

John 8:1-11

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[0 : 00] Well, please turn with me in your Bibles if you have one with you, the 8th chapter of John's Gospel.

If you do so, allow me to say for a moment what a pleasure and privilege it's been for me to be with you these past few weeks.

I'm not sure if the pleasure exceeds the privilege or the privilege exceeds the pleasure. But I want to thank you for your kindness, the warmth of your welcome.

Again, it's a sign of remarkable grace when English people in particular can welcome so warmly a Scot. I'm not sure it's easily reciprocated, sadly.

It's lovely to be in a congregation so diverse as this. When I ministered in Scotland, everyone in the congregation was like me, pasty white.

[1 : 03] We had foreigners, but they came from Cheshire. But in Cambridge, we had a United Nations. We had about 14, 15 different nationalities.

And I loved that. And I loved looking out and seeing people of different backgrounds, cultures, colours. But confessing the one God, the one Saviour, the one Lord and the one baptism.

You'll notice there is an unusual heading to this passage if you have an ESV translation.

The earliest manuscripts do not include 7, verse 53 to 8, 11. Well, and that's somewhat true.

It's a partial truth. And often partial truths do not begin to reflect the whole truth. So I don't intend to spend any time on textual criticism, seeking to vindicate why I think this passage is authentic to the Gospel of John.

[2 : 13] You can take my word or you can go away and do some research on your own. One caveat as we begin.

There is a never-present danger when Christian believers come to read the Bible. And the danger is this. We go to the Bible to find ourselves and not to find God.

What I mean by that is we can read a passage like this and we can come away from it and someone might say, What were you hearing about this morning? And you reply, well, we were hearing about a woman who had sinned greatly, but she experienced the mercy and kindness of God.

And the danger is that we remember the extremity of the woman and her sin. And we somewhat downplay what actually is the great emphasis in this passage, which is not actually about the woman.

The great emphasis in the passage, and I hope you at least began to see that in the reading, the whole emphasis in the passage is to set before us Jesus Christ.

[3 : 46] Jesus had been scandalising the religious establishment. This man, they said, welcomes sinners. How can he really be the Messiah if he consorts with people like this woman?

And John wants to show us that Jesus Christ truly is the Saint-One of God. That he is the one who has come from God.

To reveal to us the heart of God. And so when we read the Bible, our first concern should always be, Lord, show me yourself.

Show me your glory. Show me your grace. Show me your goodness. Show me your kindness.

Show me your mercy. Lord, show me yourself.

And so I hope this morning we will, in some measure at least, begin to see the Lord Jesus Christ as he is set before us by John.

[4 : 57] As I said in my introduction to the Bible reading, the Gospel of John is really an evangelistic tract. Of course, John is seeking to instruct believers in their faith in Jesus Christ.

But he specifically tells us at the end of chapter 20, these things I have written that you might believe that Jesus truly is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing in him, you will have life, eternal life, fullness of life, with him.

So John is out here not simply to educate us and instruct us, he is out to get us. He is out to persuade us.

He is out to win us to Jesus Christ. It's a very dramatic encounter.

The Gospel of John is significant for any number of things, but one of the significant features of John's Gospel is the way that John shows us Jesus in a number of dramatic encounters all the way through.

[6 : 20] You find him encountering Nathaniel at the end of chapter 1 and disclosing to Nathaniel that he knows what's going on in his heart.

In chapter 3 we find Jesus encountering Nicodemus. Now Nicodemus is called by Jesus in verse 10 of chapter 3, the teacher of Israel, the teacher of Israel, the reverend professor, Dr. Nicodemus.

But Jesus said to this man with all his religion, you must be born again or born from above.

All your religion does not make you right with God, Nicodemus. You need a new heart. You need a new beginning with God. You need God to come and make you new from the inside out.

And then in dramatic contrast in chapter 4, we find Jesus meeting this woman, this woman from Samaria by the well of Sychar. It's a remarkable picture that's being painted for us in John chapter 4 because Jews had no dealings with Samaritans.

[7 : 44] But we find Jesus breaking every conceivable convention. He breaks religious convention by meeting with the woman. He breaks social convention by meeting with her alone.

And he breaks moral convention. This woman had five husbands and she was now living with a six. He was a live-in lover.

He was not her husband. But Jesus was going to be her seventh and last man. And Jesus evangelizes her. Not like the way he did with Nicodemus.

His first words to Nicodemus were, you must be born again with the woman. Jesus starts very gently. He starts where she is.

He's there to draw water and Jesus asks her for a drink. It's a very remarkable encounter that Jesus has.

[8 : 44] And slowly but surely he evangelizes the woman and draws her to himself. And John's gospel proliferates with these encounters.

And here is another of those remarkable, dramatic encounters that are intended to do two things. Number one, principally, to set before us the heart of God.

Behold your God. Is what this passage is saying to us. Jesus Christ is the revelation of God.

John chapter 1 verse 18. Jesus is the exegesis of God. He has come to make God known. There is no un-Christ likeness in God.

Behold your God. And the second note that is struck in these encounters is no matter who you are, no matter how badly you have failed and fallen, no matter how messed up your life is, no matter how miserable you are, no matter how religious you are, what you need, Jesus Christ alone can give.

[10 : 08] let not conscience make you linger, nor of fitness fondly dream. All the fitness he requireth is to feel your need of him.

So let me look with you at this passage. Notice three very simple things as we introduce this sermon focusing on this encounter.

Notice first of all the human heartlessness that confronts us. These religious leaders, these scribes and Pharisees find a woman obviously and the narrative doesn't tell us this, but this is very peculiar and peculiar to Hebrew narrative.

These men have been lying in wait. They've heard news, it would seem, that this woman, and we don't know about the man, I'll come to that in a moment, they're lying in wait and they, instead of stopping this illicit encounter, they let it happen in order to catch the woman in the very act of sexual adultery.

There is a human heartlessness about this encounter as John introduces it to us.

[11 : 39] How cold hearted these men must have been. But then there was religious hypocrisy. Where is the man? Why are we not bringing him to Jesus?

Why are we dragging this poor woman? Where is the man? There is a selectivity about these religious leaders.

They're not only humanly heartless, they're religious hypocrites. They say that they are concerned about honouring the law of God.

But the law of God equally condemned the man as well as the woman caught in adultery. Where is the man? And then we see thirdly a satanic wickedness.

Human heartlessness, religious hypocrisy and satanic wickedness. What are they doing? They're out to entrap Jesus. They bring the woman to Jesus, teach of us women to be caught in the act of adultery.

[12:45] now in the law, Moses commanded us to stone such women. Actually it didn't. It's probably inferred, but it doesn't actually say they were to be stoned.

So what do you say? They said this to test him or entrap him that they might have some charge to bring against him. They're not interested in the woman.

they couldn't care less about the breach of the seventh commandment, you shall not commit adultery. They were out to get Jesus. They wanted to place Jesus on the horns of a dilemma.

If Jesus said, yes, take her out, stone her to death, they could immediately report him to the Roman authorities, who alone had the power and the authority to put anyone to death.

But if Jesus said, no, he is not worthy of death, they could say, well, there you go. He's denying the plain teaching of the Bible.

[14:04] You see, the Pharisees, and the word literally means the separated ones, the elite, they believed every word in the Bible. They were Bible literalists.

But they had sucked the marrow of grace and mercy out of the Holy Scriptures because they didn't know the God who gave the Holy Scriptures.

They interpreted the Scriptures others apart from the character of God. And there is a satanic wickedness here. They're out to further their own aims and ends.

They want to get Jesus at all costs. And so they bring this woman to Jesus.

You don't need much imagination to think how humiliated she must have felt. Publicly shamed.

[15:10] Perhaps in the state of some undress. Dragged through the dust. humiliated shamed and now brought to Jesus.

So this morning I want to look with you especially at Jesus response and reaction to the events that unfolded.

There are four things to notice first of all. Number one noticed Jesus silence. So they say to Jesus the law of Moses commanded us to stone such women.

What do you say? Jesus bent down and wrote with his finger on the ground. Initially he's silent.

Why is he silent? well we're not told are we? Again that's very Hebrew narrative.

[16:23] We're left to infer. Was he stunned by the heartlessness and the wickedness of these religious leaders? Was he speechless at their heartlessness, their wickedness, their hypocrisy?

Well we're not told. What he does is to bend down and write on the ground.

And again we might ask, well what was he writing? If you can read that passage and not ask yourself, what exactly was he writing? Well we're not told.

But again this is the way Hebrew narrative operates. It's a Greek text but it's very Hebraic. We're expected to join up the dots, we're expected to know our Bibles well enough to think perhaps this, ah, ah, ah.

That's Jeremiah 17. isn't it? That's what you're all thinking. That's Jeremiah 17. Listen to these words, O Lord, the hope of Israel, all who forsake you shall be put to shame.

[17:40] Those who turn away from you shall be written on the earth. For they have forsaken the Lord, the fountain of living water.

O Lord, the hope of Israel, all who forsake you shall be put to shame. They brought this woman and shamed her. And what Jesus is now doing is shaming them.

Now I don't know for certain that that's what the Lord was doing. There are other interpretations but I think perhaps the Lord was saying to them, so you want to quote the Bible?

Well let's quote the Bible. what do you make of Jeremiah 17:10? All who forsake me the fountain of living water shall have their names written in the dust.

Some commentators think as Jesus goes on and they continue asking him and he continues to write. Some even suggest that he's writing their names. I don't know that.

[18 : 46] sometimes silence is the only fitting response to human heartlessness and religious hypocrisy.

One of the things I would often tell my assistants in Cambridge and the students that I teach is that you can't quantify it but I would often say 90% of pastoral ministry is learning to cultivate the art of silence.

But here our Lord his initial response is one of silence. But then secondly notice Jesus challenge. They continue to ask him.

They're pressing Jesus and so he stands up and says to them let him who is without sin among you be the first to throw a stone at her.

You want to throw stones? Well what does the law say? Well in the book of Leviticus it says that when you accuse someone of adultery and it was a capital charge because adultery was not simply conceived of as an illicit physical act it was seen to be stabbing a dagger into the very heart of society breaking asunder families destroying lives dismembering children and those who brought the charge they were to be the ones to throw the first stone.

[20 : 34] And so Jesus says okay let him who is without sin cast the first stone. Now Jesus could hardly be saying you can only judge other people when you're sinless.

He's not saying that otherwise there will be no law courts no judges no anything. Jesus is putting his finger on their consciences.

He's probing their hearts. He's seeking to bring the law of God to bear upon their heartlessness and inhumanity.

Some suggest the way the language is constructed that Jesus is saying you want to talk about adultery? Okay let's talk about adultery.

You remember earlier in the gospel accounts Matthew 5 Jesus says when a man looks at a woman lustfully and mentally copulates with her that's as bad in God's sight as the physical act itself and some suggest Jesus is saying to these men so this woman's been caught in the act of adultery what about you?

[21 : 56] God has caught you many a time in the act of adultery I'm not sure about that I think it's simply more likely Jesus is probing their consciences and he's challenging them and remarkably once more he bends down and writes on the ground some commentators think he was actually doodling and you know that's not fanciful sometimes life can be so surreal sometimes religious behaviour can be so tragic tragic comedic almost that you just think are you serious?

I can't get my head around this you know I don't think he was doodling 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 conviction of sin had begun to afflict their consciences but notice this conviction of sin is not conversion from sin were any of these men later converted were not told wouldn't it be wonderful to discover in heaven's glory that some or at least one of these men would be around the throne of God saying I bless God for the day that the son of God said those of you without sin cast the first stone but you can be convicted of sin and have your conscience afflict you of the reality of sin and not be converted from sin we're told in the letter to the Hebrews about Esau

Esau was beside himself when he sold his birthright for a mess of pottage as the King James version puts it and he was sorry he was very sorry and he wept tears but he wasn't converted he didn't come and prostrate himself and say God be merciful to me the sinner being convicted of sin of being a sinner before God it doesn't even take you halfway there you can end up living all your life aware you're a sinner and never yet fly to Jesus Christ for mercy forgiveness and for salvation and so Jesus challenge results in the men going away one by one and then thirdly we have Jesus mercy we're seeing Jesus silence Jesus challenge and then Jesus mercy

Jesus was left alone with the woman standing before him can you imagine what that woman must have been wondering she's been dragged unceremoniously shamelessly publicly she's been humiliated the threat of death was hanging over her and now all her accusers have vanished she must have been absolutely bewildered just what what's what's happening what on earth is happening to me Jesus was left alone with the woman Jesus stood up and said to her woman where are they has no one condemned you she said no one

Lord no one and Jesus said to her neither do I condemn you Augustine great early church father has a wonderful wonderful statement I know someone here is a Latin so I'm going to tell you Latin and I translate it so you're okay he comments in this passage and he says *relictus sunt duo miserat et misericordia* there remained but two misery and mercy neither do I condemn you how could

[27 : 23] Jesus say that to her she committed an altering and that was just if you like the the efflorescence the flowering the outward observation of her sinful life how could Jesus just say well I don't condemn you because he had come into the world to be a sin bearing sin atoning saviour he knew the day would come when he would bear the condemnation of her adultery on himself the day would come when God would lay on him the iniquity of us all Isaiah 53 he wasn't sweeping her sin under the carpet he wasn't turning a blind eye he wasn't just saying well let's bygones be bygones in those words of Jesus Christ he was in effect saying the woman wouldn't know it later she would I'm going to pay the price for that sin

I'm going to die the death that sin and all your sins deserved neither do I condemn you you see the great first movement of the gospel is to set before us the love of God John Owen the English Puritan said many Christians find it hard to believe there is any sweetness in God except what was purchased at the high cost of Jesus blood but the Bible tells us that God so loved the world that he gave Jesus didn't come to procure the love of God he came as the evidence and gift of the love of God the first great movement of the gospel is God so loved the world that he gave and that has to be the primary note in

Christian worship in Christian preaching in Christian serving and so Jesus shows this woman great mercy because he himself would bear the price of her sin but then fourthly notice Jesus command Jesus silence Jesus challenge Jesus mercy and then Jesus command neither do I condemn you go it's an imperative there go as a command and from now on sin no more this woman was being forgiven she was being shown mercy that she might now live a new life that the dominant note in her life will no longer be sin and rebellion against God transgression of his law but from now on she would be living unto

God she would be a hater of sin and a lover of righteousness you see God doesn't save us to leave us as we are he saves us and restores us to himself to change us and make us new and fit us for his fellowship in heaven's glory if this morning you are simply continuing!

sin no matter how eloquent your evangelical testimony is it's a charade because when we are united to Jesus Christ new creation we begin to hate sin and when we do sin we are shamed by it we are humbled by it and we unceasingly cry to the Lord to forgive us for Jesus sake because of it go and sin no more that's that's the calling of every Christian you see is this not an unrealistic calling obviously not Jesus Christ said go and sin no more does that mean it's possible that I won't sin anymore do you know your own heart at all no we sin but that's our calling to sin no more to have done with sin to be quit with sin every sin every sin you and

[32 : 12] I commit is a rebellion against God a transgression of his mercy and love every sin if it had its own way would un god god the puritans would often say sin is god killing sin is god killing if sin could have its way it would kill god every sin what we call little sins if sin had its way at the heart of every sin there is the desire to kill god and so the christian who has been forgiven and who has received mercy has set before them a new life to love god's commandments and to love the god who gave the commandments so let me try and just in a moment or two highlight three great truths that this encounter highlights for us number one it shows us the gospel is glorious good news that we can go to men and women whose lives have been utterly disfigured and dismembered by sin you know we live in a culture today in

Britain where people are three four almost five generations many of them removed from anything christian life is dysfunctional someone maybe one day will wake up and say have we ever asked the question why is our society so socially and morally dysfunctional people with broken lives broken homes broken relationships partners by the dozen life has just been a succession of miserable encounters and the gospel of God says I've got good news for you no matter how mangled your life no matter whether you've had five husbands and are living with a six live-in lover here's good news for you

God sent his son into the world not to condemn the world but to save the world through him there is forgiveness with God that he might be feared there are new beginnings to be had if you would have them good news good news secondly beware of being strict about other people's sins and soft about your own these religious leaders they were strict about this woman's sin but they were soft on their own sins of human heartlessness and religious hypocrisy remember Jesus' words in Matthew 11 it will be better for Sodom Sodom notorious for flagrant egregious immorality sodomy it will be better for Sodom than for covenant privilege Capernaum on the day of judgment beware of being strict about other people's sins and soft about your own sins remember

Jesus spoke about people who are very acutely observant at seeing specks in other people that they are blind to the sins in their own life and Jesus gives this comedic word picture of someone with a big tree sticking out of their eye and saying to someone I think there's a little speck somewhere in your eye you need to help me get it out there's this big tree sticking out of their eye we're meant to see the absurdity of it it's much easier to see the sins of others than to see your own sins to be strict about other people's sins and soft and your own beware of that and the last thing never forget whoever it is you meet that Jesus Christ came into the world not to condemn the world but to save the world through himself

John 3 17 I don't mean you don't confront people with their sin I don't mean that I don't mean you don't tell people that the wages of sin is death I don't mean you don't tell people that there is a way that seems right to a man that the end thereof is the way of death I don't mean any of that of course you do what people hear from your lips and see from your eyes is very important Thomas Boston whom some of you will have heard of early 18th century Scottish minister one of the truly great men produced by the Scottish Church he tells us that he stumbled across a book one day that transformed his ministry and he used a word that struck me when I first read it 40 years ago his memoirs of Thomas

[38 : 11] Boston he said I read this book and it brought a certain tincture to my ministry you know what a tincture is you drop a little tincture of say iodine into a solution and it impregnates and suffuses the solution and changes its colour he says I read a book and it brought a new dimension a new fragrance a new pervasiveness to my preaching and it was simply this he read a book that said the gospel of Jesus Christ is principally about a God who is rich in mercy who is slow to anger and who abounds in kindness and mercy Moses one day prayed to God

Exodus 33 Lord show me your glory and in chapter 34 of Exodus the Lord hides Moses in the cleft of a rock and the Lord causes all his goodness to pass before him it's a theophany and as he passes by Moses he speaks so what is Moses asked show me your glory and the Lord speaks and he says you want to see my glory let me tell you about my glory what are the first words the Lord speaks the Lord Yahweh Yahweh the living one rich in mercy and slow to anger yes he will by no means clear the guilty absolutely but what's the first thing Yahweh rich in mercy get your head round that

Moses rich in mercy so an adulterous woman who discovered unfathomable grace and a merciful savior you you