

August 1, 2021

ASKED & ANSWERED

...Shifting our mindset from expectation to revelation



Image by daniel-pascoa

*"In the Law
Moses commanded us
to stone such women.
Now what do you say?"*

John 8:5

Special Music: "Who am I" Casting Crowns

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mBcqria2wmg>

Question 5

John 8:5 "In the Law Moses commanded us to stone such women. Now what do you say?"

Answer 5

John 8:7 ...**"Let any one of you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her."**

CASTING STONES

My house of glass stands before me,
Sparkling in the sunlight,
Reflecting the blues of the sky
And the greens of the grass,
Mingled with nature -
Merged into the magnificence
Of God's abundance.
What a beautiful thing I have created.
My home, my dwelling, my castle,
A crystal monument to my own magnificence.
Resting on rock.
Casting no shadow.

But wait,
An unkindness of Ravens
Has taken perch
Upon the dome,
My eye to the sky,
Blocking sun and dreams
From pouring through
Preventing the feeding my countenance.
Shadows cast in filigree
Silhouettes of pain and grief.
This should not, cannot be,
A vile conspiracy
To defile the view of my horizon,

Vexing avian
Screaming at the sky
In lightning cackles.
And thunderous caws
I carefully reach beneath my feet
And grasp a stone,
Determined deterrent within my grasp.
I take aim and throw
To scatter the throng
And clear my head
Of this veil of obscurity.
The demons take flight
And I watch in glee
As they flee the scene.
Of my superimposed
Reality.

But then in horror,
I watch,
As the stone meets glass
Spider webs of crinkling cracks
Merge, scourge, insurgency
Against my creation
My soul's reality.
This tower of glass
Collapses before my eyes
Into sand and grit,
Taking with it dreams and schemes

The plans of man.
My creation, my folly.

We all are told
It is not wise
To build our castles on the sand
Lest they founder in the storms of life.
But somehow, we forget
That glass is made from sand
Our temples of dreams
That shine light on our faults.
No matter the firmament
Of the foundations of our lives,
We are only as strong
As our weakest building block.
Our cornerstone.
And if we choose
Elegance over purpose,
Beauty over structure,
Lies over truth,
Glass over good bones,
Something less than Christ
For our cornerstones,
We would be fools
To engage in casting stones.

In my first year of college, I took a summer class in physics. It wasn't because I loved physics, but because I disliked chemistry more and I was required to take two science courses. The first was biology, which was not my forte' either. But at least I had taken physics in high school. I had not taken chemistry, so I figured that my best chance for passing was by choosing physics. I was extremely pleased with my "C" at the end of the term.

There was a series of filmed lectures called "The Feynman Lectures on Physics" that we watched as part of the class. If you are into physics at all, you would know that Richard Feynman was one of the greatest physicists of his day, assisting in the work of the atomic bomb and on the investigative panel for the Space Shuttle Challenger disaster. He was integral in the development of the concept of quantum mechanics and the theory of quantum electrodynamics. He was one smart cookie and very dynamic in his lectures.

The lecture I remember the most, was on the Tacoma Narrows Bridge disaster. At the time it was completed in 1940, it was the third long longest suspension bridge in the world, just less than the length of the Golden Gate Bridge and the George Washington Bridge. It took a little over two years to complete it, and it was located in Tacoma Washington. It was a marvel to behold when it opened, spanning the channel of the Tacoma Narrows strait of Puget Sound.

When the bridge collapsed on November 7, 1940, just 4 months after it's completion, it made the headlines around the world. Although no one died in the collapse, it brought new insight into the construction of bridges that continues to

be used today. You see, the bridge did not collapse because of shoddy workmanship or inferior materials. It collapsed due to a lack of understanding regarding the physics of oscillation amplification due to frequency caused by moderate winds. In winds of 35 miles per hour or more, the bridge would start to sway, and the frequency of that sway was amplified through the consistent push of the wind. Did you ever create waves in a bathtub? The waves start out small but with each push the waves get bigger and easier to create because you have the volume and momentum of the previous wave working to your advantage. And then the water shoots out of the bathtub, and you have a mess to clean up. Not that I would know anything about that.

No one took frequency into account when designing the bridge. The science wasn't unknown, it just wasn't usually considered in the building of bridges and the winds on the Channel of the Tacoma Narrows was a perfect storm just waiting to happen.

Feynman showed film of the bridge's collapse in his lecture to show the event in all its glory. It was utterly fascinating to watch that bridge twist and turn like rubber before it collapsed. There was no visual reason that it should be happening, but science eventually solved the puzzle and changed the way suspension bridges are built today.

Which brings to mind the story of the Tower of Babel found in Genesis, Chapter 11. While the book of Genesis does not tell us how tall the Tower of Babel was, there are many references to the tower in other ancient texts. But when we search those texts for how tall the Tower of Babel was, we get answers

that range from 328 feet to a mile and a half (which would have made it to be three times taller than tallest structure today). The Bible does not tell us about the destruction of the tower, but there are references in other ancient texts and the reasons are as numerous as the versions. We do know the Bible teaches us that God changed the languages of the construction workers to stop the construction. And the commonly held reason is its very construction was an affront to God, a validation of our own hubris as we tried to give credence that man struggles to find equality with God. Historical texts tell us that the tower was eventually destroyed.

What does any of this have to do with the story of Jesus and the woman accused of adultery? Let's take a moment and refresh our minds regarding the story as it is told in John:

At dawn he appeared again in the temple courts, where all the people gathered around him, and he sat down to teach them. The teachers of the law and the Pharisees brought in a woman caught in adultery. They made her stand before the group and said to Jesus, "Teacher, this woman was caught in the act of adultery. In the Law, Moses commanded us to stone such women. Now what do you say?" They were using this question as a trap, in order to have a basis for accusing him.

Isn't it true that we get caught up in someone else's sin, ignoring compassion or the damage we may be doing, just like these Jewish leaders. This

story isn't about sin. It's about hubris. This woman caught in the act of sin is really not important to these law keepers. It is about a means to an end. A way to trap Jesus into saying something contrary to the law and take Him down a notch. When they say to Him "Teacher", it is with an air of sarcasm. The woman is secondary to their purpose. Their attempt to discredit Jesus with their question is more important than the sin itself. It could just as easily have been a man accused of murder, or a woman caught stealing, or even someone they thought was committing blasphemy. The sin wasn't important. While they were verbally talking about throwing stones at the woman, they were more focused on throwing religious and philosophical rocks at Jesus.

John continues the story:

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

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."

Again he stooped down and wrote on the ground.

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. Jesus straightened up and asked her, "Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?"

"No one, sir," she said.

"Then neither do I condemn you," Jesus declared. "Go now and leave your life of sin."

People are often more than curious about what Jesus wrote in the dirt. I used to wonder myself when I would read the story. But I've come to the conclusion that it really doesn't matter what wrote. It is more about the action of writing than the writing itself. Why would He do that? Here was a group of men with large stones, angry and trying to be intimidating, and Jesus stops to write in the dirt. All they need is a nod of Jesus's head to kill this woman. No one would have found fault in them if they did kill her. He knew this. The rebel rousers knew this. Even the woman knew this. But if He had given in to the intended legalism, it would have diminished the message and lesson Christ was trying to teach His followers.

Which is why the crowd continued to taunt Him into giving an answer and why Jesus stooped to write on the ground. The crowd was not going to make a move until Jesus answered them because they wanted whatever He said to be responsible for their next actions, not the sin of the woman. When Jesus stooped to write, he put a pause in the equation, a moment for everyone to take a breath. He knew that those ready to cast stones would find it frustrating because they wouldn't cast a single stone without His input.

Do you find having to wait, frustrating? Someone's late picking you up. Someone doesn't call on time. Someone is late to an appointment or for a dinner reservation. Waiting in line on Black Friday, maybe? We all hate to wait, some more than others. Some people even become violent when they have to wait too long. But Jesus forces the crowd, in all their tension, to wait. Which in and of itself, probably made them even a little bit more angry. How many of them might

have gotten so much more angry at this stall tactic and want to change their minds and start throwing the stones at Him?

When Jesus stands up, it's not in a hurry. He just slowly rises to his feet and addresses the crowd. **“Let any one of you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her.”** Not the words they were expecting to hear. The law taught them that no man was without sin. They even sacrificed at the Temple in case that might have accidentally sinned. If any one of them threw a stone, they would be committing blasphemy before God and would probably have become a target themselves. Notice that Jesus doesn't stand up and tell them that they are wrong or that the law is unjust. He doesn't even question the law. After all, Jesus came to complete in the law.

It was never about the law. It was about intent. And the intent was to embarrass Jesus before His followers. And instead of being angry at their intent, Jesus does the whole “write in the dirt thing” again. It still doesn't matter what He wrote. Jesus has presented them with a conundrum. Instead of rushing them for an answer, He gives them plenty of time for contemplation. He wasn't trying to win an argument or convince them that they were wrong. He wanted them to think about what he said and find the truth in the wrongness of their actions. They had to come to their own conclusions for the lesson to sink in. This was meant to be a moment of enlightenment and understanding. Not a “repeat after me” moment. The best lessons in life don't come when we make an “A” on the test by remembering the answers, but in the moments where we find enlightenment as we understand the meaning and truth behind the answers.

Suddenly, this crowd was no longer a crowd, but a collection of individuals struggling for truth that was different from what they had brought to the table. The only possible reaction they could choose and still maintain their dignity was to drop their stones and walk away. If any of them had cast their stone, their glass house of hubris and pretense would have come crashing down around them. After all, although their beliefs had a foundation on the rock of God's law, their structures were tied to unsubstantiated interpretations of that law and had no real basis in God's love for His creation. Their rules did not, nor could they ever account for God's grace in the equation. Their black and white interpretation of law left no room for mercy or compassion.

Now, I don't want to forget about the woman even though this story was never really about her sin. There is a story here that needs to be told.

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. Jesus straightened up and asked her, "Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?"

"No one, sir," she said.

"Then neither do I condemn you," Jesus declared. "Go now and leave your life of sin."

While the story thus far has been about trapping Jesus and Jesus turning that moment into a teaching moment, a new story emerges. We now have a one-

on-one conversation between Jesus and this woman. Up until this time, the woman could just as well have been lamp post. No one has said a word to her, not even Jesus. That doesn't mean that Jesus is ignoring her, but Jesus knows that in order to reach this woman, the threat to her has to be eliminated first. Which He does. And while everyone in the crowd walks away, Jesus looks at her and acknowledges her. Do you comprehend the magnificence of the blessing she must have experienced by Jesus acknowledging her? Having cleared the way, Jesus can now address the problem of the woman's personal sin. This is one of the most compassionate moments in the entire Bible. Having hit the pause button by writing in the dirt and letting those involved choose their paths, Jesus now stops writing in the dirt and begins His ministry to the woman.

So many of us would be tempted to say things like:

"Boy, you really dodged a bullet this time."

"You realize you got of lucky. They could have killed you."

"You know, you made your own bed and deserve to suffer the consequences."

"You are so lucky I was around to save you."

But that is not how Jesus approaches this woman. It is not the way Jesus approaches sin in any of our lives. He knows of her sin. She knows that He knows of her sin. No one is denying or defending her sin. But Jesus does not start with admonishing her about how she got into this situation.

Instead, he asks her a question they both know the answer to.

“Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?” She probably is a little confused by the question since they seem to be standing in an empty street. But, she answers, **“No one, sir.”** And Jesus responds with, **“Then neither do I condemn you. Go now and leave your life of sin.”**

And with that, the story comes to an end. Jesus doesn't spend hours admonishing her or preaching to her. He simply says, **“Then neither do I condemn you.”** Where have we heard something like this before? This would be a great moment for Jesus to stand on a soapbox, point His finger, and proclaim the error of her ways, maybe draw a crowd, and preach about the evils of sin, and the ramifications of sin. Maybe expound on the Law of Moses like the religious leaders who had forced the events of this moment and then point out the grace of God for forgiving her. **“She is evil! She deserves to die! The law says that this is true. But God forgives her.”** Maybe use her an example to shine a light on sin and forgiveness. When we think about it though, wouldn't that put Jesus in the same category as the religious leaders, using this woman to set an example?

God's love for all people, as exemplified in Jesus, is not about crowd sourcing. It is a one on one, let's sit and talk about this, I see you, I hear you, I love you, relationship. **“For God so loved the world that he gave His only begotten Son that whosoever believeth in Him shall not perish, but have everlasting life.”** But Like I said to you before, John 3:16 is incomplete if you don't include John 3:17. **“For God sent not His Son into the world to condemn**

the world, but that the world through Him might be saved.” God sent not His son into the world to condemn the world. **“Then neither do I condemn you.”**

Too often we focus on other people’s sins without even looking at those people, looking into their eyes, not considering their circumstances, their struggles, their pain. We just look at the black and white of the law and expect God to slam the gavel down and cry “Guilty.” God knows they are guilty. God knows we are guilty. But our relationship with God is not based on some warped sense of justice. It is based in compassion and grace.

We don’t know if the woman joined everyone else who was following Jesus. We don’t know what became of her. But I’m pretty certain this situation and this one-on-one time with Jesus, must have had a profound effect on her life. If we want that same profound effect on our lives, we have to have a one-on-one time with Jesus as well. This is not about a group hug. We have to allow Jesus to speak into us and let Him tell us how much He loves us and we have to do it at a personal level. We have to establish a relationship with Jesus. We have to experience the joy of that moment when we realize that He is acknowledging us.

We have to drop the casting stones attitude that we carry around with us, the “I am better than her” attitude, the “she is a criminal and I’m not” attitude, the “he’s a drunk and a loser” attitude. We need to find within us the compassionate side of Jesus who sheds His grace on all of us, no one better than the other. But each one unique and completely loved by God.

By the way, in 1950 a new bridge was opened over the Tacoma Narrows Strait, which incorporated the necessary changes to avoid the problems with resonance. After the disaster, they paused to reflect on the issues with the first bridge and corrected their mistakes. They didn't give up. The bridge was needed, just as our relationship with Jesus is needed. We don't give up when we fail. We ask God to show us our mistakes and how to do better. We let Jesus write in the dirt to give us time to reflect and then adjust our lives accordingly. That's how love works. Gentle enlightenment and persuasion through reflection. We are so fortunate that our creator knows us so well that He is patient with us while we learn.

AMEN

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