

Jesus and the woman caught in adultery

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[0 : 00] Rules became a really very big thing for us all in March 2020.! It became the time I think I discovered my inner Pharisee.

! Let me explain. During those Covid lockdowns, we were told all sorts of rules. They changed every so often. I would eagerly await the next government announcement to see what I had to do next. I was very focused on making sure I was sticking two metres away from people, even if that meant I had to dash out into the road and avoid cars and things like that.

I made sure I was only leaving the house once a day. I even set time limits at one point. If I went for a walk, it couldn't be any longer than an hour.

And I added other rules, like washing hands for 20 seconds didn't seem quite long enough to me.

And so it was 30 seconds for a while that I made myself wash hands.

Or wiping surfaces in the house every day. Yeah. Yeah. Loved trying to keep these rules.

[1 : 15] But as the months went on and rules changed and I was trying to stick to them and so were other people, it became a bit confusing at times.

And I was living in a house with eight other people, which is quite a lot of people to agree on what all these rules meant. And our interpretation and our attitude to the rules were very different.

Some existed like the rules didn't exist at all. And there was a very heated house meeting. And this was when I really discovered my inner Pharisee.

We were sitting there chatting about what the next installment of rules meant. And one of our housemates revealed that they had been seeing three different people from outside of our house for weeks.

They even went in and had dinner with one of them. And we were horrified. And judgment fell upon him. I hardly spoke to him for days.

[2 : 18] Couldn't look him in the eye. It was not great. Pharisees, they were Jewish religious people who endeavored to stick to the law as much as they can.

And they even added in their own commands. And anyone who didn't follow them or didn't follow them the way they expected them to be, they were looked down upon, maybe mistreated.

They were self-righteous people who thought they knew better, who thought they were the ones who were good and everyone else was wrong. Maybe you're here this morning and your experience of Christians is that they're all a bit like Pharisees to you.

They're people who say one thing and do another, who expect me to do this and that and they don't seem to do it themselves. Maybe this morning you're a Christian and you know that you yourself have a bit of a tendency to judge people too easily.

Maybe you hear of someone who sins and you think, oh, I would never do that. Just recently, about a month ago, there was a pastor in America who stepped back from leading his church because of messages sent to old women.

[3 : 50] And I looked on Twitter afterwards and the amount of people who thought, I told you there was something wrong about him. Or knew there was something up there.

I wouldn't do this. Maybe we say, I'm far too self-controlled to swear. And then we get angry and shout some words that we said would never ever come from our lips.

Or maybe this morning you're feeling full of guilt. There's that thing you've done in the past. There's that relationship that you've had and you just still feel guilty.

You wonder, has God actually forgiven me? Could God forgive me? Have I gone too far? I'm a sinner condemned and unclean and I don't think that can change.

So what does Jesus say about this? Or what does he say to those who say, I would never be like them? What does Jesus say to those who say, I'm too sinful?

[5 : 01] I'm too guilty. He can't forgive me now. We see in this passage, Jesus' heart for sinners. Jesus' extravagant mercy towards sinful people like me, like you. And it's worth noting as we come to this passage that it may look a little bit odd in some of our Bibles. For some of us, we may find that it's in italics. Or in some, there's a note at the top saying about the earliest manuscripts and other ancient witnesses do not have John 7, 53 to 8, 11. And for some of us, it may not even be in our Bibles. It might seem a little bit strange that it says that, but most theologians agree that this is a true account from Jesus' life. Most say that this probably wasn't part of John's Gospel, but it was probably part of Luke. It seems to follow on well from Luke 21, verse 38.

[6 : 24] So be assured, this is the Lord's Word that we're looking at. And we see three things from this encounter. We see the trap, the truth, and the treatment.

So first of all, the trap. See, it's like the Pharisees are setting a trap in these verses for Jesus. If we have a look at verse 3, it says this. 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.

It's kind of like they set up this little courtroom in front of Jesus. And they say, here she is. Here's the person who's guilty. This woman, she's been found to have committed adultery.

To have not been with someone who's her husband. To have been with someone who's not her husband. Not fulfilling promises made at a wedding.

[7 : 32] So Jesus, what are you going to do about it? See, they explain this about the law. Verse 5, in the law of Moses, the law of Moses commanded us to stone such women.

Now, what do you say about this, Jesus? What are you going to do about it? But this is a trap. And it says that it's a trap in verse 6.

They were using this question as a trap in order to have a basis for accusing Jesus. You see, there's two ways that Jesus could respond here.

That they could catch him out on. Jesus could either say, yes, stone her. Or no, don't. If Jesus said, yes, stone her.

Then it would be faithful in part to the law of Moses. Deuteronomy 22, verse 22. If a man is found sleeping with another man's wife, both the man who slept with her and the woman must die.

[8 : 47] You must purge the evil from Israel. So, in part, if Jesus said, yes, stone her, it seems like he would fulfill the law.

But there's some issues with that. It says that it's got to be the man and the woman. And also, this, in Jesus' day, was just not done.

This was not something that happened anymore. And there's a real lack of evidence here as well. The Pharisees just bring this woman along and said, she's committed adultery.

What are you going to do about it? Where's the evidence? On the other hand, if Jesus says, don't stone her, then it may look like he doesn't keep the law seriously.

He's far too relaxed. We've got him now. It seems like Jesus is trapped. Whichever answer he gives, it's going to give them reasons to catch him.

[9 : 49] In the summer, I was intrigued to see a show on Netflix called Man vs. Bee.

It stars Rowan Atkinson, who you may know from Mr. Bean. And it's a very simple plot. He goes to house it, and there's a bee that he just can't get rid of.

And he tries everything in his power to catch this bee. And it starts off in simple ways. Try and hit it, and chase it around, and spray it.

But then he tries other things, like lure it into a microwave, and kill it there, or Hoover it up. Or even blow it up. And it ends up, the house is set on fire at one point, I think.

It's very dramatic. And he just can't get rid of this bee. He tries all sorts of traps to catch it. And the Pharisees here, they're trying a trap to catch Jesus.

[10 : 54] And yet, Jesus, he is not fooled. Jesus knows what they're up to. He won't give in to their trap. Jesus is not in the dark.

No, it's like he can open the curtains on people and see right into the window of their hearts. Jesus is not fooled. He sees behind what's going on.

He sees behind this trap that they are trying to set for Jesus. He sees behind this. You see, you can't mess around with God. We can't fool God.

We might be able to fool other people into traps. Maybe, maybe we want other people at church to think really well of us.

See all the good things that we do. Go to all the meetings that we can. All the prayer meetings. The Sunday evenings.

[11:57] All, everything. And yet, we're so glad they don't see what goes on at home. They're so glad, we're so glad that people don't see what goes on in our thoughts.

But God sees. God sees our hearts. They're open and they're laid bare before him. We can't trap God. We can't trap Jesus. He sees the truth.

That's the second thing. The truth. See, it's rather a bizarre way that Jesus responds to this trap. He bends down and he starts writing on the ground. Halfway through verse 6. But Jesus bent down and started to write on the ground with his finger.

That seems rather odd, doesn't it? He doesn't say anything to them. He just bends down and writes on the ground with his finger. What on earth is this about?

[13:02] Much ink has been spilled, it seems, on what verses from the Old Testament Jesus was writing down. But we don't have any answers to that.

It's just speculation. But it does seem to be significant that he writes down on the ground. In Exodus 31.

When the Lord finished speaking to Moses on Mount Sinai, he gave him the two tablets of the covenant law. The tablets of stone inscribed by the finger of God.

God gave his law to Moses and wrote it with his finger. It says that in Exodus 31.

There's another place in Deuteronomy it says that. And so Jesus, he's not rising to their trap.

[14:00] He's not giving an answer, yes or no. Instead, he says, by his actions, this is me.

I am God. I'm the one who's given the law. You can't judge me by the law that I've given.

Only I have authority to judge. He says that later on in chapter 8, verse 15. You judge by human standards. I pass judgment on no one.

But if I do judge, my decisions are true because I am not alone. I stand with the Father who sent me. Jesus is the right judge.

But these Pharisees, they accuse this woman of adultery. They want her stone to death and they do this because of the law of Moses.

[15:01] They stand in front of him and try to trap the one who gave the law.

And so the lawgiver and the judge says to them this, verse 7. When they kept on questioning, he straightened up and said, let any one of you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her.

He calls them to look within themselves. Can you really throw a stone at her?

Can you really condemn this woman? Can you really bring her before me and tell me that she needs judging, that she needs stoning? Because can you honestly say that you are better than her? He doesn't say any more and then bends down and goes back to writing on the ground. Let any one of you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her.

[16:12] He leaves them with convicting and searching words. He gets to the heart. For those of us here this morning who may take a no, I would never do that awful thing approach.

Those of us who even as the Bible was read this morning and we hear the mention of a woman caught in adultery. And we see, think, oh what an awful woman.

We need to take a look at ourselves. Is there sin in us? Are we really any better?

Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians, so if you think you are standing firm, be careful that you don't fall. It's only by grace that we stand. Each one of us sins and each one of us is worthy of God's judgment.

God who sees into our hearts. God who sees what we're really like. Who sees what other people do not see and we hope they don't see.

[17:27] I spoke about COVID lockdown rules. Another thing that became familiar to us over the last couple of years were wearing face masks.

For a while we just couldn't see people's faces. We didn't really know what people look like beneath. But God still knows.

God knows what we look like beneath. We may just see what happens on the outside, but God knows the thoughts that are going on in the heart.

God knows the thoughts that are going on in the heart. He knew the trap that the Pharisees were trying to trick him with. And he wasn't rising to it. Jesus knew that there was sin in them too.

A few months ago I was going through Instagram and I suddenly saw a picture come up. Which had me in it with another friend.

[18 : 30] And I was shocked. I didn't remember that picture being taken at all. And I was quite scared by it. It was a perfectly fine picture, but I was like, how on earth did this get here?

When was this taken? I just had no idea. I was being watched. I had a photo taken and I don't remember it. And yet with God, he is watching us all the time.

I was scared about that just brief moment of a picture taken when I had no idea. But God, he is watching all the time. Whether we know it or not, he knows our hearts.

Nothing in all creation is hidden from God's sight. Everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of him to whom we must give account.

Jesus, as he reveals the truth of their hearts by just saying those few words in verse 7, Let any one of you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her.

[19 : 42] Jesus knew their hearts. And each one, one by one, walks away. They knew there was sin within them.

If they threw a stone at her, then they were hypocrites. They could not cast the stone. But walk away one by one.

They just used this woman to try and trick Jesus. And yet they found the truth of their sinful hearts. That has been exposed by Jesus, the lawgiver and the judge. Finally, we see in this little passage the treatment.

How Jesus treats the woman. Which is very different from how the Pharisees treat her. See, a woman that has been accused of committing adultery.

[20 : 49] A woman that religious leaders want stoned to death. How is Jesus going to treat her? Is he going to judge her guilty? Is he himself going to stone her?

Or cast her away? Well, we see Jesus treats her with great love and compassion.

Verse 10. 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 said, go now and leave your life of sin. Jesus treats her with great love and compassion.

She's a sinner condemned and unclean. How can anyone forgive her? And yet Jesus does. And so we can wonder and marvel at the marvelous love that Jesus has.

[21 : 57] As he says, neither do I condemn you. See, Jesus said, let any one of you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her.

And one by one they left until it was just the woman and Jesus. Jesus is the one who is without sin. Who could maybe pick up a stone and throw it at the woman.

But he doesn't do that. They are wonderful words from a wonderful, compassionate, gracious Savior. Does she deserve this?

No. Does Jesus say this though? Yes. Neither do I condemn you. And so if you're sitting here this morning.

And maybe you know you have that tendency to say, I would never do that awful thing. I would never be like that person. As we read the words that Jesus says to a woman caught in adultery.

[23 : 13] As you thought, what an awful person that is. Jesus says, neither do I condemn them. We need to see how Jesus treats sinful people.

Sinful people like us. Jesus, the sinless one. Who was bent down to the floor.

And the woman stands. It should be the other way around, shouldn't it? Jesus is God. It should be her falling on her knees before God. But Jesus, he chose to stoop down to this earth.

To be like one of us. God in the flesh. Come to live among us. To live a sinful, sinless life. Not to cast stones of judgment at us.

But to go to the cross. Where he who knew no sin became sin for us. This is wonderful news.

[24 : 24] Jesus is the one who exposes the truth of our sinful hearts. It's convicting. But it's also comforting. Because he's the one who took the judgment our sin deserves.

There was no other good enough to pay the price of sin. Jesus could only unlock the gate of heaven and let us in.

It's because the sinless savior died that our sinful souls are counted free. For God the just is satisfied to look on Jesus and pardon us.

So if you're saying that would never be me. Think again. Only Jesus was the sinless one.

Only Jesus could say that he was without sin. And instead of using that to make us feel kind of inferior to him.

[25 : 27] He the pure, holy, blameless lamb of God. Dies on a cross to take away our sin. Maybe this morning.

You're someone who's struggling with feelings of guilt. And you wonder how on earth can God forgive me. You don't know what I've done, Daniel.

You don't know the sin. But Jesus does. And he hung on a cross to die for you. He died not for the perfect.

Not for the good. He hung there for the sinful. For guilty, vile, helpless people. Jesus died for you. So that you can be saved.

Jesus said elsewhere, I do not come into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world.

One day there will be a time where Jesus comes back and judges the world.

[26 : 37] And if we leave it too late to come to him for forgiveness, that there is a judgment which will last forever. But right now, today can be the day of salvation.

Today can be the day that you can find the full forgiveness that Jesus offers to sinful people. Jesus, who stands and says to this sinful woman, can say to you today, neither do I condemn you.

No condemnation now I dread. Jesus and all in him is mine. That's what Christian people can say. But this passage doesn't end there.

Jesus has something else to say to this woman. Jesus declared, verse 11, Go now and leave your life of sin. Go now and leave your life of sin.

You see, being forgiven by Jesus doesn't give us license to then go and sin some more. Rather, it means the whole direction of our life changes.

[27 : 56] We turn 180 degrees from that place of following sin, ourselves, the world, and we turn around to follow Jesus as Savior, as our Lord and King.

Because Jesus has given his life up for us. We see his great love shown to us on the cross, and now we hear his words, Go now and leave your life of sin.

And so what does that look like for us today? What does it look like for you to go now and leave your life of sin? Maybe there's a sin in your life that you've been struggling with for years.

You try not to give in to temptation and sin, but you're stuck in what feels like this endless cycle of sin. But Jesus says to us this morning, Go now and leave your life of sin.

It's hard. Why don't you tell someone? Why don't you tell a trusted brother or sister in Christ about the sin that you struggle with?

[29 : 15] Because Jesus doesn't condemn you, and neither should they. Instead, they can pray for you. Someone you can be accountable to.

Someone who will help you in the struggle. Or maybe you know that sin that you do wrong, and you've stopped coming to God and asking for forgiveness about that.

You love that sin, and you're not willing to give it up. Whatever that sin is, maybe too much alcohol, getting drunk, maybe deceit, maybe anger.

It's like, I just can't help it. I love that too much. I love doing that thing too much. Jesus says, Go now and leave your life of sin. He says, Come back.

Fall down before him and ask him to forgive you. Jesus has given up his life for you. So go now and leave your life of sin.

[30 : 36] Maybe you haven't yet come to Jesus. And found his forgiveness. Jesus stands ready to save you.

Coming to Jesus, we call it repentance. Make that U-turn of following sin and self, the world, and make that U-turn and turn to Christ and follow him as your savior.

Jesus who stands ready to say, Neither do I condemn you. And go now and leave your life of sin.

Jesus in this little passage, he reveals the truth about humanity.

He shows us that we are sinful people. We come to church today and we should be saying to each other, Pull up a chair.

I'm a sinner. You're a sinner. But see how great a savior Jesus is. Hear his words. Neither do I condemn you.

[31 : 48] Go now and leave your life of sin. Let's pray together.