

FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH, 10-9-11 AM NOTES
"THE WOMAN CAUGHT IN ADULTERY"
JOHN 7:53 – 8:11
#30 in Series, "Verse-by-Verse Through John"

John 7:24 (NKJV) "Do not judge according to appearance, but judge with righteous judgment."

Philippians 3:13b (NKJV) "...forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead".

I. The Humility of Jesus (7:53-8:1)

Matthew 8:20 (NKJV) "Foxes have holes and birds of the air *have* nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay *His* head."

2 Corinthians 8:9 (NKJV) "For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor, that you through His poverty might become rich."

II. The Wisdom of Jesus (8:2-9a)

John 8:6a (HCSB) "They asked this to trap Him, in order that they might have evidence to accuse Him."

Leviticus 20:10 (NKJV) "The man who commits adultery with *another* man's wife, *he* who commits adultery with his neighbor's wife, the adulterer and the adulteress, shall surely be put to death."

Matthew 5:17 (NKJV) "Do not think that I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets. I did not come to destroy but to fulfill."

Luke 19:10 (NKJV) "for the Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost."

Colossians 2:3 (NKJV) "in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge."

Jeremiah 17:13 (NIV) "O Lord, the hope of Israel, all who forsake you will be put to shame. Those who turn away from you will be written in the dust because they have forsaken the Lord, the spring of living water."

Exodus 20:14 (NKJV) "You shall not commit adultery."

Matthew 5:28 (NKJV) "But I say to you that whoever looks at a woman to lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart."

"Christ's enemies had thought to ensnare Him by the law of Moses; instead, they had its searching light turned upon themselves. Grace had not defied, but had upheld the law! One sentence from the lips of Holiness incarnate and they were all silenced, all convicted, and all departed. At another time, a self-righteous Pharisee might boast of his fastings, his tithes and his prayers; but when God turns the light on a man's heart, his moral and spiritual depravity become apparent even to himself, and shame shuts his lips. So it was here. Not a word had Christ uttered against the law; in nowise had he condoned the woman's sin. Unable to find any ground for accusation against Him, completely baffled in their evil designs, convicted by their consciences, they slunk away."

—Arthur Pink

Matthew 7:3-5 (NKJV) “³ And why do you look at the speck in your brother's eye, but do not consider the plank in your own eye? ⁴ Or how can you say to your brother, 'Let me remove the speck from your eye'; and look, a plank *is* in your own eye? ⁵ Hypocrite! First remove the plank from your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother's eye.”

Matthew 23:33 (HCSB) “Snakes! Brood of vipers! How can you escape being condemned to hell?”

John 8:44a (NKJV) “You are of *your* father the devil, and the desires of your father you want to do.”

Matthew 15:7-8 (NKJV) “⁷ Hypocrites! Well did Isaiah prophesy about you, saying: ⁸ *‘These people draw near to Me with their mouth, and honor Me with their lips, but their heart is far from Me.’*”

1 Peter 2:1 (NKJV) “Therefore, laying aside all malice, all deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and all evil speaking.”

III. The Forgiveness of Jesus (8:9b-11)

Ephesians 2:4 (NKJV) “But God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us.”

Psalms 85:10 (NKJV) “Mercy and truth have met together; righteousness and peace have kissed.”

Romans 3:25-26 (NKJV) “²⁵ whom God set forth as a propitiation by His blood, through faith, to demonstrate His righteousness, because in His forbearance God had passed over the sins that were previously committed, ²⁶ to demonstrate at the present time His righteousness, that He might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.”

*In evil, long I took delight,
Unawed by shame or fear,
'Til a new object met my sight,
And stopped my wild career.
I saw One hanging on a tree,
In agony and blood,
Who fixed His languid eyes on me,
As near His cross I stood.
Sure, never to my latest breath
Shall I forget that look.
It seemed to charge me with His death,
Though not a word He spoke.
A second look He gave, which said,
"I freely all forgive,
My blood was for thy ransom paid,
I died that thou mayest live.*

—John Newton

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Most translations of the Bible have some kind of notation concerning the passage of Scripture we are looking at today. In the oldest manuscripts, this passage doesn't appear. In other old manuscripts it appears, but at a different location in the Gospel of John and in some manuscripts it is found in the Gospel of Luke. I have studied the evidence on both sides of this controversy, and I believe for several reasons that this passage is a part of our God inspired Scriptures. One of the most respected New Testament Bible scholars, F. F. Bruce, presents the evidence on both sides and concludes that this passage is “authentic gospel material”. Most all of the early Church Fathers believed this incident happened. One reason I believe that it is authentic is that it contains nothing that contradicts any other passage in the Bible. Also, the passage just fits here. The development of the rest of chapter eight flows out of this account of Jesus and the woman caught in adultery.

One of the most difficult balances I have to keep as a Pastor is the balance between proclaiming the consequences of sin and the mercy and grace of God. If I get out of balance on either side, the result could be devastating, especially with immature Christians. If I get out of balance in proclaiming the consequences of sin in the Christian, it leads to burdened down believers who have very little joy. This imbalance becomes a barrier to intimacy with God because the Christian feels that God is always angry with Him. Constant reminders of the consequences of sin make it very difficult to obey **Philippians 3:13b (NKJV)** “...forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead”. On the other hand, if I emphasize the mercy and grace of God and neglect the consequences of sin in a believer's life, the result is that an immature believer might begin to take sin lightly and treat it as no big deal. Oh how important is this balance! In this incident recorded in our text we see Jesus with the perfect balance. We will see that He in no way minimizes the evil of the sin of the woman that was brought before Him. Adultery is a hideous sin. It destroys marriages and lives. It wrecks homes and children's lives. Adultery attacks everything that God holds dear. As we will see, Jesus affirms that under the Mosaic Law, adultery is a sin worthy of death. The balance is that Jesus recognizes this woman's repentance and forgives her of her sin.

I. The Humility of Jesus (7:53-8:1)

The chapter divisions aren't inspired by God. They were added a few hundred years after Scripture was written. Verse 53 actually belongs with chapter 8. These verses really touch me. After the confrontation in the temple the Feast of Tabernacles was over and everyone went home. Even Jesus' disciples went to stay in someone's home. Jesus, by Himself, went to the Mount of Olives. The implication is that Jesus spent the night on the mountain side alone. It is likely that this was in October, and it gets very cool in Jerusalem in October. This is an example of what Jesus said in **Matthew 8:20 (NKJV)** "Foxes have holes and birds of the air *have* nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay *His* head." Think of it, The One who created all things had no place to stay. The One who lived in splendor and glory in heaven, the One who was the object of the angel's adoration and worship slept outside under the stars He created. What an illustration this is of **2 Corinthians 8:9 (NKJV)** “For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor, that you through His poverty might become rich.” Oh how this flies in the face of our clamor for our rights, our turning bitter because of how we are treated. How this contradicts with our demand for the comforts of this world. May we be a people who are willing to accept any hardship, any mistreatment, or any lack of creature comforts to accomplish the mission God has given us. Oh, may we be known as a humble people who will do whatever it takes. Set your mind on the Savior of the world huddled in His robe under an olive tree, sleeping alone at night on the Mount of Olives.

II. The Wisdom of Jesus (8:2-9a)

The feast of Tabernacles was over, but Jesus was back in the Temple early, teaching all who thirsted for the truth that He proclaimed and embodied. As He was teaching, suddenly, rudely, a group of Pharisees and Scribes burst into this gathering. After the temple guards had failed to arrest Jesus, they had come up with the perfect setup to trap and discredit Jesus. If they couldn't arrest Him, they would destroy His following with His own words. They brought with them a woman – no doubt disheveled and resisting their attempts to bring her before Jesus. This woman, the HCSB in verse four correctly translates was “caught in the act of committing adultery”. There are some things that we need to understand about this incident. First, it was a set-up. Verse six tells us their motive. **John 8:6a (HCSB)** “They asked this **to trap Him**, in order that they might have **evidence to accuse Him**.” Second, there was no man brought before Jesus. The Mosaic Law required the same penalty for the man and the woman. If they had been caught in the act they should have brought the man to be stoned also. The absence of the man and the fact that they were caught in the act leads many Bible scholars to assume that the man may have been in on the set up to trap Jesus and could have well been one of their own. The leaders would have to have known about it beforehand. Jewish law as it was practiced in the first century required multiple witnesses to the act of adultery before there could be a stoning [James Boice, “The Gospel of John, Volume II”, Page 603].

What was the dilemma that Jesus faced with this series of events? First, this woman was obviously guilty of what she was accused of. The Mosaic Law did call for the stoning of a couple who was guilty of the sin of adultery. **Leviticus 20:10 (NKJV)** “The man who commits adultery with *another* man's wife, *he* who commits adultery with his neighbor's wife, the adulterer and the adulteress, shall surely be put to death.” Jesus had already said in **Matthew 5:17 (NKJV)** “Do not think that I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets. I did not come to destroy but to fulfill.” On the other hand, Jesus said in **Luke 19:10 (NKJV)** “for the Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost.” He was known as the friend of sinners. The reason many of the common people loved Him was that He had compassion on them and cared for them and reached out to the outcasts of society who were just called “the sinners” by the religious leaders. If Jesus had said, “Go ahead and stone her”, what would have happened to His reputation as “The friend of publicans and sinners”? That answer would have turned the common people against Him. If Jesus had said, “Let her go”, He would have been advocating the breaking of the Mosaic Law which He earlier affirmed. When the religious leaders came up with this trap they no doubt were giving one another whatever the first century equivalent was of “high fives”. Jesus was trapped. There was no way out. Ah, but this is the Son of God – God in flesh and we read of Him in **Colossians 2:3 (NKJV)** “in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.”

What happened? Jesus was silent. They didn't like that. Verse 7 says that “they continued asking Him”. That means that they were pressuring Him for an immediate answer. What did Jesus do? He stooped down and wrote something with His finger in the dirt. What did He write? No one knows for sure because the Bible doesn't tell us. There is endless speculation as to what it was so I will add my speculation (remember, this is only speculation). I think it was one of two things. Perhaps he wrote the words of the prophet Jeremiah in **Jeremiah 17:13 (NIV)** “O Lord, the hope of Israel, all who forsake you will be put to shame. Those who turn away from you will be written in the dust because they have forsaken the Lord, the spring of living water.” That would certainly fit the context of what Jesus had just shared on the last day of the Feast of Tabernacles in John 7:37-38. Another possibility is that He was writing out the seventh commandment and His earlier commentary on that verse. **Exodus 20:14 (NKJV)** “You shall not commit adultery.” His commentary was in **Matthew 5:28 (NKJV)** “But I say to you that whoever looks at a woman to lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart.” Others speculate that since he knew the hearts of all men He was writing out the specific sins of these religious leaders. Any of these may be true; we don't know for sure what He wrote. After writing in the dirt, Jesus raised up and looked these evil men in the eyes and said in **John 8:7b (NKJV)** “He who is without sin among you, let him throw a stone at her first.” I think that Jesus was referring specifically to the sin of adultery (in action or in

the mind). The result of what Jesus did and said was that the Pharisees and Scribes were speechless. Their “giddiness” over having trapped Him turned to conviction and shame. Arthur Pink summarizes well what happened. “Christ’s enemies had thought to ensnare Him by the law of Moses; instead, they had its searching light turned upon themselves. Grace had not defied, but had upheld the law! One sentence from the lips of Holiness incarnate and they were all silenced, all convicted, and all departed. At another time, a self-righteous Pharisee might boast of his fastings, his tithes and his prayers; but when God turns the light on a man’s heart, his moral and spiritual depravity become apparent even to himself, and shame shuts his lips. So it was here. Not a word had Christ uttered against the law; in nowise had he condoned the woman’s sin. Unable to find any ground for accusation against Him, completely baffled in their evil designs, convicted by their consciences, they slunk away” [Arthur Pink, “Exposition of the Gospel of John, Volume II”, Page 16]. Instead of passing judgment on the woman, Jesus passed judgment on the religious leaders. They were convicted by their own consciences (probably spurred by what Jesus wrote on the ground and what He said) and they left one by one beginning with the oldest. Why did the oldest ones leave first? I’m not sure that we can say for certain but let’s think about that. Perhaps it was because they recognized first that with Jesus’ answer, this battle was lost. It may have been because with more years, they had more sin to remember. Since they didn’t know the grace of God, they were convicted of their sin and its immensity.

These religious leaders who prided themselves in keeping the law had violated the very spirit of the law. They were guilty of doing what Jesus warned of in **Matthew 7:3-5 (NKJV)** “³ And why do you look at the speck in your brother's eye, but do not consider the plank in your own eye? ⁴ Or how can you say to your brother, 'Let me remove the speck from your eye'; and look, a plank *is* in your own eye? ⁵ Hypocrite! First remove the plank from your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother's eye.” These religious leaders had their hypocrisy revealed and they went away having been humiliated by the wisdom of Jesus Christ. When we carefully study the Scriptures, we see that it was the sin of hypocrisy that Jesus hated most. In Matthew 23 Jesus spoke plainly to the Pharisees about this sin that seems to be considered especially heinous by the Lord. In Matthew 23:13, 14, 15, 23, 25, 27, 29, Jesus begins His words with, “Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites!” Oh how the Lord hates this sin! What is a hypocrite? In the Greek, it is literally one who is an actor in a play. As Jesus uses it in the gospels, it is referring to people who give the impression (play a role) of a walk with God, a relationship with God, a holiness of life that they don’t have. In all things related to God, they are like actors in a play. What they portray is not really true of them. All through the gospels, you find Jesus showing compassion and mercy and grace toward those who recognize their sin, confess their sin, and repent of their sin. Jesus has nothing but harsh words and condemnation toward hypocrites who portray a life and a love for the Lord that they do not have. Listen to Jesus’ words to the hypocrites in **Matthew 23:33 (HCSB)** “Snakes! Brood of vipers! How can you escape being condemned to hell?” He will speak to these same hypocrites later in **John 8:44a (NKJV)** You are of *your* father the devil, and the desires of your father you want to do.” If you are listening (or reading) to this, I plead with you to examine your hearts to make sure there is no hypocrisy there, that you are not like an actor in a play, playing a role. Are you giving others the impression you know God and love God and walk with God when your heart is full of sin and self righteousness? Are you looking the part of a Christian at church, but while at work or school your language is filthy, your ethics stink, and your mouth spews out gossip, slander and dirty jokes? Are you giving the impression of walking with God, but you never spend time in His Word and communion with Him in prayer? Are you playing the role of a faithful husband or wife while involved in an illicit relationship with another person? If these describe you, then you are one of those Jesus is speaking to and about when He addresses hypocrites. Let me give you another passage. **Matthew 15:7-8 (NKJV)** “⁷ Hypocrites! Well did Isaiah prophesy about you, saying: ⁸ *These people draw near to Me with their mouth, and honor Me with their lips, but their heart is far from Me.*”

III. The Forgiveness of Jesus (8:9b-11)

In these verses we see the provision for a perceived dilemma of God. I use the phrase “perceived dilemma” because in reality our God has no dilemmas. What is the perceived dilemma of God? It is the dilemma of how God’s justice and mercy can both be manifested with sinful people like you and me. God’s justice says, “Sin is serious and always brings death. Sin must be paid for with the giving of life. No one can simply have their sin ignored. All sin must be paid for – all sin!” The law of God is His standard for righteousness. When the law of God is broken, justice requires the penalty of death. The purpose of the law we are told in Romans 3:19-20 is to show us our sin with the result that every mouth will be shut and we are left without excuse when we recognize that we don’t measure up to His standard of righteousness and we are justly condemned. The justice of God says that we are condemned. But God is also merciful. **Ephesians 2:4 (NKJV)** “But God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us”. How can God pour out His rich mercy and love upon us without ignoring or violating His justice? The answer to this dilemma is a Savior and a cross. In a Psalm that speaks prophetically of the coming Savior we read in **Psalms 85:10 (NKJV)** “Mercy and truth have met together; Righteousness and peace have kissed.” The truth of God’s justice and the righteousness His justice requires have kissed mercy and peace with the God we have sinned against in the person of Christ on a bloody cross. When Jesus Christ (God become man) became our substitute and satisfied the wrath and justice of God through the shedding of His blood, it became possible for God to pour out His mercy on us without violating His justice. Justice was received by the substitute who was God the Father’s only begotten Son that we might be saved from our sin through His mercy. It is most clearly detailed in one of the greatest passages in the Bible - Romans **3:25-26 (NKJV)** ²⁵[Jesus] “whom God set forth *as* a propitiation [satisfactory offering or atonement] by His blood, through faith, to demonstrate His righteousness, because in His forbearance God had passed over the sins that were previously committed, ²⁶ to demonstrate at the present time His righteousness, that He might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.” The gospel in brief is that justice and mercy have met together in Jesus Christ and a bloody cross.

Again let me emphasize that Jesus was not going easy on sin – specifically the sin of adultery. How could Jesus not condemn by forgiving this woman without violating the justice of God? Remember that we are dealing with the one who knew the heart of each person. In her heart He saw repentance and faith and she was forgiven just like all the Old Testament saints were forgiven – repentance of sin and faith in God to provide a substitute. In a sense this woman caught in adultery and every person saved before the cross was saved on credit. When Jesus died on the cross, it was not just for those who would live in these almost 2000 years since the cross. It was also for those who trusted God for His provision from the time sin came into the world until the cross.

The woman caught in adultery was pronounced guilty by Jesus but because of her repentance and faith she escaped condemnation and was forgiven. To evidence the fact that Jesus was not treating sin lightly He adds in verse 11, “go and sin no more”. True salvation brings a desire to not sin along with being set free from the slavery to sin. The leaving behind of a life that is characterized by sin, where there is a pattern of sin to a life where sin is no longer the pattern is evidence of true salvation. I am thankful for the order here in verse 11. I am thankful He didn’t say, “Go and sin no more and then I will not condemn you.” The forgiveness comes first and the evidence we are forgiven is that we do not go on sinning as the pattern of our life. Our salvation is not the result of our works, but the result of Christ’s work on the cross and our trusting, relying on, depending on His provision for our sin.

CONCLUSION

Perhaps the person in history who most greatly appreciated the mercy and grace of God was John Newton who lived in the late 1700’s. He had been an evil man – an African slave trader before God marvelously saved him. He is best known for writing the most sung hymn even today – Amazing Grace. But there were many other things John Newton wrote. I think my favorite said this:

*In evil, long I took delight,
Unawed by shame or fear,
'Til a new object met my sight,
And stopped my wild career.*

*I saw One hanging on a tree,
In agony and blood,
Who fixed His languid eyes on me,
As near His cross I stood.*

*Sure, never to my latest breath
Shall I forget that look.
It seemed to charge me with His death,
Though not a word He spoke.*

*A second look He gave, which said,
"I freely all forgive,
My blood was for thy ransom paid,
I died that thou mayest live.*

- John Newton

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