

A note on John 8.1-12

As you are reading John 8 you might see a note above the chapter about the authenticity of the text. For example, the editors of the English Standard Translation left this note: “[The earliest manuscripts do not include 7:53-8:11].”

The reason for this note is that simply it is true. It is the consensus among scholars is that this portion is not authentic to John. Why?

1. It is not found in the earliest New Testament manuscripts.
2. It *appears* to break the flow of the story.
3. It contains language that is not used other places in John and therefore does not feel like John is the author the text.

How then are we to approach this passage of Scripture? There are two primary approaches.

The first approach is to ignore the question marks and deal with the text. The problem with this approach is that is the text is not original, then it would not have the same authority as the rest of John 8. It seems difficult to preach and teach it with the same authority.

The second approach would be to ignore the passage all together. This is what some reputable scholars recommend. In many of the leading commentaries, by those who hold a high view of Scripture, it is excluded all together. The problem with this approach is that, even though we are not confident the text is original, most scholars also conclude that the events of this text most likely *did* happen. For some reason the story was so important it was included.

So, a third approach is to put an asterisk there and see what we could learn from this event in the life of Jesus. This, after all, is what the editors of the ESV have done. They included the text, but with brackets of caution. This approach has the encouragement of John Calvin who wrote,

It is plain enough that this passage was unknown anciently to the Greek Churches; and some conjecture that it has been brought from some other place and inserted here. But as it has always been received by the Latin Churches, and is found in many old Greek manuscripts, and contains nothing unworthy of an Apostolic Spirit, there is no reason why we should refuse to apply it to our advantage.¹

This, third approach, seems the most prudent. And as I preach it, I will take that same approach. The question becomes, what makes this story something we can learn from about the life of Jesus? How does it compliment the idea of authority in the in the surrounding text?

If you want to dig further let me encourage you to read, *John, Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament book Four* by [Edward Klink](#). His commentary on the

¹ http://textus-receptus.com/wiki/Jesus_and_the_woman_taken_in_adultery

problem is quite compelling. While I do not have copy write permission to reprint the entire article here, he essentially argues that we use the text “on probation”. We stop short of treating it with authority, but do ask the compelling question of its inclusion here.

After reading this, you may ask, why are we even having this discussion? The answer is that according to Psalm 119 the Word is life. Jesus echoed this in John 6:63 when Jesus said, “It is the Spirit who gives life....The words that I have spoken to you are spirit and life.” Later Peter confessed that Jesus had “the words of eternal life” (68). When God speaks there is life. Understanding his word, and communicating his word is critical in so much as it is one conduit to spiritual life! it is so very important.

God help us as teachers and preachers to make the text clear and dispense it in the Spirit.