

Series: Unlikely Encounters

In the Dirt

John 8:2-11

Sermon by Lead Pastor Paul Joslin

Waterstone Community Church, Littleton, Colorado

Sunday morning, March 15, 2026

For those of you that haven't met me, my name is Kyle Frisbie, and it is my privilege to read today's scripture. A reading from John chapter 8, verses 2 through 11: "At dawn He appeared again in the temple courts, where all the people gathered around Him, and He sat down to teach them. The teachers of the law and the Pharisees brought in a woman caught in adultery. They made her stand before the group and said to Jesus, 'Teacher, this woman was caught in the act of adultery. In the law, Moses commanded us to stone such women. Now what do you say?' They were using this question as a trap, in order to have a basis for accusing Him, but Jesus bent down and started to write on the ground with his finger. When they kept on questioning Him, He straightened up and said to them, 'Let any one of you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her.' Again, He stooped down and wrote on the ground. At this, those who heard began to walk away one at a time, the older ones first, until only Jesus was left with the woman still standing there. Jesus straightened up and asked her, 'Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?' 'No one, sir,' she said. 'Then neither do I condemn you,' Jesus declared. 'Go now and leave your life of sin,'" the word of the Lord. You may be seated.

Paul: Thank you, Kyle. Good morning, Waterstone. It is good to be with you. A few years ago, I was a student pastor here at Waterstone, and I had taken a group of students up to YMCA of the Rockies, and as we were making our way from the lodging area where we were to the mess hall for breakfast one morning, we started to notice that there were a ton of people running the other direction, and it caused a few of us to stop, pause, wonder, like, "What is going on? Why is everybody running away from breakfast? Is it that bad?" I mean, sometimes camp food is not great, but surely it is not that bad. Everybody's running away from it, and what we realized was that at this camp, it is YMCA of the Rockies, we were one of the only groups from Colorado there. A lot of the groups had come from Texas for obvious reasons, because who wants to go to summer camp in Texas when you could go to Colorado, and so they were running. It is all these Texans running away from the mess hall, and they are shouting at a herd of elk that had wandered onto the property. If you have been around for Colorado for a number of years or lived here most of your life, you know that that is not an uncommon occurrence, especially up in the mountains in places like YMCA of the Rockies, and so most of us from Colorado were like, "Okay, like elk, sure, that's awesome," but what made the moment really special was that as these Texans were running toward this herd of elk, because they were shouting, "Hey, look at those giant deer," and then you just knew right off the bat that like, my goodness, this is a different. Do you guys actually remember that? Okay, some of my former students were at camp with me that year. Now they are like married and have babies and stuff, and I feel really old, but it was this amazing moment where, and we've probably all had that, right?

Like there are moments when you live in Colorado where you look up at the mountains, and I remember this when I moved here fifteen years ago, that I would look at the mountains, and I would just be like awestruck, just like dumbfounded about how beautiful they were. I would come up over Interstate

70, and you know that spot where you can see under the bridge in Evergreen, and you just see the vista of the mountains in front of you, and it would just take my breath away. Now, usually I am driving it, and there are kids in the backseat, and we are trying to figure out what music to play, and the grandeur is gone. The sense of wonder has been lost a little bit, and I say that because the story that we are looking at today, the one that Kyle just read, is a very beautiful story in the gospel of John. It is a part of our series, Unlikely Encounters, where we have been looking at Jesus' encounters with unlikely people in unlikely places. One of the things that we have seen is that whether people come from a religious background, or they come searching or questioning or wondering, an encounter with Jesus absolutely can change a person's life, and that is part of the reason why we are walking through the story, because we believe that one encounter with Jesus can change everything about the trajectory of a person's life. It can change their heart. It can change their story. It can change their relationships.

We believe that when we encounter Jesus, something powerful can happen in a person's life, but here is my fear. It is that sometimes we come to moments in the gospels where we come to encounters with Jesus, and we have maybe heard the story before. Maybe you are not even a believer here today. Maybe you have never even heard the story we are about to walk through. We have heard the story of Jesus. Yeah, He died for people because they're bad, and God wanted Him to die so that they could get a ticket into heaven, and you have heard the story, and my fear is that we lose the sense of wonder about stories we have heard before. We lose the sense of grandeur, and so part of what I want to do with you today is walk through this story and hopefully reveal to you, not through my own words or through my own preaching, but just through the beauty of the word of God, God's heart for each and every one of us in this room. Because there is something foundational in this story where I think it encounters a deep need that every single human heart has, whether or not we recognize it, and sometimes we miss it, because we have heard the story so many times that it loses its sense of wonder in our hearts, and so I am going to pray for us, and then we are going to dive in, but my prayer for you today is simply that God would make this story come alive in a new and powerful way so that you would not just say like, "Oh yeah, there are some elk again. Like, that's great," so let's pray together, and we are going to dive into this message.

Heavenly Father, Lord, we come before you, and Lord, we just come humbly. We open our hearts to you. We recognize that many of us are coming into this space with different things weighing on our hearts. God, we come with different stories, different backgrounds. Some of us are here today just giving church one more chance. Some of us are here today because it is what we do on a Sunday, even when it is snowing outside. God, I pray that wherever we are, by the power of your Spirit, you would meet us today, and that we would encounter you, and God, I pray that we would encounter you in a way that would change our lives this morning, and it is in Christ's name that we pray, amen.

All right, so as we dive into the story, it is found in John chapter 8, verse 2. If you have your Bibles, you can follow along with me. It will also be on the screen for you if you do not have a Bible with you. John chapter 8, verse 2: "At dawn, Jesus appeared again in the temple courts, where all the people had gathered with Him, and He sat down to teach them." Now, I want to just pause really briefly here as we dive into the story, to notice a couple things. One is that Jesus has gone into the temple. It is essentially like where the people would gather for church, so a building not unlike this one, where people would

gather together to worship God, and they have come to hear Jesus teach. They are wanting a word from God. They are wanting to hear this rabbi teach, and He sits down to teach them.

Now, it is a little different in the ancient world. I am the only one standing in the room right now. All of you are sitting. In the ancient world, out of respect for the rabbi, the rabbi would sit, and everybody else would stand, so I thought actually just a good move for today was to have you stand for the next thirty-five minutes. I'm going to go get it. No. Church attendance would drop so hard, wouldn't it, if I made you stand for thirty-five minutes? Also, I do not want that kind of notoriety or respect. Like, let's just keep doing what we have been doing. Okay, so they are coming to hear Jesus. It is a quiet moment. It is at dawn, so you can imagine an early morning Bible study, essentially, is what is going on at the church, when suddenly everything is interrupted. Verse 3, "The teachers of the law and the Pharisees brought in a woman caught in adultery," and notice this, "they made her stand before the group, and they said to Jesus, 'Teacher, this woman was caught in the act of adultery. In the law, Moses commanded us to stone such women. Now what do you say?'"

I want you to picture that moment for just a second. There is a Bible study happening. Jesus has sat down to teach as the sun is rising over Jerusalem in the temple courts, and suddenly there is a mob mentality. There are people running and shouting and heavy footsteps, and they drag a woman into the middle of the crowd, and they claim that she has been caught in the act of adultery. Now just to paint a picture of that scene, they are saying that they have essentially found this woman in the act of sleeping with someone who is not her husband, and they have brought her before Jesus to see what He will say about what we should do with sinners like her, because the law of Moses commands that this type of person who has committed adultery with someone who is not their spouse, slept with someone who is not their spouse, should be murdered.

Now I just want to pause for a moment, because I think on the face of it, as we dive into this story, there are two questions that immediately jump out to everyone, whether you have heard this story before or not. The first question is, "Okay, if she was caught in the act of adultery, where is the guy?" That is the first question many of us have, because last time I checked, adultery is like a two-team sporter, like a two-person endeavor. One person does not get the job done. It takes two to tango, and so immediately you are thinking, "Okay, why just the woman?" Why was the man, if they caught them in the act, why was he let go and was she brought forward for judgment? There is something off and fishy about the story, and then secondly, I think to many of our modern ears, this command from scripture where God, the law of Moses, has commanded that we should stone such a woman, that sounds really harsh to many of us, if not barbaric, right? I mean, many of us, if we think of the act of adultery, we would say, "Yeah, I am not great, right? Like I think most of us would say, in fact, just last year, Gallup did a study where they were trying to figure out, okay, what do people think about what is morally right or morally wrong, and one of the only places that almost all Americans agreed with, 90% of Americans in this study said adultery was morally wrong. I don't know if you could get ninety Americans to agree that the sky is blue, right? Like we disagree on everything, but almost everyone says, "Nope, this is wrong. This is still something that's off limits. We should not do this," and so when we hear that it is something that someone should be essentially killed for, though, I think many of us, if I asked for a poll to say like, "Okay, how many of you think adultery is wrong?" I am guessing the majority of the room would raise their hand and say adultery is wrong.

Then if I asked a follow-up question and said, “How many of you think that a person caught in the act of adultery should be killed?” I am guessing some of those hands would go down, right? It feels a little bit like an extreme or a harsh response to what is happening in the story, and here is what I want to do for just a moment, is to pull this out of the text and try to answer that second question. We will get to where the guy was in just a moment, but first I want to deal with the second question of essentially, “Does scripture say that if someone caught in the act of adultery, they should be stoned?” and the simple answer on the face of it is yes. There is actually a passage that you can look to in the Old Testament, Deuteronomy 22:22, where it says this, “If a man is found sleeping with another man’s wife, both the man who slept with her and the woman must die. You must purge the evil from Israel.”

Now, I do not know about you, but when I see that word “evil,” I do not necessarily think right off the bat about two people who are not married to each other sleeping with one another. When I hear the word “evil,” I think like Nazis, right? I think of some of the most heinous, immoral acts in history. I think of people who have murdered millions of people or people who took out the Twin Towers at 9-11-2001. That to me sounds or feels evil, and while I would say that sleeping together is morally wrong, I am not sure that I would ever use that language in talking to someone and say that it is evil, so there are a couple of things we have to unpack about what is going on in the text. When it says evil, is it talking about the kind of thing that many of us think of, like the worst acts of human atrocity in history, or is it talking about something else?

Essentially what this passage, what I would argue is this verse from the Old Testament is trying to say, is that, yes, this seems like a harsh punishment, but there is reason behind why God would say that this is such an evil act, even though it feels foreign to our ears. There is a two-part answer to this question that I think we need to wrestle with today, because I think part one is the reason that we feel this might be a little harsh is because many of us, in our own personal lives and the way we look at the world, we have done something with sexual sin where we have shrunk it or minimized it, and we have considered sexual sin to be not that big of a deal. You do not really have to go too far in our culture to see the way that we have shifted the moral boundaries around sexuality to see that many of us just think like, “Yeah, it is not great, but it is just between two consenting adults, and it is their choice, and as long as people are consenting to whatever is going on, we just have to be okay with it. All is well as long as everybody is okay in the situation,” and that is our moral standard around sexuality, but I think what is going on in the story and in this passage in Deuteronomy is that God is essentially saying that sexual sin in general is not a big deal to you, but it is a big deal to me.

In our culture, we think of sex and the moral boundaries around sex as just consensual, but in scripture, God sees sexuality as covenantal, not just consensual. In fact, if you look at the ancient people of Israel, when they are receiving these sorts of laws, they have just been brought out of slavery to Egypt. They are being brought into a world where there are so many nations that are following all sorts of different moral laws, different moral rules that would be considered absolutely barbaric to us today. Their practices around sexuality and the way that they would treat other people and the way that certain people were property to them, I mean, it would be absolutely morally abhorrent to us, and so into that environment, God is trying to raise up a people who are supposed to reflect his heart to the world and say that you will be set apart. “You will be different. This is how the world engages with all of these kinds of things. I want

you to engage in a way that is absolutely distinctive from the rest of the world, and so I am going to take these sorts of things seriously,” because if you go down the rabbit hole long enough around things like sexual immorality or adultery, you recognize that they are **not** victimless crimes. So many times we look at these kinds of things, and we think, “Oh yeah, like it is a bad thing, or it is not a great thing, or it is a morally bad thing,” but when it really dives into it, you can see that actually the boundaries God is creating around this kind of thing are so important

Just a quick example, I grew up in a church, and I have shared bits of this story before, where we had an associate pastor who had an affair with our children’s pastor, and their language around it was that, “Yeah, not that big a deal. Like it was just a choice that we made. It was a mistake. It was a lack of moral clarity. It was something that we probably should not have done,” and they treated it like this private thing that only affected them, but if you look at the ripple effect from that moment, it affected their children, they both lost their marriages, and the church that they were working at was torn apart in some really catastrophic ways. What we tend to do especially with sexual sin is we tend to privatize it and say, “Well, it is just between me, and maybe God sees what is going on, but He does not think it is that big of a deal. As long as people are consenting, what harm is there?” and what God is saying is that sin, and in this particular instance, sexual sin, can have devastating consequences. It touches so many people that we do not even recognize, and it brings death into the world, and so when you start to see it from that light, and you understand that when God says things like, “Do not do this,” He is not just trying to be prude, and He is not just trying to say like, “Hey, I don’t want you to have any fun.” When God says “don’t,” He is actually trying to say, “Do not hurt yourself. Do not harm the people around you. Do not do the things that will cause devastation in the world and in your community and your families and in your homes.”

We do not have to go far down the rabbit hole. Some of you have lived through the devastating consequences of these types of choices. You know firsthand how devastating a simple mistake or slip up can have on a marriage or a family or a community, and so on the face of it, one of the things we have to recognize is that when God is coming into these types of situations, He is not just trying to say that you are not allowed to have fun or you are not allowed to do what you want. He is essentially saying that your sin is far weightier than you would like to admit, that your sin has more consequences than you will even recognize, and so one of the things we have to do is recognize that in this story, it is not trying to paint this woman as some sort of monster or some sort of monstrously evil person. What it is trying to say is that she is causing devastation in this area, and that fact has to be dealt with, which is why the story becomes so beautiful, but even if we can start to understand some of the reality of a choice like adultery, I think some of us still might have this gut-level reaction to, “Okay, but that still feels really harsh. Like that still feels really severe,” and you might be thinking like, “Why did I choose to come to church today? Because it is snowing outside. I could have just stayed home, and this feels really heavy, Paul. Like can we just have a little bit of lighter mood on a snowy Sunday?” I get that, but here is the reality that I think we also bypass, that when we look at things like sin in our lives, we do not just minimize sin, but we actually minimize our view of God, and we minimize God’s view of His holiness. We not only do not recognize the weight of sin in our lives, but we fail to recognize and tend to minimize the weight of God’s holiness.

Here is something that I have found to be true as a pastor in my own life and in the lives of people that I walk alongside. It is that your view of sin will only become as big as your view of God, and if you

think God is small, if you think God is manageable or safe or tame, if you think that God on some level is really just like you, except a little bit better, then you will tend to look at your sin in such a way where you will think, “It is not that big a deal. I am not sure that God really cares. I do not know that God really cares. I mean, have you seen the world? Have you seen how many problems there are in the world? Do you think God really cares about what I look at on my computer? I mean, He has got bigger things to deal with,” and we can get to this place where we minimize the choices we make, and we justify the sin in our lives, because we think, “I do not know that God cares that much.’

One of the things that this story is trying to bring out to us is that God cares really deeply, like so, so deeply about the choices we make, and many of us, we have just lost sight of the blazing beauty of God’s holiness and what it means when the angels in the throne room of God say, “Holy, holy, holy.” It is the only attribute of God that is ever attributed to Him on repetitions of three. God is love, but God is holy, holy, holy. What we tend to misunderstand is we try to make God familiar or accommodating to our life or our choices, but scripture is so clear that God is not tame and that He is not manageable. In fact, what it tells us about God and His holiness is that the angels who surround Him day after day after day and experience His holiness, never grow tired of the wonder or the beauty of it. In fact, they have continuously veiled their faces, because they are so awestruck by His holiness.

When humanity, when people like you and me, come into the presence of God’s holiness, their reaction is not like, “Oh wow, that is pretty cool.” Their reaction is to fall on the ground as if they were dead and say, “Woe is me. I am ruined,” because when you step into the room of a holy God, God is not simply just morally clean. He is not just someone who is a little better than we are. He is altogether pure, beautiful, without stain or compromise or shadow. He is light, and in Him there is no darkness at all, and when you start to see God like that, what I have found is that sin starts to look different too. Sin stops being just like merely a misstep or a mistake. It is open rebellion against the reality of life itself, against a God who is life itself, goodness itself, love itself, and that is why the law sounds so serious to us, not because God is cruel, but because He is absolutely holy, and it is not because He is less compassionate than we imagine. It is because He is more glorious than we could ever imagine.

I think sometimes the severity of the text is meant to wake us up to the reality of sin that sometimes we tend to minimize, and I think that is important for us to understand, because it actually leads us into the first question that I mentioned. If God is that holy, and sin is that serious, then it becomes glaringly obvious that there is something wrong with this story, because suddenly the lack of a man who has been caught in adultery with this woman becomes glaringly obvious, that the people who are bringing the woman into this situation before Jesus, asking what to do with her, they do not actually care about holiness or justice or righteousness or sin. They are simply trying to leverage the law against Jesus. They do not actually care about God’s heart in the matter and what He thinks of sin. In fact, John tells us really explicitly why they are doing this and what they are doing. It is not that they are grieved by sin. It is that they are trying to leverage it against Jesus. In verse six, we are told that they were using this question as a trap, in order to have a basis for accusing Jesus.

Now I have to back up and give you a little context. In the verses and chapters previous to this story, Jesus declares to people that He is the living water, that He is a representative of God, and that through Him the Spirit will be poured out on the people of God, essentially claiming that He is the Messiah,

and people look at Jesus, and the religious leaders think, “Are we sure this guy is the Messiah? Are we sure that we should follow Him?” and there is this big debate, and our friend Nicodemus, who we talked about earlier in the series, he speaks up to the Pharisees, and he says, “We can’t accuse a person without hearing what he has to say,” and then it leads into this story. So, they are essentially bringing this woman to Jesus, trying to figure out what He will say in order to figure out if He is a Messiah worth following. Now, what is the trap that they are trying to set for Jesus?

There are essentially two things that are happening. If Jesus, who claims to be the Messiah, who is leading people towards God, looks at the law and what they have presented, and He says, “You know what? Not a big deal. Like, yeah, sounds like you guys caught her in the act, but like, let’s just let it go. We don’t need to do anything about that today. We just want to keep going back to our Bible study. So yeah, let’s just let her go back to whatever she was doing,” then suddenly He is not following the law of Moses. He is not someone who is worth following as the Messiah, because He is essentially disobeying God, but if in that moment Jesus says to the crowd, “You are right. She is a sinner. She deserves death. Let’s stone her. Let’s kill her,” then something else is happening, because the Roman government at that time reserved the right of execution or death sentences for themselves, and so all of their other nations that they were controlling at the time had no right to condemn people to death. That is one of the reasons why they bring Jesus before Pilate, the Roman governor. It is because they can’t actually kill Him apart from Rome’s affirmation, and so essentially they are putting Jesus in this no-win situation, this like, “Heads I win, tails you lose, like lose-lose for you all the way around, because if you say that the law does not matter, then we do not have to follow you anymore, and you lose your ministry, and if you say it does matter, and you choose to stone this woman, then you are going to be in trouble with Rome, and they will probably kill you, and your ministry will be gone anyways, and so they think they have Jesus painted into a corner.” How will He respond? What will Jesus do?

You have got to imagine that that question in this moment is not hypothetical for the woman who has been caught in adultery. Let’s just bring it back to her for a moment. She has been sleeping with someone who is not her husband. She has been brought forward in all of her humiliation and all of her deepest, darkest sin, brought before the community of people, put on display as bait for this theological argument. How will Jesus respond to her and to her accusers? In verse six, “But Jesus bent down and started to write on the ground with his finger. When they kept on questioning Him, He straightened up, and He said to them, ‘Let any one of you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her,’ and again, He stooped down, and He wrote on the ground.”

Now, we have already dealt with two questions that the text asks of us, and you know what the third one is, right? What did Jesus write on the ground? That is what everybody wants to know. What did Jesus have to do? Why did He bend down and start writing in the dirt in front of the temple courts, in front of all these people, and what did He say? What did He say? Then He tells them, “If you do not have sin, go ahead and stone her. That is fine,” and then He bends down and He starts writing again. What did He say?

I am glad you asked, because I am going to definitively tell you today the answer that you have all been waiting for, for two thousand years. Now, I do not have that answer. I have some theories. I have some thoughts, but I am not going to get into those today, because what I have seen when pastors preach

this text is they do this. They bend, and none of us know, and they will say that. They will say, “I do not know, but here is my theory,” and then they will bend whatever their theory is to fit their interpretation of the text, and I do not think that is actually honoring what the story is trying to do, because I think John is very intentionally leaving out what Jesus wrote, because it does not actually matter what He wrote. It matters why He wrote.

What Jesus is essentially doing in this moment is He is refusing to play the game. They are coming with this mob mentality. They are bringing a woman to trial. They are trying to condemn her in front of all of these people, and Jesus is saying, “You are not asking the right question. You are not asking the right question,” and so He withdraws from the debate, and while they keep pressing Him, they try to force Him to engage with the debate. We have seen that happen before, where people are like trying to pull back from an argument and say like, “You know what? I do not know that it matters to me that much. I do not know that I am going to engage that way. You are unhinged right now,” and then people just keep pressing into it. That is what is happening in this moment, so Jesus stands up, and He says in this moment, “Well, if any of you is without sin, be the first to throw a stone at her.”

I want you to recognize here the gamble that Jesus is playing a little bit. He is essentially saying if you do not have sin, if you feel like you are morally upright, and it is not saying that if you have never sinned before, you have the right to throw the stone. That is not what this text is actually saying. What He is saying is that essentially in the law, if you were to bring a person into this situation where you brought them into a trial, and you were accusing them of something, you needed to be morally upright in your accusation, which means you were not supposed to have personal biases. You were not supposed to have something you could gain from the moment. You were not supposed to use the law for your own personal advantage, and so Jesus is essentially saying if you are that type of witness, who has not used the law for your own personal advantage in this moment, then you have the right to do what you say, because He already knows their hearts, because He already knows that they were trying to trap Him, because they did not bring the man. They did not care about justice. They did not care about holiness. They did not care about upholding the law. All they cared about was winning the argument, and Jesus says, “If you can honestly say that that is not your motive, then feel free,” and I always think it is a gamble.

Like, what if one of them was just like so unrepentant or something? They are like, “Yeah, you know what? Someone sent me a video last night of sinless Steve,” who sees this moment and is like, “Yeah, I will go ahead and throw a rock,” and it is like, “Jesus, what are you doing? Like, you can’t just gamble with this person’s life,” but He is not, because He knows what is happening, and He knows that what the men have done to this woman is absolutely brutal. They have dragged her into the middle of this courtroom. They have placed her sin on display in front of everyone.

I want you to think for a moment about this woman, and I want you to put yourself in her shoes, because what we can all probably recognize is there are parts of our lives that we wish no one would ever know about. Or that there are things within us that we hope will not be exposed. I want you to imagine for a moment, Pauly, our technical director, that in the back of the room, he has a light that if we shine it on anyone in the room, and it fixes on one person, then it will display their deepest, darkest secrets on the screen behind me. I want you to think about if it would shine on you, and your sin was suddenly on display in front of everyone. I mean, think of the things we might see up there, the pictures, the images, the words,

the bitterness, the jealousies. I mean, every single one of us has parts within us that we do not want seen, and here's the thing, when you recognize those places within yourself, that you wish for no one to know about, for no one to see, the way that you have talked to that person, the way that you have treated that person, the hidden thoughts you have had about those people, you suddenly recognize the woman's predicament, but deeper than that, you recognize what it is to feel the weight of sin, because the weight of sin is that thing that we want to keep hidden. The weight of sin is the recognition that things are so heavy about what I have done that I do not want anyone to know. If we had that spotlight, and we just flashed it on different people, I could guarantee that church attendance would just bottom out. Like no one would come back for fear of what would happen if their sin was exposed, but that is the beauty of this story, that this woman has a spotlight shined on her. Jesus knows her deepest, darkest sin, and this is how He chooses to respond.

“At this, those who heard began to go away one at a time, the older ones first, until only Jesus was left with the woman still standing there,” and I want to pause, because there is this slowness of the moment that happens in the story, where it says that the people who were there who were so ready to take this woman's life and who are trying to trap Jesus have essentially recognized the weight of their own sin. They are choosing to step away one at a time, because what Jesus has done in this moment is where they have shined a spotlight on a woman's sin, Jesus has turned that into a mirror. So many times what happens in our lives is we try to turn other people's sin into the issue, and if we can just keep everybody pointing at somebody else and everyone in the room looking at someone else, then we do not have to examine our own hearts and our own souls, and so we will just talk about somebody else's parenting, so they do not examine our marriage too closely. Or we will point out flaws in their political party and their political allegiance, but we are biased and prideful in our own. We are so good at shining the spotlight on other people, and Jesus will not allow it. He says, no, the law was never intended to shine a light on other people's sin. It was intended to be a mirror to expose you to your own, and so He causes these people to walk away one by one by one, until only two are left, a sinful woman, because she is sinful in this story, and an absolutely sinless savior.

I think this is where the story becomes so personal to us, because when you are dealing with sin, eventually the crowd clears, the noise dies down. What matters most is not what other people have maybe said about you. It is what Jesus says about you, and this is what Jesus says to the weight of sin in all of our hearts. “She said, ‘No one, sir. They have all left,’ and Jesus said to her, ‘Neither do I condemn you,’ Jesus declared. ‘Go now and leave your life of sin.’” I think those are some of the most beautiful words in all of scripture, because there are two things that Jesus is doing in this moment, and I do not want us to miss how stunning this is. The only one in the courtyard who is holy and who is sinless, who would essentially have a right to throw the stone, chooses mercy instead. Jesus, instead of condemning this woman who has just been through probably the most traumatic event in all of her life, does not choose to pick up a stone to throw at her. He chooses and offers mercy without minimizing her sin. He tells her to go and stop sinning and stop pretending holiness does not matter. He says that it does matter, and yet He is revealing the heart of God in this moment, that the one who could condemn the sinner came instead to save them. It is the verse we talked about a few weeks ago, John 3:17: “God did not send his Son into the

world to condemn the world, but to save the world.” Jesus, a few chapters later, is literally living this out with a woman who stands in condemnation and accused.

Some of us have this view of God that He can just not wait to condemn us for the things that we do, for all those missteps, for all those mistakes, for all of the errors that we make, that God is just waiting and cannot wait to punish us. Whether it is through difficult circumstances or tragedy in our life, He is just ready to make us feel the weight of what we have done wrong, and yet what Jesus reveals in this moment, and this is where the story meets every single one of us, is that that is not the heart of God at all, and this is what we see.

Some of us are more like the crowd than we would care to admit. Some of us are so quick to accuse, we are quick to judge, we are quick to carry stones, and others of us, we are more like the woman. We are ashamed, we are exposed, we are terrified that our worst moment will define us, and if we are really honest with ourselves, most of us have been both. We have stood in line with the accusers, and we have stood in the middle of the courtyard with the accused, but whether we carry stones or feel the weight of shame within us, beneath all of those things is a deeper problem that every one of us has, and that is sin in our hearts. That is why we need Jesus, because Jesus is the sinless savior, who could condemn and chooses not to. Jesus is revealing the heart of God, and this is why John’s gospel is so profound, because he says, “Neither do I condemn you,” because one day Jesus will go to the cross for the condemned. Sin still needs a payment. Sin still needs to be dealt with, and the only Holy One will stand in the place of the unholy, and the sinless one will be shamed and exposed and judged, so that sinners like you and me can be forgiven and welcomed and made new. Holy, holy, holy is God, but He deals with our sin in a beautiful way in Jesus. He does not dismiss our sin. He defeats it, and so if you are here today, and you are feeling the weight of shame and sin in your life, the choices you have made, the things that have been done to you, Jesus speaks over you, “Neither do I condemn you,” but notice in the story, He also does not condemn those who judge too severely. He lets them go away with their dignity intact.

So, here is the invitation for you today. It is a simple one. Some of us need to put down our stones, and some of us need to put down our shame. Some of us need to stop using the failures of others to avoid the work that needs to be done in our own soul, and some of us need to stop hiding behind comparison or condemnation or performance and carefully managed versions of ourselves that we want everybody else to see. We need to stop believing the lie that your worst moment gets the final word over your life. The invitation of Jesus is that some of us need to start dropping our stones, to repent of being harsh and critical and self-righteous, and others of us, we need to step out of hiding, which Jesus does not force, but He says, come out of your shame. Stop living in that place where you believe that you are beyond the reach of grace. The invitation of Jesus is to come to Him and to confess what is real, to also leave behind the life and the sin that is killing you, to receive the grace that Jesus has, mercy for our sin, freedom for our shame, and a whole new life, where we can go and sin no more.

So, I am going to ask you to just stand here as we respond in worship. I am going to say a simple prayer over you. Heavenly Father, for those of us in this room right now who are feeling the weight of the stones we carry, who feel the weight of the ways that we judge and criticize and condemn others for not being like us, God, I pray that by the power of your Spirit we would simply drop those stones, and God, for those of us who are carrying around shame like a backpack that is weighing us down, for those of us

who just feel the weight of the things that we have done, that the Spirit is showing us maybe for the first time in a while the weight of the sin that we carry, God, I pray that those beautiful words of Jesus, “Neither do I condemn you,” would be spoken over us by the power of the Spirit. God, I pray for all of us, that therefore, because of the beauty of God’s holiness and the majesty of his grace, that we would leave our lives of sin at the cross. God, we give ourselves to you, and we give this moment to you. We respond out of an understanding of what you have done for us. May we go and live for you. It is in the beautiful name of Jesus that we pray this, amen.

That is what is on offer for us today, that Christ gives us new life and that we can be alive. Every once in a while, as I have lived in Colorado, and the beauty of the mountains has gone away, there are moments where the beauty still punches through. It is a particular sunset. It is a moment where they are covered in snow, and they have not been that way in a while, and my prayer for you today is that the gospel will have punched through in that way, that you would have been reminded, or maybe even for the first time, seeing who Jesus is and what He does for us.

I think some of us are in this room, and we are in a wrestling match as we leave today. We are stuck between that place of Jesus saying, “Neither do I condemn you,” and the place where He says, “Go and sin no more,” because we still have those places in our lives, those strongholds that we are holding onto that we are not quite sure what it looks like to let go of and to walk in the freedom Jesus has provided for us today. So, I just want to say those words of Jesus over you one time as you leave, that when everyone else left because they could not condemn her, “Jesus said to her, ‘Then neither do I condemn you.’ He declared, ‘Now go and leave your life of sin.’” Amen. You may go in peace.

43:32 minutes

Edited by Tom Kenaston

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