

John Lesson # 9 Articles

The statement that Jesus came into the temple at daybreak is significant for a fuller understanding of this event, for it presents several interesting facts for our consideration. Firstly, it gives us an insight into Jesus' character and also into His appeal to the masses who willingly came for instruction at this early hour. So we have a clear picture of our Lord completely absorbed in His mission, rising at daybreak to teach; the people knew this, and came to be taught by the Master-Teacher. Secondly, the episode involving this woman also occurred early in the morning as the narrative revolves around her; so the time reference must bear on it. Jesus' schedule was clearly public knowledge (v. 2), and as this seems to be a strange hour to find the scribes and Pharisees around by chance, it is easy to suggest (though we cannot be positive) that they had laid a trap for this woman and were thus implicated in her sin. To have the body of scribes and Pharisees available to drag her before Jesus before breakfast seems so unlikely that it suggests the whole episode was pre-planned. In these circumstances, Jesus' requirement that 'he who is without sin' cast the first stone would have been particularly convicting and condemning.¹

Jesus' verdict, "neither do I condemn," however, was not rendered as a simple acquittal or a noncondemnation. The verdict was in fact a strict charge for her to live from this point on (*apo tou nun*) very differently—to sin no more (*mēketi hamartane*). The liberating work of Jesus did not mean the excusing of sin. Encountering Jesus always has demanded the transformation of life, the turning away from sin. The paralytic in John 5:14 was similarly warned to "sin no more," but in that story the man was also confronted with the devastating consequences of failing to heed the warning. Sin was not treated lightly by Jesus, but sinners were offered the opportunity to start life anew.

In concluding my commentary on this very significant little pericope, it may be appropriate to reflect on why such a story suffered nonrecognition/nonacceptance for so long. Was it simply because it was unknown? Or could there be some other reason? While we may not discover the answer in this life, it is interesting to ponder the question. The answer certainly does not seem to be that the story is any more antinomian than some of Paul's writings. The story is not an attack on Moses or the law.

Instead, the Scandinavian scholar H. Riesenfeld, who reviewed this pericope in light of the perspectives of the early church in the historical settings, may have stumbled onto a reasonable explanation.¹⁸ In the centuries following the ministry of Jesus, the early church developed strict rules of discipline. Not until the fourth century with the passing of the persecutions and the easing of the patterns of reinstatement following sin was the church in the west more open to less stringent means of penance. In the earlier periods, when the church was forced by outside social pressures to maintain a self-protective stance, grace and forgiveness often were subject to legalistic interpretations, just as in the times when the Jewish rabbis felt threats from Syria or Rome. In such a time as this, fearful Christian men could easily have interpreted this text as giving their wives too much latitude in dealing with inappropriate behavior. Although the story hardly promotes sin (cf. 8:11), fearful people often find the lack of strict rules to be threatening.

But this little story captures magnificently both the gracious, forgiving spirit of Jesus and his firm call to the transformation of life. I consider this text to be divinely inspired and fully authoritative for life.²

¹ Mills, M. S. (1999). *The Life of Christ: A Study Guide to the Gospel Record* (Jn 8:2–11). Dallas, TX: 3E Ministries.

¹⁸ H. Riesenfeld, "Die Perikope von der Ehebrecherin in der frühkirchlichen Tradition," *SEÅ* 17 (1952): 106–11.

² Borchert, G. L. (1996). *John 1–11* (Vol. 25A, p. 376). Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers.