

The Problem of Sin
March 22, 2009
John 8:1-11
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As some of you know, my husband and I just returned from a trip to Hillcrest, South Africa, a city outside of Durban in KwaZulu-Natal. The community that is right next to Hillcrest is known as the “Valley of 1000 Hills.” This region, the “Valley of 1000 Hills” has one of the highest prevalence of HIV infection in the entire world, leaving over 4000 double orphans, children who have lost both parents to AIDS, and are considered “outcasts.” We stayed with friends, Danie and Judy van den Heever, who are responsible for bring Focus on the Family to South Africa after apartheid was lifted in 1991.

With the Lord’s leading, Danie and Judy, have now, founded Focus on iThemba, iThemba is the Zulu word for ‘hope’. It is a cluster of foster homes with a school connected to it. Working with social workers, these homes are specifically for orphans who have lost both parents. The property of iThemba looks over this Valley of 1000 Hills. With the huge problem of aids and orphans, in South Africa, the Van den Heever’s motto is **“Start where you are, use what you have, and do what you can.”** So that is exactly what they have done with iThemba. With that said, our purpose for going to South Africa was to help make a strategic alliance between schools, starting with iThemba, and an international education system, entitled SABIS. The presidents of both organizations were in my husband’s class at a program run by Harvard Business School, 17 years ago. The role we played here was to connect the two organizations.

So, we visited five schools all within a five mile radius. This picture is of one of the school in the Valley, so poor that there were 2 classes without teachers.

This next slide is of the wealthiest school I have ever seen, just 2 miles away for the other school with a computer for every 2 students. Such great contrast within a very short distance.

I could go on and on about what we learned, how God has directed this amazing couple, and tell about the people that God has put in their lives with the same vision, but I must get to the passage of John and the problem of sin.

Let us pray before we get into the Scripture today.

One more thing, before we get into the Scripture; I must ask you one question. How many of you sitting here think you are perfect? Raise your hand. My guess is that you all know you are sinners, or else you wouldn’t be attending this church for very long, as in each of our services here, early on in the service we have a prayer of confession. After each prayer of confession, we also have a Bible verse as our assurance of pardon. So, this sermon will not be one of convincing you of your sinfulness. We know that if we confess our sins, God is faithful and just and will forgive us from all unrighteousness.

As I experienced contrast in Africa, this passage today where the woman is caught in adultery and dragged before Jesus also has great contrasts. Let me set the stage. Keep your Bibles open to P. 122-123.

In chapter 7, Jesus was teaching in the temple during the festival of Tabernacles, and the crowd and authorities were asking who was Jesus and what was he about. **V. 43, in chapter 7**, “there was a division in the crowd because of Jesus, Some of them wanted to arrest him, but no one laid hands on him.” And the religious leaders were also divided. Nicodemus, a Pharisee, spoke out and wanted a fair trial according to the Law of Moses, but others wanted just to arrest him and then find a reason it later. We see division and contrast here.

From **Chapter 7:53 to the end of our passage today, we will find 3 contrast. V. 53** “Then each of them went home, while Jesus went to the Mount of Olives.

Here is our first contrast- the religious leaders and the crowd went home. Jesus went to the Mount of Olives, alone. Time and time again throughout the Gospels we read that Jesus went away alone after a busy time of ministry. He needed to be alone to pray and spend time with his father, to get recharged. What a lesson for us today, in the fast pace of Orange County, but, oh, how hard that is for us to simply sit and listen to our Almighty, Sovereign God!

V. 2 by dawn the next day, Jesus was back teaching in the temple courts. The Pharisees and Scribes bring the woman caught in adultery to Jesus with the question, “Teacher, this woman was caught in the very act of committing adultery. Now, in the law, Moses commanded us to stone such women. Now what do you say?”

Okay, let’s stop here and see what law they were referring to. **Deut. 22:22** states, “if a man is caught lying with the wife of another man, **both** of them shall die, the man who lay with the woman as well as the woman.” **Leviticus 20:10** says the same thing. Now, back to John 8, so if she was actually caught in the act, where was the man? **If these Jews were really concerned about following Moses’ law as they pretended to be, they would have brought the man along too.** What they really wanted to do was to test Jesus. This word does not mean “test” like we know it today, to find out what a person knows. The leaders asked this question “to test him, so that they might have some charge to bring against him.” In the Greek, this word implies trickery and temptation. I think that is why some translations use the word “to trap” Jesus. These religious leaders only wanted one thing- to trap Jesus so they could arrest him and get rid of him.

Why was this a trap? If Jesus judged that woman according to the Law of Moses, and did what the leaders wanted him to, let them stone her, then Jesus would be accused of rebellion, since only the Roman Government could sentence anyone to death. **If Jesus said** “do not kill her” then these leaders would accuse him of breaking the Law. These leaders thought they had Jesus was in a “no win” position. They thought they had trapped Him. They could care less about the woman. She had become “a thing”, an “object” they could use to get their hands on Jesus.

But, in contrast, look what Jesus did. V. 6-7, he bent down and started to write in the ground. He took his time to respond. **What do you think he was thinking about? What were his**

emotions? When I was in the midst of raising children, there were times when I had to send my daughter into her room while I cooled off before I responded, I had to take a deep breath, before I went in or else I would have over reacted. Now, Jesus, being human, even though he was perfect, he could have used this time for cooling off. We don't know. We can guess that He was very angry towards the leaders, angry about the trap. And He was angry and sad about the "sin" of the woman.

Yet, he also had great love and compassion toward the woman. He knew it took two to tango. So, he straightened up, and instead of looking at the woman, he spoke directly to the leaders, **"If anyone among you is without sin, be the first to throw a stone at her."** Then he bent down and continued to write.

So here is our second contrast- the religious leaders simply wanted to stone this woman in order to trap Jesus. This woman was nothing to them, only a tool to get what they wanted. But Jesus, simply loved her and had great compassion for her.

Wouldn't you like to know what he was writing. This is the only recorded time that Jesus ever wrote anything. We can guess if we like; maybe he was writing lists of other sins, including hypocrisy. Maybe he was writing their names. Or maybe he was just doodling, treating their question with the contempt it deserved. Maybe he simply wrote the 6th commandment. **What is important is not what he wrote on the ground, but what he SAID to them. "If anyone among you is without sin, be the first to throw a stone at her."**

Now for the 3rd contrast. V. 9 says, "When they heard it, they went away, one by one, beginning with the elders." But Jesus stayed. Even though he knew where everyone went, He asked the women where are your accusers, "Has no one condemned you? I think he purposely did this so that the woman **would verbalize what had happened, to emphasize his point.** She answered, "No one, sir." He then say, **"Neither do I condemn you."** With those words, **He forgave her.**

But, I don't want to gloss over this lightly. Yes, she was forgiven but it was not without payment of the penalty it deserved. On the contrary, Jesus himself was going to pay that penalty, the penalty not only of the woman's sins, but of the sins of her accusers, and indeed the sins of all humanity, for the sins of all of us in this room.

I have a collection of crosses in my office. I love to wear a cross. These crosses are all empty, no body hanging on them- symbolizing the resurrection power of Jesus. But, it is quite appropriate to look at the cross with the body on it, to remember what it cost Jesus to do once and for all. We are in the second week of Lent. Holy Week will be upon us. This is the time in the church to remember what it cost Jesus so that we could have a relationship with him as forgiven people. Mark your calendars now, make it a priority to come to all the Holy Week services we have here at Geneva. If you have accepted Jesus as your Lord and Savior, come with grateful hearts and remember what Jesus did of YOU. If you are not sure of your faith and have many questions, come and let him embrace you with all your doubts.

This story does not end here with forgiveness. Jesus forgive this woman, but he also gave her a challenge. "Go your way, and from now on, do not sin again."

This is the grace of God, Jesus is saying, “I have forgiven and accepted you, now respond to my love by allowing me to change your life.” We don’t change in order to be accepted, but because we have been accepted.

For us today, we all have areas in our lives in which we are like the judgmental Pharisees, seeing people in pain and thinking, “They deserve it”. Or we use people for our own gain, or maybe to “trap” another person we disagree with. What is your attitude about the AIDS pandemic. Do you think they deserve what they get? Do you think it is hopeless to change? Or is it too big a problem to tackle? I used to think that the problem was hopeless and it was pointless to get involved until the **culture changed first**. God sure dealt with me on my attitude by taking me to South Africa. For me, the motto of Danie and Judy, has had a huge impact upon me, “Start where you are, use what you have, do what you can do.”

What is the issue in which you are intolerant? Last week Terry Cocking shared the prison ministry work that is going on here. Praise God that there are people in this church that are not judging the prisoners, but are bringing God’s love and compassion to them.

So we have a choice.

We can either be a religious leader of judgment or we can ask the Holy Spirit to coach us, like Pastor Jeff spoke about last week, and allow Jesus’s love and compassion to fill us, to help us love one another more and at the same time go out and sin no more.

He loves the sinner, he loves us in spite of our sin. He is calling us out of sin, calling us to sin no more.

And at the same time, Jesus is calling us to love and show compassion to people without hope, to love the unlovely, to be his light into a darkened world. Remember, after all, Jesus first loved us, showed his love for us when we were in our most sinful state.

Let us pray.