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Sermon Summary

Speaker: Keith Harrington



Life: Reflections from the book of John pt. 2

John 8:1-11

Woman: I married vey young. I was just 16. I didn't really have much choice in it. My family arranged it. He was much older. Almost old enough to be my father. He was very respectable - one of the teachers of the law. And he provided well for me and I was very comfortable. But after a few years he just seemed so serious and so boring. He was always going on about the religious rules and the Law. I just felt suffocated. I didn't intend to have an affair. But there was this young guy who lived next door we just started talking one day. He made me feel alive, and loved. I couldn't wait to see him again.

Young Leader. He had been really good to me. Almost like a father figure. I was one of the youngest teachers and he had mentored me. I think he saw in me the same passion he had. We loved the law, and were disturbed about what we saw happening around us. There were some teachers who were taking God law way to casually. Didn't they understand the Holiness of God. Didn't they understand that it was sin that had led our nation to where it was today. We needed to get serious about God again.

Woman: I thought we had kept it a secret. We were very careful. I suppose we just got careless. It's hard to keep anything secret in a village. I knew it was wrong, but I just kept coming back

Young Leader: I was so angry when I heard that his wife had been cheating on him. He was a great man of God. He deserved better than this. He was devastated. I had never seen him like that before. It was understandable that he was confused as to what to do. But I knew. The law was quite clear. She should be stoned. She had to go to stop the rot. This was exactly what was wrong with our nation. God would expect nothing less.

Woman: They burst in in the middle of the night. I was mortified. It was the worst moment of my life. All these men staring at me. I could see the lust in their eyes. And the disgust. It was like I was just a piece of meat to them. I grabbed a sheet to try to cover myself. But the shame. I was dying a thousand deaths

Young Leader: This was my chance to show some leadership to my colleague. I told them this was a great opportunity to deal once and for all with Jesus. His teaching was so dangerous. He had people following him who were prostitutes, tax collectors, drunkards. They loved him. But this was not right. These people should not have been allowed to follow this man. He was leading astray, telling them that God loved them.

Woman: The next morning they dragged me to the Temple and put me in front of Jesus. I had heard about this new rabbi. But I hadn't been following him too closely.

Young Leader. We put it to Jesus. Should she be stoned. The clever bit was that we had trapped Jesus. If he said stone her, that would wreck his reputation. And we could report him to the Romans. But if he said no, he would be breaking Moses law. And he would be encouraging adultery. I mean, there has to be a consequence. It's ok to be loving, but at some point you have to draw a line.

Woman: I really thought I was going to die. I had heard of others in the past who had been stoned. It seemed everyone was just waiting for Jesus to give the word. I thought he would be just like all the other guys but then I saw him look at me. I was trying to read the look on his face. He didn't seem angry. His eyes seemed to convey something but it was not sexual desire. I know that look. It was something else.

Leader: Jesus just stared at us for ages. And then he bent down and started writing in the dust. I kept demanding that he give an answer. He had to answer. Was he really about God's laws and holiness or not. He could not sit on the fence. The Bible was black and white on this issue. What was his answer. He just looked at me again, and then bent down and kept writing.

Woman: I couldn't understand what Jesus was writing. Girls did not go to school so I couldn't read it. But I did notice the change in the atmosphere. They had been yelling at Jesus to make a decision. But it had gone really quiet. I could feel the mood change but I did not understand why. I recognized some of my husband's friends there. And my husband. I knew those feet anywhere. I knew I had disgraced him, publically humiliated him. and he had every right to be angry. I'm sure he would never want to see me again. I fact knowing how the law, he would probably be throwing the first stone.

Young Leader: I hadn't taken any notice about what Jesus was writing at first. But when he didn't say anything, I looked down. He was writing the ten commandments. Love the Lord your God with all your heart and all your mind and all your strength. I knew these inside out. I loved the Law. This is why this woman had to die. We had to do the right thing. We had to stand up for truth

Woman: It was so quiet it was eerie. I knew something had changed. Jesus said. Stone her and I started to shake and sob. But then he said. But let those who have never sinned cast the first stone.

Young Leader: Suddenly I remembered times when I had not really loved God with all my heart. Don't' covet your neighbours wife or ox or house. And I remembered how envious I was of my neighbour when he bought that flash new house. In fact I remembered the time when I had thought about my friends wife. I mean, it was hard not too. She was so pretty. Not that I had done anything but I had thought about it.

Woman: I saw my husband leave first. He just dropped his rock and left. And then his friends. Slowly they all started drifting away. The last to leave was my husbands young protégée. I could see him struggling.

Young Leader: Suddenly some doubt crept into my mind. Who was I to stone her when I had also done wrong. I hadn't kept the law perfectly either. But then I said. Yes but God is holy and this is so wrong. But I couldn't get rid of that niggle. And then I was even more confused. I saw my mentor drop his rock. He had been so angry. He had every right to be angry. And he was the one I looked up to. A man who truly loved the word of God. Jesus never said a word. He did not even look at me. He just kept writing. He had finished the ten commandments and now he was writing from Leviticus. Love your neighbour as yourself. I felt the anger leaving me – instead all I could see was my failure. I went away confused. Suddenly all I was aware of was my own sin and it overwhelmed me. I had prided myself on someone who kept the rules, but it was as if someone had just looked deep into my heart and I had nothing

Woman: There was just me there with Jesus. A few minutes ago I had expected to die and I had been overcome with fear. But now I just felt calm. I was barely decent, sprawled in front of this man, in the temple, but I can't explain it, I just felt the peace. He asked me if anyone was left to stone me. Seemed a weird question. He could see there was no one left. But I said as respectfully as I could Lord, No there were none. The he said. Well I am not going to condemn you either. Go and sin no more.

Young Leader: I turned around after I had walked away. I saw Jesus look at that woman with such compassion. I don't know what he said to her. I couldn't hear it. But something happened.

Woman: I knew I had been given a second chance by Jesus. I would have died if he had not said what he said. I couldn't get my head around what had happened. I lay awake at night thinking about it. I remembered the way he had looked at me, and I realize now what I saw in his eyes. Love. Not a sexual love. But a deep love. I knew what I had been doing was wrong. But I sensed Jesus giving me another chance.

Young Leader: It doesn't seem right but my friend and his wife are getting on really well. She left her young friend and they seem to be getting on better than I have ever seen them. I have lost respect for my mentor. I don't know how he could take her back. It just doesn't seem right. Like something changed in him that day too

Woman: I keep thinking about those words he said to me just before I left. I sensed him saying that he believed in me. That he had a purpose for me, even with my marriage. I had never felt anyone believed in me before. I had felt trapped but now, ... well, I have been following Jesus around whenever I can to listen to him. I know he is more than a man. It's like God himself has spoken to me. Leader. I can't sleep at night. I'm angry but I don't know why. Why do I feel condemned when I wasn't the one who committed adultery. I feel angry that my mentor can take his wife back. I feel angry at Jesus who does he think he is anyway?

I have used a little bit of imaginative licence. But you will find that story in John 8. Most translations either have it in brackets, or acknowledge the early translations omit it. It seems the story was around from the very earliest time of the new church. But the church leaders were scared to put it in. They were worried it would encourage adultery. They feared it would inhibit people to choose the right way. So for years, they left it out. It was just too powerful. Too grace filled. The first thing we see is the man using the woman. We don't know about her lover. Maybe he was a married man using her as well. But to the other men she was just a pawn. Notice the guy was not held to account. The me-too movement and our addiction to porn reveals nothing has really changed over the years. Women as still being abused and used. Jesus first instinct was not to condemn, but to have compassion and forgive. If we are honest, our first attitude is often to judge. Jesus just after this says we judge with human limitations. We don't know a person's background. We don't know their story. We don't know how we would react in the same situation. He says he does not judge anyone. We live in a season of grace. There will be a time for judgement but it is not now. So are we often so judgmental? The reality is that we are often like the teachers and Pharisees in this story. We want to punish. We want to pass judgement. We want to stay in the old testament. We want the law. Somehow it seems we become blind to the fact that the law condemns us as well. That actually we are just as much in need of grace as the person we are condemning. We pass judgement because it makes us feel good about ourselves. I am not as bad as that person. He forgives her. He is not saying it is all OK. The law stands. She has done wrong and is in need of forgiveness. Sin is sin. He is not watering down sin. He names her behaviour for what it is. God has given us a moral law. Sex is reserved exclusively for marriage. He forgives her but at the same time challenges her to live better. He really believes in her. How often is it that we don't believe in ourselves. We feel trapped. I excuse our behaviour by saying. Well, I have no choice. Jesus is saying to her. I am with you. I believe in you. You can walk a different path. You don't need to remain trapped in this lifestyle. In this behaviour. In this sinful habit. I can help you walk a different path.

There are 3 people in this story. One is the woman, filled with shame, guilt, regret. Needing a fresh start. Needing someone to believe in her. Grappling with condemnation. One is the accuser. Critical. Condemning, wanting justice. One is the forgiver who speaks truth and grace in equal measure. Who do we identify with this morning? Where is the church in this story? May God speak to us this morning.

Questions for Reflection and Discussion

- The early church were reluctant to include this story in the Bible. Is it still challenging to the church today?
- A home group leader is having an affair, and church leadership find out. Does this story suggest we should do nothing? If something, what? If the person is not in a leadership role, what should we do?
- How do we hold truth and grace in tension when it comes to sin?
- Why are we so quick to judge others?
- What does this story tell us as a church?
- What is God saying to you personally?