



This last week I heard a rustling sound on my driveway at midnight. I listened attentively and my imagination was not at work—there really was a sound. When I turned on the exterior light, this huge raccoon looked up at me with bugged eyes. Caught—trying to get into my trash.

Two weeks ago the story of the IRS targeting specific groups for extra scrutiny hit the news. Caught—abusing their power.

My Little League team the Bees are in the playoffs, so humor me with one baseball example. Yesterday, there was a sharp hit grounder to the short stop and the runner on second base broke on contact. The runner was caught—easily tagged for the third out of the inning. But that's ok, we still won the game!

For today's sermon we're going to look at John 8 where someone is caught doing something. It's a story with emotional punch and Old Testament history. It's a story that can teach us a lot about how to respond when we are caught. And it's a story that reveals to us that Jesus was the most humble man to ever live.

Caught

But Jesus went to the Mount of Olives.

At dawn he appeared again in the temple courts, where all the people gathered around him, and he sat down to teach them. 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?" They were using this question as a trap, in order to have a basis for accusing him.

But Jesus bent down and started to write on the ground with his finger (verses 1–6).

We're told two times in these verses that this woman was "caught in the act" of adultery. Caught. According to the Law of Moses, God's Law by the way, the punishment was death by stoning. The scribes and Pharisees are setting Jesus up with the scenario: The Law of Moses or Your way. Which will you choose?

There are two things going on here that we need to think about: 1) the human response and, 2) the legal response.

The Human Response

What a horrible moment for her, this woman who has been dragged from a private embrace into the public eye. Her private sin is now on display for everyone to see and judge. An act, done behind closed doors and drawn curtains, is now out in the open.

Each of us can relate to her in some way, can't we? All of us have behaviors we hide from others. Perhaps eating so much you make yourself sick or eating so little you starve yourself. Perhaps viewing images on your computer or your TV. Perhaps your private thoughts of fantasy. Perhaps a fit of rage against your child or your dog or your cat. Perhaps it was a night of drinking too much alcohol. Imagine that you were "caught in the act" in one of your private sins. Some of you, right now, might even be battling within yourself, hesitant to acknowledge your secret sin even within the safety of your own thoughts. Imagine the shame, the humiliation and the fear of being fully exposed.

Everyone is riveted with anticipation wondering, "what will Jesus do with this sinful woman?" and perhaps wondering, "does Jesus' response to her reveal how he'll respond to me?"

The Legal Response

The legal response is the second thing we need to think about here. When I say legal, I'm referring to the Old Testament Law. This is vital for us to understand because all of the people in our story—Jesus, the Pharisees, the crowd, the woman, the scribes—they all know the Law of Moses and their minds are trying to piece together the details of this legal scenario.

So let me explain the legal ins and outs of this situation. In Deuteronomy 22:22–24 and Leviticus 20:10 it clearly explains the punishment for being caught in the act of adultery. It was clearly laid out—execution by stoning for both people.

In the Old Testament you'll read "stoning for this or that," which seems severe. However, keep in mind that the Law of Moses was more merciful than our own laws because of the high requirements of evidence.

Laws of Evidence

» Witness the very act happen. Seeing them coming out of a house was not enough. Seeing them lying in a bed together was

not enough. Because of this requirement, they almost never accused someone of adultery.

» Two or three witnesses were required in capital offenses (Deuteronomy 17:6–7; 19:15).

» Lying as a witness was punishable with the same punishment as the crime being testified about. If you were caught lying in a capital crime, you would be put to death.

» Impartiality. While difficult to evaluate, the Law of Moses stipulated that a witness must have a pure heart; they must be impartial.

Jesus knows these laws perfectly because he created them. They existed in his heart before he inspired Moses to write them down. And to take it one step further, Jesus perfectly embodied these laws. The morality, virtues, fairness and strict punishments of the Law of Moses perfectly represented Jesus.

So let's return to our scene now. The crowd is looking on and in addition to wondering things like, "what will Jesus do with this sinful woman?" and "how will Jesus respond to my sin?", people are also wondering, "how will Jesus get out of this one? It seems like a legal juggernaut. It's a trap, Jesus. Run for it!"

This is a good trap. It appears that if Jesus goes his normal way and forgives the woman he will trample on the Law of Moses and nullify his claim to be from God, to speak on behalf of God and to be God himself. God can't contradict himself!

On the other hand, if Jesus says stone her according to the Law he would be going against his message of grace and forgiveness he preached to the crowds. Jesus' entire message has been one that attracted the sinners. Jesus said "come to me all who are weak and heavy burdened and I will give you rest." If he stones the woman it would be like him saying, "ha, now that I have you, let's stone you!"

The choice seems to be: trample on the Law or trample on people. What will Jesus do?

Jesus Doesn't

Jesus doesn't say, "Your sins are forgiven" like he did to the paralyzed man who was lowered through the roof of the house. Jesus doesn't lay out her life story like he did with the Samaritan woman at the well. Jesus doesn't interpret the Law of Moses in fresh ways like he did in the Sermon on the Mount.

Instead, Jesus does and says very little. He bends down and scribbles in the dirt. And he says one sentence of 18 words. Imagine the miracle of this! Jesus was a preacher and he only said 18 words. According to the word count of my manuscript, it's going to take me a lot of words to explain this!

So there Jesus is scribbling in the dirt. This is a tense situation. Since we aren't told what he wrote, that must not be the point. Instead, the point is Jesus is unflappable; he is poised; he is calm; he is fearless; he is brave. In the middle of this chaos and storm, Jesus stands securely. What's going on inside his head and heart? While Jesus possessed unlimited power, he also possessed disciplined restraint.

Abraham Lincoln said, "Nearly all men can stand adversity, but if you want to test a man's character, give him power." This situation is a test of Jesus' character. Jesus had and still has today unlimited power. How will he use it? Will he use his power to control people? Will he use his power to abuse people? Will he use his power to pursue his selfish plans? Or will he use his power to lift up the broken and strengthen the weak? In his response Jesus is going to show us what humility looks like.

Let me show you what I mean. Humility is a very misunderstood virtue. The Biblical idea of humility is meekness. Meekness comes from the Greek word *praus*, which comes from the word for a powerful and wild animal that is now submissive and receptive to the rider. A lot of people think of meekness as someone who is weak, fearful, wringing their hands, hearts filled with turmoil. Jesus is none of these things. He is powerful and wildly unpredictable but he doesn't use his power as a club to beat people. Instead, he defuses this complicated situation filled with sin that deserves punishment and the Law of Moses by showing his humble heart.

Let's look in detail at Jesus' next acts and see how the story unfolds. Verses 1–6 showed us a woman Caught. Now we'll see although Caught, she is Not Condemned.

But Not Condemned

When they kept on questioning him, he straightened up and said to them, "Let any one of you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her." Again he stooped down and wrote on the ground.

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. 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" (verses 7–11).

Jesus absolutely honors the Law of Moses here. How? It would seem like Jesus is side-stepping the Law but he's not. Instead,

Jesus is perfectly following the Law, but he's doing so with a gentle heart.

Remember the Law of Moses:

» The Law demands that you actually see the act being performed. How interesting that in order to set-up Jesus, these religious leaders had to set-up a sexual liaison and then they had to watch enough of the act in order to have grounds for an accusation. In his one sentence Jesus has caught these men and they know it.

» The witnesses had to be innocent of the crime they were testifying about.

» The Law demanded both people be stoned—the man is missing.

» The Law required a moral and pure heart—impartiality. They aren't impartial because they let the man go.

» Look at how Jesus honors the Law by requiring these men to abide by it to a higher standard than they put on themselves.

Jesus knows the hearts of these men who are bringing the accusations. So Jesus in essence told them, "go ahead and cast the first stone, and remember the requirements of the law." The guys who were the oldest knew they were caught. They didn't meet the standards the Law of Moses required. So they were the first to leave. And eventually everyone is gone.

Then Jesus turns to the woman and we see his gentle heart. He says, "Neither do I condemn you." Instead of unleashing his power on her and following the Law, instead he restrains himself and shows gentleness. How can he do this, you might wonder? How can Jesus so readily accept a woman who clearly has committed adultery? Is Jesus twisting and manipulating the Law like a highly paid defense lawyer today? Isn't this just a technicality?

No! Jesus knows that justice for her sin will be paid in full when he dies on the cross. Jesus doesn't condemn her because he's going to condemn himself.

Does the woman fully understand what Jesus is doing here? Does she know that Jesus is going to be condemned for her, in exchange for her? No. She has no idea. Most likely, she thinks she's getting away with it because Jesus is lenient.

Everything Jesus taught and stood for is the opposite of condemnation. "*There is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus*" (Rom. 8:1). You can think of condemnation as guilty, harsh accusations, phrases like, "You are horrible," "You are an utter failure," "You are an adulteress," phrases said with a harsh spirit and a sneer on your face.

Jesus doesn't do this. Instead he says, "I love you. You are precious in my sight. I designed you for a wonderful relationship with me. Now stop doing horrible things. Stop sinning. You're destroying yourself and others." See how he graciously accepts everyone right where they are, offers freedom from sin and then expects a changed life? Jesus did not come to earth to condemn sinful people; he came to save sinful people.

In his response to this woman, Jesus completes the picture for us of True Humility. Here's what I mean. Think of how gentle Jesus was with her. Not only did he save her life, he doesn't explain to her how costly her freedom will be. He doesn't lecture her. He doesn't roll his eyes in exasperation because he has to deal with her.

Tim Keller says Christian humility is a paired polarity—bravery and gentleness. If you're gentle but not brave or brave but not gentle, you are not humble.

The thing we see in Jesus here is that he treats her as an equal. A humble person doesn't treat someone like they are beneath them. Think of Jesus with Judas, washing his feet at the Last Supper. He had a gentle attitude toward him.

Being meek, Jesus did not have an inferiority complex. He knew exactly who he was. He was confident. He was secure. "I am the judge of the earth." "I am the Lord of heaven and earth." Jesus acts like nothing but he knows he's the King of the Universe, a perfect picture of humility.

Jesus ends his conversation with these words, "Leave your life of sin." Committing adultery was a sin, and it still is today. Everyone knew this. In this phrase, I think Jesus was saying to her, "you are trading the beauty of sex that I designed for a monogamous marriage for a fleeting moment of satisfaction. Leave your life of sin. I have something better for you."

And Jesus is offering every one of us today the same thing he offered this woman—a freedom from condemnation and an expectation to live according to his plans.

Are you afraid of being caught? You are already caught because Jesus knows everything about you. We learn from this story that you don't have to be afraid to come clean with Jesus. He will not condemn you. You are safe with him.

Aren't you intrigued by the humility of Jesus? You should be. He has a lot to teach all of us about the paired polarity of bravery and gentleness. I encourage you to read the Gospels through the lens of Jesus' humility. He was a man like none other.

Look at the order. "Neither do I condemn you," then "go and sin no more." If you are waiting to clean up your life and beat the bad habits before you come to Jesus, you'll never come. It's only

by coming to Jesus first and letting him change you that you'll ever change. Ask him for help. Accept his help and his salvation. Some of you need to stop beating yourself up for sins that you've done. Some of you need to stop condemning yourself.

When we come clean with Jesus, he will not condemn us. He'll intrigue us and he'll empower us to leave our life of sin. Then our hearts will fill with supernatural joy.

This manuscript represents the bulk of what was preached at CPC. For further detail, please refer to the audio recording of this sermon.

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