

Study Guide for the Central Church of Christ 10-7-18

To Adult Teachers:

October 7 we will study John 8:2-11. Discussion questions are:

1. Why is it difficult to be both just and compassionate?
 - a. What character traits are predicted for the Messiah in Isa. 42:3?
 - b. What character quality does Jesus possess that his enemies will use in an attempt to trap him?
2. Which of the following words best describes how Jesus treated the woman caught in adultery:
 - a. Harsh
 - b. Dismissive
 - c. Judgmental
 - d. Gentle
 - i. Is it as easy for you to see Jesus as being gentle with the adulteress woman as it is for you to see him being gentle with you?
 - ii. Which of the following words best describes how you see Jesus dealing with you:
 - a. Harsh
 - b. Dismissive
 - c. Judgmental
 - d. Gentle
3. Describe the physical appearance of a woman caught in adultery and forcefully taken to a religious place for trial.
 - a. Describe how she felt.
 - b. Was Jesus aware of her feelings?
 - c. Was he concerned about her feelings?
 - d. How might writing in the sand be an effort to soothe her feelings?
4. Who does Jesus love most in this story?
5. Agree/disagree: *“Jesus called for the death penalty for the adulteress woman.”*
6. How does the capital punishment regulation given in Dt. 17:7 enhance the significance of Jesus’ statement, *“Let him who is without sin cast the first stone.”*?
7. What is the difference in these 2 statements:
 - a. *“I do not condemn you. Go and sin no more.”*
 - b. *“Go and sin no more and I will not condemn you.”*(1) In your heart of hearts which one of those do you year Jesus saying to you about your sin?
8. According to the Law requiring 2 eye-witnesses, could Jesus condemn her by the Law?
9. How could Jesus just say, *“Sin no more.”* and let it go at that?
 - a. Was he thinking about what he would accomplish on the cross when he told her that?
10. As Christians, which tendency is most prevalent in our fellowship:
 - a. Regarding sexual conduct too lightly?
 - b. Regarding sexual conduct too harshly?

The Gentleness of Jesus John 8:2-11

This story illustrates the prophecy of how the Messiah would treat those overwhelmed by sin. Six hundred years before Jesus came, Isaiah prophesied: "A bruised reed he will not break and a smoking wick he will not snuff out till he leads justice to victory." What is a "bruised reed"? Shepherds had an enormous amount of time on their hands, especially at night. In their loneliness they would often sing across the valley to one another or make a flute out of a reed by hollowing it out and carving holes in it to change the notes. It would take days to make a reed flute and, while it was worthless monetarily, it was worth a lot to a Shepherd. So they treated their reed flutes with tender care. Occasionally one would get bruised and the Shepherd, rather than breaking it in half and throwing it away would do his best to repair it. The Messiah was going to be so full of caring he wouldn't even break a bruised reed. Nor would he snuff out a smoldering wick. The cheapest thing in a Jewish household was a piece of twisted fuzz pulled out of a garment. Those pieces of fuzz were twisted and used as wicks in oil lamps. When the wick quit burning and started smoking they didn't throw it away, they trimmed it so it could burn again. The Messiah would treat every human being with great care. He would consider no one worthless. "A smoldering wick he will not quench."

That prophecy is a declaration that the Messiah would combine compassion and justice so perfectly that the world has never seen anything like this before or since. He is not a compromise of strength and tenderness. He is absolutely totally strong and absolutely totally tender. He renders absolute justice and he renders absolute mercy at the same time. We think of justice and mercy as either/or qualities. An angry customer returned to the photographer who had done his portrait, slammed the picture on the counter and said, "This picture does not do me justice." The photographer looked at the picture, looked at the man, looked at the picture again and said, "Sir, you don't want justice. You want mercy." That's how we see justice and mercy. From our point of view you can't have both so pick one. But with Jesus you have absolute justice and absolute mercy combined in one man. Here is a person of absolute power and majesty who will one day lead justice to victory but in the meantime he is so tender that a bruised heart, a broken heart, a flickering soul about to go out, in his hands won't break or be extinguished. In his hands healing occurs.

Notice how this principle is illustrated in the story of this adulterous woman. Jesus deals gently with her. That teaches us that he deals gently with us and in turn we are to deal gently with others. The story presents a couple problems. Twice the story says the woman was caught in the act of adultery. "In the act", can you imagine? According to Old Testament law a person could not be charged with adultery unless 2 people saw it happen. Those 2 eyewitnesses cannot merely claim to witness someone coming out of a room, or in a compromising position, or even lying on a bed with someone. They had to witness the act itself. The second problem in the story is that Jesus is not being asked if she is guilty. That has already been established. He is being asked about the penalty. The accusers point to Leviticus 20:10 and Deuteronomy 22:22 and remind Jesus that the punishment for adultery is execution.

The whole scene is obviously a set-up to trap Jesus. We know this first of all because the text says so but secondly we know it because the Old Testament says to stone "them", not just "her." This is quite a trap for Jesus. On the one hand Jesus cares very much about the life of this woman and on the other hand he cares very much about the Law. Isn't it interesting that they consider Jesus' Achilles' heel to be compassion, forgiveness, and tenderness? I wonder if someone set out to trap you they would say, "That guy is really compassionate, let's set a compassion trap for him?" Would they say, "That woman is really forgiving, let's set a forgiveness trap for her?" Jesus was enormously compassionate and forgiving but he also taught that not one jot or tittle of the Law would pass away until all is fulfilled. Jesus lived every day of his life under the Law of Moses. He kept the law but he also said, "Come to me all you who are heavy burdened and I will give you rest." The heaviest burden of the day was law keeping.

The Pharisees surfaced a problem that lingers with us today. The problem is if you have absolute compassion you minimize morality and if you have absolute morality you crush people. How do we solve this? What does Jesus do? He does 2 things. First of all he disturbs the comfortable, then he comforts the disturbed. How does he disturb the comfortable? He scribbles in the sand. What does he write? That really has nothing to do with the story. I know some of you have heard some preacher speculate on what Jesus might have written and you will probably go to Bible Class and share that thought. I wish you would get this - what he wrote has nothing to do with the story. But, why he wrote has everything to do with the story. Let me see if I can show you what his doodling in the sand accomplished. Jesus steps over to a sandy spot, kneels and writes something in the sand. If you are in that crowd of rock throwing hypocrites who have set up this adulteress for stoning, where are you looking right now? For one brief moment, this woman who has endured enormous humiliation since the moment a group of men burst into her bedroom, has some relief from accusing eyes. All eyes are on Jesus. It is the first demonstration of grace this woman will benefit from. Listen to what Jesus says, "Start the stoning!" That's what he says. He never rejects the Law of Moses. He calls for the penalty but adds one small pre-condition. Whoever would throw the first stone must be sinless. Deuteronomy 17:7 says the eyewitnesses must be the first to throw a stone. Now, who is embarrassed? Now the eyewitnesses who participated in the scheme to trap Jesus are embarrassed. Now the stone throwers are embarrassed. So what does Jesus do? He doesn't stare down the stone throwers. He doesn't further shame them. He writes in the sand again. He looks at his own sand doodling and with his eyes on the ground they all drop their stones and leave. He does exactly the same thing for the stone-throwing hypocrites that he does for the adulteress - he offers a touch of grace and a chance to re-think your behavior. I hope you get that. Until you get that you do not understand the heart of God. Here is the heart of God - Jesus loves rock-throwing hypocrites as much as he loves people caught in adultery. He will go to the cross as much for the child molester as he will for the church gossip.

That was Jesus disturbing the comfortable. Now he will comfort the disturbed. Watch what he does. He turns to her and asks, "Where are you accusers?" She replies, "I have none." He then says, "Neither do I condemn you. Go and sin no more." Tragically some of you do not know that Jesus. Some of you just went through the Lord's Supper thinking

about condemnation. Your guilt is so great you can't even take a 30 second break from it and just feel forgiven and say "Thank you" to God. You who are so consumed by your guilt, would you please hear Jesus' words to a woman who was caught in the actual physical act of adultery? "I do not condemn you." But he does say to her, "You are sinning. Sin no more." He demands a change of life. He didn't say she was not guilty. When he said, "Sin no more." he was saying, "You are guilty." How can Jesus not condemn someone who is guilty? He does that on 2 levels. First, since the eye witnesses have left, under the Law she cannot be found guilty. But, second, and on a much more important level, he is demonstrating something Paul will describe in Romans 8 as, "There is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus." Jesus is saying, "I am going to take your condemnation. I am going to suffer the consequence of your sin for you." Imagine what Jesus is feeling when he says that. He knows what it will cost him to make that promise. He is saying to her, "Yes stones should be thrown but they will hit me. Spears should be thrown but they will land in my side." Jesus did not condemn her because he took her condemnation for her.

How should this affect you?

1. If you are a bruised person you need to go to him. What does it mean to go to him? It means stop the blame shifting. Stop blaming the way you were raised. Stop blaming your spouse. Stop blaming some tendency that your family has.
2. Don't underestimate the abundance of grace. Do you recall the words of the Prodigal Son when he remembered his father? He said, "In my father's house, there is bread and to spare." "And to spare!" Don't ever say, "I can't come to Jesus. I am too bruised, too tainted, too far gone for redemption." In your Father's house there is grace and to spare!
3. Stop sinning. Some of you have tried to stop sinning and failed. Guess why that happens? It's because you take your bad habits, your sin to the Law. To take something to the Law means to say, "I've got to change this way of living or I'm going to get it." And all the Law can do is say, "Yep that's a sin all right. Shame on you." Take your sin, your guilt, to the cross. Taking it to the cross is hearing Jesus say, "Look, these things have to stop coming between you and me. They aren't going to condemn you. I've died for you, to take away your sin. But let's get rid of them. If you keep this up is this the way you say 'thank you' to me for my sacrifice?" The blood of Jesus has power to wash sin away. The cross will agree with the Law that you have sinned. As a matter of fact the cross will tell you with greater intensity than the Law ever could just how grievous your sin is. But the cross won't stop with saying, "Yep that's a sin all right. Shame on you." The cross will then pour the blood of Jesus all over your sin and in the process clean you as white as snow. Look at him on the cross and picture him saying personally to you, "Neither do I condemn you."

Notice the order of what Jesus says to this adulteress. He does not say, "Go and sin no more and then I won't condemn you." He says, "I don't condemn you. Go and sin no more." He is saying, "Get off the treadmill of trying to be good enough. I have taken your condemnation for you. Now just go live a grateful life." Some of you can't change

because you have the order reversed, "Go and sin no more and I won't condemn you." Lay that down and listen to him, "I don't condemn you. Go and sin no more."

One last thought. Sexual misconduct - we must be careful not to count it too lightly or too heavily. Jesus never said adultery was not a grievous sin. The Bible teaches that sex is a way of communicating absolute, complete and exclusive commitment to someone else. That's why sex must be reserved for marriage. Adultery is a very serious thing because it destroys your ability to trust someone else or to open yourself completely to someone else. On the other hand we must not make sexual sin somehow the worst of all sins. Never forget that in the lineage of Christ is Rahab the harlot and Tamar the incestuous. Never forget that God tells us that some prostitutes and tax collectors will make it to the kingdom of God before some of the religious in-crowd. Never tell yourself that because of sexual sin you are so damaged God won't accept you. "A bruised reed he will not break."