

Sin & Grace - Mr Duncan Macpherson (North Harris)

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[0 : 00] So I want to look tonight at that passage that we read and the incident of the woman caught in adultery being brought before Jesus.

I think the text is really quite similar in the two versions here.

By way of context for this incident where we have the woman being brought in front of Jesus, we can see, first of all, if you look back at John 7 and verse 1, that the Jews, that is the authorities, the Pharisees, they wanted Jesus dead.

And that was their intention, and they would carry that out when they had the first opportunity. And then we see from our reading that Jesus was up in Jerusalem for the Feast of Tabernacles.

And that's described in detail in Leviticus 23, verses 37 to 44. But essentially it was a week-long harvest Thanksgiving festival, and the people would come together for a whole seven-day period.

[1 : 25] They would stay in booths made of branches to remind themselves of the Exodus and how they didn't have houses to stay in at that time. The principal or a key element of that feast was it was a joyous festival for the people to have because they would come together and rejoice that the Lord had provided for them again.

And on the very last day of that feast, we read in chapter 7 and verse 37, Jesus with his famous saying, If anyone is thirsty, let him come to me and drink.

And the guards who had been sent to arrest him and take him to the Sanhedrin did not do so because, as they said, no man ever spoke like this man.

And then at the beginning of chapter 8, we have Jesus in verse 2 teaching once again in the synagogue. And it's highly likely that this day was in fact the Sabbath day, the day set aside for worship and for learning specifically about Scripture and about God and his dealings with mankind. And Jesus is there teaching in the temple when the teachers and the Pharisees bring this woman and make her stand before not only Jesus but the whole crowd who was listening to Jesus.

[2 : 57] So you can imagine in verse 3 how humiliating that would have been for the poor woman. So the first point I would like us to think on tonight as we look in detail at this passage is simply that of the deceitfulness of sin.

We have this woman brought before them who had been caught in the act of adultery. And it's amazing how when we think of sin, we often convince ourselves that we can have the pleasure of sin but not the consequences of it.

No doubt she had it in her mind that this was going to be a great day of pleasure and delight for her. But as soon as she was caught, all that simply crumbled away.

She thought what she was doing was something that was being done in secret. And yet here she was with her sins paraded publicly in front of everybody in the temple.

She thought it would be secret. She thought that she could potentially cheat on her own husband if indeed she was married. Or equally she could cheat on the wife of the man who was her lover.

[4 : 14] And the consequences of that would have been pretty severe. A broken marriage. If she lost her own husband, maybe she herself would have ended up destitute.

And here in this situation, she's got these religious police dragging her before Jesus and asking, well, should we do what the law says and stone her to death?

So the very thought of the pleasure of her sin in a very quick time had turned very much into one of terror and humiliation. We can see there how deceitful sin was in her life and the concept of it.

She had been completely deceived. But she was not the only one there who was deceived that day by sin. We see the accusers before her.

And as I mentioned in the introduction, they had it in their own hearts to put Jesus to death. So there they were, in effect, looking to commit a worse sin than the one that she had done.

[5 : 19] And they were looking down upon her, and yet murder was in their own hearts. They were very much self-righteous with regards to that woman who was in front of them.

And to everyone else around, chapter 7 and verse 49, they thought nothing of the crowd whatsoever.

In the New International Version, they translate the word that translated crowd in the ESV as mob. No, but this mob that knows nothing of the law. That's what they thought of the ordinary people, the ones whom Jesus specifically cared for.

In a different circumstance, in Mark 7, Jesus condemned them because he said they didn't honor their parents. They had this rule that if they gave a gift and called it korban, that then released them from any obligation to look after their parents.

So as long as they were giving a gift to God, it didn't matter in their minds that their parents might be left destitute and hungry. But Jesus had already condemned them for that.

[6 : 35] They hated their neighbor. They said of the crowd in general there that there was a curse upon them. Who were they to go putting curses upon people and judging the state of other people's hearts?

And yet, despite that, they appealed to the law in verse 5, and say that Moses commanded us to stone this woman to death.

What do you say? They were just as deceived as that woman had been. Everyone in front of Jesus that day in that group had been deceived by sin and by its power.

The problem, or the big problem though, was although the woman could see that, and she'd been thoroughly humiliated, her accusers were completely blind to the deceitfulness of sin in their own hearts.

Now, the commentator Hendrickson points out that in verse 6, where it talks about they were trying to test and to tempt Jesus, he said the verb there can actually be translated in the sense of lead into sin.

[7 : 50] God tests us, but does not lead us into sin. But here these accusers, they were coming up to Christ, and they were deliberately using this woman as a tool in order to try and lead Jesus into sin.

Sin had got a really tight grip upon their hearts, and it was deceiving them, and they could not see the real situation. Our second point then is to think upon the reality of sin.

Here we have these rulers and teachers of the law wanting to deceive and to bring Jesus down.

And as we look at this situation, we have to say to ourselves, from a human perspective, it would appear that Jesus was in a real bind in this situation, because it would appear that he had two choices.

Firstly, he could agree with what the law said and condemn the woman, and say, yes, she must be stoned to death. But then if she was stoned to death, that would be to break Roman law, because the Romans were the rulers in Israel in that day.

They were the ones who decided who lived and who died. So if Jesus carried out such a thing, he would be considered to be a lawbreaker in the Romans' eyes.

[9 : 14] Equally, he could lose authority in the eyes of the common people, who were suffering greatly under their own supposedly spiritual rulers, but those who had no care for them, and were just thinking about their own self-righteousness.

On the other hand, Jesus could have disagreed with what the law said, and said, no, she shouldn't be stoned, in which case he would have been condemned by the Sanhedrin for refusing to fulfill the law of God.

On the mountain, Jesus said that he had come to fulfill the law and fulfill it in all of its fullness.

He had no intention of not fulfilling the law. So we see Jesus' response there. He simply bent over and he wrote in the ground.

It's very hard to say what was going through Jesus' mind at that point. We're not told. I think the best and most likely thing, he was simply greatly shocked at this incident that had occurred right in front of his very eyes.

[10 : 35] Here he was teaching, and in the process of worship, of expounding the word of God, when this rabble who claimed themselves to be teachers of the law came in dragging this poor

wretch of a woman in front of him.

And in all likelihood, it was on the Sabbath day, the day in which God himself was to be worshipped, the day of rest, the day for focus solely upon spiritual exercises, not upon judging those beneath us. And he sat there and he simply wrote in the ground. A lot of ink has been spilt down the centuries, wondering what Jesus might have written in the ground. But as we're not told, we simply don't know.

To my own mind, I think one key element that is there is Jesus, in writing on the ground, was seeking to draw the focus of attention away from the sinner, the woman, and onto himself. He was taking upon himself the accusations that were being made, the accusations arising from the law. In verse 7, they kept on questioning him.

[11:51] So obviously, he was under pressure, and yet he just stayed calm, writing in the ground. And you can just imagine the crowd watching on.

And this could have taken several minutes as they kept questioning him. Jesus, what have you got to say? What is your answer? But all the time, his actions drew their abuse onto himself and away from the woman.

We then see that he's straightened up. And I think it's very important when we see something like that in Scripture, just to think of where else we see that.

As I read those words, I'm reminded of Job, who is described as an upright man. In fact, the most upright man of his day. And whenever we think of somebody being straight, we think of them being upright, and honest, and moral.

Whereas Scripture often talks about the crooked man. And I just think that in straightening up Jesus, in going to speak, we're saying, here he was speaking, as an upright man, an honest man, someone who was going to speak the truth from his heart, and not from a corrupt heart, like the woman's accusers had.

[13:10] And he speaks directly to them. And he said, if any one of you is without sin, let him cast the first stone at her.

What a response that is. There's a story of a Jew in modern times who is absolutely fascinated by reading the Scriptures.

And as they came to this story and wondered how Jesus would respond to it, they shut the Bible at that point and thought to themselves, how can Jesus get out of this?

How can Jesus respond to people, to what is being said? They opened the Bible again, read those words, and were just dumbfounded by Jesus' response.

That ultimately led to that Jew becoming a Christian, because the wisdom and the power and the authority that's in those words transcends the ordinary words of men.

[14:18] In speaking in that way, let him who does not have sin cast the first stone. He was putting the focus on sin itself as an entity and not on sins as individual mini-rebellions against God.

He was putting the focus on how sin corrupts the heart, how it corrupts the life. Because nobody would be able to stand before him and say they had not sinned.

As Paul was to write later in his letter to the Romans, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. And we see a remarkable turnaround.

Here these men coming to Jesus, demanding he answer them. Lots of questions, trying to trick him and trap him. And here we have them.

Now the spotlight is upon them. What is their response going to be? As Jesus again stoops down and he writes on the ground. The focus has moved to them.

[15:28] And we see that the older ones gradually drift away. Then the younger ones followed them.

They knew that they'd been caught out at that point. They knew that none of them could say, I have not sinned and therefore I can cast the first stone. And the people who would cast the first stone, according to the law, would be the witnesses to the breaking of the law that had taken place.

So as these witnesses all disperse, there is nobody left to accuse the poor woman. But if we think for a minute in terms of their response, was that a response of repentance in terms of the recognition that indeed they had sinned.

And indeed they needed to turn away from their sin and to seek repentance. My own thought is that no. Because what we have is them recognizing that Jesus had caught them out on this situation.

But what do they do? Instead of coming to Jesus to ask for forgiveness, they leave Jesus. They go out from his presence. If you compare that to Peter, when he fell at Jesus' knees after Jesus had enabled him to catch a huge amount of fish, after not being able to catch anything all night, he simply fell down at Jesus' knees and he says, Lord, go away from me for I am a sinful man.

[17:04] Peter knew that he really shouldn't be in the presence of Jesus. And he knew that Jesus would be better outside of the presence of a sinful man. But yet he came to Jesus recognizing his sin.

And these accusers of the woman here, there's none of that for them. Each and every one leaves Christ's presence without asking for forgiveness. That's a really tragic situation for anybody to be in. And if you feel and hear God speaking to you at any point, if you hear Christ speaking to you, calling you to seek forgiveness, you must be like Peter and come before him and seek that forgiveness rather than shutting your Bible and fleeing from his presence.

as those guards had said, no one spoke like this man. Nobody spoke like Jesus while they were on the earth.

And yet, those people who wandered away from Jesus had described him in verse 47 of chapter 7 as a deceiver, the one who deceived the people.

[18:18] all the while that this was going on, Jesus had stooped down again and was writing in the ground again. There, with his finger in the dust, was he pointing simply to the dust of death, the consequences of sin.

because of sin, each and every one of us must return to the dust because our lives come to an end and there is no more hope. There's certainly that linkage between sin and death.

The self-righteous left Jesus' presence and the one who in the eyes of the world was described as a sinner remained. So, a final point then is the words of grace as we see Jesus dealing with this woman who'd been caught in adultery.

Once more, Jesus stands up. He's upright again and he asks her two questions. And he says, where are your accusers?

Where have they gone? Has no one condemned you? Jesus was the one who made them go. And then judgment was coming from them.

[19:42] Has no one condemned you? To which she replied, no one. What a real turnaround that was for that woman.

And who knows what was going on in her own mind and her own heart at that time. The turmoil of having gone from her illicit liaison to being dragged through the streets and into the temple to having been suggested that she be stoned to death and now having nobody turning, being willing to cast the first stone at her.

The very people who described the crowd as the mob, as the rabble, were themselves a mob as they had wanted her death. And here she stands in front of the one man who had saved her from death and condemnation.

In essence, in Jesus' response here, he declares her righteous and free to go. He says, then neither do I condemn you.

He does not set aside the law in that instance because he was shortly to go to the cross in which he was going to pay the price for the sin of all his people.

[21:04] He didn't condemn her in that instance. And for that woman in that situation, it must have been absolutely bewildering. It reminds us of that verse that we sang in Psalm 130.

With you there is forgiveness, therefore you are feared. Jesus gave her a simple command, go now and leave your life of sin.

I think when Jesus gives a command as direct as that, whoever was on the receiving end would have obeyed. The one speaking with the moral authority of Christ, the one who had just allowed her to escape the consequences of her sin, being told quite clearly to go and leave that life of sin, I'm certain that she will have obeyed.

She was being called by Christ to go and live a holy life. And that is the same command that Christ gives to each and every one of us here tonight. He says, go now and leave your life of sin.

Anyone who has been saved by Christ will live a holy life. They will not be perfect, but their life will be radically changed as they turn away from following sin to following Christ.

[22:31] Matthew Henry in his commentary summed it up by saying that Jesus did not come as a magistrate, but he came to save sinners. And I think here in his dealings with this woman, we have

that picture, or a great picture of the salvation of the sinner in general.

We see how in the mind of the woman sin is sweet and so it is to sinners everywhere. Sin is sweet at first, but then it turns bitter in the mouth and the consequences of sin bring fear of judgment. But forgiveness of sin leads to holiness of life. And I think I can have confidence in saying in the context of that woman that was the case and that she indeed was saved by Christ because of what comes before and what comes after the reading that we had there.

We had Jesus saying, saying, if anyone is thirsty, let him come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as the scripture has said, streams of living water will flow from him.

And then after that incident, we have Jesus speaking again to the people saying, I am the light of the world.

[23 : 57] Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life. Jesus had shed his light into that woman's life.

Hendrickson said that she'd been living in moral darkness, but Jesus came in to dispel that darkness. she herself, in seeking the relationship she had, was seeking to quench her thirst with the things of this world, whereas Jesus said he alone was the one who could give people a proper drink, from which they would never be thirsty again.

And how similar this woman's situation in that context is to the woman who was at the well, who learned that Jesus alone was the one who could make her so that she would never be thirsty again. The lessons are quite clear for each of us here tonight. Each of us can probably identify with one of the two parties involved.

It's quite possible that someone here tonight is an adulterer, if not actually carrying out an affair, certainly in your mind, you imagine that you would rather be with someone else rather than your own spouse.

[25 : 20] All of that is condemned in the law. There could be other people here tonight, and they usually are in a church of any size, those who are sitting self-righteously, judging everybody around them, seeing themselves as better than others.

If that is you, you risk being in the same situation as those accusers who came before Jesus, who when the word of Christ came to them, they couldn't come before him, but they had to leave his presence, and later on, they were to work to put him to death.

Each and every one of us must put sin to death in our own lives, must repent of our sin, and seek forgiveness from his hand.

as this woman found that day, that forgiveness from Christ was something quite remarkable. His compassion for the lost is remarkable, and when wicked men do wicked things to sinners, Jesus is willing to step in to save them from the consequences of their sin, and not just in this life, but for the life to come, let each and every one of us have that spirit of repentance, and let each and every one of us trust in the Christ who himself took our sin upon himself, that we might go free, and that we might drink of his water, and that we might walk in his light.

Amen. Let us pray. Laura, God, we thank you once more for your word.

[27 : 09] We thank you for the power that is in it. We thank you, Lord, that you have enabled us to meet tonight to hear this word, and that, Lord, your word speaks, that your word is living and active, and so often the problem is, Lord, that we are dead, or we are asleep in our sins.

Lord, we pray that you would awaken those who are dead in their sins tonight. We pray, Lord, that you would revive your people, that each of us might have a greater hatred of sin, and a greater love for Christ.

We pray that your grace would come to each and every one of us, and that, Lord, you would take away any self-righteous thoughts that we have, you would take away the evil that is in our hearts, and that, Lord, you would enable us to live for Christ in the light of his word, that we would delight at being in his presence, and that, Lord, we would seek your face through Christ at all times.

In Jesus' name we pray. Amen. We shall sing to close from Psalm 33 in the Scottish Psalter.

Psalm 33, and we're going to sing verses 8 to 11. Let earth and all that live therein with reverence fear the Lord. Let all the world's inhabitants dread him with one accord.

[28 : 49] For he did speak the word, and done it was without delay, established and it firmly stood whatever he did say. God doth the counsel bring to naught which heathen folk do take, and what the people do devise of none effect doth make.

O, but the counsel of the Lord doth stand forever sure, and of his heart the purposes from age to age endure. The plans of men come to nothing, but the purposes of God come to the fulfillment in their entirety in God's good time.

Let us sing these verses to God's praise, verses 8 to 11 of Psalm 33. Let earth and all that live with reverence fear the Lord.

Let all the worlds in habit earth spread him with one accord.

For he did speak the word and done it was without delay established in he shared and firmly said whatever he did say.

[30 : 39] God doth the curse a break to not which he then folk do take and water be but earth devised thought none effect doth make O but the castle of the Lord does stand forever sure and of his heart the purposes from the age to which endure and now may the grace of the

Lord Jesus Christ the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with us all amen