LEAVE YOUR LIFE OF SIN

John 7:53-8:11
Key Verse: 8:11b

“Then neither do I condemn you,’ Jesus declared, ‘Go now and leave your life of sin.”

In the previous passage, Jesus went down to Jerusalem during the Feast of Tabernacles. But he did not join his brothers to enjoy the celebration or to show off his miraculous powers. Jesus waited until halfway through the Feast to begin to teach the crowd the life-giving word of God. Even though the religious leaders did their best to discourage the people from believing in Jesus, they could not stop the people from listening to Jesus’ word. On the last day of the feast, Jesus invited everyone to come to him and drink the living water that flows from the throne of God in heaven. It was Jesus’ promise that whoever comes to him in faith and listens to his word will receive the Holy Spirit. Jesus had faith that when God’s people received the Holy Spirit, they could make right judgments, and take their stand on the side of truth. We must pray that in this semester all WIU students might receive the Holy Spirit by listening to Jesus’ word and believing in his name.

In today’s passage, Jesus’ bible teaching is interrupted by the religious leaders. They saw Jesus’ message of mercy as one of lawlessness. So they tried to trap Jesus through a woman caught in the act of adultery. Jesus rescued the woman, but he did not break Moses’ law. Through today’s passage, we can learn that Jesus did not come to catch sinners, but to set them free from sin. Even today may God show you his mercy and may his word of command set you free from sin!

I. A woman caught in adultery

First, Jesus sat down to teach (7:53-8:2). The Feast of the Tabernacles was one of the three great feasts on the Jewish calendar. It celebrated the end of the harvest, and recalled their time of wandering in the desert, when God’s people had to depend on God for their daily bread. It was a time to celebrate, rejoice and enjoy God’s blessings. After the eight days of feasting, the people were tired and ready to go home. But they could not forget the beautiful invitation Jesus had given them, “If anyone is thirsty, let him come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, streams of living water will flow from within him.” (Jn 7:37,38). The Feast was over, and it was time for them to go back to work. But many of them realized that they were still hungry and thirsty in their souls.

Jesus went up to the Mount of Olives after the Feast. It was his usual place of retreat after a day spent in Jerusalem. The Mount of Olives was the place where Jesus would pray all night before his arrest. Jesus often withdrew to a mountain by himself to pray (Lk 6:12). The Feast was over, but Jesus did not think that his spiritual struggle to serve the crowds was over. He fought hard in prayer all night long so that his people might repent of their superficial attitude towards God’s word, and begin to live by faith as men of honor and truth (Jn. 7:17).
The next morning, while it was still dark, Jesus came down from the Mount of Olives and went to the temple courts in the city. Strangely, many people who had been at the feast were also there. Look at verse 2. “At dawn he appeared again in the temple courts, where all the people gathered around him, and he sat down to teach them.” This verse presents a beautiful picture of the shepherd-sheep relationship Jesus had with the people of Israel. They were sheep. They had not made a clear decision of faith regarding Jesus. They were too weak to repent of their worldly desires or give up their lives for Jesus and for the gospel. But they knew that Jesus was their shepherd. They came to him because they knew that Jesus cared for them and wanted to give them good things from the good that was stored up in his heart. Jesus was not impatient with them, but was ready to keep teaching them God’s word. It was because Jesus knew that only God’s word could satisfy their thirsty souls. Jesus knew that only God’s word can give eternal life to those who believe. The crowd of people needed many things. But Jesus, the good shepherd, gave them the most important, life-giving word of God. It was Jesus’ prayer for them to repent of their unbelief, and to trust in God and in God’s purpose for their lives. But there were some men who were too busy doing other things to receive the life-giving word of God from Jesus.

Second, The religious leaders’ trap (3-6a). Look at verse 3a. “The teachers of the law and the Pharisees brought in a woman caught in adultery.” Jesus had prayed all night long because he knew that the people were in anguish of heart due to their spiritual thirst. On the other hand, the religious leaders had sensed that Jesus was gaining the upper hand in the hearts of the people. They were afraid to act directly, because they knew the people were inclined to listen to Jesus, but they knew that to avoid acting was to give Jesus their tacit seal of approval. In desperation, the teachers of the law and Pharisees restlessly searched the city all night until they found what they were looking for: a woman committing adultery. Probably, she was a prostitute. They seized her, and brought her into the temple courts, where they interrupted Jesus’ teaching and confronted him with her situation. Look at verse 3b-6a. “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.”

The religious leaders wanted to trap Jesus into violating the Law of Moses. They saw Jesus’ teaching of mercy, repentance and forgiveness as a threat to Judaism. The Judaistic worship of God held that the Law of Moses must be obeyed, even when it involved obvious deprivation or loss. For example, many Jews refused to fight their enemies on the Sabbath day, and were slaughtered as a result. But they were happy to die and please God through their obedience. Nevertheless, during the Maccabean revolt, the Jews decided to fight on the Sabbath in order to defend the very existence of the temple and of their right to worship. Likewise, Jesus pointed out in chapter 7 how the Jews circumcised their children on the eighth day, even if it was a Sabbath, so that they might be accepted by God. Jesus told them in verse 7:19a, “Has not Moses given you the law? Yet not one of you keeps the law.” Though the Jews prided themselves on having the law that was given to them by God himself, they could not keep the Law of Moses in their practical lives. They were blind, however, to their hypocrisy. In their self-righteousness, the religious leaders saw Jesus’ ministry of healing on the Sabbath as a conflict between human sympathy for the sick and God’s truth in his Law. So they found an adulterous woman and brought her to Jesus before the crowds. They calculated that Jesus would be forced to choose,
either to have the woman stoned, thereby negating his teaching and ruining his popularity, or to ask the woman be spared, and be exposed as a deceiver who did not come from God. There seemed to be no way out for Jesus.

Third, Jesus’ challenge (6b-9). Jesus saw the Pharisee’s motive was to trap him. Jesus’ heart was filled with compassion for the woman who had become a tool of the Pharisees’ evil desires. Perhaps Jesus wanted to ask the Pharisees where was the man she had been committing adultery with? For Moses’ Law demanded that both be stoned. But Jesus did not want to get into an argument with the Pharisees. It was because Jesus also had compassion on these religious leaders. They looked so good in their fine robes and with their flowing beards. But they couldn’t see their own hypocrisy. Though they zealously proclaimed the law, they could not live up to the very law they so passionately defended. So their consciences were terribly wounded. Perhaps one of the men there was like Saul, who later became St. Paul. Such a man was ready to kill others before he would give up his self-righteousness as a Pharisee. To Jesus, these men were like critically wounded patients in the ER. How wonderful is our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, who struggled to the end to help those who were trying to kill him! Still, how could Jesus help such people, while at the same time rescuing the woman from their evil plan?

Look at verses 6b-8. “But Jesus bent down and started to write on the ground with his finger. 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.” Perhaps Jesus had a great inner struggle to love and care for such hateful men. Perhaps he took the time to write down each man’s sin in the ground with his finger. Mostly, Jesus didn’t want to fight with these men. Instead, Jesus wanted them to see themselves before God. It takes great patience and a gentle, shepherd heart to help proud men see themselves before God. Usually, we fail to help people in this way. Our own pride drives us to point out the other person’s sin too soon, and our sheep only feel hurt or discouraged. When Dr. Samuel Lee was shepherding one very proud young physics major, he took care never to rebuke the young man publicly. Instead, he gave him many opportunities to see himself before the word of God. Finally, when the young man studied John chapter 3, he saw himself exactly as the proud Nicodemus, who could not believe Jesus’ words, but only asked “how?” The young man repented for always insisting on his way, and never acknowledging the truth and goodness of God’s way. He was healed in his inner man, and he became a good shepherd for American college students. This took place after 5 years of Bible study. Our Lord Jesus himself really wanted to rebuke the Samaritan woman for her having had five husbands and a live-in boyfriend. But first, Jesus offered her the gift of God, the living water welling up to eternal life. Then, he offered some to her husband. She was caught. But she did not feel that Jesus had condemned her. Instead, she felt liberated from the power of her sin, so that she could testify to her neighbors, “Come, see a man who told me everything I ever did! Could this be the Christ?” When one sinner points out the sins of another sinner, the result is conflict and division. But when a shepherd helps one sinner see himself before the Almighty and Holy God, there is healing and rejoicing in heaven.

Jesus challenged the religious leaders to consider, which of them was without sin that they might freely cast a stone at the woman. He did not contradict Moses’ law. But his challenge exposed
the truth that there was a bigger problem that needed solving, than just this one woman’s sin. It was the problem of the sin of the world. To solve the problem of the sin of the world with Moses’ law was to condemn the world to death and hell. The religious leaders saw the problem, and one by one they left, leaving Jesus and the woman all alone. Look at verse 9. “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.” The older ones were the first to see. If the only solution for the woman’s sin was death, then there was no hope for all mankind. The tragedy is that none of them saw the solution, at least not at this time.

II. Neither do I condemn you

First, Jesus does not condemn the woman (10-11a). The religious leaders left Jesus and the woman alone. The crowd was watching what Jesus would do next. Look at verse 10. “Jesus straightened up and asked her, ‘Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?’ ‘No one, sir,’ she said.” Jesus alone, of all mankind who have ever lived, was free from sin. He came born of the Virgin Mary, conceived by the Holy Spirit. He came from God, and in a little while he was going back to God. Jesus had set her free from the condemnation of her fellow sinful men. But she was still guilty of sin before the Almighty God. And how could she answer before God for what she had done? She had taken her precious life and her purity as a woman, and she had thrown it away for the sake of money or pleasure. She was spared because of Jesus’ compassion and mercy, but what good was her life, if she couldn’t be set free from her sin?

Look at verse 11a. “‘Then neither do I condemn you,’ Jesus declared.” Jesus was the Son of God. But Jesus declared to the woman, “Then neither do I condemn you.” Jesus had not come to condemn sinners, but to save all sinners from condemnation. Jesus came as the Lamb of God to forgive the sin of the world. All the condemnation and judgment that is due the world because of sin was laid on Jesus when he suffered and died on the cross as the Son of Man. Jesus could have condemned the woman and the whole world for our sin. But Jesus chose instead to bear the sin of the world by himself so that all men might be forgiven and set free from their guilty consciences. It was Jesus’ declaration of love for this sinful woman. It was Jesus’ declaration of love for this sinful world. Praise Jesus, who died on the cross in our place so that he might declare us “not guilty” before the Almighty God!

Second, Jesus commands, “Leave your life of sin” (11b). For many Christians, their confession of faith ends with Jesus’ declaration of love and mercy. They want to claim God’s forgiveness for their sins, and that is all! But Jesus revealed that God’s love is more than forgiveness. God’s love is God’s hope that sinners can be set free from their sins to live forever as his holy children. Look at verse 11. “‘Then neither do I condemn you,’ Jesus declared. ‘Go now and leave your life of sin.’” Jesus forgave the woman’s sin. More than that, Jesus believed that the woman could live from now on as a daughter of God. And she could, because it was Jesus who had commanded her to do so. Jesus’ command is the word of God. The word of God has power that enables those who believe to also obey. When Jesus commanded the man who had been an invalid for 38 years, “Get up! Pick up your mat and walk,” the man heard the divine voice of God in Jesus, and he obeyed Jesus’ impossible command and stood up. Jesus who can make the lame man walk has the power to forgive sins (Mk 2:10). It seems impossible for us to ever be free from sin and able to live as instruments of righteousness. But it is not impossible. When we
hear Jesus’ divine voice and listen to his command, then Jesus is with us through his Spirit to help us grow in the holiness of God.

It is true. One young girl was so tormented by her guilty conscience due to the hypocrisy of her father, who was a deacon at church but a devil at home, she decided to live exactly as she pleased. But her decision to live selfishly did not make her happy. Instead, she became a slave to her emotional feelings, and nearly died when she stopped eating food for days. By God’s grace, she met a Christian boy who introduced her to Bible study when she was at the University. But Bible study for her was a means to get the husband she wanted. So she absolutely rejected God’s word and the counsel of her Bible teacher as total nonsense. Still, she had to keep coming to Bible study, partly because of her boyfriend, but partly because she wanted to believe that there was still hope. Then one day, she studied the story of Jesus who healed the invalid man. When she read how the man was healed by obeying Jesus’ divine command, she saw in Jesus the power of God to make her well. When she saw how the man forgot Jesus’ name and accused him of breaking the Sabbath, she saw herself as the same sinner before God. She repented of her sin. And she decided to listen to Jesus’ voice and get up off the mat of her sinful habits and selfishness. It was not easy. But God helped this one young woman to get up and leave her life of sin. She married the Christian boy by faith. But she did not take her prize and run. She and her husband have grown more faithful since marriage. It is an unbelievable story. But it is a true story. Everyone who hears Jesus’ divine voice and listens to his command can leave their life of sin and live from now on as the holy child of God.

May God bless each of us to believe that in Jesus, “there is now no condemnation.” May God bless each of us to hear his divine voice and leave our life of sin. May God bless each of us to practice Jesus’ shepherd heart, by helping our Bible students to confront who they really are before the Almighty God.

Let’s read together our key verse. “‘Then neither do I condemn you,’ Jesus declared. ‘Go now and leave your life of sin.’”