



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

[Message] Now for the Scripture reading will you turn with me to a passage in the Gospel of John chapter 7, verse 53, the last verse of that chapter, through chapter 8, verse 11. Chapter 7, verse 53, through chapter 8, and verse 11.

And before I read this passage I want to make a few comments about it. For a long time in the ministry of the word of God I have had the conviction that you in the audience should be acquainted with all of the facts about biblical criticism. Now, when I use the term biblical criticism I do not mean criticism only in a negative way, but also in a positive way. Biblical criticism is biblical study.

And I've always felt that you in the audience have all of the intelligence necessary to understand what we behind the pulpit desk who teach may be able to understand and grasp as well. I do not feel that there is a special fund of information for which I as a teacher or preacher of the word should possess which is unavailable to you because we are all priests, we are all Christians, we are all equal in our spiritual blessings. We have differing spiritual gifts and we also may serve in differing offices in the church but spiritually we are equal and every bit of knowledge that is available to a teacher is available to you.

Now it is the habit, I'm afraid, of some of the Bible expositors to feel that some information about the text of the New Testament would be disturbing to people and therefore it should not be expressed. The result is, of course, that the first acquaintance some evangelical Christians have with the text of the New Testament is not from a man who believes the text but from a man who does not believe it. And consequently, instead of creating assurance of the reliability of the text the tendency is to create doubt and uncertainty.

And so I have always felt and I will always feel to the end of my days that my purpose as a teacher is to lift up my audience to my level in any sphere of information that I may have that they do not have, rather than to speak down to them. Now when we come to a passage like this we open up our New Testaments and in some of our New Testaments we do not even find it. For example, in our modern translations frequently this is found in little print at the end of the Book of John. Or it may be in a footnote. Or there may be a little marginal note to the effect that most of the ancient manuscripts do not have this passage.

And so I want to say a few words about it before we engage in the exposition of it this morning. Most of the very early uncial manuscripts; that is, those manuscripts which are written with letters that resemble capital letters. Uncial probably comes from a word that means “inch high” but it was not inch high, they were not inch high letters. But anyway, that's the name of the manuscripts. The uncial manuscripts are generally the earliest of our manuscripts of the New Testament. Most of the early ones do not have this portion. John 7:53 through chapter 8, verse 11, at this point in the Gospel of John there is only one fairly ancient manuscript, and it is not one of the best, which has it.

In addition, the translations of the New Testament which were made very early in other languages -- for example Latin, Syriac, Coptic -- these versions for the most part do not have this section. Furthermore, none of the early church fathers in the earliest days knew of or know of this passage of a part of the Gospel of John. The Greek fathers,

those who wrote new Greek do not know anything about it. Some of the Latin fathers knew of its existence. As a matter of fact it is probably true to say that it was known very early. For Eusebius in his church history he wrote in the 4th Century refers to Papius who was a 2nd Century believer and he referred to the fact that Papius knew of a certain story in which Jesus had some conversation with a woman taken in adultery. But Papius goes on to say that that account was found in the Gospel of Hebrews. Not the Book of Hebrews, but the Gospel of the Hebrews.

Augustine and Ambrose later on, they know of it, and Augustine suggested that the reason it was not found in some of our early manuscripts, the reason it was expunged from some was because it seemed to encourage adultery and, therefore, some of the early scribes felt it was bad to have it in the New Testament. And Augustine, thinking that it was a genuine passage, said that was probably the reason it was taken out of it.

Well I think you can see from what I'm saying that the manuscript evidence for this particular incident being a part of the Gospel of John is very weak. It is found in some of our manuscripts at the end of the Gospel of John. It is found in some manuscripts following Luke chapter 21, and verse 38, I believe it is. So that what we have then is evidence that this story was known very early. Weak evidence that it belongs to the Gospel of John at this place.

Now the question is, why should we preach on it then? Well I think there is something else that we must consider. Is it a true account of an incident in the life of our Lord? Well, if one wanted to forge an incident in which Jesus played a part one of the clearest things that a forger would do would be to copy and repeat things that he has seen elsewhere in the New Testament. For example, the Epistle of Paul to the Laodiceans, which is a forged document, if you read that document you want to smile at the end of it for all it is, is just a collection of Pauline phrases from the known epistles. And it is obviously a forgery.

But nowhere else in all of the gospels does Jesus ever write on the ground. That's something absolutely unique. A forger would not create by the insertion of something like that doubts about it being genuine. The whole evidence of this account and the impression that it makes upon you is that it is a true account of an incident in the life of our Lord even though it may not be part of the Gospel of John.

Now I cannot prove it is not a part of John, I cannot prove it is. But the evidence of the account, to me, is it is an account of a genuine incident in the life of our Lord. And if that is true then, of course, the things that our Lord said were always inspired of God. They are always reliable, they are always to be counted upon even though they may not be part of our New Testament record. And if you'll turn over to John chapter 20 and read with me the last two verses of his gospel you will see that he himself has in a sense authenticated other incidents not recorded in his gospel; that is, if we may have a true historical record of them.

In verse 24 of chapter 21, John 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.”

So I am inclined to think that this is a true incident in the life of our Lord. I really believe that. And I think it is placed in the Gospel of John by some early scribe who saw how fitting it belonged here because in verse 15 of chapter 8, our Lord says, “Ye judge after the flesh, I judge no man.” And it is a beautiful illustration of the truth of that text. So I am going to preach on it this morning, feeling that it is a genuine incident in the life of our Lord and thus his remarks are authoritative for us. I have a little question about whether it belongs in the Gospel of John at this point, or in the Gospel of Luke at another point.

So now you know what I know. And I hope that it does not in any way shake your confidence in the word of God because, you see, we do not believe in the

inspiration and authority of the English translation. We believe in the inspiration and authority of the original text arrived at by the practice of textual criticism. So I hope now you understand better what we have in our New Testament.

Let's read beginning with chapter 7, verse 53,

“And every man went unto his own house. 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, (that is feminine in the Greek, by the way,) that such female persons 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. (That last clause is not found in the Greek text, as you can tell from your italics in the English 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. (Now that statement is so unique and so appropriate that it impresses itself upon you as being a genuine statement of our Lord.) And again he stooped down, and wrote on the ground. And they which heard it, being convicted by their own conscience, (some of the manuscripts do not have it at this point, that little clause,) 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 up himself, and saw none but the woman, he said unto her, Woman, where are those thine accusers? (Literally, where are they?) Hath no man condemned thee? She said, No man, Lord. And Jesus said unto her, Neither do I condemn thee: go, and sin no more.”

Let's bow together in prayer.

[Prayer] Father, we are grateful to Thee for the holy Scriptures and we are grateful to Thee for the marvelous preservation of them. We thank Thee that the text of the word of God is preserved more accurately, more truly, than any other ancient document. We are gratefully Lord for the way in which Thou hast enabled us to ponder and read Thy word. And we are thankful for this incident which we feel is a true incident in the life of our Lord and which illustrates Thy truth.

We ask, oh God, that as the word is proclaimed Thou alt bless and direct and make profitable for all of us. We are grateful that we are able to live in the 20th Century and have a part in the great program of the ages. And we are grateful Lord that through the preaching of the word Thou hast reached us and Thou hast motivated us to communicated this great truth to others. We thank Thee for each one present in this auditorium. And Father, we pray that as the word is proclaimed we may each be strengthened and built up in our faith. We commit sick ones to Thee, troubled ones to Thee, perplexed ones to Thee. All who need the ministry of the Holy Spirit and we pray, oh God, that it may be their experience and that through Thy blessing and ministry to them they may live to bless Thy name.

We pray for the whole church of Jesus Christ. Oh Father, in these critical days strengthen us, unite us, and use us for Thy glory. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

[AUDIO BEGINS]...for this morning is The Woman Taken in Adultery, or Misery and Mercy. In the art galleries of Europe any visitor who visits many of them will see two paintings that make an impression upon him. One of them is of the martyr St. Sebastian bound to a tree with his murderers shooting arrows at him. And the other is of the woman taken in adultery. But none of the paintings of the woman taken in adultery can compare with the Spirit's portrait of this prodigal daughter expressed and described here in John chapter 8.

It is a beautiful illustration of one of the statements made by the writer of this gospel in his prologue when he says, “The law was given by Moses but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ.” Most great men write something but this is all that our Lord ever wrote so far as the records show, and it was not even a sermon, for Jesus Christ is not an educator who comes simply to instruct men in the things of God. He is not a philosopher who comes to reason with men about ultimate questions. He is not a religious leader like a bishop. I doubt that he even looked like a bishop with a large pot and dressed in clerical garments. He was not a man who was rapidly coming to the front [Laughter]. He was not a king or a president in the sense in which we speak of kings and presidents. He was preeminently a savior. And the angels who announced his birth expressed that when they said, “This day there is born unto you in the city of David a savior, who is Christ the Lord.”

Our generation has been called “The Adulterous Generation” and I think that that probably expresses one aspect of our civilization in the 20th Century. We are, in a sense, an adulterous generation. That particular sin characterizes our Western Civilization to a degree at the present time that I have not known and that others apparently also have not known. And, therefore, this incident speaks to us. It speaks of sins guilt and it also speaks of the possibility of divine forgiveness. And the thing I like about it is that it speaks honestly to us. That is one thing that characterizes the Bible. It speaks honestly. It tells us of the brokenness of history and it tells us also of redemption in history. It points out that history has a fatal flaw and that flaw is really a flaw of man.

And when you take the Bible and compare it with the Marxist dialectic I think you must agree that the Bible at least is honest. The Marxist dialectic ends in a stainless paradise, which is really a naïve and faulty view of human nature. It reflects that. Or if we were to compare the Bible with Hegelian optimism, supposed to come to climax in the perfect Prussian state. We would, again, have to agree that the Bible is much truer to the facts of human nature.

Compare the Bible with American faith and the natural goodness of man. The so-called American Dream. The natural goodness of man that is supposed to ultimately issue in the endlessness of material progress, then you would have to agree that the Bible is truer to the facts. And so I am grateful for the honesty of the Bible stories, I am grateful that when we look into the Bible we see human nature as it really is and I think also that when men read the Bible men whose minds have not been twisted by other teaching, brainwashed by philosophical views, they come to the conviction that really the Bible does tell it like it is. The man in the street seems to sense that. The Bible pages are bloody. I've even heard the Bible accused of being said not to be the word of God because of these bloody pages that it contains. I rather think that they are testimony to the Bible's truthfulness. The Bible's pages are bloody because men are violent and therefore it is a perfect transcript of human nature.

The Bible pages tell us of patriarchs who visit prostitutes and that, too, is true to human nature. It does happen. And while the Bible does not approve that, the Bible nevertheless expresses the fact of it. There is no Pollyanna in Scripture and we may be thankful that there is none because that is a revoltingly, sugary child. I think that some of our men of literature have come to realize this. If you read Albert Camus *The Fall* you will understand that that man, though not a Christian at all, opposed to Christianity, came to a similar view of human nature. Or Robert Pen Warren's *Brother to Dragons*, the same thing is true. So I am grateful that the Bible tells it like it really is. And this incident is, I think, a transcript of that too.

Now first of all, let me say a few things about the circumstances surrounding the incident and then we will look at our Lord's conversation with the scribes and the Pharisees and finally at his conversation with the woman.

It was the end of a long day's debate if this incident belongs at this place in the Gospel of John. The crowd had dispersed and Jesus had gone to the Mount of Olives. That, by the way, is something unique in the Gospel of John and for this reason others

have said the style of these verses is contrary to the style of the Apostle John. We cannot be absolutely certain about such criticism but it is unique in the Gospel of John.

He went to the Mount of Olives. Why did he go there? Well the text does not say. I suggest, and probably most of us would agree, that he went there to meditate and pray and that this formed a large part of his activity while he was there that night.

William Law once said, “He who has learned to pray has learned the greatest secret of a holy and happy life,” and he was not far wrong because the man who prays is the man who is holy and the man who is happy.

The next morning Jesus arose and he went into the temple and he began to teach, so John tells us. In the midst of his teaching there were shouts in the back, voices, noise. He may have thought, well another riot. But he heard voices of authority saying, “Open up, open up, make way,” and soon the crowd parted and here came the scribes and the Pharisees and they were dragging with them a wretched woman who obviously was deeply disturbed. And they stood her right in the midst of the crowd and they addressed our Lord with the question. The scribes and the Pharisees: the scribes were the legal experts, they were the scriptural experts, they were the professors of biblical theology in a sense. It was they who were responsible for the Jewish laws. And the Pharisees were those who devoted their whole lives to the carrying out of these laws. They were callous, they were ruthless, they were subtle, and above all they were proud. Governor Bradford made the famous remark as he saw a criminal taken off to be executed, “There but for the grace of God go I.” And he recognized that human nature is sinful. I think one of the most pertinent remarks that Winston Churchill ever made was one that he made about Sir Stafford Cripps, one of his ministers who was noted for his pride and arrogance. And Churchill once commented concerning him, “There but for the grace of God goes God.” [Laughter] And I think that one might have said the same thing about the Pharisees, “There but for the grace of God goes gods.”

Now not all of the Pharisees were like this and we must not think that all of the Jewish Pharisees were proud, ruthless, callous men. Many of them were very earnest and sincere in their religion. I think that Nicodemus is like that. And so we must not get the impression from the reading of the Bible that all of these Jewish men were like that, but many of them were and the leaders in our Lord's day certainly seem to have been.

And so they are the ones who come bringing the woman. We do not know the woman's situation, she may have been an engaged woman. Or she may have been a married woman. The text is not clear on that point but we know that if these charges were correct she was criminal and she had been caught and she was not condemned by men. The Bible is very plain about adultery and so were the rabbis. The rabbis felt that one of the three greatest sins was the sin of adultery. The other two being idolatry and murder. And they had a saying, “Every Jew must die before he will commit idolatry, murder, or adultery.”

The Old Testament lays down some specific provisions for those that were caught in adultery. For example, an engaged young lady if she were seduced by a man and it was established that she had committed adultery she was to be stoned to death. But also the adulterer was to be stoned to death as well. Now the Bible does not make plain the judgment upon the married woman who was caught in adultery, the adulteress. But it does say that she should die. Some Jewish testimony is to the effect that the custom was that they were strangled to death. It would appear from this if this were a married woman that they could be stoned to death. At any rate the Pharisees and the scribes were accurate with regard to her possible end. If she were proven guilty she should be put to death.

And so they have come to spread their net for our Lord. They did not come for information from him, really. They came in order to trap him and John points that out in the 6th verse, “This they said, tempting him, that they might have to accuse him.” And so they spread their net for Jesus by coming into the midst while he was teaching, standing

the woman in the midst, and then asking the question. They said, “Moses in the law commanded us, that such should be stoned: but what sayest thou?” She was caught in adultery, “In the very act.”

Now I must say a word about this, “In the very act.” It was very difficult for a person to be caught in the very act of adultery according to Jewish law. For it was not necessary just to see two people emerge from a room where they had been alone together, that would not make them guilty according to Jewish law. It was not sufficient just to see them in bed together, that was not sufficient. But they must not only see them in bed but actually engaging in the physical movements that constituted sexual intercourse.

Now since witnesses must be obtained it was obvious that it would be very difficult to obtain witnesses who would agree in their depositions. And so for a person to be charged as caught in the very act of adultery would be a very, very rare thing. In fact, in almost all of these cases the probabilities were that they were devised cases. That is, they were places in which persons had been deliberately trapped and that was probably the case here. I do not know what was the reason back of it but knowing human nature it could well have been this: you see, if a man divorced his wife because he did not like his wife, he could do it and that would be all right, he would be rid of his wife but she would take her property with her. And that might not be so good. But if he could somehow or other arrange for her death then he would inherit her property. And so it may well have been that their relationship was such that the trap was arranged and the adultery did take place in order that she might therefore be stoned to death and her husband would not only be rid of her, but also obtain her property.

Now that, by the way, is not in this text. [Laughter] That is only my supposition of what may have happened. At any rate, this incident had probably been arranged. She was deliberately entrapped. And what makes it very evident that this was the case is that the man who committed adultery with her is not brought by them into our Lord’s

presence for judgment to be passed upon him but he was equally guilty. And according to the Old Testament he should have been put to death too. And so it seems that they obviously desired to get something against the woman that would bring her guilt but they allowed the man to go free.

Now I know what you women are saying, “Well they needed woman’s Lib in that day too,” and that is probably true. But nevertheless, this was the way the incident took place. By the way, you will notice that they do not refer to her as a person by name but they refer to her as simply, “This woman.” It’s obvious that they think of her just as a thing. Dr. Paul Tournier in his book *A Doctors Casebook* talks about what he calls the personalism of the Bible. He points out how fond the Bible is of names and he makes the point that since the Bible is so fond of names, even whole chapters are just chapters of names, that God is interested in the person first and foremost. He is not interested in a fraction of the mass, he is not interested in an abstraction, an idea, a case, he is interested in a person. And then he goes on to say, because he is a doctor, he said, “If I forget my patient’s names, if I say to myself, ‘Ah, that gallbladder type,’ or, ‘That consumptive that I saw the other day,’ I’m interesting myself more in their gallbladders or in their lungs than in themselves as persons.” And by the way, in case there are any physicians in the audience, I have occasionally heard a physician refer to a person as a gallbladder type or as a -- and I cannot think exactly of the term that was used -- but it was a similar term.

Now, of course, when they refer to her as, “That woman,” they knew her name. If they had arranged this trap they knew very well her name but they refer to her simply as a kind of a thing because they are not really interested in her as a person. Now I know what you’re going to say, does not Jesus later on say, “Woman, where are your accusers?” That’s true. But we do not have any evidence that our Lord knew this woman. “This they said, tempting him.” Now, you see, the test was simply this, if our Lord said, “Yes, you should stone her,” then that would bring him in conflict with Rome, for Rome did not allow the Jewish people at this time to put individuals to death. And so if he had said,

“Yes,” they would rush right off to the Roman authorities and they’d say, “This Jesus of Nazareth is advocating that we put somebody to death, what are you going to do about it,” and he would be accused as an insurrectionist. But if, on the other hand, he said, “No, she should not be stoned,” then they would say, “Ah, you do not believe the Old Testament after all.” So he was in conflict with Rome on the one hand or in conflict with Moses on the other. Like the famous question, “Have you stopped beating your wife.” It was the kind of question that you cannot really answer.

Arthur T. Pierson says that in the 7th chapter Satan has acted with the raw of the land because they attempted to take Jesus by force in the 7th chapter. But here Satan comes using the wiles of the serpent in order to entrap him. Notice, too, that the wicked can quote Scripture. It is they who refer to Moses. They know what Moses teaches. There are naïve Christians, you know, who often think that the Satanic cannot cite Scripture and if a person appeals in support for his teaching to the Scripture record that that must be something that is true. Let me assure you that Satan knows quite well the words of the word of God. In fact, Satan knows the words of Scripture a great deal better than most Christians know them. And he is able to cite Scripture and use Scripture. Now he puts Scripture against Scripture and so the man who wrestles with Satan will have to know his word of God as our Lord did, for Satan after he listened to our Lord quote Scripture came to him with another test quoting Scripture himself. And our Lord answered with another text of Scripture pointing out that Satan had misused the word of God and had failed to take into account another part of it.

So one must compare Scripture with Scripture. *Scripturam ex Scriptura explicandam esse*, Scripture is to be explained by Scripture. And so the fact that a person can quote Scripture does not really mean anything much. The question is are they quoting it accurately and in harmony with the context? That’s the real question.

Jezebel quoted Scripture when she arranged for the murder of Naboth in order to get his vineyard. And she accused him of violating passages from the Old Testament.

Thou shalt not revile the gods or the judges, the ruler of the people. She knew what Scripture was and she used Scripture to entrap him. And sad to say I've seen that happen in Christian circles, individuals using Scripture in order to entrap simple Christians and thus have basis for accusing them.

Our Lord's response to this question is very interesting, it's unique in fact. For we read, “But stooped down, and with his finger wrote on the ground, as though he heard them not.” Now that word “to write” can mean to trace, it can even mean what we mean when we say, “He doodled with his pencil.” And some have thought that he simply knelt down and for a time began to doodle in the sand of the ground. On the other hand, it can mean to register and in the Old Testament Greek translation of the Old Testament it meant to register something official in a document and usually in a blameworthy sense. That is, if you use this word in the sense of register you registered an accusation against the person.

Now we do not have a great deal of information but I'm inclined to think that that was the sense in which our Lord carried out this writing in the ground. Why did he write? Well, perhaps to write out his judgment of the matter which he would then pronounce as a judge pronounced. But I think also our Lord wanted to impress upon his listeners that it was not really his province to sentence in a question like this because he was not a legally constituted judge among the Jews. They should have taken this woman to the Sanhedrin and not to him but they wanted to entrap him. And so our Lord refuses to pass judgment as a judge because he was not the legally constituted judge.

He rather in his reply as we shall see turns the matter from the judicial to the moral because he did have a right to ask them a question in that realm. It has been suggested that there were a number of reasons why he might have written. Someone has said he wrote to gain time; he didn't want to be rushed into a decision. Others have said he wanted to force them to repeat the question over and over again so they would see the sadistic cruelty of that question in this incident. Still others have said that Jesus was so

seized with such an intolerable sense of shame that he could not meet the eyes of the crowd, much less the eyes of the woman. And so he bent over and began to write in the ground because of his burning embarrassment and confusion. And some said he wanted to write the sins of the accusers in the ground.

Now it's very striking that some of our ancient manuscripts do have at the end of verse 8, “And again he stooped down, and wrote on the ground the sins of each one.” And in the 6th verse in one of the manuscript traditions, the Armenian, there is also a word to that same effect so there is a reasonable tradition to the effect in that scribes interpreted this writing in the ground as a testimony against the men. Now if that had been true and you had been standing by you might have seen our Lord bend over and begin to write in the dust and if you had been one of the men standing by one of the scribes and Pharisees you might have looked over and seen the word “extortioner” and you'd say, “Ah, he's writing about me.” Or “wife beater”, “Oh, he's writing about me.” Or “murderer”, “He's writing about me,” someone would say. “Adulterers” and others would say, “He's writing about me.” And all of the sins of the crowd were written by our Lord in the ground. We do not know that that happened, it could have happened, but our Lord by his dramatic silence and the words that follow summoned the men to judge themselves and not to judge the woman.

Well they're not satisfied with his silence and so they say, “Come on, come on, tell us what we should do,” because we do read in the 7th verse, “So when they continued asking him,” they continued to ply him with question, finally he arose and he gave them his answer and it was like a thunderbolt, “He that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone at her.” In other words, do as Moses said, “Only let the sinless cast the first stone.” So he agrees with Moses but he words it in such a way that Moses cannot be carried out in her case.

Someone has said, “Then the fun began.” Because, you see, he knelt back down and began to write again in the ground and the crowd stood and there was this, I think,

one of the most dramatic silences in all of the Bible. Not a word was said. The woman was silent, perhaps a sob escaped from her, the crowd is standing there, the scribes and the Pharisees right around our Lord, and then the others who are there who had been listening to the teaching and they were just completely shocked by what he said. And then one began to peel away from the crowd and he slinks away as others look at him, and he's one of the oldest of the men. And then one of the other elderly begins to slink away from the crowd, and finally they have all gone away, from the eldest on down. Someone has said, “The eldest went first because they had the most sins.” I'm not so sure that the eldest did not go first because they had the most sin, but at any rate they all left.

Now they were not ashamed, they were simply out-generated by our Lord. The evidences of that are in the remainder of this gospel. Augustine says in one of his places, in fact he refers to this more than once, he says, *Remansit magna miseria et magna misericordia*, “And there remained a great misery (the woman) and a great pity (in the case of our Lord).”

Now his conversation with the woman, this is the climax of our Lord's compassion. He speaks to the woman and he says after he lifted himself up again and no one was there but only the Lord and the woman, “Woman, where are they?” Now woman is not a word of degradation, our Lord refers to Mary as woman in chapter 2 and then when he's hanging on the cross he said, “Woman, behold thy son, behold thy mother.” Today if we were to say to some woman, “Woman, do this,” well it's not the kind of thing that you say. And if you say it to your wife you may not survive [Laughter]. But this term is not that kind of term in the New Testament. “Woman, where are they? Hath no man condemned thee?” And she says, “No, Lord. No man.”

Now I want you to notice she said, “Lord. No man, Lord.” There is no excuse. There is no attempt to explain what happened. There is an admission of everything and, furthermore, there is an acknowledgement, I think, of true penitence in her confession of our Lord as Lord, “No man, Lord.” Now as a result of that evidence of faith on her part, it

seems to me, Jesus then says, “Neither do I condemn thee.” You see, there was only one man in all of that gathering who had within himself the right to judge the woman. The only person who was sinless who could take up a stone and cast at the woman was our Lord, who is the only sinless man who ever lived. But he does not execute the judgment because in this woman there has come the conviction that Jesus is more than a man. And so our Lord pronounces the words of acquittal, “Neither do I condemn thee.”

Now he does not condone adultery. That is the error of the men to whom Augustine referred when he said that some men because they were afraid this might tend to support adultery have taken this out of the New Testament. Notice the remained of our Lord’s words, “Neither do I condemn thee, go and from now on stop sinning,” he says. So it is evident he does not condone the adultery but, you see, on the basis of her faith he has given her a new standing in righteousness. And so if this is an evidence of faith she stands justified before our Lord. “Neither do I condemn thee.” Why? For the simple reason that our Lord himself will soon be condemned for her. “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 because he would die for her condemnation she is able to go free upon the expression of her faith.

And furthermore, this new standing is to issue in a new state, “From now on, stop sinning.” And so the Christian who has come to faith and has come to the possession of righteousness is to be characterized by holy living. Well I think in this incident then we have the problem of the ages pictured in human sin. Whether caught or uncaught, we are sinners. And we have the broken law and all have broken the law of God. We are all sinners and completely touched by sin in all that we do. But we also have our Lord’s pardon in the confession of sin.

Now some commentators have commented on the fact that Jesus does not say that this woman exercised faith and that really all our Lord did is to call her to amend her life. I presume that if you took that interpretation you would have to say that when she said,

“No, Lord,” she did not mean it in the sense in which I have suggested, but she must have meant it simply in the sense which this word *kurios* did have in the 1st Century, “sir”.

“No, no man, Sir.”

Well, if that is true, of our Lord did call her simply to amendment of life still there is involved in this our Lord’s conviction of the fact that the time would come when sin would be paid for. You know, there is a text in the Gospel of Luke which our Lord uttered when he was on the cross that expresses the postponement of judgment which may be involved in this. Jesus prayed on the cross, “Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.” Now I’ve often pointed out to the audience, some of you are not, of course, have not been here since I had but I’ve often pointed out that Jesus did not pray, “Father, forgive them,” because he said, “For they know not what they do,” and ignorance is no excuse for sin. He did not pray, “Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do,” that Greek word means “to let go”, “to release”. It’s translated “to let go” on the Gospel of Luke. It’s translated also to “let alone” in the Gospel of John. What our Lord prayed for was the postponement of the exercise of the judgment in order that men may have an opportunity to return to the truth. Now, ignorance is no excuse for guilt, but ignorance may obtain for us a respite, a time in which we may respond in the light of certain judgment to come for our guilt.

And so what our Lord prayed on the cross was, “Father, let this perverted crowd of sinners go, release them for a time, because they do not know what they are doing. May there be a time in which men may have an opportunity to respond to the gospel message, realizing their guilt and receive forgiveness of sins through the preaching of the cross.” And God answered that prayer and we live in the age of averted judgment, postponed judgment. That judgment is sure to come and the next time God speaks from heaven it will be speaking in judgment. In the meantime we have the room for repentance. God is not willing that any of us should perish, but that all should have room for repentance. That’s why thousands of years have come to pass since Jesus Christ died.

He prayed for an Apostle Paul, a chosen vessel to preach the gospel. That Paul would be saved when he said, “Father, release them for that them is just as universal as humanity.” He prayed for an Augustine, he prayed for a Luther, he prayed for a Calvin, he prayed for a Wesley, he prayed for a Graham, he prayed for S. Lewis Johnson Jr. when he said, “Father, release them, for they know not what they do.” That may be what our Lord is referring to when he says, “Neither do I condemn thee, go and sin no more,” and may there be opportunity for repentance.

I’m inclined to the other view. I think our Lord did forgive and give her a new standing before him and told her that she would result in a new state. At any rate, it is evident that when our Lord says, “Go and sin no more,” that there is a punishment for continuation in sin. And someday Christians shall stand at the beam of the judgment seat of Jesus Christ and their works shall be brought in judgment before God. Their eternal destiny is not at stake, then, their rewards are.

But for those who are not Christians there is the great white throne judgment of the future and the time is coming when all men who have not come to Jesus Christ in faith shall stand before our Lord himself, for all judgment has been committed to him and they shall stand before him just like that woman did with our Lord many centuries ago. Only two people are present: the Lord and the person.

De Quincey once said in one of his essays, “That the mind is like a palimpsest.” A palimpsest is a document in which the writing has been erased and then other writing has been written over it, but by chemical means you can discover now what was written underneath. Some of our New Testament manuscripts are palimpsests. De Quincey said, “The mind is a palimpsest, that we never really forget anything.” That our ideas, our experiences, all of our thoughts are just piled on one on top of the other and it seems that we forget them but we never really do. And have you ever noticed how it is that suddenly you have not thought of something for twenty years and it comes back just as plain as if it happened yesterday. And when we stand before the great white throne

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judgment, if we do not believe in Jesus Christ all of the life's history of a man shall be just as plain as if it happened today. And there shall be you and our Lord, alone. What shall you say?

Forgiveness is offered on the basis of the blood that was shed for sin. And if you recognize your sin, my dear friend, I would flee immediately, before I can even utter this sentence, to our Lord and receive the forgiveness which he offers to sinners. May God help you to come to him right now. Let's stand for the benediction.

[Prayer] Father, we are grateful to thee for the word of God. And while, Lord, we do not know certainly that this incident belongs in the Gospel of John we sense within our hearts that it is true to the life of our Lord. That the Holy Spirit speaks through it and we regard it as a genuine incident in his life and thus revelatory of truth. And oh Father, we pray if there is one...

[RECORDING ENDS ABRUPTLY]