

## John 8:1-11

**Introduction:** (Read John 7:53-8:11) (Discuss the issues of authenticity with respect to this passage in John)

In order to set our hearts and minds in the right space I want to refer back to the key passages in the prologue by which John introduces his gospel (1:1-4, 14-18), as well as his stated purposes for the gospel (20:30-31). We will read every bit of the John's Gospel through the lens of these two key sections.

1. John's stated purpose for the gospel is that we come to understand and believe that Jesus is the Divine Son of God Incarnate and that in believing in we may have life in His name (cf. 20:30-31). This is far more than believing in an objective statement of Jesus' being. We are given access to the deepest passions of His heart – both in His statements and by His interactions with those among whom He lived and ministered.

2. What we learn throughout the gospel about Jesus is what John says about Him in his introduction/prologue (1:1-4, 14-18). He is Himself the One True and Living God – the Creator of all things (the very ground of all existence) and the source and giver of life – to include the new birth into Eternal Life (which is to know God).

We also learn that the Eternal and Divine Son of God became fully human while remaining fully God – Incarnation (1:14). He came (Incarnation) so that He could take all of the sin of all of humanity to the cross (Crucifixion). He died bearing the burden of our sin, so that He might destroy the curse under which we live, conquer death on our behalf and give us eternal life in relationship with God (Resurrection). He has ascended and has taken our humanity glorified with Him to the right hand of the Father where He is now seated and lives forever interceding for us (Exaltation). That is what is meant/implicit in 1:14-18 – in words like “we have seen His glory...full of grace and truth” or “from His fullness we all have received grace for grace” or “the Law came through Moses, grace and truth came through Jesus Christ” or “the only begotten God who is in the bosom of the Father.”

3. Finally – according to John 1:1-2 & 18 when we look at Jesus we see the glory of God (cf. 2 Corinthians 4:4, 6). In Jesus, the very heart of the Father is on display! He doesn't soften the holiness or righteousness of the Father (the Law Giver) nor does He balance judgment or wrath with love and grace!! All of Him is in His every breath and His every heartbeat is the very heartbeat of heaven!!

Why is all of this big “theology” important to consider in looking at Jesus' very brief interaction/discussion with these Jewish leaders who have delivered this woman caught in adultery to Him for judgment? It is important because – very simply put – all of who Jesus is and came to do – along with what it says to us about the Father and about who we are – is packed into every syllable of this short section of scripture – as well as into every syllable of the gospel.

***Everything in the life of Jesus takes place in the shadow of the Cross!! And that shadow is cast both backward and forward over all of history – corporate and personal. Therefore everything in your life and mine takes place in the shadow of the Cross!! Nothing can be rightly understood in meaning or implication apart from the clarity given by the Cross!!***

**Note:** The clear emphasis in this passage is not the woman caught in adultery, though that is very important - rather it is the hypocrisy of the Scribes and the Pharisees in their pretense of faithfulness to the Law. These Jewish religious leaders attempted to use this woman's adultery to cause Jesus to run afoul of the law and to diminish His image among the people. – to set His “truth and grace” against fidelity to Moses in a “no win” situation. This hypocrisy is due to spiritual blindness and the resulting and faulty application of Law in judgment or grace.

***The Context: Jesus is Teaching in the Temple Court – 7:53-8:2***

- This was a common practice among the “teachers” of the day.
- The events were set in a public teaching context. This lent itself well to addressing issues of Law and its application before a group of people/disciples.
- Once again Jesus attracted a large crowd because of His unique and authoritative teaching. His growing popularity was clearly a threat to the legalistic Jewish leaders who could not relate to the people in their aloof, cold and legalistic application of the Mosaic Law.

**Ironically**, those who were commissioned as stewards of God's holiness in the Law had no capacity for compassion or sympathy, while the Incarnate Son – the Law giver – the One whose very holiness was codified in the Law – came so that not only would He pay the price for our sin by bearing it in Himself to the cross – but He came among us as a man so that He could “feel with us” (“from the fullness of His grace we all have received and grace for grace” and “grace and truth came through Jesus Christ”).

***The Question That is not a Question: This Woman Caught in the Act of Adultery was Used by the Jewish Leaders to Place Jesus on Trial – 8:3-6a***

- They came to Jesus under the pretense of asking Him a question. The accusers (Jewish leaders) brought the adulterous woman to Jesus, stated the accusation and presented an unarguable case for adultery against her (notice that the offending man is not brought with her), and they cited the judgment of the Law of Moses to one caught in adultery. They were correct in their citation of the Law (cf. Leviticus 20:10; Deuteronomy 22:22, 23-24). It appears that this was either a betrothed woman caught in adultery, which required stoning OR a married woman for which the Law specified only death with no specific means of capital punishment prescribed – though the later distinction probably didn't exist in Jesus' day (In the Mishnah; *Sanhedrin* 7:4 – death by strangling – cf. Carson, page 335; “Pillar Bible;” Also Keener, 736-737).

- She was caught *in the act* of adultery. It was not simply a report to which some bore witness. She was caught in the act and it appears that her accusers were also those who caught her and served as the witnesses necessary to find one guilty of a capital offense like adultery and sentence them to death.

- However, the Scribes and the Pharisees were not actually putting the woman on trial for her adultery. They were using her adultery to place Jesus on trial. The Jewish leaders were not genuine in their questioning, as is clear from the text itself (cf. 8:6a). They were not seeking wisdom from a rabbi nor were they concerned with preserving purity or biblical justice within the culture. These Scribes and Pharisees sought to put Jesus on the horns of a dilemma and trap Him (“but they said this tempting/testing Him in order that they might have an accusation against Him”).

They wanted to test Him and put Him between the Mosaic Law and the love/grace/kindness for which He was known among the people. On the one hand if He dismissed the Law of Moses He would lose credibility and perhaps even be accused of opposing Moses. On the other hand if He agreed to her stoning then He would lose the reputation of kindness and grace among the common people which set Him apart from the self-serving, legalistic and heartless leadership which characterized the religious leaders of the day. In addition He could potentially be in deep trouble with Rome since it appears that in 1<sup>st</sup> century Palestine, under Roman rule – only the Roman Prefect could impose capital sentences (Carson, page 335).

### ***The Answer That is not an Answer: Jesus Responds to the Jews and Their Accusations/Questions of Application – 8:6b***

- Jesus’ initial response was to silently stoop down to write in the dirt. ***This seemed to make the Jews impatient and led them to push the question harder, almost demanding a response*** (cf. 8:7a). This served to reveal that the Scribes and Pharisees had an agenda which had nothing to do with the question of a sticky application of the Law.

- Jesus then stood up and in a single, succinct, statement, ***Jesus effectively put them on trial. Moreover He called them to bear witness against themselves.*** In one fell swoop He indicted them and dismissed their understanding and application of the Law in judgment. The bending and writing gave time to make public the disingenuous motivation of the Jews in asking their question. Jesus’ writing in the dirt, somehow, set the Jews up for His penetrating statement, “The one without sin (a substantival adjective) from among you, ***let him*** be first to throw the stone.”

**Note:** - (cf. 8:8-9) - These were clearly powerful and penetrating words. Jesus then, without another word, bent down again and resumed writing in the dirt. At this point the woman’s accusers, who had surrounded her, one by one, beginning with the oldest, left without a word. What a poignant moment. When Jesus stood again they were all gone. Not a single stone had been lifted, let alone thrown/cast at the guilty woman.

- (8:10-11) - Jesus then turned to the woman, who knew the guilt of her sin, and asked her, “Where are they? Has no-one condemned you?” Her response “No-one Lord” was followed by a simple and what must’ve have been sweet to her ears – “Neither do I condemn you. Go and from this time/from now on sin no more.” Imagine the relief in her soul and yet she knew so little of what really took place – No-one who either participated in these events or watched them really understood the depth of what had just taken place!! This was a moment – these events – which was/were only possible because of the cross of Christ. The Cross/the gospel cast its shadow back on this event!!

**“Grace and Truth” Came to That Moment Through Jesus Christ** – 8:10-11 – How can we understand all of this as having taken place in the shadow of the cross - see it all with the clarity provided by the lens which is the Cross/gospel?

- I want to remind you of something you may already know. This moment, and every single moment since Genesis 3, is made possible because of the Cross of Christ (cf. Genesis 3:15). It is by the gospel (Incarnation, Crucifixion, Resurrection, Exaltation) that this dangerously Holy and absolutely just God can be patient with sin – in anticipation of the atonement/redemption provided by Jesus at the cross (cf. Romans 3:19-25; 5:20-21). None of the participants in these events had the understanding and clarity provided by the cross – how could they (cf. John 1:14-18)?

- **The words of Jesus to the woman** – These words were not an offer of cheap or sloppy grace - “neither do I judge you.” Don’t miss the substantial kindness and grace in this succinct statement. *It was an offer of the grace He would purchase by incarnation and at the cross.* It was the grace of substitution and atoning sacrifice (cf. Matthew 9:1-8; 2 Corinthians 5:17-21). *It is easy for us to minimize the gravity of this moment by the tendency to consider the woman’s sin in general terms – adultery. However, if we are to understand the power of Jesus’ grace we must see it in specific terms. The eyes of God were on this woman and the man who was her partner in adultery, in the “darkness” of the private moments of their sin. Moreover, He saw into their hearts when lust was taking root and when it was indulged and grew into full scale sexual sin and betrayal. He knew the ruin in their souls and the ruin in their families and culture that came out of this sin...Jesus knew all of those details and He knew them all when He said “neither do I condemn you” He alone could say those words because He would take it all to the cross and bear it as His own!!!*

- The Jewish leadership represented the “graceless” application of the Law. This included the arrogance that presumed the position of “judge” which only God could occupy – indeed the position that the Lord Jesus alone – in the plan of God – could rightly occupy based the cross (cf. Matthew 9:1-6; John 3:16-17, 18-21, 35-36; also Romans 8:31-34). They did not understand the place of grace in the Law and so they could not apply it in humility (cf. Romans 1:18-3:25; 5:20). Jesus knew their hearts. He knew what went on in the deep dark recesses of thought and the moments where they acted beyond the “light of day” – perhaps this was a reference to the

fact that many from among them had been guilty of the very same sin – either in act or in the thoughts they indulged (cf. Carson page 336)

*The Law (standards of holiness) must be applied and it must be applied by imperfect people. However, there needs to be a sense of the dangerously holy nature of the Law which leads to a profound respect as it is applied to indict and “judge” – as it is “held” in application to judgment!! The dangerously holy nature of the Law is such that in its very application it can condemn those who seek to arrogantly, presumptuously and gracelessly apply it (cf. James 4:11-12; 5:19-20; Jude 22-23)!!*

**Application:** 1. Jesus said to the woman “Go and from now on sin no more.” Grace and forgiveness – both when offered or received – is purchased at the cross. Consequently, we must never receive or offer grace without a deep sense of the cost of grace. This woman was given her life because Jesus gave His in her place! If her husband or betrothed forgave her – it would have no strength – indeed it would be counterfeit grace – if it were not the grace purchased at the cross. We have no right to cheapen the cross by giving “grace” as though it were ours to give!!

2. We can never rightly apply standards of righteousness apart from the profound sense of humility born of the cross. We need to carry righteousness with the grace available only at the foot of the cross. Submit your heart to Him – “Let him who has no sin be the first stone.”