



## What Did Jesus Do?

He Asked People to Put  
Down Their Stones

*This week's Scripture passage*  
*John 8:2-11*

<sup>2</sup> *At dawn he appeared again in the temple courts, where all the people gathered around him, and he sat down to teach them.*

<sup>3</sup> *The teachers of the law and the Pharisees brought in a woman caught in adultery. They made her stand before the group*

<sup>4</sup> *and said to Jesus, "Teacher, this woman was caught in the act of adultery.*

<sup>5</sup> *In the Law Moses commanded us to stone such women. Now what do you say?"*

<sup>6</sup> *They were using this question as a trap, in order to have a basis for accusing him.*

*But Jesus bent down and started to write on the ground with his finger.*

<sup>7</sup> *When they kept on questioning him, he straightened up and said to them, "Let any one of you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her."*

<sup>8</sup> *Again he stooped down and wrote on the ground.*

<sup>9</sup> *At this, those who heard began to go away one at a time, the older ones first, until only Jesus was left, with the woman still standing there.*

<sup>10</sup> *Jesus straightened up and asked her, "Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?"*

<sup>11</sup> *"No one, sir," she said. "Then neither do I condemn you," Jesus declared. "Go now and leave your life of sin."*

This Week's Message  
August 16, 2020

*What Did Jesus Do?*  
*He Asked People to Put*  
*Down Their Stones*

*Let any one of you who is without*  
*sin be the first to throw*  
*a stone at her.*

John 8:7  
(New International Version)

On Sunday I continue the series of messages titled *What Did Jesus Do?* For this message, we will remain in John's gospel, and will study one of the most famous stories from the ministry of Jesus. The story comes from John 8:2-11 and tells of the woman who was caught in adultery. The story contains one of the most famous lines in all the Bible – *let any one of you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her.*

Surprisingly, you might find that this entire passage is missing from your Bible.

What!

That's right. Depending on the translation you use, this passage might be placed in brackets, with a note such as *the earliest manuscripts and many other ancient witnesses do have John 7:53 – 8:11* (this is what the New International Version, which is the translation I generally use, does); it might be placed in a footnote, with a similar explanation that the passage does not appear in early manuscripts; or it might be simply absent, with or without a note about why the passage has been removed.

I do not have space to go through a full explanation of the history of the Biblical text, or how and why a decision to either remove

*Questions to Consider –*

\* If you are curious about what other passages might be in footnotes, placed in brackets, or moved from the text, look at the end of Mark's gospel, in chapter 16. Some translations bracket off verses 9 – 20.

\* In translating the Old Testament, scholars depend primarily upon what is known as the *Masoretic Text* (written in Hebrew and Aramaic) and the *Septuagint* (written in Greek). For the New Testament they primarily depend upon the *Textus Receptus* (which means *received text*). The *Textus Receptus* is being refined as new discoveries related to Biblical manuscripts continue to take place.

\* What do you think about the fact that this passage is placed in a footnote or either removed altogether from some translations of the Bible?

\* In verse 6 John writes that *Jesus bent down and started to write on the ground with his finger*. What Jesus wrote has long been the subject of much speculation. Some believe he was writing the sins of the woman's accusers. What do you think he might have written?

or bracket off this passage was made, so I will try and offer an adequate, and brief, answer.

The Bible, as we have it, came together over the course of centuries, and not without some measure of controversy. As late as the Middle Ages, for instance, there were still arguments taking place about what should, or should not, be included in the Bible. Martin Luther, for instance, was no fan of the book of James, saying of it, *St James' epistle is really an epistle of straw, compared to these others, for it has nothing of the nature of the Gospel about it*. Tell us how you really feel, Martin.

The Bible we use is put together from a collection of thousands of manuscripts, some of which form complete books of the Bible while some are only fragments of a book. Some of the manuscripts are worded differently and some are missing a verse or two, or, in some cases, larger sections. The difficult task for translators is not only translating the Bible from two different languages into English – or any other language in use today – but to first put together a complete manuscript from which to translate. This is no easy task, and it is a process that has been continuing for centuries.

As textual scholars continue to work with newly discovered Biblical manuscripts, they are able to refine what would be called the “primary text,” or the text from which translations are made. In the case of Sunday morning's Scripture passage, many scholars have made the decision to separate it from John's gospel – either by placing it in brackets or in a footnote – because some of the oldest existing manuscripts do not contain the story.

So what does this mean? Is the story genuinely part of the ministry of Jesus? Does it belong in the Bible or not? My answer to those question is, *yes*. The story of the woman taken in adultery is mentioned quite early in the history of the church by historical figures who are quite important, in terms of their influence and knowledge of both Scripture and theology. It is also a story that is not only very much in keeping with the spirit of Jesus, it is a story that perfectly sums up the grace and love that was central to his ministry and should be to ours as well. To remove this story from the gospel, I believe, would be to remove one of the most important stories in all of the Bible.

We'll talk about what the story means on Sunday morning, in person and via livestream, at 10:00 a.m. God bless you!