

Stone Throwing and Trap Setting

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We are in a sermon series where I am addressing some controversial statements that Jesus made during his ministry and we have a lot of ground to cover this morning so I say let's get right into the message and Today I want us to look at a passage found in John 8:1-11. If you have your bible, turn there with me, if not, you can use one found in your row and turn to page _____.

Read John 8:1-11

Pray

Seldom is throwing stones a good idea – physically speaking, people can get hurt, windows can get broken, there's just not a whole lot of good that comes when we start throwing stones. Morally speaking, it's not a good idea to throw stones either - moral stone throwers are those who see that something is wrong and feel empowered to go on the attack against it. They are a "defender of what's right" and they go into battle.

And here in this passage, we have to get a visual of what's happening here.....

From the woman's standpoint, she's guilty. The doors burst open during the act of the adulterous affair. There is gossip, murmurs, and all kinds of things that were probably being quickly said about her out in the community.

From the Pharisees standpoint – the woman has been caught in the act of sin and something needs to be done about it!

From Jesus' standpoint – The woman isn't the only one who is guilty here.....and he's placed in this position to address not only the sin of the woman (which the Pharisees wanted), but he knows that he also has to address the sins of the would be stone throwers. And Vs. 7 is the confrontational and controversial statement for us today – "If anyone is without sin, let him be the first to throw a stone at her"

So let's unwrap this passage a bit and see what it says to us.....

I think there are 3 primary situations we need to look at today.

First, let's look at the

1) Trap for the woman.

There seems to be something a little suspicious that is taking place here....

- a. Vs. 2 – "At Dawn..." this is a strange time to catch somebody in the act!! Things like this typically take place after a long day at the office, you meet somebody, have a few drinks, and then "you want to come back to my place" type conversations take place. OR things like this happen at moments of loneliness in the evening or later hours of the night and a phone call is made, a knock at the door takes place.....etc., etc. BUT at dawn??? When the sun is coming up and a new day is about to begin?

- b. Another suspicious thing here is that there is no man mentioned.....But under the Jewish law, he would be under the same judgement if he was caught in the act of sin....Is it possible that a plot was taking place and maybe the man was in on it?
- c. Vs. 4 leads us to another suspicious piece of this passage. The idea of catching someone in the act implies that someone (Pharisees or a hired spy) was there, in the room or in the house, or was looking through the window – waiting for just the right moment to “catch her”
- d. Vs. 5-6 –Here’s the last suspicious thing about this passage - If it was so clear in the Mosaic law that this woman must be stoned to DEATH, then what was the big deal about bringing her to Jesus and asking him to speak into the law of Moses – they were the teachers of the law – they knew the law.....this was probably not the first time someone had been caught in adultery and was brought out into the public square to be stoned.....but for some reason, at this moment in time, the Pharisees brought this woman to Jesus in order to get his “input” into the situation.

Now here’s one thing we have to ask..... At what moment did the woman realize that this story wasn’t really about her....she had clearly been set up and trapped for this moment in time, but I wonder when she realized that she was also the bait for trapping Jesus? Vs. 5-6 tells us that the Pharisees were using this situation and their question as a trap in order to accuse Jesus!!!

Now here’s the 2nd thing I think we should look at today.....

2) A trap for Jesus.

Jesus was in a dilemma - Jesus knows that whatever he says, in response to their question, that they are going to act upon it immediately....they have stones in their hands ready to kill.....and his dilemma comes at him from a few different angles.....

- a. First, He has to deal with the Law of Moses that says “whenever someone is caught in sin, they would be subject to death by stoning.”
- b. Second, He also has to deal with the Law of Rome and the Roman law said that “No Private or Religious execution can take place without permission” – a perfect example of this is in Jesus’ own execution, the people had to get permission to crucify Christ.
- c. And then third, he had to deal with his own purpose – John 3:16-17 – “Jesus didn’t come to condemn the world but to save the world”

And so what is Jesus supposed to do here?

- a. If he supports the Law of Moses, and let’s them stone her, he violates the Roman Law and his own mission and purpose
- b. If he says “Let her go”, he supports the Roman law but violates the Law of Moses
- c. And then in verse 6 we find what Jesus did in the midst of all this drama that was unfolding..... **This is drama at it’s best. Here is a woman shivering, fearing for her life and at any moment she could die. And the Pharisees are here standing with stones – ready to stone her with the intent to kill her and then Jesus bends down – he’s cool, calm, and collected.**

It’s not the first time we see Jesus in scripture as someone who is cool, calm, and collected when there are moments of chaos and drama

Ex. When the storm rose out on the lake and his disciples were worried, concerned, and feared for their life.....and they went to find Jesus and what was he doing? He was sleeping.....during a storm – no worries or fears at all – but when the time was right.....he performed a miracle

Ex. When Lazarus was sick – Jesus was in no hurry to get to him.....even though others felt as though he should ACT immediately and do something for HIS FRIEND - but he didn't - he waited 4 days before he went to Lazarus and when he came to Lazarus, he discovered that Lazarus had died and had been buried, but when the time was right, he performed a miracle

Ex. Now here.....amidst all the drama and the energy of the moments that were ticking by, for the woman, for the Pharisees, for the onlookers.....Jesus is found writing in the dirt. And it's perhaps in this moment when, for the woman, a miracle was beginning to take place.....

Can I ask a question...just as a side note here today? Has there ever been a moment in your life when there was chaos, confusion, and a whole lot of drama and you've just had to wait for Jesus to step in and perform a miracle? Even in the midst of the Pharisees trying to trap Jesus, he was still thinking about the woman and her situation! Friends, don't give up or give in when life gets a little tough.....Christ wants to do a miracle in your life and he will only do that at the RIGHT TIME!!

Read 2 Corinthians 4:16-18 – “Though outwardly we are wasting away.....”

Now the third thing I think we should look at today is this.....not only was there a trap for the woman, and a trap for Jesus, but maybe within the context of this scripture, there are some traps for us that we need to make sure we avoid.....

3) Traps for us to avoid:

The first Trap that we need to avoid is the

The trap of diminishing divinity. – What this means is that often times in our lives, we diminish God down to the Person that we are comfortable with and when we do that, we are really making him smaller than He truly is. There are parts of God we connect with and there are parts of God that are mysterious to us and so often we only view God in a way that we understand and are comfortable with. Let me give you some examples....

- a. The Creative God vs. The Orderly God – Some of us are very creative and we connect with God from a more visual perspective and we love the beauty of all that He has created. And it's the experience of art, and feeling and emotion in how we connect with God, best. And then others of us connect with God from a more orderly perspective. We like things to have their proper place, we're a bit more analytical in nature, and we like to know that God has placed situations or things in this universe for a defined purpose and a defined period of time. And there's nothing wrong with either connecting with God through the creativity of God or through His order and structure. But we can't diminish his to just one of those two options
- b. Another example is The Sovereignty of God vs. the Love of God – There are some theological debates over this issue that drives this trap of diminishing divinity. If we elevate God to “just an all loving God”, then we're going to have a difficult time with the issue of “hell” – “How can an all loving God ever let anyone spend eternity in hell?” BUT, if we raise sovereignty to the highest level, and ignore love, then we get into the idea of predestination and God has fixed the whole world from beginning to end ALREADY and there's nothing we can do about anything! And when we push these 2 views apart, we diminish who God is!
- c. And the 3rd example is this.....The Just God vs. the Merciful God – Many people who have been hurt in life lean heavily into God's Justice.....”They should get what they deserve.....they had it coming to them!! Etc., etc. But For people who have lived a broken life, they tend to lean toward God's mercy...”God, I'm am so grateful for your mercy on my life....and for the things that you have brought

me through.....” And again here, when we put God in one “box” and not the other, we are diminishing his Divinity!!

And when we look back at this passage when Jesus is writing in the sand, it’s not because he’s stumped!!! The Creator of all things, the One who has ordered the universe, The God who is all LOVING and at the same time Sovereign. The God who is full of both Justice and Mercy is writing in the sand.....

- a. There has always been a lot of debate about what he was writing.....maybe he was writing the names of the Pharisees, maybe he was writing out their sins for all to see?
- b. OR, maybe He is writing something else.....? It’s interesting to note here that 3 times in scripture we see the “finger of God” writing
 - i. The first time is in Exodus 31 – God gave Moses the 2 Tablets that He himself inscribed with his very own finger
 - ii. The second time we see the finger of God is in Daniel 5 – Belshazzar throws a feast to celebrate his own “God hood” status and because of this, we find in verses 24-28 where the finger of God wrote on the wall telling Belshazzar that God has numbered his days, and that his reign as King would come to an end, and that God is not pleased.

We find here that in the first example, where God gives us the law – it’s the moral standard for which we are to live by. And then in our second example we find that God tells us we have fallen short of the moral standard.

The law was given by the finger of God. The judgement was given by the finger of God.....

- iii. And the third time we find the finger of God writing in scripture is right here in this passage.....and what does he write? Maybe he’s writing something that John says about him in John 1:17? “For the Law was given by Moses, but Grace and Truth was given through Jesus Christ”

Listen friends, the finger of God here in this moment of time was illustrating for us this perfect balance of Who He is!! He’s creative, He’s orderly. He’s Sovereign. He’s love. He’s Just. He’s Merciful. And He’s full of grace AND truth. And maybe in this moment he wants to reiterate that we are small, and he is Big?

And friends, we have to make sure that the God who we serve is bigger than our experience or feelings and that we don’t diminish His Divinity.

And here in this story, we find the religious leaders were bringing God down to their size and that fit their interpretation of the law.

Let me ask us a question today..... Are there moments and experiences, and situations in our lives when we tend to diminish Who God is so that He fits into our views, our needs and wants, and our experiences?

Here’s a second trap that we need to avoid....

The trap of self-righteousness. It’s an obvious part to what we see going on here in this passage.

And this is a classic example of the trap of self-righteousness!! From the standpoint of the stone throwers, this woman is a homewrecker, and she’s perverted the morals of the young people! And Jesus in this situation doesn’t seem much better from their standpoint.....they probably think that he is a “compromiser” , and that he’s one who hangs out with “these type of people”, and because he does this, he must be encouraging them to continue to live in this lifestyle and he sure doesn’t appear to uphold the high moral standards of God” And

when they look at themselves.....they see self-appointed guardians of the Righteousness and the Glory of God – they are the defenders!!

And then we notice in verse 7 that after they asked Jesus once, he bent down and wrote in the sand.....and they apparently weren't satisfied with what he was doing, and so the text tells us that "They kept on questioning HIM" and it was at this moment that Jesus turned this whole situation about "someone else's sin" back on them and said, "If any one of you is without sin, let him be the first to throw a stone at her. "

His statement here had a profound impact on the group. Vs. 9 tells us that after Jesus said this.....they left.....one at a time, until it was only Jesus and the woman who was left.

Here's another interesting note about this passage – It was the Jewish custom that when a person is found guilty, the accuser has the privilege of throwing the first stone! And so Jesus was telling the accusers to start throwing the stones!! But I wonder if the reason they all turned and left is because at this moment they remembered part of the OT law found in Deuteronomy 19 that speaks of there being a 'Malicious witness' – IF someone brings a charge that is malicious, then they were subjected to the SAME punishment that would have been for the accused person!!

Maybe this is what Jesus was talking about in Matthew 7:1 when he tells us..... "Do not judge, or you too will be judged. ² For in the same way you judge others, you will be judged, and with the measure you use, it will be measured to you."

And what Jesus was doing here in this passage was that he was highlighting their self-righteous attempt to force the law on this "sinner" while they themselves would be breaking the law if they were malicious with their accusation! And guess who turned away!!?

Now, some of us would take a look at this passage and situation and say that the laws of government should take care of the moral issues and evil-doers. This is clear teaching in the Bible. BUT, it's also clear teaching that as believers, we are called to enter into people's lives to help them in their struggle with sin for the purpose of trying to restore them. And this is where the potential conflict of addressing someone else's sin has to be dealt with very carefully. We can't be judgemental, although when people are confronted with their sin, this is often a feeling they have – that they are being judged. And, we can't be condemning in our efforts to restore people. BUT, just as Jesus came to share Grace AND TRUTH, we too have to share Grace and TRUTH with people.

Galatians 6:1 tells us that when someone is caught in sin.....that those who are spiritual, should restore him gently. BUT, be careful that we aren't tempted in the process of doing that." It doesn't tell us that we should stone people.....we have this God-given responsibility to help people deal with their sin issues and to lead them away from that sinful lifestyle, whatever it might be.

And then the Third trap is the

***The trap of sin.** The woman is caught – she's busted and she has NO DEFENSE!! And friends listen, sin will always present itself as something that is going to be fun in the moment but once you've stepped over the line of temptation and into sin, it only becomes a trap.

James 1:15 tells us that sin, when it is full grown, will lead to death!!! .

Jesus doesn't want any of us to die.....And here in Vs. 10 Jesus says, "Woman, where are your accusers? Has no one condemned you?"

And there are 2 thoughts here and then we'll close

1. Just because there are no accusers, doesn't mean she's not guilty. I heard some teens trying to justify some of their behavior earlier this week and they made a statement that fits perfectly here..... "It's only breaking the law if you get caught" No. It's not. Breaking the laws of the land and the spiritual laws still renders us guilty – even if we don't have accusers or get caught. The urgency of Jesus 's statement is a powerful statement that reminds us there is NO Justification for sin.....except for what Christ has done for us. Jesus is both Grace and Truth in our lives.
2. Jesus is giving her the opportunity to be forgiven and freed from this life of sin.....He says in verse 11 "I did not come to condemn you, but go now, and leave your life of sin."

Can I ask a question today? What is it that we need to be freed from? Jesus doesn't condemn us. But he loves us enough to speak truth into our lives.....and he's giving us an opportunity to turn away from living a life of whatever sin issue we are dealing with.

Maybe it's one of those private sins that no one can easily see? Maybe it's a heart issue, an attitude? Maybe it's something that you do in secret?

Maybe it's more of a public sin where everybody knows what your sin is?

Maybe our sin today is stone throwing – judging other people, condemning them.....not loving them?

Here's the great news for us.....no matter what type of sin you and I are dealing with, Christ wants to set us free from these things today!!!

This passage is a passage that can radically transform our lives if we hear what it's saying to us and my prayer is that each of us would receive it and apply to our lives as God desires.

Prayer/Closing –