

Session 3

March 19, 2023

JESUS GAVE ME GRACE AND FORGIVENESS

John 8:2-11

This is one of those stories I remember from my *Primaries* class in Sunday School. Our teacher would hold up the big pictures from the Teacher's Kit and point out the mean men with the rocks. We didn't know anything about adultery (praise God!), but we sure did like the story of Jesus drawing in the dirt. While it is true that some of the biblical manuscripts omit this story, it nonetheless illustrates the compassion of Jesus who does not excuse our sin, but rather removes its condemnation. I have divided the story into two scenes.

Jesus versus the critics (vv. 2-6). In his usual way, John paints a colorful picture to set the stage. As was Jesus' custom when visiting the Holy City, He would spend the nights nearby and visit the temple first thing in the morning. Notice His popularity: "The people were coming to Him" (v. 2). And Jesus did what He always did: He taught them! In contrast to the *admiring crowds*, came the *adversarial Pharisees*; and with them, an *adulterous woman*. This of course, was a carefully orchestrated set-up. You can almost picture the crowd separating like the Red Sea as the woman is brought in and forced to stand "in the center." (v. 3). The crowd of people were to witness the spectacle, and if all went well, to condemn Christ, their teacher. Their accusation is as scripted as the rest of the spectacle. She was caught in the very "act of committing adultery" (v. 4). Thus, according to the Old Testament law, she should be stoned. And hence, the trap was set (v. 6). Presumably, if Jesus said to stone her, His lack of compassion would provoke the crowd who adored Him. It would also have the added benefit of aligning Jesus with their own legalism, which was a favorite topic of His scorn (see Matt. 23:13ff). If, on the other hand, He disagreed with the law of Moses, He would be seen as a false teacher, contradicting the word of God. To the Pharisees, the woman was little more than a convenient prop, as the case itself was full of holes. The same law that condemned the woman required at least two witnesses (Deut. 19:15) who here are not mentioned. And there looms the other obvious question: where is the guilty *man*, since *both* are to be put to death? (see Lev. 20:10). For reflection: Read Matt. 5:17-20. How does Jesus define His relationship with the law? Does anything in this story contradict His teaching in Matt. 5?

Justice versus mercy (vv. 6-11). As smart as they were, they were no match for the Lord. Rather than rush to some judicial decision, Jesus essentially ignored them. Writing in the sand with His finger gives us no clue as to *what* He wrote. Rather it indicates His disinterest in the civil affairs with which the Pharisees were so enamored. But the tempters were not easily dissuaded, and they "persisted in questioning Him" (v. 7). In resignation, Jesus did not address the charge brought against the woman, nor nullify the righteousness of law, nor issue a decree of guilt or innocence. Rather, He pronounced condemnation of the hypocrites who sought to impose the stiffest of all penalties against her. Linguistically, the phrase "one without sin" (v. 7) is closely tied to the *type* of sin referenced earlier. If so, Jesus showed His divine knowledge of the *immorality* hidden in the hearts of the accusers. But the broader application is still valid: those who bring accusations of gross sin against others ought themselves be free from those same sins! As soon as He said this, Jesus went back to writing in the sand, and the Pharisees went back to

where they had come from! Their departure was one at a time, from oldest to youngest. Normally, any vote taken by the body proceeded from youngest to oldest, presumably to keep the younger members from being influenced by the older. But here, the older men departed first, not necessarily because of their many years of sinning, but rather their wisdom in not wanting to declare themselves sinless in front of so many witnesses. The final scene is actually quite touching. Jesus never excused her sin (all the evidence pointed to her guilt); rather He appealed to the same law that the Pharisees used to try to stone her! In the absence of witnesses, there could be no condemnation (v. 10). And the witnesses against her had all gone home. For reflection: *Read Romans 8:1. How does this verse help us relate to the woman in our lesson?*