



a study of
The Gospel According to John
 Summer 2025
 Lesson #9
 John 8:1-11
***"Peeling Back the Onion Skin
 on a Stinky Situation"***

[1] Calhoun, Trevor, "Distorting the Gospel: The Meaning of John 8:1-11 Blogger at *The Point of Reflection*. 2019 <https://thepointofreflection.blog/2019/12/30/distorting-the-gospel-the-meaning-of-john-81-11/>

[2] Miller, Baron, Church of God Navy Chaplain & pastor "The Accused: An Old Testament Hermeneutic of John 8:1-11", *The Other Journal at the Seattle School, Issue 7: Gender and Sexuality* (<https://theotherjournal.com/issue/07-gender-and-sexuality/>)

[3] Wends, Dr. Steve UMC Pastor/Teeacher "Breaking Out of the Box – John 8:1-11" Sermon, March 8, 2014. <https://seedbed.com/name-sermon-saturday/>

[4] Arntessoni, Arnell, "John 8:1-11: She Was A Pawn ... Expendable And Insignificant" Blogger at *Daughter of Eve: Delving into the Bible and Ourselves ... For Freedom*. <https://Daughtersofeve.Blog/2020/05/28/John-8-1-11/>

REVIEW:

What spiritual significance do you recall from the following chapters?:

John's Introduction: _____

John the Baptist's Introduction: _____

Jesus' first disciples (1:35ff): _____

Wedding at Cana: _____

Jesus Cleanses the Temple: _____

Nicodemus: _____

Samaritan Woman: _____

Healing on the Sabbath and Jesus' Authority: _____

Feeding the 5,000 and Bread from Heaven: _____

Festival of Booths: _____

BRIEF HISTORICAL AND CULTURAL CONTEXT:

Diligent searching reveals layers of meaning within this text, like onion skins. Onion skins is a good metaphor, as this story stinks to high heaven of evil trickery. We'll peel back three layers of this story. The first, is the outside, overall picture. *What is John's subject matter?*



"We are looking for the author's subject and not the subject of the characters the author is writing about.

The significance of scripture is not in 'what it says,' but, how 'what it says' contributes to what it means." [1]

Share your thoughts

Read: John 8:1-11

1. THE BIG PICTURE: The story of the woman caught in adultery is considered to be a story that was passed around orally for decades following Jesus' time on earth. These eleven verses have been found in later Greek and Latin manuscripts, but it's not in the earliest Greek manuscripts of John's Gospel. It is widely accepted that this was a popular story about Jesus - told for yers within the early church community and was later inserted into both the Gospel of John (most commonly found in chapter 8) and some versions of Luke.

So, why did early theologians settle on the eighth chapter of John for its home in our Bible today? Let's see what is going on in John's Gospel around the point of its insertion.

Read: John 1:1; John 6:42; John 7:27, 41-42, 52; John 8:19, 25

The word "father," in relation to God, is found over 100 times in John's Gospel. The words "my father" occur 34 times, and "Father" and "Son" are used together in at least 19 instances. *You think John is concerned with Jesus' lineage?* John even goes so far as to omit and ignore the birth narratives found in Matthew and Luke to avoid any misunderstanding of Jesus' parentage, because proper lineage is crucial to the Jews.

This particular story is plopped down right in the middle of these heated discussions between the Pharisees and Jesus about his lineage. So, here's a question: *Was Jesus aware of the nature of his birth?* Mary is shipped to live with relatives during her pregnancy. Several years later, she shows up in Nazareth with her now husband and children in tow. Surely there was "talk." *Was Jesus taunted for being born out of wedlock? Was there residual shame from the community, from his brothers?* According to Deuteronomy 22, Mary should have been stoned to death, because, who but Joseph knew who the father was?

"Consider how hard it must have been for our Savior to explain who his parents were and where he came from." [2]

Share your thoughts

One argument (John 8:31-58) into which today's story is placed was so intense, both sides (the religious leaders and Jesus) were claiming the other was illegitimate. Jesus says their father is the devil, and they are illegitimate children of Abraham, concluding with the phrase: "Before Abraham was, I Am." That particular confrontation ends with the religious leaders picking up stones to kill him.

This is all speculation, but John has to be focused on Jesus' parentage for a reason. We also know human proclivity for nastiness and taunting. The religious leaders could have come up with any number of other situations to trick Jesus. Their manufacturing of this "sin" is riddled with holes. *Are they abusing this woman as a taunt against Jesus' mother and his lineage? AND... if that's the case what does it tell you about Jesus' life as a child and firstborn son?*



Share your thoughts

Peel back the next onion layer... "The Test"

2. THE TEST: This story also comes right after attempted arrests and the abandonment of many followers. The role of the Pharisees in this story is to test Jesus on a question about sin and get him to do or say something to discredit him and his ministry, or provide them with justification for his arrest, or turn him over to the Romans.

The Test Question for Jesus:

Does this woman deserve the death penalty?

Look at John 8:1-2

1. Where are they? Who is there? What are they doing?

Look at John 8:3-5

2. Then what happens? Who, what, where?
3. What question is asked of Jesus along with the presentation of this woman? (it's interesting, they could have simply posed the question during debate, but for some reason felt they needed live visual aid)

Deuteronomy 22 ²² “If a man is discovered lying with the wife of another man, both of them shall die, the man who lay with the woman as well as the woman. So you shall purge the evil from Israel.” Various sexual relational sins are mentioned in chapter 22, some of which require the death of both parties, all of which declare the man pay with his life. ROME also have a thing or two to say about Jewish public stonings. They would only permit capital punishment for very few cases, and not for this offense. *How do they think they've trapped him? Why does Jesus have to be judge? How common is it for traveling rabbis to be consulted over these kind of matters?*

Look at John 8:6-9

4. Then what happens? Who, what?

Jesus ignores them, they persist. *Are they getting nervous? What is he writing? Why are the elders first to leave? Is it awkward? Is anyone paying attention to the woman at this point?*

Share your thoughts

The TEST revealed something more disturbing about the Pharisees and Scribes than what was revealed about the woman.

“In light of a culture where the leaders —the righteous ones— would deliberately and thoughtlessly murder a woman for their own agenda ... [Selah: reflect on that]

well ... it makes Jesus' actions and encounters with women revolutionary, radical, even extremist.” [3]

Peel back the next onion layer... "The Woman"

3. THE WOMAN

“Here is where the meaning becomes significant for the reader. The test that the scribes and Pharisees introduced is still on the table. Now that He is alone with the woman, will He condemn her? Will he stone her or will He condone her sin? The law did say that she should be stoned.” [1]



Look at John 8:10-11

She was viciously snatched. Brutally yanked through the streets. Shoved to the middle of the crowd. Whispers loud in her ears. Shouts even louder. Forced to stand in front of a crowd in the middle of the Temple! *Was she a pawn? Is she clothed? Was someone paid to seduce her? Is she there in front of her neighbors? her family? Is she known? Is she terrified of being stoned to death? Only hands that have not sinned can be the judge. Jesus has the authority to judge sin. Will he condemn her according to the Torah? How does she comprehend the situation, stones and rocks now falling to the ground by hands that were poised to kill. Could Jesus' response to her say something about the violence of the Law in Deuteronomy?*

Share your thoughts

“Being pardoned when we deserve death and being told to go and sin no more is not a warning, it's an invitation to new life and transformation by grace.” [1]

She Was A Pawn ... Expendable And Insignificant

“Jesus stands to address the woman, just as He stood for the Pharisees. And for the first time in the story, the woman is addressed. She—the adulteress—is given dignity.

This is God's way toward us—you and me—toward this woman. God's crazy, unbridled love.

Dignity while we yet sin.

Can you imagine the look in Jesus' eyes? Such tenderness. Such love. Such sorrow for us sinners who try so hard to find life and love in earthly things.

Can you imagine the woman? Weeping. Full of gratefulness. Words spoken through sobs of relief.

Forgiven.

This, I believe, is the main point of the story. Not that Jesus again slipped out of the trap set by the Pharisees. But, rather, that while we are yet sinners ... before we have even asked for forgiveness ... Christ's love surrounds us, encircles us, envelopes us and swallows up our sins.

It is Grace.

Amazing grace.

For the Pharisees. For the woman. For us.” [4]

