

Throwing Stones

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[0 : 0 0] Well if we could, with the Lord's help this morning, if we could turn back to that portion of scripture that we read, the Gospel according to John and chapter 8. John chapter 8 and if we read again from verse 3, what it says, then the scribes and Pharisees brought to him a woman, that is him that is Jesus, a woman who was caught in adultery. And when they had set her in the midst they sent to Jesus, teacher, this woman was caught in adultery, in the very act. Now Moses in the law commanded us that such should be stoned. But what do you say? This they said testing him, that they might have something of which to accuse him. But Jesus stooped down and wrote on the ground with his finger, as though he did not hear. So when they continued asking him, he raised himself up and said to them, he who is without sin among you, let him throw a stone at her first.

Please don't point fingers. Please don't point fingers. That was the plea of the NHS in the Western Isles this past week. You know after so many comments appeared on social media blaming NHS staff in the Western Isles hospital for allowing the coronavirus to spread and causing us to move into tier four. Now while I share everyone's frustration of going into another lockdown, I completely agree with the statement which the NHS Western Isles gave.

Because they said to blame anyone or to point fingers as we said to the children is unhelpful. The staff of the NHS Western Isles have been working tirelessly and selflessly throughout this pandemic and have put themselves in the front line without a second thought. Don't point fingers. You know surely we should be praising the NHS rather than pointing fingers at them. But you know that's our sinful nature isn't it? We're always so quick to point fingers and to blame people. We want to point the finger and you know that's what we see as we come to this passage in John's Gospel. The religious leaders are pointing the finger at this woman who has been caught in adultery. Now you know that this incident takes place during the Feast of Tabernacles because as we said chapter seven and eight in John's Gospel they form one scene and the scene is the Feast of Tabernacles. And the Feast of Tabernacles as we've said before it was an annual festival in the Jewish calendar and it commemorated and celebrated the Lord's protection of his people and even the provision in the wilderness, the provision of water and light. And as we saw last Lord's Day it was on the morning of the great day after the religious leaders had completed their ritual of pouring that living water from the pool of Siloam and pouring it around the altar of sacrifice. It was then that Jesus stood up in John seven and he spoke into the silence and he said if anyone thirsts let him come unto me and drink. But you know another feature of the Feast of Tabernacles was that during the Feast the temple was brightly lit each evening and God willing we'll consider this in greater detail next Lord's Day. But in anticipation of the Messiah coming who as they said he would be a light in darkness there was always this lighting ceremony during the Feast of Tabernacles and it's during this lighting ceremony in the temple that we read in verse 12 that Jesus stood up again and he spoke into the darkness and said I am the light of the world. He who follows me shall not walk in darkness but shall have the light of life. And what John is asserting and affirming to us is not only that Jesus is the Messiah but that Jesus is able to deal with the desires and darkness of sin.

Jesus is able to deal with the desires and darkness of sin. Jesus is able to quench our spiritual thirst, as we saw in John seven, and he's able to bring light into our spiritual darkness as we see here in John. Jesus is able to deal with the desires and darkness of sin. But you know in order to emphasize his point John he sandwiches between these two statements of Jesus he sandwiches an illustration, an illustration of a woman caught in adultery. She's a woman who had sinful desires and a woman who was still in the darkness of sin. And you know what John does in these verses is he uses this very personal illustration in order to emphasize to us that Jesus is the only one. He's the only one who's able to deal with this with our sinful desires and our darkness of sin. Jesus is the only one who's able to deal with the desires and darkness of sin. And so I'd like us to just consider this sandwiched section this morning and I want us to consider it under three headings. The display of sin, the deterrent of sin and the discipline of sin. The display of sin, the deterrent of sin and the discipline of sin. So first of all we see the display of sin, the display of sin. We read in verse 2, now early in the morning Jesus came again into the temple and all the people came to him and he sat down and taught them. Then the scribes and Pharisees brought to him a woman caught in adultery and when they had set her in the midst they said to him teacher this woman was caught in adultery in the very act. Now Moses in the law commanded us that such should be stoned. But what do you say? So John tells us that while it was still early in the morning Jesus went to the temple, he went into the temple courtyard to teach.

Now as you know this wasn't the first time that Jesus taught in the temple because as we saw even in chapter 7 Jesus taught the religious leaders and he taught them in the temple that they were nothing but holy hypocrites. They were holy hypocrites who were twisting and tweaking the word of God to suit themselves. And you remember in John 7 that Jesus he asserted and affirmed that God's word is authoritative and that we must submit and surrender our lives to the inspired, inerrant and infallible word of God. And the thing is Jesus taught with such authority. You'll remember that he called the religious leaders out for who they really were. They were nothing but holy hypocrites. And as Jesus addressed these holy hypocrites he addressed them head-on and you'll remember when he addressed them head-on they held back. Because instead of apprehending and arresting Jesus as they had been told to do they just stood there. They stood there silent and speechless. In fact the reason the temple officers didn't bind Jesus and bring him to the religious leaders was because as they said no one ever spoke like this man. No one ever spoke like this man. And the concern which the religious leaders had was that in their mind more and more people were being deceived by this Jesus. Because there was mounting tension you remember. There was tension between the Jews and Jesus and

[8 : 32] Jesus was becoming in their eyes Israel's most wanted man. The religious leaders they thought that Jesus was guilty of religious extremism and political terrorism. And that Jesus he was inciting the people to turn against the religious establishment. To the point that the religious believers they even believed that if they didn't stop Jesus he would take over the nation. If they didn't take Jesus out and kill him he would cause this revolution. But you know what's remarkable is that the religious leaders they had tried for a whole year to condemn Jesus for breaking the Sabbath. You remember how Jesus had he had healed the man on the Sabbath day and it caused an uproar in Jerusalem among the religious leaders and they wanted to kill Jesus and for a whole year they waited for Jesus to come back to the Feast of Tabernacles so that they could condemn Jesus by death for breaking or supposedly breaking the fourth commandment. But as Jesus explained to them in the temple that they were nothing but holy hypocrites because they were seeking to kill him and by seeking to kill him they were in violation of the sixth commandment. But now we see in chapter 8 that the religious leaders they want to test and trap Jesus in relation to the seventh commandment because as Jesus is teaching in the temple courtyard early in the morning we're told that the religious leaders they disturb Jesus as discourse. They disrupt everything that's going on and they bring in a woman who had been caught in adultery and they just shove her in front of Jesus. And you know you can almost imagine the scene can't you? Jesus is he would be sitting on the steps of the temple court yard and he would be teaching the people about the things of God and eternity.

When all of a sudden the religious leaders they disrupt and even disperse the crowd by dragging this adulterous woman right in front of Jesus and they just say to him in a derogatory way teach her this woman was caught in adultery in the very act. Now Moses in the law condemned has commanded us that such a woman should be stoned. But what do you say? What do you say? Of course it was a loaded question. But you know the shame and the humiliation which this woman must have felt being dragged into the temple court in front of a whole crowd and then thrown in front of Jesus. And yet what's remarkable is the way in which the religious leaders explained to Jesus that this woman had been caught in the very act of adultery. Now as John has already told us it was still early in the morning. But to have actually caught this woman in the act of adultery as they said they did it would have meant that the religious leaders witnessed this woman in bed with another man who was not her husband. But as you're aware committing adultery is not something that's done in public it's done in private. Committing adultery is a secret sin. But in order to preserve and protect that secret sin the adulterer or the adulteress needs to lie and deceive the one whom they're committing adultery against whether it's their husband or their wife. But the secret sin of committing adultery you know it is rarely revealed by being caught in the very act. It's rarely revealed by being caught in the very act because adultery is usually revealed either by confession or by conception. Adultery is usually revealed either by confession or by conception. You know was that not the case with King David? David tried to conceal his adultery with Bathsheba but he couldn't. His adultery was revealed first of all by conception and then later by confession as we have it in

Psalms 51. And so for the religious leaders to have actually caught this woman in the act of adultery it would have meant that they witnessed this woman in bed with another man who was not her husband. Which as we'll see in a moment it was not true. But this brings us secondly to the deterrent of sin. So the display of sin and then the deterrent of sin. The deterrent of sin.

Look at verse 4. They said to him teacher this woman was caught in adultery in the very act. Now Moses in the law commanded us that such should be stoned. But what do you say? This they said testing him that they might have something of which to accuse him. But Jesus stooped down and wrote on the ground with his finger as though he did not hear. So when they continued asking him he raised himself up and said to them he who is without sin among you let him throw a stone at her first. You know we're all familiar with the phrase it takes two to tangle. It takes two to tangle and it's especially through when it comes to committing adultery. But you know adultery doesn't just start with lust.

Adultery starts with a look. That was the case with King David and Bathsheba. It started with a look and a look led to lust and lust led to lies and lies led to let down. It started with a look. You know that's why Jesus warned us about the severity of sin in the Sermon on the Mount. You remember Jesus said he said you have heard that it was said you shall not commit adultery. But I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lustful intent has already committed adultery with her in his heart. And so according to Jesus adultery doesn't start with lust. Adultery starts with a look. And there are always two parties involved.

[15 : 25] It always takes two to tangle and both are equally responsible for committing adultery. But in this case as you see there's no mention of the man. There's no mention of his involvement. And this is important because when the religious leaders when they dragged and displayed this woman before the crowds and even before the Christ they asserted and affirmed to Jesus that she had been caught in the act and the law of Moses condemns her to death. Because the religious leaders they claim that according to the Mosaic law adultery was a capital offence and was punishable by the death penalty. Of course the religious leaders they were right. They were right to say that adultery was a capital offence. But the law condemned both parties. Not just the woman who had been caught. You know in the holiness laws of Leviticus chapter 20 we read there the man who commits adultery with another man's wife. He who commits adultery with his neighbour's wife the adulterer and the adulteress shall surely be put to death. And so what that holiness law says is that both parties were guilty of committing adultery. Not just the woman. But you know what we have to understand about adultery being a capital offence and punishable by death is that this holiness law was part of the civil law. Meaning that it only applied to the covenant nation of Israel. The Mosaic law the law of Moses which makes up the first five books of the Bible. It is it's said we describe it as being divided into three sort of categories. The moral law, the sacrificial law and the civil law. The moral law is the Ten Commandments which applies to the whole of humanity because God has inscribed the moral law upon our hearts. That's why you have a conscience even though you may not be a Christian. You have a conscience that tells you what's right and what's wrong because the moral law the Ten Commandments has been inscribed upon your heart. And that's why as we'll see with the religious leaders that's why they were convicted by their conscience. They had the moral law written upon their heart. Then there's the sacrificial law which related to all the different types of sacrifices and rituals of all the things that were offered at the temple and also at the

Tabernacle. But these laws the sacrificial laws they're no longer applicable since Jesus has fulfilled them all. He was the ultimate sacrifice. He offered himself as the ultimate sacrifice for sin at Calvary. And then we have the civil law which emphasized how the Israelites were to relate to one another and to God within their covenant community, within the covenant nation of Israel. And many of these civil laws were called holiness laws because as a nation the Israelites had been called to be a holy nation and a peculiar people, a treasured people. And again the civil law it no longer applies to us as those living in the Isle of Lewis or even out with the nation of Israel because the civil laws they applied to the covenant nation of Israel.

Yes, this is a part in Romans chapter 11 where Paul describes the Christian as part of the spiritual Israel. But the civil law only applied to the physical nation of Israel. Now many people that they condemn and criticize Christianity because they consider the God of the Bible to be a harsh God rather than a holy God. They say that the God of the Bible is nothing but a harsh God who condemns people to hell. But you know we have to remember first of all who God is.

God is holy. The Bible says that God is of purer eye than to behold evil, that he cannot look upon iniquity. God is righteous meaning that there's no unrighteousness in him and God is light and in him there is no darkness at all.

And so when God called the nation of Israel to be his people they were to reflect his character. They were to be a holy nation and a peculiar people. And the nation of Israel were given these holiness laws which in our 21st century they may seem strict and severe. But you know of anything when you read these holiness laws. These holiness laws acted as a deterrent to sin. These holiness laws acted as a deterrent to sin. Because you know it was very rare to hear of a case of adultery. You know in this commentary the New Testament scholar Don Carson he writes, although capital punishment by stoning is still meted out today in some Muslim countries for the offense of adultery he says there is little evidence that was carried out very often in first century Palestine. The holiness laws they acted as a deterrent to sin. And you know my friend you can actually see what happens in the case of adultery when you don't have that deterrent to sin. Because in our unholy nation of Great Britain adultery is no longer seen as immoral. Because as you know it's promoted on our TV screens. It was practiced by our Prime Minister and it's seen as something positive among celebrities. We see adultery all the time. And you know the fact remains an interesting fact. One in five British adults admit to having an affair. And of those who have had an affair only 50% stopped at just one. 25% of British adults went on to have two affairs while 20% have participated in three.

[22 : 21] Surprisingly this fact states that 8% have had five or more affairs. And it said that women are more likely to have an affair than men. And so you can understand why this holiness law was in place. It was a deterrent to sin. The law was there to protect and prevent the heart and the heartache of family breakdown and family breakups. It was a deterrent to sin. But you know the greatest deterrent to sin is not the law of God but the love of God. The greatest deterrent to sin is not the law of God but the love of God. It was the early church father Augustine. He said love God and live as you please. Love God and live as you please. Obviously Augustine he wasn't giving us a license to sin. No the opposite in fact he was calling us to love the Savior. Because Augustine said that if we really love God as we have been commanded to do and even as we confess to do as Christians. If we love God and follow the greatest commandment which is to love the Lord your God with all your heart with all your mind with all your soul with all your strength and your neighbor as yourself. If we really love God then we'll want to do what pleases him. We will love God and live as we please. We will love God and live as we please and as

Jesus said to his disciples if you love me you will keep my commandments. If you love me you will keep my commandments. And so the greatest deterrent to sin is not the law of God. It's the love of God and we're to love God in response to his love and demonstration of that love to us in Jesus Christ. But you know as John explains here the religious leaders they brought this woman in order to test and trap Jesus into saying something against the law of Moses. And as you know this wasn't the first time that they tried this. They did it in chapter five and chapter six and chapter seven and now they're doing it again here in chapter eight. The religious leaders were like these holy hypocrites who were twisting and tweaking the word of God to suit themselves and also to try and trap Jesus. But notice Jesus doesn't respond to them. Jesus doesn't say anything to them. Instead Jesus were told he bends down and he writes on the ground of the temple courtyard with his finger. Now we're not told what Jesus wrote on the ground but as you can expect there have been lots of suggested speculations. Some suggest that Jesus wrote the words of Jeremiah chapter 17 and he wrote these words in relation to the religious leaders where it says those who turn away from you shall be written in the earth for they have forsaken the Lord the fountain of living water. And you know it's a sensible suggested speculation after what has just happened at the temple with the water sacrifice. But you know I would be more inclined to go with the suggested speculation that Jesus wrote on the ground with his finger he wrote the seventh commandment. Jesus wrote the commandment which this woman had broken thou shalt not commit adultery. But as you'd expect Jesus would have written the commandment in Hebrew which would have only been two words low teeneth low teeneth thou shalt not commit adultery. And you know I believe that

Jesus wrote the seventh commandment on the ground with his finger. Why? In order to remind and reaffirm to these religious leaders that the Ten Commandments were written by God with the finger of God and that Jesus is God. Jesus wrote the seventh commandment on the ground with his finger to remind and reaffirm to the religious leaders that the Ten Commandments were written by God with the finger of God and that Jesus is God. This brings us lastly to consider the discipline of sin. The display of sin, the deterrent of sin and then the discipline of sin. The discipline of sin. Look at verse 7. So when they continued asking him he raised himself up and said to them he who is without sin among you let him throw a stone at her first. And again he stood down and wrote on the ground. Then those who heard it being convicted by their conscience went out one by one beginning with the oldest even to the last and Jesus was left alone and the woman standing in the midst. You know we're all familiar with that phrase people who live in glass houses shouldn't throw stones. People who live in glass houses shouldn't throw stones and that was certainly through of the religious leaders who were ready to point the finger at this sinner and stone her to death. But if the religious leaders had stoned her they would have only highlighted their own hypocrisy because they'd have broken the law of

Moses a law which clearly states that in the act of committing adultery both guilty parties must be stoned and that the punishment of stoning must be initiated by the one who witnessed the act of adultery. And the religious leaders they knew that they didn't have both parties present to stone them and they knew that they they didn't have any witnesses who saw this secret sin of adultery. And so after writing the seventh commandment on the ground we're told that Jesus stood. He stood stood to to speak to these religious leaders and he said to them he who is without sin cast the first stone. He who is without sin cast the first stone and then we see Jesus he just stood down again and he wrote on the ground. But those who heard it those who heard what Jesus said meaning the gathered crowd and also the religious leaders were told that being convicted by their conscience they all went away one by one. Their God-given conscience convicted them of their hypocrisy. And you know my friend it's good to be sensitive to sin. It's good to have a conscience with conviction but your conscience will never save you. Only Christ can. Your conscience will never save you. Only Christ can. You know my good friend JC Ryle he said conscience is an important part of our inward man but it has never led anyone to Christ. Yet our conscience he says is not to be despised. It's the minister's best friend when he stands up to rebukes sin from the pulpit and it's the mother's best friend when she tries to restrain her children from evil and quicken them to good. But happy is he says Ryle. Happy is he who prays to have their conscience enlightened by the Holy Spirit and sprinkled with the blood of

Christ. Happy is he who prays to have their conscience enlightened by the Holy Spirit and sprinkled with the blood of Christ. And you know when Jesus kneeled down the second time to write on the ground with his finger. Again we don't know what he wrote but you know I'd like to think that Jesus he wrote over what he had written first. He wrote over the seventh commandment with another word.

[31 : 08] Another Hebrew word. Nisalach. Nisalach which means forgiven. Forgiven. Because what we see is that when everyone walked away from this scene at the temple. We're told in verse 10 when Jesus had raised himself up and saw no one but the woman he sent to her. Woman where are those accusers of you. Has no one condemned you.

She said no one Lord and Jesus sent to her neither do I condemn you. Go and sin no more. Now let's not be tempted to think that Jesus went easy on this woman and let her get off with her sin. Not at all. Because you know we have to remember that this woman she knew she had done wrong. She knew that she had broken the commandment. She knew that she had sinned. She knew that she deserved the death penalty. No one needed to tell her that. No one needed to highlight her sin to her.

But you know what this woman did need was forgiveness. She needed reconciliation and restoration. This woman needed Jesus to deal with the desires and darkness of her sin. This woman needed Jesus to deal with her spiritual thirst and her spiritual darkness. She needed Jesus to discipline her. She needed Jesus to discipline her. Now we often have a wrong understanding of discipline because we think of discipline as a negative thing. We think of discipline in a negative way.

But the truth is discipline is for a positive purpose. Discipline is for a positive purpose. It was the Scottish reformer John Knox who emphasized in the Scots confession of 1560. He said that the three marks of the church are the preaching of the word, the administration of the sacraments, and the discipline of the church. Church discipline. The three marks of the church preaching of the word, the administration of the sacraments, and church discipline. And so church discipline is always to be for a positive purpose. A positive purpose. Because the biblical pattern for discipline, whether it's the case of adultery, or stealing, or murder, or lies, or breaking the Sabbath, or idolatry, or apostasy, whatever the case of discipline, it should be carried out. Not in hypocrisy, or in a harsh or heavy-handed way. No discipline must be implemented gently and graciously with the positive purpose of a sinner experiencing reconciliation and restoration. So discipline is not to be carried out in hypocrisy in a harsh or heavy-handed way. But discipline must be implemented gently and graciously with that positive purpose of a sinner experiencing reconciliation and restoration. I find the discipline of sin is to be dealt with by the demonstration of Jesus. Because what we see here is that Jesus didn't sit this woman down on a stool of discipline and lambast her. No Jesus said to this woman, go and sin no more. Go and sin no more. Of course Jesus wasn't saying to the woman, you're now going to live a sinless life.

No Jesus was saying to the woman, repent of your sin. Turn away from your sin and live in the light of salvation. Repent of your sin. And you know what John is reminding us and reaffirming to us is that whatever sin we may be harboring or holding on to in our heart, like this woman, we have to come and call and commit and confess Jesus as Lord. Because He alone is able to deal with the desires and darkness of our sin. Jesus alone is able to deal with the desires and darkness of our sin. My friend, the message of the Gospel is a message of reconciliation and restoration. It's a message of no condemnation and no separation. It's a message of full and free forgiveness. But let's never forget that in the Gospel forgiveness is free but it's not cheap. Forgiveness is free but it's not cheap. It cost our sinless Savior everything.

[36 : 08] Is that not why William Cowper said in his hymn, there's a fountain filled with blood drawn from Immanuel's veins and sinners plunge beneath that flood, lose all their guilty stains. And as Cowper he went on to say, Dear dying Lamb, thy precious blood shall never lose its power till all the ransomed ones of God be saved to sin no more. Be saved to sin no more. That's what Jesus said to this woman, go and sin no more. Go and sin no more. My friend Jesus is able to deal with the desires and darkness of your sin. He's able to deal with whatever you are harboring or holding on to in your heart. He's able to deal with it. If like this woman you will only come to him and call upon him and commit your life to him and confess like this woman did, confess Jesus as your Lord and as your Savior.

And Jesus will say to you, go and sin no more. May the Lord bless these thoughts to us. Let us pray together. All our gracious God, may I give thanks to thee for that reminder of the God whom we are dealing with, a God who does not deal with us according to our sin, but a God who deals with us in grace and in mercy and in forgiveness. And we give thanks today that we live in a day of opportunity, a day to come and call and commit and confess Jesus Christ as our Lord. Help us we pray. Oh help us Lord as thy people.

Not to point fingers, but to point to Jesus. Help us Lord we pray to be forgiving and to be loving and to be gracious and to be gentle. We confess Lord that we are not what we ought to be, but help us to live like Jesus and love like Jesus and even look like Jesus in the way we live our lives. All Lord go before us, protect us, draw us nearer and nearer to thyself for we ask it in Jesus name and for his sake. Amen. We're going to bring our service to a conclusion this morning by singing to God's praise in Psalm 51. We're going to sing the words of Psalm 51 in the sing Psalms version and we're going to sing from verse 7 down to the verse Mark 15. As you mentioned, Psalm 51 is David's, it's his confession, his prayer for forgiveness after committing adultery with Bathsheba. And it's a reminder to us, it's my favorite Psalm, Psalm 51 is my favorite Psalm. It's a Psalm that reminds us that the Lord is able to cleanse us from any sin. Whatever our sin may be, doesn't have to be adultery, could be anything and yet he's able to cleanse us and wash us as white as snow if we will only come and ask because that's the promise. If we confess our sin, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sin and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. So Psalm 51 from verse 7, cleanse with his hip, purify me, I'll be whiter than the snow, let the bones you crush be joyful, may I joy and gladness know, from my failure hide your face, blot out all my wickedness. And we'll sing down to the verse Mark 15 to God's praise.

May I joy and gladness know, from my failure hide your face, blot out all my wickedness. Lord, we eat the food our dinning, and the step of smile bring you.

Do not take your spirit from me, pass me not away from you.

[41 : 27] Give me my good joy I find, eat my willing spirit light.

Then I'll teach your ways to sinners, rebels will turn back to you.

Bring me from what filled my savior, God most merciful and true.

Then I'll praise your righteousness, teach my lips your name to bless.

Amen.