

She was guilty as sin. She knew it, Jesus knew it, everyone knew it. Early one morning as Jesus was teaching near the temple, a group of Pharisees dragged a woman to Jesus and deposited her at His feet. She had been found in the arms of another man. The penalty for adultery was death by stoning. "Teacher, this woman has been caught in the act of adultery. <sup>5</sup> Now in the Law Moses commanded us to stone such women. So what do you say?" <sup>6</sup> This they said to test him, that they might have some charge to bring against him."

It was a trap, a trap set for the woman and for Jesus. The Pharisees were frustrated in their attempts to do away with Jesus (7:1-2) so they came up with an ingenious plot. Picture yourself in a secret meeting of the Sanhedrin. "Next item on the agenda - Jesus of Nazareth. How do we get rid of Him?" "I've got an idea. God's Law is clear about the penalty for adultery. Death by stoning. If He allows an adulterer to go free in the name of grace He shows utter disregard for the Law. On the other hand, if He gives the order to stone her in the name of truth He loses His popular support with the masses. So He'll have to choose...Mercy or justice? Truth or grace?

This is the devil's work - to pit one of God's attributes against another in an effort to make God less than He is. Human/divine; loving/just. What is Jesus going to do? He can choose grace and let the woman go or He can choose truth, obey God's Law and have her stoned. John said, "the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us, and we saw His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father full of grace and truth."

Jesus is full of grace. Last week we considered what grace is and what it's not. It is not gap insurance. It is not tolerance. It is God doing for us what we could never do for ourselves. We met a young man named Mephibosheth, the grandson of Saul and son of Jonathan, and discovered that King David wanted to show him hesed, the OT word for grace. In spite of M.'s disability he was given a place at the King's table forever. David did for M. what M. could never do for himself. That's grace.

But grace without truth is little more than soft sentimentalism. In order to glorify God, to truly reflect His nature we must keep a firm grip on grace while being passionately committed to truth. If we lose our grip on either we lose our effectiveness and fail to show what God is like. Randy Alcorn puts it this way, "Many nonbelievers know only two kinds of Christians: those who speak the truth without grace and those who are very nice but never share the truth. What they need to see is a third type of Christian – one who, in a spirit of grace, loves them enough to tell them the truth." Alcorn, p. 77. He goes on, "If we minimize grace, the world sees no hope for salvation. If we minimize truth, the world sees no need for salvation. To show Jesus to the world, we must offer unabridged grace and truth, emphasizing both, apologizing for neither." Alcorn, p. 94

We've discussed grace so let me point out a couple of truths about truth. People are confused about the truth. In previous generations it may have been easier to get people to agree that there is truth outside of my own mind, truth that I don't create but discover, truth I don't control but must respond to. There may have been a time when certain truths were "self-evident." But not today. Politicians turn lying into an art form. Journalists and news reporters no longer value objectivity but cherry-pick facts that will support their

predetermined worldview. In the midst of so much confusion the Bible offers the truth about the truth.

1. Truth is absolute. Jesus said, "For this I was born, and for this I came into the world, to bear witness to the truth. Every one who is of the truth hears my voice." Jn. 18:37. What an amazing claim. Think about what Jesus is saying - there is truth that comes from outside the world and gives meaning to the world. We don't get to make up the truth. We don't get to change the truth. It is THE truth. There is not a truth for me and a different truth for you. Truth is absolute. Jesus came to bear witness to THE truth - for all people in all places for all time.

2. Truth can be found in Jesus. Jesus said, "I am THE truth," not, "I have the truth," or "I am one of many truths."

3. Truth is a treasure entrusted to the church. Paul reminded Timothy that the church of the living God is "the pillar and foundation of the truth." 1 Tim. 3:15. We are called to be faithful stewards of the truth. We are called to be champions of God's grace and custodians of God's truth. Without grace, no one will want to hear what we have to say. Without truth, we HAVE nothing to say.

4. Truth is a rich heritage to be passed on. 2 Tim. 2:2 Paul charges Timothy to faithfully transmit the truth from one generation to the next. Joanie Williams' grandchildren speaking at her memorial service.

Truth feeds our faith and gives us a future and a hope. Years ago someone told me they were on a flight from California to the Chicago. As they flew through a storm the plane bounced all over the sky. The person telling the story said the older woman next to her seemed remarkably calm, so much so that she asked her, "Do you fly a lot because you sure are calm?" The lady just smiled and said, "No, I haven't flown much but I'm going to see my daughter. I was blessed with two daughters, I've outlived one of them and she is now in Heaven. My other daughter is in Chicago. So no matter what happens today - I'm going to see my daughter!"

Meanwhile, back at the Temple, Jesus is about to turn the tables on the Pharisees... vv.6b-9a. Jesus' response is a curious one. Was He writing something or just scribbling? Either way it is a dramatic reenactment of Ex. 31:18, "When the LORD finished speaking to Moses on Mount Sinai, he gave him the two tablets of the Testimony, the tablets of stone inscribed by the finger of God." By writing with His finger on the ground Jesus is saying, "Don't try to explain the Law to me I wrote it." But there is more behind his actions... v. 7. Is Jesus suggesting we have to be perfect to confront sin? The answer is found in the Law...Dt. 19:16-19,21. The idea of a "false witness" mentioned here could be phrased a "malicious witness." The law required testimony by two or three objective, non-malicious witnesses to establish guilt. If it could be demonstrated that the witness was not really concerned about justice but was merely using the system to harm someone, the malicious witness would face the same penalty as the accused.

The truth has been established, the woman is clearly guilty. Justice must be done. But there are a couple of clues that would lead the reader to believe that justice was not the primary goal of the Pharisees. For example, the man involved in this adulterous relationship is conspicuous by his absence. Add to that the statement that the Pharisees were actually there to catch the woman in a compromising situation (v.4). This is clearly a set up!

Jesus knew (2:24-25) that these men were malicious witnesses...v.6. And He wasn't the only one aware of it...v.9. When He starts writing Dt. 19 in the dirt these legal experts knew they had been had. You can picture them thinking about it and then, starting with the oldest (wisest?) they decided the risk was too great at this time.

So Jesus then turns His attention to this woman who is being humiliated before a crowd of onlookers...vv.10-11.

How could He let her go, she was guilty? That's grace right? But isn't Jesus compromising the truth? Not at all. The Mosaic Law is very clear, Dt. 17:4-7, "(when) this has been brought to your attention, then you must investigate it thoroughly. If it is true and it has been proved that this detestable thing has been done in Israel, take the man or woman who has done this evil deed to your city gate and stone that person to death. On the testimony of two or three witnesses a man shall be put to death, but no one shall be put to death on the testimony of only one witness. The hands of the witnesses must be the first in putting him to death, and then the hands of all the people. You must purge the evil from among you."

There are no longer 2 or 3 witnesses as the Law requires. So Jesus is not just being lenient, letting her slide, He is following the requirements of the Law. He is truth. He followed the Law at every point. But He wasn't interested in executing judgment. He came to save not condemn. Jesus was greater than Moses the Lawgiver. "For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ." Jn. 1:17. The world was condemned through the Law but Jesus came to set us free. "For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him." Jn. 3:17

1. Handle the truth graciously. It is possible to be 100% correct in our assessment of a situation but 100% wrong in our application of the truth. The Pharisees knew the Law but were unaware of their own sin, a sin which is every bit as ugly and maybe even more damaging than adultery. It is the sin of self-righteousness. In their hatred they lost sight of the purpose of the Word of God - to build up not to tear down. You may observe the behavior of a brother or sister and be 100% correct in your evaluation of that behavior. It may be sin. But God is every bit as concerned with what you do with what you know as He is about the sin you have observed. The penalty for a malicious witness was death. Needless to say God is not pleased when we hide behind truth to satisfy our own selfish desires.

2. Offer grace truthfully. One of the hardest concepts for people to grasp is that even though we are saved by grace there will still be consequences for our sin. If you are a

follower of Jesus you will experience Heaven but if you don't take sin seriously you will experience Hell on earth. So we want to welcome all people to be members of God's family and citizens of Heaven but we must also warn all people that there are consequences for sinful behavior. That may seem like a tough sell in such an immoral world but it doesn't take a rocket scientist to realize that all of society's ills are rooted in sinful choices.

How can I handle the truth graciously and offer grace truthfully? YOU can't. Only Jesus is "full of grace and truth." But you can be full of Jesus. In the past it was not uncommon for our church to wear grace like a badge of honor. It is a wonderful thing to be known for grace...but not at the expense of truth. I don't want to be about grace. I don't want to be about truth. I want to be about Jesus.

Next week we are going to begin a new sermon series called Life Together. We are going to spend 40 days reading through the NT together between now and Easter Sunday. We will be using a unique format that takes out the chapters, verses and footnotes in the Bible. We have the books for you right after this service for \$5. If you can't afford it, just take one. Then, if you are not already in a group, join one so you can discuss what you have read during the week. I'll tell you more next Sunday but today, pick up your NT.

Lord, we need You. As You live within us in the person of the Holy Spirit so do grace and truth in harmony. We need your grace. Our sin has blinded us to our own faults and magnified the faults of others. In our attempts to preserve the truth we have wounded the very ones You came to save. We need your truth to stand firm in a flimsy world. Help us to walk in truth tempered by grace so we do not brutalize people. And help us to extend grace to others without abandoning truth so that we have more to offer than a soft, sloppy, shallow sentimentality that conveys no true forgiveness.