

The Great Sayings in the Gospels
Message 88
Neither Do I Condemn Thee

John 8:1-11

- 1 Jesus went unto the mount of Olives.
- 2 And early in the morning he came again into the temple, and all the people came unto him; and he sat down, and taught them.
- 3 And the scribes and Pharisees brought unto him a woman taken in adultery; and when they had set her in the midst,
- 4 They say unto him, Master, this woman was taken in adultery, in the very act.
- 5 Now Moses in the law commanded us, that such should be stoned: but what sayest thou?
- 6 This they said, tempting him, that they might have to accuse him. But Jesus stooped down, and with his finger wrote on the ground, as though he heard them not.
- 7 So when they continued asking him, he lifted up himself, and said unto them, He that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone at her.
- 8 And again he stooped down, and wrote on the ground.
- 9 And they which heard it, being convicted by their own conscience, went out one by one, beginning at the eldest, even unto the last: and Jesus was left alone, and the woman standing in the midst.
- 10 When Jesus had lifted up himself, and saw none but the woman, he said unto her, Woman, where are those thine accusers? hath no man condemned thee?
- 11 She said, No man, Lord. And Jesus said unto her, Neither do I condemn thee: go, and sin no more. KJV

Introduction:

As we noted in the last message, Jesus has left Galilee after about a two-year ministry there. His return to Judea and Jerusalem begins the final phase of His ministry which will end with His crucifixion.

He has come at the Feast of Tabernacles which was held near harvest time in Sept./Oct. and which served two functions. It was a Thanksgiving feast with thanks given to God for His provision of crops and food for the year. And, it was a memorial to the time that Israel spent living in tents in the wilderness as they came out of Egypt to the Land of Promise. One of the unique elements of this feast was that all of Israel was required to leave their permanent homes and build temporary shelters or 'booths' in which they lived for the week of the Feast.

It was mandatory that the men of Israel attend this feast and Jesus had come, going through Samaria, in secret at first. He did not make His appearance known until the middle of the week when He entered the Temple and began to teach. It was here that He made the famous declaration, "In the last day, that great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried, saying, If any man thirst, let him come unto me, and drink. He that believeth on me, as the scripture hath said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water." John 7:37-38 KJV If you will recall, this was the text of our message last week.

You should know that this text before us today is a controversial text. Almost all of the new translations set it apart in some fashion with a note that it does not appear in the oldest manuscripts of the Greek language. There are scholars on all sides of the issue but I need to address this issue with you before we move on.

Some of our very earliest Christian sources, Ambrose (374) and Augustine (400) Also the Spanish Father Pacian (c. 370), noted the text and commented on it. It appears that there were some in the early church who really struggled with this passage because it seemed to them that Jesus was letting an adulteress off to easily, not calling her to account for her sins. Some scholars even conjecture that some of the early scribes left the text out fearing that people would take it somehow as a justification for immoral behavior.

“The facts of history indicate that during the early Christian centuries throughout the Church adultery was commonly regarded as such a serious sin that it could be forgiven, if at all, only after severe penance. For example, Cyprian (c. 250) says that certain bishops who preceded him in the province of North Africa "thought that reconciliation ought not to be given to adulterers and allowed to conjugal infidelity no place at all for repentance." (42) Hence offence was taken at the story of the adulterous woman brought to Christ, because she seemed to have received pardon too easily.” Edward F. Hills, taken from chapter 6 of his book, **The King James Version Defended, 4th edition (Des Moines: Christian Research Press, 1984), pp. 150-159.**

We receive this passage just as it appears, just in the place that it appears and believe that it actually happened as described and was recorded by John. Notice that if someone were “making this up” he certainly included some really small detail concerning the event. It happened in Jerusalem, somewhere, no doubt, near the temple, and in exactly this way.

Now, let us look at the story itself and glean something precious from it.

- 3 And the scribes and Pharisees brought unto him a woman taken in adultery; and when they had set her in the midst,**
4 They say unto him, Master, this woman was taken in adultery, in the very act.

I have always thought of this text as if these men had just the night before, or just that morning, taken the woman in the act of adultery. But, as we shall discuss, it may have not been that way. This event may have occurred some time before. In thinking about it, it doesn't seem to me that it was a fresh incident and I will explain what I mean later.

One of the questions that has been asked by some is, “where is the man?” Adultery is certainly not a thing that a person commits all by themselves and, if she was literally taken in the act, then someone was with her.

Lev 20:10

- 10 And the man that committeth adultery with another man's wife, even he that committeth adultery with his neighbour's wife, the adulterer and the adulteress shall surely be put to death. KJV

They referenced the Law of Moses.

5 Now Moses in the law commanded us, that such should be stoned: but what sayest thou?

They wanted to pit Jesus against Moses and then condemn Him as a heretic and destroy His reputation among the people.

But, something is amiss here. Something does not “smell” right. Jesus, of course, knowing the hearts and thoughts of these men, did not ‘bite’ on their little scheme. Instead, He did something that has stirred the curiosity of bible students for 2000 years.

6 This they said, tempting him, that they might have to accuse him. But Jesus stooped down, and with his finger wrote on the ground, as though he heard them not.

What was it that He wrote? Was it Lev. 20:10? Or, was it something else? At first the men did not seem to notice what He was doing and continued to question Him.

7 So when they continued asking him, he lifted up himself, and said unto them, He that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone at her.

8 And again he stooped down, and wrote on the ground.

He did not disagree with the Law of Moses. After all, He was the One Who had given Moses the Law. He did not defend the woman or in any way excuse her sin. He did not deny that she was guilty. But something He wrote on the ground caused the men, these highly religious and hypocritical men, to feel extreme embarrassment and guilt. Now, what could that possibly have been? I doubt that merely quoting Lev. 20:10 would have done that without something else to make the connection.

Now, I want you to think for just a moment. Here is a culture in which women are not generally treated very well, a culture in which there are elites and there are the common people. By the way, the common people are despised by the Pharisees.

In the previous chapter, the Jewish council had sent officers to arrest Jesus, but they did not.

John 7:46-49

46 The officers answered, Never man spake like this man.

47 Then answered them the Pharisees, Are ye also deceived?

48 Have any of the rulers or of the Pharisees believed on him?

49 But **this people who knoweth not the law are cursed.** KJV

Now think about a group of elitist hypocrites who have a woman’s life in their very hands. They can publicly accuse her of adultery, bear witness to taking her in the act, and have her stoned to death. But they haven’t. They have held the matter as something to use. And how do you presume that they have used it? One does not need to think very hard to realize that this

woman was caught in a spot and subject to being abused by the very people who credited themselves with believing and enforcing the Law of Moses.

By the way, some of these Jews were extremely perverted. They had a whole list of “activities” that would fall under the heading of “immoral” to us that they considered by their technicalities *not* to be either adultery or fornication. I will leave the matter at that rather than offend sensibilities or needlessly expose the innocent to corruption. No doubt this is the reason that Paul often ended his lists of ungodly behavior with “and such like.”

To my mind, there is something specific to this event and to these mens’ treatment of this woman that Jesus wrote on the ground. He could not bring an open accusation against them under Moses’ law because He lacked the “two or three witnesses” that Moses’ Law required. So, He wrote on the ground enough of the details that they knew that He knew what they had been doing and how they had been treating this woman. They decided to leave rather than suffer any public shame or have their behavior called into question. He nailed them, which is what He always did with hypocrites.

9 And they which heard it, being convicted by their own conscience, went out one by one, beginning at the eldest, even unto the last: and Jesus was left alone, and the woman standing in the midst.

The next part of the story is that which troubled some of the early Christians, but it should not have if they had only thought about it.

10 When Jesus had lifted up himself, and saw none but the woman, he said unto her, Woman, where are those thine accusers? hath no man condemned thee?

Apparently, He had remained stooped down, continuing to write until every one of the accusers had left in shame. His questions point to the fact that there is no longer the “two or three witnesses” required by the Law to condemn her to death. There is no one to testify against her.

Now, understand, this in no way mitigates her guilt. Nor did Jesus say that the Law was incorrect for sentencing the adulterer to death. He simply asked if the terms of the Law could be enforced now, and, of course, they could not.

Now, carefully think with me about the final exchange here.

11 She said, No man, Lord. And Jesus said unto her, Neither do I condemn thee: go, and sin no more.

The Eternal Law of God has passed sentence upon every sinner and condemned them both for Adam’s rebellion as well as their own sin. “The soul that sinneth, it shall die,” God has said.

Jesus is on earth for the very reason that they only way for God to have a people to Himself was for Jesus to pay the price of their sins, to bear them in His body, on the cross.

And, the only way for a human being to participate in that Work of Christ is to repent of his sins and believe on Jesus, resting all his hope in the Finished Work of the Savior.

There is only one possibility here. At some point since the original sin for which the woman was taken in the first place she has heard the teachings of Christ, she has repented of her sins and she has believed on Him with all her heart. Her words, “No man, Lord” must be taken as a statement of her faith in Him much like the seemingly small words of the thief on the cross are taken as proof of his faith.

That being said, let us look at the words of Jesus, “Neither do I condemn thee.” Jesus did not say that He did not condemn the sin because every one of His spokesmen have always condemned the sin of adultery and on His authority.

He said, the He did not condemn her. And that brings us to an interesting application of the lesson in this text, guilt and condemnation.

Paul stated a principle in Rom. 8 that is a challenge for believers to embrace.

Rom 8:1

1 There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit. KJV

As I previously said, the only way that this woman was not condemned by Jesus was that she was “in Christ Jesus” and now did not live “after the flesh, but after the Spirit.” In other words, she had been born again, regenerated, saved.

But there is an interesting interplay on this subject in the story. As the story began, it seemed that the woman was the “condemned” one but as the story unfolded, the accusers became “condemned” by their own consciences and the woman ultimately was declared “uncondemned.”

There are two elements to this condemnation and both of them are referenced in the text. One the one hand, the person who has broken the Law of God and not repented of that is condemned by God and by His Law. In addition to that, if they have any sense of right and wrong about them, they are also condemned by their own conscience. They know that they have done wrong and that they stand under God’s judgment. Condemnation as we are seeing it in the story of the woman taken in adultery is both a legal thing and a felt thing.

Jesus not only desired for the woman to be forgiven, He wanted her to *know* that she was forgiven, to feel it in her soul, to walk away from that encounter with the certain knowledge that she had been cleansed from the guilt of her sin.

And why is that? It is because the only way that a person can live a healthy, thriving, spiritual life is to have the internal certainty that he/she is not condemned by God, that all is forgiven, that he/she has really been made clean.

Why is that a problem? The human conscience is a really good mechanism. It works to register sin upon the soul of a human being by assigning a certain weight of guilt for each crime recorded. As a person moves through life, the assigned 'weight' grows larger and larger and it influences the person to deal with it in some way.

But humans are very inventive. They construct many mechanisms to deal with guilt, most of them not very healthy. Some try to bury their guilt by filling their lives with activity: work, entertainment, chemical stimulation, the pursuit of relationships, etc., etc. Others try spiritual activity to rid themselves of guilt and pursue all kinds of spiritual programs, religions, exercises, etc.

But here is the reality. God is the One Who programmed the human conscience. He made it and designed it and sustains its function in the human soul. It is designed to teach man that he is a sinner and bring him, humbled, broken and repentant to God.

Rom 2:1-3

- 1 Therefore thou art inexcusable, O man, whosoever thou art that judgest: for wherein thou judgest another, thou condemnest thyself; for thou that judgest doest the same things.
- 2 But we are sure that the judgment of God is according to truth against them which commit such things.
- 3 And thinkest thou this, O man, that judgest them which do such things, and doest the same, that thou shalt escape the judgment of God? KJV

Here, Paul considered the conscience of the lost man. How do we know that he knows right from wrong? He "condemns" those who do wrong against himself. Therefore, he knows that certain things are wrong.

The Jews were especially guilty because they had so much information. Paul used the same principle to show that they knew what sin was.

Rom 2:17-22

- 17 Behold, thou art called a Jew, and retest in the law, and makest thy boast of God,
- 18 And knowest his will, and approvest the things that are more excellent, being instructed out of the law;
- 19 And art confident that thou thyself art a guide of the blind, a light of them which are in darkness,
- 20 An instructor of the foolish, a teacher of babes, which hast the form of knowledge and of the truth in the law.
- 21 Thou therefore which teachest another, teachest thou not thyself? thou that preachest a man should not steal, dost thou steal?
- 22 Thou that sayest a man should not commit adultery, dost thou commit adultery? thou that abhorrest idols, dost thou commit sacrilege? KJV

This was the way that Paul built his case that “all have sinned and come short of the glory of God.” And, he built the case that man knows that he is a sinner.

In order for a person to be free from sin, he must be free from its’ legal penalty **AND** from the ingrained condemnation coming from the memory of his sins, his conscience.

It is the latter of the two issues that the woman would need to get past in order to resume life and live it without being forever crippled by her sense of guilt. ***Christ has forgiven her! He refuses to condemn her! Even though she deserves to be condemned!***

Here is the point. There are many Christians who are struggling to come to terms with their commitments to Christ but are being weighted down by their conscience, their sense of their own sinfulness, by a failure to comprehend just how profoundly Jesus Christ has dealt with their sins.

And, while every Christian should know and always remember that they are nothing apart from Christ but a wretched sinner, they must embrace the reality that they are in Christ and are not any more a wretched sinner but a forgiven, cleansed, whole, and restored person. Somehow the glory of the Work of Christ on the Cross must become so profound to them that they can value it the same way that God values it, as the absolute, total, complete and eternal purging away from them of ***all condemnation.***

John 5:24

24 Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that heareth my word, and believeth on him that sent me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation; but is passed from death unto life. KJV

If you are in Christ, let me be very clear, if you are in Jesus Christ, you are not condemned, nor shall you ever be. It is not possible for any guilt to be attached to you because it was all born by Jesus Christ in His body on the Cross.

There is a page in a book in heaven (so to speak) which once contained the record of all of your sins. That page is now blank and there is no pen in heaven or earth that can write anything to it. Your conscience may condemn you and Satan will surely accuse you but the Savior had made a declaration, ***“Neither do I condemn thee, go and sin no more.”***

As that poor woman walked away from Jesus there in Jerusalem, a weight was lifted from her that had been with her all of her life and had gotten heavier as she went along. But now she was free! Free from her accusers, free from her sins and free from her internal condemnation of herself.

Jesus made an interesting comment on that very topic just a short time later.

John 8:31-36

31 Then said Jesus to those Jews which believed on him, If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed;

32 And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.

- 33 They answered him, We be Abraham's seed, and were never in bondage to any man: how sayest thou, Ye shall be made free?
- 34 Jesus answered them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Whosoever committeth sin is the servant of sin.
- 35 And the servant abideth not in the house for ever: but the Son abideth ever.
- 36 If the Son therefore shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed. KJV

Jesus had set her free from being the servant of sin. He had set her free from the condemnation of sin. He had set her free from the penalty of sin. He had set her free from the power of sin.

Now He wanted her to live as a free woman. And, in the same way, He would have you live free. Free from condemnation and guilt. Free from weakness and powerlessness. Free from the accusations of Satan and your conscience. ***Free! Free Indeed!***

Are you? Do you desire to be? Take it upon yourself to learn exactly what He did for you on the Cross and you can walk free.

So who are your accusers?

Your memories? Jesus says, “remember this”

Rev 1:4-5

- 4 John to the seven churches which are in Asia: Grace be unto you, and peace, from him which is, and which was, and which is to come; and from the seven Spirits which are before his throne;
- 5 And from Jesus Christ, who is the faithful witness, and the first begotten of the dead, and the prince of the kings of the earth. ***Unto him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood,*** KJV

“I washed your sins away,” He says. “Yes they really happened and yes, you really did that, but I have washed you and washed them away. Carry this in your memory.”

Your feelings? Feel this.

1 John 3:20

- 20 For if our heart condemn us, ***God is greater than our heart, and knoweth all things.*** KJV

If you ***feel*** about your sins what God ***feels*** about them, do you know what you ***feel***? Nothing at all. They do not exist so far as any condemnation is concerned. Believe God and keep believing Him until your ***feelings FEEL*** what is true. Your sins are forgiven.

You conscience? Let your conscience chew on this.

Heb 10:22-23

- 22 Let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, ***having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience,*** and our bodies washed with pure water.

23 Let us hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering; (for he is faithful that promised;) KJV

Other people? Hear the words of your Savior.

“He that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone at her.” If you know any perfect people, then maybe they might have something to say about your sin. But, do you know what a perfect soul would say? “Since God has forgiven you, I forgive you as well. If He is not going to remember your sins against you then neither am I, except as I may need to help you, in love, toward repentance.”

The Devil?

Since when did you start listening to him? Listen to what Jesus said to some people concerning the evil one.

John 8:44

44 Ye are of your father the devil, and the lusts of your father ye will do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and abode not in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaketh a lie, he speaketh of his own: for he is a liar, and the father of it. KJV

So, your accusers are gone. They have left one by one. Now it is only you and Jesus. You must listen to the Lord Himself. What He said to this poor woman, He says to every child whom He receives, **“Neither do I condemn thee: go, and sin no more.”**