

**Series:** Receiving life by believing in God's Son (a Gospel of John study)

**Sermon Text:** John 7:53-8:11

**Kids Phrase:** Intentions

(This part of the story is told only by John)

John said he wrote this letter to help us find “*fullness of life through believing Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God.*” We’re working through *1:19-11:57* where he tells real-life stories of how it looked when people met Jesus.

- When studying a passage, I always look for the central idea to build the sermon around. To be honest, that can be challenging, and sometimes I miss it. Thankfully, the central idea of *John 8:1-11* is easily found in *verse 7, 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."* Once we find the center, we sometimes find parallel verses around it (bible writers used [this technique](#) to [aid memory](#)). Check out how *verses 6 and 8* parallel each other. *Verse 6* says, *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. Verse 8* says, *and once more he bent down and wrote on the ground.* John wants us to know Jesus was writing but not necessarily what He wrote. *Verses 1-5* and *verses 9-11* also parallel each other. Starting in *7:53* we read, *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."* John wants us to see an accusatory mob form around Jesus and the woman, then see them slowly crumble away in shame in *verses 9-11, 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."* Several things make this a controversial text. Many translations have a footnote stating something like, “*Some manuscripts do not include 7:53–8:11; others add the passage here or after 7:36 or after 21:25 or after Luke 21:38, with variations in the text.*” If you’re interested, I’ve included some notes about this issue below. The bottom line is...there’s confusion about where it fits in Scripture, but there’s agreement on this being a real incident in the life of Jesus. It became controversial because Jesus appears to be altering the 10 commandments. However,

by looking beneath the surface as Jesus said to do back in 7:24, we realize He was explaining, not changing what God meant. This will be our...

**BIG IDEA: Jesus clarified His Father's intentions.**

Since you're now aware of this passage's structure and controversies, let's ponder some takeaways.

Takeaway #1: ***Never pit Jesus against His Dad.***

- Some think Jesus was cooler and more easygoing than His Old Testament Dad, but He plainly said in John 14:9, "*Whoever has seen me has seen the Father.*" After Jesus healed the Bethesda guy on the Sabbath (cf. John 5), Jewish leaders began to view Him as a liberal interpreter of God's Law, despite Jesus plainly saying in Matthew 5:17, "*Do not think I've come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I've not come to abolish them but to fulfill them.*" Jesus never defied His Father or altered the 10 commandments. In fact, that seems to be why, 2 TIMES, John mentioned Him ***writing with his finger on the ground***. He wants us to think of what Exodus 31:18 says, "*God gave Moses...on Mount Sinai, the two tablets of testimony... written with the finger of God.*" Additionally, God's authority is often tied to concepts like [hands](#) and ***fingers***. For example, in Luke 11:20 He said, "*If it is by the finger of God that I cast out demons, then the kingdom of God has come upon you*" (cf. Daniel 5). As ***the Pharisees*** were accusing Jesus of ignoring or going soft on the commandments, I think Jesus may have been implying, "*Um, fellas...I wrote these commands, so I know what they mean.*" This takes us to...

Takeaway #2: ***Use wisdom to avoid human traps.***

- Consider the ***trap*** being set by ***the Pharisees***...They expected Jesus to go easy on ***this woman*** like he had gone soft, in their eyes, on the Sabbath. If He let her off the hook, they would have accused Him of teaching people to ignore the 7<sup>th</sup> commandment, "*Do not commit adultery.*" It's true God's Law prescribes death by ***stoning*** for adulterers (cf. Deuteronomy 22:22-24), but Israel needed Rome's permission to execute anyone (this will come up later when they want to crucify Jesus). This was the ***trap***...To honor God's law would bring Rome's wrath upon Jesus; but to obey Roman law, would've meant dishonoring His Father. Their narrow minds couldn't not conceive of a "*third way*" forward, so ***the Pharisees*** set this ***trap*** to exterminate this pest. Jesus stood against these religious leaders ("*representatives of the law*") to care for the needs of this ***woman*** as these men unfairly applied God's laws. Think about it...her male accomplice should have been dragged into the temple too (cf. Leviticus 20:10), but that wasn't the norm in

a society where women and children were viewed as dispensable property. Before you accuse Christianity of being chauvinistic, consider how frequently Jesus challenged such attitudes and restored dignity to every image bearer while simultaneously upholding God's unique roles for men, women, and children (cf. Matthew 19; Ephesians 5:21-33).

- The **Pharisees** misunderstood God's intentions, and **verse 6** states their goal was **to test Jesus, that they might have some charge to bring against him**. Now, before I make them sound like the worst people ever, consider this comment Jesus made in Matthew 23:2-3 (NASB), "*The scribes and Pharisees have seated themselves in the chair of Moses. Therefore, whatever they tell you, do and comply with it all, but do not do as they do; for they say things and do not do them.*" They were right about so much but didn't practice what they preached. We might have expected Jesus to say, "*run from these hypocrites*"; but ironically, He said "*Do as they say but not as they do.*" While I'm often tough on legalists, and often hate their tone, I'm learning from Jesus to appreciate their zeal for truth. On the other hand, **John 8** contains the harshest words Jesus ever said to **the Pharisees**. It begins with them wanting to **stone a woman** and ends with them wanting to **stone** Jesus! By using godly wisdom (like Solomon used wisdom to discover the real mother of a baby back in 1 Kings 3:16-28), Jesus avoided their human **traps**. It's sad how **entrapment** became the "*signature move*" of their religious obsession. This takes us to...

Takeaway #3: **Love mercy as much as you love truth.**

- To say, "**Let him who is without sin among you be the first to throw a stone at her**" was both shocking and slick! Now, don't misread that...Jesus was not saying, "*Only sinless people can judge.*" Instead of telling these men to "*step away from the woman*", He essentially said, "*If you're qualified to execute her, [go for it](#).*" Let that sink in...Jesus upheld the Law of Moses and the punishment she deserved; however, He upheld every point of law, including a law that said these guys were unqualified to punish, much less accuse her. You see, Deuteronomy 17:7 says, "*The hand of the witnesses shall be first to put him to death, and afterward the hand of all the people.*" Also, Deuteronomy 19:15-21 says false accusers get the punishment for the crime in question. It seems Jesus was saying, "*You are unqualified witnesses because of your bias and culpability in this matter.*" Here's the thing...they judged the **woman** but not the man, used her to **entrap** Jesus (probably framed her too), and in their haste to pull this off, failed to follow everything Jewish law required of witnesses (like urging her not to sin in the first place). They

knew Jesus was somehow on to their scheme, so they peeled off, *on by one*, before ending up in the hot seat (Jesus mercifully let them). So, our passage isn't saying, "*sinners can't ever judge*", rather it's more like what Jesus said in Matthew 7:5, "*First take the log out of your own eye, then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your brother's eye*" (cf. Matthew 18). Scripture urges us to make proper judgments, but it also urges us to examine ourselves first.

- In the end, there were no legit witnesses to the crime, so Jesus let her go without punishment, penance, restitution, or community service. Jesus is God, right? He knew she was guilty. So, was He setting the law aside here? Not exactly. We're forgetting, as we often do, how God's laws were not only about truth and justice, but they also called for things like mercy and grace. For instance, every law hints at Jesus being the Lamb of God who's death would satisfy sin, and Exodus 21:28-32 allowed judges to accept ransom payments to satisfy penalties, except in the case of murder (cf. Numbers 35:31). So, merciful options were available for this *woman*, which the hasty *Pharisees* chose not to offer because they only cared about *entrapping* Jesus. I mean, why didn't they bring her to Jesus privately? Evidently, it was because they did not *love mercy as much as truth*. This takes us to...

Takeaway #4: *We're unlike God unless we're merciful.*

- Let's be clear...*adultery* is wrong, but so is using a people as a pawn in your game of proving moral superiority. Snatching her from the bed and parading her less-than-dressed body before everyone only piled more shame on this guilty *woman*. Jesus was like, "*Guys, this is not how we operate!*" Why do believers do stuff like this? How does changing an image bearer's status to "*criminal*" justify mistreating them? Where do we get off overlooking our personal failures while calling for others to be cancelled or killed? This story forces those with certain political and evangelical views to wrestle with a complex problem...can the incarcerated repent and be given the same second, third, or fiftieth chance we've been given? While I'm not necessarily suggesting we free convicted criminals, this story certainly raises questions about what is being satisfied by capital punishment...is it revenge, is it preventive, is it really about justice? Are we with Jesus if He wants to set some people free or are we with the religious leaders who prefer to not ask questions and sacrifice a woman on their alter of truth? Decide for yourself, but if you claim to be "*pro-life*", just consider whether you're for "*all*" life or just "*some*" life.

- How can we claim to be like God if we never show mercy? I know it hurts to be sinned against and heinous crimes deserve punishment, but some church folks respond to sin like they don't believe the gospel. We're not supposed to be like these guys, who attempted to atone for their sins, in part, by publicizing the woman's sin and calling for her death. We must never handle sin in ways that undermine our message. The world can't see Jesus as sin's ultimate solution if His followers ignore the gospel as we solve problems. How can they know our God of second chances if His people are always blood thirsty? Sadly, the conversation usually goes like this, *"If we don't punish or teach them a lesson, they might do it again. We can't be sure."* At the same time, we can't know who WILL and WON'T change! We do know this...NOBODY can repent and change when their dead. Have you ever been blindsided by your consequences like this **woman**, who's world was spinning as they whirled her around? I have, and you become terrifyingly unsettled! In those moments, you need to know someone, anyone, has your back, like Jesus had this **woman's** back regardless of her guilt or innocence. That not everyone will walk away, like **Pharisees**, who ditch you fall short of their expectations. While truth is good, and justice is good, things like mercy, grace, and forgiveness are equally good (cf. Matthew 23:23). If you're never merciful, you're obviously oblivious to how God deals with everyone on this planet, including you (cf. Luke 6:36). His goal is to restore life on earth, not to cancel or kill everyone who sins. His graces allow life to grow out of death. In this case, when Jesus told **the woman** to **go and sin no more**, He overlooked her sin based on His future death for sin and essentially said, *"Go, be grateful for your second chance, and live like I've pardoned you."*

Let's pray: Father, in Micah 6:8 you declared what is good and what you require of us...to do justice, to love kindness (mercy), and to walk humbly with you. Similarly, in Isaiah 1:17, you tell us to learn to do good; seek justice, correct oppression; bring justice to the fatherless, and plead the widow's cause. While it's right to have a sincere thirst for truth and justice, it's equally right to have a sincere thirst for things like mercy and compassion. Teach us, oh God, to channel our intolerance for sin in loving, merciful, and pastoral ways, like Jesus, who was full of grace and truth. Amen.

Will you please stand and sing, "Sweetly Broken" with us? As you do, see if you find yourself in agreement with the lyrics. If not, perhaps you can sing it as a prayer of repentance.

So, what's your NEXT STEP?

- Remember, our next step always begins with faith in Christ. Either placing faith in Him for the first time or exercising faith to repent, change, and grow. Either way, His Spirit will help you.

### Quotes/Additional thoughts:

- **Book Context:** The Gospel of the Apostle John, the son of Zebedee, provides a clearly stated purpose. *John 20:30-31* says, “*Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.*” Some people demand to have all their questions satisfied before bowing to Jesus, yet John claimed his limited account was enough to bring anyone to faith. As we read it, our Savior and friend emerges from the pages as a real person in the real world. Jesus shows us what we could become, if we too would rely on His infinite Father who will gladly supply whatever we need.
- **Life in his name:** Life is the Greek word, “zōē”, which means “Life, Living, Lifetime, Life-Giving” and is where we get the word, “zoology” in English. Vine's Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words says it's “used in the NT of life as a principle, life in the absolute sense, life as God has it, that which the Father has in Himself, and which He gave to the Incarnate Son to have in Himself, Jhn 5:26, and which the Son manifested in the world, 1Jo 1:2. From this life man has become alienated in consequence of the Fall, Eph 4:18, and of this life men become partakers through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, Jhn 3:15, who becomes its Author to all such as trust in Him, Act 3:15, and who is therefore said to be 'the life' of the believer, Col 3:4, for the life that He gives He maintains, Jhn 6:35, 63. Eternal life is the present actual possession of the believer because of his relationship with Christ, Jhn 5:24; 1Jo 3:14, and that it will one day extend its domain to the sphere of the body is assured by the Resurrection of Christ, 2Cr 5:4; 2Ti 1:10. This life is not merely a principle of power and mobility, however, for it has moral associations which are inseparable from it, as of holiness and righteousness. Death and sin, life and holiness, are frequently contrasted in the Scriptures.”
- **The Feast of Tabernacles:** “Many Jewish communities around the world keep the festival of Tabernacles, or ‘Booths’, to this day. The ‘tabernacles’ in question are usually makeshift shelters, made out of whatever comes to hand, set up in the open air in a back yard or porch. They may be used for meals, or even for sleeping. Their purpose, like so many Jewish traditions, is to remind the people of the time when their ancestors wandered in the wilderness, living in tents, that is, ‘tabernacles’ or ‘booths’...It was also an agricultural festival, coming at the climax of the harvest season, celebrating the harvest of grapes and olives in particular...In the time of Jesus it was one of the three great annual pilgrimage feasts (the others being Passover and Pentecost), when tens of thousands of Jewish people would converge on Jerusalem...The celebrations went on for a full eight days, starting and ending with a special sabbath...John is the only gospel that mentions a celebration of this festival, and the chapter begins here with all kinds of teasing hints of what is to come. Will Jesus go up to Jerusalem for the festival, or won't he? What does he mean by talking of his ‘time’, which isn't here yet? What are his brothers trying to get him to do?” Professor NT Wright
- **Controversy:** Professor NT Wright wrote, “There is a puzzle about this story. It doesn't really seem to fit here. Chapters 7 and 8 – omitting this passage – seem to flow on reasonably well. And, tellingly, the earliest copies of John's gospel do in fact run straight on from 7.52 to 8.12, missing this story out altogether. At the same time, some manuscripts put it in, but in a

different place. Some have it as an extra story after the end of the gospel. Some even place it in Luke's gospel (and it has to be said that the way the story is told is, if anything, more like Luke than like John). That's why some translations of the Bible put the story in brackets, or add it to the end as an 'appendix'. At the same time, there is something to be said for reading it here, where a lot of manuscripts do have it." Pastor Bruce Milne added, "There can be no real doubt that it was not an original part of John. One or two manuscripts include it in Luke after 21:38. This may be a clue to its origin, as the passage has some textual affinities with the language of Luke's gospel...The hesitation over this paragraph may have been partly due to its content, as on the surface at least it appears to express a liberal attitude towards sexual sin on Jesus' part... 'The theme of judgment is strong in chapters 7–8, and the story could well be regarded as illustrative of 7:24 and 8:15–16.'"

- **What Jesus wrote:** "Nobody knows, of course, what Jesus was writing on the ground. (In the ancient world, teachers often used to write or draw in the dust; We can guess if we like; maybe he was writing lists of other sins, including hypocrisy. Maybe he was making a point about sins of the eye and heart, as in Matthew 5:28. Or maybe he was just doodling, treating their question with the contempt it deserved." Professor NT Wright
- **The trap:** "The trap is a clever one. To refuse to uphold the stoning would clearly confirm the authorities' suspicions, already aroused by matters like his attitude to the Sabbath, that Jesus stood light to the law... On the other hand, his compassion for the downtrodden and the lawless is known. A hardline judgment in this case would have discredited him in the eyes of the common people... There may also have been another hook on their line, in that advocating stoning, in strict conformity with the Jewish law, might have brought down on Jesus' head the wrath of the Roman authorities because of their jealous retention of the right to execute." Pastor Bruce Milne
- **The culpability of the Pharisees:** "What evidence do they need? So that suspicious husbands could not accuse their wives unnecessarily, the law required strong testimony from two witnesses who saw the couple in a sexual context: lying in the same bed, unmistakable body movements, and positive identities. The two witnesses had to see these things at the same time and place so that their testimonies would be identical. Such evidence virtually required the witnesses to set a trap. The law also expected that if a person witnessed another about to commit a sin, compassion required them to speak up. These witnesses stand silently, neglecting their moral obligation to give guidance to the woman. They want to catch her and use her... A woman who is sexually unfaithful to her fiancé was to be stoned to death along with her lover (John 8:5; cf. Deut. 22:23–24). Unfaithful wives were likewise killed (Lev. 20:10; Deut. 22:22), but the law did not indicate the method of death. The Mishnah (which was oral law in Jesus' day) specified that unfaithful fiancés should be stoned, but wives strangled (Sanhedrin 7:2). In the present passage, the woman therefore must be engaged.<sup>14</sup> But if so, where is her lover? If they were caught in the act, he was caught too. The accusers have permitted him to get away clean." Professor Gary Burge
- **Forgiveness says sin matters:** "Being forgiven doesn't mean that sin doesn't matter. On the contrary: 'forgiveness' means that sin does matter – but that God is choosing to set it aside... the sin that matters even more, as the rest of the chapter makes clear, is the deep-rooted sin which uses the God-given law as a means of making oneself out to be righteous, when in fact it is meant to shine the light of God's judgment into the dark places of the heart... By

confronting this sin, Jesus has put himself, literally, in the firing line from which he has just rescued the woman.” Professor NT Wright

- **Sin never goes unpunished:** Do you struggle with statements like Matthew 6:15, “*If you do not forgive others their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses*”? Do you see forgiveness as letting people off the hook? Well, consider this...sin never ultimately goes unpunished. Those who die without faith in Jesus will pay for their sins forever in Hell. The sins of those who receive forgiveness by grace through faith are paid for by Christ’s sacrifice on the cross. One way or the other, sin gets paid for, right? This enables us to freely forgive!
- **We need not be sinless to judge:** “Jesus’ saying is a particularly impressive example of his astonishing wisdom in dealing with his critics, a characteristic which has been reflected again and again in the dialogues we have been examining...Jesus’ statement ought not to be seen to imply that the law can be enforced only by moral paragons, nor that one cannot pass a judgment on moral issues, or on sexual moral issues in particular, unless one is untainted by any history of wrong deeds or desires... Jesus is confronting us, however, with the need for consistency in passing judgment. The sword of judgment is double-edged. In judging others we judge ourselves, and an unwillingness to pronounce judgment on ourselves undercuts our right to pronounce it on others. Put more generally, God’s call to all of us, all of the time, is to live holy, godly lives. Any deviation from that should concern us, as much in ourselves as in others.” Pastor Bruce Milne
- **Summary:** “All Christian disciples have to come to terms with a society where pressures towards promiscuity are subtle and unrelenting. In that context this story is first of all a plea for understanding. Blanket condemnation gets no support from this passage. True, the pulpit needs urgently and repeatedly to clarify the Christian norm of sexual sanctity and commend its benefits, not least the honouring of the God, who’s will these standards reflect. In its handling of the individual who has failed, however, the church in its pastoral mission needs to move with the greatest sensitivity and understanding. Secondly, we need to declare tirelessly the reality of God’s forgiving grace. It is surely a remarkable fact that he who is the embodiment of divine holiness, the ‘I AM’ who met the people of God at Sinai in fire and thunder (Ex. 19:16ff.), should say to a self-confessed sinner with the guilt of the broken commandment heavy on her conscience, neither do I condemn you...The turning of water into wine, the healing of a dying lad by a word, the feeding of five thousand and more with a snack lunch, the walking on a storm-tossed sea; none of these, nor all of them together, compares with this, that Jesus said...In this sentence, and in the heart of mercy which lay behind it, is all our hope and all our salvation forever. Thirdly, Jesus summons the woman to a new obedience to the law—Go now and leave your life of sin. Jesus upheld the law here, even to the point of setting in motion the application of its judgments...while his forgiving the woman is not conditional on repentance, he clearly sees her repentance as the natural outcome of it...To be able to say neither do I condemn you cost Jesus the hell of Calvary. To receive the Lord’s mercy means living henceforth for the Lord’s glory. ‘Mercy from God calls for life unto God.’” Pastor Bruce Milne

#### **Articles/Songs/Videos:**

#### **Helpful thoughts for discussion leaders:**

1. Go for a single, not a home run...don’t drag the night out; realize more people = less deep sharing.
2. Keep discussion around 30mins. Once you hit the “sweet spot”, spend your time there.



## **Challenge Questions**

*Review the BIG IDEA: Jesus clarified His Father's intentions.*

**-Simple questions...**What is God teaching you? What are you going to do about it? How will it help you love & serve others?

### **Preparation questions for John 7:53-8:11.**

- What were the Pharisees right about in this passage?
- In what ways did Jesus uphold His Father's laws in this passage?
- Why do you think the Pharisees eventually walked away one by one?
- What do you think Jesus meant by, "Let him who is without sin among you be the first to throw a stone at her"?

### **Application questions from John 7:53-8:11.**

- Explain why we must never view Jesus as tolerant towards sin or as a liberal interpreter of God's law. What made Him such an expert on God's intentions, and how could He have been in such agreement with God's Law while still offering things like mercy and forgiveness?
- Ever been right about something but wrong in how you approached it? While Scripture urges us to make sound judgements, what do texts like this one (or Matthew 7:5, or Matthew 18) urge us to do first?
- How should a forgiven Christian's response to sin drastically differ from the world's response? In what ways might this story influence our problem solving or our attitude towards those who have been incarcerated for heinous crimes? How do graces like mercy and forgiveness give us opportunities to participate in redemption?
- Does your healthy commitment to truth and what's right ever morph into obsessing about people like some kind of "private investigator"? How do you normally deal with people who fall short of your expectations (religious or otherwise)? In what ways does God's ongoing restraint teach us how to treat other sinners?

### **Here are some great resources for digging deeper into community group life...**

How life together looks <http://austinstone.org/stories/film/item/140-missional-community-lukes-story>

Rethinking what we do [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kvWnXYSELF4&feature=player\\_embedded](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kvWnXYSELF4&feature=player_embedded)

Numerous articles to provoke thought <http://toddengstrom.com/archives/>

What groups of 2-3 might look like <http://toddengstrom.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/03/LTG-Overview.pdf>