

Caught in Adultery

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[0 : 00] If you have your Bibles, look with me this morning to John chapter 8. We're continuing our series about the Jesus effect, the impact Jesus makes on the lives of those with whom he comes in contact.

And we're looking at John chapter 8, the story of the woman caught in adultery. While you're turning there, let me just preface what I'm going to say by saying that sometimes in life, even in the midst of worship, we see people do things in the name of religion that just absolutely astound us, right? And we believers have to acknowledge that sometimes it's those who claim to be Christians, sometimes those who claim to be Jews or Muslims or whatever. This last week, we witnessed that in Afghanistan, right?

Remember back in the early part of the week after the fiasco, the plane trying to take off, they had brought in a number of Marines, and those Marines were pictured on the channel that I was watching, helping little children get to safety, come down over a wall to get to the airport and maybe try to be airlifted out of Cabal.

And then it showed American GIs and servicemen, Marines. They would give them candy. They'd pat them on the head. I saw several photographs of them holding children in their arms, and I just thought, boy, what a compassionate group of servicemen and women we have serving our nation in Afghanistan, all over the world for that matter.

[1 : 32] And then just a couple of days later, all that was wrecked by a terrorist who entered their presence and blew himself up, killing hundreds of other folk, among those a number of American servicemen.

And I thought to myself, he's doing this in the name of religion. He says it's because of the belief in his God. Now, obviously, he's a radical Islamic terrorist, but it's always an ugly thing whenever we see someone in the name of religion do something that just takes us back.

You just wonder, how could anyone who claims to know God act in a fashion in which they've acted? And that's along the storyline of what we see today.

If you have your Bibles, look with me to John chapter 8, and we're going to begin our reading in verse 1. John chapter 8, verse 1. But Jesus went to the Mount of Olives.

Now, if you were to go to Luke's gospel, chapter 21, verse 37 and 38, and we don't have time to do that this morning, but if you'll note that, you can go home and read it.

[2 : 46] You'll find that Luke coincides exactly with what John says here in John chapter 8. It tells us the customs of Jesus.

John frames it that way in chapter 8 that Jesus' custom was, when he was in the area of Jerusalem, he would go at night to the Mount of Olives. And the reason he went there was to retire for the evening, but more importantly, to be along with his father, to pray to the father, to gain spiritual insight and spiritual strength.

And then the next morning, he would arise early, Luke tells us, and he would make his way to the temple. And once he was in the temple, he would gather people together, and people would sit and listen to Jesus as he taught.

Well, look at verse 2. At dawn, he appeared again in the temple courts, exactly what Luke has said in chapter 21.

And where he taught all the people gathered around him, and he sat down to teach them. Now, I want you to think about that for a minute.

[3 : 58] It's a beautiful picture, isn't it? Jesus has spent the night in the Mount of Olives. And by the way, if you ever get to go to the Mount of Olives, be sure to go there. There are olive trees there that date back. There's one in particular they think dates back to when Jesus was on earth.

They estimate it to be at least 2,000 years old plus. So Jesus goes to the Mount of Olives. He prays. He spends the night praying. The next morning, fresh from a good night's sleep, fresh from this time with God, he goes to the temple.

People arrive at the temple knowing that's his custom. He's going to be there. And he begins to teach them. Have you ever heard someone who was such a masterful teacher that you just hung on their every word?

I mean, it's like they could have talked all day long, and you would never have tired of it. I can remember back in 1978, I was in Kansas City. Stephen Olford was the preacher.

And in my estimation, he was the most powerful preacher to preach in the last century. He preached at Kansas City one evening, 8 o'clock in the evening. Thousands and thousands of Baptist ministers, laymen had gathered in this arena.

[5 : 05] And I'll promise you, if somebody had dropped so much as a hymnal on the floor, it would have startled everyone in the room. It was as though the heavens opened up, and God was speaking through Stephen Olford to that crowd.

It was that powerful. Well, multiply that 100 times over, and imagine what it was like to sit and listen to Jesus teach. He's not taking the word of God and simply explaining the word of God.

He is the living word of God. This is all about him. He is God in human flesh. They had heard the rabbis.

They had heard the priests. They had heard the Pharisees. They were so inelastic in their teaching. It was so ordinary. But now to hear Jesus, what a refreshing time that must have been.

I believe they probably clung and hung on his every word as he spoke there in the temple. Well, look at verse 3.

[6 : 06] All this is interrupted. All this is interrupted. The teachers of the law and the Pharisees brought in a woman caught in adultery.

They made her stand, and my translation says, before the group. If you're reading from a Holman translation, you know what it says?

They made her stand in the middle, the middle of the room. Now, what would be the reason for doing that? The only thing I can think of is they wanted every eye focused on this woman.

And look at the accusation they make. They caught her in the act of adultery. Your mind begins to race, if you have much imagination at all, and you begin to ask yourself, now, wait a second.

How did they know that they could pull this off, catch this woman in the very act of adultery, that Jesus would be at the temple, they knew his habits, there would be people around him, and he would be teaching them.

[7 : 14] And what better way to entrap Jesus than to set all this up and to know that this exact moment we can go in and catch this woman in adultery, and bring her before the Lord Jesus Christ.

This is clearly a case of entrapment, right? I mean, they've set this whole thing up, as you're going to see in just a minute, as this story unfolds. They had planned this from the start.

They knew exactly who the victim would be. And the other question you have to ask yourself is, where is the man in this situation? Where is the guy with whom she was committing adultery?

Why didn't they drag him in there as well? In fact, you have to also ask, could he have been one of their cohorts? Was he one of their buddies?

Was he one of their friends? Was this whole thing contrived from the get-go? And so they bring this woman into the presence of Jesus. Now, let me just ask you.

[8 : 16] Put yourself in the place of this woman. How do you think she felt? What do you think she's feeling right now? Back at the house, she was embarrassed absolutely to death.

But when she sees that they're going to drag her out of the house and bring her to the temple, and she realizes that's where we're headed, and she hears the accusation they make, can you see how that embarrassment would quickly turn to a fear that's just almost hard for us to imagine?

She's fearful for her life. Look, if you will, at verse 4. And said to Jesus, Teacher, this woman was caught in the act of adultery.

Now, again, I'm not asking you to add to this story anything that's not there. But if you flesh this out in your mind, and it's not just something you read quickly and skip over, and you try to imagine what this looked like, how do you believe they brought her to Jesus?

Do you think they said to her, well, you know what? You're obviously not dressed to go to the temple, so take the next hour and go get ready, and we'll come back, and we're going to take you

down to the temple to see Jesus.

[9 : 30] Do you think that happened? No. They have set her up. They have caught her in this situation, and they're going to seize the moment to make their case.

I believe they brought her to Jesus to the temple as scantily clad as they could possibly do. I mean, they barely, I imagine, barely allowed her to put on any kind of clothes at all, perhaps wrapped her in a blanket, a towel, a sheet.

They have every intention of making this look as bad as it possibly can. They want to have Jesus condemn her, not save her, and so she goes into the presence of Jesus.

Jesus has been teaching these people the word of God. They're having a glorious time, and all of a sudden, they hear this commotion in the back, and in walks this woman. They stand in the middle of the room, dressed in the fashion that she's dressed, and they pose this question to Jesus.

Teacher, this woman was caught in the act of adultery. In the law of Moses, verse 5, Moses commanded us to stone such a woman.

[10 : 38] Now, what do you say? Now we see why all this has come about. They are trying, as you're going to see in just a moment, to entrap Jesus.

Here's the question I want you to think about for a minute. I asked you a moment ago, imagine how that woman felt. When I put myself in her place, I just got to tell you, I can't think of being in that situation.

You would want the earth to swallow you up. But here's the next question. What do you think Jesus is thinking? What if you're the one who's teaching? You've been sharing these wonderful truths of God.

These people are so encouraged, and suddenly all that's disrupted, and here's this woman, scantily clad, accused of adultery, standing in your midst.

They say, the law says to stone her to death. What do you say? What do you think's going on in Jesus' mind? Well, I can't tell you what Jesus thought, but I can tell you this.

[11 : 35] I believe he had to be angry, don't you? I think he had to be so incensed that these people, in the name of religion, could act in such a horrible fashion as they've acted.

Additionally, he knows this. They didn't do this because they want to see this woman repent. They didn't do this because they want the law upheld. They've done this in order to entrap him.

And so they victimized the woman in order to get at Jesus. She's just a tool in their toolbox. She has been used by these religious leaders. I think Jesus was so angry, he probably couldn't stand it.

He probably wanted to lash out at them, the human in him, wanted to lash out at them and give them a tongue licking like they had never heard before. But Jesus doesn't do that.

I want you to notice what the scripture tells us. Look at verse 6. They were using this question as a trap in order to have a basis for accusing him.

[12 : 39] What they want to say is this. If he says, well, the law says to stone her, I guess you've got to take her out and stone her. You know what they're going to say? We thought you were a teacher who was different from us.

We thought you advocated compassion and love and kindness. And now you're saying, kill this woman? What kind of man are you?

But if Jesus says, well, you know what? You ought to let her go. You ought to be ashamed of yourselves for behaving the way you acted. They're going to turn to him and say, you mean to tell me you folk in this assembly come and hear this man teach?

And he doesn't even uphold the simple law of Moses while he thinks he's above the law. So in their mind, they had a scheme that was absolutely airtight.

I mean, they thought we've got him now. We've got him right where we want him. There's no way for Jesus to recover from this. Look at the latter portion of verse 6. I love this verse. But Jesus bent down and started to write on the ground with his finger.

[13 : 48] Now imagine this. You're teaching, having a great time in the Word of God. People are hanging on every word. Suddenly it's interrupted. This woman, you look at her and she looks the part of the harlot.

She looks the part of the prostitute, the accuser of adultery. What are you going to do? Here's what Moses' law says. How do you respond? What's your first reaction? Do you jump at them because of their hypocrisy, because of their evil hearts, because of their maliciousness toward this woman?

What do you do? You're so taken back. You know what Jesus does? He doesn't say one word. He doesn't say one single word in response.

Instead, he just stoops down and he begins to write on the ground, what appears to be writing on the ground. Now two questions come to mind.

First of all, what did he write? You know the Bible never tells us. We're never even given a hint at what he wrote. Scholars through the years have speculated about a number of things.

[14 : 52] Your speculation would hold up just as much as theirs, just as much as mine, because we just don't know. So here's one idea that some advance. What if he began to write the other nine commandments about stealing and not coveting and honoring your father and mother in hopes that they would see those and think to themselves, you know what?

I'm guilty of violating some of those myself. Here's something a little more sadistical. What if he began, because Jesus knows everything about everyone in the room, what if he began to write the names of some females that maybe some of these who were making the accusations had been with in their lifetime, and they knew when they saw their name that they would be outed by Jesus? What if he's writing some other commands that deal with the nature of what's going on here? We could speculate all day long until the cows came home.

Can I tell you something? I don't know. In fact, I'm going to go out on a limb and tell you this. Now, I believe with all my heart I'm right about this. I don't even think what he wrote was important, and I think that's why we don't read about it in Scripture.

You know what I think he's doing? I think Jesus is creating a diversion away from the woman. The reason I believe that is because I've been a speaker all my life, and I want to tell you something.

[16 : 24] I can be up speaking, telling a great story, every eye fixed on me, and you let a phone go off, and you know what happens? Everybody turns and looks at the phone. Like, cut that thing off, right?

A kid starts screaming. Everybody in the room turns and sees the child who's screaming. A light begins to flicker. It goes on, it goes off, goes on, it goes off.

Everybody turns and watches the light, right? It's just human nature. I want to show you something. If I had been preaching another sermon, and just in the middle of the sermon, I came down here, and I stopped talking, and I just looked right here under this pew, and I began to mess around, and what you don't know is I'm messing with this microphone right here.

You know what would happen if I stayed there for 30 seconds, a minute, a minute and a half?

What's happening right now? Everybody in this room is looking here to see what I'm doing.

That's just human nature. But when Jesus stoops, and he kneels, and he writes, guess what? The eyes go off the woman. Boy, it was a welcome diversion for that woman.

[17 : 42] She felt as though everyone was just staring a hole through her. I promise you she had to. When Jesus does this, he knows every eye is now off her, and they're focused on him.

He's doing a second thing, too. You know what else he's doing? He's giving their conscience a moment to go to work and to prick them because of their sin.

Because, you see, when they had contrived this plan back in somebody's house, back at their headquarters, boy, it seemed great. This is foolproof. We've got him where we want him.

We can get that woman. We know her reputation. We'll set her up with this guy. We'll rush it.

They've mapped all this out. But nobody has thought about the integrity or lack thereof or the ethics. And suddenly, when Jesus gets quiet, he's just marveling. I think he's composing himself in part because he doesn't want to lash out too harshly.

[18 : 45] It could cost this woman her life. When all that's going on, it gives their conscience a chance to kick in and begin to convict them about what they have done and the fact that it's not right.

Look at verse 7. When they kept on, the scripture says, not once, not twice, 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.

So he doesn't say anything for a long time. And they badger him. You know what's happening?

Your conscience is getting to them. They're beginning to feel uncomfortable.

They're beginning to feel like they're on trial rather than she's on trial. And finally he looks up when they just keep on, Jesus, what do you say? Are you going to uphold the law? What are you going to do, Jesus?

Jesus, say something. And he raises up and he looks at me and he says, I'll tell you what, whoever hears without sin, let him throw the first stone.

[19 : 57] Now, you've heard that so often that it's kind of old hat to us. But I want you to think about something for a moment. That was a brilliant, brilliant, brilliant, wise response.

You know how I know that and how you know it as well, you just haven't thought about it? Because you have heard that over and over and over in your life and it has been quoted not tens of thousands of times, but millions of times over the last two millenniums by believers and non-believers alike.

They all have picked up on that statement and recognized that's a brilliant thing to say. Whenever we've seen somebody who acts a little hogger than thou and they're judging people when they shouldn't, what do we say?

Well, let he who is without sin cast the first stone. You know what? They got it from Jesus. In that moment of quietness, Jesus stands up and says, well, let he who is without sin cast the first stone. Brilliant move on his part. Look at verse nine. 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 standing there.

[21 : 14] From the oldest to the youngest. I understand that, don't you? From the oldest to the youngest. Not that they're smarter, better. They've lived longer.

They've sinned more. They've got quite a catalog of sins. They know it can't be me. And so they begin to disappear out one side, out another.

Another leaves here. Another leaves there. Pretty soon, the whole group of them have disappeared. Even those who had come for the Bible study. Just Jesus and that woman.

I want you to watch something else. Jesus went back to stooping again. He's not even looking at that woman. He just is so sensitive. Aren't you glad we have a Savior like Jesus?

He's so sensitive to her. He's not even looking at it. Finally, he looks up. Well, where'd they all go? Well, they left. I want you to notice what he says next. Jesus straightened up and asked her, woman, where are they?

[22 : 13] Has no one condemned you? No one, sir, she said. Then neither do I condemn you, Jesus declared. Now go and leave your life of sin.

Now look up and get this. I wish I could tell you she received Christ as her Savior that day and turned her life around and two weeks later she was baptized and she lived a glorious life from that point forward.

We don't know that. I don't know what she did. But I know this. Jesus gave her the best shot at redemption, the best shot at changing her life she would ever get because he didn't condemn her. He just looked at her and said, you know what? Neither do I condemn you. Go your way and sin no more. Now what do we take away from this passage?

I want you to see basically two things. One thing's going to have four parts but I'm going to run through them real quick. The first thing, just one thing. And here's the biggest thing I want you to take away from this. What a glorious, magnificent, compassionate, merciful, gracious Savior we have.

[23 : 20] Amen? Aren't you glad Jesus did what he did? Because you know what? I know in a room of this many people, there are some of you here who, boy, you've lived by the rules.

And when it comes to the things that we think of as the real big sins, you've avoided them and I'm glad for you. That's a wonderful thing. But I'm going to tell you something, there's some of you, you've got some scars on you. There's some of you bearing some things that's happened in your past that nobody in the world knows about.

You were never outed the way this woman was outed. But you've got a story. You've got some scars. I'm going to tell you something, it ought to be real comforting to any of us in that situation today to know this.

He's a Savior who forgives us. Amen? He's a God of compassion. He's a God who says, hey, you know what? Go your way and sin no more. He's not winking at sin.

He's not permissive towards sin. You can't imagine how his heart must have been offended by her immorality, her impurity because he's so pure.

[24 : 27] But what a compassionate, loving, gracious Savior. Here's the second thing. This story teaches me a lot as a pastor and as a Christian about how each of us ought to be engaged in ministry with people in need who come into our lives.

Four things I want you to see and I'm going to go through them real quickly. Here's the first. If you want to be prepared for any situation life throws at you, you had better be prayed up. If you want to be prepared for any situation that's going to come your way in life where you're going to serve the Lord the way he would have you to serve, you had better be prayed up.

Jesus had spent the night in the Mount of Olives. He did that routinely when he was in Jerusalem. You know what my guess is? Everywhere Jesus went, he got away.

Where it was on the Sea of Galilee or there at the Mount of Olives, Jesus had this habit of getting along with his Father and that's how he recharged his battery. Now I want to tell you something. You're never going to be any stronger than your personal walk with God.

Never going to happen. If you're somebody who relies on your own intellect and your own ability and your own personality and let's just face it, some of you are good at that. Some of you are great problem solvers but I'm going to tell you something, time's going to come, you're going to be throwing a problem that you're not up to, that you can't solve.

[25 : 55] You're a little cutesy saying, it's not going to be enough. You're a winsome personality, it's not going to be enough. Your intellect is not going to be enough. This was one of those moments in time. Who would have ever thought in the middle of a Bible study guys of religious background would come in with a woman just called in adultery and pose the question they posed to Jesus.

How would you have fared? Well, I tell you, I hate to think how I'd have fared in that situation. Jesus was up to the task because he was prayed up. Second thing I want you to see is this, when circumstances are chaotic and challenging, is it ever that way around your house?

Is it ever that way in your business? Are they ever challenging, chaotic, you don't know what to do? When circumstances are chaotic and challenging, you can ill afford the luxury of saying or doing simply what you feel.

Now, if you don't get anything else out of the message, get this. I think Jesus, when he is kneeling here and riding on the ground, he's creating this diversion.

He's giving their conscience a chance to kick in and act. But you know what else he's doing? He's gathering himself. When I see how he acted with the tax collectors in the temple, man, at times, Jesus could be angry, right?

[27 : 14] He didn't sin, but he could be angry. When I hear at other times the message he delivers to the Pharisees, how candid and forthright and transparent it is, boy, it's blistering at times.

He had to be angry. So why is he not angry in this issue? Why didn't he turn and just lambast them? I know why he didn't. You know why he didn't.

Because if he had, they'd have taken that woman out and they'd have stoned her. There are times in life when the situation is so chaotic and just so fragile.

If you act the way you feel in the moment and what you think and feel in the moment, you're going to make a bad situation a lot worse. I want to tell you a passage of scripture.

I don't know if it's in the outline or not. It is. I see it up on the screen now. Write that down. James 1.20. But let me tell you about the verse right before James 1.20. James 1.19.

[28 : 16] Here's what it says. Let me just paraphrase it. Be quick to listen. You know that passage, right? Be slow to speak.

And be slow to anger. And James 1.20, and I'm going to tell you something. God spoke to my heart about this years ago. Convicted me and it changed how I live. Here's what James 1.20 says.

There's no getting around it. For the anger of man never achieves the righteousness of God. Now, if you're somebody who's a little quick-tempered and a little quick to speak, boy, you need to take note of that because I'm telling you something.

James has got it right. He's absolutely dead on the money. Not most of the time, all of the time. He says, be slow to speak and slow to anger and quick to listen because the anger of man, the anger of man never, never, never accomplishes the righteousness of God.

When you're blowing up at your wife or your husband or your kids, they've done something that needs to be corrected with your children, but you just blow up and you get real verbal with them, does it make things better or worse?

[29 : 32] Have you ever just gotten really, really angry and you're so frustrated and you just blow up at work? Does it ever help? Ever make matters better?

Always makes them worse. Thirdly, in fragile, volatile situations, silence is often our best response. Again, if you don't go away with anything else, go away with that.

There are some times when things are so volatile, the best thing you can say is nothing. I won't ask for a show of hands. I don't want to show hands here, but if any of you ever tried to play Holy Spirit with your children, you try to make sure that they get the message that they should be convicted. Have you ever done that with your wife, with your husband, with someone in the church they sinned, so you just want to make sure they understand what they did was sin, so you kind of come to the assistance of the Holy Spirit?

Can I tell you something? Even with lost people, it is true. God has given even lost people, not the Holy Spirit, but a conscience. But I'm telling you, a lot of times, I think we're so fearful their conscience won't act that we just think we've got to help it along.

[30 : 53] But by helping it, you hinder it. Have you ever seen that? People maybe feel a little bit guilt until you jump on them and guess what happens? The guilt dissipates. I did feel bad about that for a second, but now you've made me feel okay, justified in my being wrong about whatever it is I'm wrong about.

And here's the final fourth thing. Embarrassing people over moral failure, it seldom leads to repentance. I say the word seldom because maybe at some point in time it does.

But I've got to be honest with you. As a pastor and somebody who's preached for 50 years, I'm real tempted to use the word never. Never.

But maybe seldom. But it's a true seldom if it's seldom. We seldom bring people to repentance by beating them down.

When people have sinned, they don't need you to remind them. Most time they're aware. And what they need is love, not a lecture.

[32 : 06] They need some love, not a lecture. And that's what Jesus did. Now you know why we think we have to give the lecture? And conservative evangelicals like me and you, we're the world's worst at it because we're fearful that another conservative looking at us will say, well, he's soft on sin.

He didn't say anything about you shouldn't commit adultery. Jesus give her a little scripture here to tell her she's got to change her ways or she's going to burn in hell.

But Jesus forgoes that because he knows she's already convicted. He knows she's scared. He knows she knows what she's done is wrong. What he does is he loves her instead of lecture her.

He says, go your way and sin no more. I don't know what she did but I'm going to tell you something. She had a better chance at turning her life around as a result of what he said than if he had just pounded her with scripture and with morality and rules and regulations.

People need love. They don't need a lecture. Let's bow together in prayer. Father, I thank you for this wonderful story. It shows us you in a matchless gracious fashion and if anyone in this room needs a savior, Lord, I don't see how anything could draw them to you more than to see how you regarded this woman called an adultery.

[33 : 38] And for those of us out there in the world trying to minister to people who we run in contact with sometimes in our own families who they've messed up for sure. But God, I pray that we could do something to bring them close to you and not drive them away.

I pray you'd let us see ourselves, Lord, first before we look at them. I pray you'd give us a heart of compassion for them and we could love them as much as we're prone to lecture to them.

have your will and way in this service today. If there's anyone here, Lord, who needs to make a public decision for you, I pray today would be that day. For we make this prayer in Jesus' name. Amen.