

Today marks the twelfth week of our exploration of the Gospel of John. We will continue this series for five more weeks, leading us into August and our missions month. Although we won't cover the entire Gospel, we've made significant progress in exploring its major themes, supporting John's purpose for writing: "that you may believe, and by believing, you may have life in His name." (John 20:31) This refers to the name of Jesus, through whom we receive eternal life by believing in Him.

I like to repeat myself because "repetition is the mother of all learning," and I don't know how many of you can hear these messages each week. So, let me say it loud and clear: Belief in Jesus is how we are saved. Let me ask you, how many of you believe in Jesus?

As we continue our expository journey through the Book of John, we encounter a problem that requires a detour to stay on track and reach our intended destination. Open your Bibles to John 8:1-11, where you'll quickly see the issues I'm discussing. Today's sermon might be one of the stranger ones I've preached, and for starters, I won't ask you to stand for the reading. This will make sense after I've read this section from John. (Read John 8:1-11...)

As many of you likely noticed, this section is either marked off in your Bibles with brackets or, for some, may even be contained as a footnote. It begins with the odd statement: [The Earliest Manuscripts Do Not Include 7:53-8:11]. When Pastor Tim returns from his sabbatical, one of the first questions I will ask is why he assigned this passage to me. In preparing for today's message, I initially wanted to skip this passage, but that would have been a disservice to you and a failure of my pastoral duty. Ignoring the obvious and simply preaching the text as it stands would also be unwise and cowardly. Michael Milton once said of this passage that ignoring it would be like ignoring a bird that flew into a service: "If a sparrow flies into the sanctuary on a Sunday morning, the preacher who continues his message without addressing the obvious flutter of little wings above the congregation, will not enjoy a congregation who hears his third point."

So, I'm going to address the obvious and make a statement grounded in solid scholarship, even though it may offend some of you or evoke feelings of doubt in others. If you stay with me, I think I can address both concerns and hopefully avoid falling into either of those ditches. Here it is: I don't believe this account in John's Gospel is canon. In other words, I don't believe this text is scripture. I assure you I am not the first to say this. Most New Testament scholars agree, and my studies have led me to the same conclusion. D.A. Carson, a trusted New Testament scholar, said, "Despite best efforts to prove that this narrative was originally part of John's Gospel, the evidence is against him, and modern English versions are right to rule it off from the rest of the text (NIV) or

to relegate it to a footnote (RSV).” Additionally, Craig Keener says, “This passage bears all the marks of an interpolation; thus, despite a few valiant attempts to rescue it for the Fourth Gospel, the vast majority of scholars view it as inauthentic here.” The list goes on.

I understand this may be hard for some of you to hear. To those who think I am out of my mind, consider that the first time we see this account appear in any manuscripts was 500 years after Christ, and it wasn't widely circulated until the first millennium. This does not meet the criteria necessary for a writing to be considered canon. To those who fear the sky is falling and wonder, "If we can't believe this portion of Scripture, how can we be confident in anything else the Bible says?" I would say that the very fact we know this is not John's original writing should give us confidence that what we do have is, in fact, the very Word of God.

We can easily identify that this is not John's original writing because we have so many manuscript copies to compare and contrast. Consider that many ancient writings we trust for history are minuscule in comparison to the monumental number of copies we have of the New Testament. It's not even close. Even non-believing scholars attest to the reliability of the Christian Bible. The Bible stands in a category of its own, giving us a sure foundation that what we have is indeed the infallible Word of God. As Paul told Timothy, “All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.” 2 Timothy 3:16-17

Given the unique opportunity this account provides, I want to share one more thought before we move on. Growing up, I attended churches and listened to speakers who did everything but preach from the Bible. As a senior in college, God gripped me with His Word, and that transformational experience has sustained my love for God's Word ever since.

I don't care about motivational messages, harebrained ideas, or claims of fresh revelation. For me, those are simply evidence that we are not satisfied with what God has said and refuse to take Him at His Word. I don't know about you, but give me the Word of God every time because only the Word of God has the power to transform. With God's living and active Word, everyone else can be silent, for God has spoken and continues to speak every time we open His Word. This safeguards us against so much untruth.

Even though this story may not change our understanding of God, it certainly presents a compelling picture of Christ. Losing this narrative can feel heartbreaking. Fortunately, there are other places in scripture that similarly reveal the heart of our Savior, allowing us to hold on to the essence of this beautiful story. So what I would like to attempt is

switching gears from teaching to preaching so that we can leave here edified and built up by the transforming power of God's Word and not mine. In order for us to do that, I want to explore three themes that emerge from this account found in John known as the *Pericope Adulterea* and see if we can't find those theme's elsewhere in scripture.

Jesus and the Trap: Setting the Trap, Response, and Sacrifice

Setting the Trap

In this particular story, the religious leaders are setting a trap for Jesus. While he is teaching, the Scribes and Pharisees bring a woman caught in the act of adultery to him. They ask what should be done with her, noting that according to the Law of Moses, she should be stoned. Depending on his answer, they could trap him: if he lets her go, he would be breaking the Law of Moses, and if he advocates for stoning her, they could report him to the Roman authorities.

Notably, they should have brought both the man and the woman caught in adultery, revealing their biased intentions. One particular account that comes to mind is found in **Matthew 12:9-14**, where Jesus heals a man with a withered hand. Since it's the Sabbath, the religious leaders believe they have trapped Jesus for breaking the law concerning the Sabbath. However, Jesus foils their plan, similar to his response, "He who is without sin, cast the first stone." Jesus says, "Which one of you, if a lamb fell into a pit on the Sabbath, wouldn't help him?"

Here, Jesus subverts the religious leaders' understanding of the law, which they used to control people, and returns to the heart of the law: to love the Lord your God and love your neighbor as yourself. Against such things, there is no law, and in loving the Lord and others, you actually fulfill the law.

Response

Jesus takes it one step further because the religious leaders dehumanized this woman and broke the law of God for their selfish gains. Jesus sees past their ploys and speaks to the woman, saying, "Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?" She replies, "No one, Lord." And Jesus says, "Neither do I condemn you; go, and from now on, sin no more."

My mind goes to another woman who washes the feet of Jesus, as found in **Luke 7:36-50**. While reclining at the table with a religious leader, a woman known for her lifestyle enters their gathering and begins washing Jesus' feet with her tears and hair. The religious leaders look down on this woman, but Jesus says to her and the religious

leaders, "Therefore I tell you, her sins, which are many, are forgiven—for she loved much. But he who is forgiven little, loves little." Then he says to her, "Your sins are forgiven." Those at the table with him begin to say among themselves, "Who is this, who even forgives sins?" Jesus then says to the woman, "Your faith has saved you; go in peace."

Jesus graciously understands that you are stuck in your sins with no way out.

Sacrifice

Jesus cannot relate to the self-righteous religious leaders, but do you know who he can relate to? People who are honest with themselves and recognize their need for a savior. In the story of the woman caught in adultery, the irony of Jesus asking, "He who is without sin, cast the first stone," and everyone leaving is that Jesus is sinless and chooses not to cast the first stone. Though we've established that this story is not Scripture and therefore not authoritative, a similar idea that portrays the heart of our savior is on display in **Hebrews 4:14-16**:

"Since then we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin. Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need."

Furthermore, we can confidently say that Jesus did not, and would not have, "cast the first stone" because of what Isaiah prophesied about him long before he left heaven's throne and humbled himself to become like us. This prophecy is found in **Isaiah 53:5**: "He was pierced for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his wounds we are healed."

In conclusion, let's recap. John 8:1-11 is very likely not scripture. This should not be a reason for alarm since the simple fact that we can identify what isn't scripture allows us to confidently identify what is. Additionally, nothing is lost or gained by this arguably beautiful account written about Jesus. We can easily look elsewhere within scripture to draw the same conclusion about his character.

In the spirit of John and the series we are in today, if you find yourself trapped in sin, be reminded that it's the kindness of God exemplified in Christ that is meant to lead us to repentance. Do not delay; you have a Savior who has been tempted in every way and is without sin, yet has lovingly taken on the punishment for your sin. By believing in Him, Jesus, you can have life in His name. Pray... "Go and sin no more!"