

# GOSPEL OF JOHN

## Encounter Jesus – The Son of the Living God

### *Caught in the Act!*

Today's lesson looks into what happened when someone was 'caught in the act' of doing something wrong and that person was brought by the scribes and Pharisees to Jesus. When I was growing up, my mother taught me that it does not matter whether someone sees me doing something wrong because the Lord always knows. There are numerous verses that tell us this is true. I will just give you one. **Job 34:21 (ESV)** <sup>21</sup> *"For his eyes are on the ways of a man, and he sees all his steps."*

Before we begin our study, let's talk about the context of today's passage since a little controversy surrounds it. It's not a controversy that will shake our faith or discredit God's Word. However, being aware of biblical controversies helps us to speak to others with doubts concerning certain scripture passages

In most Bibles, **John 7:53–8:11** is either set off in brackets or has a footnote attached. The reason is that some New Testament scholars do not think this passage was part of the original Gospel of **John**, and was added later. Our English Bibles are translated from the original languages. The New Testament was first written in Greek. Existing manuscripts were used to compile a Greek New Testament; then our English translations were made from that.

This particular story is not found in some ancient manuscripts and it is sometimes put in another place in scripture. Some say the story's 'style and vocabulary' are different from John's writing.

However, Dr. F.F. Bruce calls it "a fragment of authentic Gospel material regardless of where it is placed." Augustine writes that it was omitted because of a prudish fear that Jesus' forgiveness would encourage adultery.

So, are we going to study the passage or skip it? You know the answer! We are going to study it. It is a story of Jesus. The Bible is God-breathed and it would not be in His Word if the Lord did not want us to know about God's great forgiveness. The Feast of Tabernacles was over. The people went home but Jesus went to the Mount of Olives.

**Read John 7:53-8:6 (ESV)** <sup>53</sup> *[[They went each to his own house, <sup>1</sup> but Jesus went to the Mount of Olives. <sup>2</sup> Early in the morning he came again to the temple. All the people came to him, and he sat down and taught them. <sup>3</sup> The scribes and the Pharisees brought a woman who had been caught in adultery, and placing her in the midst <sup>4</sup> they said to him, "Teacher, this woman has been caught in the act of adultery. <sup>5</sup> Now in the Law Moses commanded us to stone such women. So what do you say?" <sup>6</sup> 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.*

*They went each to his own house, but*—Ironside writes, “The afternoon had passed away. The evening shadows were falling and the company broke up and every man went unto his own house, *but Jesus*—Jesus, the Creator of all things, had no house to go to. He went out to the mount of Olives.... Jesus, a stranger in the world His own hands had made” **Luke 9:58 (ESV)** <sup>58</sup> *And Jesus said to him, “Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head.”*

Early in the morning, Jesus was back to His ministry of teaching when suddenly there was a disturbance and the scribes and Pharisees came dragging a struggling woman into the midst of the group of learners.

These men knew the Old Testament scripture. **Leviticus 20:10 (ESV)** <sup>10</sup> *“If a man commits adultery with the wife of his neighbor, both the adulterer and the adulteress shall surely be put to death. We do not know if this law was ever carried out. If so, it is not recorded in scripture. We do know from the Old Testament that King David was forgiven for his sin of adultery and also his sin of murder. Where was the man who was ‘caught in the act’? In today’s era of the Me Too movement, we know the crowd would certainly have been focused on the man’s involvement. However, there is no mention of the man being brought to Jesus because that did not happen.*

These ‘religious’ leaders were determined to put Jesus into a position where He would have to take a stand against the law of Moses, or else He would have to condemn a poor sinner who needed His help. This was the reason why they were dragging this woman before Him—a woman taken in adultery.

They must have stayed awake nights thinking of ways to trap Him – thinking out all the angles. If He said, “Yes, the woman must be stoned!” then never again would a poor sinner come weeping at His feet. Never again would someone who had been overpowered by temptation and sorrow, ever dare to go to Jesus for forgiveness. But, if He said, “No, the woman should not be stoned!” then they could accuse Him of breaking the Law of Moses!

They thought they had trapped Him, but that was impossible! The Message paraphrases this way: They stood her in plain sight of everyone and said, “Teacher, this woman was caught red-handed in the act of adultery. Moses, in the Law, gives orders to stone such persons. What do you say?

They were self-righteous to their core! And how does Jesus answer? *Jesus bent down and wrote with his finger on the ground* as though He didn’t hear them. Why did He do that? For some of us it is hard to not immediately answer a direct question. Here we see from the example of Jesus in this difficult situation, it is not always required of us to give an immediate response.

This is the only place in the Gospels where Jesus wrote anything, and we all want to know what He wrote! Here’s the answer: Nobody knows! And, if He had wanted us to know, the words would have been recorded in God’s Word for all to see. Most likely none of His actual writing was preserved because people would have been worshiping His handwriting instead of worshiping Him. We are so often inclined to place more emphasis on the physical than the spiritual.

These men were familiar with the Scriptures, but it is possible to be familiar with the Scriptures and still have a hard heart towards others. Jesus writing on the ground parallels *Jeremiah 17:13 (ESV)*<sup>13</sup> *O LORD, the hope of Israel, all who forsake you shall be put to shame; those who turn away from you shall be written in the earth, for they have forsaken the LORD, the fountain of living water.* As the religious leaders gathered around Him, He stoops down and writes on the earth because these accusers were forsaking the fountain of living water. (This is why I personally believe that this particular story goes right where it is in the narrative.) Jesus had just spoken about living water prior to this encounter.

These ‘religious’ leaders are hypocritical in their pretence of being passionate about the law when they really are just working to put Jesus in a corner where they can discredit Him!

**Read John 8:7-8 (ESV)**<sup>7</sup> *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.”*<sup>8</sup> *And once more he bent down and wrote on the ground.*

*Let him who is without sin among you be the first to throw a stone at her.* From this passage we learn that we do not accuse others unless we first thoroughly search our own hearts and minds to make certain that we are pure in every possible aspect. *Matthew 7:3 (ESV)*<sup>3</sup> *Why do you see the speck that is in your brother’s eye, but do not notice the log that is in your own eye?*

And then the scripture tells us that Jesus began writing again. I have already said that we don’t know what Jesus wrote. However, I love the way J. Vernon McGee dramatizes what might have happened as Jesus wrote. McGee says: “Perhaps He wrote the name of a woman living in Rome. One old pious Pharisee had had an affair in Rome when he was a young fellow. His wife didn’t know about it; no one in Jerusalem knew about it; but our Lord knew that old rascal. As He just wrote the name of the woman, the old Pharisee came over and saw it -- and suddenly remembered that he had another appointment. Perhaps one of the scribes made regular trips to Ephesus, a great sinning place, to a certain address over there which Jesus wrote in the sand. The scribe looked at it and said, “Oh, my gracious!” He left hurriedly. Another scribe may have left a girl in Galilee who was pregnant. He didn’t marry her, and he didn’t think anyone knew. Our Lord wrote the name of the girl and the scribe’s name with it.”

Of course, this is all speculation on McGee’s part. Jesus might have been drawing out the plan for a piece of furniture. Talk about having a piece of His handwriting. Wouldn’t it be good to have chair or table that Jesus built? But, no, He built something more practical for each of us – that is a home in heaven and a way to get there – *Romans 10:9 (ESV)*<sup>9</sup> *because, if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.*

**Read John 8:9-11 (ESV)**<sup>9</sup> *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.*<sup>10</sup> *Jesus stood up and said to her, “Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?”*<sup>11</sup> *She said, “No one, Lord.” And Jesus said, “Neither do I condemn you; go, and from now on sin no more.”*]]

All of the accusers of the woman ‘caught in the act’ had gone away including the man who had to have been ‘caught in the act’ with her. Was he a casual fling or was he someone she loved dearly? Either way – now, she was alone standing before Jesus. Here she stood in front of the Sinless One feeling dirty and ashamed.

Jesus was the only sinless one at the temple, and, instead of condemning the woman ‘caught in the act’, He looked ahead to His work on the cross and offered her life. Jesus gives us a living example of how we should use every possible opportunity to forgive others and to reach out with the gospel and the love of Christ, always remembering that we, too, are sinners in need of the Savior.

*Jesus stood up and said to her, “Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?”* This was the first time that anyone had addressed her. Notice how she addresses Him – *no one Lord*. She recognized something superior about Jesus. Imagine the woman’s surprise when *Jesus said, Neither do I condemn you...*

Make no mistake even though Jesus refused to condemn the woman, He did not condone her sin. He also said *go, and from now on sin no more*. Let me emphasize Jesus’ words again: *go, and from now on sin no more*.

We currently live in a world where ‘anything goes’, a world where everyone has their own truth – and like in times of old – everyone does what is right in His own eyes (**Judges 17:6**). These beliefs are not the road to heaven and everyone is not going to get there somehow. It does not matter who says it. The Lord is the Great Forgiver and it is His heart’s desire for everyone to be saved. **Romans 10:13 (ESV)**<sup>13</sup> *For “everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.”* The key is to call upon the name of Jesus. **Acts 4:12 (ESV)**<sup>12</sup> *And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name [Jesus] under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.”*

It is not just this woman who has been ‘caught in the act’. It started with Adam and Eve and we carry on the tradition. We have their sin nature and we are bent to sinning and we have been ‘caught in the act’. However, we need not despair – forgiveness is available.

Today, many doors have an electronic code in order to enter. We have the entrance code to heaven. It is the name of Jesus. But, the door will not open unless we call upon His precious name. Don’t get ‘caught in the act’. Jesus is the door to heaven and we enter through Him. It is like chorus says,

I’m forgiven because you were forsaken  
I’m accepted, You were condemned  
I’m alive and well  
Your spirit is within me  
Because you died and rose again!