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John 8:1 - 8:11



Gospel of John - Steve Gregg

In this commentary on John 8:1-11, Steve Gregg discusses the historical background of the passage and various theories regarding its transmission and placement in the Gospel of John. He proposes that the story may have originally been part of the Synoptic Gospels' description of Jesus' final week, but was later added to John's Gospel. Gregg also explores the possible location of the scene and the motives behind the actions of the scribes and Pharisees. He ultimately highlights the powerful message of forgiveness and humanity found in Jesus' interaction with the woman caught in adultery.

Transcript

Let's turn to John chapter 8. One of the favorite stories about Jesus' life is found in the first 12 verses, actually first 11 verses of this chapter. And what's ironic about it is it's a classic. I mean, it's such a classic story about Jesus, but it's not found in many of the older manuscripts.

Which has raised questions in scholars' minds as to whether it was part of John's Gospel originally. There are some English Bibles that place it in brackets. They leave it where it is, but they place it in brackets with the footnote that this is not found in some of the oldest manuscripts.

There are some that put it off as an appendix at the end of the Gospel of John, and some even place it elsewhere in order to communicate that they don't really believe that it was originally part of John's Gospel, at least not in this location. There are over 900 Greek manuscripts that contain it in this location, but the most ancient Greek manuscripts do not. Now, there's a lot of different kinds of manuscript evidence about this particular story, because some, as I said, about 900 manuscripts do include it here, but they're not the earliest and therefore not the manuscripts that many scholars trust the most.

And yet there's others that place it somewhere else. They place it in another location. In fact, there's even some manuscripts, one family of manuscripts, that place this story, these verses, at the end of Luke 21, which might seem strange.

But actually, when you read this story, it's not strange. It actually sounds like a story from the Synoptic Gospels. For example, you find the expression, the scribes and Pharisees.

The scribes, other than here, are not mentioned at all in John. And the term scribes and Pharisees is very common in the Synoptic Gospels. In Matthew, Mark, and Luke, we read often of the scribes and Pharisees, but never in the Gospel of John.

We do read of the Pharisees elsewhere in the Gospel of John, but never the scribes. And so the expression scribes and Pharisees is a typically Synoptic kind of phrase, not very typically Johannine, or not typical John. Another thing is that this is a story that tells about the scribes and Pharisees coming to test Jesus with a difficult dilemma in order to find fault with him.

This is something that the Synoptic Gospels describe as the tact of the scribes and Pharisees in the final week, the Passion Week, of Jesus' life. In fact, if you look over at Luke chapter 21, just for a moment, Luke chapter 21 is the place where a few manuscripts actually place this story. And I'm not saying that it belongs here, but it certainly fits here very well.

Because Luke 21, this is during the Passion Week, in verses 37 and 38, it says, And in the daytime he was teaching in the temple, but at night he went out and stayed on the mount called Olivet. Then early in the morning all the people came to him in the temple to hear him. So it's at that point that some manuscripts actually place the story that we're about to read from John chapter 8, they place it after Luke 21, 38.

But you'll notice that these two verses at the end of Luke 21 describe Jesus' pattern of behavior during the Passion Week. He would stay at night on the Mount of Olives, and he would come in the morning and sit in the temple and teach, and people would come and listen to him. That's what we find actually going on.

Notice John 8, 1, But early in the morning he came again to the temple, and all the people came to him, and he sat down and taught them. It's very close to, almost verbatim, to what Luke 21 says in those verses we were looking at. And so some have thought that this really fits better into a context such as Luke 21, and that the manuscripts that preserve it there might be preserving it in its original location.

But somehow in the history of transmission of manuscripts, it somehow got transposed over into John's Gospel, where it was not originally a part. It doesn't really matter too much if we can figure out where the story originally stood. Almost all scholars are agreed it's an authentic story from the life of Jesus.

In fact, it's possible that it was a story that survived independently of the four Gospels for some time, and then because the early Christians knew it to be a true story, they

sought to insert it in the places they wished to do so. And some put it here in this part of John, some put it in Luke, and so forth. It might be a story that was not originally part of any of the four Gospels, but was just as authentic as the stories in the Gospels, and was preserved orally until it was inserted variously into different places in the Gospel tradition.

In any case, I'm going to proceed on the assumption that it's a true story. It seems unlikely that one of the most amazing, most beloved stories, one in which Jesus' genius and poise and composure are illustrated probably as much as in any place in the Gospels, may be the very most, may be the greatest example that that would somehow be something that somebody made up. Now, there are stories that people made up about Jesus.

We know that because we have in the 2nd and 3rd century Gnostic Gospels that have legends about Jesus, but they're kind of magical, weird, not true-to-life kind of stories about Jesus. He does miracles, but they're ridiculous miracles. Not miracles like healing people or doing things that really are helpful, but more like making birds out of clay when he's a child and they turn into real birds and fly away, or striking his playmates dead by cursing them and they supernaturally die.

These are some of the stories that come in the Gnostic Gospels. The kind of stuff of legends that doesn't fit the story of Jesus at all. This hardly has the character of a legend.

It fits like a glove into the narrative of the story of Jesus. It's a case where Jesus places his opponents on the horns of a dilemma. Actually, they place him on the horns of a dilemma, but he turns it back on them.

This is quite typical of the kind of thing that was going on in the Passion Week. Now, we're not at this point in John looking at the Passion Week yet. We have yet to go to chapter, well, later on in chapter 9 and 10, and we're going to be looking at the Feast of Dedication, which is Hanukkah, and that's in December.

It wasn't until the next April that Jesus was crucified. So, regardless what the correct setting of this story is, this is where we encounter it in our present manuscripts of John. And so we'll just treat it without concern about its context or its chronology and just see what it tells us about Jesus.

Actually, the disputed portion begins in the last verse of chapter 7, verse 53, that says, and everyone went to his own house. That's actually part of the block of material that's missing along with the first 11 verses of chapter 8 in many manuscripts. So, this, everyone went to his own house, in its present location, speaks of the conclusion of a dialogue between the chief priests, Pharisees, soldiers, and Nicodemus about the failure of the soldiers to arrest Jesus and them being scolded by the chief priests who had sent

them to do that errand and saying, you know what, are you deceived also? Have any of the rulers of the Jews believed in him? These common people are cursed, they don't even know the law.

But in answer to the question, have any of the rulers of the Jews believed in him? Nicodemus speaks up sheepishly and says, well, you know, I'm not so sure we should condemn this man without hearing his case. And we know, of course, from other material in John that Nicodemus was, in fact, a believer in Jesus. He didn't quite say so, but he did speak up objecting to the unfairness of their condemning Jesus without really giving a thorough examination to the merits of his teaching and what he's doing.

Anyway, that ended up with the Pharisees and scholars scolding Nicodemus, one of their own, and saying, search and look. He said, are you also a Galilean? Search and look, no prophet arises out of Galilee. And that's where we left off last time.

And so if chapter 7, verse 53, properly belongs in this location, we find that everyone going to their own house was simply a conclusion to this unsatisfactory disagreement that they had. They didn't come to any agreement among themselves. And so they just parted and went different ways.

Meanwhile, we see Jesus going himself to the Mount of Olives. Now, I believe it's possible that he camped out on the Mount of Olives from time to time, but he did have friends who lived over there in Bethany, which is just a couple miles there from Jerusalem. And Jesus did sometimes go to Bethany for the night, especially in the final week.

He was staying with his friends Mary and Martha and Lazarus who lived in Bethany. But here it doesn't mention Bethany, and he may have just camped out under the stars on the Mount of Olives at night with his disciples, we assume. We do not read that they are with him at this time, but they usually were.

Early in the morning he came again to the temple, and all the people came to him, and he sat down and taught them. Then the scribes and the Pharisees brought him a woman caught in adultery. And when they had set her in the midst, they said to him, Teacher, this woman was caught in adultery in the very act.

Now Moses, in the law, commanded us that such should be stoned. But what do you say? Now this they said, testing him, that they might have something of which to accuse him. But Jesus stooped down and wrote on the ground with his finger as though he did not hear.

So when they continued asking him, he raised himself up and said to them, He who is without sin among you, let him throw a stone at her first. And again he stooped down and wrote on the ground. Then those who heard it, being convicted of their own conscience, went out one by one, beginning with the oldest even to the last, and Jesus

was left alone and the woman standing in the midst.

When Jesus had raised himself up and saw no one but the woman, he said to her, Woman, where are those accusers of yours? Has no one condemned you? She said, No one, Lord. And Jesus said to her, Neither do I condemn you. Go and sin no more.

Alright, this is a great story, obviously. And it raises questions about a number of things. One of them is what did Jesus write on the ground.

We read twice of him stooping down and writing on the ground. The first time it's mentioned, verse 6, in the New King James, it says, He did so as though he did not hear. That line is missing from the Alexandrian text and therefore its original presence in the passage is disputed.

If it was not there, we have less to go on than if it is there because if in fact he did it as though he did not hear, it means he was not writing anything relevant to the story. He's just ignoring them. He's just doodling.

He was not writing anything of significance that we need to figure out what it was, the mystery of what did Jesus write in the dust on the floor. If he said, I mean if in fact the passage originally said that he wrote as if he didn't hear, then the point is he's ignoring them completely, not writing anything relevant to what they've asked or else he wouldn't be doing it as if he didn't hear. But it is not in all the manuscripts and therefore many people believe that what Jesus wrote was something relevant to this and we'll have to discuss what that could have been since that is a possibility.

We also need to perhaps wonder how it was that this situation got set up as it was. This was in the daytime, we're told. This woman is caught in adultery, apparently in the daytime.

In the very act. Now if someone is caught in the very act there must be two people there. It's not that she was caught afterward and confessed or something and the man who was involved with her was unidentified.

She was caught in the act if the accusation is true and if that's true there was a man involved. Now the law did in fact say that an adulterous woman should be stoned but also said that both partners should be stoned to death. Under the law adultery was a capital crime and both participants were criminals and they both suffered the same fate.

The Pharisees knew this, Jesus knew this, everybody knew this. So it seems strange that they didn't give any explanation of how they caught a man and a woman committing a criminal act and brought only the woman and let the man get away. Now of course one possibility is that the man was more agile and stronger and he broke loose and he was able to run faster and he escaped and so they just let him go and they grabbed her.

That's possible. There's also another possibility I think and this is my speculation. You don't need to put any weight on it at all.

I wouldn't be surprised if the one that was with her was one of them. That is to say not one of them in the crowd but somebody that was one of their friends. In fact I wouldn't even be surprised if they'd set the whole thing up because it says they wanted to test him.

Now if you want to bring a test case like this you've got to catch somebody committing adultery. That's not the easiest thing to do just whenever you want to. Let's just go find someone committing adultery and bring them to Jesus.

Most people who commit adultery are rather secretive about it. It's not as if you can just anytime you want to locate someone in the act of adultery. That's the kind of thing that usually is done cloaked in darkness.

Usually it's done when nobody's likely to find out. How these religious leaders would stumble into a room and find a couple committing adultery is hard to know unless they knew. Unless they maybe even had prior knowledge of it and perhaps they even set it up with maybe one of their guys was the guy that was involved.

I don't know for sure but it was certainly if they wished to do this kind of thing to bring a test like this to Jesus it was certainly fortunate of them to stumble upon this particular act being committed and to make no attempt apparently to condemn the man involved. And more than that when Jesus said he that is without sin among you let him be the first to cast a stone at her many scholars believe that without sin does not mean perfectly sinless because after all it's not necessary for a judge or an executioner to be perfectly sinless in order to carry out his duties. Most scholars believe that when he said let him that is without sin be the first to cast a stone he means whoever's not involved in this sin whoever's not complicit in this would be another way of saying it.

Now there's different ways to see it some scholars think he's saying whoever has never done a sin like this before shouldn't condemn her for doing it but many have felt that the weight of his statement was whoever has not committed this sin, whoever is not involved in this sin, whoever is not an accomplice in this, let him be the first to cast a stone at her. If his words carry that meaning then of course it suggests very strongly that Jesus knew that they had been involved, this was a conspiracy, this was something they had set up they were all involved in this they had brought it about. Now it's not necessary to see it that way this is my own speculation I've never heard anyone suggest that theory but it seems to me that there are elements of the story that would lend themselves to that construction that would explain how they were fortunate enough to find the act in progress how it was that they cared very little about the man's being punished and perhaps how they would have understood Jesus' statement whoever is not guilty of this sin let him be the first to stone her now by the way there is another way

that could be understood even if Jesus' words do mean whoever has not committed this sin because he could mean that his accusers actually had committed adultery on other occasions now we might think he's referring to his teaching on the Sermon on the Mount about whoever looks at a woman to lust after she has committed adultery with her in his heart but we wouldn't expect the Pharisees to be convicted on that basis since they were probably not listening to the Sermon on the Mount which was delivered to Jesus' disciples nor would they necessarily have agreed with him on that it's clear that whatever he said made them feel convicted they knew that they were busted and so from the oldest on down to the last they all kind of faded off into the crowd so it must be or at least it seems like it must be that they understood him to be saying whoever has not committed a capital crime like this may be this very same sin let him be the first to cast a stone at her because it would not be possible to go into a courtroom and say judge you might as well go home because you're not a sinless man you can't condemn these thieves and these robbers and these gang members and these murderers because you're not a sinless man you have to be without sin to do that Jesus never would have said that Jesus did not come to overthrow the government or overthrow the legal system or the criminal justice system what would be the result of that? Criminals would be running loose unchecked and victimizing people all the time this is not what Jesus came to do when Jesus talked about not resisting the evil man and turning the other cheek he's telling his disciples how to respond to people who are hostile to them he's not telling magistrates how to adjudicate when criminals are brought to them he's not saying just let them walk they're evil men you courtrooms you shouldn't be resisting evil well that's what the courtrooms are there for the Bible says that in the New Testament God has ordained governments to punish evil doers Jesus didn't change that and therefore this was actually a criminal case this was a capital crime under the law that a person who committed adultery should be put to death just like a murderer or many other kinds of criminals should be and Jesus would not be saying yeah but there should never be any criminal penalties unless the person who's the executioner is sinless that's not what he means when he says he that's without sin it's more whoever is not guilty of either this sin or at least one of equal weight whoever is not as guilty as she is whoever doesn't have on his conscience a sin of the same magnitude as hers and maybe he might have been implying this very sin and this very instance I don't know I just put those things out there as possibilities that would help to explain some of the things that are otherwise difficult to make sense of now the point here is they brought this woman to Jesus as a test of him they wished to test him it says how was this a test of him I said that they put him in a position to have to be on the horns of a dilemma as we say a situation where you're damned if you do and you're damned if you don't no matter what you say you're in trouble because they give you a yes or no choice and neither choice is okay it's like what Jesus himself did to the scribes and pharisees when he said to them they came to him and said well by what authority did you do these things and he said well let me ask you a question John's baptism was that by what authority did John baptize was that of God or man now he only gave them two choices there wasn't a third option but both of

them were unacceptable options to them because if they said well John's baptism was from God they knew Jesus would then say well then why did you oppose him if he's from God if he's a prophet from God why didn't you accept him so they didn't want to say that of course what they really wanted to say was his baptism was of man but they knew and they reasoned among themselves as they deliberated about how they should answer Jesus they said if we say it's from man we fear the people because they think John's a prophet now we don't like John but we don't want the people to know we don't think he's a prophet because that would really make us look dull spiritually and so they came to Jesus and said well we can't answer you that and Jesus said well then I can't answer your question either you're not going to be honest with me I'm not going to be honest with you I won't tell you but he had them on the horns of a dilemma that's what the expression means he did that again to them on another occasion when he was in the synagogue early in his ministry and the man with the withered hand was there and of course his enemies were there to see if he was going to heal on the Sabbath so they could find something to accuse him of and he knew it he saw them there and he called the man forward he told the man to step forward and of course his enemies were on the edge of their seats waiting to see if he's going to do something they can charge him with something actionable some kind of healing on the Sabbath because this was not a case of a life-threatening situation under the law or at least under the rabbinic understanding of the law a physician could heal somebody on the Sabbath if the guy was dying and going to die before the next day but if he had no life-threatening situation he had to wait he couldn't do that on the Sabbath he had to do it the next day or some other day in fact there was a time when Jesus healed a woman in the synagogue on the Sabbath who was bent over and couldn't stand up for 18 years and the synagogue official angry at Jesus rebuked the crowd saying there are 6 days when you can bring your sick to be healed come on 6 days but don't do it on the Sabbath and Jesus turned to the man and started rebuking him in front of the congregation it would have been interesting to be at some of those services can you imagine having a guest speaker at church and the pastor stands up and starts rebuking him and the guest speaker starts rebuking the pastor that would be a tense situation Jesus did that in the synagogues but the man with the withered hand Jesus knew they wanted to accuse him if he healed and he knew he was going to heal him he was going to do it whether they liked it or not but he said first of all to them what's lawful to do on the Sabbath to do good or to do evil well he didn't give them a third option it's either one or the other it's lawful to do good or it's lawful to do evil and the Bible says they remained silent they wouldn't answer, why? they didn't like either answer if they said it's lawful to do evil that would make no sense but if they said it's lawful to do good on the Sabbath well they just gave him permission then to heal this man that's clearly a good thing and then they couldn't accuse him of anything if they just gave him permission so they didn't want to say anything and that's the only time we read that Jesus looked on them with anger being grieved at the hardness of their hearts he was so angry because they weren't honest you know sometimes a dilemma is a rhetorical device to win a debate legitimately because the opponent's position is so

wrong that you can point out and be wrong by saying from your point of view is this the correct option or is this the correct option and it's obvious that those are the only two possibilities and from the standpoint of the person you're debating because they don't have the truth on their side they have both prongs both horns of the dilemma are unacceptable that's what they've done to Jesus they thought they came to him and said Moses said this woman should be put to death what do you say now why is that a dilemma Jesus could easily say well of course I agree with Moses on this she should be put to death but they suspected he wouldn't after all he did have a lot of friends who were sinners some of them were notorious sinners some of them were notorious sexual sinners there were prostitutes and tax collectors and other kinds of sinners among the people that Jesus obviously was friendly toward and if he had said yes go ahead and stone her that would have indeed shocked his supporters who were largely made up of people who were had those kinds of compromises in their lives already it would seem so uncharacteristic of him and for him to take that hard line would be would put him into trouble with his followers although he could have done it anyway he never really chose his comments in order to be popular with his followers in fact sometimes he chose the comments in order to drive followers away if he could if they could go he wanted them going if they were not among those who could say Lord to whom shall we go you alone have the words of eternal life if that wasn't where they stood he wanted them to go and he would even use offensive language deliberately as he did in John chapter 6 to make people go away who weren't going away quickly enough they were following him and insisting on following him but for the wrong reasons so he didn't want them there now therefore of course Jesus would never have been intimidated by the suggestion that he should say something unpopular but they knew that Jesus was in some ways slack as they thought about the law of Moses after all they considered him to be a repeated offender on the Sabbath question Sabbath breaking was also a capital offense on Jewish law and yet he was very slack about Sabbath keeping they thought he had come to destroy the law that's why Jesus had to say to his disciples don't think I've come to destroy the law for the prophets I didn't come to destroy I came to fulfill them why would he have to say that why would anyone even raise the issue of him coming to destroy the law because that's what people thought he was the way he was acting he was violating the traditional understanding of the rabbis and therefore to their mind violating the law and he did in fact violate the Sabbath but he said he had the authority to do that because he was the son of God and God violates the Sabbath and what his father does the son can do the point is though the opponents of Christ were angry at him for this very reason they felt like he played fast and loose with the law therefore if he said well the law said we should stone her and they felt that that was pretty much against Christ's disposition in general and his friendship with all these sinners pretty sure they thought he wasn't going to take a hard line in favor of the law on this point and if he didn't then they could accuse him of opposing Moses even though the Mosaic law would be an unpopular one in this case Jesus' friends of course they wouldn't much be excited about the idea of following Moses' laws on this case of stoning this woman but nonetheless if

Jesus didn't stand by the law then he could easily be accused of being anti Moses which wouldn't go down well with any of the Jews he could easily be accused of being subversive and against Judaism because Judaism is defined by the law of Moses so there wasn't really an answer that Jesus could give that wouldn't get him into some kind of trouble and it's not just that you see if he said don't stone her as I said then he could be accused of breaking the law, the Jews turn against him but if he said do stone her if he simply upheld what Moses said he'd be not only in trouble with his public but he'd be in trouble with the Romans because the Romans when they had conquered that region though they had left the Sanhedrin a measure of freedom to adjudicate crimes and punishments Rome had deprived the Jews of the right to exercise capital punishment and although they sometimes did it as mob actions stoning people and so forth like Stephen or others occasionally we don't know that they were going to stone this woman this was more to test Jesus than to get this woman stoned they brought her to him but there were times when the Jews went ahead and stoned people and dispersed too quickly before the Romans could pin it on anyone but the Romans did not allow them to coolly dictate capital punishment and carry it out and that's what these Jews were asking Jesus to decide should we kill her if he said yes then they could go to Pilate the Roman governor and say this guy's telling people to violate the Roman law the Roman law tells us we can't kill people and he's telling people to do that so either Jesus is going to be represented as violating the Jewish law or the Roman law and he'll be in trouble either with the Jews or the Romans neither is very desirable this was the dilemma that they had him on now Jesus initially didn't answer them he instead stooped down they were in the temple and he wrote on the dust of the temple floor and then he did it again later he stood up and answered them then he stooped down and did it again now if of course that line is authentic and original that says as if he never heard them then it's almost like he wasn't even giving them the time of day and they looked up and said oh you're still here? I'll give you an answer then he ignores them again he's not going to dignify them with attention and with a response that is one possibility but of course preachers and bible students have often speculated about specific things Jesus might have been writing there are actually a few manuscripts that are not very authoritative that actually include some lines about how he wrote down the sins of everyone in the crowd and there are preachers who have suggested that's what he did that Jesus knew the hearts of every man he knew what those people had done so he began to list in writing all the sins that they had committed and then he said now anyone who hasn't committed a sin will be the first to cast a stone his comments would be related to what he had written but then he stooped down and wrote some more I don't know if he was continuing an appendix to the list or what in that case I'm not sure that this is a likely scenario I've never really been very convinced and there's no reason necessarily to be convinced it's just someone's theory it's just a guess there are others who feel that what Jesus wrote down was the law they start writing down the Ten Commandments now remember Paul said without the law I would not have known sin I felt just fine about my covetousness until I read the law that says I shall not covet and he says by the law is the knowledge of sin if

he wanted to convict these people of sin he could just start putting laws down and letting them read them and then say anyone not committed sin here's the law and so some have felt that's what he was doing writing down the law that's another possibility though it's only a guess no one can say for sure if it's true I've always seen some similarity in this story but not close enough to make a tight connection to the law of in the Old Testament in Numbers the law that is sometimes called the ordeal of jealousy it's an interesting and strange law but it has to do with the dust on the tabernacle floor and it has to do with adultery and therefore it just seems to be interesting that this case of the woman taken in adultery involves also Jesus and the dust on the temple floor in the fifth chapter of Numbers there's this very strange law it says in verse 11 Numbers 5.11 And the Lord spoke to Moses, saying, Speak to the children of Israel, and say to them, If any man's wife goes astray and behaves unfaithfully toward him, and a man lies with her carnally, and it is hidden from the eyes of her husband, and it is concealed that she has defiled herself, and there is no witness against her, nor was she caught, if the spirit of jealousy comes upon him and he becomes jealous of his wife, who has defiled herself, or if the spirit of jealousy comes upon him and he becomes jealous of his wife although she has not defiled herself these are the two possibilities either he's feeling jealous of his wife and she either has or has not done something wrong.

It obviously makes it clear that the spirit of jealousy coming upon a man is not like a revelation from God necessarily that she has defiled herself because both possibilities. The spirit of jealousy may come upon him and she is guilty or the spirit of jealousy may come upon him and she's not guilty. Those are the two possibilities.

How do you decide? You know, he can't just on a hunch prosecute his wife for adultery. And the setup of the situation is such that no one has caught her. There's no witnesses.

And so the only thing that, you know, causes her not to get away with it is that the spirit of jealousy has come upon her husband. He feels that she's done this. He has a sense that she has.

But that sense is not always reliable. I've told some of you before that, and this is a strange, I, as Paul Harvey used to say, this is a strange. My first wife, as some of you know, was unfaithful a few times before she ran off and divorced me.

But one of the men that she was with was a man that I barely knew and I didn't even know she knew him. He was a young man who came to my Bible studies. I was teaching Bible studies in the home where we lived, in our home.

And there were like 30 people or so that would come a couple times a week to our Bible studies there. And there was this young man who was there. I don't even remember.

His name was, I think, Bob, but I don't remember anything else about him. I don't even think I knew his last name. And he was not a man I had conversations with.

I had nothing against him. I had seen him a few times in the crowd. I had never once seen my wife talk to him.

I never had any idea if she'd even met him. But one night I had a dream that she was having an affair with him. And when I woke up, I mean, it's like the spirit of jealousy had come up.

It's almost like I just sensed it was true. And I confronted her and asked her, and she confessed it was true. She was having an affair with him.

Which is the most bizarre thing because I had no, I mean, I might have had reason to suspect that she would be unfaithful in some kind of circumstance because her background was not real pure and she was not really walking real strong with the Lord at that particular point. But for me to suspect that she would be with him, I mean, I didn't, it's not like he was a good-looking guy so I was always afraid, you know, in my subconscious, I thought, well, he might win my wife's heart. He wasn't particularly the kind of guy that I would even imagine she'd be attracted to.

I had nothing in my mind that would have ever connected those things. And I had this dream and it turned out it was true. And it was just strange.

It was like the spirit of jealousy in this case was like a revelation from God. The problem is men sometimes have dreams or suspicions about their wives being unfaithful and they're not true. They're just lies of the devil.

The spirit of jealousy may be from God or it may be from the devil and you can't just say, well, I just feel strongly that you've been unfaithful, therefore I'm going to punish you as an unfaithful wife. That was not permitted. Now in some societies that would be permitted because a man had such total control over his wife like over his slaves or his children.

He could abuse them terribly and just because he wanted to. That was not okay in Israel. She could not be punished for adultery just because he was quite sure she had done something wrong and he had a hunch about it.

It had to be determined whether she was innocent or not. And so there was this strange ordeal. There's nothing else like it in the whole Bible and the whole law.

Many people think it's very barbarous but I think they misunderstand it. It says, if that's the case this man has the spirit of jealousy, verse 15 then the man shall bring his wife to the priest he shall bring the offering required for her, one-tenth of an ephah of barley meal. He shall pour no oil on it and put no frankincense on it.

This is not a sweet thing. This is not a pretty thing. This is an ugly thing because it is a grain offering for jealousy, an offering for remembering, for bringing iniquity to

remembrance.

And the priest shall bring her near and set her before the Lord. The priest shall take holy water in an earthen vessel and take some of the dust that is on the floor of the tabernacle and put it into the water. Then the priest shall stand the woman before the Lord, uncover the woman's head and put the offering of remembrance in her hands, which is the grain offering of jealousy.

And the priest shall have in his hand the bitter water that brings a curse. And the priest shall put her under oath and say to the woman if no man has lain with you and if you have not gone astray to uncleanness while under your husband's authority, be free from this bitter water that brings the curse. But if you have gone astray while under your husband's authority and if you have defiled yourself and some man other than your husband has lain with you then the priest shall put the woman under the oath of the curse and he shall say to the woman, the Lord make you a curse and an oath among your people when the Lord makes your thigh to rot and your belly to swell.

And may this water that causes the curse go into your stomach and make your belly swell and your thigh rot. Then the woman shall say Amen, so be it. So she's still protesting her innocence here.

And the priest shall, of course she would, might as well if she's going to be put to death if she's guilty. Might as well protest innocence as long as you can. But then the priest shall write these curses in a book and he shall scrape them off into the bitter water.

Now what goes into this water? Dust from the tabernacle floor and writing the words of the curse. And then he shall make the woman drink the bitter water that brings the curse and the water that brings the curse shall enter her to become bitter. Then the priest shall take the grain offering of jealousy from the woman's hand, etc, etc.

And verse 27, and when he has made her drink the water it shall be if she has defiled herself and behaved unfaithfully toward her husband that the water that brings the curse will enter her and become bitter and her belly will swell her thigh will rot and the woman will become a curse among her people. But if the woman has not defiled herself and is clean then she shall be free and may conceive children and so forth. This is the law of jealousy when a wife while under her husband's authority goes astray and defiles herself.

Now I don't know it's hard for me to make a tight connection but it's just rather interesting to me that the ordeal of jealousy is about adultery about the jealousy of a husband it has to do with the dust on the floor of the tabernacle and a writing of the curse also the dust and the writing of the curse are put together into this water which the woman drinks. Now by the way a lot of explanations well not a lot but several, more than one have been given as to this strange custom. Some think it's a psychosomatic thing this is a way of the woman who is concealing her guilt, her conscience because she

is superstitious and you know not all that sophisticated she thinks that this is going to work and so if she really is guilty her conscience is bugging her and so these symptoms actually occur when she drinks the water, there's no magic in the water of course it's just something that's psychological.

But if she's innocent of course she knows she's innocent her conscience isn't bothering her, she drinks the water there's no issue there. I've had a debate online at our Bible forum with one man about this passage more than once he doesn't believe that every, he's a Christian but he doesn't believe that everything in the law of Moses is really from God and thinks some of it was Moses' own invention and he thought this was a barbaric thing and he felt that there was something in the dust of the tabernacle floor that would cause these symptoms and that this was sort of like those witch ordeals you know tie a rock around the witch's ankle, throw her in the ocean or in the lake if she sinks she's guilty if she's innocent she floats you know or something like that we hear those kinds of stories about how in the Salem witch trials allegedly they had these very unfair ways of testing a woman's innocence you know, if she sinks she was guilty, oh well, good if she's innocent she floats, so in any case if the rock pulls her to the bottom as one would expect it to do in every case, it proves she deserved it. And this guy was saying this is a way that a guy who doesn't trust his wife can get rid of her and this is just a law that was sort of serving the interest of the husband to get rid of a wife that he couldn't trust anymore and that he, you know, of course this man was saying this, of course if you drink the water that has this defilement in it from the temple floor, it's going to cause, it's got some kind of virus or some kind of bacterium or something that's going to cause these symptoms.

I wrote to him and said what sickness do you know of that has these precise symptoms? The swelling belly and the thigh rotting now there might be any number of gastrical, gastronomical problems that cause the belly to swell but the thigh rotting, I'm not aware of any particular bacterium that causes those symptoms. Furthermore, how would Moses be sure that those bacterium would be in that particular place? Especially in view of the fact that the tabernacle floor is one place to be cleaner than any other place because people were not allowed to walk with shoes on in it and they had to take their shoes off and it would be kept rather clean. How could Moses be sure that there's going to be this particular kind of organism in the dust that would cause this thing? It just doesn't make sense to me.

As far as I'm concerned, it looks to me like this is something where God himself would bear witness against the woman if she's lying, if she's cheated on her husband and she's lying about it, God will bring her guilt to light to vindicate the husband whose wife has been cheating on him. When we come to the story of the woman taking an adultery, here we have a case of a woman taking an adultery, though there were witnesses. Unlike the case of the ordeal of jealousy where it specifies there were no witnesses, here's a woman who was witnessed in the act.

Therefore, we're not following the ordeal of jealousy, but some elements of it almost seem to be alluded to. Maybe because there's another jealousy and another adultery that is hinted at. Jesus certainly believed that Israel was apostate at this time and that the leaders of Israel were themselves apostate.

And everywhere in the Old Testament when Israel was apostate, especially when they worshipped other gods, they were accused of being a harlot, they were accused of committing spiritual adultery. Isaiah used the term, Jeremiah used the term a lot, Hosea used the term. This is something that was not uncommon.

Ezekiel had a couple of chapters, 16 and 23, that were very graphic about how Israel was an adulteress when they worshipped other gods. When they were not faithful to their God, who was their husband, and they broke covenant that they were guilty of adultery. And that may be, there may be some subtext of that in Jesus' actions.

He calls attention first to the dust on the temple floor. He may have even written down the curse. We don't know what he wrote.

He wrote something. But whatever would be written in the ordeal of jealousy wouldn't be retained. It would be scraped off.

Whatever they wrote it on, they'd scrape it off into the water the woman would drink. And what Jesus wrote was not retained permanently either. It's the most impermanent medium of all possible mediums.

Unless you're going to write on the steam on your bathroom mirror, I guess that's fairly impermanent too. But when you're writing on the dust on the floor, that's not going to last long. The only thing Jesus ever wrote.

Wouldn't you love to have the writings of Jesus himself? And yet, he wrote one time that we know of and it was not preserved. But I wouldn't be surprised if whatever he wrote was somehow related to this Numbers chapter 5 thing. And when he turned to the leaders and said, if you're not guilty of this sin, you cast the first stone.

In other words, he's suggesting that they may be guilty of adultery of another sort. They haven't been caught. But they have come to the temple.

They've come to the high priest, Jesus. And he is, you know, messing with the dust on the floor. He's writing something down.

It may be that what he wrote was the curse of Numbers chapter 5, of adulterous women. Or maybe even the curse of Deuteronomy chapter 28. Where God said that if you, Israel, do not keep my covenant, then all these curses will come upon you.

He couldn't have written the whole chapter. It's too long. But the point is, he may have

worked at it.

He sat down and did it. He sat down and did it a couple times. He may not have finished the chapter before they had all left.

But the point is, I think, though I'm not sure, that there's some kind of intended connection. Just because of the coincidental points I'm mentioning. Jesus may have been acting as the priest in the case of the ordeal of jealousy.

And these Jewish leaders were the ones on trial. And they got out of there before their belly would swell and their thigh would rot. I don't know that that would have actually happened to them.

But the point is that they realized that they were the ones on trial. They were the ones convicted. They were convicted in their own conscience.

And they didn't want to wait around to be sentenced, I have a feeling. Because the older they were, the wiser they were. None of them were very wise.

But the older men are wiser. The young men were foolish enough not to catch it. Until they saw that all the older guys had left.

I guess I better go too, you know. They must see something I'm not seeing. The young fools didn't see it as quickly as the old fools did.

But the point here is that Jesus seems to have struck a nerve. And maybe by appeal to Moses. See they were appealing to Moses.

They're saying Moses said she should be stoned. What do you say? Maybe Jesus was in some way appealing to Moses too. It's in Numbers chapter 5. In a way that takes the heat off the woman in this case and puts it on them.

They too may be guilty of adultery. Spiritual adultery. I don't know.

I'd like to see someone who's smarter than me put that together better than I can. But I've never heard anyone even make the connection. So I just don't know.

Maybe it's not there. Now his statement, let him that is without sin be the first to cast a stone at her. That certainly is applicable.

But to what? Of course many times the same people who aren't Christians and who like to quote Matthew 7.1 Judge not that you be not judged. They also like to quote this verse. This is their second favorite verse in the Bible.

Let him that is without sin be the first to cast a stone. Obviously Jesus was not saying that a person has to be absolutely sinless in order to make judgments about sinful

behavior. As I said, the police force, the magistrates, the judges, the criminal justice system, they couldn't operate at all.

If that was supposed to be a rule, you have to be flawless and perfect before you can judge. When Jesus said judge not that you be not judged, he explained what he meant in the verses immediately following where he said if your brother has a speck in the eye and you've got a beam in your own eye then don't try to remove the speck from your brother's eye until you first remove the beam from your eye then you can see clearly to remove the speck. Jesus did not say it's wrong to judge.

He said it's wrong to judge someone if you're as guilty as they are or even worse. If you are guilty of this sin, you shouldn't be casting stones. Someone else more qualified than you should step in because you are a hypocrite he says.

You hypocrite first get the beam out of your own eye. This is in Matthew 7. And then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother's eye. When people say get the beam out of your own eye brother, often what they're saying is don't point to my sin.

No one has any right to tell me I'm doing the wrong thing. Well, everybody has the right to tell you you're doing the wrong thing if you're doing the wrong thing. Anyone has the right to tell you so.

They're doing you a favor. Faithful are the wounds of a friend, but the kisses of an enemy are deceitful. The person who confronts you when you're in the wrong is doing you a favor.

The thing is if they are being critical of you and they're doing the same thing, or even worse, they have a beam in their eye and you only have a speck, well then they're rather hypocritical in doing it. And the person who makes a career of finding fault with other people had better make sure that they aren't guilty of something of the same sort or worse. And that would be the position Jesus is taking here.

He's not saying you have to be completely without sin before you can judge or correct someone's misbehavior, but you're awfully hypocritical if you try to do that when you're just as guilty as they are and you're ignoring your own breach of the law. And you're allowing a beam to remain in your eye. But notice Jesus said if you get the beam out of your eye, then you can remove the speck from your brother's eye.

He's made it very clear. Removing a speck from your brother's eye is a positive thing. A little painful at times.

It's hard to get something out of your eye painlessly, but the point is you don't want it to stay in there either. The man who has a speck in his eye wants it out. And a person who's got a flaw in their life, if they care about their relationship with God, they want that flaw cleansed.

They want that flaw removed. But they're less likely to be receiving correction from somebody that they can see has the same flaw only worse. And now when Jesus says let him that is without sin be the first to cast stone at her, notice he did not cancel the Mosaic law.

If anything, he seems to have supported it. His words can be understood to mean, yeah, Moses is right. She should be stoned.

Anyone here qualified to do it? She has done something worthy of death, but you aren't worthy to be the executioner because you're no better than she is. Jesus didn't deny that adultery was a capital offense. He just said these people were mighty hypocritical if they were going to be the ones to carry out the execution.

And Jesus who could have done it didn't want to, didn't care to. He was the one without sin, and therefore he was the one who was qualified to cast the first stone. And yet because he was without sin, he was also the only one qualified to atone for her sin and to not cast the first stone.

He was qualified to do whichever needed to be done. And he decided, I won't condemn you. Go and sin no more.

Now his statement is very balanced. He said you have been sinning. This is a sin.

You must not do that anymore. You have to stop. You have to repent.

But I'm not going to condemn you. Now was she repentant? Is that why he didn't condemn her? I don't know. Good chance that she was.

We don't know. She was probably broken and humble and ashamed and so forth. Whether there was true repentance, none of us know.

We don't have any reference to her state of mind. But Jesus knowing what her state of mind was felt he could give her another chance. He said, I'm the only one here without sin.

Now of course, it's a good thing Mary wasn't there. Because she might have thrown a stone. Because according to the Roman Catholics she's without sin.

But she wasn't there that day. So the woman had no danger from anyone except Jesus wanting to cast stones at her and he wasn't interested. And so he said that.

Now we of course face sin in our culture, in our lives, in the church, in our families, and so forth. And it's essential that we represent Jesus' attitude about sin. And his attitude was not tolerant.

He said, don't do it. That's a command. Don't do that anymore.

That's not tolerance. He was not lenient. There's a difference between being lenient and being merciful.

There's a difference between tolerance and grace. Because grace only exists where there is the acknowledgement that there is something to forgive. Something has been done that is wrong.

That's not okay. You never have to bring mercy into the picture, or grace, unless something has been done that isn't okay. But lenience is sort of like acting like everything is okay.

A lenient parent is one who doesn't really make any rules, or doesn't enforce the rules, and basically the kid can do whatever they want, and the parent doesn't ever confront them. The parent doesn't ever say that's wrong. They act like everything's okay.

God doesn't act like everything's okay. He says that's wrong. You have to stop that.

That's not okay. He's not lenient. He's not tolerant.

But he's gracious. And grace is saying there is nothing okay about what you did, but I'm going to forgive you for that. Not because the act is forgivable, but because I'm forgiving.

Not because something you did can somehow lay claim on innocence and immunity. You can't. But I choose to be gracious, and that is my prerogative.

I don't approve, and I do not say you have permission to do what you did, but I can't say I won't condemn you. I could, because I have not committed that sin. So I could condemn you, Jesus says, but I won't.

I don't. Now, of course, when it comes to us dealing with sinners, in many cases, we have not committed the same sins of the people that were condemning. Most of us are not quite so dull as to, although some may be, I've certainly seen people who are, but most of us are not so dull as to be aware in our own conscience that we're doing some heinous crime and go out and condemn someone else.

Maybe I shouldn't say that, because that happens more often than it should. I think of Jimmy Swaggart, who before he was caught in his sins was very vehement in his preaching against another preacher on television, who was compromised. He was very intolerant, very condemning of this other preacher.

And then, lo and behold, it wasn't it seems like it wasn't weeks before his own sins were manifested. He was guilty of the same thing. So maybe people do that more than I think.

To me, I know what my sins are, and I could never even for a moment feel self-righteous around somebody who's doing the same thing I do and feel like I can condemn them. But

I guess some people are able to do that. But even if we're not, let's say you're condemning someone who got an abortion, and you've never had one.

You're condemning a homosexual, because you're not a homosexual. You're condemning an adulterer, but you're not an adulterer. And therefore, you don't have the beam in your eye, and therefore you feel justified in condemning them.

Well, condemning isn't Jesus' stock and trade. He didn't come to condemn the world. He came that the world through him might be saved, it says in John chapter 3. Jesus, the Son of Man, did not come to condemn the world.

That's not what he's interested in doing. If he wanted to do that, he could have just stayed home in heaven, because the world was already condemned. He didn't have to do a thing.

He could just wait for everyone to live out their life and die and go to hell. There's no need for Jesus to come and bring condemnation. He came to not condemn the world.

He came to forgive the world. God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself, not counting their sins against them. It says in 2 Corinthians 5. Jesus was not counting the world's sins against them when he came.

You see, the spirit of Jesus and the spirit of religion are opposite. The scribes and Pharisees are an excellent example in the story of the spirit of religion. They're religionists.

And religion condemns. Christ does not condemn. Christ may, in some cases, not be able to completely redeem somebody who refuses to believe, who refuses to repent.

He may not be able to save them from the condemnation that they're already in, but he doesn't come to bring condemnation. And yet sometimes I've heard people, you know, some preachers talk as if, you know, if Jesus were here, you know, he'd go into the homosexual bars and take a whip and drive them all out. Would he? He never did that in his town.

He never went into the brothels and drove out all the prostitutes. He never went into the tax collecting booths and drove out all the tax collectors. He drove people out of the temple who were defiling his father's house.

That's a different story. Jesus didn't go and clean up society. He cleaned up his father's house.

That corresponds to the church. If Jesus was here, he might take a whip to the church. But he's not going to go out to the unbelievers and take a whip to them.

He never did anything even remotely like that. In fact, if you read of all the

denunciations that come out of Jesus' mouth in the Bible, they're all directed to the religious people. It's always woe to you scribes and Pharisees, you hypocrites.

We never have Jesus standing up and preaching, woe unto you prostitutes, woe unto you sinners, woe unto you tax collectors or whatever. It just never happened. And if it did, it's not likely that all these tax collectors and sinners would be drawn to him so much.

They didn't need him to condemn them. They were condemned already and they knew it. They needed someone to tell them, I don't condemn you, but you need to stop.

You need to stop sinning. Don't do that anymore. But I'm not here to condemn you for what you've done.

And that is not what the world feels from Christians right now. That is what they felt from Jesus. And Christians have to be careful to make sure that the world isn't looking at us the way that Jesus looked at the scribes and Pharisees.

Because the spirit of religion is to condemn. Because the spirit of religion is really self-righteousness. The spirit of Christ is humility.

He washed the dirt off of his disciples' feet. And to clean people up, to wash people's feet, to clean them up, is really what he was interested in doing. The sinners knew they were sinners.

They didn't need him to rub it in their faces. They knew it. What they needed to know is if there was any hope for them.

If there was any way God could possibly have them back. If there was any way to be reconciled to God. The woman at the well.

The cry of her heart was where can I meet with God? Where can I worship God? I want to know, but I'm confused. Because the Jews say here and the Samaritans say here. I've got problems.

I've got sin in my life. But here's a prophet. Thank God.

A man has come who can solve this dilemma. Which is the right place to worship God? And Jesus would never have given her a straight answer if she wasn't honest. I mean, he never gave straight answers to the Pharisees if they weren't being honest.

He wouldn't give her a straight answer if she was dodging her moral culpability. Her issue was I have been a sinner. I've had a broken life.

And I know that our religion requires us to offer sacrifices. The problem is our religion says if you offer the sacrifice in the wrong place, God won't accept it. And now I've got a problem because you people say that's the right place and my people say this is the

right place and I just don't know.

But you're a prophet. You can solve this for me. Her desire was not to have Jesus come and condemn her for her sin.

And it's amazing how many Christians read that and think that's exactly what he's doing. Oh, he's putting a finger on her. Oh, you're a sinner.

You're living with a man, not your husband. There's no reason to believe Jesus had any of that tone. Jesus didn't come to see a smoking flax and put it out.

Or to break a bruised wreath. That's the opposite of his manner. If there's a bruised wreath, he'd do his best to repair it, heal it.

If a flax and wick was smoldering because it was just about to go out, he'd more likely reignite it. He wouldn't snuff it out. That's what Christians often do because they think that that's what Jesus would do and they don't apparently think clearly about what they read.

Jesus' attitude is always this. I don't condemn you, but don't do it anymore. That's not lenience.

That's not tolerance. That's intolerance of sin. But grace.

It's uncompromising grace. You've broken the law. The law is true.

The law is good. You've broken a pure law. You're guilty, but you already know that.

What I'm here to tell you is that I don't condemn you. That there is grace. And that's the message that Jesus had to her.

That's the message that we have for the world, but that's not the message they're getting. If I think of if Jesus came here right now and was in that part of town where there's a lot of gay bars or whatever it's amazing how many Christians think he'd go in there and start denouncing and start turning things over and so forth. That doesn't look like the Jesus in the Bible.

The Jesus in the Bible would go in there and eat with them. He'd go in there and call them to repentance the way that a doctor visits a sick person. A doctor doesn't go to a sick person to finish them off.

They're sick, so I'm going to go I'm the executioner. No, I'm the physician. I'm on their side.

Jesus is on the side of people. He's on the side of sinners because everyone is sinners. And he came here because he was on our side, not against us.

Religion is against us. Jesus is for us. And if people aren't getting that impression from us, then they're not seeing Jesus.

They're seeing something else. Traditional Christianity or something. I believe if Jesus was here, the gays would be drawn to him as somebody who seemed like maybe he had the answer to their brokenness, but they're not drawn to us.

To them, we're just a rival political special interest group. We're a voting bloc that always votes against them. We're their enemies.

And someone says, what do you think we're supposed to do? Befriend them? We can't encourage them. The gay agenda is trying to destroy our country. True.

And what's going to stop them? Politics? Laws? Do you think that you can make a law against being a homosexual and those people who are driven by that sin are going to just say, oh, okay, it's illegal. I guess I'm going to change now. How? The law can't change anybody.

The best laws in the world were given to Israel. It didn't make them good. Laws can't change you.

Grace changes you. The law was given by Moses, but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ. And that's what the church is supposed to be bringing to sinners, is grace and truth.

Truth? The truth is that you must stop sinning. The grace? I don't condemn you. I'm not here to create greater alienation between you and me or between you and God.

I'm here to resolve that alienation that is obvious already and that you're probably very much aware of. And therefore, I'm not here to talk to you about your sin. I'm here to talk to you about salvation from sin.

Many, many people who teach on evangelism say the first thing you have to do when you evangelize someone is point out all the sins they've committed. Go through the Ten Commandments and show them that they've broken every one of them. Heap the law and condemnation on them.

Then they'll know they need a remedy. Then they'll know they're sick and they'll be interested in the medicine. You have to give them the bad news before you give them the good news.

I don't find it. I don't find Jesus going to them and giving them the bad news. The only bad news he had was for the scribes and Pharisees because they were religious and hypocritical.

We never read of any bad news to the prostitutes and the tax collectors. There was

some, but they already knew it. Jesus didn't have to tell them about that.

They didn't think they were good people. He didn't have to point out to them all the times they'd broken the law. We love to do that because it's so self-righteous because I'm not breaking those laws.

It puts me in a position of power, of authority and superiority over them. Jesus came and he was in the form of God, but he emptied himself and made himself in the form of a servant. Very unthreatening to sinners.

Very threatening to religious people. You know what? Whether it's Jewish religion or Christian religion or Hindu religion or Muslim religion or any religion, religion is religion. It condemns people.

Jesus didn't start a religion. He started a family. And he called the alienated children to come back and be reconciled to God, who is like the prodigal's father, eager to forgive, eager to embrace, eager to run out and meet them at the first indication that they were coming back, that they wanted to come home.

That's what Jesus came to do. And religion does the opposite. It alienates.

It condemns. And this contrast between Jesus and the Scribes and Pharisees is a contrast in paradigms. One view of God versus another.

One view of God is that God is an angry, legalistic, vengeful, punishing God. And he, you know, you better not step out of line. You better dot every I and cross every T properly or else he's got a short fuse.

He's a very angry God. And you're a sinner in the hands of the angry God. And he delights to destroy you.

He's dangling you like a loathsome creature over a flame. He hates you with an unutterable hatred. That's what, of course, Jonathan Edwards tells sinners.

I don't know which Bible he read because I haven't read anything like that about God in our Bible. But that is the attitude of many Christians. And it's not the attitude of Jesus.

It's just the opposite. Okay, so we can't get any further in this chapter tonight. We've run out of time.

I didn't expect to, by the way. I'm not disappointed. Usually I disappoint myself.

Because I usually expect to get further than I get. But this time I didn't expect to get any further.