



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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The Sermons of S. Lewis Johnson

John 7:53-8:11

“The Woman Taken in Adultery, or Misery and Mercy”

TRANSCRIPT

[Audio begins] This morning for the Scripture reading we’re turning to John chapter 7 and verse 53 and reading through chapter 8, verse 11. Some of you will immediately recognize that this is a passage that is not found in some of the translations of the New Testament because the manuscript testimony for it is relatively weak. Among the ancient manuscripts of the New Testament there is really only one that contains these verses. There are a number of manuscripts of more recent age that do contain the section. It is however, a section that was known in the early church, though the manuscripts that I’ve mentioned, the oldest manuscripts that we have generally do not have it. Therefore, it has been the subject of considerable debate among New Testament textual critics.

There are some rather amusing things that have happened with reference to it. If you were to go into the Freer Gallery of Art in Washington, at least a few years ago, that gallery contains *The Washington Gospels*, a famous Greek manuscript of the 4th and 5th Centuries. They provide souvenir gospels with a photograph of a page of the text of that ancient manuscript. They have in the past used the section beginning with chapter 7, verse 46 and going through chapter 8 verse 16. They say at the bottom of the page that that passage is from that particular section of the gospel, and they even quote the section on the back in English. The interesting thing about it is that the maker of the card happened to choose a section which really is not contained in the Freer manuscript, but nevertheless has given an English translation of the New Testament, though the Greek text that is

printed does not even contain it. But fortunately for him, most people who picked up the card couldn't read the Greek anyway and didn't notice that it was not there.

One of the things that has also interested textual critics and students of the New Testament about this passage is the fact that it contains a couple of rather interesting things. In the first place, it represents the Lord Jesus Christ as writing upon the ground. And as you know, from reading the New Testament, never in any other place is the Lord Jesus presented as writing anything on the ground. And furthermore, the words of our Lord to the woman taken in adultery contains such a note of originality about them that many of the students of the New Testament have concluded that in spite of the fact that the section that we are reading is not found in almost all of the most ancient manuscripts, it nevertheless is probably an authentic account of an incident in our Lord's life. And for that reason, has been regarded as a text which Christian preachers and teachers might teach, with some assurance at least that it represents the word of our Lord.

We need to remember this, that if Jesus Christ was the Son of God, as Christians believe, if he was the second person of the Trinity, he therefore was very God of very God, and consequently everything that the Lord Jesus ever said while he was here upon the earth was absolutely true, being the word of the living God. And all of the incidents in his life, if they are described accurately, would be incidents that would be worthy of the utmost attention on the part of every one of us. That is one reason why students of the New Testament are interested in discovering any of the sayings of our Lord that might not be included in the canonical gospels.

Now John himself makes reference to the fact that there were many things that Jesus did and said which he did not put in his book. In the last two verses of this gospel he writes, “This is the disciple which testifieth of these things and wrote these things and we know that his testimony is true, and there are also many other things which Jesus did, the which if they should be written every one, I suppose that even the world itself could not contain the books that should be written.” It is likely, in my opinion, that this is an authentic account of an incident in the life of our Lord and it just

so happens that John himself tells us that there were many such incidents and he didn't make any attempt to include them all.

This little account, circulated separately. It's found in some manuscripts in the Gospel of Luke. It's found in some manuscripts of the Gospel of John, at the end of the gospel. And so I'm treating it as if it were an authentic account of the Lord Jesus Christ's ministry, although it is unlikely that it really belongs specifically to the Gospel of John itself.

Now if you're interested further in it I suggest that you get down your Bible dictionaries, and concordances, and read further concerning the question. We don't have time to deal with it in a more technical fashion in a sermon. Let's look now at John 7 verse 53 through chapter 8 and verse 11. Remember we are in the context of the celebration of the feast of tabernacles. And we read in verse 53,

“And every man went unto his own house. (coming now to chapter 8 verse 1) Jesus went unto the Mount of Olives. And early in the morning he came again into the temple, and all the people came unto him; and he sat down, and taught them. And the scribes and Pharisees brought unto him a woman taken in adultery; and when they had set her in the midst, They say unto him, Master, this woman was taken in adultery, in the very act. Now Moses in the law commanded us, that such should be stoned: but what sayest thou? This they said, tempting him, that they might have to accuse him. But Jesus stooped down, and with his finger wrote on the ground, as though he heard them not. (those words are added in the Authorized version) So when they continued asking him, he lifted up himself, and said unto them, He that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone at her. And again he stooped down, and wrote on the ground. And they which heard it, being convicted by their own conscience, went out one by one, beginning at the eldest, even unto the last: and Jesus was left alone, and the woman standing in the midst. When Jesus had lifted himself up, and saw none but the woman, he said unto her, Woman, where are those thine accusers? Hath no man condemned thee? (by the way when he speaks to this woman as “woman” it's not a derogatory

term, remember this is the same word that he used of Mary in the 2nd chapter of this same gospel, and later on in the 19th chapter he will use it again, verse 11) She said, No man, Lord. And Jesus said unto her, Neither do I condemn thee: go, and sin no more.”

May the Lord bless this reading of the Word.

Agustine, in one of his writings, makes reference to the incident that we are looking at this morning, the woman taken in adultery, and in the course of the account and his comments on it, he concludes by saying, “The two are left; misery and mercy.” And that’s the occasion for the title of the sermon today as “The Woman Taken in Adultery, or Misery and Mercy.”

In the art galleries of Europe, when you travel around and look at the paintings that are found there, you will notice that there are two paintings that occur over and over again. One is the painting of the martyr Saint Sebastian, who was tied to a tree and others are shooting arrows at him. And then the other picture that is so commonly painting, the subject of art, Christian art, is the picture of the woman taken in adultery. None of the paintings can of course compare with the Spirit’s portrait of the prodigal daughter that is found here. It is a beautiful illustration, in some ways, of the statement that John makes in his prologue in chapter 1 when he says, “The law came by Moses, but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ.” I think we shall see an illustration of that as we look down through the account that is given by the author.

Most great men write something, but this is all that our Lord ever wrote. He wrote a little something upon the ground, and we don’t even know what it was. It wasn’t even a sermon. So it’s obvious our Lord is not presented in the Scriptures as a great educator. He’s not presented as a great philosopher. He’s not presented even as a great religious leader, as a bishop for example. He’s not presented as an earthly king or a president. He is preeminently presented as a savior. That comes out right in the beginning, when in the annunciation of the birth of Jesus given in Luke chapter 2, the angel says, “For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior which is Christ the Lord.” So when we think of Jesus Christ we shouldn’t think of a great educator, a philosopher, a religious

leader, though of course no one educated more accurately and correctly than our Lord, and certainly no one ever had a purer philosophy than that which our Lord had, nor was anyone a religious leader to compare to him, and no one will ever be a king like him, and if we may equate king and president, no one would ever be a president like him, but preeminently the Scriptures present him as a savior. That is the way in which he would have himself presented to us.

Our generation has been called the adulterous generation for obvious reasons. It's quite obvious as we read the events that happen in our society that adultery plays a great part in it. We're not the only age, of course, for adultery has characterized man from the beginning. But our age has been called the adulterous generation.

One of the things that this incident speaks to therefore is that which characterizes our day, or one of the things that particularly characterizes our day, the guilt and the condemnation of the sin of our age. It also speaks to us of the possibility of forgiveness. The thing I like about the Bible is its honesty, its truth, of course. It honestly depicts men as they are. Marxist dialectic does not. It pictures things as ultimately ending in a stainless steel paradise. Hegelian optimism supposed that it would come; things would come to a climax in the perfect Prussian state. When you read American history books a great deal was made over the American dream, as if that were great. And of course what was referred to by that was that our faith in the natural goodness of man and the endlessness of material progress.

One thing we can be grateful for is the honesty of the Bible. The Bible pages are bloody because men are violent men. Patriarchs visit prostitutes in the Bible. The human story has never been free of that stigma. There is no Pollyanna in Scripture, and for that we should be grateful. One can even see the signs of the sin of man in the world of nature about us. It's the stage on which the history of man has played out, and it too has been affected by sin. It's flawed, it groans, and travails until the revelation of the sons of God in the future. And then of course, so far as man or human nature is concerned, it is flawed. Paul says, “There is none righteous, no not one. There is none that doeth good, no not one. There is none that seeketh after God.” We are all terminal cases and we

have a cancer working in the midst of every one of our hearts, and that cancer is the cancer of original sin. We are all affected by it, and sooner or later our names shall appear in the obituaries of our newspapers. I like that about the Bible, because it tells things as they really are.

And in this incident here, we have a beautiful illustration of that fact. The circumstances that surround the incident are given in the last verse of John chapter 7 and the first three verses of the next chapter. Jesus is in Jerusalem for the celebration of the feast of tabernacles. He’s just engaged in a long debate with the Jewish people, with the scribes and Pharisees, with the multitude, in the presence of his disciples, and he has gone out for the night to the Mount of Olives. I would assume that he went out, since his custom was to do this, to pray, and that he spent a great deal of the night in prayer. William Law said, “He who has learned to pray has learned the greatest secret of a holy and happy life.” And our Lord had a holy and happy life. And I would think that therefore he had learned to pray. The Scriptures seem to make that very plain. And he had probably spent a great of the night before in prayer, though I’m sure that he also had slept a good bit too, because I know that he was tired after that day of debate.

The next morning he arose early, he came into the temple and again in one of the porticoes of the temple he sat down and began to teach again. What he said, John or the author of this incident does not tell us. But in the midst of his teaching he heard a noise, and the others heard a noise, voices in the back of the crowd around him saying, “Open up, make way” and suddenly, thrust into the midst right before him was a woman, and the scribes and the Pharisees were bringing her into the presence of the Lord. Now they were very callous, ruthless, subtle, and proud men. The scribes were the students of the law. The Pharisees were those who sought to carry out the things that the scribes had learned from their study of the law. This is I think the only time in the Gospel of John in which the two are linked together, one of the signs perhaps that this is not something written by John the apostle.

But at any rate, the scribes and the Pharisees are found together elsewhere, and there is nothing unusual about that. They bring the woman and put her in the midst. These men, I say, were

very proud men, very callous. They were sinners, just like the rest of us. There is an incident, which many of you no doubt have heard, about Governor Bradford who saw a criminal being taken to the gallows and who said, “There but for the grace of God go I.” It’s well for us to remember, when we think of the scribes and Pharisees, that the things that characterize them are the things that characterize us. And I think particularly, they are the things that characterize us in Christian circles, because we move in circles that the world would call religious circles and the crimes of the religious people are often the crimes of pride, jealousy, the types of sin that are not so violent as the others, but nevertheless just as heinous in the sight of God.

Winston Churchill, he obviously had heard the statement by Governor Bradford, commenting upon Sir Stafford Cripps, a very well-known public figure of a generation or two ago who was known for his pride, said, “There but for the grace of God goes God.” [Laughter] Now in the religious circles there are people like that; they give you the impression that they are extremely proud, but at the same time they also put themselves forth as being very religious.

The scribes and the Pharisees then, bring the woman to the Lord Jesus Christ. And they set her right in the midst. That was a rather cruel thing in itself, because it was not necessary for them to do that. If they really had caught her in the act of adultery, it was not required that she be brought publicly before others, and least of all the Lord Jesus Christ, one whom they were seeking to slay.

Now, the Jews thought very seriously about adultery. In the eyes of the Jews adultery was an extremely serious crime, and in fact with two others it formed the third of the three most serious crimes; idolatry, murder, and adultery. They treated adulterers in two ways. In the case of people who were married who committed adultery with another party, they were strangled to death, if they were caught and it could be proved that they had committed the act. For a woman who was betrothed, the Scriptures speak specifically that she should be stoned to death if she should be caught in adultery. It may be that this was a woman who had been betrothed to a man. One asks immediately, why was not the man brought with her? It would seem that it’s likely that this was a contrived case and therefore the woman alone is brought because it would simply afford them

occasion, an occasion for showing the Lord Jesus up and therefore making it possible for them to take him and crucify him in, at least the appearance of legality.

So, we read then that she was brought and set in the midst. I wonder, as I read this incident, if it's possible that this was done by collaboration with a man, because in Judaism if a wife divorced her husband, then the property was divided. But if in the case of adultery, it could be shown that she had committed adultery and therefore would be stoned to death or strangled to death, then all of the property would be the man's. And it's perhaps possible that just such a situation exists here, and that's why the husband is not there. He has arranged with the scribes and Pharisees for his wife to be caught, and in this way she will be put to death and he will obtain all of the property that belonged to them. So it's very possible that this was a deliberate trap arranged by the scribes and the Pharisees and the man involved.

Now the conversation with the leaders begins in the 4th verse of the 8th chapter, and we read, “They say unto him, Teacher, this woman was taken in adultery in the very act.” That by the way was a very difficult thing to do, because in Jewish law circumstantial evidence did not help. If for example, you should see a man and a woman coming out of a house in the morning, or late at night, that was not evidence of adultery. They had to be caught in the very act together. And furthermore, the motions and movements of the couple had to be unmistakably that of sexual intercourse. So it was very difficult for anyone to have this particular crime proven against them. And very few times was the judgment executed for that reason. But this woman has been caught in the very act, again perhaps indicating that this was a contrived case.

Now they say to the Lord Jesus, “this woman was caught in the very act, and Moses in our law commanded us that such should be stoned: but what sayest Thou?” They sought of course to impale our Lord on the horns of a dilemma, because you see if he had said, “Well yes, she should be stoned to death or she should be strangled” then that would bring him into conflict with Rome, because Rome did not permit the Jews at this time to execute individuals. Occasionally it did happen and they did not do anything about it. They stoned Steven to death, but ordinarily Rome did not

permit the Jews to execute anyone. They retained that right for themselves. That’s why our Lord later had to be accused before the Roman authorities in order that the crucifixion might be permitted. So if he had said, “Yes she ought to be stoned to death” well that would conflict, bring him into conflict with Rome, but if he said “No she should not be stoned to death” then that would bring him into conflict with the Law of Moses. So they really thought they had him, very much like the ancient conundrum, have you stopped beating your wife? If you say, “Yes I have stopped” well you are confessing that you have been beating your wife. If you say, “No” you are confessing that you are still doing it. So in the case of our Lord they say, “Should we put her to death or not?”

Now they had failed in the preceding chapter because they had sent officers to take the Lord, but the officers when they came into the presence of the Lord and heard him preach they said, “Never man spake like this man” and they went back empty-handed to the Jewish leaders. So they’ve tried the roar of the lion and that fails, so now they try the wiles of a serpent. Isn’t it interesting; the wicked can quote Scripture.

We often have people say, “I ran into a Jehovah’s Witness the other day and they set out for me their teaching concerning Scripture and I didn’t know exactly what to say, and they were quoting Scripture.” I think that is very unusual. People seem to think for some reason that if you know any text of Scripture that means that you’re bound to be true to the word of God. I often have people call me on the phone and say things like this. And then they ask, “What can I do? What can I say?” Why if you read the Bible you know that not only do the wicked quote Scripture, Satan himself quotes Scripture.

Do you remember the incident in the case of Jezebel and Ahab? Naboth had a little vineyard. Ahab wanted it. Ahab was the king. He wanted it. He came to Naboth and he said he’d like to buy the vineyard from him and furthermore he said, “I’ll give you some other place where you can have your vineyard” but his vineyard was right by Ahab’s palace and he wanted that vineyard. Well Naboth said no, he wasn’t going to do it, why should he sell property that had been given to his family by the Lord, because in Israel everybody had their particular plot given them by the Lord. It

was a theocratic community. So Ahab went back, fell on his bed, he was very upset over this. He fell on his bed, turned his face to the wall and was moody, and depressed, and took probably a few Valium pills or something like that [Laughter] in order to get over the disappointment and distress of not being able to have this vineyard. Well Jezebel came in and Jezebel said, “What’s the matter?” Well he told her the story. She said, “Who’s King, you or Naboth?” And he said of course, “Well I’m King.” And she said, “Well I’ll tell you how to get the vineyard.” And so she sat down and wrote a few notes. And these notes were designed in such a way to get Naboth accused of blaspheme and thus put to death. So Naboth is brought in before the judges and the letters are read in which it is stated that he’s committed blaspheme against the Lord, and he’s removed and Ahab gets his vineyard. But the interesting thing about it is that when Jezebel writes the notes, or letters, by which Naboth is to be put to death, she quotes Scripture. She knew Scripture. It’s not enough to know Scripture.

It’s not enough to be able to quote Scripture. One must be able to compare Scripture with Scripture, and quote Scripture with understanding. There’s all the difference in the world between quoting a text of the Bible and taking the Bible and, by understanding of the meaning of texts, harmonizing its teaching so that it presents a consistent whole.

Isn’t it interesting too that they call this person, “this woman.” Now they knew her name. One of the things I like about the Bible is its personalism. Dr. Paul Tournier speaks about this in his *A Doctor’s Casebook*. He talks about the personalism of the Bible. He points out how the Bible is fond of names. God says to Moses, “I know thee by name.” God said to Cyrus, “I am the Lord which call thee by name.” The believers are those who are known by name. In fact, a great part of the Bible names are set out specifically. Those parts of the Bible some of you haven’t read because you skip those, when you come to those lists of names. But that’s part of the personalism of the Bible. He knows his own by name. Doctors don’t always speak of people by their names, so Dr. Tournier said. He said, “Frequently we refer to a person as ‘that gall bladder type’ [Laughter] or ‘that consumptive’ or ‘that cancer patient’.” And he said, “In that we acknowledge that we do not have

the personal relationship that we ought to have with our patients. We don't call them by their names. See that gall bladder walking down the hall of the hospital, that kind of thing.”

Well they refer to this woman as “this woman.” You'll notice that the Lord Jesus is frequently referred to as “this fellow.” They know his name. They knew this woman's name. They knew the name of the person with whom she had committed adultery, but they call her “this woman.” It's a note of contempt.

Now when the question is put to our Lord, we read in verse 6, that Jesus stooped down and with his finger wrote on the ground as though he had not heard them. One might ask the question, why did the Lord Jesus do that? It's been suggested that he wanted to gain time, and not to be rushed into a decision.

Well I can understand how that might be the case, because having been a professor in a theological seminary for many years, I'm very skilled in dodging questions. [Laughter] You would be interested to hear a question put to me that I don't really know the answer to. I usually can put them off to the bell. [Laughter] When the bell rings then I can go out and do research on it, and the next day I come back and they will think that I knew the answer all along. I will say, first of all, “Now what was that question, repeat it?” and if it's still puzzling I might even say, “Remember I'm getting a little deaf, [Laughter] so say it again.” And then I might ask a few questions myself, like “Do you mean this? Or do you mean this, or is this the way you really want to phrase the question?” And by then of course the welcome sound of the bell comes and I say, “Well sorry, we'll take that up tomorrow” and I'll answer the question. Some have thought that perhaps the Lord wanted to gain some time to think over the matter.

It's possible also, some have said, that the Lord Jesus took this time, got down and wrote on the ground because he wanted by the repetition of the question to have it impressed upon the minds of the scribes and the Pharisees that this was a sadistically cruel thing that they were doing to this woman and that they might become embarrassed themselves about what they were doing.

And still others, citing [indistinct] say Jesus was seized with an intolerable sense of shame. He couldn't meet the eye of the crowd or of the accusers, and perhaps at that moment least of all, of the woman. And in the burning embarrassment and confusion he stooped down so as to hide his face, and began writing with his finger upon the ground. He was just embarrassed by the fact that they brought an adulterous right into his presence and have said to him, “She was caught in the act with her disheveled clothes and appearance, and the other things that might characterize a person caught in the act and dragged into his presence.

And still others have said he wanted to write in the dust the sins of those who were accusing him. It's interesting that in some of the ancient manuscripts it says, in these ancient manuscripts they're not the oldest manuscripts, they're later manuscripts and you can see it's a scribe who has made some additions to the text, hoping that his additions were correct, that he sat down and he wrote the sins of the men in the ground. But those manuscripts are not the old and better manuscripts, and so it's probably just a scribal suggestion and that's all.

By the way, in connection with manuscripts we should always remember this; the problem of the New Testament text is not that we don't have old and good manuscripts, it's the fact that we have so many of them. The problem of New Testament textual criticism is dealing with so many manuscripts. We have older and better manuscripts of the New Testament than we have of any other ancient writing. We have five thousand, over five thousand, Greek manuscripts alone. And not only that, but translations into other languages made very early; into languages like Armenian, Syriac, Egyptian, Latin, and so on. In fact, there are literally thousands and thousands of manuscripts of the New Testament because the early church felt that the word of God was important. And so they copied those texts and they circulated those texts.

Well now, our Lord's response then is to kneel on the ground, or stoop down, and write. I would think that this is one of the most dramatic silences in all of the Bible. Why did he write? Now one reason, perhaps he wrote, was that it was not his province to judge. It wasn't his province to judge because he was not an official judge. The priests could judge, but he could not judge. He was

not a priest. Now he was a priest after the order of Melchizedek, but he was not a Levitical priest. And therefore he could not offer sacrifice for example. He could not engage in the activities of a Levitical priest. The writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews points that out when he says that Jesus came of the tribe of Judah, not of the tribe of Levi. And so it was not proper to come to him to pass judgment on a case like this. So he was not the judge, and therefore it may well be that that accounts for his reticence. But they kept pressing him. I’m sure that they thought “We’ve got him at last.”

It’s like occasionally students will raise their hand when I’ve said something about the atonement, and being Universalists rather than believing in a definite or particular redemption, they will call out some text. And I may hesitate for a moment, they say, “We finally caught him. We finally got him.” And then of course, will launch into an explanation of the particular text, but if I should hesitate at all they’ll ask it again, “What about so and so? What about so and so? What about 2 Peter 2:1? What about 1 John 2:1 and 2?” And in the meantime they pester you with the questions because they think they finally caught the professor.

Well right here our Lord is writing in the ground. And it says in verse 7, “So when they continued asking him he lifted up himself, and said unto them, He that is without sin among you, let him cast the first stone at her.” They thought that his silence may have arisen from evasion of the question. You know there is a marvelous art in our Lord’s reply. Have you ever thought [about] what he did? They had asked him a judicial question. They had said, “What about Moses’ Law?” Well he moves from the judicial, which was not his particular territory, into the moral province, beyond which he did not wish to go. So he simply said to them, “He that is without sin among you, let him cast a stone at her.” Again, there was a dramatic silence. Having said this, our Lord knelt again, and he was writing on the ground. Now when they heard this, “He that is without sin among you, let him cast the first stone” our Lord by this caused them to begin to judge themselves, because that was really important thing so far as he was concerned.

And as one of the commentators said, “Then the fun began.” Our Lord is on the ground, he’s writing, he’s said “Let him that is without sin among you cast the first stone” and there is silence,

dramatic silence, the crowd around not understanding, the Pharisees beginning to catch the point that they're going to have to make a decision concerning themselves; are they without sin, do they have the right to cast the first stone? Someone has said, “This is the only thing our Lord ever wrote, and it wasn't a sermon, but the thing that he had said was certainly a very convicting statement.” I wonder what he was writing in that sand that was at his feet. He must have heard the shuffle of the feet, as finally individuals began to move away, convicted by their own conscience they went out one by one beginning at the oldest. Because of course the oldest had the most sense. No, not necessarily. Perhaps because they had more experience of sin. At any rate, from the older down to the younger, they all began to slink out because they were convicted by the things that the Lord Jesus had said. They were not ashamed. I don't think they were ashamed. They are still anxious to put him to death, but they were outgeneraled by the Lord Jesus Christ. Acknowledging the fitness of the statement that our Lord makes in Matthew chapter 12 and verse 37 where we read the words, “For by thy words thou shalt be justified and by thy words thou shalt be condemned.”

Well the conversation's not over, the two are left. What Agustin, “Misery and mercy are left, the misery of the woman, and the mercy of the Lord Jesus Christ.” Now the climax of the compassion of our Lord; and he turns to the woman, having lifted himself up, and having seen none but her there, he said, “Woman, where are those thine accusers? Hath no man condemned thee?” And she replies, “No man, Lord.”

Now I'd like to lay stress on that, because I think while the term Lord may mean only sir, and does seem to mean only sir in certain places. Probably means that when for example, Sara called Abraham lord, and that is set out as one of the reasons why women ought to be in submission to men; they ought to live like Sara did. She called Abraham lord. Probably means something like sir. As I've mentioned to you before, Martha occasionally calls me lord, but she says it in such a voice that I don't get any real pleasure [Laughter] out of hearing it, [Laughter] “Sir?”

But now the reason I think that this is probably a real instance of a recognition of something more than a man in him is because in verse 4 they had spoken to him and they had said to him,

“Teacher, this woman was taken in adultery, in the very act.” And so I’m going to say without absolute dogmatism, that she probably had begun to recognize something unusual about him, and so she said to him, “No man, Lord.” Now if she recognized that the Lord Jesus was Lord, the only way in which she recognized this was because the Holy Spirit had enlightened her.

Remember Paul says, “No man calls Jesus Lord except by the Holy Spirit.” Now of course anybody can call him Lord, just using the term, but Paul means no man can call him truly Lord, recognizing him as such and bowing before his Lordship except by the Holy Spirit. That’s one of the many, the countless, texts of the New Testament that teach the efficacious grace of God the Holy Spirit, “No man can call him Lord except by the Holy Spirit.”

She said, “No man, Lord.” Notice she does not excuse herself in any way. I gather that in saying, “No man, Lord” the sense of penitence has already fallen upon her. And then Jesus replies by saying, “Neither do I condemn thee: go, and sin no more.” Isn’t it striking that the only person in that whole gathering, all of that multitude in the temple area, the only person who could have cast a stone at her, for he was the only sinless individual there, did not cast a stone at her, but said, “Neither do I condemn thee.”

Now I don’t think, this is a little difficult, I do not say this with dogmatism, I do not think that the Lord Jesus could have said, “Neither do I condemn thee” were it not for the fact that there is evidence already of repentance on the part of the woman. One of the commentators said, “If Christ dismissed her and forgave her sins, we can be sure too that she was repentant.” I would turn it around and say if Jesus Christ could say to her, “Neither do I condemn thee” then that was an acknowledgement of the fact that the Lord regarded her as having repented. But he said, “Neither do I condemn thee.” In other words, she was introduced into a new standing before him. Our Lord does not condone what she has done. He will say, “go, and sin no more.” He will say that what she has done is sin, but he does not condemn her because he has given her a new standing, dependent upon the fact that she has repented of her sin and has acknowledged it before him.

Paul in Romans chapter 8 and verse 3 speaking about the law says, “What the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh.” And our Lord speaks in the light of the fact that in a few days from now he will hang upon the cross at Calvary, and there he will condemn sin in the flesh. “Neither do I condemn thee: go, and sin no more.” But the forgiveness that she receives, the lack of condemnation, the standing in righteousness, is to be followed by a new state. And so she is exhorted to sin no more. I regard that, not simply as an exhortation, but also as a word of hope. The fact that he would say to her, “go, and do not sin anymore” is an evidence of hope for her, that a different kind of life was possible for her in the future.

One of the expositors of this particular incident has pictured individuals coming ultimately to heaven. And as we come to heaven, having lived our own particular kinds of life, this preacher has suggested that maybe when we come to the doors of heaven we will be greeted by angelic beings, or by our Lord who may make a similar kind of statement to us. To those who’ve labored hard on this earth he will say, “Enter and labor no more.” To those who’ve suffered a great deal here on this earth he will say, “Enter and suffer no more.” For those who have groaned and travailed, for those who’ve wept, he will make the necessary statement. To those who have been fearful and in other ways have found it difficult to live here he will say words that will be a comfort to them. But the greatest comfort of all, and one thing that he will say to all of us as we enter heaven, is “Enter and sin no more.”

Let me close by just pointing out one or two points here. I think that the problem of the ages, pictured in human sin, that with which I began the message this morning, is set out again here. That is, whether caught in our sin or uncaught, we are nevertheless sinners. We have broken the law of God, and as a result of that we are guilty before God. “The wages of sin” the Bible says, “is death.” The gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.

The Bible also says that there is a time coming when we must all stand before divine judgment. Fortunately the Bible speaks most wonderfully about the pardon that is available through

the Lord Jesus Christ. In the Old Testament the Psalmist speaks of it in anticipation. In the 103rd Psalm, in three of the great similes of the Bible, he says, “As the heaven is high above the earth, so great is the mercy of God toward them that fear him. As far as the east is from the west,” I heard a story of a man who had a scientist in his presence, and he said, “Tell me how far the east is from the west?” And the scientist pulled out his instrument in order to calculate, after a moment’s thought he said, “That’s impossible.” Well, “As far as the east is from the west, so far hath he removed our transgressions from us and like as a father pitieth his children, so the Lord pitieth them that love him.”

Some of the commentators have said this was not a forgiveness of this woman, and it’s possible that that is true. You’ve seen why I think that that’s unlikely. But I must admit that there are some very fine interpreters who say that all our Lord did was really postpone judgment. In effect he said to the woman, “I don’t condemn thee for the moment: go, and sin no more.” And that his words were really not a cancelation of guilt, but simply a postponement of judgment.

Very much like our Lord’s last words on the cross, when in the midst of his death, he said, “Father, let them go for they know not what they do.” Translated in the Authorized Version, “Father, forgive them for they know not what they do.” Those words do not mean forgive. Ignorance is no excuse. If anyone thought seriously about that, and theologically, he would know that’s not true, “Father forgive them for they know not what they do” then let’s keep everybody from the knowledge of truth and they would be forgiven. No, no, lack of knowledge does not remove our guilt. The difficulty lies in the false rendering of the verb *afiēmi*. It often means “to release.” It often means “to let go.” In fact, in the very gospel in which we find these words, it is rendered in that way. What our Lord prayed was “Father, release them from immediate judgment because they’re putting me to death, because they don’t know what they are doing. In other words, ignorance is no excuse for guilt, but it is cause for postponement, or delay, of judgment.

And that prayer that our Lord prayed on the cross, “Father let them go, for they know not what they do” is a prayer that has had its answer in the age of grace in which we live, and every single

individual brought to the knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ in the nineteen hundred years since that time is an answer to the prayer that Jesus prayed, “Father, let them go, for they know not what they do.” Spelled out, it was a prayer, “Let Augustine come to faith in me. Let Irenaeus come to faith in me. Let Ignatius come to faith in me. Let Luther come to faith in me. Let Calvin, let Whitefield, let Wesley,” and so on down, and you can put your own name there. That’s the meaning of the text.

In 2 Peter, chapter 3 and verse 9, where he says with reference to this, that he is not willing that any of his elect should perish, but that all of his elect should have room for repentance. That’s why Peter says there will be a delay for a lengthy time before the Second Advent. He is bringing his people to the knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ.

So, if that’s the meaning, that would make sense, and the woman would be given an opportunity to receive forgiveness at a later date. You’ve seen why I think the other is more likely.

Let me close by simply saying this. There is an engagement that we all have. If we are unbelievers in the Lord Jesus Christ we have an appointment with judgment. The writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews makes that very plain when he says, “For it is appointed unto men once to die and after this the judgment.” Every single one of you in this room who do not know the Lord Jesus Christ as Savior, you have an appointment. It has already been made for you. And divine strength and power will make it absolutely certain that you will meet that appointment. For believers in the Lord Jesus Christ, we too have an appointment at the judgment seat of Jesus Christ. And then our works shall be judged, and we shall receive reward. We have an appointment, all of us.

You know one of the characteristic things of an old person is that they are often forgetful. You have people say, “Mm, well I cannot remember that. As I get older I just cannot remember names.” Some of you are already smiling. It’s very bad when it happens when you’re in your twenties, or thirties. Later on you expect it.

Well do you know actually the likely thing is that you don’t ever forget anything. You just cannot call it up at the particular moment. It’s impressed upon you forever. The mind is most likely like a palimpsest; an ancient manuscript in which a person wrote, and then he would go back and

erase what was written and write over it, and then he would erase and write over it. That was called a palimpsest; a manuscript that had several layers of writing. And by certain types of chemical activity and other ways now, you can take an ancient manuscript like that and tell what was originally written on it. Have you ever noticed that when certain things happen something is recalled that may have happened ten years ago, I look at the young people, ten years ago? You remember, you hadn't thought about it for years. And some of you who are older, something that happened forty years ago. You'd forgotten about it completely. You couldn't have recalled it, but something happened and you remembered, and it almost seemed as if it happened yesterday.

Well when we stand before the great white throne judgment as unbelievers, all of those layers of ideas, and images, and feelings, and events, shall all be handled by the Lord God, and we shall remember and see the very things that we have done, and the evidence shall be irrefutable and final.

Oh what a blessing it is to escape through the mercy of the Lord Jesus Christ. And so we invite you to come to him, who offered the sacrifice on the cross, who cried out, “It is finished” and made it possible for men to receive eternal life. Come to Christ and all of those sins shall be blotted out, so far as the guilt of them is concerned, in the blood of Christ. Come to him, receive forgiveness.

[Prayer] Father we thank Thee and praise Thee for these marvelous accounts of the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ. And O may they speak to each in this auditorium who do not know him. And for those of us who do, may they speak to us and give appropriate conviction of...

[RECORDING ENDS ABRUPTLY]