

Who is without sin?

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Let us turn to **John 8: 3-11**

John 8: 3-11

- 3 The scribes and the Pharisees *brought a woman caught in adultery, and having set her in the center *of the court*,
- 4 they *said to Him, "Teacher, this woman has been caught in adultery, in the very act.
- 5 "Now in the Law Moses commanded us to stone such women; what then do You say?"
- 6 They were saying this, testing Him, so that they might have grounds for accusing Him. But Jesus stooped down and with His finger wrote on the ground.
- 7 But when they persisted in asking Him, He straightened up, and said to them, **"He who is without sin among you, let him be the first to throw a stone at her."**
- 8 Again He stooped down and wrote on the ground.
- 9 When they heard it, they *began* to go out one by one, beginning with the older ones, and He was left alone, and the woman, where she was, in the center *of the court*.
- 10 Straightening up, Jesus said to her, **"Woman, where are they? Did no one condemn you?"**
- 11 She said, "No one, Lord." And Jesus said, **"I do not condemn you, either. Go. From now on sin no more."**

Today, I want to concentrate on the way the people responded to what the Lord Jesus said. It is helpful for us to ponder over this so that we can better appreciate the impact of the life of the Lord Jesus.

This was a situation that seemed to be such that it was very disadvantageous for the Lord Jesus; it would be very difficult for Him to get out of it. There was a trap laid for him by many people. And yet when we look at the situation, we see that the situation suddenly turned quite different from what it seemed to be and what it might become. Why is that so?

The crowd wanted this woman to be stoned, or at least for the Lord Jesus to say something that would put Him in trouble. They were quite prepared for this woman to be stoned to death.

And yet after what the Lord Jesus said, they *began* to go out one by one, beginning with the older ones, and He was left alone, and the woman, where she was, in the center *of the court*.

All the people departed one by one. Why? What made the difference?

If we look at the context, we see that the Lord Jesus straightened up, and said to them, "**He who is without sin among you, let him be the first to throw a stone at her.**" So we can say that it was the result of these words from the Lord Jesus. When He said these words, they were deeply affected and they left.

But what was it in these words that affected them?

Is it that they did not know that they were not without sin?

If they were asked, if these Jews were asked before they came before the Lord Jesus: "Do you know that you are not without sin?" the likelihood is all of them would basically say, "Of course we know we are all sinners. That is why we have offered sacrifices to God under the Law of Moses; we all need forgiveness."

So if that were the case – they already knew that they were not without sin – then why is it the words of the Lord Jesus had such great impact?

They could have responded and said, “We know that we are not without sin but the Law of Moses says we are to stone this woman and we are going to stone her. Don’t You agree?”

Why did they not respond that way? Why did they leave one by one?

This is an example of the power of words – the power of words from the mouth of the Lord Jesus.

If someone else (like for example the Corinthians) had said such words to these people, it is quite likely they would have laughed at them. They would have laughed at the persons who were to say such a thing to them.

That is because they would not recognize the authority, the power and the meaning of those words.

The Lord Jesus said: “...the words that I have spoken to you are spirit and are life”.

So when the Lord Jesus said those words, it was not just knowledge for them to be aware of, it was not just to tell them, “You are also sinners”. They already knew that. The impact of His words was that the meaning struck their hearts. What the Lord Jesus said pierced their hearts: they recognized a spiritual reality within them; their conscience was affected. And that is why when they heard it, they *began* to go out one by one, beginning with the older ones.

It began with the older ones probably because they were more aware of things, they had gone through life more and they understood these issues more readily. But that is not always true. Sometimes those who are younger are more discerning, more receptive and more able to appreciate some of these issues.

What is important for us to appreciate is that if we want to influence people in a meaningful way, if we want to help people to respond in the right way then it is important for us to learn from the Lord Jesus: the words that we speak, are they spirit and life?

Why is it they were spirit and life? Why is it that in many instances when we speak, it may not be spirit and life?

If we look at the life of the Lord Jesus, it is quite clear that as the perfect Man, He lived by the power of God. It was the power of the Holy Spirit expressed in all the things that He did. And that is what the apostle Paul learned that he too must do likewise: he must speak with the power of the Holy Spirit, with the wisdom of God, not the wisdom of man.

Why is it the Lord Jesus could do that? Why is it the Holy Spirit had such freedom to communicate through the Lord Jesus? The basic reason is that the heart of the Lord Jesus was totally identified with the Father. In all that the Father wanted to accomplish, the heart of the Lord Jesus was fully with Him and so He did whatever the Father wanted Him to do, not passively but with active understanding and cooperation.

That is what we too must do if we want to help others in an effective way.

What does this incident tell us about the way we ought to respond to situations like that?

In terms of the principle underlying what the scribes and Pharisees were saying, it was not in itself wrong. It is true that in the Law of Moses such women should be put to death, whether by stoning or other means, and that was a command from God.

Why then in this instance it was not carried out?

What God commanded in the Old Testament for the people of Israel as a nation in the context of their being under the rulership of God as a nation, it was appropriate for them to fulfil the requirements of the Law in different areas, whether it be the animal sacrifices or the many laws and ordinances that God had given to them. This was to preserve them as a nation.

However in this context, Israel was no longer in the same situation as it was as a nation under the rulership of God, separate from the people of the world. They were now under the rulership of the Romans and the laws of Moses could not be applied in the same way as in the Old Testament.

More than that, the important issue that we are addressing here is not whether the Law of Moses ought to be carried out or not.

The issue here is the wrong spirit behind the people.

They were not seeking to honour God in keeping the laws of God; they were seeking to do something evil. Their spirit was self-righteous; there was no real compassion.

It was the wrong spirit within them that was manifested, and what the Lord Jesus said highlighted this, helped them to recognize it: "He who is without sin among you, let him be the first to throw a stone at her."

In the Old Testament, if they were to put someone to death, the people who put others to death were not without sin – they were still allowed to carry out the execution of that sentence. So that by itself does not disqualify a person.

But here is the meaning within their heart – something was wrong – and the Lord Jesus when He spoke, reached their heart, their conscience, and they could no longer stay in that context and so they left one by one.

This incident helps us to appreciate what is in the heart of the Lord Jesus.

Who is without sin? We know that amongst the people who brought this woman to the Lord Jesus, none of them was without sin. The only one who was without sin was the Lord Jesus and yet He was the one who was not seeking to put this woman to death.

As we think of the cross, as we think of the life of the Lord Jesus, it is very helpful for us to think about our own attitude, our approach to life, our relationship with people.

The Lord Jesus as He lived on earth, He cared for the people who were suffering, who were oppressed, including people who were sinful, who were in great need.

For us, it is very easy for us as we relate with people, as we live in this world to be basically preoccupied with ourselves: what we want, what we like, what we want from others and what we want others to do to us and for us. As we read through the Scriptures, this comes through again and again even amongst the people who believed in God.

The preoccupation with the self is a very, very powerful factor in the way we live our lives and this is something that we need to come before God to seek His help to understand how we can correct this. If we do not correct this, then the impact of our lives cannot be very, very positive.

When we look at the life of the Lord Jesus, we can see the opposite.

His very coming into this world arose from a spirit of self-giving. He came to do the will of God. He came to give of Himself a ransom for many. He came to help us. He came because He cared for our well-being.

As we read the records of how the Lord Jesus related with people, we can see how much He understood their needs, how much He was concerned for their well-being, how far He was prepared to go in order to help them.

We do not see so much of this in the lives of people and even among Christians. But it is possible for us to develop this quality and there are those who show a significant level of this and that is most encouraging and most refreshing.

When there is this kind of spirit of love and compassion, of self-giving, it brings meaning to life.

So as we think of the Lord Jesus, let us be very conscious that the Lord Jesus knows what is in our hearts, in all aspects.

It is because the Lord Jesus knew what was in the heart of these people that He could speak to them in such a way that it reached their hearts and it helped them to turn away from what was negative.

The Lord Jesus understands what is in our heart not just in areas like this, but He knows every aspect of our lives: what we are going through, the things that we long for, the things that we are afraid of, the things that we are confident in. And if we appreciate what He can do for us, if we recognize our need of Him and we properly come to Him, then the Lord Jesus can help us to become like Him.

In the context, we can see that it is not that the Lord Jesus condoned what the woman had done. It is not that the Lord Jesus was saying, "Sin does not matter". That cannot be. He came to deal with the problem of sin. Sin is such a terrible issue and the Lord Jesus knew it very well because He suffered most terribly for us, for our sins. And we see that at the end of this passage, the Lord Jesus said, "I do not condemn you, either. Go. From now on sin no more."

So He spoke to her very specifically: **sin no more**. It was not for her to take it lightly, that she could just go; but she had to repent, she had to turn away from the wrong path, she had to follow what God wanted her to do.

One of the aspects I see is important for us to learn from what these people went through is to think for ourselves: Do we agree we are not without sin, and if we agree, what are the implications?

Yes, basically all of us will agree we are not without sin, but it may not have very great impact on our lives; we may not think very much about it.

We may say, "Yes, I am not without sin. I am grateful to the Lord for His death on the cross for me and I am forgiven." And we are sincere, we mean it; and we are grateful. But what I am raising for your consideration is to go further. Consider more deeply: what does it mean?

Do we recognize how serious sin is, how much it pains the heart of God, what is the cost to Him?

When the Lord Jesus died on the cross for our sins, what does that mean to us?

Yes, we are not without sin and this is a very serious matter because sin is a moral choice on our part. We chose, we choose, to sin.

Let us not take it lightly and if there is any area in our lives that we know is not pleasing to God, let us take it seriously and deal with it thoroughly.

Otherwise, it is not possible to have a deep fellowship with God; it is not possible to have a truly meaningful life because a truly meaningful life has to be centred on oneness with God, moral and spiritual quality in our being.

And dealing with sin is at the heart of being transformed to become what we ought to be.

If we are conscious that we are not without sin in a significant way, it will help us each day to be humble, it will help us to recognize our need of God.

It does not mean that we must be sinful in order to be humble but being sinful and having sinned should be a factor that intensifies our consciousness of our own unworthiness and help us to be humble before God and before man.

But this is a quality that is difficult to develop. We would rather that people praise us; we would rather be recognized as someone worthy to be listened to.

So let us then as we come before the Lord, ask Him to help us to think through our lives and to consider whether are we living our lives with that concentration on what is in the heart of God, or are we living our lives concentrating on what it is that we prefer or what this world expects of us or what the world can offer us.

These are opposite in directions.

The problem is we often have a mixture; we have both.

We love God, we want to do His will; we are grateful to Him; we want to honour Him. At the same time, we also want the things of this world, we also want our enjoyment; we also want the glory that man may give to us.

So our hearts are divided. In that kind of state our fellowship with God is unstable and God may not be able to properly trust us and to entrust to us what is really precious in His heart.

So then let us ask Him to help us sincerely to ponder before Him to understand what it is that the Lord is looking for and how we can respond in a way that will bring joy to His heart.

Let us thank Him for what He has provided to help us to attain to the meaning of His calling.