

Go, Sin No More

John 8:1-11

September 22, 2019

Have you ever loaned your children money? Pastor J. Howard Olds once talked about his experience of loaning money to his son, Brad. When Brad was young, he was delivering newspapers in the morning, a Moped would make his job really easy and fun. So, he wanted it, but he didn't have any money. With his little income, he would never be able to buy one.

So, being a loving father, Pastor Howard bought him the Moped and made an arrangement for his son to pay back a certain amount every month. It was great for a few months, but soon Brad realized that paying his Dad the amount he promised was difficult. After giving his Dad the amount, he hardly had any money left to his spend. The debt was a heavy burden for Brad.

Knowing this, one Easter when Brad participated in Egg Hunt at the church, Pastor Howard placed a note inside a plastic egg and put that egg in Brad's basket. When Brad was opening all the eggs at home, he found the note. The note said, "Just like Jesus has forgiven all our debts, so this Easter your debt has been forgiven! Rejoice! You are FREE!!!" Can you imagine the joy of this young boy? I am sure it was the best Easter Brad ever had.¹

Forgiveness is such a freeing and uplifting feeling. Leslie Weatherhead once said, "The forgiveness of sins is the most therapeutic idea in the world. It is like the dawn breaking after a long night of torture."²

Today's lesson is about a woman who had experienced forgiveness of sin, a serious sin. She was caught in the act of adultery. She was brought before Jesus for her fate. According to Jewish law, adultery was a serious crime. The penalty for adultery was death. There is no doubt that this woman knew this law. So, when she was caught, she knew that her life was over.

However, we are not sure how she was caught. Did someone know about her illicit relationship with her lover, and catch her in the middle of the act? Or was this a set-up for her, so that they might use her for a bigger catch? If she was caught in the middle of the act, what happened to her partner? He should have been caught, too. Where did he go? How is it that she was caught and he was not? Was he part

¹ From J. Howard Olds' sermon "We Believe in the Forgiveness of Sin", www.esermons.com

² Ibid.

of the plot? If he was, she was definitely used for their scheme. The man she thought was her lover, was the man who used her.

The Pharisees and the scribes did not care about her or her adultery. They did not care what might happen to her. She was expendable. She was just a pawn on a chess board. They simply used her to achieve their goal, which was to catch Jesus.

They dragged her through the busy streets of Jerusalem in the broad daylight. I can imagine people gathering, cursing, laughing, spitting, and throwing trash at her as she was being dragged through the streets. Can you imagine the shame, the fear, the anguish, the hopelessness she must have felt?

Not only the Pharisees and scribes, but a large crowd must *have circled* around her and Jesus in the temple court. Someone from the Pharisees and the scribes said, “Teacher, this woman was caught while she was having an affair. The law of Moses demands death for such people. So, what should we do with this one?”

The Bible says that they said this to “test him, so that they might have some charge to bring against him.” Both Jesus and this woman knew that she was not the catch; she was the bait. Their purpose was to catch Jesus by using her.

Can you imagine how that must have intensified this woman’s anguish, pain and despair?

Now, this whole situation presented a dilemma for Jesus. If he told them to stone her to death just the way *the law demanded*, then he would be breaking the Roman law. At that time, capital punishment was something only the official Roman representatives could prescribe. So, Jesus would have violated that.

But then if Jesus said to let her go, then he would have violated the law of Moses. If he did that, he would not be able to maintain his claim to truth. This was a real dilemma for Jesus.

The accusers were building their case against this woman and Jesus, and Jesus’ defense was “He who is without sin among you, let him be the first to throw a stone at her.” He didn’t say that only the ones who did not have any sin could condemn her. He simply said, let the one who is without sin be the FIRST to condemn her. The only person who was without sin in that crowd was Jesus.

What Jesus was saying is that before you look at others through the eyes of condemnation, you better look at yourself through the eyes of God. God knows

your true intention. Examine that first, before you condemn her. Putting it in another way is, the only reason you are not condemned for your own sinfulness is because of God's grace.

Jesus was not saying that only the sinless people can judge others. If this is the case, then our legal system would fall apart. We would not have any judge sitting on the bench.

The truth of the matter is that as a society, we not only have the right to condemn what the Bible condemns; we also have the responsibility to do so. One thing we need to recognize is that the act a person does is not necessarily his character. The act should not be equated with the person. A person who has committed stealing is just a person who has committed stealing. We should recognize and condemn that act. He needs to be punished for that act, but once he pays his price for his crime, we should not permanently call him and constantly identify him as a thief. He has paid the price. His past act should not define his present character. Condemning sin is not same as condemning the person's character.

Now, one thing I want to share with you is that God loves us just the way we are. No matter what we have done, and how we have lived, he loves us too much to let us continue to live that way. He loves us too much to let us stay the same way. He wants us to be better. Jesus said, "I do not condemn you either, go and sin no more." What he is saying is this, "You are forgiven. Now, honor my forgiveness by NOT committing sins anymore."

In Psalm 130, the psalmist says, "You, O Lord, offer forgiveness, that we may honor you."³ God forgives our sins. And we must honor God's forgiveness by not willingly committing sins continually. We honor the Lord by staying close to the Lord. We honor him by obeying his word. The Lord says, "Go, sin no more."

In this story, we see the Pharisees and the scribes, and perhaps the crowd dragged this woman through the most humiliating public display, and they all condemned her publicly. They dragged her through a public shame.

To them Jesus said, "Anyone among you who is without sin, let him be the first to throw a stone at her." Now by saying this, Jesus was *putting the accusers* to their own private shame. It was his way of calling them to a self-examination. It is

³ Psalm 130:4.

too bad that they all left in their shame without repentance. I believe Jesus wanted to say more to them.

But they ran away, all of them, to hide themselves. They were convicted of their own sins, but they were not honest enough or brave enough to acknowledge their own sins. They were too arrogant and self-righteous to confess their sins. They were too proud to experience God's forgiveness. Yet they knew their own sins and sinfulness. They were convicted. So, they ran away not only from Jesus but also from each other. They hid themselves from others.

Like fear or grief, shame is an emotion,. It is a powerful emotion. It is perhaps the most painful feeling there is. Shame is registered in the brain the same way a strong physical pain is. When you have shame, your brain thinks that you have a strong physical pain. Shame is so painful that most people will do anything to avoid it. That is what the Pharisees, scribes and the crowd did. They ran away and hid themselves.

When Jesus straightened up, he asked the woman "Where are they?" I believe Jesus asked that question because he wanted to tell them the very same thing he would tell this woman, "Go, sin no more."

It is too bad that they were not humble enough, or vulnerable enough, to hear the message of grace. Not everyone who is convicted of their sins experience forgiveness. That is why the Pharisees, scribes and others could not experience forgiveness, but this woman did.

In the message of "Go, sin no more," this woman not only found forgiveness of sin and a second chance for her life, but she also found faith in Christ.

After she walked away from Jesus, do you think she had never regretted her sin or never experienced the shame again? I think she did. I am sure she felt terribly about her adulterous past for many years if not for the rest of her life. I am sure she experienced people's scorn, mockery and ridicule for many years, but still in the midst of all that, she had found her sense of self-worth in Christ Jesus.

She felt badly about her past, but her sense of gratitude was much stronger than her feelings of unworthiness. Her sense of renewal was much more encompassing than her feelings of shamefulness. Her faith was her source of strength and energy to go on. That is grace. That is salvation. Hear the message. It is also for you. "Go sin no more."