

## John 7B

- This week we finish one story and begin another
  - First, we must finish the account of Jesus in the temple at the end of the Feast of Tabernacles
    - This is the week-long feast where Israel remembers the wanderings of Israel in the desert prior to reaching the promised land
    - It also looks forward to the Messiah's arrival and the kingdom the Lord will bring to Israel
    - This is the most popular feast in each year, and it's one that every Jewish male was expected to observe in Jerusalem
  - Jesus' unbelieving brothers tried unsuccessfully to convince Jesus to use the occasion of this feast to campaign for support as the Messiah
    - Instead, Jesus traveled up to Jerusalem secretly to observe the feast
    - And then while He was in the city, at a point late in the feast week, Jesus began to teach in the temple drawing attention from the crowds
  - And then a debate ensued concerning the identity of Jesus
    - Was He the Messiah?
    - Some said yes, but others said no
    - While the religious leaders actively opposed the notion that Jesus was the Messiah
- The fact that a debate took place over a question that should have been easy to answer explains why the kingdom wasn't given to Israel at Jesus' first coming
  - Since Israel didn't embrace Jesus, Jesus didn't embrace them
    - Since Israel was divided on the question of Jesus' identity, He didn't bring the Kingdom into reality for that generation
    - Instead, this generation of Israel will be condemned, while a future generation will receive the Kingdom

- So John wrote this ironic chapter, set during a feast that celebrates the Kingdom
- Meanwhile, the Jews are rejecting the opportunity for the Kingdom
- Let's return to the story to where John explains how the week-long festival ended

[John 7:37](#) Now on the last day, the great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried out, saying, "If anyone is thirsty, let him come to Me and drink.

[John 7:38](#) "He who believes in Me, as the Scripture said, 'From his innermost being will flow rivers of living water.'"

[John 7:39](#) But this He spoke of the Spirit, whom those who believed in Him were to receive; for the Spirit was not yet given, because Jesus was not yet glorified.

[John 7:40](#) Some of the people therefore, when they heard these words, were saying, "This certainly is the Prophet."

[John 7:41](#) Others were saying, "This is the Christ." Still others were saying, "Surely the Christ is not going to come from Galilee, is He?"

[John 7:42](#) "Has not the Scripture said that the Christ comes from the descendants of David, and from Bethlehem, the village where David was?"

[John 7:43](#) So a division occurred in the crowd because of Him.

[John 7:44](#) Some of them wanted to seize Him, but no one laid hands on Him.

- John refers to the great day of the feast, which was the end of the seven-day observance
  - It was the great day because it involved an elaborate ritual involving water
    - Early on each morning of the seven days, the high priest would lead a procession from the pool of Siloam in the city up to the temple
    - Another priest would bring a golden pitcher, which he filled from the water in the pool
    - He then carried this water through the Water Gate on the south side of the temple and up into the courtyard
  - Then in a ceremony, the priest would pour the water into a silver basin on the west side of the brazen altar
    - The Jews had connected a tube to the silver basin, which carried the water down to the base of the altar

- The water would then run out at the altar base
- The crowd of Jews that would follow the priests to the pool to watch them collect the water each morning
  - Some Jews might drink from the pool
  - While others would joyous recite Isaiah 55:1 and 12:3

[Is. 55:1](#) "Ho! Every one who thirsts, come to the waters;

[Is. 12:3](#) Therefore you will joyously draw water  
From the springs of salvation.

- The Mishnah stated that he who never has seen the joy of the water-drawing has never in his life seen joy
- Finally, on the seventh day of this feast, the same routine was repeated, except with one change
  - When the priests entered the temple with the water, they walked in a procession around the altar seven times
    - As the water was poured into the silver basin on its way to the altar, other priests would pour the daily drink offering of wine at the altar
    - The pouring out of water represented the Lord's provision of water in the desert
    - While the pouring of wine symbolized the Lord's pouring out of His Spirit in the last days as Joel foretold
      - Ironically, when Pentecost arrived and men spoke under the influence of the Spirit, they were accused of being drunk
    - Meanwhile, the crowd of men gave thanks and recited Psalms
- So now we can appreciate the drama of Jesus' words, as He stands in the temple on the final day of this feast, and makes His declaration
  - Jesus says if anyone thirst, let him to Me and drink
    - And he who believes in me, from his innermost being will flow rivers of living water

- Obviously, Jesus' statements are drawing upon the vivid images of the feast
- People are celebrating a river of water leaving the altar
- And they're drinking of water from the pool
- But they are missing the spiritual significance of these symbols
- Meanwhile, the very fulfillment of these things is standing in their midst
  - If anyone comes to believe in Jesus as Messiah, that person will never experience a thirst for God
    - Not in the sense of wanting for something that lies out of reach
  - Instead, we can experience so much living water that it becomes a constant flow through and out of us
- To be sure we got the point, John adds a verse of commentary in v.39
  - He tells us that this river Jesus mentioned was a euphemism for the ministry of the Holy Spirit inside every believer
    - Because the people wouldn't come to Jesus as a group, He invites them to experience Him individually
    - While the nation as a whole wasn't receiving the Kingdom yet, still it was possible for individuals in the nation to receive many of its joys even now
  - That division is still very evident, as the people continue their debate
    - In vs.40-41 the crowd offers two familiar answers to the question of Jesus' identity
    - Some say He is the Christ while others say He is the Prophet
    - Remember John the Baptist faced similar questions from the religious leaders
    - The Christ refers to the conquering Messiah, while the Prophet refers to the suffering Messiah
    - Two Messiahs instead of two arrivals
- To settle the argument, some begin to go down the prophecy checklist for who the Messiah would be and from where he would originate

- Some remember that the Christ was not to come from the Galilee
  - They say that the scriptures said the Messiah would be a descendent of David
  - And He would be from Bethlehem
  - Of course, they don't realize that Jesus was born in Bethlehem'
  - How ironic that the very verse of scripture that could prove Jesus was Messiah was being used by the ignorant crowd to discredit Him
- In the end, the division remained, leading some to threaten violence against Jesus for impersonating the Messiah
  - But His supporters stood in the way
  - So no one laid hands upon Him
  - Once again, another stalemate and continued division

**John 7:45** The officers then came to the chief priests and Pharisees, and they said to them, "Why did you not bring Him?"

**John 7:46** The officers answered, "Never has a man spoken the way this man speaks."

**John 7:47** The Pharisees then answered them, "You have not also been led astray, have you?"

**John 7:48** "No one of the rulers or Pharisees has believed in Him, has he?"

**John 7:49** "But this crowd which does not know the Law is accursed."

**John 7:50** Nicodemus (he who came to Him before, being one of them) said to them,

**John 7:51** "Our Law does not judge a man unless it first hears from him and knows what he is doing, does it?"

**John 7:52** They answered him, "You are not also from Galilee, are you? Search, and see that no prophet arises out of Galilee."

- Apparently, those in the crowd who wanted to seize Jesus had enlisted the temple officers to make the arrest
  - The officers, who were Levites, were unable to complete the arrest, so when they report to the chief priests and Pharisees, they show up empty-handed
    - Their excuse is that Jesus spoke with such power it prevented them from acting

- They probably mean that Jesus' words stirred up the crowd to the point that they couldn't have enforced their orders
- Or perhaps they mean that they themselves were so impacted by what Jesus said, they couldn't bring themselves to grab Him
- As a commentator once wrote, the soldiers came with weapons to arrest the Lord, and instead He arrested them with His words
- In the end, we know it was the sovereignty of God that stopped their act
- The Pharisees chastise the Levites
  - They ask if they have also been led astray as well?
  - Then they add that not a single Pharisee has been fooled into following Jesus
- These statements are classic techniques of peer pressure and appealing to fear and pride
  - The Pharisees want the officers to feel foolish for showing sympathy for Jesus
    - If they agree with Jesus' words, then they will be branded as having been fooled and tricked
    - No one likes to be accused of being a fool
    - And so this accusation pressures them to fall into line
  - This is a favorite trick of the enemy: making you feel pressure to join the crowd
    - My favorite example for today is the way opponents of the Creation account in Genesis try to make those who believe it feel like fools
    - I was listening to a science program on the radio recently as a scientist who took every opportunity to mock those who reject Evolution and believe in Creation
    - His tactic was exactly the same as these Pharisees
    - Rather than address the substance of the conversation, he moved directly to attacking the person who holds a different view

- We have to be prepared to become a fool for what we believe concerning Christ
  - Whether it's our belief in Creation or the Flood account
  - Or because we believe the Bible is literal history
  - Or because we hold to biblical views of morality and family and Heaven and Hell
  - Or simply because we believe in the deity of Christ
- We should expect to receive such treatment
  - Since the Lord determined that His children would not be treated better than His Son received

[1Cor. 1:25](#) Because the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men.

[1Cor. 1:26](#) For consider your calling, brethren, that there were not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble;

[1Cor. 1:27](#) but God has chosen the foolish things of the world to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to shame the things which are strong,

- Then we have the Pharisees' second statement that no Pharisees had followed Jesus
  - Here's another favorite tactic of the enemy: never disagree with the experts
    - The Pharisees say that you can't trust the crowd's assessment
    - They said the crowd didn't know the Law like the Pharisees did
    - Therefore, they were bound to come to the wrong opinion about matters of God
    - So if you side with the crowd over the experts, then you are equally stupid
  - This tactic has never fallen out of favor, because it's very effective
    - The priests and bishops of the Catholic church long argued that laymen shouldn't read the Bible
    - Only priest and bishops can interpret the Bible properly

- If anyone else tried, they were punished, which was the tactic used against Martin Luther
- Ironically, the so-called experts are typically the ones without any spiritual understanding of their own
- The enemy also uses this technique in the battle over Creation
  - We're told that many so-called experts have determined that Genesis is a myth and that Darwin was correct
    - Then they leave us feeling like the fool because the experts and the majority view are against us
    - After all, if 4 out of 5 dentists agree, it must be true
  - Of course, when it comes to knowledge of God, the majority are generally if not always wrong
    - The Bible says that the path is narrow that leads to righteousness
    - And there was only ever a remnant of true faith in Israel
    - And today only a minority of the world population knows the truth about Christ
    - So don't be surprised to find yourself in the minority
- The truth is though you are in a minority, you are not alone in knowing the truth
  - There are believers everywhere, in every camp and among all kinds of men
    - Like the Lord told Paul before Paul entered Corinth, the Lord has many of His people in every city
    - I read a story about Chinese believers enduring great persecution
    - One day they were overjoyed to meet with a Western Christian visiting their home church in China
    - And they asked him if there were Christians outside China
    - They had assumed that Christianity was limited to China!
  - We see the same thing here, as John reminds us there was a Pharisee who did know the truth



- In v.50 John reintroduces Nicodemus, the one who had visited Jesus at night back in chapter 3
- Obviously, John mentioned the sympathetic Pharisee at this critical moment to counter the Pharisees' false claims
- There was a believing Pharisee although he was keeping a very low profile!
- In this moment, Nicodemus speaks up in a subtle defense of Jesus
  - He reminds his peers that anyone accused under the Law must be given a chance to defend himself and explain his words or actions
    - He wants to put the brakes on their rush to judgment
    - He's trying to buy Jesus time, yet he's being careful not to risk aligning himself too visibly with Jesus
  - We might want to be critical of Nicodemus for not taking a more public stand, but we should withhold that judgment
    - He's a new believer, without the benefit of discipleship
    - And he's trying to preserve his position of influence so he can use it to Jesus' advantage
    - We would probably do the same thing
- Notice how the Pharisees ignore the substance of Nicodemus' arguments and instead attack him personally
  - They insult him by suggesting he was from the same backwater region as Jesus, that is the Galilee
    - This is a third tactic of the enemy
    - They were attacking him to provoke fear
    - They're suggesting Nicodemus' loyalties might lie with Jesus instead of with the Pharisees
  - The fourth tactic of the enemy is to misquote the truth
    - The Pharisees said no prophet arises from the Galilee
    - They make this assertion as if it was a well-accepted fact
    - But it was not true in the least

- Prophets did in fact arise from the Galilee
  - Jonah, Hosea, Nahum and other prophets originated from the region known as Galilee
  - Perhaps they meant that the Prophet was to come from Bethlehem and not Galilee
    - But I'm not included to give them the benefit of the doubt
- As we move into the next section, make a note of how the enemy works against us when we stand up for the truth of scripture
  - Enemies of the Gospel have four favorite tactics as we've seen used here
    - When you show your faith publicly, they will mock your views as proof of your ignorance and gullibility
    - If you say you rest on scripture to support your views, they will misquote biblical truth
    - If you make logical arguments to reveal their errors, then they will simply abandon the debate and move to attacking you personally
  - In other words, they aren't interested in the truth, because as John said, they hate the light for it exposes their evil deeds
    - You can't reason with spiritually dead people
    - You can only present the truth in love and wait in hope for the Lord to open the heart
- That brings this story to an end, and it launches us into the next

[John 7:53](#) [ Everyone went to his home.

[John 8:1](#) But Jesus went to the Mount of Olives.

[John 8:2](#) Early in the morning He came again into the temple, and all the people were coming to Him; and He sat down and began to teach them.

[John 8:3](#) The scribes and the Pharisees brought a woman caught in adultery, and having set her in the center of the court,

[John 8:4](#) they said to Him, "Teacher, this woman has been caught in adultery, in the very act.

[John 8:5](#) "Now in the Law Moses commanded us to stone such women; what then do You say?"

[John 8:6](#) They were saying this, testing Him, so that they might have grounds for accusing Him. But Jesus stooped down and with His finger wrote on the ground.

[John 8:7](#) But when they persisted in asking Him, He straightened up, and said to them, “He who is without sin among you, let him be the first to throw a stone at her.”

[John 8:8](#) Again He stooped down and wrote on the ground.

[John 8:9](#) When they heard it, they began to go out one by one, beginning with the older ones, and He was left alone, and the woman, where she was, in the center of the court.

[John 8:10](#) Straightening up, Jesus said to her, “Woman, where are they? Did no one condemn you?”

[John 8:11](#) She said, “No one, Lord.” And Jesus said, “I do not condemn you, either. Go. From now on sin no more.”]

- As we begin to study this story, we first need to address a curious issue in this text
  - You may have noticed in your Bible that this passage begins and ends with brackets
    - Brackets means the Bible translators suspect this text was not originally written by John
    - In other words, the story of the adulterous woman that opens John’s eighth chapter was not originally written by John
    - The section 7:53–8:11 appears to have been added several centuries after John wrote His Gospel
    - Most English translations today acknowledge this by enclosing this section in brackets to indicate its questionable origins
  - There are several clues that lead scholars to this conclusion
    - First, the vast majority of original manuscripts of John’s Gospel lack this passage
    - In fact, the passage didn’t appear in manuscripts of John’s Gospel until about the sixth century
    - That was long after the New Testament canon was officially established in the fourth century
  - Also, the style of writing in this passage differs greatly from John’s normal style
    - It reads much more like one of the synoptic Gospel writers

- And it's placement at this point in John's eighth chapter makes for an awkward interruption in John's narrative
- If you jump from John 7:52 directly to John 8:12, the narrative flows seamlessly,
- That suggests the passage was inserted later by a copyist
- So should we still study this passage? Absolutely!
  - The fact that John didn't write these verses doesn't mean the story isn't true or isn't trustworthy as inspired Scripture
    - On the contrary, most scholars believe there is no reason to doubt this story's authenticity
    - Personally, I think Luke is probably the original author, who wrote this account as part of his Gospel under the inspiration of the Spirit
    - The writing style matches his style closely, and it features a woman in distress, which is a favorite theme of Luke
    - And the events would fit very easily into the narrative of Luke 22 when Jesus is teaching in the temple and avoiding the traps of the religious leaders
  - So why would a scribe or copyist move this story out of its proper place in Luke and into John's gospel?
    - In a word: convenience
    - The texts of scripture were copied by hand onto long rolls of parchment called "scrolls"
    - These parchment rolls were made of certain, fixed lengths
  - After the biblical cannon was amended to add chapter and verse headings, copyist endeavored to copy entire books or at least complete chapters of scripture onto a single scroll
    - They resisted spanning a single chapter of scripture across multiple scrolls
    - Usually, a chapter of scripture fit easily on a single scroll, but occasionally copyists would encounter longer chapters

- The men who assembled the NT canon assigned some of the longest chapters in the NT to Luke's Gospel
- While John's Gospel has numerous short chapters
- So a copyist might have been running low on scrolls and reached the end of his parchment while copying Luke 22
  - So to avoid running chapter 22 onto a new scroll, he decided to end the chapter by deleting the story of the adulterous woman altogether
    - Not wanting to lose the material of course, the copyist inserted the story between John's seventh and eighth chapters
    - He chose this location probably because these chapters are also set in the temple and John 8 is relatively short
  - Many unbelieving Bible critics see this textual issue and others like it as evidence that scripture cannot be trusted
    - They scoff at the notion that we can place our trust in what the Bible says
    - They cite examples like this as proof that we can't be sure we have received the scriptural texts in an authentic, unadulterated form
    - Consequently, they dismiss all scripture as untrustworthy and useless for serious study
    - In reality, these examples are proof of just how trustworthy our Bibles truly are
- The surviving record of ancient Biblical manuscripts is simply unparalleled among ancient literature
  - For example, the world today still has over 24,000 surviving ancient manuscripts of New Testament writings
    - By contrast, we have only 643 manuscript copies of all the works of Homer
    - We have only 49 copies of all the manuscripts of Aristotle
    - And in all the world, only 7 copies of all of Plato's work exist in original manuscript form

- Despite the survival of so few copies of these ancient document, you'll never find the academic world questioning the authenticity or accuracy of these works
  - They never wonder whether the works of Plato or Aristotle are worthy of serious study because of the limited number of copies
  - On the contrary, literary scholars in universities the world over devote entire careers to studying the Greek classics
  - No one suggests that our few surviving copies of Plato's works might have been altered or manipulated to the point that they holds no value
- Yet when it comes to scripture - which has far, far better documentation and a far, far more important message - these same academics say the rules should be different
  - We can't be sure scripture was preserved correctly
  - We can't know if it's been modified, since the manuscripts have been copied and changed so many times
  - And because the originals are so old
  - Ironically, the truth is exactly the opposite
- It is because we have so many surviving copies of the original biblical texts that I am able to stand here today and tell you the material in John 8 isn't original
  - We can see how it was moved from one Gospel to another
    - We can compare the many original surviving manuscripts with later copies and detect the changes
    - That's the power of the many thousands of ancient manuscripts
  - The huge number of copies confirms for us the authenticity of what we possess today
    - In fact, no ancient record is better preserved than scripture
    - Because God has ensured His word would be accurately preserved
    - God even reveals to us how the movement of John 7 occurred

- So even though it's not in the right place, nevertheless it's still scripture and worthy of study
- That's the power of God to preserve His word just as He desires
- Back to the story, everyone left the temple at the end of the day, while Jesus goes to the Mount of Olives (probably added to provide a transition)
  - Jesus returns the next day to continue teaching, when Pharisees and the scribes spring a trap on Jesus
    - You might recognize this pattern from the synoptic Gospels
    - The Jewish leaders, who were unbelievers and frauds masquerading as men of God, are frequently shown devising ways to discredit or accuse Jesus
    - They contrived situations that placed Jesus in a dilemma from which there was no easy escape
    - They expected Jesus to either look foolish before the crowds in struggling to avoid the trap
    - Or He would be forced into committing a violation of Roman law
    - Either way, the leaders could neutralize Jesus as a threat to their authority
  - On this occasion, they bring a woman accused of adultery and set her in front of Jesus as He taught the crowd
    - The leaders chose this moment for their trap for good reason
    - Jesus was sitting in the large open court of the Temple, a place filled with many Jews on this week of Passover
    - Whatever happened to Jesus during this confrontation, it would be witnessed by literally hundreds if not thousands of His followers
    - So the Pharisees chose this setting to inflict the maximum potential damage to Jesus' reputation among His followers
  - Secondly, the temple grounds was the one place in Jewish society where the Jewish people had some latitude to exercise their own law free from Roman interference

- In Jesus day, the Jewish people were an occupied nation, under Roman rule and oppression
- Though the Jews had a Law of their own, they were not permitted to exercise self-rule, especially in the area of criminal justice
- For example, Jewish authorities could conduct trials according to their own Law but they could not carry out sentencing without Roman permission and Roman supervision
- Inside the Temple grounds, Jewish leaders had greater freedom and latitude because the Romans would not enter the Jewish courts of the Temple
- This was probably the one place and time of year when Jewish leaders might carryout an execution under Jewish law without Roman interference
- So against this backdrop, the Pharisees ask Jesus to render judgment in the case of this adulteress
  - They claim this woman was caught in the very act of adultery and that such a crime was punishable by stoning, according to the Law of Moses
    - If Jesus agreed with their assessment, then almost certainly the Pharisees would have call upon the crowd to stone the woman on the spot
    - This is challenge they have placed before Jesus: they dare Him to condemn this woman to death
  - Before we look at Jesus' response, we need to recognize that the Pharisees were playing fast and loose with the language of the Law
    - Let's look at the Law concerning adultery in the Law

**Lev. 20:10 If there is a man who commits adultery with another man's wife, one who commits adultery with his friend's wife, the adulterer and the adulteress shall surely be put to death.**

- The penalty for adultery was death under Moses, but it was to be death for both the man and woman
- So we ask where's the man?
  - The Pharisees claim they caught her in the act, which means they would have caught a man in the act too



- They take time to drag this woman all the way into the Temple grounds to face Jesus
- Then shouldn't we expect them to do the same to the man who is equally guilty?
- So why didn't they apprehend both man and woman and bring them both before Jesus?
- The reason is this woman was just a pawn in a chess match the Pharisees were playing to defeat Jesus
  - She was probably a well-known harlot who the Pharisees would have likely ignored on any other day, but today they make an example of her to trap Jesus
    - It was probably obvious to everyone that the Pharisees had no sincere interest in serving justice
    - Moreover, the Pharisee didn't need Jesus' approval to judge and convict this woman
    - There was no good reason to bring this woman before Jesus at this time and in this manner except in an attempt to discredit Jesus
    - And everyone in the crowd would have see through their game
  - Secondly, the Pharisees misstated the penalty in the Law concerning adultery when they spoke to Jesus
    - The Law does say adulterers deserve death
    - But it doesn't say that adulterers must be stoned
    - In fact, historically the method of execution in Israel for this offense was strangling
    - Later in the time of Ezekiel, it was stripping the offenders naked in public, stoning them and then cut the bodies to pieces with a sword
    - If the adulteress was a daughter of a priest, she was burned to death
  - By Jesus' day, stoning was again an approved method, but it was not required by the Law and it would not have been conducted by crowds in the temple in any case

- It would have been conducted in place outside the city usually, and only after a proper trial
- So these men are demanding immediate, vigilante justice against the woman, which was itself against Jewish custom
- Now we can clearly see how the Pharisees intended to trap Jesus
  - They bring a sympathetic defendant before Jesus in a very public setting and demand Jesus agree to an immediate, harsh judgment
    - Jesus had two equally dangerous options for how to respond to these men
    - Whatever Jesus decides to do, He is likely to run into trouble, either with the crowd or with the authorities
  - On the one hand, Jesus could agree to punish the woman
    - Her guilt was probably beyond doubt
    - And the Law did specify the death penalty for her crime
  - But agreeing with the Pharisees was a real problem for Jesus
    - The crowd knew the Pharisee's were applying the Law selectively and unfairly in this woman's case
    - And they generally hated the Pharisees anyway for their harsh enforcement of the Law and their self-righteous hypocrisy
    - So they would have been sympathetic toward the woman and opposed to the Pharisees
  - Furthermore, the crowd loved Jesus because He taught mercy and forgiveness and fairness and justice
    - So they would have expected Jesus to defend the woman against this kangaroo court injustice
    - If He presided over a stoning of this woman, then everything Jesus stood for – grace and mercy and love – would have been forfeited in the minds of the people
    - This woman's blood would have been on Jesus' hands
    - Which of course was the Pharisees' goal

- Finally, had Jesus agreed to the stoning, the Pharisees could have turned him over to the Romans for ordering an illegal execution
  - The Jews were not allowed to execute capital punishment
  - The Romans reserved that right for themselves
  - So by issuing an order to kill the woman, Jesus would have broken Roman law
- On the other hand, if Jesus had declined to punish the woman, the Pharisees could accuse Jesus of being a law breaker
  - As Heb 10:28 reminds us, anyone who sets aside the Law of Moses is due the punishment of death
    - So Jesus couldn't rule that a guilty woman go free, since the Law required a punishment
    - His own righteousness was at stake
    - The Pharisees would now have a legitimate charge against Jesus with which to prosecute Him
  - So how does Jesus escape this trap?
    - In v.6 we're told Jesus says...nothing
    - He just stoops down and begins to write in the ground
- To fully appreciate what's happening here, we need to put ourselves as an observer in this crowd
  - Imagine yourself seated on the ground in the temple court watching this scene from maybe 30-40 feet away
    - From our seated position, we are surrounded by a sea of other seated people
    - Jesus is standing in the center
    - We see Him clearly above the heads of the thousands of people seated around us on the ground
  - Suddenly, a group of Pharisees and scribes appear on the edge of the crowd, stumbling their way toward Jesus dragging this woman
    - Eventually, they reach Jesus and the confrontation begins

- You hear them challenge Jesus
- And as you strain to hear Jesus' response, you reach the climactic moment when...
- Jesus simply drops down to the ground
  - He disappears out of your view!
    - One moment you're watching Jesus and the Pharisees talking
    - The next moment the Pharisees and this woman are left alone standing in a sea of people
    - They look a bit foolish, don't they?
  - The visual impact is clear
    - Jesus has removed Himself from the conversation
    - He has declined to play their game or participate in their trap
    - More importantly, He has refrained from judging this woman
    - He leaves only the Pharisees standing in the middle of the crowd, isolated in their judgment of this woman
  - While stooped down, we're told Jesus occupies Himself with something a bored child might do: he draws or writes in the dirt
    - He's showing a complete lack of interest in the circumstances
    - We do the same thing today, of course, though we probably don't stoop to draw on the ground
    - Instead, we pull out our iPhones
    - But either way, the message is clear
- Naturally, the Pharisees are uncomfortable by Jesus' maneuver
  - They must have recognized Jesus was avoiding answering their question
    - So the writer tells us that the Pharisees persisted in asking Jesus even as He draws
    - At this point, Jesus straightens up, coming back into view for just a moment

- He presents the Pharisees with a simple condition for how they may proceed if they are to judge this woman
- He says the one among them who has no sin may cast the first stone at her
- Then Jesus promptly returns to His low position near the ground leaving the Pharisees standing alone again
- It wouldn't surprise me if some in the crowd were snickering at this point, though the stakes were very high
- Before I go any further in the story, let's address one of the most hotly debated questions among Bible students...what did Jesus write in the ground?
  - Two popular suggestions are Jesus wrote the Ten Commandments or He wrote a list of sins committed by the Pharisees
    - Before we pass judgment on these ideas or any others, let's acknowledge an important fact:
    - The Gospel writer didn't think it important to include this detail in his account
    - He pays no attention to it what Jesus wrote
    - If what Jesus wrote were important to the story, John would have told us
  - Secondly, any suggestion of what Jesus wrote must be the product of pure guesswork
    - We cannot know what wasn't recorded
    - So while it may make for an entertaining exercise, there can be little value in such speculation
    - In fact, speculation is likely to move us farther away from insight rather than granting us more insight
- Case and point, the two suggestions I mentioned earlier are not only unlikely to be true, they lead us to a wrong view of the moment, in my opinion
  - First, there doesn't appear to be near enough time in this exchange for Jesus to write such an exhaustive document in dirt

- Try writing even one of the commandments in dirt with your finger and you'll see how impractical the whole thing would have been
- Given the length of time that seems to pass in the moment, Jesus wouldn't have had enough time to get more than a few words written out
- Secondly, both these speculations are attempting to suggest the same reason for why the Pharisees' gave up on their trap: guilt
  - The thinking goes that when the Pharisees saw the Ten Commandments or when they saw their sins written in dirt, they were convicted
  - And as that conviction entered their hearts, they felt sorrow and regret for having tried to trick Jesus
  - They felt pity for the woman and they left with their tales between their legs
- But that storyline runs counter to everything else we're told about the Pharisees
  - Jesus' words never bring conviction to the Pharisees, only anger and increasing frustration
  - They may feel conviction, but they never acknowledge it nor react in repentance or sorrow
  - They certainly don't back down simply because Jesus tells them they have sin
  - So these answers are leading us away from what's truly happening, not toward greater insight
- Personally, I don't not believe there was any significance to Jesus' writing - He was probably just doodling for all we know
  - His purpose in being near the ground was simply to disengage from the Pharisees and avoid their question
    - He wanted to separate Himself visually from the Pharisees leaving them to be alone in the eyes of the people
    - He went to the ground as if to identify Himself with the people rather than with these men

- He stooped out of sight to emphasize that only the Pharisees were standing in judgment over this woman
- The Pharisees were her only judges
- If we focus too much on the drawing, we miss the true point of the moment, which is found v.7
  - As Jesus straightens back up and reinserts Himself into the conversation, He says only those without sin may render judgment against her
    - Jesus doesn't deny their accusations or insist the woman wasn't guilty
    - So He isn't contradicting nor contravening the Law
    - Instead, Jesus accepts the role of judge, and renders His decision for how punishment will be executed in this case
    - He established that the standard for those who may execute the sentence against this woman is sinlessness
  - What is Jesus doing here?
    - The Pharisees were the legal authorities in Israel, so they had legal authority to adjudicate this woman's case
    - But at the start of this exchange, they delegated their authority to Jesus to render judgment over this woman
    - They told Jesus He should decide the woman's fate
  - Therefore according to Jewish tradition and law, this woman's judgment would now come from Jesus' decision and not the Pharisees
    - Now we must remember who Jesus truly is
    - He's not simply another rabbi making a determination in some run-of-the-mill criminal case
    - Jesus is THE judge of all creation and for all eternity
    - When Jesus renders judgment for sin, it always carries eternal consequences

- So any judgment Jesus might render against this woman's sin would carry eternal consequences
  - Jesus would be rendering judgment as the Judge of all Creation, because He can do no less
    - Jesus has been appointed as judge of the world by the Father
    - But Jesus is not to render His judgment until an appointed day
  - As Paul declared:

**Acts 17:30** "Therefore having overlooked the times of ignorance, God is now declaring to men that all people everywhere should repent,  
**Acts 17:31** because He has fixed a day in which He will judge the world in righteousness through a Man whom He has appointed, having furnished proof to all men by raising Him from the dead."

- For now the Lord is overlooking the times of ignorance, meaning the time when men sin against God
- But in v.31 Paul said this period of overlooking won't last forever
- Once day He will judge the world
- But in His first coming, Jesus did not render judgment but instead offered salvation to sinners
  - Had Jesus been willing to judge the world for its sin, then who could possible stand?
  - Before His atoning work on the cross, there could be no hope of anyone surviving Christ's judgment because all men stand guilty of sin
  - Therefore, it's the supreme example of God's mercy and grace that He sent His Son into the world with a mission that precluded any judgment for the moment

**John 12:47** "If anyone hears My sayings and does not keep them, I do not **judge** him; for I did not come to **judge** the world, but to save the world.

**John 12:48** " He who rejects Me and does not receive My sayings, has one who judges him; the word I spoke is what will **judge** him at the last day.



- Notice Jesus adds that on the last day, Jesus will become the world's judge
- And in the meantime, Jesus cannot pass judgment on sin, not even for a moment like this
- But because Jesus has been assigned authority by the Pharisees to dispose of this woman's case, He rules that her punishment could go forward but only by the hands of sinless executioners
  - Jesus applies the same standard to these men as the Father applies to Jesus
    - Jesus earned His right to judge the world because He lived sinlessly
    - He obeyed the Father perfectly so He alone was qualified to judge sin
  - Therefore, Jesus demands that if these men would presume to take His place as judge, then they must first pass the same test Jesus passed
    - Only the one without sin shall be qualified to begin the execution of this woman
    - Sinlessness is not ordinarily a requirement for passing judgment under the law
    - Imperfect human judges are called upon to bring judgment against lawbreaker everyday
  - But because the Pharisees elected to delegate this particular matter before Jesus, they allowed Him to define the terms of the judgment
    - They committed themselves to whatever course of action Jesus prescribed
    - Now they they have delegated to Jesus' authority, they cannot ignore it or else they will become law breakers themselves
  - So now the Pharisees find themselves in a trap
    - If they choose to stone the woman, they will be mocked by the crowd - and perhaps even charged with blasphemy - for daring to consider themselves sinless
    - And they can't object to Jesus' condition, since they gave Him permission to decide the matter

- So beginning with the oldest, that is to say the wisest, of the group, they decided that they had to retreat
- They aren't retreating out of guilt or sorrow or repentance
- They are retreating angrily, reluctantly, out of fear of the crowds and out of a desire to preserve their pride
- So as the scene comes to an end, only the woman remains with Jesus
  - Jesus asks her who judges you? She says no one, Lord
    - And so Jesus responds, neither do I. Go and sin no more
    - This is the same message the Savior is giving to you from the pages of Scripture tonight
  - No man in this world judges you, for no one is qualified to render that judgment according to God's standard
    - And neither is Jesus passing judgment on your sin...yet
    - If you are a believer, having placed your trust in Christ for your salvation, then know for sure that no one stands in judgment over you
    - Not a man, not a woman, not the enemy, not even the Lord your God stands in judgment over you
    - Your sins have been washed away by the atoning blood of Christ
    - The Lord place only one expectation on you: go and sin no more
  - If you have yet to know Jesus as your Savior, then you will be pleased to know that this is still a time of grace and mercy
    - You may have ignored His commandments, you may have spoken words against Jesus
    - But He tells us that these things may be forgiven during this time of grace, by our faith in Him as our Savior and stoning sacrifice
    - So if you have never placed your trust in Christ, you still have time and opportunity
    - Your sins will not be held against you in the day of judgment if you have accepted the gift of mercy the Lord offers you now
  - But this time of mercy and forgiveness will not last forever

- Sooner or later, the last day will arrive and Jesus will assume His role as judge
- And the Lord's judgment will be strict and inescapable
- How much better is to bow your knee to Him now, while His grace and mercy are still available
- Then to wait for the moment of your conviction on the judgment day
- When every tongue will confess and every knee will bow