

FROM CONDEMNATION TO FREEDOM

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Scripture: John 8: 1-11

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8 But Jesus went to the Mount of Olives.

2 Now early in the morning He came again into the temple, and all the people came to Him; and He sat down and taught them. 3 Then the scribes and Pharisees brought to Him a woman caught in adultery. And when they had set her in the midst, 4 they said to Him, "Teacher, this woman was caught in adultery, in the very act. 5 Now Moses, in the law, commanded us that such should be stoned. But what do You say?" 6 This they said, testing Him, that they might have something of which to accuse Him. But Jesus stooped down and wrote on the ground with His finger, as though He did not hear.

7 So when they continued asking Him, He raised Himself up and said to them, "He who is without sin among you, let him throw a stone at her first." 8 And again He stooped down and wrote on the ground. 9 Then those who heard it, being convicted by their conscience, went out one by one, beginning with the oldest even to the last. And Jesus was left alone, and the woman standing in the midst. 10 When Jesus had raised Himself up and saw no one but the woman, He said to her, "Woman, where are those accusers of yours? Has no one condemned you?"

11 She said, "No one, Lord."

And Jesus said to her, "Neither do I condemn you; go and sin no more."

This is a very familiar verse which we've read often. But today, we're going to break it down into the theme that we have – From Condemnation to Freedom.

ACT ONE: THE SCENE – A COURTROOM WITHOUT MERCY

What's happening here? As per the word, the story opens at dawn when Jesus had gone to the Mount of Olives. Eventually, when He returned to the temple, He was teaching there. during those times, the temple was a place where people would come to meet God's mercy or to hear from God's word.

But suddenly out of the blue, the atmosphere changed. The scribes and Pharisees dragged in a woman. They were uninvited. They were not being heard. There was no defense being placed. There was no plea being granted. Simply a display! For a woman, as you would easily understand from the situation that she's in, this is probably when she's reduced to her worst moment.

Not only is she put on display into the middle of the crowd, but they start shouting. "Teacher, this woman was caught in the very act of adultery." Notice there is no name. there is no story behind this. There is no sense of repentance. And there is obviously no dignity being offered here. Outright accusation. Obviously, the people here are not seeking justice, as it would seem to be the case that they have come for. But they are seeking condemnation.

But one thing is very odd here. They said that the woman was caught in the act of adultery. Where is the man? What happened to him? She was obviously not by herself, but supposedly there was somebody else also there.

But that's not the issue here. She has been dragged into the courthouse in the presence of Jesus, not with the intent of seeking justice, but something more sinister.

And what do they do next? They go even one step ahead. They start using scripture itself as a weapon. They say, "The law of Moses commands us to stone such a woman. What do you say?" They did not intend to follow the law. They intended to see if Jesus would contradict the law. They didn't say it was Yahweh's law. It was not the law that Moses dreamt up. It was the law given to him. But they say, "The law of Moses commands us to stone such a woman. What do you say?"

And this is what is going wrong. Religion is at its most dangerous situation, when people suddenly think that it's more right to care about their correctness than being redeeming, their correctness than being merciful, their being right than offering love.

So this is the courtroom scene that we're seeing. It's obviously not a courtroom, because a courtroom would have a witness, a defense, an offense. This was something completely different. It was outright accusation with condemnation from the very start.

ACT TWO:

SCENE 1: THE SILENT RESPONSE OF JESUS

What does Jesus do? In fact, we heard Pastor talk about this a couple of weeks ago, about Jesus stooping down and writing something, and no one knows what He was writing. That's what is described here. He bends down and writes on the ground. He says nothing.

Why does that happen? You know, condemnation usually begins to always sound very loud. Condemnation is never silent. It is very, very loud.

But here's the best part. Grace always starts usually with silence. Grace doesn't create chaos. Grace always begins with silence. The accusers demanded a verdict. And what did Jesus do? He gives them a mirror. He tells them to look at what they were wanting to do.

We heard this at last Sunday's message too. When he came to Jesus and said, "Who is my neighbor?" And Jesus said, "What is a neighbor?" Jesus had this very innate way of turning the question around. They wanted a verdict. They wanted to endorse their accusation. But Jesus turns around and gives them a mirror.

SCENE 2: WHAT DOES JESUS SAY?

He says, "Let anyone among you who is without sin be the first one to throw the stone." And suddenly, He turns the entire concept of Moses' law around. He does not question the law itself. He says, "Yes, the law is right. But whoever is without sin can throw the first stone."

It's very easy for somebody to misinterpret this as Jesus probably going easy on the woman. Because obviously no one is without sin. But this is not leniency. This is not denial of sin. This is truth being applied to everyone. And that's where we step in. We need to understand the truth that we so strongly uphold. What happens when it applies to us? How do we respond to it when the tables are turned?

And what happens then? One by one, they leave. The oldest one first. It's very funny why the Bible says specifically, "starting from the oldest even to the last." Probably the oldest ones were mature enough to realize wherever they made mistakes, wherever they had faltered. And they realized it first. They knew their own failures. And so, they walked away. And then the younger ones probably realized, "Uh-oh! I have much to learn from this." And they also walked away. Finally, no one was left.

What do we see here? They came into the courtroom with stones in their hand. What about these stones? Is it the stones that they only carry? Do we not carry any stones? Here's the thing: we all carry some stones. Not literal stones, but we carry stones in the form of judgment, in the form of comparison, stones of resentment, stones of self-righteousness. And sometimes, even stones against ourselves.

When you look at that, suddenly you realize that while some of us may not have been the Pharisees, some of us are the woman herself. We stand before God rehearsing our failures. If you look at the woman standing in the middle of the courtroom, she must have been thinking: Why did I take that step? Why didn't I think twice before doing something like this? I have gone too far. God is fed up with me. God is not going to forgive me. I should have known better. I can't change.

When you hear the words of somebody who is standing in the courtroom accused of wrongdoing, you realize that many times we also find ourselves talking like that. And sometimes the sound of condemnation is so loud that it's not from the outside; it's from inside. We often find that the deepest condemnation comes from within us.

And that's where Jesus steps in. Today, we have the Holy Spirit who exposes this, not to shame us but to free us. And what does Jesus do? He does not allow that condemnation to overcome that woman. Romans 8 – *Therefore, there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.*

This is something which is very real to us because we have read it time and time again. But for that woman, she's standing before the Lord Almighty. She does not know that. She does not know that she is facing redemption from condemnation in totality. For her, that is her worst moment where she is accused, she is reduced to what can be the worst situation. She's probably going through hell in those moments where the entire courtroom is looking at her glaringly, stones in hand, and shouting accusations. But she does not realize that there is no condemnation for her because she's standing in front of the one who can set her free.

SCENE 3: WHAT DOES JESUS DO?

This is the turning point. Jesus stands up. After they have left, He stands up. And this is probably the only time He addresses the woman directly in conversation. He says, "Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?" and she replies, "No one Lord."

And then the statement that changed everything. He says, "Neither do I condemn you. Go your way. And from now, do not sin again."

This is often a very misunderstood statement in scripture. Jesus is not letting go of the of the situation. He is not releasing her in a manner of diluting what had happened. But He does two things. And He does those two things together, which we normally tend to separate.

- He neither condemns her,
- He does not excuse her.

He identifies that this woman has been caught in adultery, and He knows very well that she is completely in shame by what has happened. But by doing so, God's grace that Jesus showed at that time, does not imply that sin didn't matter.

It more emphatically says that your sin is not the end of your story. Things will change from now on. That's why He says, "Go your way from now on, and do not sin again."

How do we understand the difference between condemnation and conviction? What does condemnation say? It says: You are your sin. Your sin defines you. There is no escape from this.

Conviction in Christ says: You are more than what you have done. There is a hope of change. While condemnation paralyzes, conviction transforms. Condemnation traps us in the past. It freezes in that time. It keeps us in a continuous state of guilt.

ACT 3: FREEDOM IN CHRIST

But Jesus changes that, when He says: Go. He moves you into the future, a step towards freedom.

And that's the theme for today. Condemnation to freedom. The problem is when we land up condemn ourselves, we get stuck in a ground of shame. We just refuse to know that we have freedom in Christ. And even though Christ says: Stand up, walk again, begin again, we kind of get trapped in it.

Why did Jesus so boldly dismiss condemnation that was so loud in that courtroom? Because He knew very well what was going to happen in the future. He was pointing forward to the cross. The woman did not know it. We know it today from what we have read in the bible. The stones that were meant for her would ultimately fall on Him. The condemnation that she had escaped, He would ultimately carry. The judgment she avoided, He would absorb. Jesus took the place of the accused on the cross. That woman did not know what was going to happen in the future. For us it's done.

That's how we can see that we are no longer in condemnation. Why does that happen? So that each one of us cannot get trapped in that ground of shame. But we can all hear Him saying: "Neither do I condemn you. Go and sin no more." This is not cheap grace. It's a costly grace because it cost God the ultimate sacrifice.

APPLICATIONS

We saw the woman being brought up in front of the court. We saw the people standing with stones. And then Jesus saying, "Go ahead and throw the stones, whoever is without sin. And everybody vanished. And then finally, Jesus tells her, "You are free of any condemnation. Go and sin no more."

How does that apply to us? I'm going to give you three invitations.

1. Drop the stones you hold against others.

Very often, we are caught up holding stones – not literally, but metaphorically. We have frozen somebody in the worst moment of their lives, and we hold them at ransom with some kind of stone in our hands.

Has Jesus asked you to drop that stone? If you are not aware, ask Him to show you where those stones are, the ones that you are holding up against others.

2. Drop the stones that you hold against yourself.

Some of us keep confessing our sins which are already forgiven again and again and again – kind of live in the guilt of what had happened. This is not humility. This is living a life as if the cross was not enough.

There is no more condemnation in what we did. We are forgiven and we need to live a life of freedom.

3. Walk into the freedom of change.

Jesus did not say: Stay where you are. Jesus said, "Go and sin no more." That's an invitation to walk into the path of freedom. The word of God is very clear. "The one that God sets free is free indeed."

Therefore, there is a purpose behind that word. It is not a permission. It is not saying: God ahead. You may live a life of freedom. It's transformation. God's commandment. You are free indeed because I made you free. That's what the word of God says.

Now imagine the woman's condition. Suddenly, she hears Jesus tell her: "Go and sin no more. I also don't condemn you." Imagine her walking home. The Bible does not specify that, but let's picturize it. she's walking back from the courtroom where she was dragged. There's no crowd around her. There is nobody shouting. There are no stones. There is no condemnation. There's just a future she thought was not possible.

And this is what Christ is offering us. it's not to replay our failures but a road that we have not walked; to walk in freedom.

But there is a hurdle. Not so much of a hurdle but kind of an uncomfortable truth that almost all of us must confront. And it kind of comes to light during this season. Too often, we turn the season of Lent into a performance. Suddenly, we become very conscious of appearing religious. We become very conscious of doing what is absolutely right. We speak about what we are giving up rather than speaking about what we have been called to become. We wear our sacrifices like badges. I gave up meat/chocolate/ this/ that. No social media and so on.

There are certain parameters that we are defining ourselves through this period. And somewhere, quietly, a dangerous thought slips in: Because I'm doing these things, I must be doing well with God.

But here is the thing. This season, or our walk through our life as His children, was never meant to be a spiritual achievement test. It was not meant to see how much we scored in that test. If you were to compare it in that manner, then the Pharisees outdid us. they were very good at the performance that they had. They fasted. They followed rules. They could list their disciplines with precision. And yet, what were they doing? They were standing in front of Jesus holding stones. What makes it different for us? And this is the tragedy of the season that we must face, that we often tend to succeed at the externals.

But we rarely allow the transformation of the heart from within. Our walk with Christ is not about externals. Our walk with Christ is what transforms us from within. It is what God intended – for us to walk the path of freedom, to live our salvation, to enjoy the redemption that we have. We are only rearranging appearances while we continue to hold the stones in our hand. That's a scary thought. That's something that we need to confront intentionally. There is not definition that says that you need to give up externals.

The only requirement is: What have you changed from inside? What have you done to completely absorb the freedom that God has offered us? what are the stones that we are still carrying, which are held tight and firm in our hands?

So today, when you sit down to pray, I'm sure each one of us has had accusations, has had condemnations thrown at us. But we are going to enjoy the freedom that God has given us. we are going to let the weight of those stones drop. Not only the weight of the stones, we are going to let the stones drop from our own hands. We are going to listen only to the voice of the One who came to save us. Because He says, "Neither do I condemn you. Now go and sin no more."

That was the word in our lives when we accepted Christ the very first day. It need not be repeated every day because you are already walking a life of freedom. It's just that we are pulled down by the stones that we carry.

We have been called from shame to dignity. We have been moved from sin to freedom. And this is God's work. This is our journey as His children – from condemnation to forgiveness till we go and be with Him ultimately. We live our life every day in the salvation that we have enjoyed, the redemption that He has given us, knowing very well that we are free. There is no more condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.

We need to identify ourselves with the walk of that woman as she walked from that courtroom back to her home.

Let's pray.
