

An Adulterous Woman, Busted!

Before we look at the woman in question, let's look at what the Bible says on the subject of adultery.

The Law.

Exodus 20:14, the 7th commandment and Exodus 20:17, the 10th commandment.

Leviticus 20:10, capital punishment.

Deuteronomy 22:22 - ditto -

Proverbs 6:23-29

Now let's look at the New Testament

Matthew 5:31-32

Mark 7:20-23

1 Thessalonians 4:3-5

It seems to me that the Old Testament is all about the deed; don't do it, whereas the New is more about the desire. This distinction nuances the difference between the two. One's a book of rules and regulations; the other's about pleasing God by being righteous and Holy before Him, brought together beautifully in Jeremiah 31:33 and 1 Corinthians 6:19. That doesn't make the New better than the Old, because without the Law, we wouldn't know how to please God.

Note, there's just two stories in the Old Testament involving adultery, can you remember them? David and Bathsheba and Hosea and Gomer. 2 Samuel 11:2-37 and Hosea 1:2 and Hosea 3:1-5, respectively. Neither of these two stories resulted in either of the adulterers being executed. In fact there is no recorded instance of adultery being punished in this way in the Old Testament.

Let's read the story. John 8:1-11.

What we do know -

This woman and her boyfriend were caught in the most compromising situation possible. They weren't just spotted checking out of a hotel together. No, no, they were busted halfway through their session.

The woman was dragged by a gang of people, or a lynch mob into the Temple. Jesus was in the middle of teaching an audience, Bible and life truths, when He was rudely interrupted.

What we don't know -

What was the root cause of the adultery? Was it the husband's neglect or the wife's diminished love, an imbalanced sexual appetite, boredom or what? What made this woman vulnerable to the charms of a 'player' willing to take advantage of her vulnerabilities, or was it the other way round? Satan will readily exploit vulnerability as a hook and line into sin.

How it is that the 'boyfriend' got off scot-free? Maybe he was more nimble on his feet and dived out of the window and ran down the street, or maybe the lynch mob was a bit sexist or they had family loyalties to the betrayed husband.

What were the circumstances of 'the bust' and who were the lynch mob? And how did the Scribes and Pharisees get involved?

How they knew that Jesus was in the Temple at that moment.

Back to the story. The woman was forcibly dragged into the Temple by a lynch mob; and the commotion interrupted Jesus teaching an audience. The mob consisted of men of a spread age demographic (Verse 8) and includes Pharisees, and it was they who addressed Jesus. Note, they addressed Jesus 'teacher'. They did this on a couple of occasions when they were trying to outwit Jesus, Matthew 22:16. It was a disingenuous title of respect, the two had no genuine respect for each other, Matthew 23:1-3.

The woman had been pushed into the centre of the gathering, whereupon one of the Pharisees outlined the case for the prosecution. There was no defence to be put forward, no mitigating circumstances or regret. No, this mob already found her guilty and so they asked Jesus to be judge, John 8:4-5. In verse 6, John describes the Pharisee's motives. If Jesus hadn't been there, what would the Pharisees have done to this woman?

I Googled: Roman law on adultery during Tiberias's reign -

The ultimate punishment for an unfaithful wife was death. A father could kill his married daughter (if she was still under his power) and her lover if they were caught committing adultery in his house or her husband's house. He had to kill both his daughter and her lover irrespective of his status, because if he killed only one of them, he could be charged with murder.

The husband's rights to kill his unfaithful wife were more limited. He could not legally kill his wife but he could kill her lover, if he was of inferior status, for example, a slave or a gladiator, and he caught them red-handed committing adultery in his own home. *

ie: under Roman law, the only ones that could carry out the sentence the Pharisees desired were the woman's dad, if the married couple lived in his house, but it had to be both wife and lover, not just one. Note how Roman law was quite sexist, there wasn't an equivalent remedy given to a cheated wife.

At this time, the Pharisees were subject to Roman law which took precedence over the Torah (the Jewish law). So, in the absence of Jesus, the woman would have just had a stern lecture from a Pharisee because there was not much else he could do. However, in this instance, the Pharisee sees an opportunity to put Jesus between a rock and a hard place. So the plan was to present this sinful woman to Jesus and demand that He passes judgement on her. That's where we join this story.

V2. Jesus is in the Temple teaching a crowd of people about God and about the Bible.

V3. A rowdy rabble consisting of Scribes and Pharisees burst onto the scene. Who were Scribes? Scribes were the Bible times equivalent of today's solicitors. They studied law, God's law, in great depth and they were the people to go to if you had a legal problem; say, if you wanted a contract drawing up. Another job the scribes did was to rewrite the Old Testament prior to printing presses being invented. For more information about scribes read about Ezra in the books of Ezra and Nehemiah. With one exception, Jesus did not get on well with the scribes, Matthew 8:19. The scribes had a big hand in Jesus's crucifixion, Matthew 16:21. It was their hypocrisy as much as their teaching that Jesus

objected to, Matthew 23:2-7, or walking the walk.

So can you imagine, Jesus either giving His audience a lesson or a sermon on the Bible, when all of a sudden, there's a big hullabaloo, with all these loud, rambunctious blokes burst onto the scene, dragging a half naked woman and dumping her right in front of Him?

V4-5. Then they read out the charges and the verdict; there was no need for a trial, just the sentence, and they even instructed what sentence He must pass on her. They read out Leviticus 20:10.

V6. They thought that Jesus had just two choices. Either confirm that she should be stoned to death, in which case they would have taken her outside and carried out the sentence and then when the Roman authorities investigated her death, they would have pointed to Jesus and He would have been charged with her murder. The only alternative they saw was for Jesus to somehow dilute the law by letting her off, which in their view would torpedo His authority because He would in effect be trying to rewrite God's law and replace it with a watered down, wishy-washy law that somehow endorsed adultery.

Jesus of course knew exactly what their plans and motives were. They didn't give two hoots about the woman's poor husband, justice or God's will. Their only focus was on Christ's undoing. Despite all this, and despite His lesson being kiboshed, Jesus kept His cool and wrote on the ground with His finger. Can you imagine what He was writing? Any guesses? Maybe, 'Numpties!' Fancy trying to outwit God! Why would you?

V7. They ask, they demand; they're not going to go away. So Jesus stands up and declares: 'He who is without sin, let him cast the first stone.' Jesus's dilemma has been about turned, the spotlight is now shining on the rabble; what's their next move? What it needed was for someone to stick his head up over the parapet and say, hey, I've got no sin! Then they can take her outside and he can chuck the first stone.

V8. Whilst He was waiting for an answer, Jesus returned to His writing in the dust on the floor. '... and plonkers.'

V9. Everyone looked at each other. No one was prepared to stick his hand up. It dawned on the oldest scribe/Pharisee there, that he wasn't without sin and so in all honesty, he wasn't qualified to throw that first stone. Notice, Matthew doesn't say, that the old man realised Jesus had outsmarted them and so he admitted defeat and walked off. No, Matthew says, he was convicted by his conscience. Maybe he was there at Jesus's sermon on the mount, Matthew 7:1-2. So off he walked, followed by the next oldest and then next down to the youngest, who scurried off embarrassed, tail between his legs.

V10. Eventually, Jesus stood up, looked around, everyone had gone, leaving just Him and the woman. He asks her, "Woman, where are those accusers of yours? Has no one condemned you?"

V11 & 12. These are the most powerful words in this passage. She said, "No one, Lord." And Jesus said to her, "Neither do I condemn you; go and sin no more." They raise a lot of questions. Romans 8:34, John 12:47. But on the other hand, John 5:22, Romans 2:16.

Discuss -

1.) What emotions were going through this woman at each stage of her ordeal?

2.) How would it be physically possible for the woman never to sin again? (NKJV) in NIV, leave your life of sin. Notice Jesus did not invite the woman to follow Him: why? She was just told to clean up her act. John 5:1

3.) What would become of this poor woman? We read about the plight of widows in the Gospels, presumably a similar situation for divorcees but without grounds to seek charity.

4.) Though she may well have, let's assume she didn't didn't respond to Jesus's advice because it's not recorded either way. Is it likely that she didn't follow it? Can people feel so trapped in sin, that a life of righteousness does not seem to be a viable option? Example, career criminals, addicts, those engaged in the sex or gambling industries. What's the answer to those trapped in such situations?

5.) Would the outcome have been any different had the woman instead, been a gay man, caught in the very act?

* Jacobs, Annalize. (2015). Maritus v Mulier: The double picture in adultery laws from Romulus to Augustus. *Fundamina* , 21(2), 276-288. <https://dx.doi.org/10.17159/2411-7870/2015/v21n2a4>