

Exegetical Notes, John 8:2-11

“Neither Do I Condemn You”

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(This story does not appear in the oldest manuscripts of the Gospel of John. Scholars believe that it was a marginal note written in the text by someone who had been an eyewitness to the events described in John 7. This person knew what happened on the day after the Feast of Tabernacles and so wrote it in the margin of the manuscript. Though the story was not in the oldest text, it is believed to be authentic.)

Verses 2-6a

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.

- At the conclusion of the Feast of Tabernacles Jesus did not return home as did the other pilgrims who came to the celebration. He went out to the Mount of Olives. (John 7:53-8:1) The next morning, he returned to the Temple courts and began to teach those who were there.
- That Jesus “sat down” to teach indicates that the atmosphere was far less charged than it had previously been. Teachers normally sat down to teach. It was a sign that their authority was unchallenged. On the previous day, Jesus had stood and had spoken in a loud voice. (John 7:37)
- On this day, the teachers of the law and the Pharisees, respected leaders within Jewish circles, brought a woman and made her stand directly before Jesus. They told Jesus that she had been “caught in the act of adultery.” This means that she was a married woman who had been having sexual relations with a man who was not her husband. She had actually been found in the act. So there was no doubt of her guilt. They caught her and the man together.
- Those who brought her before Jesus told him that the law of Moses required the woman to be executed by stoning. This was a misquote of the law. The

law to which they referred is found in Leviticus 20:10 and Deuteronomy 22:22. It required that both parties, the man and the woman caught in adultery be executed. In this case, only the woman was brought before Jesus. If she was caught in the act of adultery, the man must also have been caught. But he was not brought before Jesus. Only the case of a “virgin,” a woman who was betrothed to be married but had not yet had sexual relations with her husband, required that she be executed by stoning. (Deuteronomy 22:23) The authorities wanted to know what Jesus thought they should do with this woman.

- The text indicates that this was a test. It is unclear what the test was. Were they testing Jesus to see if he understood the details of the law or were they testing him to see if he would put compassion for the woman over strict obedience to the law?

Verses 6b-8

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.

- Jesus did not respond to the question. He stooped down and began to write something in the dust with his finger. We have no idea what it was that Jesus wrote. While he wrote, the others kept pushing him to answer them.
- At last Jesus stood up, again his authority was being questioned, and said to those who were accusing the woman, “let the one who is free from sin throw the first stone.”

Verses 9-11

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.”

- Shamed by their own guilt and overwhelmed by Jesus’ argument, those who had brought the woman before Jesus, as a way of trapping him without any concern for her, turned and walked away starting with the oldest and wisest of them. Each realized that Jesus had trapped them.
- Jesus asked the woman where her accusers were. He then told her that he did not condemn her either, even though she had been caught in the act of sinning. He told her to go home and to abandon her sinful way of life. The

last line of the text indicates that she was guilty, she had been caught in her sin, and that Jesus knew she was guilty. But still he forgave her.

(These exegetical notes are the foundational study for the sermon entitled *Neither Do I Condemn You*. They have been prepared by the Reverend Doctor Charles H. Jensen, Senior Pastor at Cornerstone Fellowship, Coatesville Pennsylvania. All rights are reserved by *Cornerstone Fellowship* & The Reverend Doctor Charles H. Jensen. They are used here by permission.)