

the gospel of

JOHN

he is the one

JOHN: THE ONE WHO GRANTS MERCY

February 28, 2021

Ken Flower

John 7:53 – 8:11

Hi, I'm Habby Mathew. I'm a member here at Doxa. We're going to be reading scripture together today. If you have one near please grab your Bible. We're going to be reading from the gospel of John, chapter 7, verse 53 to chapter 8, verse 11. Please stand in your homes for the reading of God's word. "They went each to his own house, but Jesus went to the Mount of Olives. Early in the morning he came again to the temple. All the people came to him and he sat down and taught them. The scribes and the Pharisees brought a woman who had been caught in adultery and placing her in the midst, they said to him, teacher, this woman has been caught in the act of adultery. Now in the law, Moses commanded us to stone, such women. So what do you say? 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. 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. And once more, he bent down and wrote on the ground. 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. Jesus stood up and said to her, woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you? She said, no one Lord. And Jesus said, neither do I condemn you. Go, and from now on sin no more." This is the word of the Lord. Please be seated.

Morning, church. My name is Ken Flower and I'm a part of the team here at Doxa. And it is an honor to be with you this morning and to get to continue on in John's gospel together. Sometimes we can't hide our sin. Back when we lived in Columbus, Ohio, before we moved here, we had four of those cheap plastic Adirondack chairs, you know the ones you can buy for like 20 bucks at home Depot. And one of these four had a giant chunk missing from the middle

of it. And I don't know why we held onto it, but we did. There was just this giant piece missing in the middle of the seat. My kids call it dad's sin chair.

Now three and a half years ago, we took the leap and we got a puppy. This adorable, sweet, kind and high energy chocolate lab. And for our first year and a half, to be honest, I regretted getting a dog more than I was thankful that we had one. Now, thankfully, that has changed. But at the beginning, we were new to the game of having a dog. And we were trying to figure out how to train him and how to do this well and our learning curve was really steep. And honestly, I had very little patience and God revealed a lot about my own heart, even through trying to train and teach this dog. So one day, probably six months in, I'm in the backyard with our dog and I'm trying to teach her to do something. I don't even remember what it was and I give it a command and it looks up at me with those big puppy eyes and all of a sudden something switches in its mind and it just gets crazy eyes.

And if you've ever had a puppy especially like in that six month old range, you know exactly what I'm talking about, where they just completely lose their minds. And instead of doing what I said, he got that I don't care what you say look in his eyes and then just tore off through our yard. He tore through Beth's flowers and through our perennial beds like a tornado through our yard, just tearing everything up, running in circles around our yard. Now, if you've ever tried to chase a fast dog through your yard, you know that in the end the dog wins and you end up looking like a fool. And so I'm chasing him angry, cursing at him, shouting at him, screaming at him to stop. And he does not care what I'm saying. At the height of my anger I was so mad and I had no control over my dog, and at the height of my anger, I kick this chair as hard as I can and put a hole right through the front of it. Dad's sin chair. It was this visible reminder of how angry I had become when I couldn't control my dog.

Now I couldn't hide the result of my sin, but if I could have hidden it, I would have. Maybe I could have quietly carried it out into our alley and thrown it away, pretend like we've only ever had three chairs-what like four, we never had four chairs! We've only ever had three. But I couldn't hide it. Now our instinct though is to hide whenever we've sinned. We avoid being found out. We don't want to be caught in our sin.

Kids, have you ever done something you know you weren't supposed to do and then gone to hide in your closet. Or maybe parents, you've been making your kid's bed and you find crumbs under their sheets. For those of us maybe who are too grown up to go hide under covers we find other ways to hide our sin. We give easy answers and avoid being honest when we're asked how we're doing. Maybe we send out a decoy and we confess to something small with our friends to appear like we're being transparent, but we avoid having to say what we're really struggling with. Maybe we're exploding on our kids at home filled with anger, but we just tell our friends that things at home are stressful. Maybe we follow social media accounts that we would never show our spouse. We maybe are deleting our browser history but we just tell our DNA groups that we're looking at our phones too much. Maybe we haven't had a real conversation with our spouse all week long, but we tell our friends that our marriage isn't perfect, but it's okay, and I just need to be a better leader at home. Maybe we willingly sacrifice our physical, emotional, and spiritual health for the sake of work. But then we just ask others to pray for our work-life balance, maybe ghost our friends who may ask us hard questions and dig deeper. We silently and quietly withdraw from relationships and from our communities with a "life just got busy" excuse.

When we're struggling we find ways to hide and to cover up. Now, why is that? Why do we hide? Well, since sin entered the world, shame entered with it. If you remember back in Genesis in the very beginning when God had created Adam and Eve and at the very end of that first part of the story, it says that Adam and Eve were naked and not ashamed, that there was no shame because there was no sin. But once they made the terrible decision to stop trusting God, and they turned away from him in sin, shame entered the world. And as shame entered the world, when God came to be with them Adam and Eve in their shame instead of going to him, they hid themselves from his presence. And just like the kid who hides in her closet after disobeying, they hid from God's presence. And since then, whenever we're caught in our sin and we begin to feel shame, our instinct then is to run and hide. We try to hide from God's presence as if that were even possible. And we try to hide from others as well.

Well, in today's passage in John, there are two different groups of people that are caught in their sin. As we'll see, there's this woman who's very clearly been caught in the act of adultery, but then we also see the tables turn and the religious leaders themselves are caught in their own sin and their hearts are exposed. And Jesus' response reveals two really important things for us this morning. The way Jesus responds shows us one, that we cannot hide anything from him and two, that we don't need to hide from him. Because instead of condemnation, Jesus longs to show us mercy. So for all of us who are hiding something, for all of us who don't want to be fully seen because we fear that we will be rejected and condemned, today's story offers us incredibly good news.

Now, before we look at this story, I want to address the reality that as you look at this passage in your own Bible, you may have a note right before this starts, or maybe right at the end that says that this passage or this story was not originally found in the earliest manuscripts of John. Here's the deal. Most scholars agree that this passage was added later to John's gospel and wasn't written originally by John. It seems that it was a story that had been passed down as oral history probably for a few generations which honestly was a common and very reliable way to pass down history in that day. And then it was later added on just a century or so later into some of the copies of John's gospel. So how do we think then about John 8:1-11 which probably wasn't written by John?

Well, you may remember in John chapter 21, verse 25 where John himself says there are many other things that Jesus did. Were every one of them to be written I suppose that the world itself could not contain the books that would be written. This is one of those stories. This story is found in other ancient texts from not long after the time of Jesus. And there is agreement among all scholars that this was a true account of Jesus, that this story can be trusted as reliable and true, that it was passed down orally for a while before it was at some point added into a later manuscript of John's gospel. And honestly, we trust that God was sovereign over all of this, that God knew that he wanted this story eventually to show up in our Bibles and was working behind the scenes in all of this.

And so this story, although probably not written by John, it does reveal who Jesus is. And as we read this story, we will get to see Jesus. And that my friends is the goal, is it not, to see Jesus more clearly. And in this story we see this beautiful picture of Jesus standing in the midst of an anxious and hurting world, offering mercy to those who will see their sin. Now back to the story. As you hear this story, I want you to just join me and imagine yourself here in the temple watching this scene unfold as we read this together. Let's start.

We're going to read starting in verse one. It's actually chapter seven, in verse 53 where we see this woman caught. It says they went each to his own house, but Jesus went to the Mount of Olives. Now early in the morning he came again to the temple and all the people came to him and he sat down and taught them. The scribes and the Pharisees brought a woman who'd been caught in adultery and placing her in the midst they said to him, teacher, this woman has been caught in the act of adultery. Now in the law, Moses commanded us to stone, such women. So what do you say? This they said to test him that they might have some charge to bring against him.

Now, the setting here is really important. This happens in the most important place in all of Israel-in the temple. It was the center of their cultural, political, religious life. It was the very center. And so you can just feel the tension building as Jesus in the midst of the most important place in Israel is standing there teaching with this crowd and in walked these Pharisees or these religious leaders who bring a woman right into the middle of this assembly. Right where everyone can see her, completely interrupting everything and put her on trial.

Now imagine as I'm here preaching right now a group of pastors were to walk up on stage, bringing someone with them and then to lay out charges against them in the middle of our gathering. That would be a shocking interruption. That's exactly what's happening here. The story also makes it clear that the Pharisees, they care nothing about this woman. They don't honestly care about her holiness. They don't care about the holiness of Israel. They really don't even care about the law. Verse six makes it clear that their whole intent is to use her to try to catch Jesus in a trap. Some scholars even say that they may have set this woman up. You notice that only the woman is brought with charges laid against her. And obviously for committing adultery there is a man involved, but he somehow got away. Scholars often say that they possibly set her up knowing where she would be and at what times, so that they could catch her and then bring her to trap Jesus. They even misquote and twist the law of Moses which they claim to love so much. The law did say in fact in the old covenant that those caught in adultery were condemned to death, but it required both the man and the woman and all they are focused on is this woman.

They know exactly what they're doing. They don't care about the woman. They don't care about the law. They want to put Jesus' back up against the wall. And they want to force him to answer an impossible question in the midst of a huge crowd in the most important place in Israel.

Now you might wonder how this actually was a trap. Well, Jesus if he agrees with them, in other words if he does sentence this woman to death, if he agrees that she should be sentenced to death for adultery, then although he may support the law of Moses as they're presenting it, he then comes into conflict with the Roman government who had banned capital punishment by the Jews. And the Pharisees could then report him to the Romans for sedition. And yet, if he does not condemn the woman, if he says that she can go, then he has contradicted the law of Moses as they've presented it and he loses all credibility with the Jews. Either way he loses.

So imagine the crowd waits. They wait with bated breath for his verdict. Would he show mercy or justice? The religious leaders stand smug knowing that they finally caught him in a trap that he cannot escape. The woman stands in shame, all eyes on her, knowing that she has sinned,

but also realizing that she has been used, and that she is just a pawn in the schemes of more powerful men. Well, how's Jesus going to respond?

We read on in verses six to nine. We see that not only was the woman caught, but now we see the Pharisees caught. Verse six says Jesus bent down and he wrote with his finger on the ground. And as they continued to ask him he stood up and he said to them, let him who is without sin among you be the first to throw a stone at her. And once more he bent down and he wrote on the ground. 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. Just imagine this scene, in the midst of incredible tension, with all eyes on this shamed woman, wondering how Jesus is going to respond in this moment, he bends down and he starts writing in the dirt.

Some say he was writing down the charges that had been laid out. Some say he maybe was quoting a verse from Exodus to expose the Pharisees. But the point here really is not what he wrote in the dirt. Instead, this incredible act of bending down in the midst of this highly tense, anxious moment to bend down in the midst of this time and to just start writing in the dirt, it reveals something incredible about his heart.

You see Jesus remains calm. He's not thrown off by their attack. He's not caught up in the anxieties of those around him. You know, often when we're put into anxious moments like this our usual course is either fight or flight, but Jesus doesn't get thrown on his heels by their trap. He doesn't feel a compulsion to defend himself and launch a counter attack. Instead he calmly bends down to draw in the dirt. I mean, just look at the heart of Jesus here. He bends down to draw calmly and to consider how he will respond. And I think also to draw attention away from this shamed woman. I think this act itself reveals his compassion for this woman, that all the eyes then go from her in her shame and her sin to him as he bends down to draw. Without fear then, without defensiveness, he stands up and just says one thing-let him who is without sin among you be the first to throw a stone at her. With this short response he both upholds the law of Moses and then reveals the wicked hearts of the Pharisees. He exposes their sin and they are caught in their own trap.

You see, Jesus knows the law better than they do. And in Exodus in the law, the law makes it very clear that you were to not bring a charge against someone else with evil intent in your heart. And that you were not to join together with another witness who was a malicious witness. And he knew that their intent, that the desire of their heart was not to follow God or to care for Israel, but it was to destroy him. He knows their hearts and he lays it out and exposes their wicked motives before everyone. His point is not to say that a jury or a judge must be completely sinless in order to give a verdict. His point is to reveal the evil motives of the Pharisee's hearts.

And then he does something even more amazing. Then as all the attention shifts to these religious leaders whose wicked evil hearts has been exposed, that they've twisted the law, that they've used this woman, that their only intent is to destroy him, and all the eyes now we're on these shamed leaders, he bends down again and begins to draw in the dirt. And the first time he draws attention away from the shamed woman. But this second time I think he now draws attention away from the shamed leaders. And I think we often read this story and picture it as some kind of debate - good vs evil and that Jesus wins the day. But Jesus' goal wasn't to win. His goal was to shine light and to call all men and women to repentance. Exposing the evil of the religious leaders' hearts-that was a kindness. This isn't a theological slam dunk by Jesus in the

face of the Pharisees. Instead the picture here is of a compassionate and a wise Jesus who with just a simple question calmly and lovingly exposes their sin. Just as he drew attention then away from the shamed woman, he then draws attention away from the shamed Pharisees as he continues to write.

The point here, friends, of this passage...here's the point...is that everyone has sinned. The woman, the Pharisees, the crowd who's there just wanting to see a throwdown, all of them, their hearts have all been exposed. They're all caught. They've all sinned. Jesus lovingly exposes it all so that they can see their need for mercy.

Now, how will they respond? Now that their sins exposed each of them beginning with the oldest, we watch them slowly walk away. You see, they'd come to set a trap for Jesus, but now they're the ones who've been caught. And the evil intentions of their heart have been exposed. They've twisted the law and used the woman and Jesus has exposed their hearts. But here was their opportunity to confess their sins. Their hearts have been exposed and they could have stayed. They could have confessed their sin. They could in that moment have repented. They could have cried out for help, but instead they slink away to lick their wounds.

As they felt their shame instead of moving towards Jesus, they move away from him.

Chip Dodd in his book, *The Voice of the Heart* writes about how feeling shame is not a bad thing. The emotion of shame will happen when we recognize our limits and our neediness and our brokenness and this doesn't humiliate us, but it does lead to humility and it gives us then the opportunity to move towards Jesus, to receive his mercy and his love and his help. But when we feel shame and we move away from Jesus, that shame turns into a toxic shame that denies our neediness, that refuses to seek help and eventually it turns into a shamelessness that sees everyone else as the problem.

Sadly, that's exactly where the Pharisees go. Instead of moving towards Jesus in the moment which they could have done, instead of moving towards him, they walk away refusing to seek help, refusing to acknowledge their need, more convinced than ever that they can do no wrong, and more set on destroying Jesus who they think is the real problem.

I just want to stop here and ask you, how do you respond when your sin is exposed by Jesus? When he graciously reveals your heart and your sin as exposed, how do we respond?

Do we stay? Do we stay and feel our shame and then move towards Jesus? Or do we run and hide from him? I know that some of us grew up not being able to be honest about our need. It was not okay for us to confess our sin. And you knew that maybe if you admitted to doing something wrong, that you would receive a harsh word, or maybe even some kind of abuse.

Some of us grew up in churches where confessing our sin or acknowledging our need was not acceptable. It wasn't okay to be a sinner in need of mercy. If you were, then you jeopardized your place in the community. So many of us then feel our shame and we respond by hiding, by trying to cover it up. We often hide behind our performance, our busy-ness, our accomplishments. We think that somehow our need will be buried or forgotten if we can accomplish more good things.

And for a lot of my life I have tried to hide my need for mercy. I have seen neediness as a bad thing. I came to believe wrongly that I couldn't be broken or needy or lost. And so I worked hard to perform. I worked hard to be the person that people wanted me to be. And as I struggled in my sin, I felt all alone. And that's what happens when we hide. When we hide, we

are alone. There's no one with us. I was afraid to be honest about it. I was sure that I must hide it. And this only as you can imagine got worse when I entered full-time ministry at age 22. Now that I was a pastor, I couldn't actually be honest. I couldn't be broken. I couldn't be needy. What would people think? So I felt my shame, but then I moved away from Jesus. I worked hard to try to cover myself with performance and with ministry and just like the Pharisees then my shame turned into a toxic shame where criticism from others destroyed me and I couldn't face the idea that I was needy and sinful.

And it wasn't until God brought a close brother into my life, another pastor in fact who began to be honest with me about his own sin and his need for mercy and it was at that point that I realized that I needed to stop trying to hide and instead to move towards Jesus and God used him to help me finally be honest about how broken I was and to receive the mercy that Jesus was longing to give me.

Now at the end Jesus was left alone with this woman standing right there in the middle and she waits for her verdict. And how does Jesus respond? Well, we see in verse 10 and 11, he gives mercy. Jesus stood up and said to her woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you? She said, no one Lord. And Jesus said, neither do I condemn you. Go, and from now on sin no more.

The scene here is haunting because everyone leaves. Everyone has been pierced with some kind of conviction as the evil motives of their heart has been revealed. And instead of repenting, they all go away into hiding. But the woman is left alone. The word here is literally that this woman is abandoned. It's just her and Jesus, but Jesus did not abandon her. With compassion he asks her if there's any other witnesses remaining and she looks around and knows that they've all left and says no. And so he says neither do I condemn you. Go, and from now on sin no more.

Instead of condemnation, which she deserved, Jesus gives her mercy. Now Jesus, isn't saying that her sin was not a big deal. He's not saying that it didn't matter. He tells her sin no more. He acknowledges that she had sinned. He's calling her to repentance. And by the way, he would have been just to condemn her. In fact he was the only one there that actually could have condemned her because he had no evil intent like the Pharisees. Yet, instead of giving her what she deserved which was condemnation, he gives her mercy.

I love how Saint Augustine writes of this scene, he says there are but two left - misery and mercy. Everyone's left and only the woman remains feeling the misery and the shame of her sin. But right in front of her, knowing everything about her stands Jesus full of mercy. And friends, we don't get to experience the mercy that Jesus is offering us unless we first feel the misery of our sin. Without feeling the misery of our sin and our need for help then the mercy that Jesus offers us means nothing to us.

As Jeff said last week, needing is the prerequisite for receiving. We have to see our misery and we have to see our need for help to receive the mercy that Jesus is offering us.

So are you miserable? Do you see how lost you are? Do you see how stuck you are? Do you see how condemned you should be? If you will just be honest about your misery and yet not run away into hiding, but stay with Jesus, he doesn't then have a word of condemnation for you, but wants to give you mercy. Instead of condemnation he has a word of deep love. Instead of calling you condemned, he wants to call you beloved son or beloved daughter.

Now how could Jesus though just let her go? Right? Well, if we're honest, that should bother us. She had sinned. Yes, she was trapped. Yes, she was used, but she still had decided to commit adultery. And yet Jesus is just letting her go. Did her sin not matter? Did it not need to be condemned? Well, Jesus gives mercy instead of condemnation, knowing all along that his gift would require him to receive the condemnation on himself that she deserved. He shows mercy because he's willing to take on himself the condemnation that she deserved. I love how Paul writes in Second Corinthians five verse 21, where he says, speaking of Jesus, for our sake, he made him to be sin who knew no sin. So that in him, we might become the righteousness of God. You see Jesus doesn't just forget about our sin. He doesn't ignore us. And he doesn't sweep it under the rug. Because he is perfectly just our rebellion and our sin must be condemned. It must be punished. But as Paul says, he became sin for us so that we could become the righteousness of God. And because he became sin for us, he took on himself, the punishment that we deserve so that we could receive mercy instead of condemnation. And so as Paul also writes in Romans 8:1, there is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. For those who are filled with anger and hatred against those who have hurt you, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. For those who feel stuck in lust and sexual addiction, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. For those who snapped at your kids in impatience this morning, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. For those trying to perform, pretending to have it all together, desperately afraid that their weakness and sin will be exposed, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. For the bitter, the broken, the lonely, the despairing, for those who have given up, there is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.

So friends, we need to stop hiding. We can't hide anything from Jesus. He sees us completely. He knows our hearts. We don't need to run and hide from him. He longs to show us mercy. When you feel the shame of your sin, will you move towards Jesus and receive his mercy. Now the point of this story friends is that all of us, all of us have been caught. All of us have been caught. Maybe some of us feel more like the religious leaders. Maybe some of us feel more like the woman caught in adultery. But the reality is all of us have been caught in and our hearts have been laid out, and our sin, has been exposed.

Some of us feel like the religious leaders. We're full of pride and posturing. We're convinced of our own righteousness. We've become highly critical of others. But Jesus is exposing our hearts. He sees us completely. And he's inviting you to turn away from your feeble attempts at performing and to recognize your misery, to recognize your need, and to see that you're stuck and you desperately need his mercy. Will you run away and hide again? Or as your sin is exposed will you cry out to Jesus for mercy? He is ready to help you. His heart for you is gentle. It's not harsh and condemning. He longs to show you compassion. Will you stay and face your misery? He will show you mercy.

Some of you maybe feel more like the woman caught in adultery. You know how stuck you are, you know how broken, how lost, and how needy you truly are. And you may have begun to believe that there's no mercy for someone like you, that you're beyond the reach of God's mercy. Well today as you stand before Jesus know that he sees you completely. He sees the darkest corners of your heart, and yet he hasn't abandoned you. Just like the woman he's still there with you. And instead of condemnation he longs to give you mercy. Will you receive his

mercy this morning? Will you stop hiding and come to him as the one who gives you mercy? Some of you may think it's too late. Maybe you've been hiding for years. You've been covering up for years and now it feels too late to come back to return to Jesus and to ask for his mercy. And let me just tell you, it's not too late.

This past week I had this incredible honor of meeting a brother on his death bed who had just given his life to follow Jesus. A friend in our church called me whose father was dying of cancer, had hours, maybe days to live and was in hospice at home. And the friend has been praying for his father for years and years and years, and looking for opportunities to tell him about Jesus and the life that he offers. But his father calling himself a humanist really didn't think he needed Jesus, felt like he was a pretty good person. You see, he'd been hiding and hiding and hiding for years and years and years thinking he was okay and not seeing or willing to face his own need. But as he faced the end of his life and his son once again began to share the gospel with him, the good news that Jesus gives mercy to those who are broken and needy, his father's heart was broken and his father's heart was changed and he said that he wanted to put his hope in Jesus.

And so his friend asked him do you want to talk to a pastor as well? And amazingly his father who never would have done that before said yes. And so I got to go just days before he passed away and sit with him at his bedside and once again remind him of the mercy that Jesus longs to show him, of the life that Jesus wants to give him. And as I asked him have you put your hope in Jesus and Jesus alone he replied, and by the way he had had a stroke just not long before, and all he could do in terms of response was squeeze one hand-could not speak, could understand everything, but could not speak-but as we asked him one last time, do you put your hope in Jesus, he worked so hard. You could see his mouth forming the word Yes. And I got to pray with this brother who just hours before he would then pass away, had submitted his life to Jesus and laid himself at the mercy of Jesus and received the mercy that Jesus longed to give him. And one day now he is with God and we will get to see him one day in a body that's not affected by the curse of cancer or sin anymore. Friends, it's not too late to move towards Jesus. If you've been hiding for years, it's not too late to move towards Jesus.

I love the words of this old hymn. I'm going to close with this. Listen to this as I read these words. This is Jesus' invitation for you this morning. Come you sinners, poor and needy, weak and wounded, sick and sore. Jesus ready, stands to save you full of pity, love and power. Come you weary, heavy laden, lost and ruined by the fall. If you wait until you're better, you will never come at all. And here's the response that he invites us to. I will arise and go to Jesus. He will embrace me in his arms. In the arms of my dear savior, oh there are 10,000 charms.

Friends, Jesus is ready. He stands ready to save you full of mercy and love and power. So when your sin is exposed and you feel your shame, go to him. Stop hiding and come to receive his mercy today. Let me pray for us. Father, thank you. Thank you for your heart towards us. We deserve your condemnation. We deserve justice. Justice demands that we are condemned because we have turned away from you. And yet Jesus came and offered us mercy. And the only way he could do that is because he knew that he would take on himself the condemnation that all of us, that I deserve, and that my friends here deserve, that Jesus took it on himself and he offers us today mercy. Father, help us to throw ourselves at the mercy of Jesus. Help us to stop hiding, to stop posturing, to stop performing, to stop pretending. Lord help us as our

hearts are exposed and as we feel our shame help us to come to Jesus and receive his mercy today. In his name, Amen.