

Go and Sin no More

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READ - John 8:3-11

John 8:11 She said, No man, Lord. And Jesus said unto her, Neither do I condemn thee: go, and sin no more.

THEME - Mercy triumphs over judgement (cf. James 2:13)

Introduction

Michael Card has written a song about this verse. He called it "Scribbling in the Sand." A line from that song says, "It was silence, it was music, it was art it was absurd. He stooped and shouted volumes without saying a single word." I like that last part. Jesus didn't verbalize much in this passage, but He taught us a world of truth as He stooped down and wrote on the ground.

Our scripture text paints a very interesting picture. I would like you to imagine the scene. Jesus was teaching in the temple... (DESCRIBE THE SCENE AND THE EVENTS - PERHAPS BRINGING IT FORWARD TO OUR TIME, AS IF SOMEONE HAD BURST INTO THE ROOM THIS MORNING DURING THIS SERVICE.)

Now several questions naturally come to mind when we read this passage. (At least to my mind.)

QUESTION 1 - This woman was taken in adultery - "*in the very act*" (vs. 4). How is this possible? Adultery is not a spectator sport, so how did anybody catch this woman in the act?

(PARENTHESIS - I do not think adultery is the issue here. Any sin would have sufficed and the lesson for us today would be the same. We differentiate between sins, God does not. Sin is sin.)

ANSWERS - Perhaps her partner was in on the ruse - she was entrapped by one of the Scribes / Pharisees, who used the opportunity to try and entrap Christ. Which brings up another question.

QUESTION 2 - Where was the man? According to the law, which these were demanding Christ fulfil to the letter, both the man and the woman were to be killed, if found guilty of adultery? Where was the man?

ANSWERS - Unknown, but it seems to add weight to the entrapment theory doesn't it? It also shows that these men were not interested in the law, really, or they would not have only tried to enforce a portion of it.

QUESTION 3 - If they were not interested in the law, then what was their purpose?

ANSWERS - The purpose of the scribes and pharisees was not to condemn the woman. I submit they did not care about the woman. They simply wanted to discredit Jesus by tricking Him into a contradiction.(cf. vs. 6)

QUESTION 4 - What did Jesus write upon the ground?

ANSWERS -

1. Maybe he wrote the law.

QUOTE - That there was a symbolical significance to His action goes without saying, and what this is we are not left to guess. Scripture is its own interpreter. This was not the first time that the Lord had written "with his finger." In *Exodus 31:18* we read, "*And he gave unto Moses, when he had made an end of communing with him upon mount Sinai, two tables of testimony, tables of stone, written with the finger of God.*" When, then, our Lord wrote on the ground (from the ground must the "tables of stone" have been taken), it was as though He had said, You remind Me of the law! Why, it was My finger which wrote that law! Thus did He show these Pharisees that He had come here, not to destroy the law, but to fulfill it. (The Exposition of the Gospel of John, Arthur W. Pink)

Perhaps in writing the law, He was pointing out the very issue we mentioned earlier - WHERE IS THE MAN? Perhaps He was saying, You come here citing the law, but ignore part of it?

Perhaps He wrote the very scripture they were citing:

Leviticus 20:10 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.

Deuteronomy 22:22 If a man be found lying with a woman married to an husband, then they shall both of them die, [both] the man that lay with the woman, and the woman: so shalt thou put away evil from Israel.

2. Another theory is that He was writing down things that would bolster His statement, "He that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone at her." (vs. 7) In other words, maybe He wrote some of their sins on the ground, things like:

"M (eshulam) has stolen treasures from the temple,"
"A (sher) has committed adultery with his brother's wife;
"S (halum) has committed perjury;
"E (led) has struck his own father;
"A (marich) has committed sodomy;
"J (oel) has worshipped idols."

QUESTION 5 - Was this woman saved?

ANSWERS - We simply do not know. I submit that there is no evidence one way or the other in this passage.

INTERESTING THOUGHT - Jesus did not forgive her sin, he only pointed it out with His concluding words to her (as indicated in the above quote. Neither did he contradict the claim of the men who pointed out her sin. You see, although they were wrong in their approach, and clearly had their own issues to deal with, they were NOT wrong in saying she had sinned. Clearly she had. Jesus neither ignored this fact, nor condoned her sin. His response to both the men and the woman was to point out their individual need, their individual sin, and thus to point out how much they ALL needed a Savior.

Now some people use this passage to teach that we should not judge one another, such as in this poem:

Writing On the Ground
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Neither do I condemn thee, go and sin no more. John 8:11

The Master at the temple was teaching the Holy Word,
By parables plain and simple, His every word was heard.
But a crowd ever moving faster, brought a woman in sobs and tears;
At Jesus' feet they cast her amidst their scoffs and jeers.

We caught her in adultery, caught in the very act,
To us it is desultory, and that's a shameful fact.
Said the Scribes and the Pharisees, This act can't be condoned.
The law which Moses chose for us commands she should be stoned.

But what do you say Master? We leave it up to you.
At Jesus' feet they cast her demanding what to do.
They tried to test the Master, but had they only known,
What Jesus then would ask them before they cast a stone.

For Jesus knew their questions were only to confound,
And seeing their evil scheming He wrote upon the ground.

Let him without sin among you, He said while bending down,
Be first to cast a hand stone, and He wrote upon the ground.

Soon they became convicted of their many sins,
And as Jesus no doubt predicted, an exodus begins.
While the wicked crowd was thinning, an accuser looked around;
He thought about his sinning, and the writing on the ground.

He tried to leave unnoticed, as he began to think.
He had no joy nor solace, he glided and he slinked.
The stones just started falling, softly in the dirt,
As wicked sins recalling, they quickly left the court.

Where are your accusers? Jesus turned around to ask.
Where are your abusers? Not one condemns at last.
Neither do I condemn you. Go and sin no more.
From sin please discontinue, and repent forevermore.

So my friends, you've heard the story, and what it has to say.
It has an allegory, even for us today.
Don't look for sins in others, no matter what you do.
Not your sisters nor your brothers, till first you look at you.

NOW, the thought that we should concentrate on our own sins before pointing the finger at somebody else is a good one, and Christ taught the same when He told us to get the beam out of our own eye before worrying about the mote in our neighbor's eye.

AND, I believe it was D.L.Moody who said that he had more trouble with himself than with any man he had ever met.

HOWEVER, that is no the correct interpretation of this passage. It has nothing to do with us judging one another, and everything to do with God judging our sin. Let's spend our few remaining minutes discussing what I believe to be the main truth of this passage. Here is what I think Jesus is really teaching us here.

We Have A Problem

There is an age old question - how can God be perfectly just and yet forgive sin?

We know God has attributes that define Him -

- He is ALL POWERFUL (Omnipotent)
- He is ALL KNOWING (Omniscient)
- He is LOVE
- He is JUST

I am a sinner and so are you. (*"All have sinned and come short of the glory of God."* (Romans 3:23) So how can I get past the justice of God?

You see, we all understand what perfect justice is. If a crime is committed, it will be paid for - punished. That is perfect justice. Every crime must be dealt with. No differentiation between criminals, no technicalities as are so prevalent in our court system - every crime must be dealt with - that is perfect justice.

God's perfect justice is described many times in the Bible:

... the soul that sinneth, it shall die. (Ezekiel 18:4, 20)

Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned: (Romans 5:12)

For the wages of sin is death... (Romans 6:23)

And so, you and I, like this poor woman, have a terrible problem - we are sinners, and we stand naked and condemned before our perfectly just and holy God. We have no defense, just as she had no defense.

Jesus Has The Solution

I submit that none of us really want justice. We might want it for others, but we certainly don't want it for ourselves. What we want for ourselves is mercy.

JOKE - The story is told of a politician who, after receiving the proofs of a portrait, was very angry with the photographer. He stormed back to the photographer and arrived with these angry words: "This picture does not do me justice!" The photographer replied, "Sir, with a face like yours, you don't need justice, you need mercy!"

And none of us wants justice, we want MERCY!

ILLUS - A mother once approached Napoleon seeking a pardon for her son. The emperor replied that the young man had committed a certain offense twice and justice demanded death. "But I don't ask for justice," the mother explained. "I plead for mercy." "But your son does not deserve mercy," Napoleon replied. "Sir," the woman cried, "it would not be mercy if he deserved it, and mercy is all I ask for." "Well, then," the emperor said, "I will have mercy." And he spared the woman's son. (Luis Palau, "Experiencing God's Forgiveness," Multnomah Press, 1984)

And thank God, when we find ourselves standing before God, we find Him merciful:

Psalms 86:5 For thou, Lord, [art] good, and ready to forgive; and plenteous in mercy unto all them that call upon thee.

Psalms 103:17 But the mercy of the LORD [is] from everlasting to everlasting upon them that fear him, and his righteousness unto children's children;

ILLUS - Tim Foster attended this church as a young man. I remember him, and some of you probably do, too. I remember that he loved his Bible. He always carried a pencil with him, and underlined passages that were meaningful. As the pastor preached, you would see Tim underlining and making notes in his Bible. He showed it to me once, and I saw a page that was almost entirely underlined in pencil. He loved the Bible. And one of the verses he used to quote over and over to me was *James 2:13 For he shall have judgment without mercy, that hath shewed no mercy; and mercy rejoiceth against judgment.* No where is this truth more beautifully demonstrated than in our text, where the mercy of the Savior triumphed over the demands of justice. "Mercy rejoiceth against judgement."

Conclusion

Have you experienced his mercy?

We will all stand before God, as did this woman.

And as it is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment: (Hebrews 9:27)

We can stand exposed to His justice, or we can find protection and salvation in His mercy.

Which is it to be for you?

If you do nothing about the claims of Christ, and never act upon them, and never seek the salvation that is in Him, you will be as this woman, naked and exposed to the white hot light of God's perfect justice.

If you want His mercy, you simply have to ask for it.

For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved. (Romans 10:13)

Thank God for the mercy that He offers each one of us.

Thank God for mercy that triumphs over judgement.

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