

“Just a Stone’s Throw...”



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~ John 8:1-11

by Pastor Tim Dodson

at JF Believers Church

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Jesus went to the Mount of Olives. 2 Now early in the morning He came again into the temple,

and all the people came to Him; and He sat down and taught them. 3 Then the scribes and Pharisees brought to Him a woman caught in adultery. And when they had set her in the midst, 4 they said to Him, "Teacher, this woman was caught in adultery, in the very act. 5 "Now Moses, in the law, commanded us that such should be stoned. But what do You say?" 6 This they said, testing Him, that they might have something of which to accuse Him. But Jesus stooped down and wrote on the ground with His finger, as though He did not hear. 7 So when they continued asking Him, He raised Himself up and said to them, "He who is without sin among you, let him throw a stone at her first." 8 And again He stooped down and wrote on the ground. 9 Then those who heard it, being convicted by their conscience, went out one by one, beginning with the oldest even to the last. And Jesus was left alone, and the woman standing in the midst. 10 When Jesus had raised Himself up and saw no one but the woman, He said to her, "Woman, where are those accusers of yours? Has no one condemned you?" 11 She said, "No one, Lord." And Jesus said to her, "Neither do I condemn you; go and sin no more."

It could be quite easy to immediately get lost on just one of the players in this account or fixate on just one aspect of the story. Yet if we step back, we see that all of the elements herein as well as all of the players have come together in symphony by divine appointment. The passage before us has surely been recorded to chronicle one of those supernaturally orchestrated episodes that seemed to have followed Christ around, as they well do today to those that seek to follow after Him. But what is Jesus trying to teach us?

The story reads like “Marvel Comics” meets “Dateline;” all awash with immoral activities, gender discrimination, mob violence, and of course a “Caped Crusader!” It’s hard to miss the fact that the account says that the woman was caught in the act, yet only *she* was brought to judgment! There was the roll of the angry-church-goer throng, and then the obvious attempt to mess about with the overall public perception of Christ’s ministry. Is there a meaning someplace herein? Is there a “moral to the story?” A ‘grand finale?’ A main point? Or are we just to receive this story on its surface level... “*Jesus showed grace to a sinful woman and slammed dunked the opposition?*”

In all of the havoc and anarchy of the scene before us, it seems to grow strangely quiet at the feet of Jesus. Almost like a curtain in which the woman slips through; out of the chaos, out of the bright lights. It would be a serious interpretive slight, to miss this so very important aspect of the story. Perhaps it all is to simply reflect what happens when a sinner finds his or her way to those feet? Certainly this is the place where every person who calls themselves a follower of Christ has been and even now needs to go often. It is the place where every person must sooner find themselves in order to ever actually actuate the promise of eternal life.

What was playing out there that day was life changing for everyone involved. Had it not been for Christ, there would have no doubt been a very different outcome. The woman...the man involved, (wherever *he* was)...the religious throng, the gawking bystanders. (There is *always* gawking bystanders at such events!) Everyone would have come out the other side of this very differently than they actually did after Jesus stepped on stage. At the very least, let us carry that aspect away from this! Anytime Jesus is allowed into a scene throughout history, the situation gains clarity, and things *change*.

As a redeemed child of God, I cannot help but wonder how things could have been different in my life. A thousand scenarios...a thousand events both great and small: a thousand “acts” on the stage of my life. Potentially each one playing out differently than it actually did, because Christ no doubt repeatedly intervened. Not in the roll of the mythical “guardian angel” but an advocate there by divine intervention. Remember, they brought this woman to Jesus. They did so as an effort to trap Him, but they failed to realize what they were dealing with...*whom* they we’re dealing with. Throughout history, it has always been a mistake to underestimate Jesus Christ and the “Christ effect.”

How close our ‘other lives’ reside...just one step can change our direction forever. A *moment*, a *flinch* in either direction and all is different for the rest of our lives. Everything about this story, and everybody in it, was just one brief moment away from a dramatic shift in their destinies.

In this account, John clearly presents two different forces...two different voices, that hold sway in our lives—the voices of the world and that of Christ. I’m not speaking of temptation, desires, and worldly passions. I’m not talking about *those* whispers. I’m speaking about the voices that literally make us who we are. The voices that repeatedly edge us heart and soul, one direction or another toward the eventual formation of who we are at the end of our race. Voices which often criticize and condemn. Voices that tear us down, mock us when we fall short, and humiliate us when we fail, and move us toward the one goal; *our end in failure*.

And then there is the voice of Christ. The voice of love, encouragement and grace. The voice of correction and direction. The voice of the second chance. It was these voices that gathered around her that day. Those guys were not there by accident. It was not merely ‘bad luck’ that she had been caught. This attack was planned! They wanted to destroy her and if luck was with them, they could bring down Jesus also. Because He is so intimately involved in our very living, everything we do...every decision, every word, every public manifest of our living, all which reflects upon our Lord...good or bad. Oh how often we wish it was not so...but indeed it is! Certainly we could never be the ultimate demise of the Savior of the world! But how easily we tarnish His street cred by the way we live out our lives!

It’s clear that these men were using this woman for their own personal agenda. The world they wanted...even under the guise of religion, was being threatened by Christ and His teachings. In such a panicked state, all those who have honestly failed to surrender the control of their world and destiny will always move to shore up the walls around their entrenched positions. All godliness is apt to go out the window when faced with personal loss or surrender. Even if the victor is Jehovah God, if it runs contrary to their self-designed façade then they will choose to move independent of God “for His own good.” After all, we know what is best for the smooth operation of the kingdom of God, right? These guys were just like self-righteous legalists in our day. They couldn’t have cared less about this woman, her sin, her soul, or her eternal destiny. All they cared about was pressing their agenda, and being in control. Thing haven’t changed! All Pharisees are the same throughout history!

We are often willing to sacrifice anything and anyone in order to ‘have hand.’ This is status quo behavior of those who “believe” but have failed to surrender to His Lordship. One has to wonder: is the worst sin in this story the woman’s offense of adultery, or is it the wicked pride and callous attack of the pseudo-religious folks who willingly sacrificed this woman to have their own way, all the while ignoring their own sin?

“This story reveals that we all face situations where different voices compete for our attention. We fail to recognize that the world or the crowd from which we so often seek approval and affirmation really doesn’t care about us. We are just tools to be used and discarded as needed to advance someone’s personal gain. Like the Pharisees we are all guilty of pointing out the failures of others while ignoring our own in order to advance up the invisible ladder of social status.”

(Dr. Steve Andrews, Alabaster Baptist Church, Alabaster, Alabama)

Now, this would be a good time to be reminded of one obvious aspect of this story: *the woman had indeed sinned.* She *was* guilty! Jesus doesn’t excuse her sin because of circumstances, because she had a painful childhood or because of a bad marriage situation. Jesus wasn’t acquiescing to such behavior because she had an ‘addiction’ or a behavioral “disease.” He didn’t cut her slack because she somehow had a right to her “personal life choices” or because she was ‘born that way.’ To Jesus, she had indeed sinned. That was not in question. He did not defend her actions before the Pharisees. But He also didn’t defend theirs to her! They were all guilty in the eyes of Jesus; just as we were when we first met Jesus. And they all were...for a moment, just a stone’s throw from a situation that would change their lives forever.

The grace here was Jesus. There was, as there is always, “*intervention*” on behalf of everyone on stage. A ‘chance.’ A ‘door of escape.’ 1 Corinthians 10:13 speaks of such a “door.” Again we must see that there was no minimizing her sin by Jesus. We have no idea the ripple effect of her sin, and the lives that were hurt by her actions. He wasn’t giving even an implied permission that she could continue in her sin. 2 Corinthians 6:2 says “*today is the day of salvation.*” This was her ‘moment,’ as it was for the Pharisees that stood there with stones in their hands. Acts 17:26-27 says “...*He decided beforehand when they should rise and fall, and he determined their boundaries. His purpose was for the nations to seek after God and perhaps feel their way toward him and find him — though he is not far from any one of us.*” He was there that day holding the door of escape open for everyone.

Therefore it would be a mistake to attempt to use this account as a justification for sin or a misapplied cloak of grace to cover blatant sin. Jesus wasn’t ‘looking the other way.’ He wasn’t giving this woman a ‘free pass.’ He wasn’t *ever* passive about sin! The actions of the Pharisees didn’t change this fact, nor did the wickedness in their self-serving intentions. This is another aspect that so often gets lost in sharing of this story! She was an adulterer and had sinned against God. Jesus wasn’t swept away by the emotion of the moment. There was grace and mercy in play, but not *pity*. It’s easy to feel the pain of someone who is paying the penalty of sin; perhaps because we have all been there to some degree. But sin is a crime against God, and perhaps it would behoove us to consider *His* pain when sin has been committed. After all, He sacrificed the life of His Son so we could be free of such.

But despite her sin, Jesus still showed love. But...*whose version of love?* He showed the Father’s love which did not condone sin, but forgave it if the individual desired such. Our version tends to be passive and ‘over-looking’ which is not love if such sin will ultimately destroy that individual and condemn him or her for eternity. Jesus told her to “*sin no more.*” THAT was the expression of God’s love! Jesus did what He did so well, and that was to take out “two birds with one stone.” In this case, the woman *and* the Pharisees who believed they were to be judge, jury, *and* executioner. And of course, the penalty was permanent. There would be no coming back from this one. This woman’s future was at one of those precarious moments of destiny. What would happen? And further, what would she do with this ‘second chance’ if she got one?

We have no idea how long this sin had been going on. But as is seemingly always the case, her private sin had now become public. But the woman had now a chance to be saved. Maybe we ourselves need to rethink what it means to be saved? Because wasn't ours in truth quite similar to this account? Perhaps not quite as public or graphic, but it still eventually brought us to the feet of Jesus and to those words...those wonderfully poignant words: "*Neither do I condemn you; go and sin no more.*" This woman had to of known the danger of the fire with which she played. She had to of known in that day the cost of participation in such activities. Yet, like us so often, she wanted this indiscretion so badly, she would take the risk. She would nudge up so very close to the flame...believing that she could escape the costs of having done so, or perhaps believing she would escape the consequences. Maybe she was at first strangely brave and defiant. But here she lay...dragged into the public arena with her actions out there for all to know.

Now there was no doubt a mix of fear, shame, and embarrassment. Notice that Jesus did not pull her out of that scene. What happened, happened publically. Everyone was apparently to see the sin and its perpetrator. Ironically, God had *already* long before seen this sin! It's strange that we will sin before the eyes of God as long as the lives of humanity around us do not see! But they all would also see the broken spirit and the redemption that was offered. We may sin in private, but we tend to break in public! And it is there that we are redeemed. It is there that we are restored. It is there that we experience grace.

What I desire to leave you with today is this: "what do you suppose happened after?" Because so much of our story would now go on to play out 'off stage,' and the impact of the event would go on to play out in the months and weeks...even the *minutes*, of the lives of those present that day. Everyone had 'dodged the bullet.' Everyone was so close to disaster...*just a stone's throw*, but they survived to live another day. They made it.

The point of such redemption for all involved is *what would they do now?* Everyone who witnessed this event now would decide what to do with it. Like all of us who dodged some disaster by a hairs breadth...we will respond in some manner. Either we "got away with it" so we think we can again. Perhaps we think that such a rescue was a 'wink' at our sin, and we have been thus sanctioned to continue. Or will the voice of our redeemer echo around in our heads and hearts and nudge us back onto the righteous path of our God-ordained destiny? We will be *forever* changed by our salvation? Would our rescue change us? Or will tomorrow we will have already forgotten and returned to our previous life?

On January 11th of this year, a man by the name of Tommy Allsup died at the age of 85. Maybe that name means nothing to you today, but nearly 60 years ago a seemingly inconsequential event occurred that would change history and forever change the story for Tommy Allsup. For Allsup was a member of the great Buddy Holly's band when Holly, Richie Valens, and the 'Big Bopper' and the others were doing a concert in Clear Lake Iowa. The small private plane that would carry them to the next show up in Minnesota was not big enough to carry them all, and the rest would have to travel by bus. As the story is told, there was just a moment, where someone flipped a coin to see whether Allsup or Valens would get a seat on the plane. Allsup lost the coin flip, and had to take the bus to the next stop on the tour, while the light plane that night went on to crash in an Iowa corn field and Richie Valens and everyone on board was killed. That was February 3rd, 1959. Their deaths were recalled as "the day the music died" in Don McLean's 1971 hit song, "American Pie."

Saved by a coin toss. Allsup would go on to live nearly another 60 years. I have no idea what he did with those years. Did he wake everyday of his life and breath out salvation? I have no idea what this adulterous but 'rescued' woman would do with hers. Or what the self-righteous Pharisees would do with theirs, or even the bystanders who watched this all unfold would do with theirs. ***But Christian, what will you do with yours?***