# Jesus met an Adulterer

John 8:1-11 #146

Jesus was in Jerusalem, in the temple courts where a group of people had gathered to hear His teaching. Some religious men who were opposed to Jesus came up with a plan to trap Him publicly. These men regarded themselves as decent, law abiding and respectable citizens. They sent some of their number to prowl around snooping into houses. They looked through the window of one house and caught an unmarried couple together. They entered the house grabbed the woman and dragged her through the streets right up to Jesus. They publicly accused her of committing adultery. They have their witnesses. They have each picked up a stone to throw at the woman and claim to be obeying Jewish Law.

It is really a trap for Jesus. If He joins them, He gets into trouble with the Romans who claim to have a monopoly on putting law breakers to death. If He doesn’t join them, they will accuse Him of not upholding the Law. They don’t care about the woman. She can be used and disposed of. She is useful for their agenda to trap Jesus. Nor do they really care about justice. The man involved is equally guilty.

The incident occurred after a Jewish feast in the temple grounds in Jerusalem. It was the Feast of Tabernacles and was attended only by men. [[1]](#footnote-1)They were celebrating their ancestors’ wanderings in the wilderness. They had lived in tents there, so they lived in tents at the feast. They offered sacrifices including grain offerings since it was right after harvest. The men come out of tradition, some out of duty, some for a holiday, others for lesser opportunities without their wives. Jesus came too and stayed on the Mount of Olives.

The morning after the feast Jesus went back to the temple courts and sat down. A crowd of people gathered round him and He began to teach them. He is being observed by temple officials who have not granted Him authorization. He is commanding the attention of common people whom they control, right on their territory. Jealousy and hatred grow inside them. They plan this trap for Him.

Their plan is to catch a couple in the act of adultery. Immediately after a feast for men only is an ideal opportunity. This is an offence in the Law of Moses and its penalty is stoning to death. If they drag the offending lady before Jesus in public and ask for His verdict, He will be bound to uphold the Law and agree to the stoning. If He doesn’t, He is a law breaker. If He does agree they will tell the Romans about Him. They have a law forbidding Jews from stoning anyone to death. Either way they will get Jesus in trouble. He will lose credibility and ruin His popularity. With their plan agreed they go about their business.

They burst into the room, grab the woman, and let the offending man go. Hypocrites! The man is just as guilty as she is – more so. It was his initiative. They arrest her and drag her outside. Religious men surround her; men filled with hatred and judgements. She is reduced to an object for some murderous plot as she is dragged through the dusty roads. She hears the name of Jesus on their lips. They hate him.

They arrive at the temple courts and stop. The woman is terrified, publicly humiliated, mere bait for the trap they have set to catch Jesus. With all respectability gone she goes on trial, caught in the act, arrested, accused with witnesses and a mob of religious law men quoting the book of Moses. Guilty obviously. She has no one to defend her case. And who is the judge? Jesus – the most upright man alive – the verdict must be guilty – the law men have picked up stones. One of them speaks for the rest.

**“Teacher, this woman was caught in the act of adultery. The Law of Moses commanded us to stone such women. Now what do you say?”**

The woman has no legal defence. No voice. Her mind is screaming with shame and fear, expecting the worst.

At this point of time Jesus bends down and starts writing on the ground with His finger. No one says a word. He sees their trap. He sees their guilt.

Murder in their hearts – 5th commandment broken.

Lust in their hearts - 7th commandment.

Perverting justice – 9th commandment.

Coveting Jesus’ influence – 10th commandment broken.

They pester Him again for His verdict – will he compromise the law or get in trouble with the Romans – either way His favour with the public will be over.

Jesus straightens up to speak. Everyone goes quiet and strain to hear His verdict. Calmly He opens His mouth.

**“If any of you is without sin, let him be the first to throw a stone at her.”**

He stoops down and writes on the ground again. Their law also states that only an innocent man may execute the sentence. Their consciences are pricked – lust, anger, judgements, hatred, jealousy, pride, selective justice – any one of these is sin – no one is qualified. A stone drops. Someone sneaks away. Another… more stones drop. The older men go first then the rest. Finally, the woman is left alone staring at the sandals of Jesus. He is an innocent man, the one and only man qualified to throw stones at her.

She looks up at Him and He looks at her. **“Woman”,** He says gently. **“Where are they? Has no one condemned you?”**

She finds her voice and speaks for the first time, **“No one, Sir”.**

**“Then neither do I condemn you”,** Jesus declares, **“Go now and leave your life of sin”.**

The woman stands up. She is clean. She is forgiven. She is free, no more shame. Jesus has declared all this in public. She begins to walk home, upright and restored. Out of the corner of her eye she sees some of her accusers. Humiliated, cowering, exposed and murmuring. They don’t bother her anymore. And they won’t catch her ever again. Her old life is behind her – left at the feet of Jesus. She is walking into a new life now, freed from her past.

And just what did Jesus do with all her sins? From that day on that woman followed His movements closely. She wasn't the only one to get exposed that day. Those who made the accusations also got exposed. But unlike that woman they did not turn their lives around. Instead they carried right on with more plotting and scheming and eventually got their man Jesus condemned by Pontius Pilate, the Roman governor. They demanded His crucifixion and Pilate yielded to their pressure. Jerusalem was filled that Friday with people like them, shouting and accusing. And there were people like her there too. They all watched as the soldiers whipped and scourged and crucified Jesus. The innocent Son of God taking upon Himself the punishment due for our sins. We had nothing to say. Here before our eyes was love paying the ultimate price, for us. He breathed His last and they buried His body in a tomb outside the city. The sins of that woman and of all others who believe like she did, were carried in the body of Jesus, on His cross, fully paid for. They were buried with Him and disappeared forever. Then on Sunday morning Jesus re-appeared, alive. That woman was among those who met Him, and their hearts swelled with love and gratitude at what He had done for them.

Jesus returned to heaven and left them all with the duty to tell everyone their sins can be forgiven also. Their lives can be restored, and their hearts also can be filled with the love of Jesus that filled that woman's heart that day when she met Jesus.

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| **The Process of Justice** | **With the Legalists** | **With Jesus** |
| Law | Shalt not commit adultery | Shalt not commit adultery |
| Crime | Adultery | Adultery |
| Witnesses | Yes | Yes |
| Arrest | Yes | Yes |
| Accused | Caught in the act | Caught in the act |
| Verdict | Guilty | Guilty |
| Sentence due | Death by stoning | Death by stoning |
| Legal defence | None | Jesus provided |
| Sentence given | Death by stoning | None on woman  Death taken by Jesus |
| Response | Condemned | Repentance |
| Summary | Justice | Mercy |

Woman caught in Adultery “Get real” questions

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1. What feast were they celebrating?
2. Who participated in this feast?
3. Where was this incident?
4. What was the sin of the woman?
5. What did Jewish law prescribe for that sin?
6. What qualified a person to apply that punishment?
7. Who claimed sole right to punish by death?
8. What were the Temple authorities setting for Jesus?
9. What verdict did the law give this woman?
10. What verdict did Jesus give her?

Adultery forgiven guilty innocence Men

Romans stoning Tabernacles Temple Courts trap

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|  | **Questions of the story** | **Personal questions** |
| 2. | How did Jewish law regard adultery? | How do you regard it? |
| 3. | What was hypocritical about the actions of the Temple officials? | Have you been the victim of hypocrisy? |
| 4. | Why did they hate Jesus? | What do you think of Jesus? |
| 5. | What is the role of the Law of God? | How do you stand before the Law of God? |
| 6. | How did Jesus regard adultery? | Does Jesus overlook our sin? |
| 7. | What did Jesus’ response reveal in the accusers? | What would Jesus see in you? |
| 8. | What was Jesus’ response to the woman? | How would Jesus respond to you? |
| 9. | What does Jesus do with sins and their just consequences? | What will Jesus do with your sins? |
| 10. | What did the woman believe Jesus had done for her?’ | What do you believe Jesus will do for you? |

1. Lev 23:33-43, Neh 8:13-18 [↑](#footnote-ref-1)