

“Jesus Prevents Two Stonings”

Lesson Text: John 8:1-11, 56-59 **Background Scripture:** John 8:1-1, 39-59

Devotional Reading: Matthew 7:1-5

John 8:1–11, 56–59 (NIV)

¹ *but Jesus went to the Mount of Olives.*

² *At dawn he appeared again in the temple courts, where all the people gathered around him, and he sat down to teach them.* ³ *The teachers of the law and the Pharisees brought in a woman caught in adultery. They made her stand before the group* ⁴ *and said to Jesus, “Teacher, this woman was caught in the act of adultery.”* ⁵ *In the Law Moses commanded us to stone such women. Now what do you say?”* ⁶ *They were using this question as a trap, in order to have a basis for accusing him.*

But Jesus bent down and started to write on the ground with his finger. ⁷ *When they kept on questioning him, he straightened up and said to them, “Let any one of you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her.”* ⁸ *Again he stooped down and wrote on the ground.*

⁹ *At this, those who heard began to go away one at a time, the older ones first, until only Jesus was left, with the woman still standing there.* ¹⁰ *Jesus straightened up and asked her, “Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?”* ¹¹ *“No one, sir,” she said. “Then neither do I condemn you,” Jesus declared. “Go now and leave your life of sin.”*

⁵⁶ *Your father Abraham rejoiced at the thought of seeing my day; he saw it and was glad.”* ⁵⁷ *“You are not yet fifty years old,” they said to him, “and you have seen Abraham!”* ⁵⁸ *“Very truly I tell you,” Jesus answered, “before Abraham was born, I am!”* ⁵⁹ *At this, they picked up stones to stone him, but Jesus hid himself, slipping away from the temple grounds.*

TODAY’S LESSON AIMS

- **Learning Facts:** To identify the “I am.”
- **Biblical Principle:** To explain the difference between “forgiving” and “not condemning.”
- **Daily Application:** To write a prayer of gratitude for escaping condemnation in Christ.

INTRODUCTION Deciding

the Game

Referees can be much-maligned (badmouthed) by coaches, players, fans, commentators—almost anyone who is watching the game. They are second-guessed, taunted, and even on occasion blamed for a team’s loss. Theirs is a difficult task. Referees must be quick and direct with their decisions. They must work together as a team to effectively officiate a game. And they must trust one another to know and care about the rules and work with integrity and skill to enforce those rules fairly.

The contest Jesus was called on to referee in today’s lesson was no game. At stake were Jesus’ credibility and a woman’s life. Who would come away from this confrontation crying foul?

LESSON CONTEXT

The events and teachings recorded in John 8 occurred after one of Jesus’ visits to Jerusalem for The Feast of Tabernacles (see John 7:1–2, 37, 53). Beginning in John 8:1 (today’s story lesson), the Feast of

Tabernacles had ended, but Jesus took advantage of the opportunity to minister to the pilgrims in the temple. During the feast, word had quickly spread that Jesus was not only attending but openly teaching in the temple (see Luke 21:37).

Our Lord found Himself again in conflict with the Jewish religious leaders; but this time, they were hoping to get enough evidence to arrest Jesus and get Him out of the way. However, their plot failed; but a controversy followed. In this chapter we see a series of contrasts that reveal the graciousness of Christ and the wickedness of man.

A Woman's Cause to Rejoice: John 8:1-11

Jesus routinely took time to be in His Father's presence (examples: Luke 5:16; 6:12; 9:18). And *the Mount of Olives* was a common stop for Jesus when He was in Jerusalem. Given His prayerful habit, the specific location, and no further information, we surmise that Jesus took this time to pray (consider 21:37; 22:39–45).

The Mount of Olives first appears in the Bible in 2 Samuel 15:30, when David fled Jerusalem during Absalom's rebellion (see 2 Samuel 15:32–16:4). The spot was aptly named due to the proliferation of olives in this area, though the modern reader might suggest it was more of a high hill than a mountain. It did overlook the temple, sitting off to its east side. The Mount looms large in the Christian faith because it is the location of Jesus' last night of prayer, betrayal by Judas, and arrest (Luke 22:39–54).

1. Why was the Mount of Olives an important place to Jesus? (John 8:1)

Jesus often began His day early in the morning (examples: Matthew 21:18; Mark 1:35; Luke 21:38). The *temple* was the place for religious teachers to meet with and instruct their students (example: Luke 2:46). All the people drawing near suggests that they were primed—through recent experience, word of mouth, or other means—to seek out Jesus' teaching. "Again" points to at least one event that would have prepared the people to hear from Jesus on this occasion (see John 7:14). Teachers commonly sat as they taught (Matthew 13:1; 26:55).

2. What was Jesus' normal routine when arriving at the temple? (John 8:2)

The *teachers of the law* (scribes) and Pharisees brought to Jesus a woman who had been caught in adultery. Note that the relationship between Jesus and the scribes and Pharisees was typically contentious (examples: Matthew 23; contrast John 3:1–2). In the generations following the return from Babylonian exile, these two groups of religious leaders came into prominence in the Jewish faith. Their zeal for the law was commendable, intended to prevent the sins that had led to exile in the first place. Unfortunately, several factors, including mistaken expectations (John 7:52), vested interests (11:48), and hypocrisy (Matthew 23:13–32), prevented these leaders from seeing God's larger picture and made recognizing His Messiah incredibly difficult.

How this *woman* was found *in adultery* but her partner was not is a mystery (see Leviticus 20:10). However, gender dynamics of the time are the most likely explanation for the male adulterer's absence. Especially in Roman culture, though also present to some degree in Jewish culture, adultery on the part of men was often considered an unfortunate fact of life. The women with whom they committed adultery, however, frequently were held to a higher standard and harshly punished for the role they played.

3. Who decided to interrupt Jesus' class that day? Who did they bring with them? (John 8:3)

What Do You Think?

How well do you adapt to a sudden change of plans?

Digging Deeper

Could more flexibility in this regard open doors for ministry? Explain your answer.

First, why would Jesus' enemies refer to Him as *Teacher*? We could assume that the honorific was slathered in sarcasm, since the scribes and Pharisees largely did not consider Jesus to have any authority to teach (compare John 1:38). In addition, using the title might have been a ploy to the crowd that was gathered around Jesus. On the one hand, it could sound like they were being very respectful. On the other, it put the listening audience on alert.

Nonetheless, the scribes and Pharisees devoted their entire lives to learning and living the Law of Moses faithfully. Given their long years of training and scholarly debate, they no doubt believed they had an edge on Jesus regarding questions of the law. The scribes and Pharisees attempted to put Jesus in a dilemma. If He answered that the woman should be stoned, He would be violating the Roman law which forbade such acts. If He answered that she should not be stoned, He would be violating Moses' law (Deuteronomy 22:24). Would Jesus answer as a learned teacher ought to, or would He reveal Himself as a fraud? They did this to *trap* Him (Gr *peirazo*, "to entice sin").

4. How did the scribes and the Pharisees try to trap Jesus? (John 8:4-6a)

This trap should be understood as testing Jesus—fitting, given the teaching setting. Their motive was to discredit Jesus. If they were successful at discrediting Him, they would, in turn, be able to bring a charge against Him. This was not the first time Jesus' opponents asked Him seemingly innocent questions to have reason to accuse Him. In those instances, Jesus always had a ready response (examples: Matthew 19:3–9; 22:23–46). When he *bent down and started to write on the ground with his finger*, the teachers of the law and Pharisees might have believed they finally had him stumped! Jesus, for once, seemed to be speechless.

What Jesus wrote or why He acted "as though he heard them not" (*KJV*) is unclear (see John 8:7b–8, below). We could speculate based on the context and Jesus' character and ministry up to this point. His pause, however, did nothing to deter the men from continuing to question Him.

Rather than address the issue the scribes and Pharisees presented, Jesus went to the very heart of the matter. Jesus challenged them all and asked them whether any of them were *without sin*, and if so, *be the first to throw a stone at her*. It was required by Jewish Law that the accusers cast the first stones (Deut. 17:7). Instead of passing judgment on the woman, Jesus passed judgment on the judges! Now, whether the woman deserved to die for her sins faded to the background. Later Paul—an educated Pharisee himself—asserted that "all have sinned, and fall short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23), and further: "the wages of sin is death" (6:23). Surely these legal minds also knew that every person was a sinner.

Jesus' statement was a pointed reminder that even those who studied the law and sought to obey its every word were still guilty of breaking it (James 2:10–11). And because of that, all of them—not just the woman—faced a death sentence. This should prevent any person from initiating the execution.

5. How did Jesus respond to their question? (John 8:6b-8)

What Do You Think?

What would be the best way for you to respond when someone asks a question to trap you?

Digging Deeper

How can you control your emotions to give a wise response in such a situation?

Heartfelt conviction of conscience leads to repentance (example: Acts 2:37). Far from insisting that they were correct, Jesus' challengers accepted this humbling turn of events and *went away one at a time*. This movement started with the *older* accuser until Jesus was the only one left, *with the woman still standing there*. Ironically, those who came to discredit Jesus and catch Him in a trap were caught in their own trap

and left without a sound. Thus, the question of whether Jesus would break Roman law for the sake of Jewish law was rendered void (see John 8:5, above).

6. What was the response of the scribes, Pharisees and crowd to Jesus' statement concerning sin? (John 8:9)

Jesus' response began with a pair of clarifying questions. Addressing the woman for the first time, Jesus' rhetorical questions were intended to confirm that the accusers were gone. Her address "sir" shows the woman spoke to Jesus with respect. While the previous title "Teacher" was used less than genuine.

Jesus knew this woman's sin, whether this particular accusation was true or not (example: John 4:16–19). Just like her accusers, the woman's sin made her subject to death. And being the Son of God, Jesus gave the woman another option. He desired her to repent and thus sin no more. In this act, we see an example of the choice between death in sin and life offered in Christ.

No further information is given regarding the woman's repentance. But based on other, similar interactions Jesus had, we might surmise that the woman did indeed find her heart changed by this interaction with the Lord (compare John 5:1–14).

7. What did Jesus say to the woman? (John 8:10, 11)

What Do You Think?

How have you seen acts of mercy attract people to Jesus?

Digging Deeper

In what current situation(s) could your merciful intervention also be a call to repentance?

Abraham's Cause to Rejoice: John 8:56-59

The second half of this lesson begins in John 8:56. In John 8:12–55 (not in our printed text), Jesus responded to questions from a crowd of both laypeople (some who believed him, others who did not) and Pharisees. Of particular interest to the following episode are the conversational threads about being Abraham's descendants. Despite the Jews' confidence that they were Abraham's family, Jesus declared that their own actions revealed them to be children of the devil (John 8:44; compare 1:13)! No crowd would respond well to being called children of the devil, and this crowd was no different.

Given that Jesus just asserted that the crowd's actions showed them to be children of the devil, calling Abraham their father implies that, *if* they were really his children, they would react as Abraham did. Abraham had received the promise from God that his own family would bless the whole world (Genesis 12:1–3). But how did Abraham "see" our Lord's day, that is, His life and ministry on earth? The same way he saw the future city: by faith (Heb. 11:10, 13–16). God did not give Abraham some special vision of our Lord's life and ministry, but He did give him the *spiritual* perception to "see" future events. That is, Abraham's *rejoicing* refers to the miraculous birth of his own son, Isaac. Abraham's son Isaac was the hope of mankind and the promise of a Messiah (Galatians 3:16). Limited to *physical* understanding, the Jews could not comprehend how Jesus saw Abraham. Christ now makes the strongest statement of His entire dialogue. *Before Abraham* existed, *I am*. Christ was from eternity and was the great "I Am" (Exodus 3:14). He said this to stress His complete union with the Father (John 8:24, 28, 58; 13:19).

8. Your father Abraham rejoiced at the thought of seeing my day; he saw it and was glad" (John 8:56-58)?

Leviticus 24:16 states that anyone who blasphemes the name of the Lord must be put to death by stoning. Their reaction confirms that they understood Jesus' "I am" to be a claim of equality with God (John 8:58, above). But the crowd was unsuccessful in the moment because *Jesus hid himself, slipping*

away. The larger picture, however, makes clear that they were unable to stone Jesus because His time had not yet come (John 7:6–8).

9. How did the people react to Jesus’ “I am” statement? (John 8:59)

CONCLUSION

Following I Am

Jesus was completely within His rights to condemn the adulterous woman, but He chose to offer mercy with His call to repentance. Jesus could have refrained from revealing Himself as I am, but He chose instead to make Himself known. We certainly benefit from Jesus’ self-revelation and His merciful call to turn to Him. Considering who Christ is and who He calls you to be, what repentance is necessary in your life? What “stonings” will you divert because of your love for Jesus? What rejoicing will you spread?

What Do You Think?

What is most challenging to you about Jesus’ teaching and actions in today’s lesson?

Digging Deeper

What is most comforting to you about His teaching and actions?

PRAYER

Lord, we all have sinned and fallen short of Your ways. Lay our hearts bare so that we might repent and sin no more. In Jesus’ name we pray. Amen.

THOUGHT TO REMEMBER

What cause has Jesus given you to rejoice?