

PM John 7:53-8:11 Throw your stones down

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[0 : 00] Take your Bibles and open to the book of the Gospel of John, the Gospel of John chapter 8, chapter 7, verse 53.

The Gospel of John chapter 7, verse 53, chapter 8, verses 1 to 11. Now this is like a strange passage because you would think that chapter 8 starts from verse 1 but seems to be starting on verse 53.

And the footnote says that the earliest manuscripts do not include chapter 7, verses 53 to chapter 8, verses 1 to 11.

But tonight that's not what we are here to discover and to explore. Why is that? All we are going to do is just look at this passage and see if we can learn something from it.

And that's all I intend to do tonight. So let us read from verse 53, chapter 7, verses 53 to chapter 8, verses 1 to 11. Let's hear the word of God.

[1 : 35] Again, it's the word of God.

And the word of God. And that's all I know. The scribes and the Pharisees brought a woman who had been caught in adultery.

And placing her in the meanest, they said to him, Teacher, this woman has been caught in the act of adultery.

Now, in the law, Moses commanded us to stone such women. So, what do you say? 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. 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.

[3 : 11] And once more he bent down and wrote on the ground. But when they heard it, they went away one by one, beginning with the old ones, and Jesus was left alone with the woman standing before him.

Jesus stood up and said to her, Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you? She said, No one, Lord.

And Jesus said, Neither do I condemn you. Go, and from now on, sin no more.

Amen. May God bless this reading from his infallible word. With me for a short moment for, to the passage that we just read a moment ago.

John the Gospel. Chapter 7, verse 53.

[4 : 26] So this morning I was talking about a woman in the Garden of Eden who had a conversation with a serpent who was deceived and in the end who succumbed to deception of the devil and the Bible calls that the fall of man.

Now, this evening I'm also talking about a woman. It's a different woman. Her story is different from that one I was talking about in the morning.

And I hope we can learn something from this woman as well. So, this is a story of a woman who was about to go under a group of men.

And these men, who I think forgot that they were supposed to be in the life-saving business because they were the scribes and the Pharisees.

Really religious and professional men. And then, the woman who was about to go and the one who keeps searching the shipwrecks for what he reassures most and that's Jesus.

[5 : 59] So in this passage we're going to see the woman, the man, and Jesus. Not much is talked about this woman.

We don't know her name. We don't know her background. But maybe she had been a younger bride with dreams about married life.

Maybe she had dreamed perhaps of having a husband who loved her. Husband who would pray with her, worshipping with him or her, of having children and raising a family. We don't know. But somehow what we know that things did not turn out the way she had planned. I don't think she planned this. But she met a man perhaps who seemed to care for her. And at first, it was all quite innocent. then one day they crossed the line. Maybe she didn't even notice it was, she didn't notice it or think about it at that time.

[7 : 14] Because you see, the evil one always prefers to keep such a moment dark and hazy so that we are hardly even aware of what we are doing or choosing.

But I think she chose. And as long as it was a secret, it was as if she was living two lives in different worlds.

This morning I was talking about secrets. Like Eva, when she was talking with the serpent, at first it was like a secret. But the more they engaged, the more they talked, the more things got bad. So maybe she too had kept this as a secret. And as long as she kept it as a secret, she seemed to be living in two worlds, different worlds.

And when she was in one world, she could pretend the other one did not exist. And she kept herself from thinking about how this was damaging her soul. You know, seen and checked, seen and checked always leads to more sin.

[8 : 24] And as long as her secret is intact, she hardly thinks about these things. But then came this dawn and she was with this man that she had been with don't know how many times before.

Maybe that was the first time. We don't know. Maybe it was. I don't know. But this time, it happens. The door opens. There had been men outside waiting and watching and now they come and capture her.

and she screams, she cries, she begs for mercy, but nothing happens. Everything turns into water. That's how we say in Uganda, if you scream and if you beg and you don't get what you want, we can simply say that everything is now turning into water. And she would give anything if she could go back to where she first crossed the line.

Think for a moment when God came into the garden and Adam and Eve were hiding and God was asking, where are you? They would give God everything they could if they could go back to where they started, where they fell.

[9 : 52] But it was too late. It is too late. She can't go back. You can never go back. Once you have done it, you have done it.

It's difficult to go back. That's why Jesus came because he knows we can't go back. We can't fix it. And as happened at the fall, her eyes are opened.

She sees herself naked and ashamed. This man grabbed her when she was naked. she wants to hide but she has no place to go.

She would kill herself right then if they would let her but these men are very determined not to let her go. So they wrap her up in sheets and lead her away to Jesus.

And like the paralytic, you know the story of a paralytic man who was brought by these friends to Jesus. She's taken to Jesus by a band of men while Jesus is teaching a crowd.

[11 : 06] And the men who brought her are not her friends but her enemies. And she's brought not to be healed but to be killed.

now the point John is trying to make here is that this is not a private conversation to figure out constructive action.

These men are more than willing to humiliate this woman publicly because surely it is Jesus thereafter.

If you read this Gospel of John, the chapters preceding this chapter 8, what you will find is that the Pharisees and the scribes are looking for ways to kill Jesus.

The tension is growing. I don't know whether you have been ever on a roller coaster. You know how the roller coaster begins? It begins slowly and it starts gaining momentum and you can hear the cranking as it goes up before it goes down.

[12 : 13] The tension here is beginning to crank because these men are looking for Jesus. How can we get him? In chapter 7, we are told that the officers sent the soldiers to arrest Jesus.

So they are looking for ways and means of capturing Jesus. So they bring this woman, not simply because it is about this woman, but they are looking for charges against this woman.

Remember one of the members of St. Henry had said, does our law allow someone to be arrested and without him, without charges?

So they are looking for charges against Jesus. And remember these are scribes and the Pharisees. You know, the scribes were scholars.

They are professional scholars. They were writers. And they were brilliant writers. They were brilliant in making drafts.

[13 : 27] They were familiar with the legal knowledge. So they knew the law. the Pharisees were an elite group of political and religious leaders.

So they are people who understand. So they are looking for Jesus. And so these men brought this woman because they are after Jesus.

Now when you look at verse 6, verse 6, they ask Jesus a question. there is a verse there in verse 6, they say this to test that they might have some charge to bring against Jesus.

So that's what they were looking for. So, they brought this woman to Jesus and they said to Jesus, this woman has been caught in the act of adultery.

And they say, now, what did you say? And the Bible says that they were using this question as a trap in order to have a basis for accusing him.

[14 : 58] So they accused the woman in an attempt to put him on the spot and gather evidence against Jesus. They do not have much love, they do not have much joy in life, but they do find delight in accusing people they don't like.

Teacher, they said, as if they were honoring him, this woman has been caught in the act of adultery. Now, the law was quite clear about what was required to be caught in the very act. One evidence is not enough to convict a man of any crime or offense he may have committed.

Moses had said that. He said that a matter must be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses. So that means these men had to come around this woman's house.

There had to be many in order to have enough witnesses. witnesses. One witness is not enough to convict a man accused of any crime or offense he may have committed.

[16 : 20] A matter must be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses. Now, this means that for some time two or more of these men have been hanging around this woman's house.

Now, scholars have pointed out that the other man is not brought here. Even though the law said he should be stoned too.

When you read Deuteronomy chapter 22 verse 22 Deuteronomy 22 verse 22 we are not going there and Leviticus 20 verse 10 it says that both of them should be brought and be stoned.

And now you have experts in the law applying the law wrongly. Because the question is where is the man? If this man is because the woman was with the man, where is the man?

And one speculation is that the religious leaders were colluding with this man to set up the whole deal. So they led him asleep away when they grabbed the woman.

[17 : 31] They could have made a deal with this man and when they grabbed them they said okay you go. We are taking the woman because we know what we want. That's one speculation we don't know.

At any rate they bring her to Jesus and this is what they are thinking in their head I suppose. We have got Jesus now.

Because if he shows mercy we get him for being soft on the law. if he says stone her the crowd surely will never forgive him.

Remember Jesus is teaching the crowd and they brought this man woman in the midst of the crowd in the temple. So if Jesus said okay you guys you stone her to this right there and then surely would the crowd forgive Jesus.

What was he teaching the crowd? And if he says no don't stone her he will be soft on the law. And remember what they said teacher because that means he was a teacher of the law.

[18 : 33] Jesus. So they think that they have put Jesus in a very difficult position. In a difficult corner. And there was another thing.

The Roman authorities had forbidden the Jewish authorities from excluding anyone. So if Jesus said stone her he would be in trouble with Rome. So for them they think Jesus is finished.

So here is the woman trembling with guilt and fear wishing she could die believing she is about to die even there. And there are her accusers with stones in their hands.

Remember each guy has got a stone. just waiting for the order from Jesus because they say what do you say? The law says we should stone to death. So what do you say?

I have a soul searching question for you. Have you ever held a stone in your hand? have you ever held a stone in your hand?

[19 : 57] I'll come back to that. Now Christian thinkers have divided sin into two categories.

Sins of the flesh and sins of the spirit. sins of the flesh involve appetites that get out of control like lust, like greed, like gluttony, drunkenness, laziness, and etc.

Those are sins of the flesh. if they get out of control, they are sins. And our flesh is falling enough that given time, we can turn almost anything into the idol of our lives.

Like Playboy magazines, like TVs and computers. These can be our idols. of worship, if you like.

And this can lead to other sins as well, like deceit and betrayal and despair. I don't know how many families have broken because of a mobile phone or an iPad.

[21 : 25] Those can be sins of the flesh. But the sins of the spirit. Now, sins of the spirit have less to do with our biology than with our souls.

The sins of the spirit have names like pride, like arrogance, like self righteousness, like judgmental. Those are sins of the spirit. And rarely does a church exercise discipline over one of these. sins of the sins of the spirit. So, I have never had a church disciplining someone just because he's proud, he's proud, or arrogant, or judgmental.

But you see, I'm a nerd in Kambalundi Free Church. But if I committed adultery, it would be big, it would be a big deal.

You know what? Call him. Tell us. This is unacceptable. The church will exercise the discipline of a nerd because he committed adultery, because his story is a thief.

[22 : 44] But what about someone who is proud, someone who is self righteous in the church, arrogant? No? It's okay. Churches in our day are not usually scandalized by sins like arrogance or self righteousness.

But you see, Jesus was scandalized by these sins of the spirit because his laws are perfect. And in the Bible, the people guilty of pride and arrogance like these men were also blind because they thought it was possible to love God and despise people.

They actually thought that they were paragonists of spiritual micurity because they avoided the sins of the flesh. But they had no idea that their sins crippled their ability to love, which makes sins of the spirit the most dangerous and destructive sins of all.

I mean, there was a beautiful orthodoxy in what they were doing by trying to deal with this situation. But they dealt with it with no love. This is a religion without mercy. We are most scandalized by the sins of the flesh, but Jesus was most scandalized by the sins of the spirit.

[24 : 21] And C.S. Lewis says this, he says this, he says the sins of the flesh are bad, but they are the least of bad of all sins.

All the worst pleasures are pure spiritual. The pleasure of putting other people in the wrong, of boasting and patronizing, the pleasures of power, of hatred, for there are two things, he says, for there are two things inside me competing with human self, which I must try to become.

They are the animal self and the diabolical self. The diabolical self is the worst of the two. That's why, he says, that's why a cold, self-righteous brig who goes regularly to church may be far nearer to hell than a prostitute.

And I find that one a sober statement. That we who go to church every now and then can be far away from heaven than a prostitute who is on the street.

church every time. These were religious leaders with no love, hatred.

[25 : 58] They are looking for charges to accuse someone who is sinless. And yet, they are religious leaders. Friends, we need a spirit-filled church, which means a church whose center is not doctrine.

You see, Christians think that when the doctrine is right, then they are right. No, they are not.

Because they can have the most sound doctrine and be the most sleeping churches.

For example, a Christian can be overgrown in sound doctrine and be stunted in kindness. Or a Christian can be free grown in religious zeal but sadly lacking in love.

Or a Christian can be well advanced in outward moral life but sadly backward in simple good manners. So in other words, we can easily find ourselves failing to grow in all ways into Christ.

And such unbalanced growth is indeed un-Christian. And so, the most important remedy at this point is the spirit of love.

[27 : 20] The Bible says that love covers a multitude of sins. You see, love is the key mark of those who are truly in Christ.

not doctrine or denominational affiliation. It is the love of God poured into the believer's heart by the Holy Spirit which is a mistakable mark of spiritual growth.

Jesus said that they will know that you are my disciples when they see you love one another. That's when they will know that you are my disciples. And to me, that's what these people, these men, we are missing.

And one wonders whether when they first signed up, these men, they first signed up as younger men to devote themselves to a life of service. They had warm hearts for God and others.

Sadly, all their learning about scripture filled them with pride. All their efforts at obedience filled them with dissident for the rest of devout.

[28 : 45] All their giftedness filled them with intentions towards those who are weaker. All their spiritual power filled them with contempt for the weak.

And they become as enslaved by a cold heart as an addict can become enslaved by crack cocaine. So these men are hard-hearted men.

And what is so insidious about the sins of the spirit is that the carriers do not have a clue. At least with the sins of the flesh, we find we have messed up.

But with the sins of the spirit, we may not even know. We just walk through life with stones in our hands. So these guys, they stand there with stones in their hands.

They ask Jesus' question, they ask Jesus' question, now what did you say? And the Bible says that Jesus does a curious thing, he bends down and starts writing on the ground, the Bible says.

[29 : 57] When they ask them that question, rather than answering them, he bends down and writes on the ground. Ironically, this is the only time in the Gospels that we are shown Jesus writing.

And he writes on the paper, he writes not on paper or papyrus, but on sand where the words will quickly be lost. But you see, that act of writing on the ground, it bothers the stone throwers.

They become bothered. What is he doing? Why is he writing down? He's not answering us. You know, they used to be a detective character.

on TV named Columbo. I used to watch his series, Columbo.

I think he's dead now. You would never be sure whether or not he was really noticing what was going on. So when Jesus bends down and writes on the ground, he kind of does the Columbo type of thing.

[31 : 11] so Jesus stands up and speaks and he says, you guys, okay, that's what the law says, that such a woman should be stoned.

Go ahead and stone her. But before you do it, it is one law. and this is it. Just one rule.

Let the man without sin go first. Let those, let the one who has committed sin go first. and then Jesus goes back and starts writing on the ground again.

These people become troubled. Unfortunately, John does not tell us what Jesus was writing.

Scores guess it was a custom in Roman law for a judge to first write the judgment, the sentence, and then read it.

So they think that Jesus was doing that as a way to express his authority to judge. some think Jesus was writing the Ten Commandments. But one intriguing idea dating back to the fifth century is that Jesus was writing down the names and sins of the leaders in this group.

[32 : 32] But he writes them on sand where they can be quickly erased. Then an amazing thing happens. One by one they put down their stones.

one by one they lay around their stones. They never stone the woman. Why? Maybe their hearts melt a wee bit and they become a wee bit more human.

Maybe they remember what it is like to stand in the need of forgiveness. None of the stones get thrown in anger. when Jesus says let the one without a sin first go.

He shows them that they themselves are sinners and are not qualified to judge others. That was the meaning.

there is no room in Jesus people for throwing stones. We are all too broken. Philipians says this Jesus' audience would have divided people into two categories.

[33 : 57] Sinners like the woman and religious like the men. Yet Jesus in one brilliant stroke represses them with two different categories.

Sinners who admit and sinners who deny. They admitted that they too are sinners like the woman. So back to the question. It's a personal question. Do you have any stones you need to let it go? A stone may be against your mother or your father, your ex-spouse, someone who has hurt you. This morning we are talking about that everyone has got some scars and some hurts and some wounds which have been caused to us by some people and situations. And sometimes it's so difficult to forgive, let alone forget. and we go through life with this bitterness and anger and hatred.

[35 : 17] Stones in our heart. You have carried the stone for so long you don't remember life without it.

well tonight ask God to change your heart. I call this the title of this message put your stone down and ask for forgiveness tonight.

You see sometimes stone throwing happens in families and it may involve only we pebbles but it becomes so habitual that throwers hardly even notice it anymore.

I fight with this myself. When I'm talking to my kids sometimes talking to my wife sometimes I'm just roaring like I am an African man.

My kids sometimes get angry. One time when I spoke very badly to my daughter and she cried the whole night.

[36 : 29] Stones in families. At the end of the story the only one left are Jesus and the woman and a bunch of stones.

And Jesus asks the woman where are all the stone throwers. Where are they? The question in the morning was where are you?

Jesus is asking the woman where are they? Really do you think Jesus doesn't know where they are? Jesus is asking this woman has no one condemned you?

Jesus is not really asking for their whereabouts. He's making a point to this woman.

He's saying you and these men are really not so different after all. They are broken sinners.

[37 : 41] You are a broken sinner. for all their spiritual superiority you are really in the same boat. So is there not a single sinless stone thrown left to let you have it?

And the woman said no. No one saw.

They all left. No stone was thrown at me. I have gone. No one condemned me. And Jesus says to the woman me neither.

no condemnation. But then Jesus says the words that cut her to the heart and bring her back to life.

These words fill her with pain because they reveal to her that Jesus knows all about her past. But these words also fill her with hope because they tell her that someone believes in her.

[39 : 07] These words will remain with her until she enters eternity. Jesus said to this woman go and sin no more.

It's incredible. Jesus covers this woman's sin. The woman who was meant to be killed his sin is covered by Jesus.

It just makes me cry. And that's how Jesus has covered your sin. Covered my sin. Jesus accepts the woman in John 8.

He forgives her. He forgives her sin. It's never possible to offer acceptance and yet withhold forgiveness.

You see acceptance and forgiveness are inseparable. And often times you hear people saying I've forgiven him.

[40 : 22] I've forgiven her. But I cannot accept her. I cannot accept him. Have you forgiven her?

Have you forgiven him? Definitely forgiveness will lead you to accept that person. No matter what that person has done to you. So long as you forgive that person then you should accept.

They go together. But this acceptance and forgiveness came at enormous cost for Jesus in defending this woman is made powerful enemies.

This man will be back with the biggest stick. Obviously Jesus is in the process of getting hurt.

Because of what is doing for her. But he says go and see no more.

And so friends Jesus' acceptance is free. It is undeserved. It is unmerited. But it is also demanding.

[41 : 38] Because for this woman to fully examine her acceptance will require entering into a new way of life. And that's what Jesus is saying just go and sin no more.

That means turn around. Repent. Stop doing what you're doing. Enter into a new life. When you're in Christ Jesus, you're a new creation.

sin. And the same grace that liberates her from past sin calls her to walk free of them in the future. Now you imagine for a moment when this woman left and these men met her.

What would they say to her? What did Jesus say to you? Why I mean you were doing something terrible but you were laughing you were having joy?

What happened to you? She's filled with joy. And that is what Jesus did for you and that's what Jesus did for me.

[42 : 57] He forgave us even when we are condemned to death. He paid the price for our sins on the cross and that forgiveness is for everyone who comes to him in repentance by faith.

Everyone. It doesn't matter what we have done. Come to him in repentance by faith.

You will be forgiven. You will be free. And free indeed. And if there is anyone among us this evening who is holding a stone, please put it down and accept Jesus' forgiveness.

Amen. May God bless these words to our souls. Thanks.