

John on Jesus - Adultery

Sign Title: Adultery

October 14, 2012

Good morning Faith Church. For those of you who are new, my name is Kurt. I am one of the pastors. We are studying our way through the Gospel of John. Today, we polish off the last verse of chapter seven and begin chapter eight. We are only looking at 12 verses but they are powerful and personal.

Take out your Bibles and turn to John 7:53. If you didn't bring a Bible, John 7:53 is found on page 892 of the pew Bible. Take out your notes.

What does it mean the earliest witnesses don't have this text?

The first thing I want to talk about is the note above the text. It tells us the earliest manuscripts do not include this passage we are about to study. To explain this comment, let me give you a little background on how God gave us the Bible.

There are two ways God reveals himself to us. One is called general revelation. The other is called special revelation. General revelation is what we can know about God by looking at creation. God made birds, trees, corn, soybeans, the sky and a beautiful sunset. General revelation tells us God exists. He is powerful. He is creative. He loves beauty. General revelation also tells us those who claim to be atheists are just smoking a crack pipe, because Psalm 19:1 tells us the universe declares the glory of God. In Romans 1, the Bible also tells us that everyone knows that God exists just by looking around.

Special revelation is God teaching us about himself and things that can not be known from studying creation. Special revelation is the Bible we hold in our hand, and technically, Jesus on earth was also special revelation.

God inspired prophets to say exactly what he wanted said and those words were collected in the Bible. We find this in 2 Timothy 3:16, where it says all Scripture is breathed out by God. The Bible is God's words spoken through his prophets to us. Sometimes God told his prophets the exact words he wanted written down, other times he inspired his prophets to say exactly what he wanted said in the course of normal communications, like we find in Paul's letters.

Of course, God's people had a great desire to read God's Word so copies were made. The problem is this all took place in the days before Xerox and PDF files. Everything was copied by hand. All that to say it was difficult to copy accurately. Thankfully, the Jews were known for the painstaking accuracy they used when making copies of God's Word though it was still copied by hand.

Now one of the questions people ask is, "Since all we have is copies of copies, can we trust our Bible?" The best answer to that question is to look at how Jesus treated the Bible of his day, which was a copy of a copy. In short, Jesus considered the Bible of his day completely authoritative. Later in the Gospel of John, Jesus made a case for the existence life after death based on the tense of one Hebrew verb in a copied scroll. Since Jesus considered the Bible he held in his hand, which was a copy of the copy of the copy, to be authoritative down to the tense of the verbs, so should we.

All that to say, for some reason, the earliest copies of the Gospel of John do not have this story in them. The first time we see this story showing up is the fifth century. Even when it does show up, everybody notes it as a questionable piece of text. Most copies put this story around John 7:53, where we find it today. Some old copies put it a little earlier in John, others put it little later in John. One manuscript suggests it should be part of the Gospel of Luke. This story doesn't anchor itself to this particular location in the Gospel of John until Jerome put it in his Latin translation in the 13th century. Even then, Jerome, noted it as not likely part of John, just like our Bible notes it wasn't around in the beginning.

What happened to this story to make it such an irregular part of this Gospel? Scholars have two explanations.

Augustine, who died in the year 430, suggested it was originally part of John but the early church was hesitant to copy it because it appears so lax on adultery, which was a prominent sin in the early church. Church leaders didn't want to promote a no-consequence adultery, which this story appears to do.

The other explanation is that this story was never part of the Gospel of John but was part of the oral tradition of Jesus. In other words, it actually happened, was talked about and was remembered for hundreds of years but God never inspired a prophet to include it in the Bible. If I had to make a choice, that is the category I fall in.

I think it was part of the oral tradition of the early church about Jesus. I don't think it was originally part of the Gospel of John. What should we do with

it? Should we skip or should I preach on it? I wrestled with that this week. I decided to preach on it for three reasons. While I believe it wasn't originally part of John: 1) I believe it is probably a true story, 2) It doesn't counter the rest of Scripture, and there is nothing here to cause us grief, 3) I believe God watches over the transmission of his word through history to give us the truth. Just as he watched over the transmission of his Word in Jesus' day so Jesus had an authoritative text, I believe he still watches over the transmission of the Bible today so we have an authoritative text. That is why I am preaching on it this morning.

I will read the passage. We will do a little background work, then, we will work our way through it.

[[They went each to his own house, but Jesus went to the Mount of Olives. Early in the morning he came again to the temple. All the people came to him, and he sat down and taught them. The scribes and the Pharisees brought a woman who had been caught in adultery, and placing her in the midst 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." 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 older 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."]] John 7:53–8:11 (ESV)

That is the story. It is simple and straightforward. Before we look at the text, I want to give you some background. This passage talks about sexual sin, in particular, the sin of adultery. Since this is such a big issue in our culture, I

want to give you some background to understand adultery from God's perspective, because I think we have lost sight of God's view of it.

Background - the biblical view of adultery

First, adultery among the people of God is a particularly serious sin. It is hard to overstate its severity. Adultery is in the Ten Commandments right next to murder. It made God's top 10 list. In the Old Testament, adultery was a crime punishable by death.

Why is adultery so serious? Adultery is a violation of the marriage covenant. The marriage covenant, between a man and woman, is to be permanent and binding. It is the most serious covenant we can take before God, and adultery is attacking that covenant. The marriage covenant is a living picture of the permanence and faithfulness of our relationship with God. Violating that covenant is a picture of rebellion against God and idol worship. Adultery has many practical consequences. It destroys families. It inflicts some of the deepest emotional wounds possible on a spouse. It destroys children. It rips away at the fabric of society and devastates the church. In short, while adultery takes place between two people, the ripple effect from adultery devastates a spouse, children, a church and a community.

I know most of you are nodding your heads in agreement. Once you are married, you must to be sexually faithful. What about before marriage? Before marriage, aren't you sexually free? After all, don't you technically have to be married to commit adultery?

Premarital sex is a form of adultery.

1 Corinthians 7 says our bodies are not our own. They belong to our spouses and are to be given to our spouses. This is why we should take care of ourselves physically. Our bodies are to be a gift to our spouses. Give your spouse a good gift. Brush your teeth. Comb your hair. Use breath mints.

When we engage in premarital sex, we take our bodies, which were to be given as a gift to our spouses and to be opened by them for the first time on their wedding night, and we give them to someone else. We often think of adultery as only postmarital, but adultery can also be premarital. Your body is not your own. It is to be given exclusively to your spouse, and the wrapping not taken off until your wedding night.

You can take something that was to be reserved for your spouse in marriage and give it away before your wedding night just like you can give it away to someone else after your wedding night.

I would love to talk in depth on God's view of premarital sex, but because of time, I can't. I put it in your Digging Deeper section of your small group worksheet answers to the question, "How far is too far before marriage?" If you visited the Christ2RCulture website recently, you probably noticed a new section called, "Answers to Your Questions." Many of you ask good questions, so building off of what we did for the Solomon on Sex series, I created a special place to put the answers to your questions; plus, you can also submit new questions. [So the answer to the question, "How Far is Too Far Before Marriage?" is also found on the Christ2Rculture website.](#) Please submit more questions.

Let's just summarize this portion of our study.

Unless a man and woman are married, any form of sexual activity outside of marriage is sin and is a type of adultery. You can just as easily cheat on your spouse by giving away your body to somebody else before your wedding night as you can by giving away your body to somebody else after your wedding night.

According to 1 Corinthians 7, your body is not your own, it is your spouse's.

In the Bible, adultery is such a serious offense that it resulted in the death penalty for both the woman and the man involved (Leviticus 20:10; Deuteronomy 22:22). The Mishnah, which was the interpretation of the Jewish law prevalent in Jesus' day, had a particular way a man was to be put to death if he was guilty of adultery. It was an effective deterrent against promiscuity.

The man was to be taken to a public place, then he was to be buried, at least up to his knees, in huge pile of poop. Then men were to take a soft towel and wrap it around his neck. Men were to take two longer towels, and wrap them once around his neck in opposite direction. Then they were to pull. That way they slowly and painfully strangled him to death without leaving a mark. When he finally collapsed, if he wasn't dead and tried to gasp for air, you know what his face was in when he inhaled. That is graphic! I share it to help you understand how serious the sin of adultery is.

Sexual purity was so important in God's eyes that if a woman was sexually unfaithful during her engagement period, she was to be killed by stoning. In biblical times, a couple was engaged for a year. During that time, they were legally considered married even though they were not allowed to be together

physically. The engagement time was not to make sure you wanted to marry someone; it was just the time needed to prepare for the wedding.

In the time of Jesus, because only the Romans had the power to inflict the death penalty, the death penalty was not typically carried out for adultery, though it really messed with your social status, because everybody who knew his or her Bible understood an adulterer deserved to die. This is why Joseph had in mind to put Mary away quietly when he found she was pregnant before they came together. Joseph knew that until that moment women only became pregnant one way and he was not the father. According to Old Testament law, Mary deserved to be stoned to death. While in that day, Mary would most likely not be stoned, Joseph was trying to spare Mary the extreme social pain that would come her way because he loved her.

In the Old Testament, Deuteronomy 22:23-24 suggests that stoning was the mode of death reserved for an engaged girl who was unfaithful to her fiancé. Strangulation was the typical means of death for all other cases of adultery. Ezekiel 16:38-40 suggests that by the time of Jesus, stoning was used for more than just engaged girls. So in the story we are studying in the Gospel of John, it may have been an engaged girl who cheated on her future husband or it may have been a married woman. According to the law of Moses, it would have been an engaged girl but because of the practice we see followed in Jewish history, it could have been either.

Of course, today, sexual ethics are very different. Extramarital and premarital sex is considered a normal and healthy form of self-expression. Living

together before marriage is expected. You try before you buy everything else, why not take a potential marriage partner for a spin before you commit? After all, we want to make sure we are sexually compatible. I am not sure what that means. The physiology is pretty straightforward. Sexually selfish, maybe. Sexually incompatible, probably not. One of the most alarming things to me are parents, in particularly fathers, who don't realize how far our culture has drifted, so they don't protect their daughters or lead their sons in this area.

Some fathers don't see anything wrong with letting their daughters live with a guy, do his laundry, cook his meals, pack his lunch and sleep with him, and the whole time the guy is a coward who will not commit to her. Instead, when he is done with her or thinks he found someone better, he will kick her out and think he is getting an upgrade. In the meantime you have a broken and battered woman who gave her heart to a man who crushed it. You also have fathers who don't encourage their sons to be responsible and treat women with respect and dignity. Dads, we need to step to the plate on this one and remind our sons to be different from the world, to be holy. Remind our sons to keep their hands off the women they date until the wedding night. Dads really need to step to the plate on this one.

All this to say our culture has so warped our brains that most young adults have no clue that sex is to be reserved for marriage. This was forcefully brought home to me when I found myself engaged in a conversation with two young men while they were helping me repair a church toilet. You never know what kind of topics come up when you are on your knees in front of a toilet. Both of those

young men grew up in the church. One was the son of a former elder. Both lived with their girlfriends before marriage. They were now married and attending church but they didn't know living together before marriage was sin. When I told them it was, they violently disagreed with me. One even said I was a heretic. I wrote a paper for him with verse after verse to show him what God says. You see it is not just our culture that is lost, but the church has so swallowed the culture on this one that many young adults don't even know what sexual sin looks like.

That is a lot of background before we get to the text, but I think it is important because I can't over-stress the severity of this sin.

The story - catching Jesus on the horns of a dilemma

Here are the plans of the religious leaders. They wanted to catch Jesus on the horns of a dilemma. They caught a woman in the very act of adultery and brought her to Jesus. The Bible is clear that she should have been killed. If Jesus endorsed what the Bible says, and she was stoned, Jesus was in trouble with the Romans, who were the only ones that can carry out the death sentence. Plus, he was in trouble with the people. He was known as a man of mercy and compassion. Endorsing a public execution would have ruined his reputation. On the other hand, if he said she shouldn't be stoned, they had him violating the Old Testament law by playing soft on the serious sin of adultery. You can picture the sinister smile on their faces as they thought they had Jesus in check on the chessboard of life.

How did Jesus respond? He wrote on the ground. The obvious question everybody asks is, “What did Jesus write?” We don’t know. This is part of the mystery. This week, as I studied, I noticed something in this text I seen before. The first time the word “write” is used in the text, it is not the common word for write. It is a special word which means to write a record of accusations against someone. Whatever Jesus wrote, it was something these guys were guilty of. Whatever he wrote, it served as a mirror that took the focus off this woman’s sin and showed these men their own sins.

What did Jesus do? Did he go for the death penalty and get in trouble with the Romans or ignore the law of Moses?

Jesus opted for the death penalty. “OK, let’s stone her. Just make sure the one who is without sin throws the first stone.” Then he went back to writing on the ground, which was probably more about their own sins.

If I am contributing towards sin, I am guilty of sin.

Here is where many people get this wrong story wrong. It sounds like Jesus said that unless someone is perfectly free of sin, they cannot throw a stone. That is not what this is saying. This text doesn’t say we can never bring an accusation against someone about their sexual sin because we are all sinners. If that is what this is says, it would mean 1 Corinthians 5 is wrong.

I wrote to you in my letter not to associate with sexually immoral people— not at all meaning the sexually immoral of this world, or the greedy and swindlers, or idolaters, since then you would need to go out of the world. But now I am writing to you not to associate with anyone who bears the name of brother if he is guilty of sexual immorality or greed, or is an idolater, reviler, drunkard, or swindler—not even to eat with such a one. For what have I to do with judging outsiders? Is it not those inside the church whom you are to judge? God judges those outside. “Purge the evil person from among you.” 1 Corinthians 5:9–13 (ESV)

Obviously there are times you have to deal with unrepentant sexual sin among God's people. There are times you have to make a judgment about it. What Jesus was talking about in John 7 comes from Deuteronomy 19. It is called the malicious witness.

If a malicious witness arises to accuse a person of wrongdoing, then both parties to the dispute shall appear before the Lord,... if the witness is a false witness and has accused his brother falsely, then you shall do to him as he had meant to do to his brother. So you shall purge the evil from your midst. Deuteronomy 19:16–19 (ESV)

In the Old Testament, throwing the first stone was a risky proposition. First, if you brought a false accusation or maliciously framed someone to sin and it was discovered, you would be given his or her penalty. If these guys were connected with or contributing towards this woman's sin and that connection was caught, they would have been stoned. They could not throw the first stone. That makes me think this was a set-up. How do you catch a woman in the very act of adultery unless you knew it was going to take place?

My guess on how this transpired is this girl was in a bar one night during the Feast of Booths and she was lonely. The religious leaders handed a \$100 bill to a guy in the bar who was known as a good-looking guy of poor character who took advantage of young girls. They told him to buy her all the drinks she wanted. They told him to get her so drunk she couldn't think straight and then go to bed with her. They would be watching to catch her in the act. They gave him another \$100 bill for hush money. It doesn't say that in Scripture, but I think it is reasonable to assume they were connected to and contributive toward her sin in some way. They weren't looking out for her and protecting her. They were using

her. The reason they didn't throw a stone is not because they were sinful like the rest of us. If that was the case, nobody would ever be executed. They didn't throw a stone because they were connected. They knew it, and Jesus caught them.

The second piece of evidence that makes me think this was a set-up is if these guys were really concerned about legal justice for this woman, where would they have brought her? Not to Jesus! They would have brought her to the Sanhedrin. That was the Jewish ruling council that handed out justice. They didn't want to bring her to the Sanhedrin. They were not interested in justice. They just wanted to use her to ruin Jesus. It doesn't say it in the text but I think she was a young girl they set up to fall, and they took advantage of her.

The third piece of evidence that this was a set-up is what is missing in the story. Where is the guy? According to the Old Testament, both the man and the woman were to be killed in the case of adultery. Remember the Mishnah says the guy gets strangled in a pile of poop. This woman did not commit adultery by herself. If she did commit adultery by herself, there are a whole new set of issues that I have no clue how to deal this with morning. My guess is they were protecting the guy. I think the guy was working for them. That is why these religious leaders knew where to go so they could catch her in the act of adultery. It smells like a set-up to me. While these religious leaders may not have committed adultery with her, they didn't set about to protect her. They didn't set out to help her. They set her up to fail.

Now before we go too far one way, let's be honest the other way. If this woman was set up for adultery, was she still guilty of adultery? Yes! She still drank the beer. She still chose to pursue a relationship with someone who wasn't her husband or fiancé. She chose to put herself in a situation where she was very likely to sin. She is still responsible for her actions. She is still guilty. She does deserve the death penalty.

Jesus doesn't ignore sin; he dies for sin.

Technically, the only one who was without sin and who could throw the first stone was Jesus. He didn't. He said to her, "Has no one condemned you?" She said, "No one Lord." Jesus said, "Neither do I condemn you, go now and leave your life of sin."

You see, this is where many people get it wrong. They say, "Sexual sin must not be a big deal. Jesus just let this woman off the hook. Thank goodness we do not live in the Old Testament where they killed you for adultery. Now we are in the days of Jesus. Jesus winks his eye and ignores sexual sin." Is that what happened? Did Jesus simply ignore her sin? No, he didn't. The Old Testament was upheld. Her sin was punished by death, except not by her own death. Jesus died in her place for her sin. He died for her so she could go free.

For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him. John 3:17 (ESV)

You see, these guys thought that when they caught her, if they brought her to Jesus, he would condemn her. It would be Hell, fire and brimstone. They thought he would shame her. They thought he would humiliate her. They

thought he would punish her. Instead of bringing her to Jesus being the worst thing that could happen, it was the best.

I suspect she couldn't forgive herself. I suspect she was filled with shame as they dragged her half-naked body through the public square. I suspect she figured her life and future were ruined now that she committed adultery. I expect she thought that standing in front of Jesus would be the worst thing that could happen to her. What I find so amazing is that even though her sin was serious, Jesus' love and forgiveness was greater than her sin.

This morning, I know a number of you are struggling with sin. Maybe it is sin similar to this woman. It may be premarital or extra-marital sex or pornography. That is serious sin. Some of you may be struggling with the more socially-acceptable kind of sins like pride, greed, arrogance or boasting about the stuff you have or the things you have done.

Today, you are caught. You are standing before Jesus. God knows all about it. Standing in front of him is not the worst place you can be; it is the best place you can be. He loves you. He died for you. He offers to forgive you. He doesn't just offer to take the punishment of death you deserve, but he offers to take away the guilt and the shame. He didn't come to condemn you; he came to die in your place for your sin. He offers to forgive you. Go now and sin no more.

Conclusion

What we are going to do as we close is we are going to come before Jesus in a time of confession. We are going to have a few minutes of silence when you can talk to God about our sins. Don't hide it from him. He knows all

about it. He died for your sin to free you from the guilt, the shame and even the grip of your sins. Let's take a few minutes to give it to Jesus and to call out for his grace and mercy. Jesus said, "Neither do I condemn you; go, and from now on sin no more." Amen.

Prayer

Jesus, thank you for amazing us. Thank you for not condemning this woman but dying for this woman. Thank you that as we stand before you today, with our sexual sin, our guilt and our shame, even though we deserve to die, you love us. You died for us. You took our penalty. Jesus, we thank you for loving us when we don't deserve it. Amen.



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