

Last week we began a series of messages about who God is based on the personal encounters Jesus had w/ people during His earthly ministry – snapshots of the person, nature, and activity of God that affords us a glimpse into the glory of our wonderful Lord and Savior.

Last week we received a glimpse of the generosity of God in the story of Nicodemus as we learned how God engages us at the point of our need, to explain to us the truth of who and where we are in relationship to His love, and how He's exchanged His life to give us life so we can be born again.

As we start this AM on who Jesus is... I want to share an idea from one of my favorite theologians – Calvin/Hobbes.

If we were honest, many of us would say we wish the riff raff would just go away or that they'd be punished. The truth is we tend to be hard on people when they do things that bother us or rub against our beliefs/preferences. **We clamor for justice to be poured out on others, while we ourselves think we're deserving of mercy/grace.**

Don't believe me. I read an interesting survey this week. A group of people were asked of 15 prominent people – *Who is most likely going to heaven?* Here are some of the results:

79% – Mother Theresa

66% – Oprah Winfrey

52% – Bill Clinton

47% – Pat Robertson

19% – O.J. Simpson

87% – Themselves

Recognizing our propensity to be harder on others than we are on ourselves, this AM we're going to look at a remarkable story in *John 8* where we find (3) scenes where we learn from Jesus about true mercy/grace.

I Scene 1 – the ENCOUNTER

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?” They were using this question as a trap to have a basis for accusing him.

Early before sunrise, Jesus had already assembled a crowd and was teaching. In the midst of His lesson there was a loud commotion interrupting His study. A posse of Pharisees invaded w/ a ½ clothed woman – obviously shaken, disheveled, and humiliated by the situation. **But who was this woman and why was she here?** The answer wasn't long in coming as the leader of the group spoke, **“Teacher, this woman was *caught in the act of adultery.*”**

Now this was a serious charge – **a sin punishable by death** – a capital offense. For according to the Law, anyone caught in the act adultery was to be stoned to death.

The 7th Command in **Ex. 20:14** forbid adultery – **Lev. 20:10** prescribed death for those who defy God's Law.

*If there is a man who commits adultery w/ another man's wife, one who commits adultery w/ his friend's wife, **the adulterer and the adulteress shall surely be put to death.***

Now the Pharisees' plan is obvious. They're not concerned w/ the woman – **she's just a pawn**. Her actions were of no concern to them, but just a convenient way to put Jesus on the spot. **And honestly, it was a clever trap.**

The Law of Moses specified death by stoning for adultery, yet Roman law forbid the Jews from carrying out executions. **So if Jesus doesn't condemn the woman, He breaks the Jewish Law. But if he does condemn her; He breaks the Roman law.** In either case, the outcome isn't good for Jesus.

Remember, it's early in the AM – before sunrise. So it's possible they found this woman w/ a man several hours earlier. But how did they catch her? Where was the man? Doesn't adultery take two? Why didn't the Pharisees bring the man? ***If you caught her, you should've caught him too.***

Was this a set-up? Did the Pharisees plan this – and then just “happen” to catch her in the act in the middle of the night? Probably. But whatever the case, the Pharisees thought they had Jesus. *Yet not one of them could’ve remotely anticipated how Jesus would solve this dilemma.*

II Scene 2 – the EDIFICATION

Jesus bent down and started to write on the ground w/ his finger. When they kept on questioning him, he straightened up and said to them, “Let any one of you who is w/out sin be the first to throw a stone at her.” Again he stooped down and wrote on the ground. At this, those who heard began to go away one at a time, the older ones first, until only Jesus was left, w/ the woman still standing there.

So what does the Master do? Of course, He stooped down and began to write on the ground w/ his finger. And what did He write? We don’t know. Over the centuries, commentators have speculated any number of ideas. Some have suggested he wrote Scripture that somehow condemned the Pharisees. The word – *katagrapho* – suggests He made a list of either of their sins or of Scripture; but the truth is, we don’t know. Which leads me to the conclusion: **It’s not so much what He wrote but what He DID that we should grasp.**

But as He wrote, the Pharisees kept pressing the moment. *“What are you going to do? Should we stone her or let her go? Make up your mind.”* After a moment of contemplation, Jesus stood up, faced the men and made one of the most profound statements in history: ***If any one of you is w/out sin, let him be the first one to cast a stone at her.*** Then he stooped down and once again wrote on the ground.

The word used means – ***sinless***. ***Whoever is sinless – he can cast a stone; but no one else can serve as judge and jury.*** So if you’ve met the standard of perfection; you have My consent to render a judgment and exact a punishment. Otherwise..., **BACK OFF!**

The leering bullies had lost control of their circus. Jesus’ silence was powerful – and his mysterious writing was frightening, recalling in a subtle way the ancient occasion when God wrote on tablets of stone. The ‘theology thugs’ who knew nothing of the heart of God were at a loss. Their façade of self-importance cracked and their consciences began to speak to them. *Zeisler*

It’s almost humorous. They’re stunned. Speechless! Confounded! Jesus had taken the wind out of their sails. They were certain this woman was going to be His downfall; but instead He completely upheld the Law, and in effect said, ***“Yes, she must be stoned – and I’m going to appoint the executioners – and you’re not worthy of such a role.”***

vs. 9 – *But when they heard it...* – As soon as the words left the lips of the Savior, these *pious pretenders* knew they'd been bested. They knew Jesus had not only expressed the truth, but had exposed their hearts. So when they heard it, they went away, one by one, beginning w/ the eldest. They disappeared as if they were in a David Copperfield magic trick – until no one was left but Jesus and the woman.

Here's what apparently occurred. The oldest man in the posse, w/ the longest record of sin, suddenly recalled he had a prior engagement. The next man thought he heard his wife calling. Another had a coughing fit and had to excuse himself. Another felt it was time for an early lunch – until all of them walked away w/ their tails tucked b/w their legs.

Truth is – Jesus had awakened the conscience of each man and they fell under conviction and one-by-one they realized *all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God.*

III Scene 3 – the **ENCOURAGEMENT**

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.”

Jesus' exchange w/ the woman begins w/ a moment of dignity – w/ compassion/kindness – He reaches out to her.

A A Moment of DIGNITY

woman – a polite term of endearment. It was the same word Jesus used to address His mother in *John 19:26* – when He entrusted Mary into the Apostle John's care.

Understand what's happened. After being treated by the Pharisees as an object and a tool, Jesus treated this woman w/ dignity/worth. He didn't look at her through the lens of her failure, but through the lens of her need for mercy/grace.

Jesus met her at the point of her need – not w/ condemnation but w/ compassion. **Although she deserved His wrath, Jesus met her w/ what she needed most – which was mercy and grace.** And He does the same for all of us.

This doesn't mean He turned a blind eye to her sin or that He condoned her actions. This woman was in the process of destroying one or more marriages/families and was absolutely guilty before God. **She deserved judgment!**

caught in adultery – indicates this wasn't a single act but a pattern of behavior as she was caught in a web of desire, shame, and hypocrisy seemingly impossible to escape.

Yet in spite of her sinfulness – **Jesus loved her more than He hated her sin.** So instead of stoning her as she deserved – Jesus offered her the miracle of mercy.

B A Miracle of MERCY

mercy – to w/hold punishment to someone who deserves to be judged. It's when a person doesn't get what they deserve.

And this is what Jesus does – not only for this woman, but for the Pharisees He had just turned away – and for you and me. **He offers us grace when we deserve wrath.** He offers us peace instead of punishment. **Instead of giving us what we deserve; He offers us what we need – forgiveness.**

But when the kindness and love of God our Savior appeared, he saved us, not b/c of righteous things we had done, but b/c of his mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the H.S., whom he poured out on us generously through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that, having been justified by his grace; we might become heirs having the hope of eternal life. Titus 3:4-7

Don't miss this: Jesus didn't give this woman forgiveness – He didn't force grace. **He offered forgiveness, but she had to embrace it by faith.** The same is true for all people. As all of us are by nature sinners who sin, we all stand deserving of God's wrath. Yet as we saw last week, Jesus didn't enter time/space to condemn us but to give us life and forgiveness – but people bring condemnation on themselves when they reject God's grace/mercy through unbelief.

For God so loved the world He gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him. Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already b/c they have not believed in the name of God's one and only Son. John 3:16-18

So forgiveness is not a license to sin, but an opportunity to be made right w/ God – and we all need it. And for those who have it – we're called to share it w/ others.

C A Mandate of LIFE

Jesus declared. "Go now and leave your life of sin."

I love this statement. In the instance this woman embraces God's grace through faith – **she would be forgiven** – *the old is gone and all things become new*. And the evidence she had repented and experienced regeneration is that she would walk away from her sin in the direction of God's truth.

And in this instance, Jesus told the woman to leave her life of sin and live like a woman who's been forgiven/cleansed.

Jesus isn't interested in who we were or what we've done, but rather, He's in who we've become and are becoming as a result of His mercy/grace.

Perhaps no person in history illustrates this truth like John Newton. Newton was a sinful slave trader who ran slaves from Africa to England – that's until He met God and was converted in the midst of a storm in the Atlantic when he thought he was doomed. Newton left his lifestyle to become a preacher and hymn writer. His one great hymn familiar to us all is a testimony of God's mercy and grace – he penned:

Amazing grace! How sweet the sound, that saved a wretch like me! I once was lost, but now am found, was blind, but now I see.