

Street Magic 2 - Making Shame Disappear

Introduction:

Today we'll look at one of Jesus most controversial encounters on the street. We'll look at each of the people and groups involved in the incident and try to find ourselves in the crowd. We'll also see the impact of event on our lives today.

Background:

Jesus had just made His famous call during the Feast, "if any thirst let him come to Me." (John 7)

The Pharisees and religious leaders were now bent on shutting him up. But how could they do it. They were too religious to commit an outright murder (and they feared the Roman rulers). The scheme they came up with was to trap Jesus in a no-win situation, to condemn Himself.

The Religious Trap (v. 1-5)

But Jesus went to the Mount of Olives. ²At dawn he appeared again in the temple courts, where all the people gathered around him, and he sat down to teach them. ³The teachers of the law and the Pharisees brought in a woman caught in adultery. They made her stand before the group ⁴and said to Jesus, "Teacher, this woman was caught in the act of adultery. ⁵In the Law Moses commanded us to stone such women. Now what do you say?" ⁶They were using this question as a trap, in order to have a basis for accusing him.

It is more than obvious that the scribes and Pharisees were not the least interested in seeing true justice executed. Had they been in pursuit of justice, they would have **taken the woman to the appropriate authorities**. What did Jesus of Nazareth have to do with such legal affairs? **Nothing at all.**

The **Jews did not have the authority** to execute law-breakers (see John 18:31).

The Old Testament listed adultery as a capital crime (Lev. 20:10). This is horrifying to the modern reader, when it merits no punishment in our society. The Mosaic law was very tough on crimes against people, relationships, and the family unit. The other law codes were very tough on property crimes (cut off hands). This difference highlights the different value-systems (things vs. people).

The dilemma:

If he agreed with the Old Testament law and called for her execution, they could accuse him of **sedition** before the Romans, because since 30 AD the Romans had taken away the Jews' right of capital punishment.

If he said she shouldn't be stoned, they could accuse him of **false teaching** and discredit him with the people, because of what the Old Testament law mandated. Common people usually prefer harsh punishment for proven criminals.

They thought they really had him!

But the same law stated that **both** parties were to be produced and prosecuted (Deut. 22:22). It is obvious that there is a conspiracy here!

They probably sent an "undercover agent" to solicit her services (maybe one of them), then on a pre-arranged signal burst in, let him go and dragged her to Jesus. This makes them accessories to the crime and therefore guilty of adultery themselves!

Jesus is saying, "Whoever among you who is without **equal** guilt **in this specific case** be the one to initiate the execution."

It's hard to have clean enough hands to throw stones.

What did Jesus write on the ground? (v. 6-9)

But Jesus bent down and started to write on the ground with his finger. ⁷When they kept on questioning him, he straightened up and said to them, "If any one of you is without sin, let him be the first to throw a stone at her." ⁸Again he stooped down and wrote on the ground. ⁹At this, those who heard began to go away one at a time, the older ones first, until only Jesus was left, with the woman still standing there.

'Oh Lord, the hope of Israel, all who forsake you will be put to shame; Those who turn away from you will be written in the dust! because they have forsaken the Lord, the Spring of Living Water!' Jer. 17:13

"the older ones first". The older I get, the more soft my heart becomes. I think of how harsh and judgmental I was in my younger days. I had such strict rules for everyone else, even when I didn't follow them myself. I never stopped to think that someone living in sin may have gotten there via a tragic circumstance. I never stopped to let my heart feel mercy for them. Now, I see it differently. Instead of focusing on the person's sin, I try to stop for a moment and think of their heart.

One of the greatest acts Jesus performed was to take the shame the Pharisees had placed on her and put it back on them.

The woman (v.10-11)

¹⁰Jesus straightened up and asked her, "Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you? ¹¹"No one, sir," she said. "Then neither do I condemn you," Jesus declared. "Go now and leave your life of sin."

Who is this woman, just a faceless prostitute, deserving of what she's getting. Think of the shame, the public embarrassment.

"Shame" is a deep feeling of guilt, sadness, and hopelessness that we experience when we become convinced that past failures, bad habits or poor appearance have made a permanent scar on our self-worth."

Before you condemn her...**this woman is an illustration of all of us.**

Rebellion against God = adultery.

We have sinned, we deserve death--but Jesus is willing and able to completely deliver us from judgment we deserve. And this is the way all of us are to get forgiveness: by coming to Jesus and asking him for forgiveness. When we do this, we are completely and permanently accepted by God (Rom. 8:1).

"Then neither do I condemn you," Jesus declared. "Go now and leave your life of sin." The rest of the New Testament is an elaboration of this statement.

Notice the **order**: 1.) "Neither do I condemn you. 2.) Go and sin no more." **First** God assures us of his forgiveness; **then** he calls on us to cooperate with him as he liberates us from a life of sin.

RELIGION SAYS: "Change, or I will condemn you." The fear of God's judgment hanging over our heads in order to "keep us in line."

People who live under this tend to have a superficial and self-righteous kind of holiness.

In the same way the Pharisees used a religious trap to ensnare Jesus, the Devil uses the same religious trap against us. We fall into the trap of TRYING instead of TRUSTING. (Turn and ask someone "do you get that?")

GRACE SAYS: "I have forgiven and accepted you. Now respond to my love by allowing me to change your life." Loving gratitude is the most powerful motivator in the universe. We don't change **in order to be accepted**, but **because we have been accepted**. This is why grace, properly understood, produces a superior righteousness in the mature believers.

Why was the passage left out by some copyists? Probably because the early church got away from the radical message of grace very quickly. For example, the "Shepherd of Hermas," writing in the early second century, held that Christians who committed serious sins could be forgiven **once**--after public confession and penance. The amazing thing is that he was roundly criticized by his contemporaries--for being too lax! **(CHURCH HISTORY CLASS)**

The opportunity to sin is always there. If there is only two options, yes or no, sin or don't sin. If you stare at it long enough or think about enough you'll sin. Like going to fridge, hungry, walking away appetite only gets stronger, you go back, now standards are lower, stuff that didn't look good early is more appealing now.

It is not sin-avoidance that saves you but embracing grace and loving God and being grateful that He loves us so much to accept us.

Paul said, the mind on the Law is death but the mind set on the Spirit is life. Rom. 8:5

The Crowd

Don't you know the **un-religious people** were hanging on this scene and the words of Jesus just hoping that maybe he would be different from others that have condemned them.

The **religious people** who know God is a holy God and were doing their best to live by the guidelines of the Law and making their sacrifices. Both parties waited to see which way Jesus was going to lean.

Which side are you on? Part of the religious crowd ready to pick up stones, or the people who had been abused by the church and given up on religion?

Jesus pleases the un-religious when He refuses to judge and condemn the woman. He also bothers them a bit when He tells her to "go and sin no more."

On the other hand the religious people had just the option reaction to Jesus' words. In the end I think they both went away perplexed but felling deep down inside that they had witnessed something good.

Psalm 34:5 – ***"Those who look to Him are radiant; their faces are never covered with shame."***

Two side questions this story brings up: 1.) Is adultery is okay? & 2.) Can we judge others?

Adultery okay?

He was not sanctioning adultery, nor minimizing the lady's wickedness—quite the contrary. Christ was commenting upon the legal aspect of the situation. With the accusers gone, there was no case left! The witnesses were required to throw the first stones (Deuteronomy 17:7); without them the matter could proceed no further.

In fact, he said: "Go on your way; and sin no more." The verb ("sin") is a present tense form in the imperative (command) mood. The idea conveyed is: "Stop this life of sin."

Can we Judge?

Paul didn't hesitate to "judge" a brother who was living in sin (1 Corinthians 5:3), and he rebuked those who tolerated these people (1 Corinthians 5:1-13). Paul had learned the Master's truth that while we are not to judge according to appearances, we are obligated to "judge with righteous judgment" (John 7:24).

When we point out sin in someone's life we are not saying we are perfect that is why Paul said to, "***restore someone with a spirit of gentleness.***" We are cautioning them that they have sinned against God. They may be deceived so we go humbly, out of love. We believe the best of them. We believe they want to succeed and be faithful and obedient to God.

A baseball coach may not be able to hit a 98 MPH fastball but he can coach a young player how to. The young player can resist and rebel against the coach to his own demise.

"Those *outside*, God judges." (1st Cor 5:13, Gal 6:7, Heb 10:31)

"To Me belongs vengeance and punishment: Their foot shall slip in due time!" Says the Lord. Deut 32:35