

THIS WEEK'S MESSAGE

APRIL 15TH-16TH, 2023 // GOSPEL OF JOHN

WRITING ON THE GROUND (JOHN 8:1-11)

This particular section of John's Gospel (7:53-8:11) is a matter of some debate and controversy in that most of the earliest Greek manuscripts of John's Gospel don't have this section.

- Most scholars agree that this is Scripture, and this is an actual event that happened in the life of Christ. The controversy is whether it belongs in this part of John's Gospel (or in another spot) or even in Luke's Gospel.

The scene is set in verse 2—it's early in the morning, and Jesus is teaching in the Temple.

- The scribes and Pharisees bring before Jesus a woman "caught in adultery" (quite literally, an adulteress caught in the act).
- The fact that the man is not brought in as well points that this was a setup (vs. 6).
- The religious leaders just wanted to put Jesus in a "no-win" situation in order to trap Him.

If Jesus said, "Let her go," then He'd be guilty of breaking the law of Moses.

- The law of Moses did state that adultery was a capital offense, however, the rules for providing evidence in cases like this were very extremely strict.
- There had to be two witnesses who agreed perfectly on what they saw, and it had to be beyond reasonable doubt that sexual intercourse had actually occurred.

But if Jesus had said, "Execute the woman," He would seem harsh and cruel, and He'd be guilty of breaking Roman law because the Romans had taken the right of official execution for religious offenses away from the Jews.

- These religious leaders have Jesus exactly where they want Him—seemingly painted into a corner. They've used this poor woman as a pawn in their sick game.

In response, Jesus stooped down and started writing on the ground (vs. 6b).

- Why??? What in the world was He writing??
- Some say Jesus might have written all the names of the men in the crowd who had also committed adultery (Jer. 17:13), others say He wrote the names and sins of the accusers, while still, others suggest Jesus wrote the passage from the law that condemns adultery.

The truth is, we don't know what Jesus wrote or why He wrote it, and apparently, we're not meant to know.

- The point is that Jesus' response to these religious leaders wasn't reactionary, rash, or hasty—it was thoughtful and deliberate.
- "The one without sin should cast the first stone": this reply perfectly followed Jewish and Roman law and exposed the wickedness of the accusers.

According to Deuteronomy 17:2-7, the witnesses of a crime who had reported it to authorities had to be the first to cast the stone.

- These men were so quick to weaponize this woman's sin against her they hadn't stopped to consider the wickedness of this entire situation.
- They'd orchestrated and plotted (probably in a dishonest manner) to use her sin and shame as a weapon against Jesus.

After Jesus's response, He stooped down again and wrote on the ground.

- Feeling convicted by their own hypocrisy and sin, the older Pharisees leave first until all had gone except for Jesus and the woman (vs. 8-9).
- Jesus issues this woman forgiveness and sends her away with a call to stop her lifestyle of sin: He never excuses, approves, or accepts her sin (vs. 10-11).

WHAT THIS TEXT DOES NOT MEAN.

1. It doesn't mean that Christians don't have the responsibility to or can never hold anyone accountable for sin or sinful behavior.
2. It doesn't mean that Jesus is easy on sin or completely throws out the O.T. law—for Jesus to forgive this woman means that someday He'd have to die for her sins (He also tells her to "... go and...do not sin anymore").

WHAT THIS TEXT DOES MEAN.

1. We are all just like that woman: guilty of sin and under the penalty of it. Jesus stands ready to bear the penalty upon Himself and forgive us.
2. Religious pride, legalism, and self-righteousness delight in punishing the sins of others while being completely blind to our own sin.
3. Forgiveness from God requires a clean break from sin.

LIGHT OF THE WORLD (JOHN 8:12-20)

This is the second of seven "I Am" passages in John.

- Like water (ch. 4) and bread (ch. 6), light is necessary for life.
- Light was an important symbol in Jewish worship: many of the candelabras and lights in the Temple symbolized the pillar of fire that gave light to Israel during the Exodus.

"I AM THE LIGHT OF THE WORLD..."

Just as the sun is the center and source of physical life on Earth, so God is the center and source for all true life.

- If we follow Him (just like the Israelites who followed the pillar of fire), we will never walk in darkness but have the light of life.
- The only way to leave the slavery of sin (which leads to death and judgment) is to follow the light of Jesus.

Jesus proclaimed that He was the light of the world, but the Pharisees couldn't see it: they were spiritually blind, and they argued that Jesus' testimony about Himself wasn't valid (vs. 13).

- Jesus was qualified to bear testimony about Himself because He came from heaven and was sent by the Father, but the Pharisees couldn't understand this because they judged by human standards (vs. 14-16).

But if the Pharisees required another witness to testify about the identity of Jesus, the testimony of the Father affirms that Jesus is everything He said He is (vs. 17-18).

"WHERE IS YOUR FATHER?" (VS. 19)

- The rumors surrounding Jesus' birth story were not that He was conceived miraculously while His mother was a virgin, but that Jesus was a bastard child of an unknown father.
- In response, Jesus made it clear that they didn't know Him or His Father (God) because if they truly knew Him, they'd know His Father (God) (vs. 19).
- These words no doubt infuriated the Pharisees, and even though this debate was taking place in the Temple (the most sacred and public place in Jerusalem), no one seized Jesus because His hour had not yet come (vs. 20).

DEPARTURE (JOHN 8:21-29)

In vs. 21, Jesus reveals that after His earthly ministry, He would ascend into Heaven.

- His accusers, in their sinful hatred and rejection of Him, would not be in Heaven—they would die in their sin.
- Of course, the Pharisees didn't understand this spiritual reality, so they wondered if Jesus was simply speaking of committing suicide (vs. 22).

Regardless of how holy and religious these Pharisees regarded themselves, Jesus tells them that they weren't heavenly ("from above"): they were quite earthly in their thinking (vs. 23).

- Even though they were religious, they lived in darkness that filled their minds and hearts and directed their actions.
- No matter how religious they were, if they didn't believe in Jesus they'd die in their sins (vs. 24).

"...YOU WILL DIE IN YOUR SINS." (VS. 24)

We are all born into sin (Psalm 51:5): we are sinners by both our nature and our choices.

- If we hold onto our sin and don't deal with it, we will die in our sins.
- Since all sin must be dealt with, those who die in their sins will have to pay for their sins in hell.
- But our sins can be paid for now through faith and trust in Jesus.

"WHO ARE YOU?" (VS. 25)

Jesus had already answered this question, but the Pharisees didn't like the answer Jesus had given them.

- There are many who, deep down, know exactly who Jesus is, but they don't like that truth or want to accept it, so they claim that Jesus is unknowable or His identity is a mystery to us.
- Jesus doesn't have a new answer for these Pharisees or for those who have suppressed the truth of Him in their own hearts.
- Jesus is fully God, the Savior of the world, the bread of life, the light of the world, and the only way to Heaven.
- Jesus' words were words from God the Father, but the Pharisees were too blind to see.

When Jesus would be crucified, all would see His perfect obedience and submission to the will of the Father (vs. 28).

- The world would know Jesus more fully as the Messiah after His sacrificial death.
- Despite the accusations from the Pharisees, Jesus was as close as ever to the Father as He walked in perfect obedience to Him (vs. 29).

JESUS FORGIVES.

- We are guilty of sin and under the penalty of it, but Jesus stands ready to bear the penalty upon Himself and forgive us.
- Jesus doesn't delight in our shame or condemnation; instead, He bears it upon Himself and covers us with grace.
- Do you know just how much you've been forgiven (or you can be forgiven)?

JESUS RESTORES.

- Contrary to the great lie and mythology of American Southern Churchianity, grace is not a license to keep sinning: it's a reason to stop.
- Jesus doesn't wink at, excuse, approve, or accept your sin; He'll forgive you of it, but He's commanded you to stop because He wants to restore, heal, and remake you.
- Will you let Him restore you?

JESUS BRINGS LIGHT.

- The only way to leave the slavery of your sin (which leads to death and judgment) is to follow the light of Jesus.
- The only way to know the truth of God and the way to Heaven is to follow the light of Jesus.
- What does it mean to follow Jesus? It means He becomes everything to you as you obey and submit fully to His will in faith.

JESUS PAYS OUR SIN DEBT.

- We are all sinners by our nature and choices.
- If we hold onto our sin and don't deal with it in this life, we will die in our sins.
- Since all sin must be dealt with, those who die in their sins will have to pay for their sins in Hell.
- If we trust in Jesus in repentant, obedient faith, He will pay our sin debt in full.
- Where will you go with your sin debt?