Jesus' Dealings with a Sinner

By Rev. Arnoud T. Vergunst

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Reformed Congregations of New Zealand
6 Howard Street
Carterton 5713
New Zealand

Website: www.rcnz.org
Online Sermons: www.sermonaudio.com/rcnz

Our Scripture reading is from the Gospel of John, chapter 7, starting with verse 37 and reading through chapter 8, verse 11

If you read the Gospel stories of the Lord Jesus, you must have noticed that Jesus acted, thought and taught different than the other religious leaders of His days. He dealt totally different with people. He did not break the bruised reeds and the smoking flax. He was very sensitive to those people who felt burdened with sin, needy and uncomfortable about their past life. He had that special defined presence and gift of the Holy Spirit that enabled Him to speak a word in season whenever He was faced with such situations that would have baffled all of us.

Particularly noteworthy is how Jesus treated women. Already in the very beginning of His earthly ministry He radically departed from the way in which women were treated in the Jewish society. The Lord Jesus was not afraid to be counter-cultural if the habits or manners of acting were contrary to God's law of love. By His actions and interactions He taught men as well as women the value of every person that was created in His image.

This morning we are going to listen to God's Words to us from John 8. It's a Scripture that you will find missing in many Bibles. Many modern Bibles have omitted this portion of the Scripture. I will not go into all the background of why they do and neither do I go into the background why I feel convinced that this remarkable incident in the Lord's ministry is inspired Scripture.

Our purpose is to hear what God has to say to us in this unusual event in the temple area. As I meditated and studied through this passage, I took the time to look through all the different eyes of those involved in or witness of this particular incident. That proved a very helpful way of beginning to understand the passage. Place yourself in the mindset of the Pharisees and the Scribes; then try to place yourself in the mindset of all the witnesses that are seeing this; then through the eyes of this woman who stands there in the midst of these men. And lastly, and that's really what I want to bring out this morning, is to look at this through the mind of Jesus. And that's where the glory of the Lord Jesus will be

seen. And that's why it's recorded for you and me. Not only to know more of Jesus but to be more like Him by the grace and power of the Holy Spirit.

Our focus will be on 'Jesus' dealings with a sinner.' First we will consider the background to this incident; next the setting of this incident; followed with the trap placed in this incident; lastly Jesus' solution of this incident. The sermon will close with a few applications to bring these truths home to the heart.

The background of this very incident lies back in chapter 7. In verse 37 and 38 of the previous chapter Jesus makes a startling announcement. This time He doesn't even sit as He normally does when He teaches but He stood up to make sure He could be heard farther than normal. And with a very loud voice He says these very words that are in this Scripture, "If any man thirst let him come unto me and drink." If you know your Old Testament Scriptures well, you would hear the echo of Isaiah 55:1. Every average Jew would know that. So what is Jesus here saying by quoting from the prophet Isaiah? "I am that very LORD God Who invited in Isaiah 55 to come unto him. I am the LORD Jehovah Myself!"

People understood it well what Jesus here implies in this passage, as He points Himself out as the God who is calling sinners to come to Him. Instantly, this announcement is creating massive waves of unrest among and within the hearers. You notice the people are confused and divided. The one says, This is Christ, this is the prophet, this is the Messiah." And the next one says, "No, it can't be because He cannot come from Galilee. How can He be?" So, again, all kind of division is happening.

But not only division among the hearers, it's also a turning point among the leaders. Once they hear this they say, "This is it. We're going to have Him arrested. He can go no further. We must not allow it. The people are completely deceived but this man's teachings and claims." Quickly they sent out the Temple police to arrest Jesus. Well, that fails entirely. As they come to arrest Him, they find Him surrounded by these huge crowds of people that are listening to His teaching. The temple police not only refrain from laying hands on him, but they are touched by His teaching. Hear what they say in verse 46, "Never has any man spoken like this." So, they are even taken in, as it were, by the teachings and the person of the Lord Jesus. Sharing this with the leaders, loosens an avalanche of rejection and hatred. The Pharisees answered them saying, "Are you deceived?" That means, "These people and you allow yourself to be deceived. None of us Pharisees have believed on Him" (which wasn't true because Nicodemus sitting in the midst of them did). In verse 49 they write off the common people with, "These people who know not the law are cursed." They are so ignorant, they are so easily deceived, they're cursed. Nicodemus makes a feeble attempt to stand up for Jesus. But that also is not taken.

Fruitless and undoubtedly frustrated, the whole Sanhedrin returns home. Yet it appears the next morning that they haven't gone to sleep, at least not a group of them. During that night they hatch out a nasty plan to have Jesus arrested or somehow discredit Him publicly. The plan is evil, hypocritical and insensitive. But none of these things bother

these so-called religious men. All they are after is to get rid of this Jesus who is challenging their authority and respect.

The trap that will be set involves an adulterous woman. They were apparently not too hard to find in those days. From what I read in the sources dealing with the society of those days, adultery then was probably as common as it today. Though it was a religious feast day, in general the public wasn't all that sincere in their religion. These feast days often became gatherings where all kinds of immoralities took place. So sadly decayed was the spiritual state of Israel that it wasn't so hard to find this woman at short notice in the act of adultery. Clearly their purpose is not to preserve the law, not at all. They are only out to humiliate Jesus for if you catch someone in the *act* of adultery, there are always two of them. But one is conveniently left out. As said before, women didn't count in Jesus' times. But they do to the Lord Jesus. Caringly, thoughtfully but above all graciously did He receive women and ministered to them the blessed words of the Gospel.

Having looked at the background of this incident, let's now look at the setting. In the next verse we read that Jesus spent the night in the Mount of Olives alone. Undoubtedly He has been in prayer. The Lord is aware of all of the things that are happening. The threat can be felt in the air. Early in the morning He came again into the Temple and all the people came unto Him and He sat down and He taught them. Notice the courage of the Lord Jesus. He purposely returns to teach despite the threat of the previous day and in spite all that is taking place within the minds of the religious leaders. But He doesn't shy it for He wants to go back to reach the people and to teach them about God and salvation. As soon as the people are all around Him again, He sat down like a Rabbi and He teaches them.

Once the people have gathered, you notice what happens. The Pharisees and the Scribes make their move. They wanted many witnesses to this public humiliation of the Lord Jesus they were plotting. Their hearts are filled with hatred to Jesus as well as confidence that now they have the perfect situation to take Him down. Without any regard of the feelings, they forcefully bring in a fearful looking woman or girl. It is hard to tell what age she is but no matter how young or old, this is a very vulnerable woman. Yet nobody is there to protect her. There she stands all alone in the middle of this probably all male company, all by herself. It must have been a dreadfully uncomfortable moment. They do not show a shred of compassion or sensitivity for this woman and that was a typical thing in this Middle East country. It was a pride and shame culture. It's still that way today. Parents don't say, "That is wrong you did that!" but they say to their kids, "Shame on you. You discredit our name." That's also how they dealt with those who committed sexual sin. Even today many women are killed as 'honor killings' because their sinful behavior has brought shame on the family. But the point we need to take home is that we find here a display of utter regard of any feelings, even toward those who have broken the law of God. It is the typical 'older brother attitude' toward the 'younger and rebellious brother.'

Let us learn from this. The Pharisees demonstrate one typical aspect of an organized religion. Do you know what that is? It's more about the rules then about the people. As long as you walk the rules you are fine but woe to you, if you break them. Then there is little or no respect for the person. Here is where the Lord Jesus is so different. He honors all the rules God has given us; He does it more than any man ever will but He has this incredible compassion for people though they are deeply fallen and have broken all the rules. May God give us more of that Spirit of Christ in our hearts. In Galatians six we are admonished to restore those who fall into sin with meekness and love. That's entirely the opposite of the manners of these Scribes and Pharisees. For them it is upholding a reputation and maintaining power that is the most important thing rather than showing mercy and love to the lost prodigals, to the wandering sinners, to the bruised and broken.

That leads us to consider the trap these religious leaders set up in verse 3. The Scribes and the Pharisees brought unto Him a woman taken in adultery and they had set her in their midst. They say then, "Master, this woman was taken in adultery, in the very act. Now, Moses and the law commanded us that such should be stoned. What saith thou?" It's obviously a very delicate situation that here is placed before the Lord Jesus. I want you to think for a moment through Jesus' eyes at this situation. Jesus sees above Him His Father looking on all this that is standing before and around Him. He loves His Father and He loves His law and He will uphold His holiness. We are all to uphold His justice and He will also uphold God's justice. Yet He also is on this earth to reveal His grace and love, all in that unity that only is possible in God. What a delicate situation for Christ as He sees His Father whom He has to represent at this moment. Around Him stands a multitude of people. Many of them are lowering God's standards of holiness in their private lives, if not all of them. The Lord Jesus is to honor the law of God. He cannot condone as serious a sin as adultery. He cannot. He cannot contradict the Word of God. He cannot send the wrong message here to the people as if it's okay to do such a terrible sin and not be rebuked or judged.

But before Him also stands a group of Pharisees and Scribes who very slyly have appealed to the Scripture. Moses says in the law that such should be stoned, what saith Thou? They were actually wrong about that. Moses didn't command that. The Lord through Moses commanded that the adulterers were to be put to death without specifying how. To be stoned is a later addition but wasn't God's command. But nonetheless they have one point: adulterers were to be dealt with and could not walk away unpunished. Jesus cannot ignore the Old Testament laws. He would completely contradict His ministry of having honored the law of God. Yet He can also not ignore what He sees before Him. What does He see before Him? He sees the vilest hypocrisy that you can imagine. All these goody-goody Pharisees and Scribes who hide terrible sins in their heart. He knows what's in their lives. He knows what happens behind their closed doors. He knows what they talked about yesterday and during the night. He knows what they tried to do the day before. He sees before Him the most ungodly people you could ever meet: on the outside they are super religious but on the inside they are plotting murder.

So above is His Father, around are all the witnesses, before Him stand the Scribes and Pharisees but then there are also the Roman soldiers who are keeping their eye upon this

multitude of people. Especially on the feast days they would be out with extra forces, marching back and forth throughout this crowd to keep an eye on these unruly Jews. So Jesus has to watch them too because He cannot contradict their laws. If He would do or suggest stoning, He would go to jail.
Lastly the eyes of Jesus are resting on that woman that stands there shyly, ashamed, fearful, humiliated and fragile. Undoubtedly she is the focus of His heart at this moment. We don't know any details of her life but there is far more than meets the eye. Not every woman gives away her dignity just like that. There are issues, events, needs and things in this woman's life we have no clue about. No one else knows except Jesus. He knows all the details about her story of her life, the burdens that precede and that surrounded the deed of her life that is here brought to the foreground. Let's remind ourselves, it's so easy for us to judge but there are so many more sides to the stories of people's lives than what comes to our eyes. Jesus knows. He knows the full story and He wants to heal and save rather than to break this bruised reed.

As this all has been placed in front of Him, we read in verse 6 a very strange reaction. "But Jesus stooped down, and with his finger wrote on the ground, as though he heard them not." Notice that these words 'as though He heard them not' are in italic print. They are not in the original Greek. The translators of the King James Version have tried to help us understand why Jesus wrote with his finger in the dust of the ground as though he heard not. Their suggestion is one explanation which in some ways doesn't really satisfy. Jesus is not pretending not hearing what they said. So why does Jesus do this action? It is somewhat bewildering.

There are a couple of explanations beside the one suggested in the King James version. A second one is that this was a Sabbath day and there's no work to be done on the Sabbath day. According to the Pharisaical law, writing on a piece of paper is work because it's permanent but writing with your finger in the dust of the ground was not work because it's not permanent. It is therefore possible that Jesus is showing with this action to those Scribes and Pharisees, "I know exactly what your rules are. I know it's the Sabbath day and I'm fine with even keeping your rules about writing." A third suggestion is that Jesus is so shocked at the hypocrisy and the lovelessness He sees in front of Him in the sinful attitude and murderous thoughts in the heart of those people that He simply wrote letters without any purpose to make them speak as it were with His silence. It would have been a silent moment where everybody was thinking.

What did He write? We have no clue. I like the suggestion that He wrote the Ten Commandments, the law of God. But since we don't know let's leave it as unnecessary to know. What is sure is that what He wrote didn't answer their question. You notice in verse 6 and verse 7 that they continued asking Him as He is stooping down and writing with His finger. Did they sense a feeling of triumph already because they see His silence as an embarrassment? Did they read in His reaction, "He doesn't know what to do?" So, they continue to ask questions, "Now what does thou say, Rabbi? What should we do with her? You know what Moses said. We should stone her. What would Thou have us to do?" They keep pressuring Him. You can almost see the triumphal smile on the faces of these hypocrites. "Now we have Him. There is no escape from our hands now."

Let's consider the solution of this incident that Jesus gives. Upon their insistent pressure to give direction, Jesus stood up and gave them a stunning direction. We read, "And Jesus lifted himself up, and said unto them (his accusers), He that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone upon her." What Jesus says in these words is full of power. He says something like, "I know you want me to go to jail for breaking the law of the Romans in maintaining the law of Moses to have her put to death. Well, I'm prepared to go to jail for this but are you willing to join me? And those of you without sin cast the first stone." It is the glory of Jesus' wisdom, isn't it, when we read this so beautiful answer. Jesus indeed says, "I am willing to go to jail to honor God's law and I'm willing to do so, but who is willing to join me? In others, anyone of you whose conscience acquits him at this moment of any sin in the area of sexuality, join me stoning this woman."

This question must have felt like a piercing sword that the Lord Jesus drove deeply into the consciousness of all those present. Who could move after having been asked "Anyone who can claim to be pure and clean in the 7th commandment, join me to cast a stone at this woman." We all know it's possible to break the 7th Commandment without committing adultery as she did. Take a moment to read the Heidelberg Catechism on the 7th Commandment. Looking on someone else's woman to lust after her is already adultery.

Upon this stunning question, Jesus stoops down again. He gives everyone an opportunity to step forward. But to cast the first stone is to claim sinlessness in the seventh commandment or, as some suggest, against all ten commandments. No Jewish man could do that. They all would contradict Isaiah 53 where it says, "We all have gone out of the way and we are all unclean." No Jewish leader would dare to go that far to claim sinlessness. In the meantime the Saviour is stooping down again. Why does He do this again and why is He again writing on the ground. Most likely it is because He doesn't want to publicly humiliate those men. He allows them to leave without having to look at Him. What a great and good Master He is! He's not trying in any way to be the triumphant One. He is a Minister of God and He wants to bring these men also to repentance instead of just publicly humiliate them. He seeks their salvation also as He prods their consciences with His direction. Friends, what a glory in this answer of Jesus in verses 7-9. He doesn't at all ignore her sin. He doesn't abolish God's law. He makes the law of God rise above the Roman law which forbids them at this moment to take in hand what God has commanded. His answer is in many ways more glorious because it shows all these self-righteous ones that are standing there, "None of you are in any way fit to carry out the law of God. None of you here are in any way to fit to send her and to condemn this woman." And they all feel it when the oldest to the youngest, they sneak off the scene. What is your own reflection upon Jesus' question? Who of us is without sin in any commandment? Who of us is fit to be judge of others who fall? How can we have such condemning judgments on some people who have fallen or are living in sin? Where is the compassion and the seeking love and the willingness to sacrifice ourselves to seek such lost sheep?

His wise answer wasn't only effective to turn the situation around. This answer also rescues this woman and that was ultimately His whole intent. She's a sinner. She has transgressed God's holy law as all other ones did. A few minutes before she was expecting a brutally violent and painful death. She stood there undoubtedly shivering in the midst of this group of men. But now as she sees all her accusers leaving, a sense of relief must wash over her as the immediate danger ebbs away. At that moment Jesus gives His attention to her. His final interaction shows His very precious and upright love.

Jesus was left alone with her. That 'left alone with her' means that all those men that brought her have gone away. The other witnesses and the disciples would still be there. Her heart must be in turmoil and tenderly He addressed her, "Woman, where are thine accusers? Has no man condemned thee?" He deals very tenderly with this woman. For the retreat of her accusers hasn't changed the fact that she's still guilty of God's law. She still has to face the truth that she is a guilty adulteress. How will He act? What will be next? Think through the eyes of this woman for a moment, congregation, how fragile she must have felt as she stood there. Her secret has been exposed to all those witnesses there. She's publicly shamed and humiliated and shy and fearful. We have no idea what she all thinks, what exactly has happened, what is true or not true but we can all know a little of what she feels. How would you feel if your secret would be exposed to all other eyes and ears? It is so important we ask these questions of ourselves when we face with people who fall into a public sin and come forward to admit that.

After breaking down the tension by asking this question, "Woman, where are thine accusers? Has no man condemned thee?" Jesus instantly adds His own words. "Neither do I condemn thee: go and sin no more." He will not condemn her as a person. He recognizes her as a valuable person. Though He doesn't condone her sin. He doesn't at all lessen the wrong of what she did. "Go and sin no more." Jesus didn't minimize or condone this sin when he didn't condemn her.

Jesus had no authority to condemn. He was no judge at this moment. He was a Rabbi, a teacher. The Lord Jesus also did not come into the world at this moment to condemn the world. He has come to save the world. He's looking at a woman or perhaps a mere girl, who is destroying herself. She is destroying her marriage if she was married. She is destroying her relationship with her fiancée if she was betrothed. She is destroying herself for a future marriage if she was single. She is above all living in a destroyed relationship with her God and Creator. That's what Jesus cared about. He wants to save her. "I don't condemn thee, woman. I have no authority to do so but I have the authority to tell you as a prophet, 'Go on in life but sin no more.'" He didn't acquit her, He didn't pardon her either. So often people say, "Jesus pardoned her." But He doesn't pardon her. We do not have any known facts about this woman as a repentant sinner. Even though she used the name 'Lord' in her reply to Jesus question, that doesn't prove she was repentant of her life-style or sin of adultery. Therefore all we can conclude is that Jesus admonished her in love to "Go and sin no more." He says, "Woman, your lifestyle is destructive to you, to your husband, fiancé, future husband. It's unacceptable to God. It's sin and sexual sin before marriage or after marriage is indeed one of the most destructive sins that we can do." And he warns her, "Go and sin no more."

We hope that the unwritten part of her further life-story would be that she was moved by His grace and love to leave her lifestyle of sin and to walk in the path of holiness. Jesus answer gives her another opportunity to make a brand new beginning. Did she hear the next verse in our Scripture when Jesus spoke, "I am the light of the world: he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life?" We don't know but only if she would have followed Him and obeyed His teaching, would she have found the true joy of life.

In closing let me draw out a few applications from this Scripture.
The first one is that Jesus' dealings with this woman is another example of the costly demonstration of the love of God. What the Lord Jesus did here would not be without serious consequences for Himself. His dealings with her saved her life. We hope not only outwardly but spiritually. But it was costly for Jesus. This provoked the opposition more than ever. As He answered them and dealt with this situation, Jesus was willing to lay down his life in demonstrating love.

That was the constant theme of his life, wasn't it? He never shied away from reaching out to the 'untouchables of the Bible times,' the publican and sinners. Let's not forget that these people were the ex-church goers! They left the paths of truth and gone into a worldly life. Others would observe and judge and talk about them from a distance. No one went out as the shepherd in the wilderness to seek for these lost sheep. But Jesus received and ate with them. He sought them that were lost. He wasn't afraid to be seen with them who had messed up their life with grievous and gross sins. He embraced them as they returned from the paths of sin. That wasn't considered acceptable by the religious leaders and it would eventually cost him His life. Their hatred of His teachings and dealings climaxed in the cross. Now again, Jesus is willing to show such love for this woman also. He's willing to pay the price of sin, to redeem from sin, to minister, to comfort and to receive those who are castaways by society and castaways by churches. Those who are wasters by sinful choices and sinful lifestyles.

And He's willing to take it up for them and that leaves us with a question: "Are we as a Christian community willing to be like unto Him?" It may be costly. It's easy to be like a Pharisee and a Scribe and to condemn and to judge, to walk back and to have all our answers ready about those that fall into sin. And often it makes us feel to condemn others, it makes us feel better. It will boosts our own ego. It is also so easy to find fault with others. How easily we can ignore the secret issues of our hearts and lives! But the question this example of the Lord places before us is "Are you willing to sacrifice yourself in the demonstration of costly love? Do we send sinners the message that though we condemn their sin we are ready to love them? Are we willing to receive the prodigals back in the arms of love when they return to us? Without condemnation, without berating them, without judging them, without making them worse than what we are; without stones in our hand or stones in our tongues. Isn't that what Christ does when sinners return to Him? Must that not be the reflection of the Christian Church? Restoration through forgiveness, through love, through carrying one another's burdens, to find those who've gone astray and to seek to restore them in the fellowship with God and others.

So our first application is the question: Are we willing? Are you willing to show the costly demonstration of Christian love? Another application, that Jesus refrained from casting stones at sinners. He could've taken up the first stone. He was sinless. He was the only who could say, "I condemn you, woman. And I will stone you because I am without sin." But he didn't cast a stone. He didn't even pick one up. Why is that? It is because He has come to seek and to save what is lost. He didn't come to drive down the condemnation, as it were, to those who already feel so badly condemned in themselves. See, congregation, if anyone comes to his senses and sees the track he's gone and feels sorry and condemns himself, you don't need to condemn them. They do that themselves already. Don't add to it. Be like Jesus. Neither do I condemn thee. Now, He could cast a stone but can you? Is anyone of us without sin? Is anyone of us innocent in the second, or the sixth or the seventh or the eighth? None of us are clean or perfect in obedience. Are we really on the inside what we look like on the outside? And God knows and you know to the extent that you know. So, let your conscience speak as Jesus says here, "Anyone of you without sin, cast the first stone." And notice what happens: all of these men were convicted by their own conscience; they went out one by one. They knew; they were told the truth and they listened to their consciences.

The Lord Jesus has a searching call in this history for all of us here. Clearly, He made it clear that the Scribes, the Pharisees, the witnessing people and also the woman were all wrong. None of us are in a better box than the other. That's how Jesus looked at it. He says, "You Scribes and Pharisees, you are wrong in your vile hypocrisy. You are pretending to be shocked at the sin of this woman but look in your heart. You're trying to murder Me for no good reason other than that I show love and holiness in My life." That's the hypocrisy that Jesus sees in them. Let's think about ourselves. What does He see in us? We can condemn people for adultery and for this and for that sin but about our unbelief, unrepentant heart, carelessness or indifference? It is one of greatest sin is in your heart if you haven't come to faith or haven't come to complete repentance about your own sinfulness. How easy to be self-righteous? Don't put yourself above others. If you haven't heeded the call of Christ, you're doing worse than Sodom and Gomorrah. Take it home and let that silence us all and let that drop all the stones out of our hands we so easily launch out to the world around us.

The witnessing people are wrong. They hear about the sins that exist in their own lives. They see a woman exposed but in reality who wouldn't need to stand next to her? If all would be known and if we would see ourselves as God sees us, must we not all stand there with her?

God knows our secrets and if this sermon has put any of your sins in the light of your own awareness, please don't act like the Scribes and Pharisees. You see what they did. Convicted in their own conscience, they walked away from Jesus. That's so sad. There stands the Savior willing to demonstrate His costly love to receive them all and they walk away from Him. Don't be like that this morning. If your conscience is convicting you about sin, get on your knees before the Lord Jesus today and cry out, "Oh God, have mercy upon me and pardon my sin and cover me with Thy righteousness."

The woman is wrong. He clearly condemned her sin and He warns her to turn away from sin. He knows her path of sin is destructive to her and to others. And let's heed the warning. Though Jesus did not condemn the woman, friends, if she didn't change her ways, she would one day stand before that same Jesus. If she hadn't repented from her ways and come to Christ for pardon and cover, then He would have condemned her at that moment. For if she hadn't heeded His words, she wouldn't have only broken His law, but she would have done worse. She would have trampled on His costly love by.

I hope in your heart there is a response to this message. May God bless us. Amen.