

The Balanced Jesus

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John 7:53-8:11

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Did you notice we didn't stand for the reading of God's word today? The reason is our text today is most likely not the word of God. Our text is known as the woman caught in adultery. It's in many of your Bibles, but if you look at it, there's either brackets around it, the whole thing is a footnote or it's italicized, and it says something like, "The earliest manuscripts do not include 7:53 to 8:11." Or it says something like, "Later manuscripts add this to the Gospel of John." You see that? How many of you, this is the first time you're seeing this though you've read the Bible forever. Anybody? There's some of you out there. Others of you aren't raising your hand. Now listen, you should find great comfort in what you're seeing there in the Bible that when there's a serious question about whether or not a text should be in the Bible, the people who publish Bibles tell us all about it.

They don't try and hide it. No way. They're not hiding anything. It's right there for all of us to see with italics and brackets and footnotes. Why? Because what we want is the word of God and we want to have the utmost confidence that what was originally written is what we actually have in our Bibles. I have to warn you the next few moments like flashing lights and sirens. Next few moments are what I call a nerd moment. Okay? So we're going to get a little nerdy for a minute. Please indulge my Bible nerdiness as I help us think through what's going on with this. Let's start with this. How much of the New Testament is like this? How much of the New Testament has serious questions as to whether or not the author actually wrote the words that we have on the page?

Is it 50%? Is it 20%? Is it 10%? No, it's less than 1%. Less than 1% of the New Testament and all the parts that are in question have brackets around it or footnotes or both to make it clear. So over 99% of your New Testament is what was originally written by the original authors. The less than 1% there's a question about, it's clearly shown by the publishers for all to see. So why is there a question about this text though? What's going on here? Six quick points on this. First, even though John 7:53 to 8:11 is in most of the Greek copies of John that we have, it's in most of the copies, but it is absent from every partial or complete copy of John that we have before 400 AD. So before 400 AD, there's not a single copy of John that has this text.

Of the copies of John, in other words, that are closest to the original, none of them have this text. This is why modern translations put brackets around it. So you look at your Bible, you see brackets. That's why. These ancient copies of John go from 7:52 when the authorities ask, "Are you from Galilee too? Search and see that no prophets arises from Galilee," right to Jesus. John 8:32 who responds to them by saying, "I'm the light of the world." That seems to be how John

originally wrote this text, and we're going to see why in a minute. So second, this text is absent from the oldest translations of John into other languages. Third, there isn't a church leader in the eastern part of the early church who mentions this text for the first thousand years of church history. Two of the most important early church leaders in that area, a man named Origen in the 200s and Chrysostom in the 400s.

They both work through the Gospel of John verse by verse, and they both do not mention this text. The best explanation for that is because they didn't have it. Fourth, many of the copies that do have this text have a mark by it usually showing that there's some hesitation about whether it should be in the text at all. Also, when we look at the text itself, there are also some problems. There are even more problems. So fifth, the text breaks the flow of the passage. So if you remember all the way back to December, the context of this text is the Feast of Tabernacles, and at the very end of Chapter 7 there, it's the height of the feast and there's the water ceremony where they're pouring out water on the altar and in that moment everybody's cheering and that's when Jesus proclaims, "If anyone is thirsty, come to me and drink, believe in me and you'll have eternal life."

Well, there is a lamp lighting ceremony that is a second part of the Feast of Tabernacles, and it's what's being talked about in Chapter 8 when Jesus says what? As they're lighting the lamps, "I am the light of the world." So in verse 53 and 8:1 and 8:2 to put a day and a night between verses 1 and 2 breaks the flow of the ceremony, which means that it breaks the flow of the text itself. And then finally, 6, almost every verse in this account has a word that's not found anywhere else in John. So it's not his vocabulary and it doesn't use words that John normally uses, so it doesn't read like John wrote this text. So to summarize all of that, was this text written by John? Most likely, no. If it's not written by John, it was an apostle and a prophet.

Is it God's word? No. If it's not the word of God, should it be in the canon? Should it be in the library of New Testament books that are the word of God? No. So now you might be asking what? Well, why is it here at all? Right? Well, how did it get here? Well, this text is found in hundreds of copies of John dated after 400 AD, but those copies that's only found in the western part of the church. So in case you're wondering why your Bible doesn't have brackets like, "What is he even talking about? I don't have any brackets or footnotes at all." If that's your Bible right now, if it just looks like the rest of the Bible, you probably have a King James or a new King James, which is based on this set of copies, this post 400 AD copies of the Bible.

Now this text is commented on by some western church leaders in and around the 400s, and interestingly, this text is not only found after verse 52, but in some copies, it's found after 7:36. In another copy it's found after 7:44 and others after John 21:25, the book ends and it's like, "Okay, here's another story." And it's even found in one copy after Luke 21:38. So putting that all together and what's the summary? What's the conclusion? Well, my conclusion is the account of the woman caught in adultery is not scripture. It's an extra biblical story that was known in the western part of the early church, but unlike most of the extra biblical stories about Jesus, this one

is probably true. Think about it. No scribe, no monk would make up a story that sounds like Jesus was soft on the issue of adultery, which we're going to see He wasn't.

This text is part of the quote, "Many other things that Jesus did," that John 21:25 talks about. This text can be trusted as historical, but it can't be trusted as scripture. So while our text is not inspired, it is insightful and instructive while not authoritative. I think in general it is authentic. While this text is popular and even cherished and rightly so, it's not canonical and likely should not be considered the word of God. Again, can you trust that over 99% of what you have in your Bible is what was originally written? Answer? Yes. Do Bible publishers hide the less than 1% of our Bibles that they're not sure about? Answer? No. What you have in your lap is the word of God. You can say that without hesitation, without fear, and without doubt.

Now with the nerd moment over, this text has been in Christian Bibles for the better part of two millennia, and since it's in our Bibles and since I cannot say, nobody can say with 100% certainty that it was added later and not taken out super early because you don't have physical evidence of that. With that in mind, that's why I'm going to talk about it today. I'm not going to dig into every word like I usually do or assume everything here is what actually happened because I don't think every word is inspired. We should not ground any of our doctrine on this text or do a lot of application based on this text unless we find those truths in other parts of the New Testament.

Today I'm going to treat this text differently than I normally do, but I think God is going to use it. So let's jump into the text starting in verse 53. "They went out each to his own house, but Jesus went to the Mount of Olives. Early in the morning, He came again to the temple, all the people came to Him and He sat down and taught them." When did this event happen? Well, not after the events of John 7:52. In other words, did this happen the morning after the Feast of Tabernacles and John 7? Answer, no. But did it happen in the morning? Sure. Did it happen in the temple? Sure. Was there a crowd of people listening to Jesus teach when this event happened? Sure. And the crowd is going to be the witnesses to the main event. Verse 3, the scribes, and the Pharisees brought a woman who had been caught in adultery and placing her in the midst. He said to them, teacher, this woman has been caught in the act of adultery.

Let's summarize this opening section with *point #1, The Devious Leaders. The Devious Leaders*, the scribes, and Pharisees along with a group called the Sadducees, who aren't in our text today, they're the religious leaders, the religious elite of the day. They are the lawyers, the clergy, the theologians, the experts in God's word who taught in the synagogues. In this dramatic moment, think about that. They actually interrupt Jesus to force a woman into the middle of all the people that He's teaching. She's been, verse 3, caught in adultery. Notice verse 4, she was caught in the act of adultery. Now, she may have been caught, but her judgment hasn't been decided yet for that the religious leaders have seized her and taken her not straight to jail, but where? Straight to Jesus. Verse 5. They say now, "In the law, Moses commanded us to stone such a woman." What? So what do you say? Seventh commandment forbids adultery. Leviticus 20:10 demands the death penalty for those who were caught committing adultery. And we just

pause right there. There's some obvious questions that make this whole thing a little suspicious, right? Like what, ladies?

Where's the guy? Where's the man? It takes two to tango, right? So why is it that only the woman is here about to be executed? Also, the leaders are just so concerned with justice. Why don't they take her to jail to stand trial? They're going to do that to Jesus in six months. They're not going to wait. They're going to do it instantly. Why not take her to jail? Why take her to Jesus? He's not a judge, right? He doesn't sit on the bench. He's not a judge at all. He's just a rabbi. And a rabbi isn't needed to figure this one out. She's caught. She's guilty. There are witnesses, case closed. So since those are the facts since there's no question why bring her to Jesus at all? The answer is in verse 6. "This they did to test him that they might have some charge to bring against him."

They bring her to Jesus to test him, to get information, to get dirt on him, to be used against him. Notice in order verse 6, to have some charges to bring against him in court. They're trying to trick him to do something illegal. Well, what's the trick? Well, think about it. If he says, "Do not stone her," if he argues for mercy, he sets himself up against God's law, against the word of God, against the law of Moses, which means he's a false teacher and should be rejected and even executed. But if he says, "Stone her," his reputation as a teacher of mercy is undermined. And also the Jews didn't have the power of capital punishment. The Romans had that, so the Jews needed to get permission to execute criminals. The idea then is that if Jesus argues for her execution, he could be charged with being against Rome and tried for treason and executed.

So either he's killed for being a false teacher or they're both killed. That's the dilemma. And they think they're so smart, don't they? They think they've got him, but they don't. They lose to Jesus 100% of the time. They don't know that yet, but this time is going to be no different. Their hatred for Jesus has made them foolish and hypocritical. Even coming off as respectful, you see that in verse 3, "Teacher, teacher," using flattery to hide their devious, even devilish plans to try to get him killed. They publicly put a woman on trial when privately, who's really on trial? Jesus is on trial in their minds, but the irony is they're on trial, right? John 5:27 says that Jesus has been given authority by God to execute judgment on all humanity. So here they are judging the judge of all the earth. Now, think about all that. As we see in these religious leaders in other texts, these guys are arrogant, they're superior to others.

I mean, look at what they call her in verse 5, "Such a woman." Even insincere in their devotion, right? I mean, notice they're so zealous about God's law, but why? Because they want to kill Jesus. That's why. They seem concerned with truth and obedience, but they're using religion for their selfish, even sinful designs. In fact, as we'll see, it was their hidden sin that actually outs their devious scheme. And before we look at how Jesus responds, I want us to look at next point. **Point #2), The Shameful Woman, The Shameful Woman.** What she did was wrong. It was sinful, it was evil. Adultery got the death penalty in the Old Testament for a reason. It destroys lives. If she committed adultery, that means she had a husband and maybe even had kids. She ignored them all and ignored God and ignored his word. All so she could gratify self.

Now, she was caught in the act, which means the man got away while she was caught or he was treated with lenience and she was not, or maybe he was part of the plot and she's just an ignorant pawn. Either way, he's not there and she is. And even though she is guilty, that's not fair. She should not be alone in this moment. And think about this setting, it's in public, in the temple for hundreds, maybe even thousands of people to see her. She's caught in the act. Maybe she doesn't have any clothes on. Maybe she has the minimal amount of clothing on. She's probably looking down. She's probably not looking anybody in the face. She's probably hearing yelling and screaming and judgment probably regretting everything she did, but it is too late.

I mean, imagine the worst thing that you have ever done and everybody knows about it, the humiliation, the regret this woman must have felt. She's helpless, she's hopeless, put on display for all to see as a pawn in their wicked scheme. The deed was done and she was caught and not only was what she did shameful, but what happens after the fact is heaping more shame onto her. Now, we might look at that and think about that and say, "Well, she deserves everything she gets and even then, some." She deserves it. What she did was not some minor thing. This is major. This is massive. We often don't like to feel pity for those who do something this wicked. We don't like to feel compassion for someone in such gross sin, but like the religious leaders in this text, we could think about her or those like her with utter contempt and wickedness like they did.

I mean, we want justice, especially what, especially if that was sin was against you, was against us. We want justice. She deserves everything that's coming for her and then some. Disgusted. "I would never do that. I mean, such a woman should..." Wait a minute. We become like the people in the account that we would never ever want to become like. As we read texts like this or we know people like this, we should remember that it is far easier for us to connect with the wicked like this woman because of the sin in our own hearts and our own lives. So in a great sinner comes into our lives, we should remind ourselves that if it wasn't for God's grace to me, that what? That would be me. That would be me. I wanted to bring us into her experience just a little bit so we can better appreciate what happens next. Notice verse 2, Jesus is sitting down and teaching, but verse 6, Jesus bent down and wrote with his finger on the ground.

You can have a field day reading all the theories about what Jesus wrote in the dirt. There are tons of them. Interestingly, the only other time in the Bible where the words for writing in verses 6 and 8 are used are in the Greek version of Exodus where the 10 commandments were written with the finger of God. So maybe Jesus wrote the 10 commandments in the dirt with his finger. Who knows? Answer. Nobody knows. Nobody alive at least. Also, why did he do this? Is he stalling? Is he ignoring their question? Is he showing them contempt? Is he heightening the tension? Who knows? Nobody knows. Why? Because the author of this text, whoever he was, didn't tell us and because he didn't tell us those questions are not important. What is important though is what? It's what Jesus said.

Well, the religious leaders are badgering him for an answer verse 7, as they continue to ask him for an answer, Jesus stands up. Notice verse 7, he stands up from bending down and writing in the dirt and says to them, verse 7, "Let him who is without sin among you be the first to throw a

stone at her." Verse 8. And once more, he bent down and wrote on the ground. That's called a mic drop. That's what that is. And you can see that in how everybody there responded, verse 9. And when they heard it, when they heard his words, they went away one by one beginning with the older ones. Now, what did Jesus mean in verse 7? I mean, did he mean only sinless people can assess whether or not other people's actions are sinful?

I mean, if he did that, there's no basis for law or courts or trials or any of that stuff unless the judge is what? Unless the judge is sinless and there's no such thing. So he didn't do that. So what is he saying then? Well, verse 7 is a command. It's not a request. "Throw the first stone if you're without sin." What that means, by the way, in this dilemma, Jesus chose a side, he chose a side. He upholds God's law. He's not over God's law. He upholds God's law. He did not ignore it here, but in the Old Testament, the one who was to throw the first stone was to be the witness to the sin, to the crime. And as a witness, that means that they saw the sin, but what? As a witness, they did not commit the sin themselves. So he calls them out for their hypocrisy.

He's saying, if you're not in sin right now, in this moment, throw the first stone. If you haven't committed her sin, if you're not committing some other sin in regards to this incident right now, go ahead, throw the first stone. Here they were outraged at a woman caught an adultery all while they're trying to entrap Jesus to have him executed unjustly. Notice he upholds the law of Moses, stone her. He avoids Roman law by putting the responsibility back on the leaders to do it, and he protects the woman from death by exposing their hypocrisy, and he does it all how? With one sentence. Just don't mess with Jesus. Don't mess with him. Don't be on the opposite side of an argument with Him. Just submit to what he says. Just do not try to do this. They fail every time because they are dealing with divine brilliance here. And then notice verse 8 is beautiful. He just goes back to doodling in the dirt.

Mic drop. As they leave one by one it says from the oldest to the youngest. Why is that? No idea. Maybe the older ones knew better just how sinful they were. So they left first. Who knows? Whatever the reason is, it seems that they came focused on her sin and left focused on their sin, but tragically not focused enough to turn from their sin and believe in Jesus. At the end of verse 9, the woman is left standing before, *point #3), The Merciful Lord. The Merciful Lord.*

The leaders are gone, verse 9, Jesus was left alone with the woman standing before him. Why is she standing? I mean, you picture her, she's on the ground. She's groveling. She's crying full of dirt, but she's actually standing. Why? Because she's on trial. Maybe some of the crowd that was listening to Jesus teach has also left. Maybe some have stayed, but they've faded in the background. Now it's just Jesus and the shameful woman caught in adultery.

So verse 10, Jesus stood up. So now he's looking her in the eye and said to her, "Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?" These are the first words in the text spoken to this woman. "Where are your accusers? It looks like they're either sinful in the same way that you are or they sinned in this incident today. You committed the crime, but no one is left to condemn you." Now notice he's not asking for information. What he's doing with these words is he's graciously calming her soul that she doesn't need to fear her accusers anymore, and he's drawing

the truth out of her as we'll see in a minute. We know from John 5 that Jesus is the judge, and we know that unlike all her accusers and everybody else there that day, there was one person there that day, verse 7, who was without sin, right? It was him. 1 Peter 2:2, "Jesus committed no sin." 1 John 3:5 says that in Jesus, there is no sin.

He is in the words of Hebrews 4:15, not a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are yet without sin. That sympathy of this great high priest is on display right here. As she says to the judge of all the earth, as she answers his question, verse 11, "No one, Lord." Now she calls him Lord, which most people that I read said that that just means sir, but I don't think so. I think this is a confession of faith in line with Romans 10:9, "If you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved." So in this moment, Jesus is now her Lord. She confesses that. So verse 11, Jesus said, "Neither do I condemn you. Go and from now on sin no more." Anyone have a problem with that?

She committed adultery. There's no question about that. She was caught in the act. Her husband is devastated. If she has kids, they're devastated. The law was broken. Death was God's stated will in his word for this woman. What is going on here? Jesus loved God's law. He didn't see himself as above it. After asking about her accusers, Jesus was zeal for God's law. Could have said, "They don't accuse you, but I accuse you." And as the only one there that day or any day without sin, he could carry out the law of Moses and execute her and listen, if he did that, he would not have done anything wrong. She deserved it. It would've been good. It would've been right, it would've been justice, but this is grace. This is mercy. He's not saying her sin is not worthy of condemnation, nor does He condone her sin.

Instead, he just says, "I'm not going to press charges. I'm not going to put you on trial, weigh the evidence, and condemn you." Why? It's Romans 9:15. God shows mercy to whoever he wants and he wanted to with her. Mark 2:10. "Jesus has authority on earth to forgive sin," and he does so right here. He doesn't give her what she deserved. Instead, he took what she deserved. He received her condemnation when God punished him for her adultery on the cross, which we will all celebrate with hearts full of awe and joy and gratitude this Friday evening. So come join us. If you like this woman, know that you're a sinner. Maybe you don't have human accusers, but your conscience is your accuser. Listen, when you believe in the Lord Jesus Christ to the sexually immoral, to the thieves, to the liars, to the idolaters, he will say to you, in your sin, in your shame, "Neither do I condemn you."

The words of Romans 8:1 will be true of you. There is now no condemnation. No condemnation for those who believe in Christ. If that's you, come to the merciful one. If that's you, even if you were caught in adultery, come to Jesus and he will forgive you like he did this woman. Do not harden your heart. Do not think this is for others. It's for you. Come and you will find rest for your guilty soul. There isn't a person here that doesn't need forgiveness, so come now. The one who showed her mercy, verse 11 is also who. He's the Lord. He's God. He's the one in charge, the one with all authority in heaven and on earth. In light of His great mercy, he says to her,

verse 11, "Going from now on, sin no more," and the adulterous relationship. Why? Because the only right response to grace revealed is truth lived.

We love the one who saved us. We love the one who forgives us. We love the one who shows us mercy by living a life that is constantly turning from our sin and constantly turning to him in obedience. Grace does not mean you have a license. Does it mean you have a hall pass to sin? Nor does it mean that obedience is optional. It's really no big deal. No, grace, mercy, kindness, in spite of the condemnation that we so richly deserve is what motivates repentance. It's Romans 2:1, it's God's kindness that leads us to repentance. It's mercy that motivates obedience. It motivates Christians to no longer live in our sin. It may never be that we continue living in sin after we're saved, Romans 6:1.

Ephesians 5:11 says to Christians, "Take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness." Ephesians 5:3 says to Christians, "Sexual immorality and all impurity and covetous must not even be named among you." In Ephesians 5:5, "For you may be sure of this, that everyone who is sexually moral or impure or is covetous, that is an idolater, has no inheritance in the Kingdom of Christ." He says to this group of Christians, if this is your life, you need to check whether or not you're saved. Why? Because this Christian's Hebrews 12:14, "We should strive for the holiness without which no one will see the Lord." Striving for pursuing holiness and obedience is motivated by the mercy and the grace and the forgiveness that we've been shown in Christ just like we see in the woman caught in adultery. As you can see, I hope this text, while not inspired, while not written by John like all the rest of this book was, this text does reflect many truths about Jesus, right?

No one is too sinful, too wretched, too wicked, too guilty, too vile for Jesus to show mercy to. That's great news, right? He is Lord, also meaning He's God. He's master and king full of truth, and he is full of mercy to sinners like you and me, and even this woman caught in adultery. In other words, putting it all together, he is the balanced Jesus. I know balanced is kind of a cuss word in our day, but it is so needed in our day. What do I mean by the balanced Jesus? Well, he said, verse 11, "Neither do I condemn you." And he follows that up with, "Going from now on, sin no more." "Neither do I condemn you," that's grace. "Go and sin no more," that's truth. It's not one or the other with Jesus; it's both and. He is the balanced Jesus, balancing grace in truth in ways frankly, that we don't do very well, do we?

I mean, we're either truth people or we're grace people, and whichever one we are, we think the other people should be like us, right? Let's just be honest. Then there's the truth without grace people, not usually a lot of fun to be around, they come off as arrogant and judgmental, and we just never really know when they're going to turn their truth guns where on us. And then there's the grace without truth people who don't seem to take sin and false teaching all that seriously, it's love all the time. Love, love, love, love, love, and that just negates everything the Bible says, love.

Listen, in a day when all manner of sin is running rampant and even being defended in the church on the one hand as well as in a day when Christians are eating our own, when cancel

culture is just as prevalent in the church as it is in the world. We need this balance. We need grace, and we need truth, and we need to struggle to be both, which means we need more of Jesus. Because John 1:14 says that he was full of grace and truth. That's what we see in our text. Let's pray.

Jesus, while this text today was not inspired, this text is full of truth that is inspiring and inspires us to not only stand in awe of you, in awe of your mercy, in awe of your kindness to this woman, but it also inspires us to live our lives in the same way, full of grace and truth. You give us your spirit so we can do that. You give us your word so that we can do that. You enable us to walk after your example. All of us need the truths that are in this historical account, and so please use this story in all of our lives as we stand in awe of You. We pray this in your beautiful name, Amen.