

John 8:2-11 (ESV) – Woman Caught in Adultery

Main point: God sees our faults but forgives us.

Open with a short prayer, inviting God to teach us.

Background: Jesus is gaining popularity for his teaching and healings, and some of the Pharisees and chief priests are trying to figure out a way to arrest him, to catch him in some trap of the law. Some of the earliest manuscripts don't have this section in them, but many biblical scholars believe it to be authentic history, even if it was written later and not by John.

Focus of the study:

² Early in the morning [Jesus] came again to the temple. All the people came to him, and he sat down and taught them. ³ The scribes and the Pharisees brought a woman who had been caught in adultery, and placing her in the midst ⁴ they said to him, "Teacher, this woman has been caught in the act of adultery. ⁵ Now in the Law, Moses commanded us to stone such women. So what do you say?" ⁶ 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. 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." ⁸ And once more he bent down and wrote on the ground. ⁹ 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. ¹⁰ Jesus stood up and said to her, "Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?" ¹¹ She said, "No one, Lord." And Jesus said, "Neither do I condemn you; go, and from now on sin no more."

Questions:

1. v. 2: *Where is Jesus, and who is with him?*
 - a. At the temple, with "all the people" – a large crowd
2. v. 3: *What happens? Who shows up?*
 - a. Scribes: experts in the Torah law
 - b. Pharisees: experts at observing the law
3. *Who do they bring with them?*
 - a. A woman caught in the act of adultery
 - b. *Where do they put her?*
 - i. They place her "in the midst" – *what does that look like?*
 - ii. Public humiliation
 - c. *What do they know about the law concerning adultery? What is the penalty?*
 - i. death by stoning (Leviticus 20:10)
4. *Without getting too graphic ... What condition is she probably in?*
 - a. Completely shamed, in the middle of a large crowd who are all staring at her, possibly without clothes, possibly about to be brutally executed ... miserable
5. *How do the Pharisees and scribes see her? How have they treated her?*
 - a. Not as a human being in trouble, but as a tool to entrap Jesus
6. *So she was caught in the act adultery ... she's guilty. Who else is guilty in adultery?*

- a. The man! OT law demanded that both man and woman are subjected to the same penalty. But he is nowhere in sight.
7. *So who is in violation of the law here?*
 - a. The woman, yes ...
 - b. and also the man ...
 - c. and also the scribes and Pharisees. They know the law, but they have only brought the woman. Hypocritical and inconsistent.
8. *v. 4-5: What do the Pharisees and scribes say to Jesus? What do they point out?*
 - a. The facts: she was caught in the act, no doubt about guilt
 - b. The law: Moses' law says to stone her
9. [optional; can skip to question 10] *Why bring her to Jesus? Does Jesus have some legal standing?*
 - a. No; v. 6, "This they said to test him, to bring some charge against him."
 - b. Only as a trap, not even to see justice done. Jews did not have the authority to execute law-breakers; only Rome did.
10. *What do they think is the dilemma for Jesus? What are his supposed choices?*
 - a. He has to choose either to allow the woman to go free and publicly disobey the law of Moses or,
 - b. to approve of her killing and forfeit his reputation as a friend to sinners (and possibly risk trouble with Rome for contributing to a capital punishment that they had not sanctioned).¹ The scribes and Pharisees have seen him give mercy to sinners, and hope to show that he breaks Jewish law to do so.
 - c. Break Jewish law and let her go, or uphold it and see her stoned
11. [optional; can skip to question 12] *Let's look for a moment at Jesus' posture throughout this story.*
 - a. Sitting, teaching the people
 - b. When Pharisees bring woman, stoops down and writes in dirt
 - c. When Pharisees continue to badger him, stands up to face them
 - d. Then stoops down again
 - e. Woman is left standing; Jesus stands up to face her
 - f. *Anything interesting about his choice of positions?*
 - i. Posture of gentle humility with the crowd and woman; authority when facing the scribes and Pharisees; authority and personal when dealing with the woman alone
12. *v. 7: What does Jesus finally answer?*
 - a. "He who is without sin, cast the first stone." – *I wonder what that means?*
13. *What happens?*
 - a. v. 9: They all leave, oldest to youngest. *Why?*
 - i. Oldest – more knowledge, understand what's going on
 - ii. When you think about your own sin, it's hard/hypocritical to focus on someone else's sin.
 - b. *v. 10: Jesus then asks the woman a question ... and she answers ...*

¹ <https://www.bibleodyssey.org/en/passages/related-articles/Manuscript-History-and-John>

14. v. 11: Jesus' final response: "Neither do I condemn you. Go and sin no more." *Is he saying that she didn't sin?*
- a. No. The Greek word for "condemn" here is a strong one, suggesting the handing down of a judgment. Jesus tells the woman that he is not making a judicial sentence
 - b. *In a trial, when there are no accusers, what happens?*
 - i. without accusers, there is no case left.
15. *What's his instruction/command?*
- a. Go, and sin no more. Jesus neither condemns nor excuses her; acknowledges her guilt, but challenges her to abstain from sin, to start a new life. Gives her a new chance.
16. *What does that mean for us?*
- a. God sees our sin, and forgives – remember this truth and mercy when tempted to focus on other people's sins.
17. Ask for prayer requests for today.
18. Close in prayer, naming people and needs listed.
19. End with a song, e.g., first verse of Amazing Grace
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Interesting notes about Jesus writing in the dust:

Most likely, [John 8:6](#), [John 8:8](#) represents simply a claim that Jesus could write—a claim quite significant in the ancient world, where most individuals were illiterate. Such a claim also explains why a scribe inserted the passage after [John 7](#), where the Jewish leaders question both Jesus' literacy specifically ([John 7:15](#)) and Galileans' knowledge of the law and ability to search it generally ([John 7:49](#), [John 7:52](#)). In addition, the author borrows the verbs for "writing" in [John 8:6](#), [John 8:8](#) from the Greek version of [Exod 32:15](#). This passage describes God's authorship of the Ten Commandments; the woman in John's gospel is accused of breaking the command against adultery. The context in [Exodus](#) insists that God wrote these laws with his finger ([Exod 31:18](#)), and in the story of the adulteress, Jesus, too, writes with his finger ([John 8:6](#)). The author of the story of the adulteress seems to be claiming not only that Jesus can write but also that this particular instance of writing parallels the actions of God himself, thus making Jesus superior to Moses, whom his enemies had challenged him to usurp by pronouncing judgment on the woman in the first place.²

² <https://www.bibleodyssey.org/en/passages/related-articles/Manuscript-History-and-John>