

Friend of Sinners John 7:53-8:11 www.bible-sermons.org October 26, 2008

We have come to a passage in John that was most likely not part of the original Gospel of John. Scholars come to that conclusion for several reasons. It is not in the earliest and best manuscripts or papyri. In the manuscripts that it does appear, it is found inserted at various places in John, earlier in chapter 7 and even at the end of the Gospel. It is even found added onto the Gospel of Luke in one manuscript. When the early church fathers commented on the Gospel of John, they skipped from 7:52 directly to 8:12 as if the story was not even there. The language and style is different from the rest of John with 14 unique words not found in the rest of John. So how did it end up in its present location, and is it a true account?

All I can offer is an opinion. I present this opinion on the basis of my belief that God sovereignly protected His word. When you consider the number of attempts to destroy the Bible and the many predictions that it would eventually be disregarded, it is evident to me that God had a hand in making it the best seller with the most translations. No other work of literature even comes close. That is consistent with an all-powerful and loving God that wants His message conveyed to mankind. On the basis of that conviction and the physical evidence, I would suggest that it is a true story that was passed throughout the church orally but never written down by one of the Gospel writers. Somewhere along the way, a scribe decided to insert it here in the Gospel of John. Perhaps it did take place at this visit to the Feast of Tabernacles. I believe it is a true account, the Word of God, and that it was added here by the guiding hand of Providence.

The story is certainly a radical one, especially for the religious first century Jew. It begins with the Jewish leaders going to their homes while Jesus returned to the Mount of Olives. Jesus did not have a home in Jerusalem, and apparently the only one that would provide something for Him was the owner of a cave with an olive press on the Mount of Olives. Luke tells us of the same pattern of going in the evening to Mount of Olives and back to the Temple courts early in the morning to teach. (Luke 21:37-38) This fits with the earlier statement that no one would speak openly about Him for fear of the Jews. That fear would certainly keep them from giving Him shelter. It also fits with the loneliness of Jesus during these last six months of His earthly life. Here is the Giver of Life and no one offers a roof to protect Him on the cool fall nights. (Matthew 8:20)

² *At dawn he appeared again in the temple courts, where all the people gathered around him, and he sat down to teach them.* This is what is driving the Jewish leaders crazy. (Matthew 27:18) This uneducated self-proclaimed rabbi is a hit with the people. Everyone wants to hear Him. If one of them said they would be teaching at dawn there might be a dozen people. Jesus shows up and all the people can't wait to hear what He has to say. To make matters worse, much of

Commented [notes1]: Luke 21:37-38 (NIV)
37 Each day Jesus was teaching at the temple, and each evening he went out to spend the night on the hill called the Mount of Olives, 38 and all the people came early in the morning to hear him at the temple.

Commented [notes2]: 20 Jesus replied, "Foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has no place to lay his head."
Matt 8:20 (NIV)

Commented [notes3]: 18 For he knew it was out of envy that they had handed Jesus over to him.
Matt 27:18 (NIV)

what He says makes the leaders look bad. (Matthew 23:5) He exposed their hypocrisy and pointed out the errors in the way they interpreted the Law. (Mark 7:13) They wanted to stop Him, but had failed to convince the Temple guards to arrest Him. They had to come up with a reason. They needed to trap Him saying something contrary to the Law, so they hatched a plan.

Commented [notes4]: "Everything they do is done for men to see: They make their phylacteries wide and the tassels on their garments long; Matt 23:5 (NIV)

Commented [notes5]: 13 Thus you nullify the word of God by your tradition that you have handed down. And you do many things like that." Mark 7:13 (NIV)

Jesus sat down to preach. That was typical of Jewish tradition. They stood to read the Scriptures and sat to expound on them. That was probably so the listener would be sure to know which was Scripture and which was opinion.

The leaders gathered to discuss a trap. Someone knew of a neighbor with a weakness. Perhaps it was a lonely woman attracted to a certain man, or maybe one of them had taken advantage of a woman. They knew Jesus was merciful toward sinners. People even called Him the friend of sinners. (Luke 7:34) That was another thing that annoyed them about Jesus. They condemned sinners and wanted to keep them away from the Temple and from themselves. In their minds, sinners were what was wrong with the nation and probably the reason Rome was ruling over them. So they thought they could catch Jesus being merciful to a sinner in contrast with what the Law prescribed. Someone must have suggested using this woman to trap Jesus.

Commented [notes6]: 34 The Son of Man came eating and drinking, and you say, 'Here is a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and "sinners.'" Luke 7:34 (NIV)

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?" The Greek wording implies that they caught this woman in the act of committing adultery. They somehow knew the time and place, which is very suspicious. And where is the man? The Law declared that both the man and woman should be stoned. (Leviticus 20:10)

Commented [notes7]: Leviticus 20:10 (YLT) 10 `And a man who committeth adultery with a man's wife--who committeth adultery with the wife of his neighbour--the adulterer and the adulteress are surely put to death.

According to verse two, this must have been taking place in the Court of the Gentiles. The leaders would never bring an adulteress into the Temple itself. Contrary to what you see in the movies, this was a stone paved area, probably in one of the colonnaded sides of that huge courtyard. You can visualize the leaders pushing their way through the crowd to get up front to where Jesus is sitting and shoving her in front of Him. It was confrontation fraught with tension. Someone was about to die. See the woman standing there shaking in fear, her head hung low, as Jesus stood to meet the showdown head on.

They reminded Jesus of the required judgment in the Law for this sin, stoning. Since He is always preaching, "You have heard it was said... but I say to you...", they challenged Him to directly contradict the Law of Moses. Then they could nab Him. They thought they were on the threshold of victory over Jesus. This was the moment they had been waiting for. "Come on friend of sinners, what do you say?" (Luke 15:2)

Commented [notes8]: 2 But the Pharisees and the teachers of the law muttered, "This man welcomes sinners and eats with them." Luke 15:2 (NIV)

⁶ They were using this question as a trap, in order to have a basis for accusing him. But Jesus bent down and started to write on the ground with his finger. It was a trap! (Luke 11:53-54) Surely the Spirit revealed to Jesus that it was a trap. Instead of firing back at their hypocrisy or asking where the man was, Jesus bent down to write on the ground. Remember, Jews sit to teach. Jesus is about to teach a lesson to the leaders, the woman, the crowd, and to you and me.

Commented [notes9]: 53 When Jesus left there, the Pharisees and the teachers of the law began to oppose him fiercely and to besiege him with questions, 54 waiting to catch him in something he might say. Luke 11:53-54 (NIV)

How did He write on the ground since the ground was stone? That is why the movies always have this confrontation on a dusty street. I don't know, but it says He wrote with His finger. Maybe he pressed so hard he wrote in his own blood? Did He do so out of anger that the leaders of His people were trying to destroy life and not save it? (Luke 6:9) It seems like John would have mentioned something that shocking.

Commented [notes10]: 9 Then Jesus said to them, "I ask you, which is lawful on the Sabbath: to do good or to do evil, to save life or to destroy it?" Luke 6:9 (NIV)

And what did He write? It's only a guess, but I think it may have been something out of the Law, something like the commandments around that commandment to not commit adultery. Maybe He wrote the ninth, ¹⁶ "You shall not give false testimony against your neighbor. Exodus 20:16 (NIV) If they didn't tell about the trap they set for her, they weren't telling the whole story and were therefore guilty of being false witnesses. Or maybe it was the tenth, ¹⁷ "You shall not covet your neighbor's house. You shall not covet your neighbor's wife, or his manservant or maidservant, his ox or donkey, (his classic '57 Chevy or his speed boat- authors addition) or anything that belongs to your neighbor." Exodus 20:17 (NIV) None of us can claim we are innocent of that one. Perhaps some of those religious leaders coveted the adulteress. Or maybe Jesus wrote from the prophets, ¹⁷ do not plot evil against your neighbor, and do not love to swear falsely. I hate all this," declares the LORD. Zechariah 8:17 (NIV) Just guessing. He wrote something, and whatever it was spoke volumes. Maybe the author left it out so we could fill in the one that convicts us the most. (Galatians 3:24)

Commented [notes11]: 24 So the law was put in charge to lead us to Christ that we might be justified by faith. Gal 3:24 (NIV)

⁷ When they kept on questioning him, he straightened up and said to them, "If any one of you is without sin, let him be the first to throw a stone at her." They kept at it. "Come on Jesus. What should we do? Whatever He wrote, they didn't let it convict them enough to give it up. This was their chance and they weren't going to give in so easily. (John 11:48)

Commented [notes12]: 48 If we let him go on like this, everyone will believe in him, and then the Romans will come and take away both our place and our nation." John 11:48 (NIV)

While Jesus was sitting, I'm sure He was asking the Father how to respond. Remember that the Jewish person stands to read the Scriptures. Jesus stood to proclaim the Word from the Father. "If any one of you is without sin, let him be the first to throw a stone at her." At a Jewish stoning, the accuser was the first to throw a stone. (Deuteronomy 13:9) Jesus changed that. He asked the sinless one to throw the first stone. He didn't deny the Law. He didn't justify or make light of her sin. He just asked the accusers to look into their own hearts and ask themselves if they were sinless. (Romans 3:10-12)

Commented [notes13]: 9 You must certainly put him to death. Your hand must be the first in putting him to death, and then the hands of all the people. Deut 13:9 (NIV)

Commented [notes14]: 10 As it is written: "There is no one righteous, not even one; 11 there is no one who understands, no one who seeks God. 12 All have turned away, they have together become worthless; there is no one who does good, not even one." Romans 3:10-12 (NIV)

There is a lot of verbal rock throwing in our day. There is a lot of that swearing falsely. It isn't an outright lie. It's just not telling the whole story. It's slanting the facts to make them say what we want. We don't want to kill anyone. We just want to ruin them. I think the Lord still hates that. (Proverbs 6:16-19) If you are without sin, go ahead. Ask for justice to be served. But if you are a sinner, and if you are human you are a sinner, then you better drop that stone. It's the one finger pointing at someone and three pointing back. It's recognizing that we all fall short of the glory of God. (Romans 3:23) That means we are all so short of God's perfect standard that all deserve to be stoned. Jesus said if you've looked on a woman to lust after her, you've committed adultery. (Matthew 5:28) And women, if you've gossiped about some one, you've thrown the stone. (Proverbs 26:20)

Commented [notes15]: 16 There are six things the LORD hates, seven that are detestable to him: 17 haughty eyes, a lying tongue, hands that shed innocent blood, 18 a heart that devises wicked schemes, feet that are quick to rush into evil, 19 a false witness who pours out lies and a man who stirs up dissension among brothers. Prov 6:16-19 (NIV)

Commented [notes16]: 23 for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, Romans 3:23 (NIV)

Commented [notes17]: 28 But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart. Matt 5:28 (NIV)

Commented [notes18]: 20 Without wood a fire goes out; without gossip a quarrel dies down. Prov 26:20 (NIV)

Commented [notes19]: As I have observed, those who plow evil and those who sow trouble reap it. Job 4:8 (NIV)

Commented [notes20]: 7 I thought, 'Age should speak; advanced years should teach wisdom.' Job 32:7 (NIV)

⁸ Again he stooped down and wrote on the ground. He delivered the Father's words and sat back down to let them think about it. What did He write this time? Maybe something about sowing and reaping? (Job 4:8) The power and authority with which He spoke had its intended affect.

⁹ 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. With age often comes wisdom. (Job 32:7) They had failed to catch Jesus in some contradiction with the Law. Even worse, they were convicted that they were acting in a way that was contrary to the Law. In attempting to catch Jesus, they were caught. The prideful young lawyers were the last to leave. Seeing the older ones walk away must have convicted them as much as Jesus' words.

The woman was still standing there, wondering if her head was about to be smashed by a rock. Time passed. She peaked around to see her accusers were gone. Had she escaped? ¹⁰ Jesus straightened up and asked her, "Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?" The accuser has to be the first to throw the stone, and the accusers are gone. She is safe. The Friend of Sinners rescues another sinner from the trap that was set for her and in doing so, escaped the trap they set for Him. Only the wisdom of God can do that.

¹¹ "No one, sir," she said. "Then neither do I condemn you," Jesus declared. "Go now and leave your life of sin." How could Jesus not condemn a sinner? (Leviticus 19:2) Because He will bear her sin on the cross. Righteousness demands justice, but mercy takes the penalty of justice for us. ¹⁰ Love and faithfulness meet together; righteousness and peace kiss each other. Psalms 85:10 (NIV)

Commented [notes21]: 2 "Speak to the entire assembly of Israel and say to them: 'Be holy because I, the LORD your God, am holy. Lev 19:2 (NIV)

We should be very careful to see that Jesus did not condone or excuse adultery. He told her to "Go now and leave your life of sin." She just escaped death. Time to make some changes! (Psalm 68:20)

Commented [notes22]: 20 Our God is a God who saves; from the Sovereign LORD comes escape from death. Psalms 68:20 (NIV)

We should realize that this is a story about every one of us. You may not be an adulterer, but every one of us has been a rebel against God. Everyone has at some time gone our own way and thumbed our nose at God. We are traitors to our loving and good Creator. The soul that sins must die. (Ezekiel 18:4) The wages of sin is death. (Romans 6:23)

Commented [notes23]: For every living soul belongs to me, the father as well as the son--both alike belong to me. The soul who sins is the one who will die. Ezek 18:4 (NIV)

In the heavenlies, Satan drags us all before Jesus and throws us up front. (Job 1:9) We stand there, like this woman, knowing we have been caught. We know he knows exactly what we have done and is about to declare it to our just and holy Maker. We hang our head in shame as we listen to the litany of crimes, hatred, slander, selfishness, rebellion, lust, greed, covetousness, and on and on. We know what the Law demands.

Commented [notes24]: 23 For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord. Romans 6:23 (NIV)

Commented [notes25]: 9 "Does Job fear God for nothing?" Satan replied. Job 1:9 (NIV)

The righteous judge stoops down and in His own blood writes, "Paid in full! Forgiven!" (John 19:30) Then He tells our accuser, no, He commands our accuser to take a hike. He reminds him of all our sins placed upon Jesus on the cross. Then to our amazement, He declares us righteous. (2Corinthians 5:21) Satan goes sulking off, foiled again.

Commented [notes26]: 30 When he had received the drink, Jesus said, "It is finished." With that, he bowed his head and gave up his spirit. John 19:30 (NIV)

Commented [notes27]: 21 God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God. 2 Cor 5:21 (NIV)

Then Jesus asks us, "Where is your accuser?" And we say, "You told him where to go!" And then we hear the most precious words we could ever hear. "*Neither do I condemn you.*" What sweet relief! Do you know how it feels to hear those words? If you don't, this morning you can come to Jesus and hear, "*Neither do I condemn you.*" Right with God! No fear of wrath! I want to hear those words again and again. (Romans 8:1-2)

Commented [notes28]: Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, 2 because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit of life set me free from the law of sin and death. Romans 8:1-2 (NIV)

That is not all He says though. He tells us also to, "*Go now and leave your life of sin.*" You just escaped certain eternal death. Don't you think it's time to make a change? If He would take your punishment for you, don't you want to please His heart by leaving your life of sin? (Romans 2:4)

Commented [notes29]: 4 Or do you show contempt for the riches of his kindness, tolerance and patience, not realizing that God's kindness leads you toward repentance? Romans 2:4 (NIV)

I wonder what happened to that lady. Did she become a follower of Jesus? Did she allow her life to be transformed or did she go back to her old patterns? It is hard for us to imagine that after that encounter she would go back to a life of sin. It is hard for me to imagine anyone who has had the same kind of encounter that I've been talking about go back to their old ways. God help us!

God help us see our lives from this perspective. We were standing there waiting for the first rock to strike, and Jesus wrote in His own blood, "Forgiven!" He took our punishment upon Himself, and stood up to our accuser, even when we didn't deserve it. (Romans 5:8-9) Seems like that kind of love demands that we go and sin no more. Anything less would be hardhearted and cold. Don't you think so?

Commented [notes30]: 8 But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us. 9 Since we have now been justified by his blood, how much more shall we be saved from God's wrath through him! Romans 5:8-9 (NIV)