

Hello I am Jesus - Jesus the judge

John 7:53-8:11

We are in the middle of a series in John's gospel and if this is your first time here we are up to chapter 8. But first I want to catch you up, give you some context, and remind you as to what it is we are studying and why we are studying it.

John is one of four gospels. There are the gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke that were written before John's gospel. Matthew, Mark, and Luke were written about 30 years after Jesus' resurrection. Their primary goal was to give us an accurate synopsis of Jesus' life, ministry, and His actions. That is why we call them the Synoptic Gospels. They wanted us to have an accurate account for future generations so that way we wouldn't forget.

By the time John writes – John was probably just a teenager when he followed Jesus as a disciple, He'd watched Jesus go to a cross, he'd witnessed His resurrection, and he'd served Jesus faithfully as an apostle and as a pastor in the churches of Asia Minor. He was quite effective as a pastor, so much so that the Roman Empire persecuted him and they sent him off to the island of Patmos because they discovered that every time they killed an apostle the church multiplied. When they finally got John, they were like, "Don't kill him. We don't want the church to grow anymore. Just send him to the island of Patmos."

The whole point of all this is that John is in his late 80's, early 90's by the time he writes this gospel. He is an older man. He is experienced, he is mature. And here is why he writes. He says, "Matthew, Mark, and Luke gave you an accurate account of what Jesus said and did, and those fine lads did a great job but I want to give you something different. I want to tell you **why Jesus said what He said** and **why He did what He did**. ***I want to show you why that stuff matters.***"

John's thesis is John 20:31 where he says, "***These things have been written so that you might come to believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God, and that by believing in His name you may have life.***" That is the whole reason why John writes this.

Note that John doesn't say, "You just need to believe that Jesus is the Christ, and don't ask any questions." That is not what he does. What John does

through his stories and dialogues is help us see that, at times, we will have questions and, at times, there are barriers to belief and, at times, we do get stuck. John helps us navigate around those to come to a belief in Jesus Christ without watering anything down.

That is what we have seen over the last few chapters. They tackle some deep material. There are some heady things that have been brought up. Not only that, but we see this mounting hostility that is beginning to grow toward Jesus. Remember, the crowds loved Him at first. Remember when He is feeding the 5000, they loved Him. But then, when He starts giving them hard truth, many of them say, “Yeah – Nah! That is too hard to handle.”

So, many of them begin to walk away, even Peter thought about it when Jesus said to him at the end of chapter 6, “Peter what about you?” And Peter said, “Well it’s not working out the way I thought it was,” but then he says this, “but where else am I going to go? Where else am I going to go to get the words of eternal life?”

That is where every one of us has to get to as well, where we say, “Jesus, this is hard, the truth is not easy. Following Jesus is not just as simple as ‘come as you are. You are loved and accepted just as you are’. It is that, but it is also “I am a sinner in need of a Saviour.”

There is an offense to that, especially in our current culture, where right and wrong are not easily identified. But the hard, offensive truth says, “Brian, you are not okay. You are not ultimately good. You are deeply flawed, but yet there is a Saviour who has come to pay the price.” Now if you can work through some of the tough stuff of following Jesus, what ends up happening is that you find a faith that sticks. You find a commitment that sticks.

I read something recently from, shall we say, a more mature Pastor; He said, *“The older that I get and the longer that I am in ministry, I see that faithfulness is the goal. You don’t ever retire from faithfulness”*. The goal is not to shine bright in one moment or one decade of your life. The goal is to follow Jesus faithfully to the end of your life. So if I came to Jesus only for what He could give me, or if I came to Jesus only for what I thought I could get out of it, I will not go the distance.

Gay and I have been married for 34 years next week. While I wouldn’t want to change anything, it hasn’t always been easy.... for Gay. I was 20 and Gay was 21 when we got married. While I would like to think that I was really mature

for my age, we were just kids, and we were trying to grow up, together. We were trying to figure it out. A few years after we married we resigned from well paid jobs to go to Bible College, had 2 of our 3 kids while both studying, youth pastored for 18 years and spent 5 years of that living and working in one of the most difficult countries - Bangladesh.

Each of these things stretched us in different ways, put pressures on us, so we went through some valleys in our marriage. But I can tell you this, and those of you who have been married a lot longer than us can testify to this way more than I can. After 34 years of marriage we can look at each other now knowing we have a commitment that sticks. Not because it has all been great and rosy all the time, but because we have gone through some trials.

And the same thing is true with following Jesus and John wants to help get us there.

As we come to this passage in John 8:1-11 we are going to be introduced to this tension that I think all of us face in our lives when it comes to understanding the gospel; and that is tension between truth and grace.

Here is the thing. As Christians we tend to lean in one way or another. We can be all grace, but the gospel is not all grace. Or we can be all truth, but the gospel is not all truth. The gospel is both grace and truth. The challenge is to discover a way to deliver truth in an atmosphere of grace, love, and acceptance. That is incredibly difficult to do, if you don't have the Spirit of Christ living in you.

As I mentioned before, the idea is that Jesus receives you just as you are, warts and all. It doesn't matter what you believe, where you have been, or what is going on in your life right now. In His infinite love and mercy He receives you as you are, He forgives you and offers you grace - then He points you toward righteousness. You see our tendency as human beings is that we want to hide behind our sin, we want to normalize it, we want to say, "This is just the way that I am." And Jesus says, "No, I receive you as you are," and then He points us toward righteousness.

You could say 'church should be a place where it is okay to not be okay, but it is not okay to stay un-okay.'

You see, too much grace and we find ourselves condoning the bad behaviour of others, but too much truth and you find yourself condemning them. This

Jesus who we are getting to know is the perfect picture of compassion and justice and that is what we get in our passage.

So finally let's read together John 8:1-11.

8 *Jesus returned to the Mount of Olives, ²but early the next morning he was back again at the Temple. A crowd soon gathered, and he sat down and taught them. ³As he was speaking, the teachers of religious law and the Pharisees brought a woman who had been caught in the act of adultery. They put her in front of the crowd.*

⁴"Teacher," they said to Jesus, "this woman was caught in the act of adultery. ⁵The law of Moses says to stone her. What do you say?"

⁶They were trying to trap him into saying something they could use against him, but Jesus stooped down and wrote in the dust with his finger. ⁷They kept demanding an answer, so he stood up again and said, "All right, but let the one who has never sinned throw the first stone!"⁸Then he stooped down again and wrote in the dust.

⁹When the accusers heard this, they slipped away one by one, beginning with the oldest, until only Jesus was left in the middle of the crowd with the woman. ¹⁰Then Jesus stood up again and said to the woman, "Where are your accusers? Didn't even one of them condemn you?"

¹¹"No, Lord," she said.

And Jesus said, "Neither do I. Go and sin no more."

Now there are two things I want you to see about who Jesus is and the character of Jesus in this passage. Here he is put into the position of Judge, whether he liked it or not!

- I want you to see His wisdom, his cleverness, maybe even slyness.
- And I want you to see His forgiveness.

Firstly Jesus' wisdom.

Note what is going on here. This is not some church leaders coming to Jesus for his perspective on what they should do in a difficult moral dilemma, this was a trap that the scribes and the Pharisees had set for Jesus. Jesus isn't going

to be crucified until chapter 19 but already, here in chapter 8, they are planning and plotting for it. You could even say this was possibly the first, and failed, attempt to get Jesus crucified.

So picture the scene. It is early in the morning and Jesus is already up. The scribes and the Pharisees come to Jesus in a public place at the temple, with a woman who they say has been caught in the act of adultery. Had they walked in on her in the act, how did that happen, how did they get the job of adultery police? Anyway they grab her, they pull her into a public setting, the temple where Jesus is teaching. They thrust her in front of Jesus. Who knows what state of dress she was in, but I am sure she is embarrassed, demoralized, humiliated.

They put her in front of Jesus and they say, "***Jesus, the Law of Moses says.***"

Now the Law they are referring to is Leviticus 20 and Deuteronomy 22. The Leaders say, "*The Law of Moses says that she should be executed.*" Well that is partially true. They didn't get the whole thing right. The Law of Moses actually says if a man and a woman are caught in the act of adultery they should both be put to death. So the obvious question is, "Where's the bloke?" I don't think I need to go into the details but adultery is not a solo event.

So from the beginning we can see they are not as concerned about the Law as they think. They put this woman in front of Jesus and they say, "Well Moses says this. What do you say?"

Now actually this is quite a brilliant trap. You've got to hand it to them because no matter what Jesus says, it is going to be wrong. They planned carefully to put Him in a lose-lose situation. Here is what I mean.

They've placed the woman in front of Jesus;

- And if Jesus says to them, "Yes, she has violated the Law, go ahead and stone her," then He has immediately lost credibility in the eyes of the people as a gracious Messiah. For the last couple of chapters He has been saying "I am a friend of sinners. I've come not to judge you harshly.
- Not only that, but if Jesus would have given them the nod to stone this woman, the Pharisees would have arrested Jesus and taken Him to the Romans and said, "He just broke Roman law," because Roman law said that everybody deserves a fair trial.

So He would have lost credibility with the people and He would have been in trouble with Roman law.

- However if Jesus would have said, “No, no, no don’t stone her. She needs to be forgiven,” they would have said, “Some Messiah you are, you just broke Mosaic Law.”

It is a lose-lose situation. The leaders didn’t care about this woman at all. She is just a pawn in their trap.

Now there are additional problems with this in the sense that they are also ignoring other significant pieces of the Mosaic Law in order to try to convict this woman. When you read Leviticus 20 and Deuteronomy 22 they say, “If a man and a woman are caught in the act of adultery, they should be executed,” in today’s culture that sounds a bit harsh, doesn’t it? I’m thinking, “Good grief, they must have been executing people every single week.”

But here is the thing about this. The Sanhedrin knew that in the hands of the wrong people capital punishment would be abused. So they always set up these ‘guard rails’ to make sure that it was not abused. So according to the Mishnah, which was the commentary on Mosaic Law, they said,

“Okay if somebody is caught in adultery there has to be at least two eye witnesses who have seen the same thing.”

Now how difficult would it be for two eye witnesses to barge in on somebody committing adultery? It just seems a little unusual. And, the two eye witnesses would have to say the exact same thing about what they saw and if they didn’t the judge would throw it out.

There this old Jewish story where a Jewish woman broke Mosaic Law while sitting under a tree and she was taken to court and the witnesses who saw her break the Law could not agree on the size of the leaves of the tree she sat under. And so the judge acquitted her, just threw it out. That is how serious they took this because they didn’t want people to misuse or abuse capital punishment.

So back to our text - where are the two eye witnesses? Where is the man? It just doesn’t look right, and under roman rule she deserved a fair trial. There is no good reason to drag her out into the public square as she was. None of it makes any sense. They’ve just confronted Jesus with this difficult question and here is his cleverness, his wisdom.

Here is what Jesus does. He doesn't even say a word. He bends over and starts drawing in the dirt. Initially it would have just looked weird. And we don't exactly know what He is doing.

There is a lot of speculation.

- Some people think Jesus was actually writing out the Law of Moses.
- One guy reckons he was writing out the names of these Pharisees girlfriends!!!

So He is drawing whatever in the dirt and they push Him on it. "Jesus, what do you say?" And He stands up and He brushes the dust off His hands and in one devastating, brilliant sentence He dismantles their entire argument. And He says, *"He who is without sin, go ahead and throw the first stone. I need to get back to my drawing."* And one by one they begin to drop their rocks.

That statement right there is probably the most misunderstood and misinterpreted verse in the entire Bible. How many of you have ever heard someone say in defence of themselves "He who has not sinned, throw the first stone," or, "You can't judge me because you are not innocent either." It's often your teenage child!!!

But that is not what Jesus is saying. Jesus is saying to these scribes and Pharisees, "Guys I am not denying the Laws of Moses. I am just denying your right to be her judge and executioner because, ironically, you are trying to convict her of breaking the Law of Moses by breaking the Law of Moses."

This is brilliant because Jesus does not get into a debate about Mosaic Law. He does not disregard Roman law. He simply demonstrates that they are not fit to be her judges and executioners. Jesus doesn't deny that there shouldn't be any sort of punishment. What He does here is He defuses the situation so He can deal directly, and compassionately, with this woman.

It is incredibly wise, very clever.

The next thing is the forgiveness that Jesus offers.

The irony of this whole story is that

- the leaders wanted to condemn her, but they couldn't.
- Jesus could have condemned her, but He didn't.

What He did was He noted her sin and then gave her something that the Law couldn't give her. He gave her forgiveness.

But it didn't stop there. Jesus says, "I don't condemn you," and then He gives her a practical statement. He says, "Go and sin no more."

The problem with this story is we never find out her response to Jesus. This is very frustrating. It would be way more complete if she goes, "*I believe you are Jesus Christ, the Son of the living God. I'm going to go get baptized right now.*" But it doesn't say that. Her belief could be implied by her calling Him Lord. That is possibly an indication of where her heart was.

But actually at this point of the story her response is no longer the one that is in question, if it was important, it would have been included in the records. The response that is important is yours and mine.

If we just read this passage for information, if we are just observing what is going on here, it will not transform us. At some point we have to read ourselves into the story and we have to stand where this woman stands, or maybe where the leaders stand. We have to stand before Jesus and realize none of us are innocent. You want to know the only difference between this woman in the passage and you and me and everyone else in this room? The only difference? She got caught.

None of our hands are clean. None of us have pure motives. We are all guilty. The Scribes and the Pharisees felt this, eventually.

This is the gospel in a nutshell. I want you to know that the gospel is not just the forgiveness of sins or that we are loved by God. But it is also a call to a new way of life that overcomes the power of sin. *Go and sin no more.*

Now we are getting to the essence of Christianity. The gospel says, "You are guilty but not condemned." In Romans it says, "*Therefore there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.*"

We don't know how the last part of this story panned out, but as I use my imagination I think Jesus would have been smiling. I think He would have lifted her face up, because I am pretty sure she was still looking at the ground in shame. Maybe He grabbed something and covered up her half naked body. But He looks at her and He says, "I don't condemn you."

Now if any of the Scribes and Pharisees had hung around long enough to ask Jesus to explain himself, he might have said;

- sure condemnation was deserved but I'll be condemned for her.
- sure a stone should have been thrown today, and it will be thrown, but it is going to hit me.
- sure a spear should have been thrust, but it is not going to hit any of you. It will be thrust into my side.

Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world.”

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