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John 8:2-11
So That You May Believe: John
“No Condemnation”

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Today we are continuing in our series going through the Gospel of John. Kudos to Paul for filling in last week on a challenging passage. As I'm sure you're well-aware, we humans love to point out everyone else's faults. People love to make themselves both the judge and the jury in regards to how other people live and behave. Have you ever noticed that? It's a problem that we have. Of course, maybe your immediate reaction is to say, “Preach it, pastor! The person sitting next to me needs to hear it!” It's always someone else, right?

I remember when I was in High School, and I may have shared this story a few years ago, I had some money stolen out of my wallet at the neighborhood pool where I was lifeguarding. I think it was \$20 or so. I was quite sure I knew who had done it: a 10- or 11-year-old boy who frequented the pool regularly. And I confronted him and accused him of it. He denied it, but what could I do? I didn't actually have any proof. The next day, his dad came with his son to the pool, and he wanted to talk with me, with his son there as well. And so the three of us sat in his car, and he leveled with me that after his son came home and shared that I'd accused him of stealing, and they had a talk about it and it was evident that his son had not stolen. You parents know how it is: You know if your child is lying. You can see right through them. Even at 17 or 18 years old, I knew that. I knew this dad could tell if his son was lying, and so when he told me his son had not done it, and I'd falsely accused him which had upset his son...I felt terrible. I'd put myself in the position of prosecuting attorney, judge, and jury...and I'd been wrong.

We have probably all experienced something similar. Maybe you did the judging. Maybe you were judged. You've seen others do it and have done it to others. Pride, judgmentalism, indifference toward others, assumptions about others...these are always involved in these kinds of situations.

The good news, however, is that Jesus is always with us in these kinds of situations as well. We're not alone in these things. And in today's passage, Jesus models a better way. So, this morning, we're going to see what Jesus

can teach us about dealing with someone else's faults and sins and shortcomings.

Now, before we get to it, it needs to be said that this is a passage of Scripture probably was not originally in this spot in John's gospel, and perhaps not in his biography at all when he wrote it. The very earliest manuscripts of John that we have do not contain these verses. There are some manuscripts of Luke that have this passage, instead, in fact. So, it was probably not originally given to us by John. But, that doesn't mean it's not authentic or worth studying and learning from. In fact, given all the details in these verses, it most certainly is an authentic event that really happened. So, John 8:2-11 is God's word to you and me today. Will read it in sections today.

At dawn he appeared again in the temple courts, where all the people gathered around him, and he sat down to teach them. 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?" (John 8:2-5).

Let's pause there. In the morning, Jesus returns to the temple courts, where he'd been the day before and where the events in chapter 7 took place. Jesus takes the posture of a rabbi in their day, which was to sit down. Seems backwards to us, but that's the way it was in their culture. And at some point in his teaching – maybe almost right away, maybe a bit later – some teachers of the law, also known as Scribes, and some Pharisees, brought a woman to him who was caught in the act of adultery.

Now, right off, we might wonder: How'd they catch her? Was she and the guy in a semi-public place? If not, then who was the peeping tom and why isn't that person brought forth, too? Did one of their spouses – if they were both married – discover them? Leviticus 20 and Deuteronomy 22 clearly state that both people in an adulterous relationship are held accountable, even to death. So, why isn't the guy here, as well? It takes two to have an affair, right? And these are questions we just don't have the answers to, but they can

make for interesting dialog and speculation, perhaps even educated guesses based on prevailing cultural attitudes of the time, and so forth.

What we do know is that this woman is brought forth, and stoning her is the scriptural punishment. We might wonder why the punishment is so strong. I think the answer is quite simple actually: To encourage people to take sexual relations seriously. I mean, if the penalty was a fine of a dollar or something like that, it's not much of a deterrent. It doesn't put much emphasis on the severity of the sin. But that's not how God sees sexual relations. Intimate relations in a marriage can be difficult to navigate even when husband and wife are faithful to each other. When they aren't, it can have disastrous consequences that can have huge impacts on the next generation or two or even more. So, an obvious and serious deterrent to sex outside the husband and wife relationship is warranted.

Now, these guys know Jesus' reputation for helping people who are on the margins. Perhaps word of his conversation with the woman at the well has gotten around; he's healed people who were otherwise overlooked in their culture; Jesus is known as a guy who has compassion. But God's Word is God's Word, and Jesus is teaching them about God's Word there in the temple. So they want to know how Jesus is going to respond. "What do you say?" is how they put it to him. The first part of verse 6 then says: **They were using this question as a trap, in order to have a basis for accusing him (John 8:6).** So, their motives are not totally pure. In fact, you kind of wonder if there's a bit of a set-up going on here for both the woman and for Jesus. We've seen before that some of the religious leaders were plotting against Jesus. He was angering them. His claims about who he is and the authority with which he spoke because of who he is were things that ticked them off. And so it would be no surprise if there's actually some planning on their part that's gone into this.

Part of the trap Jesus finds himself in, by the way, is between the different laws of the land. The Jewish religious law we've already talked about. But the Roman law said that a death penalty could not be levied against someone without Roman officials giving their seal of approval. We see that in Jesus' trial just before he's executed on the cross. So, is Jesus going to uphold the

Jewish law and show himself faithful to their religious teaching, or is he going to side with the Romans and be viewed as a traitor? That's a big part of the trap they're trying to catch him in, besides the tension with the Jewish law and his reputation as one who has compassion. Let's finish out verse 6 and continue through verse 8: **But Jesus bent down and started to write on the ground with his finger. When they kept on questioning him, he straightened up and said to them, "Let any one of you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her." Again, he stooped down and wrote on the ground (John 8:6-8).**

One of the great mysteries of the Bible is what Jesus wrote on the ground. If you ever meet someone who says they know for sure what he wrote, then fall to your knees in worship of him, because you've just encountered Jesus himself. Maybe Jesus listed their sins; maybe he listed their sins and the penalties that they were supposed to pay for them; Maybe he wrote the names of people they had had adulterous affairs with; Maybe he wrote down some multiple choice answers to the question he was about to ask them; maybe he was just doodling in the ground so people like you and me 2,000 years later would sit and wonder what he'd written! I mean, it is fascinating and makes for great discussion topic. But: who knows? We just know he was drawing or writing in the sand while they all kept babbling away at him. I doubt that Jesus was really even listening. We do know what he said to them when he stood back up. "If you yourself don't have sin, then be my guest and throw the first stone." So much for trapping Jesus. They've ended up trapping themselves, instead.

Then I love what he does next. He doesn't stand there and keep dialoging with them, or waiting for their response. He knows he's turned the tables. So, he bends down and starts writing in the sand again. Have you ever watched a basketball player shoot a long three-pointer and almost as soon as the ball comes off their fingertips, they pose for a moment, then start back-pedaling away from the shot, setting up for defense, because they're *that* confident that the shot is going in? That's like Jesus here. He's not standing there waiting for their answers...he's returning to his doodling in the sand, or whatever he was writing. Maybe he even whistled the Jeopardy song as he did.

Let's continue on and see how these guys respond: **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 (John 8:9).** I love how John notes for us that the older ones left first. They're the wise ones, the ones who know when to take Kenny Rogers' advice: You gotta know when to hold'em, know when to fold'em, and know when to walk away, know when to run.

Whatever hand they thought they'd been dealt, Jesus had them beat, and these guys realized it. Eventually, they all leave, and only the woman is left there with Jesus.

Let's finish out the rest of the passage: **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" (John 8:10-11).**

So, there's no condemnation from the gang who brought her to Jesus, and they both acknowledge that. I imagine Jesus asked her these two questions with a caring smile on his face. Probably with his statement about him not condemning her, either. And while the care would never leave, I suspect he got a little more serious in his final words, "Go now and leave your life of sin."

Some have puzzled at why Jesus says he doesn't condemn her. They feel that she's getting away with sin...that maybe Jesus is even approving the sin. Where's the sense of justice here?, they might ask. But see, the penalty is ultimately paid by Jesus. She need not be stoned to death because Jesus would later be crucified for her sin – as well as yours and mine. **She need not be condemned because Jesus is condemned on her behalf.**

So, no penalty is needed here. But that doesn't mean she's in the right. Jesus very clearly says, "Go now and leave your life of sin." Now, sin can take all kinds of shapes and forms. Any one of us could say we have a life of sin, really, and it might encompass a host of different things. But this seems to be most closely connected to her sexual sin, and you wonder if this is not the first time she's committed adultery. Maybe she's a prostitute, even. You may

recall that Jesus says in the Sermon on the Mount that if you even look at another person with lust in your heart, you've committed adultery. So maybe this is the first time she'd done it physically, but Jesus knows her heart and that there's a deeper life of sin she's living. And he tells her to leave that life of sin.

So, we started with this question of how to handle the judgmentalism, and accusations, and assumptions we might have toward others. Sure, other people do it, too, but we can only control ourselves and acknowledge our own sins and then set a Biblical example for others by how to more properly live. **The key verse in this whole thing is in verse 7 when Jesus says to them, "Whoever is without sin, go ahead and throw the first stone."** None of them are fit to condemn her because none of them are without sin.

When I was in High School or maybe college, my cousin Kyle and two of my friends pulled up a dinghy that had been sunk on the bottom of lake Coeur d'Alene for years and years. It was in about 12 feet of water, maybe a half mile from my grandparents' cabin. I'd always been fascinated by it, and we all decided to get a rope connected to it, attach the other end to our boat, and pull it up. We got it back to our cabin, managed to pull it up on shore, and we discovered that it had several hundred tiny holes – the size a pin head – all over the bottom. The aluminum boat had rotted out on the bottom of the lake after all those years. After we played around with it for a while in shallower water at the cabin, we finally took towed it out a couple hundred yards of shore, disconnected the rope from it, and we all sat in it as it sank down in a hundred feet of water. Obviously, we let go of the boat once it started going down a way...I hope it's the only sinking boat I'm ever on! But I think that's very much analogous to what happened in this passage.

In their effort to trip up Jesus and trap him so they could accuse him, these religious leaders all sailed to Jesus on the good ship, "Self-righteousness" or maybe it was called "pride" or "ego" or something else along those lines...and: Their ship sank with a thousand holes in the bottom of it because of each and every one of their own sins. **Self-righteousness and pride only lead to blindness about our own sins and judging others for theirs. And its fruit is wrecked relationships.** A marriage cannot withstand the forces of

pride and self-righteousness and judgmentalism. A church can't either. A company can't, a family can't, a sports team can't, a musical group can't. Jesus calls us to have humility instead, and enough humility to recognize and confess our own sin. We have to acknowledge that we're all on the same playing field – and it is level. No one is above another because we have all sinned and fallen short of the glory of God.

So: When you're tempted to judge someone this week and tell them how bad or wrong they are for what they said or did...remember that you've done the same to them and to others...and then acknowledge it. Admit it to the other person. Confess that you've done the same kind of thing, that you're in the boat with them, that you understand what it is to be an imperfect human being. At that point you're on the cusp of a holy moment and a discipleship opportunity for both of you, and Jesus is there in the middle of it. Remember, I said near the start of this message, that Jesus is with us in the midst of these things. We just have to remember that and seek to live as his disciples in the middle of them, rather than judging with a holier than thou, worldly attitude of pride and condemnation.

Then: Having acknowledged your own similar faults, you can then gently let the other person know how their words or actions hurt you. It gives them the opportunity then to ask for forgiveness and for you to give them a glimpse of the forgiveness that God gives us through faith in Jesus Christ. Or maybe the tables will be turned and you'll be the one asking for forgiveness. Either way: **In that kind of conversation: forgiveness and grace can be extended, just as God extends them to each of us.** In doing that, rather than trying to build a relationship on the shaky and tilted foundation of pride and condemnation...Instead, your relationships will grow on a solid, level foundation of humility and trust, and you'll both be growing in maturity for Jesus. I pray that this week you'd have opportunities to be Christ-like in your conversations where you might be tempted to level condemnation at someone, that instead you'd come alongside them, confessing sin and seeking to leave a life of sin...but doing that together, as one broken sinner helping another to discover the grace and forgiveness of God. Let's pray...Amen.