

Go and Sin No More

GOD'S GRACE AND MERCY CAN COVER US AND EMPOWER US TO CHANGE, EVEN WHEN WE'VE BLOWN IT BADLY.

At this very moment, an ancient battle continues to wage between Satan, the enemy of our souls, and the daughters of Eve. Since the Garden of Eden, this enemy has been unrelenting in his attempts to shame, strip and dishonor women in order to challenge God's work in their lives.

Sadly, his most vicious offensives are often launched under the guise of religion. Nowhere in the Bible is this more evident than in the story of the woman caught in adultery. This account, found in John 8:1-12, is an incredible and telling example of the cruelty of law and religion as well as the beauty of God's mercy and love.

I'm sure you are already familiar with this story. But I invite you to look at it again in a fresh light by imagining that you were there.

DRAWN TO JESUS

It is the early morning, and in the dim light of dawn you join a large crowd assembled in the temple court. You are waiting to listen to the young rabbi, Jesus.

He is different from the other teachers you've known. There is a gentle strength and powerful wisdom about Him that the others don't have. He even condescends to sit among the people when He speaks!

Yet controversy follows Jesus wherever He goes. The religious leaders hate Him. But not the common people—they love this teacher, who pours out healing on the sick and the afflicted as He speaks confidently of God's love.

You're not supposed to be in the crowd. As a woman, you really

shouldn't get mixed up in controversial things. You have even been warned to stay away.

But you can't. You feel irresistibly drawn into His presence. You must hear the words that He speaks.

In His voice you sense the voice of another. Could it be the voice of God?

"At dawn He appeared again in the temple courts, where all the people gathered around Him, and He sat down to teach them" (John 8:2, NIV).

After greeting a few in the crowd with hugs, He sits down to teach. You press forward to capture every word.

THE VOICES OF THE ACCUSER

Suddenly, a disturbance appears on the horizon. Over the heads of Jesus and His disciples, you see another group approaching. Their angry voices and dark forms are struggling with someone who is in their midst.

As the group enters the temple court, you recognize the robes and realize these men are the town's religious leaders. The object of their scorn remains hidden until they reach Jesus and thrust the figure before Him.

A disheveled woman falls at Jesus' feet, clutching a remnant of bedclothes in an attempt to hide her nakedness. It's obvious that she has been abruptly dragged from a bed of shame.

Where is the man? you wonder.

Not content to let her cower in the dust, the angry leaders stand her up for all to see.

"The teachers of the law and the Pharisees brought in a woman caught in adultery. They made her stand before the group and said to Jesus, 'Teacher, this woman was caught in the act of

adultery. In the Law Moses commanded us to stone such women. Now what do you say?'” (John 8:3-6).

You hold your breath. You want to hear His answer as much as the Pharisees do, but for a different reason. Like every woman in the crowd, you know that you have sin in your life—not adultery, perhaps, but other transgressions that make you feel ashamed.

What is the response of Jesus to obviously guilty women, such as the one now sprawled at His feet? What judgment does He pass on those for whom the law demands death?

“But Jesus bent down and started to write on the ground with his finger” (v. 6).

At first Jesus does not answer the Pharisees. He bends down and writes in the dirt.

He refuses to turn His eyes to the woman; He knows that in her fear and shame, she would interpret any glance as one of contempt. He is not willing to add His eyes to those now fixed upon her in judgment.

“When 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.’ Again He stooped down and wrote on the ground” (vv. 7-8).

What is it that Jesus hears in the Pharisees’ voices? Perhaps He hears the familiar, accusing voice of the serpent: “You may cover her, but I will eventually strip her of that cover and shame her again! She will never learn. She will never change. She must die at Your hands—it’s the law!”

WHO IS WITHOUT SIN?

Jesus doesn’t answer Satan’s accusations; He knows they will be settled soon enough. Instead, with perfect calm He says that anyone who is without sin can throw the first stone.

You hold your breath. You know it takes only one person to release that first stone. Then everyone else will simply follow suit.

“At 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” (v. 9).

The woman flinches at every movement of the crowd, but the first strike never comes. There is no one qualified. There is no one who is without sin.

No one except the One who is writing in the dust—and He refuses to throw a stone. As the only righteous judge among them, He has come to save this woman, not condemn her.

Jesus remains silent as the woman’s accusers disperse in shame. In not picking up the stones, they have admitted their own sinfulness.

MORE THAN FORGIVENESS

The woman doesn’t move. Even though she can run for cover, she waits, naked and ashamed, at Jesus’ feet.

What is she waiting for? you wonder.

And then, suddenly, you understand. After all, you, too, are a daughter of Eve.

You, too, have heard the voice of the accuser of your soul. The battle is yours as much as it is hers.

This woman is waiting for something more—something from Him. She knows her own weakness. She wants forgiveness, yes, but she needs more.

She needs release. She needs the power to live a new life.

She lifts her head to meet His gaze for the first time. In His eyes she sees forgiveness, mercy and love.

“Jesus straightened up and asked her, ‘Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?’

“‘No one, sir,’ she said.

“‘Then neither do I condemn you,’ Jesus declared. ‘Go now and leave your life of sin’” (John 8:10-11).

His words sink deep into her heart, and she rises—released from death, forgiven, freed from condemnation. She knows she has the power to turn away from sin.

She begins to walk purposefully down the very street she had been dragged through only minutes before. The sun is shining brightly now. A new day has dawned—a day that holds renewed hope and the promise of new life.

Jesus watches her depart. Then He turns to you and to the others who have witnessed the scene. He opens His mouth, and His words resonate like music in your soul.

“When Jesus spoke again to the people, He said, ‘I am the light of the world. Whoever follows Me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life’” (John 8:12).

The woman whose figure is now in the distance is no longer a daughter of death and darkness but of life and light. Yes, she broke covenant with God and fell captive to sin.

But in the midst of her unfaithfulness, she encountered a merciful King. And because of that encounter, her life was forever changed.

ONCE AND FOR ALL

Today a treacherous enemy still drags naked and guilty women before a holy God. Even now he throws our shame in the face of the King of kings.

“What is to be done with these daughters of fornication and adultery?” the serpent hisses. “Don’t they have a covenant

with You? Why are they so often found in bed with the world? How many times will You forgive them and release them from the judgment of death?"

These are heartbreaking questions for a heartbroken King. It always pains Him to see His loved ones entangled by sin.

But He does not answer the accuser. He knows that at the cross, all his questions were answered once and for all.

Instead He turns and looks upon us with compassion. He sees our sin and our shame through eyes filled with mercy and love. The words of forgiveness, freedom and release that Jesus spoke long ago to the woman caught in adultery are the very words He speaks to us today.

What sin do you have in your life? Is the voice of the enemy accusing you even now, saying, "You've sinned too much, gone too far, stayed too long. God will never forgive you. You deserve whatever punishment you get"?

If so, allow these words of Jesus to sink deep into your heart: "I do not condemn you. Go and sin no more." Embrace His forgiveness. Then, by the power of His Holy Spirit, rise up from your shame, turn from your sin and walk into the light of a new day in Christ.

Read a companion devotional.

Lisa Bevere is a best-selling author of several titles. For further study on this topic: *The True Measure of a Woman* by Lisa Bevere (Charisma House) *Woman, Thou Art Loosed!* by T.D. Jakes (Destiny Image) *Breaking Free* by Beth Moore (Broadman & Holman).