

Bi132 The Gospels I

Lesson Bi132-32 Caught in Adultery

Do you realize that marriage is God's idea? Christian marriages create a safe and loving place for husbands, wives, and children. To disrupt this harmony is a serious issue. Unfaithfulness substitutes other things for godly love for a spouse. It often results in women becoming objects to be used by men. They are no longer viewed as people made in God's image. In today's story, the leaders opposing Jesus used a woman and her situation to try and discredit Jesus. They didn't care that the woman had already become a victim. Their only desire was to use her to create a charge against Jesus, so they could get rid of him.

Jesus had spent about six months teaching in Galilee and Samaria on his way to Jerusalem at the time of the Feast of Tabernacles. There he taught in the temple and addressed the multitudes. After praying overnight on the Mount of Olives, at dawn he came again to the temple courts. Here all the people gathered around him, and he sat down to teach them. The teachers of the law and the Pharisees brought in a woman caught in adultery. They made her stand before the group saying, "Teacher, this woman was caught in the act of adultery. In the Law Moses commanded us to stone such women. Now what do you say?"

In this story there are many unanswered questions. For instance, how likely was it that a crowd of religious men actually saw this adultery taking place? Or, that it possibly happened just as Jesus was teaching nearby? Where was the guilty man in this situation; why did the accusers allow the man to escape but not the woman? Moses taught that both people should be stoned, not just the female! The law required two eye witnesses to the actual act. Rumors were not sufficient to prove guilt.

The Pharisees' purpose was to accuse Jesus using his own words. They wanted to hear what Jesus would *say*! They used this question only as a trap, in order to have a basis for accusing him. If he said to stone her, he would be violating Roman law which did not allow capital punishment by the Jews. If he said not to stone her, he would be violating God's law.

In the story Jesus refused to be trapped by them, so he didn't *say* anything. Instead he bent down and started to write on the ground with his finger. 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" (John 8:1-7).

Many have wondered what Jesus wrote in the dirt. It is possible that he wrote nothing! We are not told the other questions they asked Jesus, because he didn't answer them either. He just kept writing in the dirt. He was probably giving them time to consider their response to his statement. That statement meant, "If there is anyone here who is sinless, let them throw the first stone!" The law stated that the witnesses, who saw the crime, had to throw the first stones. The accusers had to start the execution—no one else could do it. This gave those with the loudest cries against the woman the time to consider what had really happened. They needed to remember that God would judge them if everything in their story was not totally true.

Again he stooped down and wrote on the ground. 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. Jesus straightened up and asked her, “Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?”

“No one, sir,” she said.

“Then neither do I condemn you,” Jesus declared. “Go now and leave your life of sin.”

Jesus does not excuse her sin or make it acceptable because of how she was treated by the religious leaders. He asks her to do what he asked everyone who heard his message to do. He told her to repent, to turn away from her life of sin. The Bible does not tell us her response. But what about the other people in the story, the male adulterer and the religious leaders? What decisions did they make after this encounter? We don’t know, only that the religious leaders continued to try and find an accusation against Jesus.

This story is **important** because it shows the difference between the religious leaders and Jesus. They were willing to condemn to death a woman bound by sin in order to trap Jesus. By contrast, Jesus was willing to show mercy to someone trapped in sin who was being treated unjustly.

The **main truth** of this story is that Jesus is more concerned with people being set free from sin than condemning them for their past.

Let’s **review** this lesson—

1. What was the purpose of the people who brought the adulteress to Jesus?
A. [Pause for 5 seconds.] If you said their purpose was to accuse Jesus using his own words, you are correct.
2. Concerning the charge of adultery against the woman by the religious leaders, who was missing that should have been present?
A. [Pause for 5 seconds.] If you said the person missing was the man committing adultery, you are correct.
3. What did Jesus say that caused the accusers of the woman to eventually leave him and the woman alone?
A. [Pause 5 seconds.] If you said Jesus told them, “If there is anyone here who is sinless, let them throw the first stone,” you are correct.

Your **assignment** for this lesson is to learn the story so that you can tell it to someone from memory. After you tell the story ask this question, “What is the more important lesson for us to learn here? Is it the last statement of Jesus to the religious leaders about only sinless people throwing stones, or his last statement to the woman that he did not condemn her? While Christ does not want us to judge or throw stones at others, the more important lesson is that he did not condemn the sinful woman. Instead he invited her to follow him away from a life of sin.