by one - the older and more respected first followed by others. No one ever spoke like Jesus. Listen to what John MacArthur writes about this, **"Ironically, those who came to put Jesus to shame left ashamed; those who came to condemn the woman went away condemned. Unfortunately, their indictment and sense of guilt did not lead them to repentance and faith in Christ. Like many who hear and feeling the convicting truth of the law, they hardened their hearts and turned away from Him, not even open to the gospel of forgiveness."** These men should not only have sought the forgiveness of this woman but also the forgiveness of Christ. But they walk away, and the thing that we should be impressed in as the people of God is the wisdom and power of Christ. And that is what the power of Jesus' gospel should do - drive us to conviction, repentance, and trust in Christ. But it should also cause us to have a heart of forgiveness because we have been forgiven such a weight of sin. And that leads us to the third thing that we see in this passage

### 3. We see grace extended by Jesus. Vv. 10-11.

There is such a marked contrast between the way Jesus treats this woman and how she is treated by the religious elite. It is always so sad that there are many that use the word of God just to denounce others. We denounce and we do speak out against abortion or the LGBTQ+ lifestyle, and we need to call sin - sin, but the language many times that is used is that there is no redemptive hope for these individuals. And almost gleefully say bring on the judgment of God. Jesus doesn't condone her sin but reaches out in wonderful grace. There is so much we can learn about compassion and caring for others through the Christ and his gospel.

Look again at verse 10, **"Jesus stood up and said to her, 'Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?'"** So Jesus has been writing in the sand, and there are a couple of things here. One is that this is the first time that he addresses and speaks to her, but the second is even more significant. This is the first time he even

looks at the woman. Here the judicial robes have come off, and Jesus like he spoke to Nicodemus and the Samaritan woman cares about her. She is not a thing or tool but a person, and here you see the compassion of Christ and the dignity that he gives her. A religious person would not talk to a woman and especially a woman who is accused of such immorality. It is such a touching picture of grace and how Jesus meets all of us in a personal way.

And he asked her a question - where are the accusers, and isn't that exactly what the Law does. It accuses us and rightly so. It leaves us guilty and full of shame and needy. And look at the response of the woman and what Jesus says next in verse 11, **"She said, 'No one, Lord.' And Jesus said, 'Neither do I condemn you; go, and from now on sin no more.'"** No one is left, and look at Jesus' response, **"Neither do I condemn you."** This reminds us of what we read earlier in this gospel in 3:17, **"For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him."** Jesus didn't come to condemn but to seek and to save what is lost. Here is a deeply repentant woman. You can imagine the rush of thoughts and emotions that went through her through this whole episode; how she went from hopelessness and despair, to humble joy, relief and hope in this man.

This is also reminiscent of the paralytic that was brought to Jesus on a pallet and lowered through the roof. Mark 2:5 says, **"And when Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralytic, 'Son, your sins are forgiven.'"** And here it is Jesus has the power to forgive sins. Think how authoritative these words are; this is none other than God in human flesh - "Neither do I condemn you." What words of comfort, and he is able to do that not because he overlooked the demands of the Law or the guilt of this woman, but he came to fulfill that Law and take the punishment that we deserve. There is so much grace in this passage. And he commands her to leave her life of sin. And that is the amazing thing - he doesn't leave us the same but changes us.

But as you look at this passage, there are many that are still before Jesus. Many hear the same message of Jesus. Many are even convicted by the words of Jesus, but the vast majority walk away without his forgiveness. And let me ask you this evening: have you trusted in Christ? Have you had the demands of the Law paid for and fulfilled in Jesus? And like the woman if you have truly tasted that grace of Christ we will not want the life of sin anymore. It is replace by the Lord of our forgiveness. The challenge is to come to him tonight. Trust in him. It doesn't matter the sin - he is able and willing to forgive. Listen to those words again from our Saviour and Lord, "Neither do I condemn you." Could there be any more comforting and life changing words ever spoken to her or to us?