

Jesus and the Woman in Adultery

John 8:1-11

Warm-Up Question: Share a time in your childhood when you were caught doing something you shouldn't. What were the consequences, if any?

⁵³ Then each went to his own home. ¹ But Jesus went to the Mount of Olives. ² At dawn he appeared again in the temple courts, where all the people gathered around him, and he sat down to teach them. ³ The teachers of the law and the Pharisees brought in a woman caught in adultery. They made her stand before the group ⁴ and said to Jesus, "Teacher, this woman was caught in the act of adultery. ⁵ In the Law Moses commanded us to stone such women. Now what do you say?" ⁶ They were using this question as a trap, in order to have a basis for accusing him. But Jesus bent down and started to write on the ground with his finger. ⁷ When they kept on questioning him, he straightened up and said to them, "If any one of you is without sin, let him be the first to throw a stone at her." ⁸ Again he stooped down and wrote on the ground. ⁹ 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. ¹⁰ Jesus straightened up and asked her, "Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?" ¹¹ "No one, sir," she said. "Then neither do I condemn you," Jesus declared. "Go now and leave your life of sin" (John 7:53-8:11).

The Gathering Storm

In the last chapter of John's gospel, we have seen how the Jewish leadership had banded together to seek Jesus' life (7:1; 19; 30; 32). In their minds He had become a threat that needed to be dealt with. When Jesus had courageously stood up in the midst of the Feast of Tabernacles and shouted out that He was the one who would give the water of life to the Jewish people, the religious Jews had had enough. They hatched their next plan of attack. What did Jesus do? When all the followers of Christ went to their homes He did as He usually did and retired for the evening by sleeping out under the stars on the Mount of Olives (Luke 22:39) at Gethsemane, the place of the olive press. The one who made the world had no place to lay His head (Luke 9:58). Why did He do that? Perhaps it was because He did not want to endanger others by sleeping at their house,

knowing that the Jewish ruling elite had put the word out that Jesus was to be captured, bringing a very real fear that struck the common people that loved Christ. (7:13). In all things we see Jesus thinking and caring for others.

In the morning, at dawn, He rose from His sleep and headed across the Kidron valley and entered the gates making His way up to the Temple Courts where He sat down and began to teach the early morning worshipers. Into the midst of the listening crowd came the teachers of the law and Pharisees with a woman that they made stand in front of all. We are told that she was caught in the act of adultery. More than likely she had little clothing on, perhaps just wrapped in the bed sheets for shock effect by the Jews. How ashamed she must have felt! She was more than likely weeping as she stood before them all. She knew the consequences of the situation she was in. Her life was on the line. She knew she was guilty and the penalty was death:

²² If a man is found sleeping with another man's wife, both the man who slept with her and the woman must die. You must purge the evil from Israel (Deuteronomy 22:22).

The *Mishnah*, that is, the Jewish codified law, states that the penalty for adultery is strangulation, and even the method of strangulation is laid down:

"The man is to be enclosed in dung up to his knees, and a soft towel set down within a rough towel is to be placed around his neck....Then one man draws in one direction and another in the other direction, until he is dead." The *Mishnah* reiterates that death by stoning is the penalty for a girl who is betrothed and who then commits adultery. ¹

According to Jewish law, if a couple were caught in the act of adultery, both of them were to be punished by death. So where was the man? Why do you think he wasn't brought before Jesus to be judged also?

¹ William Barclay, *The Gospel of John*, vol.2, The Daily Study Bible Series, (Edinburgh, Scotland: Saint Andrew Press, 1956), p.2.

So, where was the man? We are told in verse 6, that this was a set-up, a trap to catch Jesus in whatever decision He made, to stone or not to stone. This was not about justice or righteousness, this woman was just being used as an instrument to get at Jesus. It seems suspiciously like one of the religious leaders had actually gone undercover to woo this particular woman into their premeditated trap. When the trap was sprung on the poor unsuspecting woman, the religious leaders had burst in and caught her, I suspect, in bed with one of the religious leaders who thought it was quite alright to compromise his values in order for the greater good of catching Jesus, the one they thought was a false prophet. Of course, they let the man go because it was all part of the trap. He could not be judged and stoned—he had to be let go when the trap was sprung.

Jesus saw the motives of the men who brought her to Him. He saw the brokenness and shame that the women had endured at the hands of these self-righteous men who cared nothing for her. To them she was just an object. She had no name, no feelings, and to the religious leaders, she had no soul. She was just a woman whom they knew was someone that they could seduce into their plot. Many of us are guilty of the same kind of sin. We may have never committed the sin of adultery, but what about the sin of promiscuity? It is laid down in the Law of Moses that on a woman's wedding day, if the sign of the covenant, the breaking of the hymen, did not happen on the wedding night, and the blood of the covenant that they had made with one another could not be produced on the sheets the next morning, the woman was to be stoned to death by all the town's men (Deuteronomy 22:20-21). They were to purge the evil from Israel. In this woman many of us see ourselves—guilty before the law of God and needing grace and mercy from God. Others among us have been like these religious leaders—guilty of using people for our own ends—to satisfy our own desires and wants. They didn't care about this broken, sobbing woman; she was just a victim of their trap. They were quite happy to see her stoned to death. This kind of sin, that of using people for one's own ends, angers God. Jesus was well aware of their true motives and intentions. He was also aware of the brokenness and shame that now filled the woman's heart. Brokenness and humility will always beckon to God's grace and mercy.

Guilt Should Not Be Ignored

Of course, it is but conjecture, but I wonder how long

this woman had been known by the Jewish leadership as one who could be used in such a way. Perhaps there were areas in her life or spiritual needs that she had put off fixing over some time.

Many years ago I went on a trip with Sandy, my wife, and five others, driving through France, Spain and Portugal. We were visiting different churches and doing street evangelism and leading people to Christ as we went. While driving through the rural parts of France, the red engine light on the dashboard came on and we were hundreds of miles away from home. We couldn't afford to break down; the consequences were too great if the warning light was ignored. We had to wait until the morning and find someone to fix the problem—we didn't want to be stranded in the middle of nowhere with a blown up engine. What would have happened if we had ignored the light? It is madness to continue to drive on while a red warning light is on in your car. I like to think of guilt as the red warning light of the soul. Guilt weighs heavy on the dashboard of your soul. It's time to stop and ask yourself did you ever really get things right with God over something that happened many years ago. Is it something that keeps popping up in your mind? If it does, perhaps it's because you have never really repented and forsaken that particular sin. There is also such a thing as false guilt that the enemy lays on us, accusing us of something that we have sincerely brought to the Father and confessed and forsaken. You need to know within yourself whether it is God dealing with you, or if it is the enemy. The clue to who is reminding you as to your sin is to ask yourself, when you feel guilty do the thoughts drive you to Christ or away from Christ? If the enemy is condemning or accusing you for your sin, he always tries to get you to completely abandon your faith as he points to your sin in an accusing way. When the Holy Spirit convicts, He always reminds us of the provision of the sacrifice of Christ for our sins. Repentance, sometimes restitution, and forsaking of our sins, restores the relationship to God.

Why was this such a clever trap that the teachers of the law and the Pharisee's had devised? What were they hoping to accomplish by this trap?

Grace to Cover Our Sin

The Jewish people were living under Roman rule at the time, and Roman law reserved execution for the Roman court system. The Jews did not have the authority to

stone the woman without Roman permission. To honor God's law and stone the woman, Jesus would bring upon Himself the wrath of Rome. The religious leaders knew that Jesus was one that upheld the law, and that He was bound by God's law to judge the woman as guilty and condemn her to death. If He did not, they could sideline Him by saying that He did not uphold the law, and in fact, taught things contrary to the Law of Moses. Many people would fall away from Him if He let the woman off. What was He to do? If He was to uphold the law and pronounce her guilty, He would fall into their cruel trap, and the woman would have been executed by unrighteous men for their own selfish ends. If that would have happened, you and I would have no hope left at all, for we are all guilty of breaking the Law of Moses. None of us are without sin; all of us stand condemned by a guilty conscience before a holy and just God. Never again would you or I be able to plead before the Father for forgiveness of our sin.

Why do you think Jesus stooped down and was writing in the dust? What do you think He was writing?

The Greek word used in 8:6, *katagraphō*, literally means, "To write against." We have no idea of what He wrote, but it is possible that He stooped down and was writing their sins in the dust. It might also have been that He avoided looking at them and was using the time to think. It is also possible that in His heart He was praying and asking His Father for wisdom as to what to do. If so, we see perfect dependence on the Father. We would be well advised to do the same when under pressure. Many of us are too busy to take time to listen to the Father in the midst of pressure.

How many moments went by we do not know, but the Jewish authorities increased the pressure by pushing for an answer. Jesus stood up, looked around Him at those accusers and said, "He who is without sin among you, let him be the first to throw a stone at her" (verse 7). What a bombshell! This was not what they were expecting at all! There they all were, stones at the ready, either to throw at the woman or at Jesus for teaching things contrary to the law, and instead of getting the chance at stoning either of them Jesus stoops to the ground again and continues writing in the dust. Christ wisely put the responsibility back on the religious leaders. He reminded the woman's accusers that they should, "be the first in putting that person to death, and then the hands of all the people. You must purge the evil from among you"

(Deuteronomy 17:7).

What do you think went through the mind of the woman as she heard those words? And why did the older people begin to go away first?

I am sure the woman had her back towards her accusers and stood braced for the first stones to begin hitting her. Instead, she heard stone after stone drop to the ground behind her until there was complete silence in the crowd of onlookers. Slowly, perhaps over several minutes, every one of her accusers dropped their stones and walked off, beginning with the eldest first. Why did the elders leave first? The older we get, the wiser we get. All of us have made mistakes. None of us is without guilt as to something we have done in the past. We must all take the log out of our own eye before we seek to help others with the sliver in their eye (Matthew 7:3-5). How can we throw stones at others when we all have made serious mistakes ourselves?

What a spectacle this must have been to all those who were there for the morning devotions. Here they were seeing played out, not only the Law of Moses being upheld, but the grace and truth that came through Christ. The scripture says, "For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ" (John 1:17). How this should encourage every one of us who have sinned. There is grace to cover every sin. If you have ever been involved in an act of sexual sin outside of marriage, or have ever committed adultery, there is grace enough to cover it if you will sincerely repent of your sin, abandon it, and receive the person and work of Christ on your behalf.

Why did God place such a strong sentence on promiscuity and adultery in the Old Testament? Is it any different in the New Testament time? What do you think?

The New Testament exhorts God's people to holiness and purity in all things. Ephesians 5:3-4 best summarizes God's vision for our sexual lifestyles: "But among you there must not be even a hint of sexual immorality, or of any kind of impurity, or of greed, because these are improper for God's holy people. Nor should there be obscenity, foolish talk or coarse joking, which are out of place, but rather thanksgiving." Some might say His standards are strict, and they are. But God knows what's best for His children, and He expects obedience. Sexual immorality is very personal to God, because it

is so closely linked with our identities in Him. To sin sexually is to sin against God as well as against oneself. 1 Corinthians 6:13 states, "The body is not meant for sexual immorality, but for the Lord, and the Lord for the body." Therefore, it is against our body's nature to act impurely.

The act of sexual intercourse, two people becoming one flesh, is sacred. It resembles our union with Christ. If we truly believe God is the ultimate matchmaker who pairs us with our spouses then to have sex with anyone else is clearly apart from His will. Paul the apostle explains how our bodies are members of Christ. By uniting our bodies with those of a "prostitute," we sin not only against God, but our spouse (present or future), the individual with whom we are involved, and ourselves. Our bodies are temples for the Lord.

Paul goes on to say:

"Flee from sexual immorality. All other sins a man commits are outside his body, but he who sins sexually sins against his own body. Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own." (1 Corinthians 6:18-20).

All sin has consequences, but sexual sin brings especially damaging results and God wants to protect us from it. Some of the consequences of sexual sin may include:

- We grieve God
- Our soul is linked spiritually to the one we have sex with (1 Corinthians 6:15-16).
- We quench the Holy Spirit's activity in our life
- Our relationship with our spouse (current or future) is damaged
- Our memory is filled with sexual images for future

temptation

- We may contract a sexually transmitted disease
- Our thoughts are corrupted with evil (Romans 8:6)
- We open the door to all types of confusion
- If a baby is conceived, what then? There is the responsibility to raise the child.

What a wonderful spectacle it must have been to watch and listen to the conversation that went on between the woman and Christ. She stood before the judge of all the earth and gracious words emanated from His lips, "Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?"¹¹ "No one, sir," she said. "Then neither do I condemn you," Jesus declared. "Go now and leave your life of sin." I don't know what those words meant to the woman, but I know the effect that they have had on my life....oh, the wonder of being forgiven of one's sin!!!! My sin had incurred the penalty of death, and with it, separation from God forever, but God has sent His Son to pay the debt that I owed. But where sin increased, grace increased all the more (Romans 5:8). Christ did not disregard or overlook her sin. He could look forward to His upcoming death on the cross and deal with the women according to grace, on the grounds that His death was a substitute for her and in her place, not only for her, but for you and me also. He told her to go now and leave her life of sin. We don't know what happened to her after meeting with Jesus but we know that in all things, "Mercy triumphs over judgment" (James 2:13). My prayer is that all that read these words would find mercy triumphing over judgment. He waits for you to ask and you shall receive.

Prayer: Father, thank you for the mercy and grace you have displayed in this passage not only to the woman, but to each of us, too. Thank you for the hope that we have in You. Amen!

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