

Bible Studies for Life Series for March 4: Jesus forgives the sin of his people

February 23, 2007

Posted: 2/21/07

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Jesus forgives the sin of his people

• John 8:2-11;30-36

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As a pastor, I am called to be with families in crisis, especially death. Several years ago, I had a memorable experience—helping a family as they dealt with the loss of one they loved.

I preached the funeral service one day, and the burial was to be in a little cemetery north of Hollis, Okla., the next day. I planned my trip, giving myself plenty of time, and arrived to speak with the funeral home staff. They were just leaving for the drive to the cemetery. I could follow them, or I could go eat, change my clothes and get there on my own.



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I had a choice to make. The map the funeral director gave me looked confusing. I chose to follow the hearse and miss my lunch. It proved to be a wise choice, because I still would be looking for that remote cemetery. We drove down one dirt road for at least 10 miles.

I ducked behind the only bushes around and changed from my traveling clothes into my “preaching clothes.” As I put my clothes back into the car, I noticed a grave marker. It stood out among all the rest in that cemetery or any other I’d ever seen.

What was different? There was no name on it. There was no date of birth and no date of death—just these words: FORGIVEN, FOREVER. I so often have thought about those powerful words and their impact on my own life—forgiven, forever.

The question is just as valid at a modern-day gravesite as it was when Jesus taught in the temple in the first-century world: “Can Jesus forgive me no matter what I’ve done?”

John 8, forever speaks by answering: Jesus forgives our sins.

We begin a new series of lessons, and we note that in many Bible translations, this passage is bracketed. Some give it this explanation: John 7:53-8:11 are not found in the earliest and most reliable manuscripts. Every Bible I found includes it.

The first focal teaching point in the lesson is John 8:2-4.

Jesus is teaching in the temple when he is interrupted by the scribes and Pharisees, the religious watchdogs of the day. They had caught a woman in the act of adultery and brought her to Jesus for his verdict on the matter.

Adultery likely would tell us the woman was married. Adultery is a serious breach of the marriage vows. Adultery is sin. The word used here for “sin” points not only to the action but also to the thought of sin. The powerful picture of this woman in her shame and her sin being dragged in front of the temple by the Pharisees, standing before Jesus and surrounded by the crowd, leaves us feeling the impact of sin. Sin will find us out, to be sure—sometimes slowly, sometimes swiftly—but sin will find us out.

“For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,” Romans 3:23 reminds us.

Next, the focal passage moves us to John 8:5-6 to see what the law required.

We are not told why the guilty man managed to escape the grip of these capable authorities. Perhaps special provisions were made for the man to escape since the sin of adultery required two sinners. Could it be this whole thing was engineered as a litmus test for Jesus?

The Law of Moses was clear—a person guilty of adultery was to be stoned to death (Deuteronomy 22:22-23). This whole matter was not gossip; they had literally caught her in “the very act” of adultery.

The trouble was the Law of Moses had fallen by the wayside at this time. The Romans were in control, and they forbade capital punishment without the sanction of the Roman ruler. The Romans by no means viewed adultery as punishable by death, so they would not have agreed with the Pharisees.

If Jesus said “stone her,” he would be going against Roman law. If he said “forgive her,” Jesus would be going against Moses’ law. Jesus is between a rock and a hard place! In John 8:5, the religious leaders, the crowd and the woman all look to Jesus as the Pharisees ask, “What do you say?”

Jesus answers in our next focal passage, John 8:6-11, by writing something in the sand. This is the only record we have of Jesus writing. What did he write? We have no idea.

Then Jesus speaks. He speaks to the Pharisees; he speaks to the crowd; he speaks to the woman covered in shame and sin. Jesus speaks a word to all of us with sin. Jesus speaks a word to those who are quick to judge and slow to forgive. The Pharisees, armed with stones but empty of compassion, hear Jesus say, “If any one of you is without sin, let him be the first to throw a stone at her” (John 8:7).

Jesus’ words are aimed right at the heart and point to a change of life. They are a warning light to these Pharisees that their own lives might be at stake. If they stoned the woman, there were plenty of witnesses.

Then again, Jesus kneels to write in the sand. As the impact of Jesus’ words sink in, the men go out. One by one, they leave—from the eldest to the youngest—“They kept going out” (John 8:9). No words, just actions. They dropped their stones. The convincing words of Jesus pointed to the sin in each person’s life. No stone-throwing today.

Jesus speaks to the woman whose accusers have walked away from her now. Jesus asks her, “Woman, where are your accusers?” and asks another question, “Has no one condemned you?” (John 8:10).

Look carefully at her response: “No one, Sir” (John 8:11). Many translations say, “Lord.” Finally, Jesus says to her, “Neither do I condemn you—go now and leave your life of sin” (John 8:11).

The final focal passage reminds us that when we experience forgiveness from Jesus we are led to a new life of truth and freedom (John 8:30-36).

Forgivers become followers! Forgivers are changed by Jesus. His desires become our desires. We turn away from our sin and follow Jesus. He leads us in the right way, and he leads us to do the right things. Forgiven people become forgivers of other people who have yet to leave their life of sin.

“Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free” (John 8:32). ... “I tell you the truth, he who sins is a slave to sin” (John 8:34). ... “So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed” (John 8:36).

Discussion questions

- Does Jesus encourage “sloppy” agape—love with no accountability?
- Can sin be confronted without a “condemning” attitude?
- How can compassion be shown to sinners without condoning sinful ways?
- When someone leaves their life of sin, how can Christians welcome and encourage forgiven people?

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