

The Gospel of John

Lesson 12: The Woman Caught in Adultery and the Light of the World -- John 7:53-8:30

They drag her into the temple courts and throw her down in front of everyone. She has been caught in adultery, they say, in the very act, and the law of Moses says she should be stoned. But notice what is missing. Where is the man? And notice what she is to them, not a person but a trap. They do not care about her sin or her soul; they care about catching Jesus. If He says let her go, He breaks the law of Moses. If He says stone her, He breaks Roman law and forfeits His reputation for mercy. She is bait, exposed and humiliated in front of a gathering crowd, while the men who caught her congratulate themselves on their cleverness.

And Jesus bends down and writes in the dust. We do not know what He wrote, and the not knowing is part of the power of it. The accusers keep pressing, and finally He straightens up and says the sentence that has echoed through the centuries: "Let him who is without sin among you be the first to throw a stone at her." Then He bends down and writes again. And one by one, beginning with the oldest, they walk away, until the courtyard is empty except for the woman and Jesus. The accusers came holding stones; they leave holding their own consciences. The only One present who had the right to throw a stone is the only One who would not.

"Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?" "No one, Lord." "Neither do I condemn you; go, and from now on sin no more." Hold those two halves together, because the gospel lives in the space between them. "Neither do I condemn you", there is the mercy, full and free, no lecture, no probation. "Go, and from now on sin no more", there is the call, just as full, to a changed life. Jesus does not excuse her sin, and He does not crush her with it. He forgives her and then summons her to leave it behind. This is exactly how He still meets us.

And then Jesus lifts the whole scene to something cosmic. "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life." In a culture obsessed with hiding sin in the shadows, He declares Himself the light that exposes the darkness and then drives it out. The same light that revealed the accusers' hypocrisy and the woman's shame is the light that offers life to all who will follow it. Read this passage and watch how Jesus handles both the self-righteous and the fallen, and ask which one you are, and what the Light is asking of you.

Group Discussion: The accusers were eager to condemn the woman but blind to their own sin until Jesus said, "Let him who is without sin among you be the first to throw a stone" (8:7). Why is it so much easier to see others' sins than our own, and how does honest awareness of our own sin change the way we treat people who have fallen?

Personal Reflection: Jesus told the woman, “Neither do I condemn you; go, and from now on sin no more” (8:11), holding mercy and the call to change together. Where do you most need to hear His “neither do I condemn you,” and where is He saying to you “sin no more”?

Read John 7:53–8:30

Study Questions

1. The scribes and Pharisees used the woman as a trap, caring more about catching Jesus than about righteousness (8:3–6). What does their use of God’s law as a weapon reveal about the difference between true righteousness and self-righteous religion?
2. Jesus exposed the accusers by saying, “Let him who is without sin among you be the first to throw a stone at her” (8:7), and they left one by one. When you are tempted to condemn someone else, what would it look like to first remember your own need for mercy?
3. Jesus said to the woman, “Neither do I condemn you; go, and from now on sin no more” (8:11). How do mercy and the call to a changed life belong together, and why is it a distortion to hold one without the other?
4. Jesus showed the woman mercy without excusing her sin and called her to leave it behind (8:11). Is there a sin Jesus has forgiven you for that He is also calling you to finally “sin no more” in? What would walking that out look like?
5. Jesus declared, “I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life” (8:12). What does this second great “I am” saying claim about who Jesus is and what He offers?
6. Jesus promises that those who follow Him “will not walk in darkness” (8:12). What areas of darkness, confusion, sin, or fear, is Jesus inviting you to bring into His light by following Him more closely?
7. When challenged about His testimony, Jesus said, “I know where I came from and where I am going” and pointed to the Father who sent Him as a second witness (8:14–18). What does Jesus’ certainty about His origin and destiny teach us about His unique identity?
8. Jesus told them, “You are from below; I am from above. You are of this world; I am not of this world” (8:23). How does this contrast between earthly and heavenly origin shape the way you understand Jesus, and the way you live as one who belongs to Him?
9. Jesus warned, “unless you believe that I am he you will die in your sins” (8:24), using the words “I am” that echo the divine name. Why does Jesus make believing in who He is, the divine “I am,” a matter of life and death, and how does this fit with the kind of saving faith the whole Gospel describes? (Note for the class: the account of the woman in 7:53–8:11 is absent from the earliest and best manuscripts; see the teaching notes.)
10. Look back over this passage, from the rescued woman to the Light of the world. What is one specific way Jesus is forming you to receive His mercy, walk in His light, and follow Him out of the darkness?

Now or Later

Reflect on these passages: Romans 2:1–4, judging others while doing the same things and despising God’s kindness; Psalm 103:8–14, the Lord merciful and gracious, removing our transgressions; 1 John 1:5–9, walking in the light and confessing our sins; Isaiah 9:2, the people in darkness seeing a great light; Titus 2:11–14, grace that trains us to renounce ungodliness.