

## LIFE IN HIS NAME

### NEITHER DO I CONDEMN YOU

John 8:1-11

John 8:1-11 - I will begin in verse 2.

Early in the morning he came again to the temple. All the people came to him, and he sat down and taught them. The scribes and the Pharisees brought a woman who had been caught in adultery, and placing her in the midst they said to him, "Teacher, this woman has been caught in the act of adultery. Now in the Law Moses commanded us to stone such women. So what do you say?" This they said to test him, that they might have some charge to bring against him. Jesus bent down and wrote with his finger on the ground. And as they continued to ask him, he stood up and said to them, "Let him who is without sin among you be the first to throw a stone at her." And once more he bent down and wrote on the ground. But when they heard it, they went away one by one, beginning with the older ones, and Jesus was left alone with the woman standing before him. Jesus stood up and said to her, "Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?" She said, "No one, Lord." And Jesus said, "Neither do I condemn you; go, and from now on sin no more."

A Baptist and a Catholic went to a hockey game in Cincinnati. I know that sounds like a joke to you, but it's actually a true story, and a fight broke out. It doesn't surprise us that a fight broke out at a hockey game, but in this case it was not on the ice. It was between the Baptist and the Catholic. The Baptist was a street preacher named Joshua Johnson. He was preaching on the corner outside the arena and a 23-year-old Catholic man named Jake Strotman came out of the minor league hockey game. It had been dollar beer night at the hockey game and evidently Mr. Strotman spent more than a couple of dollars at the hockey game. He didn't appreciate the preaching and one thing led to another. They got into a fight and Mr. Strotman got arrested. The judge's penalty after the trial was that Jake Strotman had to go to the Baptist church that Joshua Johnson pastored for 12 weeks in a row, be on time and listen to every sermon. Then after the sermon he had to take his worship brochure and get it signed by the pastor. I'm not sure how I feel about: 1) Getting attacked while I'm preaching and 2) The punishment being you have to listen to more preaching. But it certainly was a unique sentence and a unique approach. Just what is the appropriate sentence for attacking a street preacher?

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In our text today the question is: What is the appropriate sentence for a woman caught in adultery? On the surface, the passage is about just that. It's about judgment. And it brings into play, into question, some tensions that we feel and that we have to deal with when we address the subject of judgment. But on a deeper level, it's about much more than judgment. It's about Jesus. It's about how he redefines our understanding of judgment. Because the episode is really about the entrapment that is brought to Jesus.

We've been reading in the book of John that the Jewish leaders are now antagonistic toward Jesus. They are trying to arrest him. They are trying to condemn him. They are trying to catch him and this is a plot to trap him. It's a plot on two fronts. On the one hand, there is the tension between Rome and Jerusalem, between God's law and Rome's law. They come with this woman caught in the act of adultery and they say, "Listen, this is what Moses said, this is what the Law of God commands - that this woman should be stoned." But the Roman law forbids capital punishment unless Rome executes it. So, if Jesus on the one hand says, "No, she should not be stoned," then they'll say, "Look, he doesn't believe God's law. He breaks the law of God." But if he says on the other hand, "She must be stoned," then they'll say, "Well, he's seditious, he's a trouble maker. Look, Rome. Look at what he's doing. You should stop him," which is eventually what they do, leading to the crucifixion.

But then there's a second trap that's set, and that's the trap between what strictly speaking appears to be morally right with a hard interpretation of God's law and compassion - what seems to be right on a popular level. Jesus has a reputation in his ministry already for helping hurting people, for being compassionate, for offering forgiveness. So here he comes. Here's a woman caught in sexual sin. What will Jesus do? Will he condemn her or will he forgive her? They have been talking a lot about his authority and that he really speaks for God. On the one hand, will he hold true to what we think God's word says and speak for God, or will he be unloving?

We can identify with those tensions. How does my faith interact with government? This is a good theme for the Fourth of July, right? Just how much of what I believe as a Christian as right and wrong -- how much of that should affect the way we govern, and our government govern? We have that tension, but we also feel it on a personal level. If we are following Jesus Christ, we understand that God makes demands on our lives. He tells us, "This is right. This is wrong. This is how I want you to honor me, and this is what honors me, and this is what doesn't honor me." But in

our lives, we have a lot of people, hopefully, that don't agree with that, that don't know Christ, and we feel the pull. Now it's not just theoretical, now it's very personal. How do I interact with people who don't either agree with or understand God's law?

Well, that's the position that Jesus is put in in a very graphic manner. And as only Jesus can do, he redefines our understanding of judgment. We are going to look at it in three categories: Practical, Personal, and Public. Jesus redefines our understanding practically, personally, and publicly. Let's start with the Practical.

I. Practical.

Here's the takeaway. From this passage, I want you to see that we need to practice God-centeredness. Let me show you how we get there. I haven't addressed something that's very unique about this passage. In your bible, it probably is in brackets, or it's listed as a footnote, and the footnote will say something like: "Some manuscripts or most manuscripts don't have this passage in the gospel of John." What they are telling you is that scholars are not sure that this text belongs right here in the scripture. That's interesting. That's something we don't deal with very frequently. I want to tell you that that's important. It's important for you to notice. It's important for me to notice. We need to talk about it for a minute. Is this bible? Does this belong here in the bible?

The first answer to that question is that almost all scholars agree that the answer to that is no, this was not here originally in John's gospel. In a number of manuscripts it is found in different places in John. It's found in Luke in some manuscripts and it's not found at all in many. You are saying, "Manuscripts, Brian? What are you talking about?"

So, I'm going to give you a brief lesson today on textual criticism. Are you glad you came this morning? Textual criticism -- it's the study of these manuscripts. Understand that for the first 1500 years, the scripture was transferred through handwritten copies. The original book of the bible as we know it was copied over and over and over again. There were times when those scribes, as individuals making those copies, would omit a mark of punctuation or add something or omit a word or skip a line. Minor discrepancies would begin to exist in these copies that go all the way back to the original. There are only two passages in the bible that have large differences. This is one of those, John Chapter 8. The other one is the longer ending of Mark, verse 9 through the end of that chapter, Mark 16. Other than that, the differences are very minor. As we study all of our

manuscripts, all of our copies of scripture, scholars come to the conclusion that this probably was not there.

Does that unsettle you? A little bit, right? The first thing is: I really like the story. I want it to be true. I want it to be there. Most scholars agree that it probably happened. For example, D.A. Carson believes it shouldn't be here in the gospel of John, but that it happened, that it took place. So, after I give you this lesson on textual criticism, I'm going to tell you why that matters, then I'm going to talk to you about the meaning of the passage. But the reason I feel like I can do that is that everything I'm going to say to you is taught clearly in the rest of the bible. I would say we should not establish new doctrine, new teaching from this passage or from the longer ending of Mark 16 if we cannot confirm it in the rest of scripture. Are you with me?

Let me answer the question that may rise up: "Well, is the bible reliable then? If you're telling me that somehow this is here and we are questioning it, is it reliable?" The answer is yes. We have more manuscripts of scripture than we do of any other ancient or classical literature. For example, for most Greco-Roman texts, most classical texts from this time period, written about the time of the life and ministry of Christ, we have two, three, four, or five manuscripts. At the most, 20 - 20 manuscripts of a classic text, and all of those manuscripts come 900-1000 years after they were originally written. Two things that you want to know: 1) Long period of time from the original to the copies that we now have, 2) Very few copies.

Do you want to know how many manuscripts of the bible we have? 5801, compared to at the most in comparative texts of the time period -- 20. And in the case of scripture, we have some manuscripts that are dated from a few decades after the events happened. So: 1) Much shorter time gap from the oldest manuscripts to the events, 2) Many, many, many more copies.

I could tell you that our manuscripts come in four categories. There is a category of all capital letters; that's a certain type of manuscript. Then there's a category of all small letters; we have a bunch of manuscripts that fit that description. Then we have the lectionary collections; these are old manuscripts that were put together to form a worship service. Have I lost you yet? The fourth category is papyri; very ancient. We have between 150 and 160 copies, manuscripts of very old fragments of scripture that are written on papyrus. So, because our manuscripts are old and because we have so many and we can compare them, we can confidently say that what we have is accurate and reliable.

That brings us to the question of: “Brian, why does this matter?” I’m so glad you’ve asked that question, because I would like to tell you. Week in and week out someone stands here and preaches. We deliberately use that word “preach” even though in culture that doesn’t have a great connotation, because we believe the person doing this is proclaiming God’s word -- that I speak to you not on Brian’s authority, but I’m bringing to you the word of God. Not all churches do that, and even all churches that appear to do it don’t do it. That means that we approach a passage of scripture and we say, “What was the original intent? What did God intend to communicate to us through this passage?” We want to make sure that when we teach it, we are being true to that original intent and the context. We are not just reading a passage and we pick out some topic, then we run off. No, we want to try to stay in the text and teach you the text, so that when the day is over, when the message is over, you have an understanding of what the passage is about and what it was that God had to say to me in this text.

We want God to speak to you from his word. That’s different than “We believe the bible, we respect the bible,” but the pastor is just all over the place. He’s not tied to the text. It’s the difference between God-centeredness and man-centeredness. We believe God speaks to us today, and when God sets the agenda, we are surprised at the topics that God brings up. This is about much more than just a relevant topic being brought to mind.

Why does it matter? I encourage you that if you are looking for a home church, look no further. Seriously, I encourage you to look for a church that’s true to God’s word, that believes in the authority of God’s word, and that there is a God-centeredness in the way that they handle the word -- that they’re not so in-step with the world that you feel like you’ve stepped out of the world and into the presence of God when you are a part of the gatherings. By the way, if you’re a guest, if you haven’t figured it out, we do this very imperfectly. But it is of value and it’s an important value.

There is a second application, a very important application. That is that this understanding, this God-centeredness impacts the way we spend time with God, the way we read our bibles. If Riverside is your church home, I want to encourage you to spend time in the scripture, and not just in a way where you are understanding the overall message, but you are studying the word of God.

I am going to issue you today an opportunity, a challenge. We have a bible reading plan, and in this bible reading plan you’ll read the New Testament in a year, you’ll read the book of Psalms in a year, and you’ll read the Old Testament every two years. So, if you are doing this plan, every two years

you'll read the New Testament twice, you'll read Psalms twice, and you'll read the Old Testament once. It's a pace that I think most of us can do on a regular basis.

Then, there is a devotional book by D. A. Carson that we encourage people to purchase or to own. There is actually one for each year. We are in Volume 2 right now, and here is my challenge. If you are not settled in, studying the scripture for a few minutes every day, I want to challenge you. There is a table set up. Pick up one of these, then pick up Carson's devotional. There is a charge for it. We are not making a profit, we are actually losing money on it. Read his devotion that corresponds to the reading. Why do we recommend his devotional? Because he works to help you understand, "What is the text? What is it saying? What is the context? Why is Jeremiah talking about Babylon? What is the reference? How does it fit? And how does it fit into the overall message of the bible?"

I invite you to do that. I challenge you to do it. Do it for 90 days, and by the time you do it for 90 days, it will be hopefully a lifelong discipline for you. You will begin to experience not just an occasional inspirational thought, but God speaking to you from his word because you are wanting to practice a God-centeredness.

That's sermon #1. You get three sermons today. The first one is Practical, by far the shortest. That's not true. #2 is Personal.

## II. Personal.

They set a trap for Jesus. Let's get into the story for a minute. They set a trap, a double trap, a trap between Rome and Jerusalem, a trap between compassion and a strict observance of the law. It's so ingenious, so marvelous what transpires. What we see here, first of all, is our personal guilt. You can find yourself in this story, in this passage.

The Old Testament law taught that a man and a woman caught in adultery would be stoned, but they had to be caught in the act, and there had to be two witnesses. It virtually never happened. It was virtually never practiced, and there were these very, very strict guidelines that protected people from flimsy and false accusations. We know almost for certain that this whole thing was a set-up. They wanted to trap Jesus, so they entrap this woman, and the man was in on the trap. Then he mysteriously disappears. They don't bring the man and the woman, the woman is brought before Jesus. If you look at it, it's just so evil. The shame and the humiliation -- to set this woman

up this way, for the man to be in on it and for him to disappear is just so wicked. She is standing there, probably not fully dressed, completely humiliated.

Then of course, there is this account where Jesus writes in the sand. We always want to talk about “What did Jesus write in the sand?” We have all of these theories about what Jesus wrote in the sand. Some people say Jesus wrote scripture verses. Other people say he wrote the names of women that the accusers had been with that were not their wives. That’s a rather creative solution. I doubt it. It just doesn’t seem like Jesus to me. But really, the point is we don’t know. We’ll come back to that at the very end of the sermon.

But here’s what happens. Here’s how the narrative builds. Jesus is writing in the sand, and as he does they get more intense. They keep on asking him, “What should we do? What should we do? Should we stone her? Should we throw the first stone? What should we do?” That allows them to so overstate their position, to appear so aggressive, that when Jesus steps back and says, “Let the one without sin throw the first stone,” it’s very climactic. Of course, then we’re told that one at a time they begin to leave, starting with those that are older.

Why do the old guys get it first? Because they’re more aware of their sin, and they begin to leave. There is personal guilt there on the part of these individuals. There’s hypocrisy and a blindness. They don’t even see the evil that they’re doing to this woman – their favoritism, their hypocrisy, their own sexual sin – blind to all of that because they are in this lust for power, this prideful campaign to exalt themselves and oppose Jesus. So Jesus, through these events, exposes them. Right? They begin to leave. Then Jesus is writing in the sand again. You feel the narrative move.

Eventually, as they under conviction fall off one at a time, Jesus is left standing there alone with the woman. He stands up, face to face with the woman. The next interaction is important, because Jesus says, “Where are the people that condemned you?” She says, “They’re gone.” Jesus pronounces this word of grace: “Neither do I condemn you. Go and sin no more.” It’s very clear that Jesus is not condoning or dismissing her sin. He is confronting her sin as well.

Now we have a different portrayal of sin – sexual immorality and all that that represented in her life. We have this religious sin -- it’s got a religious cloak, then this more carnal expression of sin. There is an invitation for you and me to find ourselves in the story. How do we fit? Are we the judgmental types looking down on others, blind to our own sin, or are we in the category of allowing and dismissing sin -- immoral, whatever it might be in our lives?

Here's the irony of the story: Jesus was the one who could have thrown the first stone. Right? He was the one who was righteous, who could have condemned her. That's the next thing we really see. We see Jesus' righteousness. We see he alone is wise and able and perfect and holy to handle the situation. He brings out an exposure of everyone's guilt and a display of his righteousness. Jesus could have killed her, but what did he do instead? He killed himself. He allowed himself to be offered as a sacrifice for her, that she might be forgiven, that he might be able to say to her these words: "Neither do I condemn you."

This is a picture of grace, which is really the main point, the third point here under the personal application: Grace is the pathway to holiness. Jesus is illustrating here what he teaches openly in other places and what's taught throughout scripture: Keeping the law, trying to do what's right will not produce holiness in your life. We need to be forgiven. We need the grace of Jesus Christ in our lives.

There is an important order here. "Neither do I condemn you. Go and sin no more." We want to reverse the order. We want to say, "If I can clean myself up, if I can go and not sin and do at least a relatively respectable job of that, then God will accept me. God says, "No. It's actually the opposite order. You receive forgiveness as a gift. Jesus offers his life to pay for your guilt, to pay for your sin. You receive his righteousness, the removal of condemnation from your life, and this is the pathway to transformation and change and growth in holiness." Holiness matters, but we can only get there by the grace of God.

Powerful, personal applications in this passage.

### III. Public.

The main idea here, the takeaway is that Jesus alone is the final judge. God is the final judge. He alone knows perfectly and he alone judges perfectly. It's interesting now as we talk about "How do I interact with the public sphere? Government? That which is codified into law? How do I influence that public sphere with my personal faith?" It's not as easy as we sometimes make it out to be. There's a real tension here.

In the last century, in many nation in Western Europe it was illegal to get a divorce. For example, C.S. Lewis, writing in the middle part of the last century was battling with that tension. I remember 20 years ago meeting a couple in Ireland who had not lived together for 50 years. They had been

separated, divorced practically, but were adhering to the law as they understood it when their relationship first ended. Do we make it against the law when you break God's law? Or another question that's asked is: "If this is what's pleasing to God, do we resort to violence? Do we impose it on others?" I think clearly the scripture tells us that God alone knows perfectly and is the final judge, and that our judgment in this life personally and publically has to be flavored by, informed by that reality.

I'm not for a moment insinuating that we don't participate in the public discussion. Of course we do. Of course we influence, but we need to have the confidence that says, "God will make this right one day. God is the final judge." We should be approaching this with a tone of humility, conviction about the truth, speaking in love, with the confidence that God will make it right.

Two days from now will be the 29<sup>th</sup> anniversary of this church ordaining me into ministry -- July 5<sup>th</sup>, 29 years here at Riverside. Thank you. Some of you deserve an award for putting up with me for this long. I keep praying, "Lord, eventually let me get it right so that they can be rewarded for their patience." Someone said, "Amen?" Oh, I deserved that, didn't I?

When I first began in ministry, there was a man at a high profile church in our area who led a campaign to close strip bars, strip clubs. Then in that same time period he was exposed when it was found out that he was going to a high-priced call girl, mistress, prostitute. Tragically, that prostitute's clients were caught on tape and the hypocrisy of this man leading the campaign against immorality, then being exposed in personal immorality himself did not honor the Lord or help the cause of the church. I felt compassion at the time for the man, but we need to see how personal guilt and our need for Jesus - his grace, his righteousness to help us - helps us to walk in humility with love for others and a confidence in the truth, that we speak truth out of love for others with an awareness of our humility and our dependence on Christ.

I think John Piper says it well. Let me give you a paragraph from John Piper.

There will come a day when Jesus Christ returns to Earth and establishes his kingdom in person. When that day comes, all accounts will be settled. He will separate the sheep from the goats -- those who embrace his authority from those who don't. There will be a final judgment, and all unbelief and sin will be removed from the new world of justice and peace. In the meantime, we are not God. We are not the final judge. Therefore, we exalt his word, and we call all people everywhere to believe it and obey it and to see and savor him through

it. But we do not use force or violence to bring about faith. Coerced Christian faith is an oxymoron. There is no such thing.

His point is that we are not apologizing that God makes a demand on all your life. God's word, God's law is true. He made you and he has something to say about how he wants you to live your life. But we begin with ourselves and we recognize our own desperate need. We receive the gift of righteousness, and that impacts the tone of everything we say personally and publically. So now, yeah, we declare the truth of God, but we don't do it by force or violence, either literally or in a tone that dishonors the Lord.

Let's conclude with a look back at a Baptist and a Catholic in Cincinnati at a hockey game. There's something about the judge's ruling that we like, right? He could have given the man 90 days in jail. He could have said, "Listen, that's it. That's the penalty. Take this and never do it again." But instead he sent the man to this church to learn, to listen, to learn respect, to interact, and there's a place for us to hear that. There's an appropriate, measured application of that for us as Christians. But we understand as Christians that God gets the final word and he is the final judge, and that he will judge in perfect knowledge, perfectly.

But there's more. There's more than just learning to get along that we learn from this passage. There's more here. We long to hear these words: "Neither do I condemn you." We need to hear and to experience the grace of God. God takes us beyond a place of just practically learning to respect others and get along, to a place of experiencing genuine personal transformation so that the weight of condemnation is lifted off of us in Christ, that he then might speak these words: "Go and sin no more." It's a process, but where we experience the grace of God, we learn to walk in now the holiness that he calls us to by the mercy that we experience in him.

Let's pray.