

John 8:3-11. The Women Caught in Adultery sermon notes.

³The teachers of the law and the Pharisees brought in a woman caught in adultery. They made her stand before the group ⁴and said to Jesus, "Teacher, this woman was caught in the act of adultery. ⁵In the Law Moses commanded us to stone such women. Now what do you say?" ⁶They were using this question as a trap, in order to have a basis for accusing him.

But Jesus bent down and started to write on the ground with his finger. ⁷When they kept on questioning him, he straightened up and said to them, "Let any one of you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her." ⁸Again he stooped down and wrote on the ground.

⁹At this, those who heard began to go away one at a time, the older ones first, until only Jesus was left, with the woman still standing there. ¹⁰Jesus straightened up and asked her, "Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?"¹¹"No one, sir," she said. "Then neither do I condemn.

We can see from the phrase, "Teacher, this woman was caught in the act of adultery". These men are making a legal claim. They possess evidence that the law requires to convict this woman. The law required strong testimony from two witnesses who saw the couple having sex. Both witnesses had to see the same thing at the same time and be able to positively identify the man and women involved. To obtain such evidence the witnesses had to set a trap.

The law also required the witnesses to act with compassion. If a person witnesses another about to commit a sin, compassion required them to speak up. These witnesses stand quietly neglecting their moral obligation to give guidance to the woman. Further, where is her lover? If they were caught in the act of adultery, he was caught too. These accusers have let him get clean away without any consequences.

They didn't have to bring her to Jesus, heaping shame and ridicule on her in front of everyone. They were using her. They didn't care about her. They didn't care if she was beaten or stoned, exposed or humiliated. She was nothing to them. They were cruel and unfeeling. They didn't even bother bringing the man she was caught with – they didn't really care about the act at all. They just wanted to trap Jesus. This was a gross misuse of power.

Power is a very seductive force. We serve a Lord and saviour who made it clear that we are to resist the allure of power. ²⁴**A dispute also arose among them as to which of them was considered to be greatest Luke 22:24.** Jesus tells them that you don't understand my kingdom when you argue like this. It's not about being a King but being a servant. It's not about being first but being last. ¹⁶**So the last shall be first, and the first last: for many be called, but few chosen. Matthew 20:16.** ⁴⁵**For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many." Mark 10:45.**

So, let’s examine the nature of this carefully planned and laid trap for Jesus. If Jesus said, “Yes, stone her,” then he would have gotten in trouble with the Romans, because only they had the authority to exercise capital punishment. Also, he would have lost his reputation as being a friend of sinners. If Jesus said, “Don’t stone her,” then he would have been accused of being light on sin, a liberal, someone who didn’t really embrace God’s law and holiness. So, in hopes he’d fall into one of those traps – they used her shamefully.

It’s terribly important in this story that the accused is a woman. A woman who committed sexual sin was “marked” but the man was not. The absence of the woman’s lover is crucial to understanding the story and confirming that this was a trap tailor made for Jesus. Jesus broke all kinds of social and religious barriers in his ministry. He particularly went out of his way to honour and affirm women. She had a big problem. Her life is in jeopardy. She has broken the law, caught in the act and the punishment is death. The tension in this story revolves around the woman’s sin and the shocking forgiveness she experiences in the words of Jesus.

²⁸ In the same way, on the outside you appear to people as righteous but, on the inside, you are full of hypocrisy and wickedness Matthew 23:28. They miss the more important matters of God’s; mercy, Justice and faithfulness. They have become the religious police. Perhaps this is a challenge for us. How do we relate to those who do not meet our religious expectations, whatever they may be.

I have personally felt the weight of this story as I prepared this message. In the last few weeks, I have heard of two colleagues who have had to leave the ministry because of adultery. Two gifted senior pastors who, by all accounts led their respective churches well, but nevertheless have had to leave their churches. The Pharisee in me is angry. How could they do that and think only of themselves. How could they leave their churches hurt and wounded. What about their wives and their families.

As I thought about this reaction, I realised that I was standing with the men in this story, rock in hand, ready to dispense some kind of Justice. Was there room in my heart to follow Jesus’ lead and not judge them. It’s our natural inclination to judge others. It may just be one of the most challenging areas in our Christian lives.

It drives us to Jesus’ teaching, the sermon on the Mount. **“Do not judge, or you too will be judged. ² For in the same way you judge others, you will be judged, and with the measure you use, it will be measured to you.³ “Why do you look at the speck of sawdust in your brother’s eye and pay no attention to the plank in your own eye? ⁴ How can you say to your brother, ‘Let me take the speck out of your eye,’ when all the time there is a plank in your own eye? ⁵ You hypocrite, first take the plank out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother’s eye. Matthew 7: 1-5.**

Jesus offers an alternative to condemnation and death. He says, ¹⁰ **Jesus straightened up and asked her, “Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?”¹¹ “No one, sir,” she said. “Then neither do I condemn you,” Jesus declared. “Go now and leave your life of sin.” John 8: 10-11.**

She is given a fresh start. For her, this was a miracle. Facing certain death she has been set free by Jesus. Even though Jesus has extended grace to her she must take personal responsibility for her sin. The ball is in her court now. She can overcome her sin as a result of having a face-to-face encounter with Jesus.

Despite the women's sin and the requirements of the law, Jesus does not permit the accusers to carry out the death sentence, the woman does not die, Jesus did not punish this woman. She didn't even have home detention or community service work. Jesus, **"implied judgement on her accusers and his mercy mixed with exhortation sets her free in a manner she never expected".¹**

Now let's pause there a moment. We really are, all of us, sinners. And the penalty for our sin really is death. That's what we deserve. If it were not for the grace of God that is what we would face, each of us. It's what is due to us. It's what we owe. Don't lose sight of this, or you'll lose sight of how amazing grace really is.

So, what did Jesus do? What did He say? His words have become almost legendary, almost iconic, haven't they. 'If any one of you is without sin, let him be the first to throw a stone at her...' Now did that simply mean that only whoever was completely guilt-free, sin-free, could ever bring a charge against someone, much less execute a punishment? No. That would mean Jesus was trying to take down the entire legal system, because no one passes that test. No, he was saying something more precise.

He knew what they had done; knew the set-up they concocted to trap the woman; knew the trap they were setting for him; knew their hearts and motives. That's not all. He knew how many of them had sinned in just this very way! It was an easy sin to get away with – unless you were set up like she was. So, He said, "If any of you are truly sinless in this matter; ...sinless in terms of your own sexual life; ...sinless in terms of what you did to this woman; ...sinless in your heart, in why you've brought her here, ...then throw your stone." And no one did. Because no one was. That was the first grace lesson Jesus gave.

Paul is called the Apostle of Grace because he couldn't stop writing about it. He understood that as a Christian I must remember that this very day I am saved by grace. God himself says that you and I are chosen.

By grace Paul says we have been made alive. You were dead to God; you had awe but no one to worship, guilt but no-one to forgive you; desire for purpose but no one to serve; fear but no source of hope. Now you are alive to God. You have strength to endure, a reason to hope.

Therefore, says Paul, we can live in joy. We can have unshakable confidence- today, tomorrow and every day. We can offer love to every human being. This is the wonder of grace. For Paul, the church is simply the custodian of Grace. Grace is how he started all his letters. Normally Greek letters would start with the word *charein*, Greetings. It was a throwaway, a cliché, much as we start letters by saying, Dear somebody. Paul changed the custom by starting with a new

¹ Gary M Burge, *NIV Application Commentary: John*, page 244.

word for letters, 'grace' or- 'May grace be sent to you". He would also end with the same way. "May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit".

Grace is what knocked Paul to the ground on the road to Damascus. Grace is what bought him to his knees over his sin and grace is what took it away. Grace was the light that blinded him and grace was the power that made him see again. Grace gave Paul a thorn in the flesh to keep him from being destroyed by his own arrogance and grace made Paul's weakness the very home of God's strength.

"My grace is sufficient for you", God said and for Paul, he was completely overwhelmed by the grace of God. I am convinced that the way we will impact the world will be by a radical way of loving empowered by God's grace. We will not overlook the role of sin in our own lives and in the worlds but we can be filled with a ridiculous sense of hope. What is the one thing that the church has to offer that the world cannot get anywhere else, Grace.

However, we do not live in a grace filled world. Living in grace, remembering grace keeps love alive. Losing touch with grace, forgetting that I am loved because God is a gracious God can kill love. Grace rightfully understood and lived produces a life of awe, joy, simplicity, worship, gratitude, servanthood, humility, courage and truth. Always its central characteristic is love.

³⁷ Jesus replied: "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.' ³⁸This is the first and greatest commandment. ³⁹And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbour as yourself. Matthew 22: 37-39. If I speak in the tongues of men or of angels, but do not have love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal. 1 Corinthians 13: 1 ⁸Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love. 1 John 4:8.

We are to be grace-givers. Every human being is marked by weakness; When you lock eyes with someone, you can safely assume that they carry deep wounds. They live – day-in and day-out – with areas of temptation and struggle, where they are fragile and often broken. Only throw your rock if you don't have any of that in your life.

Jesus gave this woman her life back. He wouldn't let anyone judge her. He pointed out that all her accusers were sinners. That's why they left. That was the grace. Next came the truth. Don't sin and live like this anymore. The encounter with Jesus sets her free from the judgment of others and free from the clutches of sin itself. She was expecting to be killed not set free. That's what an encounter with Jesus does. That's what Jesus offers us every day.

I invite you this morning to accept this truth a fresh over your life. This truth that is saturated with grace and directed your way. Judgements, criticisms, condemnations- God isn't interested in those. All he wants to know is the answer that Peter gave when Jesus appears after the resurrection. Do you love me?