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Neither Do I Condemn You

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Series: Let God Be God

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INTO HIS LIKENESS RADIO

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Neither Do I Condemn You

No story ever written was more packed with emotion, more charged with tension, had more demonstrations of the nature of God. Few, if any, incidents in Scripture paint a more complete portrait of the righteousness of God as it is balanced by the love of God. It is a story not everyone likes. It was, in fact, even omitted from some earlier manuscripts, some say because of the danger that it might present God as being “too easy on sinners”.

Yet what a panoramic picture of the nature of God! It reveals His heart where impurity is concerned, but it also reveals His heart where forgiveness is concerned. It elevated the concept of the “mote and the beam” to a whole new level of practical theology. It includes just enough detail for you to visualize the whole event, while it leaves just enough to the imagination to add a touch of mystery to its power. It is also one more illustration of what happens when the religious establishment, caught up in its own artificial spirituality, has to reckon with the Living God and His concept of spirituality instead.

It is all of the above, and it is found in John, chapter eight, verses one through eleven. We will attempt, by God’s grace, to walk through that experience with Jesus and see the mind of God and the hand of God as they are both revealed through that one potentially uncomfortable passage of Scripture.

The ranks of the Master’s followers, you may recall, had been thinned greatly. In droves, they had departed. Jesus had stopped giving them the hoopla and the heroics they were after. He stopped pampering them with parables and miracles, and told them what it would really mean to follow the Son of God on planet earth. So the world’s first religious boycott took place, and an entire congregation walked out of church and left the only Perfect Pastor who ever lived, standing with nothing but His deacons, as it were, by His side. They all went home.

Next, King Jesus was destined to suffer the utter humiliation of having His own brothers try to patent Him and barter His

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miracles for the accolades of the fickle world, by begging Him to make the Feast of Tabernacles a stage from which to display His power. Jesus declined. His answer? “My time has not yet come!” So He sent His brothers on to the feast ahead of Him. Later, He quietly slipped into town, and began teaching in the synagogue. He intentionally chose to bypass the melodramatic performance His family had in store for Him. He simply eased His way into the teaching place, with Scripture in hand, and began to break the Bread of Life. There we read, “They sought to take Him, but no one laid a hand on Him, because “His hour had not yet come”.

So Jesus did not avoid the crowds out of fear. They had no power to take His life until His hour had come. Jesus avoided the crowds out of respect for His Father’s will. He wanted to reveal to His anxious disciples, as well, the glorious reality of waiting on His Father, for His Father’s perfect time. Again and again, however, the Master’s every appearance became a cause for agitation. Every time He taught, those who were bent on His destruction would confront Him in some way in an effort to discredit Him and His doctrine. Always they failed...but ever they tried. So they sought to slay Him, but they could not...not yet. We take up reading there:

Then the officers came to the chief priests and Pharisees, who said to them, “Why have you not brought Him?”

The officers answered, “No man ever spoke like this Man!”

Then the Pharisees answered them, “Are you also deceived?” Have any of the rulers or the Pharisees believed in Him? But this crowd that does not know the law, is accursed.”

Nicodemus (he who came to Jesus by night, being one of them) said to them,

“Does our law judge a man before it hears him and knows what he is doing?”

They answered and said to him, “Are you also from Galilee? Search and look, for no prophet has arisen out of Galilee.”

And everyone went to his own house. (John 7:45-53 NKJV)

But Jesus went to the Mount of Olives. (John 8:1 NKJV)

Still they argued, an argument that would not end until the end...when God Himself would finally intervene in human history one last time. There would always be those who would be touched by His every word... “No man ever spoke like this man,”

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you would hear them say. Yet like a haunting echo, there would always be those behind them who would respond, “What? Have you also been deceived?” These men in today’s story reasoned (religious experts that they were) that no prophet had ever come from Galilee. They based their theology, however, on experience, rather than Scripture. For Isaiah had prophesied:

...In Galilee of the Gentiles.

The people who walked in darkness
Have seen a great light;
Those who dwelt in the land of the shadow of death,
Upon them a light has shined. (Isaiah 9:1e,2 NKJV)

In their ignorance, they missed the King of Glory. And He stood no more than arm’s length away. Pity. Men still miss the King of Glory out of ignorance. They, too, have Him literally at their fingertips. But through their prejudice, they reject eternal life. The last line is packed with power... “And everyone went to his own house. But Jesus went to the Mount of Olives.”

They all went to spend time with their families. So did He. They all retreated from the battle over who He was to reflect on who He might be. Jesus quietly retreated, as well, back to the mountain to be with His Father. With that setting in our minds, we return to our passage.

NOW early in the morning He came again into the temple, and all the people came to Him; and He sat down and taught them. Then the scribes and the Pharisees brought to Him a woman caught in adultery. And when they had set her in the midst, they said to Him, “Teacher, this woman was caught in adultery, in the very act. Now Moses, in the law, commanded us that such should be stoned. But what do You say?” This they said, testing Him, that they might have something of which to accuse Him. (John 8:2-6a NKJV)

GUILTY AS CHARGED

Early in the morning! Those four words typify so much of Jesus’ life. Early in the morning...the King of Glory in human form always seemed to honor the principle of Psalms 57.

I myself will awake early.
I will praise thee, O Lord, (Psalms 57:8c,9a KJV)

Psalms 108:2b repeats the phrase:

I myself will awake early.
I will praise thee, O Lord, (Psalms 108:2b,3a KJV)

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Psalm 63:1 in the KJV adds:

O God, thou art my God; early will I seek thee: my soul thirsteth for thee, my flesh longeth for thee in a dry and thirsty land, where no water is;

The character of God seems so often best revealed to the hearts of those who seek Him early. God appears to honor early risers who greet the sunrise on their feet and not upon their beds. Proverbs adds this footnote by describing those who just cannot get themselves to respond to life's alarm clocks. Remember? It says:

A little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to rest:

So shall your poverty come like a prowler, And your need like an armed man. (Proverbs 24:33,34 NKJV)

A modern translation would be "so why not sleep a little extra? Why bother to rise with the sun? Just go back to bed...and wait... poverty will sneak in on you like a bandit, like a robber to wake you up too late." The Bible is a book about early risers. Try doing a study sometimes of the men who changed the course of Biblical history, and see how many of them are described as those who "yet a great while before dawn, arose..." It will amaze you.

At any rate, Jesus arose early and went back to the temple, and there even at that hour, a crowd began to form, and He began to teach. Try to picture it in your mind. Here was the Master seated in their midst, surrounded by men who were listening to a kind of authority they had never heard before. Truly, "no man spoke like this man!" Indeed. Once again, the Scribes and the Pharisees, the masters of intrusion, barge into the room dragging with them a bedraggled young woman, as though she were nothing more than evidence for a trial. Without so much as an apology for the interruption, they threw her down in front of Jesus, and said to Him, "Teacher, this woman was caught in adultery, in the very act."

What sensitive spirits they had. What compassionate hearts they had. What understanding motives they had. So there she was, beyond a doubt, guilty as charged. No judge, no jury, no lawyer. She was proclaimed guilty, and the sentence passed out. No one sought to find out why she had done what she had done. No word is written of the man she was with (and what became of him), nor of the woman's character as evidenced before this

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crime became public. Whether she was a habitual offender or not, we do not know. Nor does anyone seem to care. She may have won the “Mother of the Year” award at the PTA meeting last fall; we don’t know. Or she could have been the town tramp. All we know is that these men had an object lesson with which to trap the Son of God by putting Him, once again, in a position which they deemed impossible to get out of. Were He to send her to her logical death under the law, His claims about the incredible Love of God that had permeated His ministry would from this moment, fall on deaf ears. So they had Him in a corner, once again...or so they thought!

Having declared her guilty, they now further put the net around the Master by reminding Him of the sentence prescribed by Jewish law for those taken in adultery. “Moses made it clear... she should be stoned,” they raved. “Now, what do you say?”

I would imagine that the moment was clothed in silence. These self-righteous religious hypocrites had begun by pulling out their Scripture memory packs and railing at Jesus about the law of Moses. They may or they may not have been accurate. We do not have enough of the facts to know. If she was a betrothed woman guilty of adultery, Deuteronomy 22 prescribed stoning to death as her sentence. Or if she were a priest’s daughter, and was also guilty of adultery, she was to be stoned to death according to the Mosaic law. In all other cases, however, death was prescribed, but the method was not. At any rate, they had her in a corner; and they had Jesus in a corner, or so they thought. They did not know just who it was they were dealing with. They were about to find out.

WHEN GOD DECIDED TO WRITE

The next verse begins by explaining their motives:

This they said, testing Him, that they might have *something*
of which to accuse Him. (John 8:6ab NKJV)

They didn’t care about the woman or the Mosaic law. They were out to discredit God. They were out to prove that either He was a God of wrath and had no compassion or that He was a God of love, who had no infallible standards of Holiness. They figured that either way the crowds, who were looking to Jesus to see if He was who He claimed to be, would be disillusioned. Just imagine their surprise, when He did not say a word! Look at what He did, instead,

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But Jesus stooped down and wrote on the ground with His finger, as though He did not hear. (John 8:6c NKJV)

This is the only recorded time in the New Testament where Jesus wrote something. His tablet was the caked dirt on the ground. His pen was the finger of the Living God...the same hand which had etched in stone the law of God generations before. The Scribes and Pharisees must have been livid. He ignored them entirely. It says, "He stooped down and wrote, as though He did not hear." He acted as though they were not there, as though they hadn't said a thing. The story goes on.

So when they continued asking Him, He raised Himself up and said to them, "He who is without sin among you, let him throw a stone at her first." (John 8:7 NKJV)

HE WHO IS WITHOUT SIN

Like little children, these religious leaders kept screaming their taunts against Him; but Jesus just kept writing. Finally, God stood up. Straight up. That means He looked them right in the eye. And in one startling instant, the justice of God and the mercy of God were wedded once again in the heart of God, and God answered the woman's accusers. What He said, basically, was this: "Okay, gang. You've got her dead to rights. She's guilty. And yes, you're right, she deserves to die. No argument. Let's stone her. Here is a pile of stones. Now line up, troops, and get ready for the rock-throwing party. Line up. That's it...in a straight line. Now, here are the rules. Since we are stoning her for violating the Law of God, anyone here who has not violated the Law of God is eligible to act as her executioner. Got it? Okay, any of you who is without sin...come on down to the front and pick up a rock. You get to throw first."

I cannot help but wonder what must have been going on in this woman's mind. I picture her as penitent, embarrassed, and scared out of her wits. Surrounded by angry accusers who had, for some reason, singled her out to use as an example. She must have been face down, head in the dirt, cringing in fear as she waited for the angry thud of the first rock against her body, listening to the jeering taunts of her self-righteous executioners.

Jesus went back to His word processor. It reads like this:

And again He stooped down, and wrote on the ground. (John 8:8 NKJV)

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It is sheer conjecture that He listed one by one, the sins of each of those who stood by. We do not know. It is possible, for the result would indicate that something He did brought about a great wave of conviction, even to the hearts of those hardened religious phonies, for the next verse reads like this:

Then those who heard it, being convicted by their conscience, went out one by one, beginning with the oldest even to the last. And Jesus was left alone, and the woman standing in the midst. (John 8:9 NKJV)

They were convicted by what He said. But it was apparently what He wrote that took what He said and burned it indelibly into their consciences. He said, "He who is without sin cast the first stone." What He wrote, then, must have somehow convicted each of them that they were not the one who was without sin. There was one, however, among them who was without sin. And He was left, standing alone, facing this woman, who had been cringing in the dirt, waiting for the death blow to fall. Now the crowd was gone. It was now an opportune time for the Master to rebuke the woman for her sin and deal out the punishment commensurate with the wrath of God. Listen to what He did.

When Jesus had raised Himself up and saw no one but the woman, He said to her, "Woman, where are those accusers of yours? Has no one condemned you?" (John 8:10 NKJV)

You may have noticed, Jesus loves to ask questions. You and I love to preach sermons. Jesus asked questions; questions require answers. Answers require thought; thought requires involvement. Jesus asked her, "Woman, where are those who brought you here? Is there no one left to testify against you before the courts of heaven?" I can imagine that she was trembling by now. This had been as traumatic an experience as any human could ever have. Caught in the very act of sin, made a public disgrace in the temple, jeered at and taunted by the religious leaders who held in their hands the power to destroy her, and finally placed at the feet of the Master with an airtight case against her, her accusers shouting for the death sentence. Not quite your ordinary day. Her response?

She said, "No one, Lord." And Jesus said to her, "Neither do I condemn you; go and sin no more." (John 8:11 NKJV)

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The frightened, bewildered woman opened her eyes and

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looked around her to number her accusers. None remained. Jesus asked, "Is there no one left to condemn you?" "No one, Lord," she exclaimed. "Then neither do I condemn you," Jesus responded; "You're free to go."

The woman arose and left...a new person. Because her life had been spared? No. Because her sins had been forgiven! Because the God of grace who framed the worlds had painted the final dimension to the portrait of the law. The purpose of the law was to disclose sin. The purpose of the Gospel was to forgive sin.

No, Jesus was not minimizing the depth of this woman's transgression. Her transgression was exposed by the law to be the most grievous of sins. And if any of you here, or any reading or listening to this lesson think for one moment that you can toy with adultery and not pay the price, you are a fool. Moral violations of the Law of God defy the Word of God; they make a mockery of the Plan of God. Paul made that clear once and for all in 1 Corinthians.

Flee sexual immorality. Every sin that a man does is outside the body, but he who commits sexual immorality, sins against his own body.

Or do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and you are not your own? For you were bought at a price; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God's.

(I Corinthians 6:18,19 NKJV)

No, Jesus did not set her free to minimize the depth of her sin. He set her free to maximize the depth of His forgiveness. And, Beloved, He was as deeply concerned about the pious, self-righteous, pharisaical condescension of her accusers, as He was about her adultery. For she was bowed in repentance. There was hope for her. They were strutting around Israel like dime-store judges without a courtroom; there seemed to be no hope for them.

The message is this: no matter what you have done, the God who framed the worlds has created an even greater miracle than the sun and the moon, and He has packaged it just for you. It is called "Grace." There is, therefore, no scar that can exist in your life today that cannot be covered over with the blood of Jesus Christ. If you have refused to come to Christ because you feel your sins are too great for God to forgive, this story was written for you. This woman stood trial before the tribunals of heaven and was pronounced "guilty as charged". But the same God who

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penned that seemingly unbending law, and who stood with that law as a righteous judge to condemn her, now stood before her as her Savior, asking for the opportunity to forgive her for the very sins for which He had judged her.

My friend, the forgiveness of God knows no limits. Even if you are a Christian, and you have once again become entangled in a yoke of bondage; you have allowed the tempter to snare you, and you have bartered away your freedom in the Spirit for the pleasures of a passing thrill; Beloved, there is no one in this place righteous enough to condemn you. Ask your Jesus to set you free right now. He will lovingly whisper,

“Neither do I condemn you; for there is now therefore no condemnation to them who are in Christ Jesus.”

(John 8:11c NKJV)

SIN NO MORE

But Beloved, never, never, never, read this story and omit the last phrase. Jesus pardoned her. He set her free. He removed the sentence of death, and cast her sins as far from her as the east is from the west. Then He said, “Go...and sin no more!”

The forgiveness of God is not a license to exercise the grace of God. It is a motivation to humble yourself before the Holiness of God and never again touch the unclean thing. And you know what the unclean thing is for you. It is anything that takes the priceless, precious, holy blood of Jesus Christ and makes a mockery of it. God says, “I didn’t forgive you to free you to do it again. I forgave you to free you to never ever toy with immorality again.”

I do not know the state of the moral holiness of your life. I do not need to. I know my own. We are wretched creatures. But there are two things I know for sure from reading this story.

First, we have a God who delights in forgiving us no matter what we have done. The religious hierarchy may not be so gracious. They never have been. But God is. You can reach out right now and drink of His forgiving grace. No matter what you have done, you can be clean again.

Secondly, and this is crucial...once God has freed you from the yoke of sin, He expects you to run from it as fast as your legs can carry you. You are told to “flee immorality”. That means anything that habitually draws you into its cesspool, you must

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put behind you at any cost. He has forgiven you, but He does not expect you to laugh in His face by doing it again. This lesson then, can be summarized by two statements God made to a fallen woman, the same two statements He makes to us:

- 1- Neither do I condemn you. You are forgiven!
- 2- Now, go and sin no more. Don't do it, again!

For Application

1- Look carefully at the Pharisees' reasoning in verses 45-49 of John 7. Can you think of a modern day parallel? What is the danger of assuming that only the clergy can interpret the Scriptures?

2- How do you reconcile John 7:52 with Isaiah 9:1,2? Why did the Jewish leaders miss it?

3- Take a concordance or a topical Bible, and do a mini study on rising early. Make a list of the people who are noted for rising early. List the things that took place early in the morning that changed their lives. List the dangers listed in Scripture (particularly in Proverbs) from laziness and over-sleeping.

4- What New Testament Scripture or Scriptures clearly advise against handling this woman's sin the way they did? What reasons does the Scripture give?

5- Why do you think the Old Testament punishment for adultery was so harsh? Was Jesus violating the Scripture by not stoning her? If not, why not?

6- What do you think Jesus wrote? Can you give any Scriptural basis for your assumption? What might have convicted self-righteous men like them?

7- Compare the principle found in this passage with the principle of the mote and the beam. Why is man never called to be the judge? Does that mean we are not to judge sin? What does it mean?

8- How can this passage be easily misused? What key phrase in the passage keeps that from happening?

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