

Introduction

A woman caught in sin is thrown at the feet of Jesus and the religious leaders demand that Jesus act. What will Jesus say that will uphold the righteousness of God? What will Jesus do that will show the mercy of God?

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The religious leaders stood defiantly before Jesus. They had made their case powerfully and simply. The woman had been caught, just hours before, in a bed of adultery.

The crowd who had been sitting and listening to Jesus stood and drew near to see what Jesus would do.

The woman lay prostrate before Jesus weeping for the injustice done to her. She was a tool in the hands of the powerful to get at Jesus. They would sacrifice her life to accuse and kill him. Yes, she was an adulteress, but they were manipulators, plotters, schemers, murderers. But they were not on trial. Yes, she was only a woman. No one would listen to her. She was powerless to act. She was helpless.

Jesus looked upon the leaders. He looked upon the crowd. He looked upon the woman and then he stooped down and began to write something on the ground as if he had forgotten the gravity of the crisis before him – a crisis for the woman and a crisis for him.

The leaders watched for a moment and then in exasperation said again, “Jesus. We asked you a question, and as someone who wants to teach the people, we have a right to hear an answer from you. This woman has been caught in the very act of adultery. Moses commanded us to stone such women. We have brought her before you. Tell us! What we should do?”

Jesus stopped writing on the ground. He stood up again and looking directly into the faces of these men he said, “Let the one among you who is without sin be the first to cast a stone at her.” And then he stooped back down and began writing on the ground again.

Everyone became quiet. The leaders looked at one another and realized that their trap for Jesus had been sprung on them. They had caught the woman in the very act of adultery. But Jesus had caught them in the very act of deception and lies to kill. The Law that said, “you shall not commit adultery” also said “you shall not bear false witness against your neighbor,” and “you shall not murder.” They knew they were as guilty as she was, and they knew that Jesus had seen through their plan.

Their wicked plot had been exposed. It was so easy for everyone to see anyway for if they caught the woman in the very act of adultery, then they caught the man too! But he was nowhere to be found!

But more than their misstep and glaring hole in their scheme was the deep searing conviction they felt and their leading this woman into sin just to get at Jesus.

One by one the religious leaders walked away. First, the wiser, older ones turned and left. Then, the young zealots, men of action and slow to give up the cause followed. One by one these men walked away, heads down and defeated. Some had faces full of shame. Some had hearts full of turmoil and anger. Oh, if only they had fallen on their faces before Jesus. Oh, if only they had fallen to the ground with the woman, asked her forgiveness and asked Jesus for mercy. How the story might have changed. But they were too proud for that. And so, one by one, from the oldest to the youngest the men walked away from Jesus.

All eyes watched as they exited the Temple, and then all eyes turned back to Jesus and to the woman who was still before him. What would Jesus do now? What would he say? She was still guilty. She was not denying her sin.

Jesus stopped writing on the ground. He stood back up, looked upon the woman and said, “Woman, where are your accusers? Has no one condemned you?”

The woman looked up. She wiped the tears from her face. She stood and saw that all her accusers were gone. Those moments when she was at the feet of Jesus and when she heard their words of condemnation had seemed like an eternity. But now as she looked around she saw that all her accusers were gone, and she said to Jesus with astonishment in her voice, “There is no one, Lord. They are all gone. The ones who have condemned me are gone.”

And then the one who was sinless, the one who could have condemned her, the one who could have cast the first and the last stone said, “Neither do I condemn you. Go. From now on, sin no more.”

The woman wrapped her light garment around herself. With relief and indescribable astonishment and joy, she walked through the crowd and went home – a new person who had been touched by the love of Jesus.

Friends, you know that this story is really a story about all of us. All of us are like the woman or like the religious leaders in the story. Which are you like? Are you like the religious leaders who are critical, judging and trying to bring others down rather than restoring and helping those in need? If you are, if that is your tendency, prepare for Jesus to expose your hypocrisy and prepare to slink away as quietly as you can, unless, you fall before him and confess your sins and failures and ask for his mercy.

Most of us are probably like the woman. If we have not committed adultery with our bodies, the likelihood is great that we have committed adultery in our hearts. Jesus said, “Everyone who looks at a woman with lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart.”

If adultery is not your problem, then it is something else. All of us have sinned.

And so, I ask, “What is your sin? What is your weakness?”

Do you remember what Jesus said on another occasion? “It is not the things that come into the person that defile a person, but the things that come from the heart. Those defile a man. Out of the

heart come evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, slanders. These are the things which defile a man.

Jesus could have picked any number of sins. There are so many. And we have committed them. Yes, none of us can cast the first stone, and all of us are like the woman who stands before Jesus guilty of our sins. In the final scene of our story the woman was left alone before Jesus. She who was full of sin was before him who was sinless. Whether we identify with the woman who stood before Jesus or the religious leaders who walked away doesn't really matter because ultimately you and I will stand before Jesus with our sins exposed.

And you and I must realize that there is only one opinion that counts, and one opinion to worry about. It's not our accusers. It's not our fellow humans. It is the opinion and the verdict of Jesus who is the Judge of all for God has fixed a day in which He will judge the world through him.

Jesus is Lord. Jesus is the Judge because he has risen from the dead, but I have indescribable good news for you. When he died, he died for our sins that we might be forgiven. And when he rose it was proof that nothing more had to be done to pay for our sins. It is as if he were stoned for the woman. When he took the nails in his hands, his feet, his side it was for her sins and your sins and mine. When he rose from the grave, it was proof that everything that needed to be done to save us from condemnation had been done.

To this woman, Jesus said, "I do not condemn you. Go and do not engage in this activity again. Go and do not sin, but you may go, and you live in freedom."

And to us he says, "I do not condemn you." And when he says "go and sin no more" to us he means that we are to go into a new life and into a new way where we learn to follow God and learn to live in obedience to him.

The woman left Jesus that day a new person. The religious leaders left Jesus that day, but they were not changed. The woman humbled herself. The men remained proud. The woman heard the liberating words of Jesus. The men could have heard such words if they had remained and asked Jesus for mercy, but they chose to walk away from the mercy of Christ.

And that, my friends, is a picture of the world. Some remain before Jesus and wait for his word of mercy. Some walk away and harden their hearts. And some will walk away for eternity and never hear his offer of peace and forgiveness because of the stubbornness of their soul.

Which example will you follow today?