

Casting the First Stone

John 7:53-8:10

⁵³ [They went each to his own house,

John 8:1 but Jesus went to the **Mount of Olives**.

² Early in the morning he came again **to the temple**. All the people came to him, and he sat down and **taught them**.

³ The **scribes and the Pharisees** brought a **woman** who had been caught in **adultery**, and placing her in the midst

⁴ they said to him, "Teacher, this woman has been caught in the act of adultery.

⁵ Now in the Law Moses commanded us to stone such women. So what do you say?"

⁶ 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**.

⁷ 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**."

⁸ And once more he bent down and **wrote on the ground**.

⁹ 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.

¹⁰ Jesus stood up and said to her, "**Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?**"

¹¹ She said, "**No one, Lord.**" And Jesus said, "**Neither do I condemn you; go, and from now on sin no more.**"]

Additions and Redactions

The passage before us today is unique. Therefore, before coming to the text itself, I want to deal with its uniqueness. You decide to sit down one afternoon and read through the entire Gospel of John in one sitting (something I highly recommend, by the way). You are cruising along and suddenly come to **John 7:53** where, in your Bible, there appears a bracket that continues through **John 8:11**. Your eye catches the footnote which reads something like this, “Some manuscripts do not include **7:53–8:11**; others add the passage here or after **7:36** or after **21:25** or after **Luke 21:38**, with variations in the text.”¹ You decide to keep reading and discover that the story in brackets is rich in theology and practical in its outcome. It teaches something amazing about Christ, yet you can’t figure out what you should do with it. Why is it “missing” in some manuscripts? Is it God’s word or isn’t it God’s word? It is true or isn’t it true?

¹ *The Holy Bible: English Standard Version* (Wheaton: Standard Bible Society, 2001).

This is the story of the [woman caught in the act of adultery](#). It is one of the most beloved stories in the New Testament, and for good reason. I'll tell you right up front, I believe this story is inspired Scripture. But John most likely didn't write it. Let me explain how I can say both things with a straight face.

Because of its infamy as an extremely doubtful section of John's Gospel, this passage has received a technical name. It is known as the *Pericope Adulterae*. "Pericope" comes from the Latin "to cut," and it simply means a selection of a book. In this case, "to cut" is an apt idea, because different ancient manuscripts do place this story in different sections of John and even in Luke's Gospel as the scribes did the old fashioned cut and paste with this passage, trying to figure out where it might best fit.

The [facts are as follows](#). The passage is [not found in any of the earliest and best manuscripts](#) we have of the book of John. Only [one Greek copy](#) out of dozens prior to the 8th

century has the passage in this traditional location.² **No Greek Church Father** prior to the 12th century comments on the passage.³ The style and grammar of the passage bear little resemblance to anything John writes elsewhere.⁴ Thus, almost no scholar today will argue that John wrote it.⁵ Just because John didn't write it and it isn't originally in his Gospel, that doesn't make it false or a lie. That's an error a lot of people have when they think that the only true things about history are things in the Bible.⁶ John ends his Gospel telling us that you could fill a whole library with the things Jesus did that weren't written down (**John 21:25**). Perhaps this explains why a couple of the early copies place the story at the end of John's Gospel, immediately after he tells us about all of those other things Jesus did.

With all that said, it needs to be added that the story was known to the Latin Father's such as Augustine and Jerome in

² See Gary M. Burge, "A Specific Problem in the New Testament Text and Canon: The Woman Caught in Adultery (John 7:53-8:11)," *JETS* 27:2 (June 1984): 141-48.

³ See Bruce Manning Metzger and United Bible Societies, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament, Second Edition a Companion Volume to the United Bible Societies' Greek New Testament (4th Rev. Ed.)* (London; New York: United Bible Societies, 1994), 188.

⁴ See Andreas J. Köstenberger, *John*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2004), 245-49.

⁵ A notable exception is Zane C. Hodges, "The Woman Taken in Adultery (John 7:53-8:11): The Text," *BibSac* 136 (Oct 1979): 318-32; 137 (Jan 1980): 41-53.

⁶ I see this attitude rear its ugly head when people approach the Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha for example. As if, because those stories are not taught in the Bible, but they deal with biblical figures, they must be false.

the early 5th century. Jerome included it in his Latin *Vulgate* and wrote that he found the story “in the Gospel according to John in many manuscripts, both Greek and Latin.” The story appears to have been known by Papias (c. 60-135 A.D.), a turn of the second century Bishop in Hierapolis, one of the churches of Galatia. He knew it from a now lost early gospel known as the Gospel of the Hebrews.⁷ Papias lived at such an early date that he was able to question many elders of the church who knew Andrew, Peter, Matthew, and John personally and were able to relate their stories about Jesus to him.⁸ Thus, as most commentators acknowledge, the story bears all the earmarks of historical veracity and is almost certainly a piece of oral tradition that circulated, especially in the Western Church, for many centuries.⁹

What I believe, then, is that this story is a true story of Jesus’ life that John did not record. But, taking my cue from the OT, where later scribes certainly added insertions into the

⁷ This seems to be the majority opinion of the words of Eusebius who says, “He [Papias] also notes another story about a woman, who has been accused of many sins before the Lord, which the Gospel according to the Hebrews [a now lost gospel] contains.” For disagreement on this interpretation see Bart D. Ehrman, “Jesus and the Adulteress,” *New Testament Studies* 34 (1988) 24-44. It has also been argued that part of the tradition of this story made it into the *Protoevangelium of James*, a second century Christian work. See Köstenberger, 248.

⁸ See Eusebius, *Church Histories* Book 3.39.

⁹ See Metzger, *ibid.*

original text (such as Moses' death in a book written by Moses, or the many times it says, "and it is still here to this day"), my view of inspiration is such that that God can inspire a scribe take a true story of Jesus' life and put it into John's Gospel by way of illustrating a point. My view of inspiration is not dictation, like Muslims and Mormons hold. Rather, the Holy Spirit superintended the entire process. This kind of addition is an extremely rare occurrence in the NT (in fact with large chunks of verses you only find it one other time, at the end of Mark's Gospel). Also, [you and I aren't free to add to the Scripture](#) like this very early scribe did, because you and I don't know other stories about Jesus like he did.

Why Here?

Why is it important to believe this text is inspired? I guess, on one level, it doesn't really matter, because there is nothing here in our passage that isn't said elsewhere. And yet, this story is more than just consistent with other Scripture. It actually explains other Scripture in a profound, important, and succinct way. Let me give an example that relates to our story,

in fact it may very well be the reason our story was added to this section of John's Gospel.

The second, third, and fourth centuries of the early church were marked by teachings of **ethical perfection and penance** (what later became a sacrament in the Roman church). As one commentator writes,

But certain sins demanded more severe warnings. In Paul's lists of sins, adultery and immorality appear repeatedly (**1 Cor 6:9ff.**; **Gal. 5:19ff.**; **Eph. 5:3ff.**; **Col. 3:5**), and these warnings are no doubt tied to the frightful immorality that pervaded the Roman empire. For Paul, this moral chaos pointed to the godlessness of the pagan world (**Rom. 1:26**), and so he calls for immorality not to be even named among Christians (**Eph. 5:3**) and in one case calls for a man's removal from a church because of it (**1 Cor. 5:5**).

The postapostolic writers emphasize this concern about sexual sin. In the *Acts of Paul and Thecla*, we have a story of a woman who converts to Christianity and becomes a model of chastity and holiness. When it comes to sexual sins, writers such as the person who wrote *The Shepherd of Hermas*, Clement of Alexandria, and Cyprian indicate lengthy, **severe**

penance for readmission to the church. Adultery is listed along with homicide and apostasy, and at least for Tertullian, Origen, and Cyprian, sexual sins were especially heinous and *without forgiveness*.

It is against this background in the second, third, and fourth centuries that the story of the woman caught in adultery is struggling for recognition. Jesus' refusal to condemn her was at odds with the outlook of the day. How could a lengthy penance be reconciled with such immediate forgiveness? How could a sexual sin be excused so readily?¹⁰

Tertullian is so disgusted with what he considers “complacent willingness to forgive almost anything,”¹¹ that he writes *On Modesty*, a work that contains many arguments for why adultery cannot be forgiven. Tertullian, however, does not seem to be aware of our story, for he never cites it in any of his works. If he were aware of it, he certainly would not have been able to conclude that adultery was the unforgivable sin (it is implied in plenty of other places). That's how our story

¹⁰ Gary M. Burge, *John*, The NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 2000), 240.

¹¹ Wieland Willker, “The Pericope de Adultera: Jo 7:53 - 8:11 (Jesus and the Adulteress),” *A Textual Commentary on the Greek Gospels Vol. 4b* (Bremen, Online Published 9th edition, 2012). <http://www-user.uni-bremen.de/~wie/TCG/TC-John-PA.pdf>

helps us. Our story holds a great balance between not excusing sin while yet forgiving even the grossest of sins. That is what we want to look at now.

There are really two points that our passage exists to show us. One is the practical point of forgiveness and Jesus' unwillingness to **condemn**. The other point is about Christ himself. Thus, the story has horizontal implications and vertical implications, much like the cross Jesus died on has a horizontal beam and a vertical beam. He is the intersection between heaven and earth, and his death is the answer to both aspects of our story.

Caught in Adultery

Let's look at the horizontal part first. Let's look at the woman, what she was doing, and how Jesus responds to her. Let's begin by thinking about **our own age and contrasting it to that of the Pharisees**. The Pharisees were **legalists extraordinaire**. At least, that was the façade they put on for others. We'll look at their hypocrisy in a moment. The point for now is, their legalism pervaded their whole culture. This

had one good side effect. Their culture did not parade violations of the Law like giant floats in a Macy's Day parade. In older times, before the exile, they did. But for the past 500 years, because God's hand of judgment was so severe upon the nation for the laxity of their sins, the religion of the Jews had become increasingly strict and moral, a lot like America was until the 1960s. They had institutionalized morality and it kept things outwardly in check. This is *not* a bad thing. We'll get to the bad part shortly.

That leads to our own culture. Since the 1960s, America has been all about *de*institutionalizing morality, tearing down laws that are now looked upon as antiquated, old fashioned, relics of a society fettered with restricting bonds of religious (read "Christian") intolerance and hate regarding, especially, sexuality. We are now convinced that radical "free love" is a virtue and anyone who gets jealous at a cheating spouse is a vice (the jealousy I mean). Don't believe me? Consider the remarks of **Richard Dawkins** in the *Washington Post*.

Why should you deny your loved one the pleasure of sexual encounters with others, if he or she is that way inclined? ... however much you love your mate, sex with a stranger is almost always more exciting, purely because it is a stranger ... We [should] rise above nature when tempted by the vice of sexual jealousy ... [and] admire — as I increasingly do -- those rare free spirits confident enough to rise above [it], stop fretting about who is "cheating on" whom, and tell the green-eyed monster [jealousy] to go jump in the lake[.]¹²

This he calls “virtuous” and “rising above [Darwinian] nature.” Is it any wonder that the good atheist doctor Dawkins has been married three times? One wonders what his wives would say to this selfish statement of stupidity.

The problem is, this same attitude is alive and well in our churches and the world knows it. As of 2003, *Barna Research Group* said that 84% of the American population considers themselves to be Christian, 60% believes that co-habitation is

¹² Richard Dawkins, “Banishing the Green-Eyed Monster,” *Washington Post* Wed 28 Nov (2007).
http://newsweek.washingtonpost.com/onfaith/panelists/richard_dawkins/2007/11/banishing_the_greeneyed_monste.html

“morally acceptable”, 42% say that about adultery, 38% about pornography, and 30% about homosexuality.¹³ It isn’t just that they engage in it, but that they think it is perfectly fine. In the past 10 years those numbers have only increased (probably significantly). The most recent survey I found says that 80% of single Evangelicals between 18-26 are sexually active.¹⁴ Statistically, there is simply no difference in on sexual issues between the church and the rest of the world. And **don’t think Reformed Christians are immune**. Plenty of people growing up in Reformed churches leave their spouses to run to a homosexual lifestyle, to commit adultery, or just about any other sexual sin you can think of, and say it is perfectly fine, justify the behavior in bizarre ways to keep their consciences from accusing them. It is called total depravity, and it knows no colors or gender or age or nationality or denomination. All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. Everyone is capable of this, including you. This is the culture we live in.

¹³ Barna, “Morality Continues to Decay,” <http://www.barna.org/barna-update/article/5-barna-update/129-morality-continues-to-decay>

¹⁴ <http://www.crossway.org/blog/category/family/dating-and-singleness/>

These are the bodies of flesh that we live in. This is the evil age that we live in. So what are we to do?

There are two reactions in our passage. There is one the reaction of the Pharisees; the other is the reaction of our Lord Jesus. You can only commit one of these two actions when faced with the same issues in your life. The Pharisaical reaction appears moral and good. It looks like it wants to uphold the law. Notice **John 8:4**, “Teacher, this woman has been caught in the act of adultery. Now in the Law of Moses commanded us to stone such women. So what do you say?” So what are they saying? They are saying that they 1. Know the Law of Moses and 2. Want to uphold the Law.

But there is a problem. What is it? It is tempting to think that the Law of Moses is the problem. That’s the route many choose to attack today—blame the law. One of these Facebook posters demonstrates this nicely (or poorly). It is titled, “**So You Still Think Homosexuality is Sinful?**” It asks “**Why?**” One of the answers you can give is, “**Because the Old Testament said so!**” The reply, “**The O.T. also says it’s sinful**

to eat shellfish, to wear clothes woven with different fabrics, and to eat pork. Should we still live by O.T. laws?” If you answer, “Yes,” they says, “Have fun living your sexist, chauvinistic, judgmental, xenophobic lifestyle choice. The rest of culture will advance forward without you.”

Anyone with even the slightest understanding of the Bible knows the difference between ceremonial laws of purity and transcendent laws of morality and the category confusion here. Its not hard to spot why this argument is absurd. The problem is, almost no one today, even in the church, has the slightest understanding of the Bible and the law. The point is the moral law of God is “**holy, righteous, and good**” (**Rom 7:12**). There is nothing wrong with the law if you use it lawfully (**1 Tim 1:8**). The problem isn't the law. I'm not going to defend that anymore here.

The problem is the hypocrisy that comes from the judgmentalism. That hypocrisy is self-evident in the smug intolerant condescending answer in the Facebook poster. I preached on this a few weeks ago. In our text, it is a little

more difficult to find, but it is there; and it is critical that you see it. The Pharisees have not done something very important. Who is missing among the people they brought to Jesus? The man! It takes *two* to commit adultery. Where is the man? If she really “was caught,” then they had to have seen her with a man. Why didn’t they bring him?

The answer is, because **they really didn’t care** at all about the adultery. In fact, they also didn’t care about upholding God’s law, only part of it. That’s the essence of legalism. It picks and chooses what to keep and what not to keep. Here is what the law actually says, “**If a man commits adultery with the wife of his neighbor, both the adulterer and the adulteress shall surely be put to death**” (Lev 20:10).¹⁵ To judge someone, pretending that you care about upholding God’s law when you really don’t is an abominable, damnable lie. It is hypocritical in the extreme, and it is why we must stay far away from such attitudes when others are caught in sin. As the Apostle says, “**Brothers, if anyone is caught in any transgression, you who**

¹⁵ The law of Deut 22:21 (“... then they shall bring out the young woman to the door of her father's house, and the men of her city shall stone her to death with stones, because she has done an outrageous thing in Israel by whoring in her father's house. So you shall purge the evil from your midst”), which they may be quoting, does not apply because the circumstances are different than what is presented in John 8. However, the next verse may apply, “If a man is found lying with the wife of another man, both of them shall die, the man who lay with the woman, and the woman. So you shall purge the evil from Israel” (Deut 22:22).

are spiritual should restore him in a spirit of gentleness. Keep watch on yourself, lest you too be tempted” (Gal 6:1). This applies not only to church leaders, but to churches that present themselves to the world on moral issues, to Christians that debate these things with those who disagree, and even to you who have caught friends or loved ones in sins. If you respond the way the Pharisees did, you have put yourself in grave, serious danger, revealed a heart that is unaware of its own hypocrisy, and stubbornly refused to follow our Lord and biblical instruction on these matters. This is not a place you want to be in. Before looking at others, look at yourself.

Where did Paul get this from? Perhaps he got it from our passage, from the oral tradition of this very story that he could easily have known from the disciples who witnessed it. It sure fits. That leads to the second reaction in the story, the reaction of our Lord.

Maybe the single most important reason why this story is so well known and loved is because of Jesus’ reaction, not only to the woman, but also the Pharisees. Dear Christian, if you

respond as the Pharisees did, then you have to know how Christ will respond to you. What did Jesus do? It says that he “bent down and wrote with his finger on the ground.” Of course, the story does not tell us what he wrote, but I assure you it wasn’t a smiley face or a hopscotch for them all to start jumping in. Almost all guesses are that he wrote something from God’s word.

One of the earliest guesses comes from a couple of manuscripts that say he wrote in the dust “the sins of each one of them.” That may or may not relate to God’s word. There are two guesses on how this happened. I want to tell you about one because it actually helps to show the reliability of our story. There is a certain heretical *Gospel of Barnabas* that dates from the 16th century and appears to have Muslim sympathies. It adds this line, “Jesus stopped down and with his finger made a mirror on the ground wherein everyone saw his own iniquities.”¹⁶ This is magic. The real story does not show any hint of magic or make-believe like you find in this

¹⁶ See also codex Etschmiadzin #229 from the late 10th century (989 AD): “And they all saw their sins on the stones.” Willker section on “Important Variants,” p. 35-51.

addition or in Gnostic Gospels about Jesus. That's one reason why it can be believed.

More sober suggestions are that perhaps Jesus wrote **Jeremiah 17:13** LXX, “All who forsake you shall be put to shame; those who turn away from you shall be recorded on the ground.” Others have suggested that he wrote **Deut 17:7**, “The hand of the witnesses shall be first against him to put him to death, and afterward the hand of all the people. So you shall purge the evil from your midst,” for after writing he stood up and said to them, “Let him who is without sin among you be the first to throw a stone at her” (**John 8:7**).

This is what Jesus will do to anyone who decides to put himself above God's law. He will show you your hypocrisy, and if you do not forsake it and forgive others, he will judge you with the measure that you want to judge others. So be extremely careful my friends and note the reaction of these fools. Note that whatever he wrote the first time, they continued to press him for an answer. They were obstinate and hardened. Thus, he wrote on the ground again (**John 8:8**).

Perhaps this time he wrote the law that they had misquoted (**Lev 20:10**), showing their duplicity in the trumped up charge against the woman but their failure to bring forth the man.

Whatever he wrote it says “**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**” (**John 8:9**).

That is how he reacts to those that want to charge someone else with sin in hypocrisy. And remember, hypocrisy is not having sin yourself, but being duplicitous and denying that you have sin or that your motives are pure or whatever. The hypocrite is the one who claims to be without sin(s).

How does he react to the one charged with sin? Two things. First, **he does not justify her sin**. This is important. Jesus does not say, “**You can leave now, I know you didn’t do anything wrong.**” He does not say, “**I’m sure the guy is very nice and treats you much better than your husband, and so were perfectly justified in committing adultery.**” He does not say, “**Don’t worry about it, adultery isn’t a sin anymore, because I came to abolish the law.**” He says “**from now on sin**

no more” (John 8:11). Jesus forces her to confront her sin. He tells her it is a sin, and he expects that she will stop it. He leaves no wiggle room for her to continue in her sinful behavior.

But this command of fealty and obedience comes *only after* he has shown her the gospel. That’s the key. How does he present the gospel to her? It is interesting what he does. He asks her a question. He probes her. “Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?” (John 8:10). The woman responds to Jesus’ question, “No one, Lord.” No one has condemned me.

Jesus’ response is pure gospel: “Neither do I condemn you.” Some commentators have suggested that Jesus really is overthrowing the law on stoning here. That he is saying men no longer have a right to condemn because Jesus is here overthrowing the law. I think that is absurd.

Jesus’ whole point was that the law commanded them to stone her, so why don’t they obey it? He knows they were unwilling to do it, because either 1. They had no authority

under Roman law to do that without a trial (I think Jesus may actually be forcing them into an untenable position, either break Roman law and face severe consequences or break God's law and not stone her) and/or 2. Would look quite bad in the eyes of the people whom they were trying to turn against Jesus. His comment about stoning actually **upholds the Law of Moses** while protecting her because he knows they won't obey it, thus revealing more hypocrisy.

I can remember in our own church's history when the issue of divorce caused several families to leave because they were convinced that there is never a biblical justification for divorce and anyone who dares to give an exception is committing an unforgivable sin. The elders at that time were prepared to show these people their own hypocrisy by implementing Jesus' strategy here. Under their own terms, all remarriage after divorce means that person necessarily commits adultery. So they want zealously to uphold the law. Yet, that same law *still* commands them, the witnesses bringing these charges, to stone the adulterers. But today as then, legalists don't want to

carry out those parts of God's law that are difficult for them. They only want to carry out those parts that don't personally affect them, to give themselves some sense of moral superiority over others or to justify their own guilty consciences on some other law they have broken ... I'm not sure the psychology behind it all. What I do know is that to a legalist, the gospel is like Star Wars ... in a galaxy far, far away.

But not only is Jesus upholding the law with regard to the Pharisees' reaction, he is upholding it with regard to his own reaction. Notice, who "caught" the woman? Did Jesus catch her? No. Jesus did not "catch" this woman in the act, even though he knew she was guilty. But the law demanded that those who caught someone in the act be the first to cast the stone. Therefore, the law did not apply to him. It only applied to those bringing charges because they caught her. **Since the law did not apply to him, he is free not to condemn her**, even before he dies on the cross, after which time he is free not to condemn anyone because he has perfectly upheld the law in all respects.

This fits in line with what we learn about Jesus back in [John 3:17-18](#), “God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him. Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God.” For the woman to leave there and sin no more would be an expression of the faith that is implicit in the gospel here.

What is critical [for those caught in such acts](#) to know is therefore 1. That what they have done is sin and they must stop but 2. Jesus has died for that sin, paid the punishment for it whatever it is or how many times it has occurred or will occur does not condemn them if they will repent and trust in Christ alone to save them and 3. Any discipline that occurs for such behavior is for the purpose of restoring a person to repentance and not for the purpose of being judgmental or hypocritical, for we have all sinned and are deserving of God’s wrath and the wrath of others. This is what our passage says in such a profound way, unlike really any other story in the

Bible. That is why it is here. Its message is redemptive, forgiving, and yet holy, righteous, and good.

How will you respond to this message? **Understand, sometime in the future you are likely to be *both* the accuser *and* the accused.** So you need to pay special attention to what Jesus says to both kinds of people. Consider all you have heard, but also consider something else. I want to turn here to the last idea of this passage, which is that this story is not really about the woman at all. It is about Jesus. **This is more than a moral lesson.** It is about the Pharisees trying to trap Jesus and about his supreme ability to not be caught by men. It is about their trying to kill him before the time when he can die on the cross. It is about Satan's plan to ruin the purpose of Christ's coming. In their hypocrisy they try to show themselves morally superior *to him*. Their key words are, **"This they said to test him, that they might have some charge to bring against him" (John 8:6).**

At the end of the day, a hypocritical judgmental spirit towards others is really a testing of Christ to bring some charge against him. **"How dare you, Jesus, tell me that my sin is**

wrong.” It is a testing of his body on earth, the church. “How dare you, church, tell me that my sin should be disciplined.” But so is not accepting his forgiveness when you are the one caught. This is also a defiance against God, a stubborn refusal to accept his mercy and grace. Both are defiance, not against other people, but against God himself. They are rebellion against him. You need to see this, so that you may be aware of the darker, deeper attitude that lurks in those murky places that cause such unforgiveness to come out of your own soul.

But Jesus extends the gospel to you. “Where are they? Who has condemned you?” The answer is, “no one.” No one is able to condemn you. Christ has not condemned you, but your sins have. So he calls you to trust in him as king and lord of the universe and to flee from the sins that have so ruined your life and continue to trouble you and hurt others. If the church ever hopes to recover its redemptive task in the world today, we need to start here, in how we respond to sin, be it our own or others. Therefore, as you deal with others or with

yourself, will you condemn? Will you condemn the one that has so grossly sinned against you? Will you condemn yourself?

There are two great problems facing each person with regard to ourselves and others. One is our lack of ability to forgive and our desire to so quickly condemn. The other is our lack of contrition and humility that will go to others and ask for forgiveness. On the other hand, there is **no greater healing power** in the world that you can give to someone else than to forgive them and be slow to judge, *even when they don't ask for it*, for this woman did not ask Jesus for anything, yet he did not condemn her. The only way you can even attempt this is if you have experienced it from Christ Jesus personally. Have you experienced the forgiveness that comes from Christ? Do you know what it means to not have your sins counted against you? If not, turn to him and you will know. Will you believe the good news and live in light of it? That is the reason this true story from the life of our Lord was added by a wise sage under the inspiration and direction of the Holy Spirit. That's what I believe and that's where I take my stand.