

CS – Go and Sin No More

10/22/23

John 8:1-11

Sunday AM

On March 22, 1824, a tragic incident took place in Madison Co., IN, which came to be known as the *Fall Creek Massacre*. (6) men murdered in cold blood (9) Seneca Indians. One of the men, 18 yr old, John Bridges Jr., although sentenced to death by hanging for his part in the massacre, showed great remorse during the trials and begged for clemency. Seemingly falling on deaf ears, w/in days, he was still sent to the gallows along w/ his father/uncle. As he was awaiting execution, Bridges Jr. first had to watch the execution of his father and uncle. Then soon after, he was led to the gallows – and as the rope was being lowered over his head, suddenly, a loud noise arose from the back of the crowd as a stranger rode up and looked Bridges Jr. in the face. He asked, "Sir, do you know in whose presence you stand?" Bridges shook his head – no! "There are but (2) powers known to the law that can save you from hanging by the neck until you are dead, dead, dead. One is the God of the Universe, the other is J. Brown Ray, Governor of Indiana – and the latter stands before you." Handing over the written pardon, the governor shared, "You are pardoned."

In an instant, what had looked like a hopeless situation became a door of hope. John Bridge Jr. went back home, settled down, and in gratitude for grace, he lived honorably/peacefully the remaining 51 yrs of his life!

Can you imagine the fear that must've gripped Bridges Jr. as he watched his father/uncle die – knowing he was next? Can you imagine the terror he experienced as he was led to the gallows and had the noose placed around his neck? I'd imagine it was unlike anything few, if any, have ever experienced!

In John 8:1-11, we find the story of another person who also experienced such terror. A guilty, sinful woman who'd been caught in the act of adultery and was thrown down before Jesus for judgment. A woman who knew the Law, and was aware that she was likely about to die a horrible death by stoning.

As we continue our *Come and See* journey, *we find ourselves in what some might call a spiritual conundrum* – both for this woman, and also for Jesus.

At dawn, Jesus appeared again in the temple courts, where all the people gathered around Him, and He sat down to teach them. The teachers of the law and the Pharisees brought in a woman caught in adultery. They made her stand before the crowd and said to Jesus, "Teacher, this woman was caught in the act of adultery. In the Law, Moses commanded us to stone such women. Now, what do You say?" They were using this question as a trap to have a basis for accusing Him. But Jesus bent down and started to write on the ground w/ His finger. When they kept on questioning Him, He stood up and said, "Let any one of you who is w/out sin be the first to throw a stone at her." Again, He stooped down and wrote on the ground. At this, those who heard began to go away one at a time, the older ones first, until only Jesus was left w/ the woman still standing there. Jesus stood up and asked her, "Woman, where are you accusers – has no one condemned you?" "No one, sir," she said. Then Jesus said, "Neither do I condemn you. Go now, and leave your life of sin."

NOW – I can't speak for any of you, but whenever I read this story, I find myself conflicted. The sinner in me is sympathetic to the woman caught in her sin, the spiritual in me is grateful for god's grace/mercy, while the legalist in me is irritated, yet understanding of the actions of the Pharisees.

This reminds of a comic strip from one of my favorite theologians – Calvin/Hobbes (show riff-raff strip)



If we're being honest, many of us would say we wish the **riff-raff** would just go away or that they'd get what they deserve. Why? It's b/c we tend to be hard on people when they do things that bother us or rub us the wrong way – especially when it goes against our beliefs/preferences.

Seemingly by nature, we tend to clamor for justice to be poured out on others, while we think that we're deserving of mercy/grace when we stumble/fall.

Recognizing our propensity to be harder on others than we are on ourselves, this AM, I want to take a few min. to learn from Jesus how we're to engage the problem of sin both *w/in* us, *around* us, and *in* others.

I the SITUATION

As we pick up the story, it's early in the AM, and Jesus has already arrived at the Temple to begin a long day of teaching/ministry. As the crowd gathers, apparently from out of nowhere, a posse of Pharisees invaded His day w/ a ½ clothed woman and a plan to expose Jesus.

But who was this woman and why was she here? The answer came quickly – *Teacher, this woman was **caught in the act of adultery**.*

Talk about a serious charge. She was caught in the act of a **sin punishable unto death** – a capital offense. And according to the Law, anyone caught in the act of adultery was to be stoned to death on the spot.

This was a violation of the 7th Command – *Thou shall not commit adultery* – and **Leviticus 20:10** prescribing death for anyone who defied this Law.

*If there is a man who commits adultery w/ another man's wife, or one who commits adultery w/ his friend's wife, **the adulterer, and the adulteress shall surely be put to death.***

NOW – before we jump to conclusions, there are a few obvious questions we have to ask. How did they catch her in the act? Where was the man? Doesn't adultery take two to tango? And why didn't they bring him too? ***If you caught her, you should've caught him too.*** Was she set up to be a patsy for a grander scheme?

Personally – **I smell a rat!** These guys were up to no good. Even more, they're no more concerned for true justice than I'm the man on the moon. This woman was just a pawn. Her actions were of no concern to them. She's just a convenient way to try and trap Jesus – and they thought they had succeeded.

I think the same can be said of us as it pertains to sin and the wiles of the devil to trip us up/condemn us.

SEE – what we can't miss in her story is that like this woman, we've all been caught in the act of sin and stand condemned before God – guilty as charged. All of us have fallen prey to the schemes of the enemy, set up to discredit Jesus and minimize His grace.

This brings us to the challenge of the situation...

II the CHALLENGE

W/out question – this woman and Jesus found themselves in a pickle w/ seemingly no way out.

WHY – the *Law of Moses* specified death by stoning for adultery, yet *Roman law* forbade the Jews from carrying out executions. Do you see the dilemma?

For this woman – she was guilty w/ no hope. She was staring death in the face as the self-righteous/legalists in the crowd were already picking up stones w/ ill-intentions. She's absolutely HELPLESS!

For Jesus, if He doesn't condemn the woman, He breaks Jewish Law; but if He does condemn her, He breaks Roman law, and in either case, the outcome isn't good for Him either. So, what is He to do?

Honestly – I'm not sure anyone could've remotely anticipated how Jesus would solve this dilemma!

What did He do? He did what every one of us would do... He stooped down and began writing on the ground w/ His finger. After all, **isn't that what you do when you find yourself in a no-win situation?**

What did He write? We don't know. Over the centuries, commentators have speculated a number of ideas. Some have suggested he wrote Scripture that somehow condemned the men – but we don't know!

I've concluded – it's not so much what He wrote but what He **DID** that should get our attention.

SEE – as the Pharisees pressed, “*What are you going to do? Should we stone her or let her go?*” Jesus paused to think about what to do next.

LESSON – in the heat of the moment, rather than REACT – He paused to ACT. You know... *Look before you leap. Think before you act. Measure twice before you cut once.* Allow the pregnant pause to give birth to wise/appropriate action b/c of what's at stake.

Then, after a moment of contemplation, Jesus stood up, faced them, and profoundly said – *If any one of you is w/out sin, let him be the first one to cast a stone at her.* Then he stooped down and began writing again.

sinless – w/out sin or incapable of sinning

IOW – Jesus told them that if any of them met the standard of perfection; then they had His consent to be *judge*, *jury*, and *executioner*. Otherwise – BACK OFF!

It's almost humorous. They're stunned. Speechless! Confounded! Jesus had taken the wind out of their sails. They were sure this woman was going to be His downfall; but instead, He completely upheld the Law.

Look at vs. 9 – *But when they heard it...* – As soon as the words left Jesus' lips, these *pious pretenders* knew they'd been bested and that their hearts had been exposed. So, when they heard it, they disappeared as if they were in a David Copperfield magic trick – until no one was left but Jesus and the woman.

The leering bullies had lost control of their circus. Jesus' silence was powerful – and his mysterious writing was frightening, recalling in a subtle way the ancient occasion when God wrote on tablets of stone. The ‘theology thugs’ who knew nothing of the heart of God were at a loss. Their façade of self-importance cracked and their consciences began to speak to them. *Zeisler*

Here's what occurred. The eldest man, w/ the longest record of sin, suddenly recalled he had a prior meeting. The next oldest heard his wife calling. The next man had a coughing fit and excused himself. Yet another decided to take an early lunch – until all of them walked away w/ their tails tucked b/w their legs.

SEE – this incident shines light into each of our own hearts to expose the widespread existence of sin in all of us – *that all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God* (Romans 3:23). B/c after Jesus prompted the accusers to consider their own lives, all of them dropped their stones and walked away, knowing they, deserved equal punishment for their sin too.

POINT – No matter how spiritual you think you are, God hasn't endowed you w/ the duty of being *judge, jury, or executioner* – but rather agents of mercy/grace.

III the **INTERVENTION**

Jesus straightened up and asked her, "Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?" "No one, sir," she said. Jesus replied, "Neither do I condemn you. Go now and leave your life of sin."

Jesus' exchange w/ this woman begins w/ a moment of dignity/compassion – He reaches out to her.

woman – a polite term of endearment. It was the same word Jesus used to address His mother in *John 19:26* – when He entrusted Mary into John's care.

THUS – after being treated by the Pharisees as an object/tool, Jesus treated her w/ dignity/worth. He didn't look at her thru the lens of her failure but thru the lens of her need for His mercy/grace.

IOW – Jesus met her at the point of her need, yet not w/ condemnation but w/ compassion. **Although she deserved wrath, He met her w/ what she needed most – mercy/grace** – He does the same for all of us.

This doesn't mean He turned a blind eye to her sin or that He condoned her actions. This woman was guilty.

And **the evidence was irrefutable**. She'd been caught in the very act. So, there was no doubt she was guilty b/c the evidence was there w/ no way to deny it!

Point – we may not be guilty of committing adultery, but we're all guilty of missing the mark of God's perfection. In God's eyes, no matter the sin, it's all serious b/c it creates division b/w His holiness and our humanity – ***making us all sinners in need of saving.***

Good News – we see in this story that Jesus ***loved*** this woman more than He ***hated*** her sin – and this is true for everyone. As much as God hates sin, He loves us more. He loved so much, He entered humanity to take our sin upon Himself in His death on the cross to rescue us from the pain, penalty, and punishment of sin – so that ***by His wounds we could be healed.***

Perhaps the most striking aspect of this story is how skillfully it illustrates the harmony of justice/mercy in salvation. God exacts true justice on sin yet provides a way to escape condemnation. God doesn't encourage sin, yet He loves the sinner. Even more, the Lord silences the critics of this world while healing hearts that are plundered w/ guilt/shame – and God never treats sin casually but calls sinners to turn away from their old, corrupt way of life thru His grace. Amazing!

And here's the big, **ginormous** lesson for all of us – ***there's NO one whose sin can't be covered by God's grace. There's no one God can't forgive/redeem.***

As a result, if I'm a Jesus-follower, then *my default should be for clemency before condemnation and compassion before castigation*. Instead of picking up stones to throw, I should be sharing w/ others the same grace and mercy God has extended to me.

When the kindness/love of God our Savior appeared, He saved us, not b/c of righteous things we had done, but b/c of his mercy. He saved us thru the washing of rebirth/renewal by the H.S., whom He poured out on us generously thru Jesus our Savior, so that, having been justified by his grace; we might become heirs having the hope of eternal life. Titus 3:4-7)

mercy is not giving someone the punishment they deserve. **grace** is giving favor that's not deserved.

This is God's calling to all who've received His mercy and grace – we're to willingly offer His mercy/grace to others whether or not we think they deserve it. Yet we can only offer it, they have to choose to accept it.

Explain: Jesus didn't force forgiveness on this woman – **He offered it. She still had to embrace it by faith.** Then, once it's received, if it's truly received, it's lived out. Hence, Jesus' next statement to the woman.

Jesus declared. "Go now and leave your life of sin."

Forgiveness is never a license to sin, but an opportunity to be made right w/ God – and we all need it. And once we experience it, we're called to share it.

In this instance, Jesus told the woman to leave her life of sin and live like one who's been forgiven/cleansed.

Jesus isn't interested in who we were or what we've done, as much as He is interested in who we've become b/c of who He is and what He has done.

A British prince went to visit the king of Spain. Upon his arrival, he was taken to the galleys to see the men chained to the oars and doomed to a life of slavery. In honor of his visit, the king promised to set free one man of the prince's choosing. So, the prince went to each prisoner to question them. To the 1st prisoner, he said, "My poor fellow, I'm sorry to see you in this plight; how did you find yourself here?" The man said, "Sire, false witnesses gave evidence against me and I'm suffering wrongfully." "Ow did you find yourself here?" "Sire, I certainly did wrong, but not to any great extent. I ought not to be here." This continued on until at last, he came to one man who said: "Sire, I'm often thankful I'm here, for I am sorry to own that if I had received my due, I should've been executed. I'm guilty of the charges against me and my punishment is beyond just." To which the prince wittily replied, "It's a pity that such a guilty wretch as you are should be chained among these innocent men – so therefore, I will set you free."