

That You May Have Life In His Name - John 8:1-11

Pastor Matt Dean

8 ⁵³ [[They went each to his own house, ¹ but Jesus went to the Mount of Olives. ² Early in the morning he came again to the temple. All the people came to him, and he sat down and taught them. ³ The scribes and the Pharisees brought a woman who had been caught in adultery, and placing her in the midst ⁴ they said to him, “Teacher, this woman has been caught in the act of adultery. ⁵ Now in the Law, Moses commanded us to stone such women. So what do you say?” ⁶ This they said to test him, that they might have some charge to bring against him. Jesus bent down and wrote with his finger on the ground. ⁷ And as they continued to ask him, he stood up and said to them, “Let him who is without sin among you be the first to throw a stone at her.” ⁸ And once more he bent down and wrote on the ground. ⁹ But when they heard it, they went away one by one, beginning with the older ones, and Jesus was left alone with the woman standing before him. ¹⁰ Jesus stood up and said to her, “Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?” ¹¹ She said, “No one, Lord.” And Jesus said, “Neither do I condemn you; go, and from now on sin no more.”]]

(Jn 7:53–8:11)

This story unfolds following the last day of the Feast of Tabernacles and Jesus has spent the evening at the Mount of Olives. The next day, he goes to the temple, where a crowd has come seeking Jesus. Again we see, Jesus settles in, sitting to teach them.

Remember - these little details — that people came seeking, wanting to learn, wanting to hear, wanting to see, ready for what Jesus had to say.

The scribes and Pharisees bring before Jesus a woman who had been caught in the act of adultery. The penalty for this was execution, but the man she committed adultery with was nowhere to be found.

As we read this, there are ways we need to see this story:

- This is the next step in an ongoing process of the Jewish leaders trying to entrap Jesus to be rid of him.
- This is a clear and practical reminder that people, knowing right from wrong, knowing even the penalty of the law, still give into sinful desires.
- This, we will see, is also another glimpse into the love and kindness of God, who does not excuse nor approve of sin, but rather with divine authority chooses to forgive sin.

Look again at verses 3-7:

³ The scribes and the Pharisees brought a woman who had been caught in adultery, and placing her in the midst ⁴ they said to him, “Teacher, this woman has been caught in the act of adultery. ⁵ Now in the Law, Moses commanded us to stone such women. So what do you say?” ⁶ This they said to test him, that they might have some charge to bring against him. Jesus bent down and wrote with his finger on the ground.

Here she is — guilty. No hiding the fact that what she did was wrong. Not only guilty but alone. Half the reason she is there is missing. There in the dust, there in the public square, there in the temple, here she is with her very real guilt, her shame exposed, her private choices now made shamefully and lethally public.

“Hey.... Jesus she is guilty and the law says we are to stone such women. What do you say?”

They were less interested in justice and righteousness — and the proof is they didn’t have the adulterous man there with her. If caught in the act, then one equally guilty person is still missing. This was a Pharisaical test to trap Jesus and see if he would ignore or excuse her sin.

And as they continued to ask him, he stood up and said to them, “Let him who is without sin among you be the first to throw a stone at her.”⁸ And once more he bent down and wrote on the ground.⁹ But when they heard it, they went away one by one, beginning with the older ones, and Jesus was left alone with the woman standing before him.

“My favorite theory is linked with Jesus’ eventual answer to the scribes and Pharisees: “He who is without sin among you, let him throw a stone at her first” (v. 7b), after which He resumed writing. My guess is that He looked at one of the accusers and wrote, “embezzler.” He then let the man see what He had written, after which the man cleared his throat and slunk away. He then continued by writing “murderer,” after which the murderer left. Or perhaps He was more direct. When He said, “He who is without sin among you, let him throw stone at her first,” He may have been thinking of Deuteronomy 17:6-7, which reads: “Whoever is deserving of death shall be put to death on the testimony of two or three witnesses; he shall not be put to death on the testimony of one witness. The hands of the witnesses shall be the first against him to put him to death, and afterward the hands of all the people. So you shall put away the evil from among you.” In short, if you accused someone of a capital offense, you had to be on hand to throw the first stones. You had to participate in the execution. Perhaps, then, Jesus used His writing to reveal to the scribes and Pharisees that He knew of instances of the same sin, adultery, in their lives.” RC Sproul

We don’t know that Jesus wrote in the dust — but I know what it’s like to be guilty. I know what it’s like to be face to face with my own sin and my own shame. I know what it’s like for people to know I’ve made a mistake.

I certainly know what it’s like to know the crushing weight of self-hatred and self-condemnation. I know what it’s like to intentionally, blatantly choose something that I know is wrong... and do it anyway.

I know what it feels like to think that sin will really satisfy only to realize how utterly empty it really is. I know what it’s like to be lured away, I know what it’s like to stumble into sin, I know what it’s like to fail... and it’s terrible.

As I write this sermon, I'm sitting in Tokyo. A glimmering, beautiful city of 14M people. For every 100 people I see passing by, 1 person may know Jesus. But they too know shame. They too have an inherent sense of right and wrong. They too know the difference between honor and shame.

- USA - 1 church for every 800 people.
- Japan 1 church for every 16,700
 - 60% of those are less than 15 people
 - 70% of those pastors are 50+ years old
 - Missionaries to Japan have decreased in the last 20 years by 34%
 - Less than 1% Christian and of that 1% only .2 attend a protestant church

Who will tell them of the mercy and grace available to them by grace through faith in Jesus?

I'm holding back tears on a street side coffee shop — because I know what it means to be broken. I know from my own life that knowing right from wrong does not always prevent me from doing wrong.

I couldn't imagine if all of my sinful choices became public. How would you feel if all your sinful choices were made public?

This woman — we are her.

And we are the onlookers too.

The only person we are not like is Jesus.

Jesus truly was and is, the only person that could have rightfully executed judgment against sin in this situation.

The perfect Lamb of God, kneeling in the dust, writing in the dirt, knowing the sin of everyone at the scene. We can't even fathom just how humble true HUMILITY looks like, but this is God, who is worthy of all praise and honor, who is perfect in truth and justice, God who sustains the universe by the word of His power, who knows every star by name and knows everything about everything and can do anything with perfection and glory... writing in the dirt.

Had we been there — we too would have been guilty before Him. Perhaps in our self righteousness we'd be tempted to pick up a stone and be ready to throw... that is until we hear the words of Jesus say:

Let him who is without sin among you be the first to throw a stone at her.

When they hear this... one by one. Walking away.

The oldest ones leave first.
They know. They remember.
They understand.

⁹ But when they heard it, they went away one by one, beginning with the older ones, and Jesus was left alone with the woman standing before him.

One by one the accusers leave because they know their own guilt.

And Jesus was left alone with the woman standing before him.

¹⁰ Jesus stood up and said to her, “Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?” ¹¹ She said, “No one, Lord.” And Jesus said, “Neither do I condemn you; go, and from now on sin no more.”

Don't miss this. Jesus forgives her. Only He has the authority to do so.
He doesn't approve of her sin.
He doesn't minimize it.
He doesn't ignore it.

He says, “Neither do I condemn you, go, and from now on, sin no more.”

He calls it sin. And he knows in this moment that the Cross was before Him.

He knows the heart of the Law. He understands the best possible way for humanity and He understands how broken and sinful people truly are.

And soon he would bear the weight of guilt for this woman's adultery. And her partner. And all the men who circled up around her with stones in their hands. And all the people looking on from the temple area. And all her neighbors who knew what was happening behind closed doors.

Jesus knew then and He knows now.
Sin was devastating humanity then.
Sin is devastating humanity now.
Sexual sin was prevalent then just like it is now.

Knowing the law, knowing right from wrong was not enough to hold back that which is broken within then... any more than it is now.

There is only one way — to go and sin no more.

John 3:16–17 (ESV): For God So Loved the World

16 “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. 17 For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him.

Today is so important for us.

At some point, you will have to accept the reality that you need a saviour. Knowing right from wrong will ultimately never be enough to keep you from failure. It may restrain you, but it can't save you.

Seeing life THROUGH your relationship with Jesus Christ is the only way to truly live and experience a greater joy than what fleeting delight sin may offer.

When you understand that Jesus stands before you — I pray that you see with eyes of faith, and a heart of belief, and a soul in desperate need of just how good He truly is.

He stands before you.

The Holy One of God.

He stands before you.

The Lamb of God.

He stands before you full of grace and truth.

He stands before you, having borne the full weight of all your guilt.

He stands before you knowing your every sin.

He stands before you knowing your every fear.

He stands before you offering His very life.

He stands before you extending His perfect righteousness.

He stands before you, covering your life with His very own.

Your every sin. Paid for.

Your actual shame. Dealt with.

Your dying body. Eternal life promised.

Your dead heart. Now alive.

“For consider your calling, brothers: not many of you were wise according to worldly standards, not many were powerful, not many were of noble birth. But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong; God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are, so that no human being might boast in the presence of God. And because of him you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, righteousness and sanctification and redemption, so that, as it is written, “Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord.””

1 Corinthians 1:26-31 ESV