

The following is a rough transcript, not in its final form and may be updated.

Turning the Table John 8:1-11

Intro: At the end of **ch7**; after Jesus had extended that great invitation in **vs37**; after the religious rulers had failed in a couple of attempts to arrest Him; the chapter concludes by saying that “everyone went to his own house.” The idea here is that Jesus had so confounded His opponents with His authoritative and profound teaching in the temple that they all just went home. One may surmise at the end of **ch7** that the religious rulers actually gave up and went home but our text in **ch8** assures us that this is not the case. On the contrary: they had yet another card up their sleeve.

When the religious rulers realized that they had failed to have Jesus arrested, they immediately devised a diabolical plan to trap Him. The execution of this plan is one of the most despicable actions performed by these men in all the Gospels. As terrible as this episode is, it is also an occasion in which Jesus not only reveals the depths of His justice, wisdom and compassion but also delivers a message of hope peace for all those will come to Him. This story is of the woman taken in adultery. The core dilemma of this story is how justice and mercy can be combined without encouraging sin or condemning the sinner. This is actually the central, pivotal point of John’s entire Gospel. In light of this foundation, there are 3 things to make note of in this passage: 1) the horror of sin; 2) God’s sovereignty in all circumstances and 3) Jesus’ word of hope to sinners.

1-6a- The first thing we should notice in this text is the absolute horror of sin. I’m not referring to the woman’s sin but the sin of the religious rulers. Of course, adultery is sin and this woman is guilty of it. But compared to the sin of the men who were using her to trap Jesus, her sin was merely a mote in her eye compared to the beams in their eyes.

To understand exactly what these guys were up to, we must know that not only were they trying to trap Jesus; they actually had to trap this woman as well. In fact, it was nearly impossible for this to happen accidentally. In all capitol cases, Jewish law had very exacting requirements in regards to the testimonies of eyewitnesses. Under Jewish law as was practiced at this time, it was required to have multiple witnesses to the physical act of

intercourse before the charge of adultery could be brought, and even this was to be under the most exacting of circumstances. It was not enough for the witnesses to see the couple in a “compromising situation” such as leaving a room together where they had been alone or even seeing them in the same bed. No, the actual physical movements of the couple could have no other explanation than intercourse and the witnesses were required to have seen exactly the same acts at exactly the same time, in the presence of each other, so that their testimonies would be identical in every respect.

Under these conditions, acquiring evidence of adultery would be nearly impossible if the situation was not a setup. We can rightly assume that the affair had been pre-arranged, probably by the very man who committed adultery with this woman. Who was the man? He’s either a mercenary of the Sanhedrin or a card-carrying member? Either way, to get the evidence they needed, they would had to have posted witnesses in the room or, at least, at the keyhole.

We can see the horror of the sin of these men in another way too. The fact that only the woman was brought to Jesus reveals their utter dishonesty. If adultery could only be proved by the testimony of witnesses who’d seen the couple in the very act, then where was the man? Why wasn’t he brought too? Either the rulers let him to escape or he had been in on the plot from the get go and was granted immunity. How horrible! But it’s merely the old case of the double standard that exists still today. In such cases, the men should be required to stand with the women and accept their share of the guilt, which is usually greater; but not here. This poor woman had to bear the shame alone.

The horror of their sin can also be seen in the way they brought the woman to Jesus. They dragged her to Him in the middle of His teaching in the temple. By all indications, they wanted to make this as public as possible, to embarrass both the woman and Jesus. It appears that the religious leaders had some special vindictiveness towards her since there was no need for this public display. She could have been kept in their custody while the matter was referred to Jesus at a later time but that’s not what they were gunning for. They brought this woman to Jesus in shame-filled, humiliating circumstances. She was held against her will after having been enticed and trapped in the act of adultery.

On top of all of this, they then have the unmitigated gall to appeal to the Law of Moses! We must also realize that this was a serious problem that Jesus was now confronted with. This wasn't like other problems He had been challenged with before like "whose wife will she be in the resurrection" or "should we pay taxes or not." One was easily answered from Scripture while the other was merely a conflict of public sentiment and Roman law. This problem had 3 important matters at stake: 1) the woman's life; 2) Jesus' teachings on the compassionate nature of His kingdom and 3) the divinely given Law of Moses. The way the question was posed by these leaders; there was little doubt in their minds that Jesus would have to surrender one or more of these items, irreparably damaging His ministry.

Everyone knew that the most obvious characteristic of Jesus' ministry was compassion. He shamelessly rubbed elbows with publicans and sinners. He constantly befriended the social outcasts. He had said, "Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden..." (Mt 11:28a). So, if Jesus was consistent with this teaching and out of compassion for this woman choose to disregard the Law, then the rulers had Him dead to rights. They could rightly denounce Him as a dangerous false prophet for what godly prophet would speak against the Law? They already suspected this of Jesus because of His attitude towards their Sabbath regulations. On the other hand, if Jesus upheld the law and called for the woman's death, they would have enough evidence to destroy His ministry and ridicule Him to the end. These rulers were trying to pin Jesus on the horns of a dilemma and they honestly believed they had Him this time.

Now, unbeknownst to these dastardly men, they had actually hit upon the problem of all problems in regards to how sinners relate to God. How can God show love to the sinner without being unjust? Or, as Paul states the problem in Rom 3:26, how can God be both just and the justifier of the ungodly? It's easy to see how God could only be just: send every guilty sinner to hell, as a just judge would do. It's also easy to see how God could only be the justifier: simply pardon every guilty sinner. Of course, then He would no longer be just because sin is horrible and it must be paid for. From a human perspective, this problem is unsolvable. In this, their plan was air tight. They figured that even if Jesus wanted to show compassion, He couldn't in this instance; or so they thought. What they failed to realize is that when they were dealing with Jesus, they were not dealing with just a mere man. They were, in fact, dealing with God and with God, all things are

possible!

6b-8- Not only does our text reveal the horror of sin, it also reveals the sovereignty of God over all circumstances. At first Jesus seems to ignore them. Instead of replying to their questions, He stoops down and writes in the dirt. A lot of theological ink's been spilt on trying to surmise what Jesus was writing in the dust but it really doesn't matter since His writing seemed to have no effect on the rulers, they rudely continued to press Him for a response.

Why stoop down then? It's the action of humility. Notice, Jesus didn't react with anger or outrage. He didn't scream at the woman or her accusers even tho both were clearly in the wrong. He simply paused and stooped down. This put Him in a low posture which immediately identified Him with the humiliation of the woman. It seems Jesus did everything He could to identify with, care for and ease the public embarrassment of this woman. How can God show love and grace to the sinner without being unjust, without breaking His own law? He does it by first identifying with the sinner in their low condition.

Finally, Jesus stood up and responded but it wasn't what they were expecting. While he was ignoring them, Jesus was stooped down to the ground but when He delivers His response, He stood to His feet, made direct eye contact with the woman's accusers and delivered the now famous line. How simple and yet, how disarming! Instead of passing judgment on the woman, Jesus passed judgment on her accusers! He didn't say, "Don't execute her." He simply demanded that justice be fairly and righteously applied. Jewish law stipulated that the witnesses of a capitol crime were to begin the stoning. In effect, what Jesus is saying is, "We can execute her but we must do it correctly. The witnesses must begin the execution. So, who are the ones who witnessed this crime and only brought the woman to Me and not the man. Who was it that designed the humiliation of this woman?"

Herein lies "the rub"; not only had these men plotted and organized this woman's public shame, they had plotted and organized her actual sin and were using her as a weapon against Jesus! In this case, they had greater sin and guilt. To their credit (in this instance) the consciences of these men were not so seared that they failed to recognize their own guilt when

presented with it; although it did seem to take a little while for it to sink in. They slipped out the back, one by one until all had escaped the searching truth of Jesus. Think of all the trouble they had went to; the plotting, arranging, manipulating! It was destroyed in an instant when confronted by the God who masters the circumstances.

9-11- Now, for the first time, Jesus addresses the adulterous woman. What He says to her applies to every sinner. His response is two-fold: 1) Neither do I condemn you. Based on what, tho? Some say that since the law required 2 or more witnesses for a capitol crime, and since none of her accusers were around, the requirement of the law could not be met. But, to lay all of this on a mere technicality in the law misses the real meat of the story.

Why didn't Jesus pronounce judgment on this woman? The only solid response is: Jesus didn't pronounce judgment on this woman for the same exact reason He doesn't pronounce judgment on any who come to Him in faith. It's because of the cross upon which He is about to bear the full penalty of God's wrath against every sin ever committed by those who come to Him in faith. Jesus didn't give forgiveness easily. He did so only because He was about to make forgiveness possible by the act of suffering in the place of the sinner. This is the gospel. This is the only solution to the problem of how God can remain just and also excuse the sinner. To us, salvation is free. But it is free only because the Son of God paid the price for us.

This woman, who was guilty of a great sin, now knew the goodness of having no condemnation. She had passed from sin and the death sentence it brings to forgiveness and new life. Jesus was the only one there "without sin" and thus, had the right to cast the first stone, but He didn't. The woman found refuge in the presence of Jesus.

Then Jesus told her: 2) go and sin no more. He literally told her to stop sinning. This command always follows divine forgiveness; we cannot be saved by God and then simply continue to do as we please. We must stop sinning! Of course, it is impossible for us to stop sinning but that is no excuse to not try! To be forgiven and saved is to have the very life of Christ and His Holy Spirit residing within us. These 2 together give us the power and ability to no longer live lives that are characterized by habitual sin. Yes,

we will still sin but we are not bound to it, enslaved by it. As Christians, we don't sin because we have to; we sin because we want to. That's what Jesus is referring to here. "Repent and turn away from sinful habits."

We should be happy that the order of this is just as Jesus delivered it. If He had said, "Go, and sin no more and I will not condemn you" where's the hope in that? We all sin, so really, there would be no actual forgiveness. Instead, Jesus says, "I forgive you on the basis of My death. Now, because you are forgiven, stop sinning."

Has this been your experience? Have you understood and accepted these words of Jesus? Where do you fit in this story? Are you like the crowd, who stood by watching? They witnessed forgiveness but didn't enter into it. Are you like the rulers? They were sinners, just like the woman, but they left without ever hearing His words of forgiveness. Or, are you like the woman who both heard and received the message of the Gospel? Out of the 3, it's better to be like the woman. The crowd was indifferent. The rulers, tho convicted, went out into darkness and 6 months later are found killing the sinless Son of God. Only the woman found forgiveness of sin in Jesus Christ, who died for her sin.

While the gist of the message is evangelical, there is a great lesson for believers here as well. It's seen in the contrast between the attitude of the religious rulers towards the woman and the attitude of Jesus. Clearly, the rulers didn't look at this woman as a person. She was merely bait for a trap, a weapon to fight against Jesus with, a tool to manipulate to a desired end. Sadly, as they used this poor woman, they are found quoting scripture. Too bad they didn't give more attention to the OT for if they had, they would have discovered that in God's sight, each person is an individual, created by Him for a specific purpose.

That's what distinguishes the God of the Bible from the deities of every other religion, the fact that He is a personal God who speaks personally to man. He called Abraham by name, He called Moses by name. He even called Cyrus, a heathen monarch, by name, years before he was ever born! When reading the OT, you can't help but notice the importance of proper names. Whole chapters are given over to long, exhausting genealogies. Why? God doesn't see man merely as a thing or an abstraction; as a species or an idea. God sees man as a person to relate to not just an object

to be used or manipulated to achieve an end.

To the religious rulers this woman was just a tool. She had no feelings, no future and no need for saving. It was only in the presence of Jesus that she found mercy and regained her identity. Jesus' attitude towards her was characterized by understanding, compassion, forgiveness and a challenge. She was forgiven but she was told to do better. It's the challenge of the sinless life. Jesus confronts us in the same way. He understands us, loves us and forgives us but He does all this so that we will not continue in sin. This should characterize how we relate to others.

Why the great contrast in attitude towards the woman? The rulers had used her but Jesus had saved her. What made the difference? Remember, before all this happened, Jesus had spent the night on the Mount of Olives, where we know from other passages He spent a lot of time in prayer. The leaders had spent their night scheming among themselves or peeping thru keyholes.

How do we acquire the compassionate attitude of Jesus? It only comes from communing with our heavenly Father. We are personal with others only when we know ourselves to be persons. We only know ourselves to be persons when we see ourselves as persons before God. 😊