

John 8: The Woman Caught in Adultery

In this story Jesus shows how judgement can be life giving.

What do you like most about God? What do you find hardest?

What comes to mind when you think of God judging?

Do you see God's judgement as a good thing or a bad thing? Why?

What is the purpose of judgement?

(2) Early the next morning he went back to the Temple. All the people gathered around him, and he sat down and began to teach them. (3) The teachers of the Law and the Pharisees ^a brought in a woman who had been caught committing adultery, and they made her stand before them all. (4) "Teacher," they said to Jesus, "this woman was caught in the very act of committing adultery. (5) In our Law Moses commanded that such a woman must be stoned to death ^b. Now, what do you say?" (6) They said this to trap Jesus, so that they could accuse him.

But he bent over and wrote on the ground with his finger. ^c (7) As they stood there asking him questions, he straightened up and said to them, "Whichever one of you has committed no sin may throw the first stone at her." (8) Then he bent over again and wrote on the ground.

Continued over...

^a The Pharisees and teachers of the law were the Bible experts and the religious police.

*What was the attitude of the Pharisees to:
i) Jesus, ii) the woman, iii) justice?*

^b The law of Moses demanded stoning for adultery, but under Roman law, the Jews didn't have the authority to execute apart from the Roman governor. By asking Jesus to judge they are trying to trap Jesus between the law and the Romans.

How would you imagine the woman felt?

In the Hebrew scriptures, the ten commandments (from where we get the command 'do not commit adultery') were inscribed in stone by "the finger of God". By writing with his finger on the ground, Jesus may well be making this allusion, and pointing towards his authority to judge.

How does Jesus' invitation work?

Why doesn't Jesus spell out their sin?

What do we learn about how Jesus exercises judgement?

What do you think Jesus might have written?

(9) When they heard this, they all left, one by one, the older ones first. Jesus was left alone, with the woman still standing there. (10) He straightened up and said to her, "Where are they? Is there no one left to condemn you?" (11) "No one, sir," she answered. "Well, then," Jesus said, "I do not condemn you either. Go, but do not sin again."

What is the effect of Jesus' challenge?

What does Jesus ask the women?

Why does he ask the question?

What is Jesus' verdict?

How do you think this left the women?

How would this affect her life?

How does the way Jesus judges differ from the way the Pharisees judge?

What do we learn about Jesus?

The symmetrical structure of the story can be shown as follows:

The women's old life (3)

Pharisees bring charges invite Jesus to judge the Women (4-5)

Pharisees appoint Jesus as judge to trap him (6a)

Jesus the rightful judge (6b)

Jesus invites the Pharisees to judge themselves (7)

Jesus the rightful judge (8)

Pharisees judge themselves (9)

Jesus passes judgement on the women (10-11b)

The women's new life (11c)

How does this structure help us see what the author sees as important?

What has struck you most from this story?

Has it had any effect on the way you think of judgement?

Has it had any effect on the way you think of Jesus?

Would you want Jesus as your judge?