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| Series: Portraits of Jesus in John | Reference: <i>John 8:1-11</i> | Title: The Savior | Date: 03.29.2019 |
| Website Writeup: | | | |
| Do we live in prideful religiosity which judges others, and therefore judges Christ? Or, do we practice loving confrontation out of a stance of grace & mercy with the desire to build up & not to shame? | | | |

COLOR CHANGES IN TEXT INDICATE SLIDE CHANGES

Memory Verses for this Series - about 1 every 2 weeks

Full disclosure, the earliest manuscripts & many other ancient witnesses don't have John 7:53–8:11. Some think it shouldn't be included in the biblical text. Although that may be true, no one seems to think it's a story which contradicts biblical teaching, not to mention it's interesting. So I'd like to still address it today. Not to mention that John even says in 21:25, *Jesus did many other things as well. If every one of them were written down, I suppose that even the whole world would not have room for the books that would be written.* I don't doubt this is one of those stories, although it may not have been in the earliest writings. And I think it's message speaks to us during these times.

John 8:1-11 '...Jesus went to the Mount of Olives. ² Early in the morning he came again to the temple. All the people came to him & he sat down & began to teach them. ³ The scribes & the Pharisees brought a woman who had been caught in adultery; and making her stand before all of them, ⁴ they said to him, "Teacher, this woman was caught in the very act of committing adultery. ⁵ Now in the law Moses commanded us to stone such women. Now what do you say?" ⁶ They said this to test him, so that they might have some charge to bring against him.

Jesus bent down & wrote with his finger on the ground. ⁷ When they kept on questioning him, he straightened up & said to them, "Let anyone among you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her." ⁸ And once again he bent down & wrote on the ground. ⁹ When they heard it, they went away, one by one, beginning with the elders; and Jesus was left alone with the woman standing before him. ¹⁰ Jesus straightened up & said to her, "Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?" ¹¹ She said, "No one, sir." And Jesus said, "Neither do I condemn you. Go your way, and from now on do not sin again."

Jesus is up early, returning from the Mt of Olives where He'd spent the night. Goes directly to the Temple, sits with people & begins to teach, which Luke tells us in chapter 21 of his gospel was Jesus' daily routine. Imagine sitting in a circle at the feet of Jesus as He shares with you! Then a group of Scribes & Pharisees bring a woman they'd 'caught' in adultery. But this situation smells contrived, 'early in the morning' wreaks of prior planning. They've missed out on other chances to arrest & get rid of Him. He's like a thorn in their sides teaching those very same people they'd called idiots in chapter 7.

They don't want His influence over them. They considered themselves to be guardians of truth, not followers of truth.

In my early Christian life I was member of an organization which employed a leader who was a bit different than the rest. There was nothing wrong with Him, just different. Other Leaders were organized corporate types, while he never donned a suit & his house was messy. They held formal meetings. He addressed problems over a beer on his porch. His lackadaisical style & seeming disorganization infuriated them, but he wasn't in sin. One day I got a call from two leaders asking me to confirm a few things this man had said involving a certain situation. It felt like an effort to entrap in order to have reason to fire him. It seemed contrived. The real problem wasn't him, he just didn't fit the mold. So instead of making room for different types of personalities, they'd decided to be rid of him. I chose not to take part.

The same's happening here. These Scribes & Pharisees are looking for a way to trap Jesus using this woman. He doesn't fit their mold. They stood the woman before Jesus announcing she'd been caught in adultery. They added, the Law stated she be stoned (Lev 20:10; Duet. 19:15; Duet. 22). And one of the reasons this seems a bit contrived is that the law stated both offending man *and* woman would face stoning - so, where's the offending male?

Realize though, this particular Levitical Law had long since been laid aside for a number of reasons. One reason may've been that it actually had had it's intended effect. That is that people were moved to compassion, conviction, forgiveness & repentance themselves. Typically people don't want to stone someone else, especially when they're not without guilt themselves. In being presented with doing so, they're confronted with their own sin which deserves the same. But, there were two other more likely reasons. Firstly, it had to do with Jesus' claims in other gospel records that this was an adulterous generation (Mt 12:39; 16:4; Mk 8:38). He didn't just say that as a spiritual metaphor, but as a fact of their present situation. Apparently the sin of adultery was so rampant everyone deserved a good stoning.

I was teaching English once to a group of Health Care workers in another country, they were of another faith. Fun loving people, surprisingly open about the sexual exploits of their community. You'd think in a pious religious culture such as theirs, there'd be nothing bad going on, but they proceeded to inform me that almost everyone they knew consistently had multiple affairs going on. They couldn't identify one married couple who kept their marriage bed pure. Hard to believe, so I started to ask my Christian friends who confirmed it to be true, that among that particular population adultery was quite common despite all the rules, regulations & threats of punishment tied to their religious beliefs. Women who held to that particular faith often expressed they wanted a Christian husband since they treated their wives better, and adultery was almost non-existent among Christian marriages. Which confirms Colossians 2:23 *Such regulations indeed have an appearance of wisdom, with their self-imposed worship, their false humility & their harsh treatment of the body, but they lack any value in restraining sensual indulgence.* The Health Care workers explained - that in their faith tradition, sin

isn't sin until you're caught in the act. To them it was a behavioral issue rather than a heart issue, and if the behavior wasn't exposed, it didn't exist - the same had become true with Israel living only under the heaviness of the Jewish hedge of law.

So the message was...don't get caught, because rules have no power in restraining sinful desire. But remember they're talking to Jesus who'd said even if you look at a woman lustfully you've committed adultery making it a heart issue, far beyond behavior - His standards, much higher. He'd not be drug into this argument on their terms. Because on their terms if He said no, He'd be overriding the law of Moses & they'd accuse Him of not following God's perfect Law. If He said, "Yes, stone her," He'd be stepping on the authority of Rome since they were the only authority able to hand down death sentences. They think themselves clever trapping him into an 'it's damned if you do, damned if you don't' scenario. So, our second more likely reason stoning's didn't occur at this time is because there's no way the Roman authorities would allow someone to be stoned for what they considered normal behavior with which they took no issue - adultery was common. People have always been deviant & sinful. The internet hasn't made it worse, it's just revealed the level of our depravity (Hosea 4:14). So, Jesus could either break Mosaic Law & be discredited before the people, or He could break Roman Law & be held to that.

He doesn't react at first. Instead He kneels down & starts to write something in the dirt (we all want to know what He wrote!). He doesn't answer. We have to realize that the answer He gives could very well cost Him His life, or at least His freedom to continue ministry! But they're adamant. So He stands up & says, "*Let anyone among you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her.*" Which apparently translated more carefully asks, *if any of you are not guilty of a sin such as this*, go ahead, throw the first stone. He then kneels & continues to draw in the dirt allowing them to chew on that!

Think about who you get mad at, what really angers you about them? A sibling who always got what they wanted while you did everything right & didn't get anything. A person who gets all the attention, and you always feel left out. The guy at work who doesn't have a filter & says whatever comes to mind. The selfish person who never gives back, but is always taking. Or, just the person who always seems to have everything work out for them while your life seems to fall apart. Or, the person who just seems so gifted in so many ways. The guy in college who partied, never studied & got all A's. Isn't what makes us mad about others often either the very same deficiency we see in ourselves, or who get the very thing we desire, but don't have? Don't we often just want what they have, or to be as free as they are?

You see this situation isn't a true confrontation of this woman. It's an effort to destroy Jesus. She's just the bait. They couldn't care less about her situation, outside of using it to attack Jesus. They're jealous of his influence, words & ability to gather people & teach well. They want Him gone. The older brother in the story of *The Prodigal Son* didn't care about the younger brother - just about what he wasn't getting himself. He didn't care for the mercy The Father showed, just getting the attention & things he thought he

deserved. These guys didn't care for the Truth Jesus brought to the people, only that their personal glory was being eclipsed.

Basically saying, "You can't come out here everyday & teach these ideas of the kingdom of God, this is our world, we control it, we hold power. You're robbing the attention we deserve." Although we'll find they'd not done everything right, but only kept up appearances....What happens? Each one of them, starting with the oldest & going down to the youngest, walks away convicted. Jesus hit a nerve. Apparently they were all guilty of this sin, or something similar, because none of them can pick up a stone. Jesus turned the tables. If they'd thrown a stone, everyone probably knew they weren't innocent. They'd lose influence. If they'd thrown a stone, the Roman authorities would've held them to breaking the law & they'd lose influence. And Jesus bends down again to write on the ground until they're all gone, maybe He wrote the names of their mistresses, who knows? Until He's left with just the woman. And says, "*Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?*" ¹¹ *She said, "No one, sir."* And Jesus said, "*Neither do I condemn you. Go your way, and from now on do not sin again.*"

No one, except Jesus, had any right to judge this woman. He was the only One without sin. He judges with mercy in hand. Realize, no one's innocent, not the woman, she had sinned & Jesus tells her not to again. None of the Scribes or Pharisees are innocent. You'd assume we'd interpret the message to be that we can't stand in judgement of others. That's one message, those with the plank in their eye standing in judgement of the One with a speck in hers. That would be a message. The difficult problem with that is, we can't get the plank out of our own eye. Every time I point the finger of judgment at someone, even if I'm correct, I find myself like these men, accused myself. And I'm driven to my knees in submission to Jesus.

Judging others is a catch 22 for two reasons. Firstly, it puts us immediately in the seat of the accused. Secondly, if we judge others, we judge Jesus. These guys use this woman as a pawn, if Jesus wasn't there taking their glory away, preaching the kingdom, gathering & influencing people, they'd never have contrived this plot. She simply doesn't matter to them. Their intention is to stand in judgement of Jesus, not her.

We think in terms of fairness & logic..."They deserve punishment! They can't get away with that! They have to understand what they did wrong! They have to pay restitution! They have to work themselves back into my good graces!"

We operate on a scale of balances in relationship. We want religious rules to govern everyone else but ourselves. Grace works against logic. Jesus simply says, I don't condemn you, go sin no more. What really irks these guys is - Jesus loves people, and is exemplifying the heart of God instead of a Law of religiosity. He's not controlling. He's forgiving, and in essence robbing their influence because people are attracted to grace.

When other people don't get what we think they deserve, we might *think* we get angry at them - but who are we really angry with? Who do we really stand in judgment of? Isn't it God? When you don't act the way I think is acceptable, even though I may be right, and I

see you experience a blessing from God, I get angry with Him. I am the older brother of the Prodigal Son judging the Father. I'm the Pharisee standing in judgement of Jesus. Remember, in John 7:49 they considered these people to be the idiotic uneducated rabble. They said, "this mob knows nothing of the law - there's a curse on them." To the Scribes & Pharisees these people didn't deserve grace, let alone to be treated with dignity & love. They needed to be punished & controlled. These leaders were guardians of Truth, not followers of Truth - what's the difference?

| Guardians of Truth | Followers of Truth (Jesus) |
|--|--|
| Lack intimacy with Jesus | Growing in intimacy with Jesus |
| Full of self-concern, governed by fear/anxiety, has to always 'fix things' | Freed from worry, can let things go |
| Anxious about what others do & don't do; too confrontative; confrontation condemns | Is not fearful, knows God will work things out; confronts only when led by the Spirit; confrontation brings life |
| Needs to look good, be successful, and be 'right' | Feels secure in Jesus, nothing to prove, operates out of his grace |
| Is overly concerned with 'right theology' rather than right heart | Values the Word, and right theology, yet understands they still have a lot to learn; humble |
| Theology is theoretical and set | Theology is practical and growing |
| Secretly never feels worthy | Sees God as a loving father accepting of them |
| Defensive, doesn't listen well, & bristles at the charge of being 'self-righteous' | Open to criticism and able to stand on Christ's perfection - willing to explore themselves |
| Losing arguments or 'failure' is not an option | Able to take risks & even fail, knows they can be wrong |
| Lacks spiritual power | Reliant and listening to the Holy Spirit |
| Strong-willed, driven, claims to be a leader | Willing to serve wherever, "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me" |
| Relies on 'self' to do ministry | Trusts less in self and more in the Holy Spirit |
| Tears down others, focuses on what is 'wrong', critical, dissatisfied | Builds others up, gives opportunity for growth, and encourages others beyond their faults |
| Claims to have the gift of 'discernment' but uses it to gossip & criticize | Not blind to things, but <i>chooses</i> to focus on what is good and right |
| Compares themselves with others which leads to either pride or depression | Self-worth comes from their position in Jesus' righteousness - not their own |

| Guardians of Truth | Followers of Truth (Jesus) |
|---|---|
| Needs to be in control of situations & people | Becoming Christ-controlled, loves others in the power of the Spirit |
| Motivated by obligation & duty, not love resulting in a powerless witness | Motivated by Christ's model of love & sacrifice, Jesus is enough so witness is strong |
| Depends on position, deeds & accomplishments | Stands complete in Jesus record, not their own |

That's pretty exhaustive & we won't read them all. Remember, all this doesn't negate loving confrontation of another. Loving confrontation's much different than self-righteous judgment. Judgment condemns, whereas loving confrontation comes from a stance of humility, love & grace, standing on the righteousness of Christ. It seeks to walk with a person into the freedom of Jesus, not control them. It seeks to encourage, to build up, it's not punitive. It overlooks the small things & is done in the right time, with the right voice & with the right tone & demeanor. It builds up & looks to potential, it doesn't recount wrongs, but moves a person forward.

Do we exude grace, seeing potential in people beyond faults? Have we put ourselves in Jesus place as Judge of others meaning we become God's judge? When Jesus judges a person or situation with mercy & grace do we grumble at God because He didn't punish? Are we overly concerned about fixing the problems instead of loving people closer to Jesus? The Guardian of Truth ceases to be about Jesus, although all the language is couched in religious terminology. It's about control & being right, which always leads to judgement of others & God, which isn't our place.

Philip Yancey tells a story of a young woman whom he'd spoken with supporting her drug habit through prostitution. He asks, "Have you ever thought about going to the Church for help?" Her response was, "The Church! Why would I go there? I already feel badly about myself, they'll only make me feel worse." It occurred to him, people like her flocked to Jesus, why don't they flock to the Church which represents Him? Because, Grace either starts here, or it doesn't. To be fair, most people who say that aren't saying it out of experience, but rumor, since I know you guys are good loving non-judgmental people as mature Christians are.

But, it does illustrate a point - how you & I in the church treat each other will translate how we treat others outside the church. Are we a social club with rules you have to measure up to in order to be a part of it. Instituting a hedge of law as Israel did which is extra-biblical & a weight no one can really bear? Or, are we deeply aware of our own brokenness as sinners becoming ever increasingly humbly reliant on Jesus & the Holy Spirit, encouraging one another to be deeply connected to Him? We *are* a community of grace, uncompromising concerning sin since it's damaging to people. We desire everyone to find freedom in Christ. We don't value judgment, breaking others down, shaming, or placing more impossible standards on the shoulders of those who are simply in need. So when we see the pride of religiosity in church we confront it lovingly.

Likewise, when another's living in damaging ways, we confront that also lovingly. Realizing every moment, we're all sinners saved by grace through faith alone - all equally deserving of death, but Jesus paid the price for all of us & forgave us too.

So, when our prodigal brother or sister comes home after destroying their own lives, we don't bark at the Father about what we're not getting, or the attention being diverted from us. We realize all that we have with the Father already, and we emulate our Father's love by embracing our sibling & welcoming them home where it is best for them & they should've been all the time.

Study Questions:

1. How are you fairing throughout this shut in? Is there anything you need, or that we can be praying for?
2. What would be your guess as to what Jesus wrote on the ground?
3. What's been your experience of 'church' past or present? Good? Bad? Judgmental or Gracious?
4. What's the fault of the Scribes & Pharisees here? Isn't it right for us to address sin in the community of God? If so, why were they doing it wrongly? Think about intentions, and heart attitudes.
5. How do we confront sinful choices in community in a humble attitude of grace & mercy? How do we operate out of our position with Jesus & not out of pride?
6. Take a look at the chart together, which statements stand out to you, which do you struggle with, and what's the difference between the two statements opposite each other in the rows?
7. How does life in Christ help us in times of great anxiety as we live in now?
8. How are you doing in your prayer times surrounding Hosea 10:12? Pray through that verse together now.