

Jesus & the Adulteress (But What Would Freud Do?)

What Really Happened

John 8:1-11 ¹But Jesus went to the Mount of Olives. ²And 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. ³And the scribes and the Pharisees brought a woman caught in adultery, and having set her in the midst, ⁴they said to Him, “Teacher, this woman has been caught in adultery, in the very act. ⁵“Now in the Law Moses commanded us to stone such women; what then do You say?” ⁶And they were saying this, testing Him, in order that they might have grounds for accusing Him. But Jesus stooped down, and with His finger wrote on the ground. ⁷But 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.” ⁸And again He stooped down, and wrote on the ground. ⁹And 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 midst. ¹⁰And straightening up, Jesus said to her, “Woman, where are they? Did no one condemn you?” ¹¹And she said, “No one, Lord.” And Jesus said, “Neither do I condemn you; go your way. From now on sin no more.”

*“He who is without sin...let him be the first to throw a stone at her.”
Only Jesus qualified... and He threw no stone. (John 8:1-11)*

But What Would Freud Do?

Early in the morning the well-known psychotherapist went into the temple, sat down, and began to observe the crowd. He made a few notes as he watched the people advancing towards him. His concentration was disturbed by a group of religious zealots dragging a woman towards him across the paving stones. They set her down in the midst of the crowd surrounding Freud, looked Freud in the eye, and threw out their challenge: “Teacher,” they said, “this woman has been caught in adultery, in the very act! Now in the Law Moses commanded us to stone such women; what do you say?”

Freud made no reply. He turned his gaze from the zealots to stoop over his ever-present pad of paper and jot down some thoughts about their motives. He noted their smug looks as they approached; clearly they considered him a man of lax morals who didn't care much for their religious rules. (Their overactive superegos had already condemned him.) There was no point in saying a thing. If he told them “Stone her!” the people gathered around would see him as a hypocrite who taught mercy and showed none. If he let her off the hook he'd deny the scriptures these same people worshiped. Freud knew a set-up when he saw one.

His accusers persisted, but Freud held his silence. He briefly met their gaze before he turned again to his writing. Jot, jot. Aggressive drives. Jot, jot. Repression of their own sexual pleasure when they caught her “in the act.” Jot, jot. Projection of their self-punitive anger onto the cringing woman before them. Aggression and sex. Sex and aggression. Jot, jot. These phony religious people had the same issues as the woman they'd accused, Not only was their God a sham, so were they.

Realizing that they were getting nowhere, the scribes and Pharisees began to leave, one by one, beginning with the older ones. And Freud and the woman were left alone in the temple courtyard. Finally her therapy could begin!

Straightening up, Freud encouraged the women to talk freely to him, “Just tell me whatever comes into your mind. Leave nothing out.” He knew she would never feel clean until she expressed to him the thoughts that would bubble up from her unconscious. They met twice a week for several years, stopping only when Freud saw she had gained the insights that freed her to discard her antiquated morality, get over her fixation on the father-substitute with whom she was having sex, and learn to sensibly express her instinctual drives without shame or guilt. Stones? They were unnecessary. Forgiveness? For what? Listening to her own words had set her free!

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