

NO CONDEMNATION!

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Scripture: John 8: 1-11

John 8: 1-11

But Jesus went to the Mount of Olives. 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. The scribes and the Pharisees brought a woman caught in adultery, and having set her in the center of the court, they said to Him, "Teacher, this woman has been caught in adultery, in the very act. Now in the Law Moses commanded us to stone such women; what then do You say?" 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. 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." Again He stooped down and wrote on the ground. 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. Straightening up, Jesus said to her, "Woman, where are they? Did no one condemn you?" She said, "No one, Lord." And Jesus said, "I do not condemn you either. Go. From now on sin no more."

Will you pray with me?

Lord Jesus, we are transported as it were to this courtyard, seeing you teach, seeing you being intruded by this group, seeing you deal with this woman. And Lord, inviting You today to speak to our own hearts. Show us Lord what lessons we can learn from Your interaction with this woman. We are open Lord, speak Lord through Your Spirit. We ask in Your name. Amen.

F. B. Meyer once remarked, "It is a terrible thing for a sinner to fall into the hands of his fellow sinners." Our text this morning contains one of the more famous statements of Jesus: "Let him who is without sin cast the first stone." We have heard this phrase used very often, not just in sermons expounding this particular passage, but among various people over the last couple of centuries where people have got involved in some kind of sin, and this statement has popped up.

But I read somewhere that this particular encounter that Jesus has with this woman is almost akin to the prodigal son; so a few have called this the prodigal daughter because it kind of brings out a passage of scripture found in John 1:17 where it says, "for the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ." As we look at this passage, we see both. We see the Law of Moses finding its way into this encounter and we see that truth was in no way diluted, but grace was wonderfully amplified, magnified and offered.

I'd like for us to just take these verses, maybe two or three at a time and see what they have to offer us. The danger of this particular passage sometimes, is that we tend to leave it in the bible. We look at it, we see the way Jesus handled it, and then we marvel at the way He handled the scribes and the Pharisees, and this woman, and we walk away with a greater appreciation of who Jesus is. And that's one way of looking at it. The bible has such profundity attached to it that we can take any passage and almost get nuggets that we never saw before. So today, I want us to look at this passage and then ask ourselves whether somehow God is speaking to us through it. Is God speaking to you, to me, through these words found in John 8? So let's look at the first three verses. That's the beginning.

Vvs 1-2: Jesus went to the Mount of Olives. 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.

He went back into the temple and all the people – they’ve been hanging on to His every word. They’ve marveled at the wisdom and the truth that He has expounded, and so they’re back again in the morning, ready to hear from Him. Then suddenly this little teaching session is interrupted by a commotion of rustling robes and maybe the sound of dragging feet that are so reluctant to be coming towards the Master.

Vs. 3: The scribes and the Pharisees brought a woman caught in adultery, and having set her in the center of the court,

In other words, they placed her in the very center, a public square. Jesus was there, there were many people. And then they bring this woman and place her there in the center of the square.

Who are these men? The bible tells us that they were scribes and Pharisees – the religious people of that time. They were people who understood the law; they were people who expounded it; they were the ones who explained it to people, common people who couldn’t understand it. They were the ones who brought this woman.

Who was the woman? We don’t know. It just refers to this woman as one caught in adultery; no name, no nothing about her.

How do they catch her? Verse 4 tells us that they caught her in the very act of adultery. The other question that we often ask when we read this passage of course is, where is the man? It takes two people to have an adulterous engagement. **Where was the man?** This account tells us that they didn’t bother bringing him, even though they caught her in the “act of adultery” which means that he was there. But they didn’t bother to bring him in as well. And that just raises many red flags about their motive, which will become very clear as we look at the next couple of verses. So they intended to expose her publicly to Jesus which is why they brought her into the temple in the middle of the square, and kept her at the very center of the square.

vvs. 4, 5: they said to Him, “Teacher, this woman has been caught in adultery, in the very act.” And then they remind Jesus what the Law of Moses says. They say, “Moses commanded us to stone such women; what then do You say?”

The Motive: vs. 6a: *They were saying this, testing Him so that they might have grounds for accusing Him.* Therefore it means that this woman happened to be a pawn in this entire setup to bring Jesus into some kind of conflict with certain stands that He may have taken, or the compassion, the mercy that He had been showing to people all around.

Leviticus 20:10 and Deuteronomy 22:22 says that both parties were to be put to death. That was what the law was, and that was why they were bringing her to Him.

The dilemma:

Now the dilemma was this: if He said she should be put to death, He might be seen as rebellious to Rome, since the Jews did not have the right to capital punishment. If you remember, that was why Pilate had to agree to Jesus’ crucifixion. I said “might be seen”, because we also read later in Acts, that Stephen was stoned to death. So, there’s a little bit of confusion about where and what they were allowed to do.

But if He said she should not be put to death, that would appear to be a violation of the Old Testament, and would put Him at odds with Moses. Either way He would be in trouble – at least that was their thinking. Because if He didn’t go with the law and went with mercy, then He was putting aside the law. And they were trying to see whether the law, and mercy and compassion that Jesus

was showing, could be side by side. Could you have one, and still have the other? An important distinction to bring. And that was the test.

The Test:

So they brought this woman caught in adultery; the law of Moses said stone her and the man, presented to Jesus – What do You say we should do? Let's have Your opinion on this.

Vs 6b: But Jesus stooped down and with His finger wrote on the ground.

Vss. 7-9: 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." Again He stooped down and wrote on the ground. 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.

Jesus' response to this confrontation by the scribes and Pharisees initially was to ignore them. He just bent down and He began to write something in the sand.

What did He write? I've read so many accounts of people speculating about all the things He wrote, but it ends up mere speculation, because it doesn't tell us. So let's not spend any time on that. But there's a more important question here. What did He write? Not important. What did He say? Very, very important.

What did He say? If any of you is without sin, let him be the first to throw a stone at her. I suspect that this time, the exodus was a little quieter – it was more with shuffling feet, people trying to find their way out without drawing attention to themselves. And it says that it started with those who were older until there was nobody left except the woman standing where they had kept her, in the center of the court. Somehow, that plan that they had to test Him had failed. They came out the loser from it. They came to trap Him, and they had to find quiet ways to disappear from that crowd, until there was nobody left but her.

Vvs. 10-11 we see Jesus' perspective of this whole sordid episode. *Straightening up, Jesus said to her, "Woman, where are they? Did no one condemn you?"*

It seems as if Jesus is putting this whole encounter in perspective for what it really was. It seems to be that Jesus looks at it through the lens of condemnation, that He saw this woman being condemned. Because He asked the question: Is there no one left to condemn you?

What is condemnation? The dictionary would give us these two meanings:

- It's the expression of very strong disapproval. We saw that – there was great disapproval. We caught this woman in the very act of committing adultery. What do you have to say? As disapproving as you can get.
- A censure or the action of condemning someone to punishment, or sentencing – which was also present. They condemned her to the point where they said the law of Moses says to stone her. The punishment was also being brought up.

And Jesus puts all of this into perspective. They came to trap Him, but He brought out their thinking in the way they were looking at this individual caught in sin. There was condemnation that was being placed upon this woman, and it seems like Jesus was not going to allow that condemnation to take place. So when He tells them - the one who is without sin throw the first stone. You want to punish her, go ahead, but you cannot have sin. Then they all go away; there's no one left to condemn her, to mete out this punishment or to show her disapproval. How do we know that? Because Jesus says, "Neither do I condemn you." Although He was the only one who could have, because He was the only one there without sin. But He says, "Even I don't condemn you; but go and sin no more. I'm not

in any way saying that your lifestyle is okay. It's a sinful lifestyle. Stop it. It's not right. But I will not condemn you."

It's an interesting place for Jesus to bring this whole conversation to, that it comes down to the condemnation of a sinner.

Why is it so important for Jesus to remove the condemnation? Why is condemnation central to this episode; that Jesus says, "Even I am not going to condemn you. But go and stop sinning. That's a different issue, and I'm addressing that – stop sinning. But I'm not going to condemn you."

Well, I wonder whether you've been under condemnation. It's not a very good place to be, isn't it? Because when we are under condemnation, we come under intense disapproval, there are conversations that go on about us, could be justified or not. Maybe even punishment is being meted out to you. Maybe too, you're guilty of what you're being accused of, but the way things are being handled by people around you is unfair. All this just to say - maybe you know what it feels like to be condemned by people.

I think there's an even more intense kind of condemnation that comes because the whole area of condemnation is what Satan uses. Satan uses condemnation to neutralize who you are beloved, as a child of God. He will bring this whole area that you are being accused of, something that you indulged in, fell into, and he will bring it up time and time again. every time you want to get past it, he will bring it up and keep it there right in the center and say, "You? You want to do something good? You want to follow God? You want to do something righteous? Have you forgotten who you are, what kind of a person you are?" And pretty soon, under this condemnation from the evil one, we just crumble and crawl into a little hole and stay there, unable to fulfill the plans and purposes that God has placed in your life and mine.

That's what condemnation can do. It can force you to be somebody who you are not meant to be under the weight of this sin. But Jesus says, "Neither do I condemn you." Could He be saying that to you, to me today, looking at what we could have done and saying: Neither do I condemn you. Beloved, if you are a child of God today, if you bear His name, the bible tells us that there is no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus. (Romans 8:1) No condemnation! Jesus would in fact tell you: You're My child and I'm not going to condemn you. I will bring conviction of sin to you and conviction is just telling you that this was something wrong and you ought not to do it. But go and sin no more. It's addressing the sin, and beloved, the only way to get out from under the weight of the accusation that the evil one can bring is to take this area that you have gotten caught in and bring it to the Lord and say, "Lord, I have kept it from You for a long time. Not that You don't know it, but I have not confessed it."

Sometimes beloved, we carry some sin with us. We may deal with others but some sins which may be deep-rooted or happened a long time back, or we find difficult, or cannot be broken. We carry those along, and those are the areas of condemnation that we find ourselves in that is fertile ground for the evil one.

Maybe today, what you need is to be able to take it to the Lord, expose it to God, and say, "God, I'm sorry. I've sinned, I continue to sin. I want to stop. Will You help me? I am weighed down with the condemnation that I face day in and day out from the evil one. Free me. Your word says, "If I confess my sins, then You are faithful and You are just, and You will forgive my sin and cleanse me from all unrighteousness. I confess today. Forgive me. Cleanse me." And beloved, the weight of that condemnation goes and instead you will feel the embracing love of Jesus drawing you close to Him, saying, "Neither do I condemn you, but go and sin no more."

That's our word today, beloved. I'm not sure why God brought this to me. Normally I follow the lectionary for my sermon passage. I had turned in for the night a couple of nights back, thinking about my sermon when this particular passage came to mind and I could not shake it. I felt very strongly that this is what needed to be preached. I believe that there are some who are listening who are under terrible weight of condemnation and who need to be freed. Dearly beloved, would you take that area that you're sorry for but never confessed to the Lord? Confess it to the Lord. ask for His forgiveness. Get back that wonderful joy that comes from fellowship with Him, to be able to move out from under the condemnation that Satan may bring upon you. And let joy and peace, just the power of the Holy Spirit's cleansing, renewing, refreshing, pouring fresh energy and vision into you. Enjoy that today as we look to Him in prayer as we close. Therefore, now there is no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus. Neither do I condemn you, Jesus said, but go and sin no more.

Let us pray.

Our loving heavenly Father, Your Word comes to us, both in a convicting and yet in a love way; convicting because it brings up to the fore those things that we have indulged in that is not at all consistent with your holiness, and loving because You don't condemn us but draw us to the point where You will forgive when You hear us confess it. Cleanse us and restore us to a beautiful fellowship with You, something that we may have missed for a long time. Restore unto us Lord, the joy that could have been missing. I pray for those who are responding to You, bringing to You areas of darkness, of sin. Lord, would You wipe the slate clean? Would You forgive, would You bring restoration into our lives today? We ask this Lord Jesus, in Your beautiful name. amen.