

The Gospel of John

Lesson #73

The Journey

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The Gospel of John

- Depending on the translation of your Bible, the next text, the account of the “woman caught in adultery” may not even be present.
- The reason is the same as we discussed when we covered the man healed at the pool of Bethesda – both narratives do not appear in the oldest manuscripts.
- This same issue is true for the final 10 verses of Mark chapter 16 – the issue uncovers itself through what theologians call “textual criticism”.

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The Gospel of John

- When the chapters and verses were added to the New Testament, around 1400 A.D., there were (6) handwritten original manuscripts.
- The oldest manuscript at the time of John’s gospel was dated 1100 A.D. – this would be the one written closest to the days in which John wrote.
- Today, we have roughly 6,000 Greek manuscripts and in those we have one that dates to within 30 years of when John wrote the original.

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- Long story short – the recent translations of the New Testament like NIV, NLT, and ESV were all based on the latest discoveries of manuscripts.
- It is one thing to compare (6) Greek manuscripts and an entirely different thing to compare (6,000) manuscripts for consistency.
- So, today we have the most (6,000) manuscripts and from the Dead Sea scrolls we also have some of the oldest.

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- It should give us confidence that major discrepancies show up in just (3) places in the N.T. – John 5, John 8, and Mark 16.
- We would identify these discrepancies by their topics quite easily – the man at the pool of Bethesda, the woman caught in adultery, and the end of Mark’s gospel.
- Perhaps this is why it is hard to reconcile “they will pick up serpents with their hands; and if they drink any deadly poison, it will not hurt them” at the end of Mark with the rest of the N.T.

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I know what you are thinking – if those textual errors went unnoticed for roughly 11 centuries how do we know there are not many other such errors in the Bible?
 Answer: The rigorous process of textual criticism would have revealed them as well as the ones we’ve found.

I hold the position of always assuming the Bible is correct on all subjects it speaks to – that is a gift from God!

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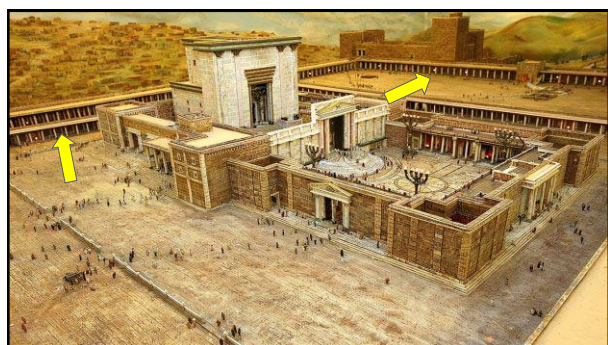
• So with that explanation in mind, we come to our text for today that the NASB places at the beginning of chapter 8.

• John 8:1 But Jesus went to the Mount of Olives. 2 And early in the morning He came again into the temple area, and all the people were coming to Him; and He sat down and began teaching them.

• Jesus now does what Jesus often did – he enters the Temple grounds, he sits down, and he teaches.

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John 8:3 Now the scribes and the Pharisees brought a woman caught in the act of adultery, and after placing her in the center of the courtyard, 4 they said to Him, "Teacher, this woman has been caught in the very act of committing adultery." 5 Now in the Law, Moses commanded us to stone such women; what then do You say?" 6 Now they were saying this to test Him, so that they might have grounds for accusing Him. But Jesus stooped down and with His finger wrote on the ground.

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Given that Jesus always attracted a crowd when he taught, the Scribes and Pharisees would have had to push (probably bully) their way through the crowd to get close enough to talk to Jesus.

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- A new category among the adversaries of Jesus, the “scribes” – it is said the scribes were the ones who earned Israel the title of “people of the book”.
- The scribes took their job of preserving Scripture very seriously; they would copy and recopy the Bible meticulously, even counting letters and spaces to ensure each copy was correct. We can thank the Jewish scribes for preserving the Old Testament portion of our Bibles. They were teachers of the people and interpreters of the Law. (from gotquestions.org)

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- All scribes were Pharisees, but not all Pharisees were scribes – so when we see “scribe” in the New Testament we should think mostly all “corrupt” like their peers.
- On this morning, a group of scribes and Pharisees push their way to Jesus with a woman they accuse of being caught in the very act of adultery.
- Though her sin was very private, adultery usually is, they bring her publicly without any regard for what she will endure that day on the Temple grounds.

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Of course, to be caught in the act of adultery would mean to be found naked – there are few things as humiliating and uncomfortable as being publicly naked. Added to the nakedness then is the guilt and shame that would follow such exposure. The scribes and pharisees seem to have zero interest in affording any such consideration at all to this woman. Like all “religious” people they don’t care what the offender has to experience. They seldom even care about the peripheral pain that comes with such sin to perhaps her husband, her children, or her parents. They care only that someone broke the rules, and they get to feel superior for a time by uncovering their sin. Jesus will have a better approach.

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- The question that usually comes to mind is, “where is the man?” – after all, if she was caught in the very act of adultery, doesn’t that sin take at least two people?
- But that question is not asked, and no one brings it up, not even Jesus, but their purpose in dragging her out in the open has little to do with adultery.
- In verse #6 we are told what this is about, it is about testing Jesus – remember the Jews wanted to arrest him in chapter 7, but the Temple Guard refused to do so.

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- Perhaps the reason for the man not being before Jesus like the woman was due to who her lover was – maybe a Roman official, or a Pharisee, or maybe even a scribe.
- For all we know, maybe one of their own lured her into a sexual act just for the purpose of tripping up Jesus if they could.
- So, they ask Jesus, “Now in the Law, Moses commanded us to stone such women; what then do You say?”

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- A little background – when the Romans conquered a nation, they allowed some of the nation’s culture, systems, and laws to stay in place.
- One power that was not afforded to the conquered nation was that of capitol punishment – you will recall this coming up during Passion week between the Jews and Pilate.
- So, here is the trap – if Jesus says, “stone her” then they will run to the Romans charging him with overstepping his legal bounds.

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- If Jesus says, “let her go” then they will run to the Sanhedrin with the charge of being an unfaithful and illegitimate rabbi.
- They thought they had him in the perfect trap situation – will he offend Rome, or will he offend Old Testament law?
- Leviticus 20:10 “If there is a man who commits adultery with another man’s wife, one who commits adultery with his friend’s wife, the adulterer and the adulteress must be put to death.”

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- But as it turns out, Jesus is a hard man to trap – he is not going to waffle, he is going to make the decision to have the woman stoned.
- But before he pronounces her judgment, “he stooped down and with His finger and wrote on the ground.” – a simple, almost child-like act, but it becomes effective.
- John 8:7 When they persisted in asking Him, He straightened up and said to them, “He who is without sin among you, let him be the first to throw a stone at her.”

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- Now on the surface you might think Jesus is choosing to neither go against Rome or the Old Testament – you might think he is stalling for time, but he wasn't.
- In fact, he made the decision – his decision was to follow Levitical law and call for her to be stoned, however, he adds a condition, the executioner had to be qualified.
- On this day, God adds a nuance to his law – on this day, the executioner had to be one without sin. Seems fair to me as they didn't bring the man so Jesus can add a qualifier.

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- John 8:8 And again He stooped down and wrote on the ground. 9 Now when they heard this, they began leaving, one by one, beginning with the older ones, and He was left alone, and the woman where she was, in the center of the courtyard.
- For the only time in the Bible where Jesus is said to have written something this is where that happens.
- It's sort of mysterious – why was Jesus writing on the ground, and what in the world was he writing?

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There is a teaching that looks back to Jeremiah 17 and says that Jesus is writing her accusers name in the earth because they they had forsaken God. I think that is interesting, but it would seem Jeremiah is writing about all the unsaved of all time. Instead of having their names written in the Lamb's book of life, the names of the unsaved are written in the dust.

Jeremiah 17:13 O Lord, the hope of Israel, all who forsake you shall be put to shame; those who turn away from you shall be written in the earth, for they have forsaken the Lord, the fountain of living water.

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- We are not told what he wrote, but whatever it was it must have been convincing for not only did it silence his adversaries, it repelled them.
- All the scribes and Pharisees who were so aggressive and pompous just minutes ago are now heading out of the temple with their heads down and their mouths shut.
- So, while the scribes and Pharisees saw what he wrote, we are left mostly clueless as to what it was, or are we?

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- Perhaps we do have some clues – we know the Jews prized power and position so much they had corrupted their own religion to protect their perks. *(one of their core values)*
- So maybe the reason they shut up and walked away was to protect what they treasured – maybe what Jesus wrote on the ground threatened their standard of living.
- If they thought they had just sprung the perfect trap, then what could Jesus write that would shut them up and send them away?

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I wonder if he wrote some names of women these “Jews” had been with for sexual favors? Maybe he wrote, “Rachel”, “Mary”, “Ruth”, “Abigail”, and so on

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- As for the woman, she has been sentenced to death and there actually is one standing there with her who is qualified to stone her – I wonder if he will?
- This is a bit of high drama there in the temple with just Jesus and a humiliated woman left lying on the ground.
- John 8:10 And straightening up, Jesus said to her, “Woman, where are they? Did no one condemn you?” 11 She said, “No one, Lord.” And Jesus said, “I do not condemn you, either. Go. From now on do not sin any longer.”

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- When the woman said, “No one, Lord” she is using a Greek word “Lord” pronounced “koo-ree-os” – it is used 722 times in the New Testament and means what you think it means.
 - 1) he to whom a person or thing belongs, about which he has power of deciding; master, lord
 - 1a) the possessor and disposer of a thing
 - 1a1) the owner, one who has control of the person, the master
 - 1a2) in the state: the sovereign, prince, chief, the Roman emperor
 - 1b) is a title of honour expressive of respect and reverence, with which servants greet their master
 - 1c) this title is given to: God, the Messiah

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- Reading then between the lines, this woman, no doubt a commoner, the very type of person who would welcome the Messiah, probably heard of Jesus.
- Now she sees his wisdom and compassion and believes he is the Christ – his response is one that indicates he forgave her.
- He does not exonerate her – she is guilty of adultery, but he does forgive her.

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- And he instructs her to “go and sin no more” which would be the desire of one who is saved anyway.
- This is the heart and soul of the gospel – though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be white as snow. Though they are red like crimson, they shall become like wool.
- To be forgiven is to be treated as though your sin never happened – it is to be treated as righteous, and in this case to be treated as righteous as her accusers thought they were.

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Questions?

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