

The Story – Caught In A Trap

We continue our year long series looking at the unfolding story of Redemption. This morning I want to look at his life changing encounter with a woman who was caught in a trap. Turn to **John 8:1-11** As we examine this passage you will likely find a note in your bible stating the earliest manuscripts do not include this particular passage. Scholars and scribes for 2,000 years have carefully protected the translation of the Scripture. No other book in the world has been studied and examined like the bible. There are over 5,800 ancient manuscripts of the New Testament. Keep in mind that until 1516 all of these manuscripts were hand written. By comparing these manuscripts scholars are able to determine what is accurate and what might have been scribal error, etc. If you only had two copies and there were multiple differences in the two, you couldn't say with certainty which copy was accurate. But when you have 5,800 different manuscripts and you compare them and you find consistency throughout, you know you have accuracy. While there are some slight variances, there is no question or variance regarding the essential facts of Christian history, doctrine, faith and practice in the Scripture. We can say reliably that what we have is in fact the infallible word of God. But what about this passage? It wasn't found in many of the oldest manuscripts. The story itself was known by some of the early writers of the first three or four centuries of Christianity. The conclusion was this passage records an actual event in the life of Jesus. It wasn't originally included in the gospel of John but it came from reliable sources. The story and the response of Jesus is worthy of our study.

Let's get a quick overview. At dawn Jesus appears in the temple courts. Typical of a rabbi, Jesus sits down to teach and the people gather around him. As he is teaching a group of Scribes (teachers of the law) and Pharisees bring a woman who they say was caught in the very act of adultery. To keep husbands from just accusing their wives of adultery, the law required there be at least two witnesses who actually saw the couple in a compromising situation. It almost required that a trap be set to catch them in the act. The question here is, where is the man? Why did they bring only the woman to Jesus with the intent of stoning only her?

They point out the Law of Moses commands the stoning of adulterers and they want to know what Jesus has to say about it. There was no reason for them to bring this woman to Jesus. He had nothing to do with settling disputes or matters of the law, that's what the Scribes did, that's what the Sanhedrin did and the chief priest, but the writer tells us they were only using this as a means to trap Jesus. If Jesus upheld the Mosaic law and condemned the woman to death,

they could accuse him of being in violation of Roman law. Jews were not allowed to carry out capital punishment. If he didn't uphold the law of Moses, they would accuse him of condoning adultery and thereby violating the Law of Moses. **“They were using this question as a trap in order to have a basis for accusing him.”** Jesus' response was to bend down and write something on the ground. We have no idea what he wrote, but when they kept on questioning him he finally said, **“If any one of you is without sin, let him be the first to throw a stone at her.”** One by one, from the eldest to the youngest, they walked away until finally Jesus and the woman were left standing alone. Jesus then spoke those words we all long to hear, **“Then neither do I condemn you. Go now and leave your life of sin.”** What a great story of grace.

Let's look at the people in this encounter with Jesus. Consider first **The woman caught in a trap.** We know nothing about her other than she is accused of adultery. That means she was either married or engaged to be married. In both instances, the law of Moses, in Deuteronomy 22, called for both the woman and the man to be stoned to death. According to one source, (The NIV Application Commentary) the oral law in Jesus' day, the Mishnah, specified that an unfaithful fiancé should be stoned but an unfaithful wife was to be strangled. On that basis we could assume this was a young woman engaged to be married. If that's true perhaps she was young and naïve and deceived by this man. The fact they brought only the woman and not the man makes me think he was in on the trap. She was used by this man and by the Scribes and Pharisees who set the whole thing up to trap Jesus. She might have been looking for love, affection, but what she found was deception and betrayal.

She was caught in a trap but the truth is she was unfaithful and searching for something outside of God's design and order for relationships and marriage. God intended that sexual relationships were to be within the safe boundaries of a marriage relationship, a relationship between one man and one woman for a lifetime. That was and is God's design and order. She was looking outside of God's design. That's why we call it sin and that's why she's in trouble.

Listen, sin always involves deception. Sin presents itself as one thing but when you grasp it you find it to be something entirely different. Jesus called Satan a liar and the father of lies. He is a deceiver, masquerading as something other than he is. Pastor Brian uses the idea of a fishing lure to a fish when he talks about sin. It looks like one thing to the fish, like lunch, but there is a hook in that lure. When he bites he discovers it's not what he thought it was.

That's what happens to this woman in the story. She thought she was finding love, when it was all deception. A trap. There was a hook in that lure. This man didn't love her, he only used her. Sin will always use you and deceive and destroy. Now she is forced to stand in shame before a crowd of people and before Jesus. The woman caught in adultery, but she wasn't the only sinner in the crowd. Consider:

The man that got away with his sin. He was as guilty as the woman, perhaps even more so if he had agreed to seduce this woman simply as part of an attempt to trap Jesus. What a low-down, despicable act. It's possible he slipped away from the Pharisees and they decided to settle for accusing the woman, but it seems unlikely to me. I think they let him get away because he agreed to participate. He thought he got away with his sin, but make sure you understand, this guy only thinks he has gotten away with something. The bible says, "be sure your sins will find you out."(Numbers 32:23) You never get away with sin. The wages of sin is death. You will always suffer the consequences sooner or later.

Consider the accusers that brought the woman to Jesus: **The Pharisees and Scribes, caught in their own trap.** As we've stated, they used this woman in order to trap Jesus. There was no limit to how low they would go to try to stop Jesus. Their hypocrisy is noted as they misquoted the Law. "The law commands us to stone such women." We've already explained, the law stated they were to stone both the man and woman caught in adultery. The fact they were willing to have this woman executed simply to meet their own needs is appalling.

I try to remember that the Pharisees were ardent upholders of the Law of Moses. They weren't all hypocrites. They were often trying their best to defend the Law of God, but in this case they weren't trying to uphold or defend righteousness. The passage in Deuteronomy 22 that speaks about adultery says they were to purge the evil from Israel by punishing adultery, but these accusers weren't trying to purge evil, they were participating in evil! When Jesus said "**If any one of you is without sin, let him be the first to throw a stone at her**" He was exposing their hypocrisy, their sin. They realized they had been caught in their own trap. They were violating their own interpretation of the Law of Moses. They knew he knew their hearts and that he saw through their trap. Their cruelty and hypocrisy was exposed.

There was only one person present who really cared about this woman and about the law of God. One by one the accusers left and Jesus asked her the question, "Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?" Where did all the others go? The man who saw you as a

sexual object, someone to be used as a means to pleasure but nothing more. Where did he go? Where did the Pharisees go? The ones who saw you as an object, a thing to be used, a means to an end. Woman, where are they? Is there no one left to condemn you? “No one sir,” she said. **“Then neither do I condemn you” Jesus declared. “Go now and leave your life of sin.”** Jesus cared enough about her to forgive her, to release her from the Pharisees condemnation, but to also direct her and point her in a new path. “Go and leave your life of sin,” he said.

What was Jesus saying to her? Let me tell you what he wasn't saying to her. **Jesus wasn't saying “Your sins don't matter. Committing adultery is no big deal.”** It wasn't okay. Sin matters. Let me tell you how much. It was because of our sin that Jesus died upon the cross as the sinless sacrifice and substitute for our sins. Sin is costly. Sin separates us from God. The bible says the soul that sins must die. Sin matters. God doesn't wink at sin nor does he excuse our sin.

Jesus wasn't saying “You should never judge or condemn sin.” When he said “if anyone is without sin, let him be the first to throw a stone,” he wasn't saying, “Who are you to call something a sin? You've all sinned so you can't ever accuse another person of being a sinner.” The bible makes it plain this woman was guilty of sin. She broke the commandment of God. We identify and judge sin based upon the clear teaching of the word of God. We can call sin, sin. We can identify sin, but we must also recognize our own sinfulness in the process. We must acknowledge our need for God's mercy and forgiveness.

Jesus wasn't minimizing or excusing her sin. Then what was he saying? **I believe what he was saying was he would not condemn her because she had been brought to Jesus and anyone who comes to Jesus in repentance can experience his forgiveness and grace.** Jesus knew he was about to make her forgiveness possible by suffering in her place and bearing her sins and the sins of the whole world in his own body upon the cross. John Piper wrote concerning this passage, **“When they are all gone, Jesus ends the story saying to the woman, ‘Neither do I condemn you; go and from now on sin no more.’ Not: ‘Neither do I condemn you, so it doesn't matter if you commit adultery. But: I am reestablishing righteousness in your life – and for the Pharisees, if they will have it – on the basis of an experience of grace. Don't commit adultery any more. Not mainly because you fear stoning, but because you have met God, and have been rescued by his grace – saved by grace!’”...John Piper**

Jesus says to this woman, as he did to the woman two weeks ago at Jacob's well in Samaria, "believe upon me and experience forgiveness." The bible says in Romans 8:1, "there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus." Believe and be free from condemnation and sin. Notice to both of these ladies there is that instruction to leave their sin and sinful lifestyle. I said it two weeks ago in the message and I say it again today, Jesus didn't come to give his life to redeem us just to leave us as he found us. He has come to give us forgiveness, hope and a brand new life. By his grace, this woman and the woman at the well can live a new life in Christ, free from condemnation and sin. So can you!

Hear the word of the Lord this morning: **By his grace, leave your life of sin!** Those chronic sinful choices are defeating and destroying you. You wonder why you keep falling into the pit? You keep walking around it. He didn't redeem you so you could keep falling back into a life of sin. He has come by his grace to save you and give you a new, overcoming life.

We are going to wrap this up but let me ask: Can you see yourself in this story? Perhaps you see yourself in the man who got away. You haven't been caught. Yet. You feel you've gotten away with your sin. No one knows or the ones that know have given you a pass. They've overlooked your sin and your mistakes and now you feel you can always get by. You've learned how to lie and deny your sin. Let me warn you, sin has a way of eating away at your life, your soul. You aren't really escaping anything.

We say this guy got away with his sin. Isn't that sad? Do you hear what I'm saying? He got away with his sin – that means he is still carrying the burden of it and the guilt of it as he runs from the scene. He is still bearing the weight and shame of his sin. But the woman who got caught and brought to Jesus, she left her sin there in the dirt at Jesus' feet. Don't try to get away with your sin, bring it to Jesus and find forgiveness!

Perhaps we see ourselves in the Pharisees and the Scribes. They were eager to expose the sins of others. They were eager to expose Jesus as a false prophet but they were blind to their own sins and to the truth that was staring them in the face.

We are all pretty good at pointing out the sins of others. We Evangelical and Pentecostal folks are especially good at picking and choosing certain sins. We demonize some people and their sins while we overlook and excuse others. Like the Pharisees in our story who were quick to point out the woman and her sexual sin but ignored the sin of the man, it appears we are sometimes quick to condemn certain sexual sins and excuse others. We condemn homosexuality

and same sex marriage in the strongest terms possible but when our son moves in with his girlfriend, we say, “well you know how the kids are today.” Yes, I do know, but the point is, sin is sin. We want to pick and choose certain ones to demonize but we don’t want to talk about pride, arrogance, lying, gossiping, coveting, disrespecting our parents, divorce, greed, slander, anger, filthy language, racism, bitterness, refusing to forgive others. Sin is sin folks.

The reality is, the Pharisees needed forgiveness as much as the woman they brought to Jesus, just not for the same thing. Then again, Jesus said if you have lust in your heart, it is the same as committing adultery. Perhaps they were guilty of the same sin. Most of us can identify with the Pharisees. We are capable of pointing out the sins of others but find it difficult to identify our own. The truth is, we have all sinned and all need his forgiveness and his grace.

Finally there is the woman. Perhaps you identify with her. Maybe she was just tired of living alone, looking for love, she didn’t want to marry the man her parents arranged for her to marry. She gave into her own desire, her loneliness. We can try to make excuses, but the truth is, this woman sinned. Jesus didn’t justify her sinfulness. He didn’t excuse her sin. He forgave her sin because he alone had the power and authority to do that. For her, for the Pharisees, for the man who got away with his sin, for all of us, he has the power to forgive us of our sins.

Do you need to hear him say those words to you today? If you believe that Jesus died on the cross for you and for your sins and if you will call upon him and ask him to forgive you and cleanse you from your sin, he will do it. Then you will hear him say, **“Neither do I condemn you. Go now and leave your life of sin.”**

Forgiveness is available if you come to Jesus in faith. The man caught in adultery and the Scribes and Pharisees left without hearing his words of forgiveness and grace. Only the woman received pardon that day, and not just forgiveness and pardon but grace to enable her to live in freedom, to live a holy life pleasing to God. Let me quote John Piper once again. “The story points us to the message of the whole New Testament: We are called to be holy as God is holy. God hates sin. But pursuing holiness without a profound experience of grace in our own lives produces hypocrisy and doctrinaire cruelty. Jesus came into the world to provide that grace through his cross, and to establish holiness, righteousness and justice on the foundation of our experience of his grace. So come to him for grace and set your face to sin no more.” **Leave your life of sin and live in the forgiveness and obedience of His grace!**