

JESUS SAVES A SINFUL WOMAN

John 7:53-8:11

Key Verse: 8:11

“‘No one, sir,’ she said. ‘Then neither do I condemn you,’ Jesus declared. ‘Go now and leave your life of sin.’”

In today’s passage Jesus confronts malicious religious leaders who want to catch him in a trap. The bait is a sinful woman. With divine wisdom, Jesus avoids the trap. More than that, Jesus saves the woman from their hands and gives her a new beginning for life. We can learn that Jesus did not come to condemn, but to save sinners. Let’s accept Jesus who saves us from condemnation.

First, Jesus again teaches the word of God to the people (7:53-8:2).

Look at 7:53. “Then each went to his own home.” The Feast of Tabernacles had lasted eight days. It was a time of special devotion to God, beyond the ordinary routine. Once it was over, people went back to their homes. They could enjoy family devotion and prepare for a new week of school and work. They might have felt like some of us after a Bible conference, as we speed home to see our children. Jesus was different. Look at 8:1. “But Jesus went to the Mount of Olives.” Jesus did not have his own home. In Serbia, Missionary Daniel and Susanna Koh and their two children live in a one bedroom apartment. It has a tiny kitchen, a small bathroom, and a central room that they use as a living room and dining room. This is also the Serbia UBF center where they hold Sunday worship service and one-to-one Bible study. When three guests were in their house, there was no place to sit,

let alone to enjoy some privacy. Our dear coworkers are really sacrificial. But Jesus was even more sacrificial. Jesus had no home at all. Jesus had no wife or children. But Jesus had God. God was his Father. God was his family.

The Mount of Olives was Jesus' place of prayer. After teaching the word of God to rebellious people, Jesus was tired. Jesus needed some rest. What did Jesus do? Jesus went to God in prayer. Jesus renewed his strength through prayer. Jesus made a new decision to serve God through prayer. Jesus recharged his holy passion to please God through prayer. Sometimes we feel tired in doing the work of God. We learn from Jesus that it is the time to pray and renew our strength in God.

Look at verse 2. "At dawn he appeared again in the temple courts, where all the people gathered around him, and he sat down to teach them." Jesus' prayer made him very diligent. Jesus was in the temple courts at dawn, ready to begin a new day of serving God. Jesus' prayer also made him very courageous. As we have seen, the temple courts were a spiritual battleground. It was the place where armed guards had threatened to arrest Jesus the day before. It was the place where venomous religious leaders flexed their political muscle at will. But Jesus was undaunted. Jesus stood in the temple courts ready to serve God as a matter of life and death.

It is interesting that many people were in the temple courts. Perhaps they did not understand why, but they had been drawn to the temple courts in search of Jesus. They were spiritually thirsty. They remembered his invitation to come to him and drink. When they found him they were so happy. They flocked around Jesus and gave their full attention to him. Then Jesus began to teach them the word of God.

In light of John's gospel, Jesus must have taught them that he is the source of life and the giver of eternal life. As they listened to Jesus' words, the anxiety of living in a dog-eat-dog world began to dissipate. The hope of eternal life gave them great peace in their souls. They began to grasp God's eternal purpose for them. They felt free and alive. They began to realize how precious their lives were. Husbands made new decisions to love their wives dearly and vice versa. Children made new decisions to study hard and to use all of their God-given abilities to the fullest extent. Moreover, Jesus must have taught them the love of God. It seems that everyone has a love problem. It is because the devil constantly plants doubt about God's love and about others' love. But as the people listened to Jesus they gained a great assurance that God loved them. They became really joyful.

As we know, teaching the word of God to college students on our campuses is not easy. Sometimes we become tired and weary. But when we pray like Jesus, we can find strength in God. We can be diligent in spirit. We can preach the gospel forcefully in enemy territory and advance the kingdom of God. Students are all thirsty for God. Nothing less can satisfy their souls. Let's make a prayerful decision to teach the Bible one-to-one to students in our universities.

Second, Jesus' shepherd heart to save a sinful woman (3-9).

Jesus' life-giving Bible study was suddenly and rudely interrupted. Look at verses 3-6. "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.”

Although the religious leaders had failed to capture Jesus the day before, they did not give up. They opposed Jesus as a matter of life and death. They knew that Jesus would not compromise with them. If they did not get rid of Jesus, Jesus would change their way of life. So they fought against Jesus as a matter of their own survival. We must know that the devil and his servants do not give up easily. Here, they made a new plan. They brought in a woman caught in adultery and tried to use her to trap Jesus. Their case against the woman was airtight. She had been caught in the act of adultery, and the factual evidence was beyond dispute. In our times, she might have been caught on videotape. The law of Moses demanded death by stoning (Lev 20:10; Dt 22:20-21). It seemed that Jesus had no choice but to agree with them. However, if he did so, he could be arrested for insurrection as a religious revolutionary, for the Roman government forbade colonial people from executing the death sentence. Worse than this, Jesus would be branded as a man with no shepherd heart. On the other hand, if Jesus did not agree to the stoning, he could be labeled like a liberal theologian who disregarded the law of Moses. Then he would lose all credibility as a Bible teacher.

The religious leaders thought they would trap Jesus. But in fact, they revealed their own wickedness. It was true that they knew the law. They were experts in the law. No ordinary person could talk with one of them for five minutes without being thoroughly humiliated and silenced. They felt that knowing the law made them righteous and also superior to ordinary people. But they did not apply their knowledge of the law with a right motive. They did not study the law to repent of

their sins and to grow in the love of God. They only wanted to wield power over others. They neither feared God, nor had a shepherd heart.

Still, their charge against the woman could not be ignored. Adultery is a great sin against God. It is included in the Ten Commandments: “You shall not commit adultery” (Ex 20:14). Simply, adultery is to break a marriage vow through acts of unfaithfulness. This includes extramarital affairs, fornication, homosexuality, and pornographic experiences. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus broadened the definition beyond actions to include the thoughts of the heart (Mt 5:28). Indulging in mental fantasies or stealing the mind of a married person is also adultery. This can be done impersonally, even through internet chatting. Adultery devastates people’s lives. Many murders have been committed as the fruit of adultery. God never overlooks adultery. God punishes adultery both in this life and in the world to come. God will send adulterous people to the fiery lake of burning sulfur forever (Rev 21:8). We must not underestimate the seriousness of this sin.

The woman was a terrible sinner. At one time, she might have been an honor student, or a most talented musician. Now she had become like Anna Karenina, or like Hester in “The Scarlet Letter.” She was nothing more than an adulteress. She was dragged to the temple courts and exposed. The bloodthirsty cries of the religious leaders made her break out into a cold sweat. There was no one to defend her, no one to understand her. She faced the wages of death for her sin.

When Jesus surveyed this situation, he made an immediate decision to save the woman at any cost. How did he do this? Look at verse 6b. “But Jesus bent down and started to write on the ground with his finger.” We don’t know what Jesus

wrote down. Augustine suggested that it was the Ten Commandments. One preacher said it was the names of the mistresses of each religious leader. Calvin says that this is all useless speculation. Perhaps we can find the best explanation for Jesus' action by reading verse 6b in the King James Version. It says, "But Jesus stooped down, and with his finger wrote on the ground, as though he heard them not." Jesus made light of the religious leaders' serious accusation. Instead of reacting to them, Jesus did something that made them stop and think. Jesus' curious action opened their hearts to his words. Jesus changed the atmosphere from emotional to rational. Jesus is a genius in communicating with irrational people. Once, a shepherd who was very upset toward a coworker came to Dr. Samuel Lee. He wanted Dr. Lee to take immediate disciplinary action against the other party. Dr. Lee said nothing. Instead, noticing a hole in the carpet, he got down on his knees and trimmed the hole neatly. He brought glue from his office, then made a patch and repaired the carpet very skillfully. It took more than thirty minutes. Gradually the shepherd calmed down and received counseling to love his brother. We live in the time of post-modernism. Many have abandoned reason to live by emotional feelings. Such people easily fall into the devil's trap. But let's look at Jesus. Instead of getting upset, we should sit down and draw a picture.

Then what did Jesus say? Look at verses 7-8. "When they kept on questioning him, he straightened up and said to them, 'If any one of you is without sin, let him be the first to throw a stone at her.' Again he stooped down and wrote on the ground." Jesus is brilliant. Jesus admitted that the law was right, and the absolute truth of God. Yet Jesus implied that God alone has the right to judge. Jesus urges those who would judge others to look at themselves first. As Jesus taught elsewhere, before taking a speck from our brother's eye, we must take the plank out of our

own eye (Mt 7:5). Those who know what kind of sinner they are become compassionate and gracious toward other sinners.

Jesus' teaching must be kept in context. Jesus does not mean that we should silently tolerate adulterous behavior because we are also sinners. Not at all! We Christians are called to be holy and to set a standard of holiness surpassing that of the Pharisees (1 Pe 1:16; Mt 5:20). St. Paul once cast out an immoral brother for his bad influence (1 Cor 5:13). Certainly Jesus does not condone immoral behavior. But in this event, Jesus stopped religious hypocrites from destroying a helpless woman by abusing the law.

How did they react? Look at verse 9. "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." Jesus' words had pierced their consciences. Jesus had spoken to them as individuals, not a group. To stone the woman, one of them had to take responsibility, make a decision and throw the first stone. That person would face the scrutiny of the other sinners. No one could do so. There was no one righteous. The older ones were the first to recognize this. Perhaps elders are precious, not because they are super-spiritual, but because the wisdom of years tempers self-righteous passion. After a few minutes, all the woman's accusers were gone. In this part, Jesus saved a sinful woman out of his great shepherd heart, using all his wisdom and courage.

Third, Jesus said, "neither do I condemn you" (10-11).

Now Jesus turns his attention toward the woman. Look at verses 10-11. “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.’” Until now, the woman felt that she was the only sinner in Jerusalem, if not in the world. But Jesus helped her realize that all the people around her were also sinners. Sin is a universal problem for all people. So we don’t have to be self-conscious toward other sinners.

However, there was one who was not a sinner; there was one who had the right to throw the first stone at this woman. He was Jesus. In the end, this woman had to stand before Jesus alone. Likewise, each of us must stand before Jesus as the sinners that we are. There is no pretense; there is no excuse. What did Jesus say? Jesus said, “Neither do I condemn you.” Jesus did not condemn her. Jesus knew all about her sins. Still, Jesus, the Son of God, declared, “Neither do I condemn you.” Jesus came to save sinners. John 3:17 says, “For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him.” God wants to save us, not condemn us. However, it was costly. Jesus had to suffer and die on the cross to bear the condemnation we deserve. This is why Jesus can say, “Neither do I condemn you.” When we come to Jesus, Jesus saves us from sin and condemnation.

Condemnation is a big problem. Condemnation leads to deadly despair and makes us totally useless. There was a straight A student who suddenly got several B’s. He felt so condemned that he wanted to quit school. There was a young Christian who decided to eat Daily Bread regularly. But after failing to do so for three days in a row, he fell into such condemnation that he wanted to give up the Christian life.

There was a parent whose child was going astray. This parent tortured himself by remembering all of his mistakes in raising the child. He was so preoccupied with his own condemnation that he was useless to his child. One shepherd gave all his heart to serve a rebellious sheep. One day, in his passion, he said something that hurt his sheep. Then he fell into such condemnation that he wanted to give up his shepherd life completely. Condemnation is the devil's tool to render God's people helpless and useless. But Jesus saves us from sin and condemnation.

We must accept Jesus' words, "Neither do I condemn you." We must get out of condemnation and boldly serve God with the assurance of his saving grace. In this, we have many heroes of faith. One is St. Paul. Paul was once the most terrible sinner. He persecuted Christians, even consenting to stoning Stephen. He had been a slave of jealousy, hatred and a murderous spirit. But Jesus saved him. Jesus forgave him and made him the apostle to the Gentiles. Paul accepted this grace by faith. He overcame the devil's condemnation and served God with all his heart and soul and strength. In Romans 8:1, Paul wrote, "Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus." When the devil whispers condemning words in our ears, let's go to Jesus right away and hear his word, "Neither do I condemn you." Let's live a powerful life and carry out God's holy mission by faith in Jesus.