

DON'T STONE HER OR THE BIBLE!

John 7:53-8:11

18 January 2015

[Note: Preaching is a live event where God meets with His people, and that cannot be reproduced or duplicated. It is unique every time, and indispensable in the life of the Christian and the church. This is not a complete transcript; it is typically about 80% of the actual sermon. Some common abbreviations in these notes are: "NB" = *nota bene*, "note well" / "+" = an illustration / "[X]" = an application / "BTW" = By the way / "Cf." = cross-reference / "i.e." = In other words / "b/c" = because / "E.G." = for example.]

At last, back to John's Gospel! – Last year, we covered chps 1-7...

Now, what a strange welcome we receive in our very next verse, the very next character is not a word, but a [bracket]?! –

With marginal notes saying (e.g., NASB, ESV, NIV) that the earliest mss don't include this, or they put it in a different place. –

Well, what a way to start the new year in the pulpit, by telling you what is *not* supposed to be in your Bible!? – 'Welcome back to John, now take out your scissors!' –

But, if we are a church committed to expository preaching, then we cannot dodge these tough questions.

Because we teach verse-by-verse through the Bible, we have to face up to just two occasions in NT where this problem arises – Mk. 16 and here, Jn. 8.

So, this beautiful story about the woman caught in adultery whom Jesus rescued – did it really happen, or is it just made up?

And if it doesn't belong in the Bible, then who put it here? – And what else might they have added to God's Word? – Christian, are you sure you can trust your Bible?

And if this story shouldn't be here, why is it still included in every Bible translation? – Why has it been believed & loved by most Christians for many centuries? – Is there anything God wants to teach us from this story?

Read & Pray...

Give title...

***THREE QUESTIONS WE NEED TO ANSWER TODAY:**

1. Is this story in the Bible? – Along with the majority of conservative NT scholars & commentators today, I don't believe it is inspired Scripture.

Here are the TWO MAJOR reasons why I do not view Jn. 7:53-8:11 as part of the original biblical text:

a. INTERNAL evidence:

NB, vv. 52-8:1 – But how did Jesus all of sudden appear, when vv. 45ff did not involve Him. – This story reads more like an interruption. – From 8:12, we're back into the Feast of Tabernacles setting that dominated chp. 7, as we'll see next week.

Plus, in the Greek, the style & vocab of this story don't fit the rest of John's Gospel. – 11 of the 12 vss here features words not found elsewhere in John's Gospel. – And none of John's standard vocabulary and key words appear here. – It bears the fingerprints of a different author.

b. EXTERNAL evidence:

This story is missing from all the Greek mss of John before the 5th century. – All the oldest & fullest & best mss do not contain it.

When it does appear, it shows up in different places in John – at least 3 other places than this, and once in a Luke mss.

It seemed to be a true story that oral tradition kept floating around until someone decided it should land in the Bible, somewhere.

ALL the earliest church fathers omit this passage in commenting on John and jump directly from 7:52 to 8:12.

Further – NO eastern church father quotes this passage before the 10th century when dealing with this Gospel.

My conclusion (with which you are welcome to disagree): I think this story really happened, but wasn't included in inspired Scripture.

Which naturally leads us then to the 2nd question...

2. Can you trust your Bible?

Satan's oldest trick. – Gen. 3 to Eve, "Did God really say?"...

Yet most Christians today are not grounded in their bibliology, their doctrine of Scripture. – So every time there is another attack on the Bible, they are badly shaken. – But it doesn't have to be this way, if believers are equipped and grounded in sound doctrine!...

~ This is why we had James White speak on this at last year's worldview conf – You can get his lectures on YouTube on the Transmissions of the NT – superb!...

+ Did you see Newsweek magazine's lovely little Christmas gift that came out last month, on Christmas Eve?! – Cover page, big & bold: "The Bible: So Misunderstood, It's a Sin"

The timing was nothing new. – Major news magazines always jump onto Christmas & Easter to tackle religious issues and debates within Christianity. –

Sometimes, these secular writers at least allow both sides to speak on issues. – But not this time. – This time, all Newsweek did is throw stones at Scripture and at Christianity – from every possible angle, without allowing any evangelical or conservative voice to represent us at all in the article.

The author begins with that tired old claim that you cannot even be sure you have the real Bible in your hands. – ‘All we have (says the author) are bad translations of translations of translations, of copies of copies of copies (like the old telephone game....).’ – And that they were ‘written many centuries after Christ’.

But that is totally false. – We have biblical mss dating back to early in the 2nd c., within 30 yrs of the Apostle John. –

And they were not all copying the guy before them; they were often copying from the originals & earliest mss. – Not the ‘telephone’ game, but the ‘speak to the 1st guy each time’ game – a very different, far more reliable method! – As all the evidence reveals.

The Newsweek article specifically uses our passage here in Jn. 8 to take aim at the Bible, saying that scribes only made up this story in the Middle Ages. –

But that is just bad journalism and ignorance of history, or blatant deception. – All the mss evidence points to this story being believed in the early centuries of Christianity, probably as a result of oral tradition from the time of Christ.

* **‘Can you trust your Bible?’ – THREE REASONS you can trust your Bible:**

Scripture is: (a) self-authenticating, (b) recognised, and (c) preserved.

Three things the Newsweek article rejects – ‘who cares about the Bible’s own claims, and there is no recognised canon that has been reliably preserved today’, they say.

~ In contrast, NB: Like any Bible-believing Protestant/evangelical church, our own Antioch Decl of Faith begins here:

1. Revelation & the Bible – ...We believe the Bible to be the Word of God [(a) self-authenticating]; that its sixty-six books, as originally written, were fully and verbally inspired by the Spirit of God and were entirely free from error [(b) a recognised canon] and have been providentially and reliably (c) preserved for us. We believe that when the Bible speaks, God speaks....

(a) The Bible is SELF-AUTHENTICATING:

Here is the best proof of all for Scripture, for all who approach it with a humble heart of faith:

Over 2,000x in the OT alone, the Bible affirms that God spoke what is written there!

In the NT, Jesus constantly affirmed that He viewed the OT as the Word of God. – And Jesus did this in spite of the fact that He too was often using an imperfect, human translation, the Grk. Septuagint (LXX)!

Cf. what Paul said about the OT: 2 Tim. 3:16... (cf. 2 Pet. 1:20-21 explains how...)

And then in 1 Tim. 5:18, Paul includes the NT Gospel writings and words of Jesus as “Scripture”. –

Then in 2 Pet. 3:16, Peter refers to Paul's NT writings as "Scripture", as also a part of the sacred writings that God was inspiring, 'breathing out' as a part of His authoritative, infallible Word.

The phrase, "the Word of God" occurs over 40x in the NT, putting the NT on par with the OT as the very voice of God. –

☒ THEREFORE, the Christian, enabled by the Spirit of God, recognises this divine quality to this Book. – This Book is divine, not just b/c of some Mormon 'burning in the bosom', subjectively. –

This Book is objectively God-breathed. – But by faith, illumined by God's Spirit, we discover the divine power of Scripture:

As Jesus said in John 10:27: "My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me."

Or, "Man shall not live by bread alone, but..."

Or, Heb. 4:12, "The word of God is living and active"!

~ Luther, *The Bible is alive, it speaks to me. It has feet, it runs after me. It has hands, it lays hold of me.* I've read other books; but this book reads me!

(b) The Bible is a RECOGNISED Canon:

Not "cannon" as in cannon ball, but 'canon' (single "n") – from Grk word *kanon* = "rod, measuring stick, rule" – *i.e., The Canon of Scripture is the official list of 66 inspired books that are the rule for all Christian faith & practice.*

SO, WHICH BOOKS belong in the Bible? – Why these 66, and not lots of others? – Dan Brown & the DaVinci Code, like Newsweek's recent article, try to tell us it was Constantine's idea or some church council who decided or created the NT Canon.

Not so! – No one authorised or decided which books to include or not. – That is the Roman Catholic view, which leads to the exalting of sacred tradition above Scripture, *i.e., Sola Ecclesia* becomes the foundational authority, not *sola Scripture*, the Bible alone.

The Protestant view of canonicity believes that no one 'decided' on the canon. – Rather, God's people RECOGNISED and affirmed which books were *already foundational* in the life of the church. –

The Church only identified those writings that were clearly God-given and authoritative.

Over the centuries, *THREE widely recognised TESTS were used to validate which writings were divinely authoritative & inspired.* – *The 'Three As':*

(i) *authorship* – written by a recognised OT prophet or NT apostle or one of their associates; [even Luke & Hbr giving apostolic material taken from the apostles]

(ii) *agreement* – the writing must not disagree with or contradict any previous Scripture;

(iii) *affirmation* – the writing must have general consensus by God’s people, under the influence of God’s Spirit, that it is a God-breathed book, i.e., self-authenticating.

I.e., God’s people affirming that it fulfils the purpose for which all Scripture was given, 2 Tim 3:16b....

+ E.G., this is why the Catholic Apocrypha is not included in our OT. Nor are any of the early Christian apocryphal writings included in our NT (e.g., *Gospel of Peter, Thomas, Judas*, etc.):

WHY? – *B/c those writings did not pass any of these three tests of canonicity:*

(i) *authorship* – Neither the OT or NT apocryphal writings come from recognised prophets or apostles. – OT apocryphal works were added much later, around 200-150 BC, over 200 yrs after Malachi, the last OT book.

Likewise, Christian apocryphal writings are all written in the 2nd c. AD or later, unlike all the NT writings from the 1st c., by eyewitnesses or their associates.

(ii) *agreement* – Much of the teaching in these apocryphal books contradicts the Bible & the truth of the gospel.

(iii) *affirmation* – these writings were NOT recognised by either the Jewish Canon of the OT, or by Jesus or any of the NT writers or the universal Church at that time.

Still you may wonder: Can we TRUST the biblical canon, the mss. on record today, from which our Bible translations are taken? – Or are these mss. too flawed or damaged? – HOW can we be sure that we have the pure & true Word of God?...

(c) *The Bible has been PRESERVED:*

In Isa. 40, the prophet declared, “The grass withers, the flower fades, but My word endures forever.” – Ps. 119, “Forever, O Lord, Your Word is settled in the heavens.”

Some will say: ‘Nobody has the original mss. today, so what’s the point in saying they are perfect & inerrant!’

+ As I once heard two Baptist leaders here say at an annual Assembly: ‘Sure, we believe in the inerrancy of the originals. But anybody got a copy?!’

But we must beware of this huge LEAP in logic: Going from, ‘We do not possess the originals’ TO ‘We do not (or cannot) know what the originals said!’

+ I have never personally handled the American “Declaration of Independence” of 1776? – But I don’t know anyone who doubts its existence or accuracy today. –

Even though we've never seen it, we trust that the translations we've seen are accurate. – And even if the original was lost, we can still be CERTAIN of what the Decl. of Independence says.

WHY? – B/c we trust the copies! – So we can be sure of what the original said.

So it is with Scripture:

We can declare that when the Bible speaks today, God speaks, b/c His inerrant Word has been faithfully PRESERVED for us down through the centuries.

B/c of God's perfect character & His Spirit who is "Holy" and who promised to guide His apostles into "all truth", b/c of these great assurances – we can know that God has kept & guarded His Word down through the ages from all of Satan's attacks & man's schemes.

Do you realise that, through the centuries, God has used a process called TEXTUAL CRITICISM, a precise science, to collect & preserve an amazing array of biblical mss.?!

"In fact," as one scholar states, "the number of existing biblical mss. dramatically outdistances the existing fragments of any other ancient literature." (MSB)

+ E.G.: Our Grk NT is constructed from more than 5,500 mss., dating from AD 135, within 30 yrs. of original writing, to AD 1200. –

They range in size from little scraps the size of a stamp to complete mss. of the Bible. – Plus, we have another 20,000 mss. of early translations of the NT, in Latin, Syriac, etc.. –

Compare that with the next most commonly copied ancient doc., Homer's *Iliad* = 643 mss., all partial, with the earliest being 400 yrs. after Homer. (Or Tacitus, 2 copies!)

YET, if you walked down to WITS today and asked the Lit. professors if we have a reliable version today of Homer's *Iliad*, what would they say? – Of course!

As NT scholars compare these thousands of biblical mss. with each other, they can establish with almost perfect accuracy what the original mss. (the autographs) would have said! –

Aside from a few thorny spots, like Jn. 8, there is remarkable AGREEMENT among the different mss.!

Yes, there are some slight differences. – But know what those differences are! – So we need not fear that we'll still find more differences one day. – Everything else agrees in the various mss!

+ On one of our Israel tours, we had the great privilege of visiting the museum of the Dead Sea Scrolls (and Qumran, where they were discovered!). – There we learned the story of this monumental discovery that began in 1947:

A little Bedouin shepherd boy was throwing a rock into a cave and heard a crash! – He went in and found jars with scrolls inside. –

Before long, scholars found that some of these scrolls contained large portions of the OT that were 1,000 years OLDER than any of the existing versions of the OT being used. – Uh oh, would they agree, or contradict?!...

Know what the Dead Sea Scrolls revealed? – It proved that the Hebrew OT mss. that Jews & Christians had been using for centuries, were very, very accurate. – God had *preserved* His Word, just as He promised!

Textual scholars today affirm that 99.99% of the original writings of Scripture have been reclaimed. – And the remaining one-hundredth percent does not significantly affect any Christian doctrine. – E.G., as in Jn. 8 here.

To SUM UP: NO, we do not have the original biblical mss. today. –

But YES, it is very important to affirm that those original mss. were revealed by God and were inerrant, B/C we CAN know almost ALL of what those originals said today through the available mss.

☒ What do you think people would do today IF we did possess the original mss.? – Probably treat them as magical relics and idolise them and charge money to visitors who come to worship these docs, instead of worshipping their Author, God Himself!

~ Recall Voddie at Monash catechising us on why we can trust the Bible: (together with me if you were there!)

I believe the Bible because it is a reliable collection of historical documents written down by eyewitnesses during the lifetime of other eyewitnesses that report supernatural events which took place in fulfillment of specific prophecies and claim to be divine rather than human in origin."

☒ WHICH Bible version should you use? – Short answer: a more literal one, not a paraphrase or dynamic one. – A word-for-word translation, not some thought-for-thought translation. –

I.e., a translation that cares more about faithfulness to the original than relevance to the reader, since you can't always have both and must choose at times. –

A Bible translator's job is not to explain it for you; that's my job, the preacher, and any Bible teacher or commentary. – The translator's job is only to translate it, as literally and faithfully, and understandably, as possible.

Thus, here we recommend: NASB & ESV, and NKJV. – An old 1984 NIV is not bad, but avoid the new NIVs (2011/12 edition), which cares more about being gender-neutral than being faithful to the original.]

3. Is the Bible in this story? – Yes, absolutely!

This story of Jesus and the woman caught in adultery – it gels with Scripture in every way, and with all that we know about the character & compassion of our Lord. – Nothing in this story contradicts the Bible. – Everything in it powerfully illustrates the Bible and the gospel!

Plus, it may have really happened in the life of our Lord. – Plus, in the providence of God, this story has been a part of Christian worship and belief for most of the past 20 centuries. –

And, this is a favourite passage of the tolerance crowd who say the Bible is soft on sin and you should never judge. –

So, surely it is worth at least a brief look:

(a) The TRAP – Here was the great dilemma:

If Jesus said, ‘Don’t stone her’, He violates the Law of Moses, which He said He didn’t come to abolish but to fulfil (Matt. 5:17, etc.). – And He would be subject to arrest for teaching against Jewish law.

YET, on the other hand, if Jesus said, ‘Stone her’? – Yet He said He came to save sinners, not destroy them. – He showed Himself to be the friend of sinners, full of grace & compassion.

Either way, Jesus was stuck, trapped, with no way out. – They’re sure they’ve got Him this time!

But this is NOT a dilemma unique only to this story. – No, this is THE great moral dilemma of the universe: *How can God be both righteous and gracious, both holy and loving, both good & merciful??* –

This is the epitome of all theological dilemmas, illustrated right here in this guilty woman cowering before the Pharisees, as they await the Lord’s answer.

BUT before answering, Jesus decides it’s time to draw, to do a little finger painting! – v. 6b...

HOW this must have irritated them? (Ladies, like when your husband won’t look up from his newspaper, laptop, or smartphone!)

WHY does Jesus do such a bizarre thing here? – Doesn’t say. Perhaps to take all eyes off of her, as she might’ve still been only partially clothed, full of shame & embarrassment? –

So Jesus takes the spotlight off of her and onto Himself, where it should be, as He draws in the sand.

(b) The TRUTHS – *Four brief lessons & applications from this story:*

People love to speculate over what Jesus wrote in the sand. – But the more important message is not what He might’ve written, but what He actually said: vv. 7b, 11b...

(1) *v. 7, Start with your own sin, before the sin of others.*

Matt. 7, taking the log out of my own eye before the plank out of yours.

v. 7b, Jesus knew they were not true witnesses and this was no true trial. – BTW, adultery requires two parties – where was the man?!...

QUESTION: Is this Jesus being soft on sin, the trendy, modern Jesus, meek & mild, judging no one? – Not at all. – On the contrary, He judges everyone here, everyone!

He judges her – implies that she could be stoned for her sin, if it was proven by a fair trial. – In v. 11, He will even call it sin and tell her to stop it.

But the shocker here is that Jesus doesn't judge only her: He also judges the Pharisees for their sin.

NB, *These religious leaders were eager to peep through a keyhole to expose others, but to not look in the mirror of God's Law that exposed their own sin & shame.*

QUESTION: Which sin is worse – sexual immorality, or religious hypocrisy? – Pretending to be monogamous, while sleeping around? – Or pretending to worship, while plotting to murder the Son of God? – Both are repulsive before God, both. –

In fact, throughout the Gospels, what is the sin that always evokes the strongest & most severe reactions from Jesus? – Not immorality, but hypocrisy. – Self-righteous pretenders are the ones Jesus hates most.

So here, more than judging the woman, Jesus *judges the judges!*

☒ You cannot be too guilty to get saved. – But you can be too good to get saved!...

(2) v. 9, Run TO Jesus with your sin, not away FROM Him.

vv. 7b-9 – When Jesus started doodling again on the ground, this time it was probably not to get them to look at Him, but to look at *themselves & their sin!*

☒ This woman seems to know what these Pharisees have forgotten in their self-righteous pride: Prov. 28:13...

(3) v. 11b, Christ came not to condemn, but to save! – Cf. Jn. 3:17...

+ Picture Christ, in a sense, speaking the words of Paul to this wicked & broken woman: Rom. 8:1-3...!

HOW could Jesus say such a thing? – How could Nathan declare to David that he was forgiven after his awful adultery with Bathsheba? How could Jesus offer the woman at the well (Jn. 4) complete forgiveness & salvation, after all her divorces & immorality? –

And the biggest question of all: 'How could Christ ever forgive me, since I know my own heart better than anyone else's? I know my own sin & rebellion more than I know yours or his or hers. YET still God would offer to forgive me & wash me clean?! How? Amazing love, how can I be?!'

Answer: There's was one reason that Christ could say to that adulteress, 'Neither do I condemn you'. – It was because He knew He would take her condemnation on Calvary's cross in just a few mos. time.

2 Cor. 5:21...

*Bearing shame and scoffing rude
In MY place condemned He stood
Sealed my pardon with His blood
Hallelujah, what a Savior!*

(4) v. 11c, Forgiveness calls for holiness.

NB, Not, 'You are forgiven, now go do as you wish, live how you want, since I'll never judge you for anything.' – No! – Repeat: v. 11c...

NB, not 'Stop sinning, so that you can be forgiven.' – That was the Pharisee's mindset (vv. 4-5)....

Christ & Christianity say the opposite: 'You are forgiven, now stop sinning!' –

A world of difference! – NOT obedience that earns grace, but grace-driven, grace-motivated, grace-fuelled obedience.

Works-based holiness (i.e., legalism) just produces more Pharisees – smug, self-righteous, joyless hypocrites!

Grace-driven holiness produces the opposite – joyful, humble, gracious, forgiving people who truly obey, not just externally, but from the heart!

Lk 3, John the Baptist's preaching, "Bring forth fruit in keeping with repentance"! – Here is true proof of salvation, true repentance:

NOT just praying to change, wishing to change, hoping, thinking, feeling, or desiring to stop sinning. –

No, true repentance = actually forsaking sin! – Actually putting of ungodliness, and putting on godliness.

CONCL. – Repeat 3 questions & answers...

End back on #3: Where do you find yourself in this story??...

Like the Pharisees, too good for God, not seeing your true sinful, diseased condition & your great need for a Saviour? – More wicked than an adulteress, because of your empty religion & proud heart??....

Or like the guilty woman – bringing your sin to Christ, exposed & ruined, yet with the eyes of faith looking into the most forgiving eyes imaginable – the Lord Jesus Christ, crucified & risen to save sinners like you & me!

~ Michael Card writes a song from the perspective of the woman caught in adultery:

*Surrounded with shouts the cruel accusations
Dragged to the court, no hope of salvation
All hope was lost, for those who had caught me
Knew what I was, they knew all about me.*

*I thought it seemed strange as we entered in
They stopped a young rabbi to ask his opinion.
Caught in the act, their reason for hating
My body could feel the stones that were waiting.*

*My judge, a man from Galilee
In His eyes so gentle I could see
A father and a brother and a son.*

*Just as I saw Him, the hope I had lost became born again
I was not hopeless, though I'd been lost
Now, I felt I was found when He looked at me
With His forgiving eyes.*

*The crowd gathered round, so angry and violent
But He stood beside me, peaceful and silent
Then with a word, with one question, He showed them
That they too were guilty and could not condemn.*

*The next thing I knew, He asked me, "Where are they?"
And I looked around the courtyard was empty
The stones scattered 'round, the warm morning sunlight
He'd made the darkness perfectly light.*

*In this new light now I understood
He would not condemn me though He could
For He would be condemned someday for me.*

*Just as I saw Him, the hope I had lost became born again
I was not hopeless, though I'd been lost
Now, I felt I was found when He looked at me
With His forgiving eyes
Forgiving eyes.*

PRAY (Ps. 130:4; Rom. 8:31-34!)...

APPLICATION QUESTIONS

1. Should this story be in our Bibles? If not, how did it get there?
2. Once we discover that there are 1% of differences among ancient biblical manuscripts, must this shake our confidence in Scripture? Can we still be sure we have God's Word in our hands? How so? (Key: Yes, there are a few differences among the mss, *but we know what those differences are!* And thus we know that there is 99% agreement, out of some 25,000 early mss, and the 1% affects no major or minor Christian doctrine or belief or practice!)
3. How did we get our Bibles? What are the three key words for having a biblical, Protestant (and reformed evangelical) view of the Bible? (self-authenticating, recognised,

and preserved) How did God's people recognise the canonical books of the OT and NT – by what three criteria? (authorship, agreement & affirmation)

4. How does this story in Jn. 7:53-8:11 powerfully illustrate the whole message of the gospel? What biblical truths are clearly displayed in this moving story? What does this mean for your life tomorrow? For us as a church?