John 7:53-8:11 — Woman Caught in Adultery

John 7:53-8:11

And everyone went to his own house. But Jesus went to the Mount of Olives. Now early in the morning He came again into the temple, and all the people came to Him; and He sat down and taught them. Then the scribes and Pharisees brought to 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?” 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 by their 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.”

Authenticity of the Passage to the Gospel of John

- Manuscript Witness
  - Earliest Greek manuscripts do NOT include the story
  - These verses are present in over 900 manuscripts of John
    - Some place it in its place John 7:53-8 :11
    - Some place the story after John 7:36
    - Some place it after John 21:25 (end of Gospel)
    - Some place it in Luke after Luke 21:38 (right before the Passion)
    - Some place it in Luke after 24:53 (end of Gospel)
- Liturgical Witness
  - These verses are not read liturgically at any point in the year - neither in the Coptic Orthodox Church, neither in the Eastern Orthodox Church
- Patristic Witness
  - Most Greek Fathers do NOT mention this story
    - Irenaeus, Tertullian, Cyprian
    - Cyril of Alexandria
    - John Chrysostom (Homily 52 on John (John 7:45-8:19) does not have ANY mention)
  - Latin Fathers DO mention this story

    - St Jerome included it in the Vulgate in John 8, which probably solidified its inclusion
    - St Augustine (Tractate 33)
    - St Ambrose
  - St Didymus the Blind
    - Commentaries on Ecclesiastes 223
      - We find therefore in some gospels: a woman, he says, was condemned by the Jews for a sin and was being sent to be stoned in the place where this was accustomed to happen. The savior, he says, having seen her and having observed that they were ready to stone her, said to those who were about to cast stones at her: "Whoever has not sinned, let him take a stone and cast it himself."
        If anyone is conscious in himself of not having sinned, let him take a stone and strike her. And no one dared; having checked themselves and known that they themselves were also liable for certain things, they did not dare to condemn that woman.
  - Syriac Didascalia Apostolorum
    - Preserves a similar story about the Lord
- Arguments Against Johannine Authorship
  - Breaks the flow of John's Narrative
    - John 7-8 is a Trial for the Lord
      - All the arguments made against the Lord
    - He's speaking about the Feast of Tabernacles... water, light, etc.
      - John 7:37-39 - Living Water
      - John 8:12 - Light of the World
    - "And Jesus was left alone, and the woman standing in the midst." - they are alone... and then the next verse "Then Jesus spoke to them again, saying, 'I am the light of the world.'"
  - Hapax Legomena (words that appear only once)
    - John never refers to "the scribes" anywhere else in his Gospel (usually "the Jews")
    - 13 other words in this section that are not found anywhere else in John's Gospel
  - Evidence for Lukan Authorship
    - Forgiveness Theme
      - Prodigal Son, Zacchaeus, Sinful Woman at Simon's House, Thief on the Cross
    - "Scribes and Pharisees"
    - Christ in the Temple usually is standing and proclaiming, not sitting and teaching
    - "in the midst"
      - Used in Synoptics and also used in Acts 4
- Did it actually happen?
  - Absolutely!
  - Question of how the death sentence should be carried out was a highly debated topic (i.e. Stoning vs Strangling)

    - The Person of Christ here is not unusual or strange
- Why might it be missing from the Gospels?
    - Not everything the Lord did was written down
    - Some believe it was originally part of John or Luke and it was taken out for being scandalous (i.e. looks like Jesus was being soft on adultery)

Adultery

- What is adultery?
    - Violation of a marriage
    - Different from fornication (porneia)
    - A married man could have relations with a woman who was not an Israelite, or who was not married to an Israelite, because that would not be an offense to **his neighbor**
- Woman is considered to be the property of her husband
    - It is not a matter of morality for her
    - But a matter of property for the husband
- Double standard for men and women
- Christ changes all of that
    - He makes it adultery if the husband has relations with anyone (not just the wife)
    - Christianity uplifts women to a status of equality with men
        - Husbands are required to be faithful
        - St Paul says the wife has authority over the husband's body, and the husband over the wife's
        - Christ says if a man remarries after divorcing his wife, he has committed adultery
- To be caught breaking the Law of Moses...
    - Two eyewitnesses with the same details, witnessing the same thing at the same time
    - Witnesses need to warn someone in advance if they are about to break the Law of Moses
    - Husband cannot be witness against his wife
    - What are the chances this happens in adultery? For this reason, adultery was almost NEVER prosecuted.
        - Never happens in front of eyewitnesses
        - Never has advance warning

Interpretation

- Did she commit adultery?
    - Where is the man? (It takes two to commit adultery)
    - Maybe the husband set this up
        - Wives cannot divorce husbands, but husbands could divorce wives. If he divorced her, he had to give her back the dowry
        - Maybe he doesn't have the dowry anymore, or lost it
    - Maybe the man got away
    - Maybe the man paid for his freedom (to the husband)

- Was stoning required?
  - The Law required adulterers be put to death, but not necessarily by stoning
- "What do you say?"
  - This is a test for Christ
    - If He says to stone her (or kill her), then He will be seen by the people as not compassionate or merciful
    - If He says not to stone her, then He is going against the Law of Moses
  - He stoops down and writes with His finger on the ground, while they keep asking Him "what do you say?"
  - St Augustine
    - "
- Writing with the Finger
  - Lots of references to the arm in the Bible, but not many to the finger
  - Writing of the Law
    - Deuteronomy 9:10 - "Then the Lord delivered to me two tablets of stone written with the finger of God, and on them *were* all the words which the Lord had spoken to you on the mountain from the midst of the fire in the day of the assembly."
    - Exodus 31:18 "He gave Moses two tablets of the Testimony, tablets of stone, written with the finger of God."
  - Casting out demons
    - Exodus 8:19 - "Then the magicians said to Pharaoh, “This *is* the finger of God.” But Pharaoh’s heart grew hard, and he did not heed them, just as the Lord had said."
    - Luke 11:20 - "But if I cast out demons with the finger of God, surely the kingdom of God has come upon you."
  - Many commentators say that Christ was writing the Law
- He who is without sin among you, let him throw a stone at her first.
  - ἀναμάρτητος (anamartitos)
    - "He who is without sin"
    - Some argue it means "if you are not guilty of adultery..." but it is highly unlikely that ALL of the people standing there were guilty of adultery
    - It is a call for recognition that we are ALL guilty of SOMETHING
  - If you brought the accusation of a capital crime, you were required to throw the first stone. This was a way the Jewish Law tried to make sure accusers told the truth and were careful not to bring charges rashly or falsely. If you falsely accused someone, you would receive the same punishment you were prepared to give that person (e.g. Susanna)
  - Christ reversed the whole situation on them
    - They brought her to him in order to trap her and to trap Him
    - But now, it is the accusers who are trapped:
      - The Law requires us to stone her!! Now they have to decide if they're going to throw the stone or not
      - If they don't throw the stone, then they violate the Law of Moses
      - If they throw the stone, they are saying they are without sin
- They went out one by one, beginning with the oldest, even to the last
- Has no one condemned you?

    - κατακρίνω
- Christ's Leniency
- "Sin no more"
    - Implies that she was guilty of *something*

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