



***Theme: Tell Me Something Good –
Good News in the Gospel of John
“Murderous Men, a Silent Crowd,
and a Woman Caught in the Middle”***

Sermon preached by Jeff Huber, March 7-8, 2026, at Summit Church, Durango

Weekly Memory Verse:

⁴ The Word gave life to everything that was created, and his life brought light to everyone. – John 1:4

VIDEO Sermon Intro

SLIDE “Murderous Men, a Silent Crowd, and a Woman Caught in the Middle”

This week I have found myself thinking about people who are caught in the middle. Have you ever been caught in the middle of something that you had nothing to do with but found yourself paying the price? When I was in 6th grade at a new school I was asked to go and get the rubber balls for PE like this one. I brought them into the gym, and the boys were on one side of the gym and the girls on the other. I didn't really know the routine, so I dumped the balls out of the bag and one of them rolled towards the boys. One of them picked up

the ball and chucked it at the girls and hit this sweet, innocent girl on the back of head. She fell to the floor and banged her nose and blood went everywhere! I found this photo someone posted in the public online art portfolio, and it sums it up well. Clearly this has been an issue for many as I found lots of fun photos!

GRAPHIC **Girl hit in head with ball**

GRAPHIC **Boy hit in head with ball**

GRAPHIC **Ball flies toward boy**

I love this last one as you know it's coming, but you can't stop it! I remember running over to the girl to see if she was okay, and just then the teacher walked in. She asked who did this and all the boys pointed at me. The new kid did it! Never mind that I had a ball in my hand. I just looked guilty. I end up running laps and then in the principal's office. One of the girls finally came forward and my good name was cleared, but it was not a great way to start off in a new school! I never did fit in there, but luckily, we moved after just a year or so.

That's life sometimes though, isn't it. Sometimes we innocently **get hit** by a ball. Sometimes we **throw the ball, not really thinking** about the consequences. Sometimes we hurt someone when we **don't mean to**. Sometimes our **anger gets the best of us**. And sometimes, we are caught in the middle because we are mortal, fragile, frail, imperfect human beings, and sometimes life is not fair or just.

I visited this week with someone who **lost their job** because there was a downsizing. They were even told by their employer they were **doing a good job**, but their position just wasn't needed anymore. I met someone who was **detained by Immigration** and Customs Enforcement because they were in the wrong place at the wrong time and spent several days in a detention center. We saw that play out here in our community, setting off a firestorm and appropriate anger, which then escalated.

I received an email Friday from someone I met in **Bethlehem** who hosted us when we went to the Holy Land, asking for **prayers as missiles and bombs** went overhead. I also received a prayer request from a pastor who has **members stuck in the middle east** with fighting raging around them. I found myself thinking of the innocent civilians in **Iran**, many of whom put their **lives at risk to protest the regime** that the war is attempting to topple. I think of my **nephew and niece** in the army, and other service members, including **those who lost their lives** in the opening days of the war. I said each one of those names out loud on Friday and prayed for their families. **Some have chosen** to put their lives at risk, but many are caught in the middle with **no control or power to change their circumstances**.

This is not a new part of being human, being caught in the middle. The question I want us to wrestle with today is this.

SLIDE Where do we turn when we are caught in the middle?

What is powerful is that the scriptures, and Jesus, give us some clear direction for when this happens in our lives. Today we are going to continue in the Gospel of John, longing for someone to **Tell Us Something Good**, when we are caught in the middle. We are reading through the Gospel of John together in this season of Lent, the 40 Days and 7 Sundays before we get to Easter, using our Meditation Moments. If you do not have a Bible, we will be happy to give you one at our Welcome Center in the atrium. If you're watching at home or online, you can download the Meditation Moments right off our website.

Each week we're going to focus on some background information that will help us understand the rest of the Gospel. Primarily we will be doing three things each week. My hope is that this information will help the Gospel of John come alive as we read it together.

SLIDE What is the historical background of John's Gospel?

SLIDE What is the Gospel writer trying to tell us about Jesus?

SLIDE How does Jesus in John impact my life?

John tells us why he wrote his Gospel at the end in chapter 20.

BIBLE

³⁰ The disciples saw Jesus do many other miraculous signs in addition to the ones recorded in this book. ³¹ But these are written so that you may continue to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing in him you will have life by the power of his name.

Understanding the historical background is helpful because John's gospel is written with **layers**. It is different from Matthew, Mark and Luke as they tell Jesus' life as more of a story, or synopsis, which is why they are called **synoptic gospels**. John's gospel is more poetic and layered because he wants us to know **WHO** Jesus is as Savior and Lord, **AND** what that means for our lives. As we understand the historical setting of a book in the bible, we **unlock a greater meaning** of the text. The historical setting helps us understand **WHY certain things were written**.

SLIDE Who is John?

The Gospel was named after John, the **son of Zebedee** who was one of the leading disciples. He was one of Jesus' **inner three—Peter, James and John**. In this Gospel, he refers to himself in the third person as, **“the disciple whom Jesus loved”** or **“the beloved disciple”**—as Jesus' closest and best friend. I am sure that upset the other disciples just a bit as they were a jealous lot, much like the rest of us. You might remember the story of John where he and his brother **wanted to be on the left and right hand of Jesus**. That tells us a bit about his personality when he was younger, that **he wanted to be seen as special**. Likely, John wrote this **after all the other disciples were dead** and gone.

The Gospel was written after the other gospels. Most scholars agree it was written somewhere **between 90 and 100 A.D.** John was

the longest living of the apostles, and **the only one not put to death for his faith**. He was **persecuted and had boiling oil poured** across his body. He was exiled to a **prison colony** on the **island of Patmos** and ended up living out his life in the **city of Ephesus**. This explains why there is more of a **Greek emphasis** in his Gospel, since he spent much of his later life in the Roman world. John lived until his **late 90's**, which was **unusual** in the first century.

With that in mind, we are going to jump into two stories today that speak to this idea of being caught in the middle. We have learned the Jesus is often in tension with Jewish leaders of the synagogue in John's gospel. During the time John is writing his gospel, the Jewish followers of Jesus were being kicked out of the synagogue and are caught in the middle between Jesus and Scribes and Pharisees. Let's start in John 5 with this interesting story.

BIBLE

² Inside the city, near the Sheep Gate, was the pool of Bethesda, with five covered porches. ³ Crowds of sick people—blind, lame, or paralyzed—lay on the porches. ⁵ One of the men lying there had been sick for thirty-eight years. ⁶ When Jesus saw him and knew he had been ill for a long time, he asked him, “Would you like to get well?”

⁷ “I can’t, sir,” the sick man said, “for I have no one to put me into the pool when the water bubbles up. Someone else always gets there ahead of me.”

⁸ Jesus told him, “Stand up, pick up your mat, and walk!”

⁹ Instantly, the man was healed! He rolled up his sleeping mat and began walking! But this miracle happened on the Sabbath, ¹⁰ so the Jewish leaders objected. They said to the man who was cured, “You can’t work on the Sabbath! The law doesn’t allow you to carry that sleeping mat!”

¹¹ But he replied, “The man who healed me told me, ‘Pick up your mat and walk.’”

¹² “Who said such a thing as that?” they demanded.

¹³ The man didn’t know, for Jesus had disappeared into the crowd. ¹⁴ But afterward Jesus found him in the Temple and told him, “Now you are well; so stop sinning, or something even worse may happen to you.” ¹⁵ Then the man went and told the Jewish leaders that it was Jesus who had healed him.

¹⁶ So the Jewish leaders began harassing Jesus for breaking the Sabbath rules. ¹⁷ But Jesus replied, “My Father is always working, and so am I.” ¹⁸ So the Jewish leaders tried all the harder to find a way to kill him. For he not only broke the Sabbath, he called God his Father, thereby making himself equal with God.

The text says the sick man had been laying by the pool for 38 years John 5:5, but we aren’t told why. We aren’t told what happened. Though most commentators say that the man must have sinned in some way to cause his condition since Jesus tells him to “stop sinning, or something worse may happen to you,” but the text says nothing of the sort. Some read this and assume it must have been some sort of sin which led to the man’s condition, or else why would Jesus say what he said about not sinning again?

There is a profound problem with this logic. First, if the man had been infirmed for 38 years, how old could he have been when he committed this *terrible* sin which caused God to strike him down as an invalid for the next four decades? I mean, what sort of terrible sin had this child from 38 years ago (or possibly a teenager) committed, which would cause God to punish him in such a terrible way?

And then, Jesus comes along and say, **“Now don’t do that again, or I’ll have to punish you even worse!”**

Does that sound anything like Jesus? Not the Jesus I know or the

one we find in the Gospels. I don't think sin led to this man being an invalid for 38 years, and I definitely don't think that Jesus was threatening this poor man with some greater punishment if he committed that sin again. So how then are we to understand Jesus' words to the man to stop sinning or something worse might happen?

SLIDE Sin is separation from God, others, and our self.

First, let's remember how we define sin. Sin is not about a list but describes a relationship. Jesus said we are to love God and love others as love ourselves. When we don't do that, when do things which separate us from God, others, or ourselves, then there is sin. With that in mind, let's take a closer look at this story and how the man being caught in the middle of Jesus and religious leaders experience separation from a God who comes in the person of Jesus to heal and restore, and not to punish.

Notice that it is not in the context of healing the man from being an invalid that Jesus says, "Stop sinning or something worse will happen to you." It is in the context of the religious leaders threatening the man's life because he had the audacity to carry his bedroll on the Sabbath in verse 10 which violates a rule of working on the Sabbath what was believed by those leaders to be "sin." They were threatening his life based on a parallel text to John 5 with **Numbers 15:32-35**.

BIBLE

³² One day while the people of Israel were in the wilderness, they discovered a man gathering wood on the Sabbath day. ³³ The people who found him doing this took him before Moses, Aaron, and the rest of the community. ³⁴ They held him in custody because they did not know what to do with him. ³⁵ Then the Lord said to Moses, "The man must be put to death! The whole community must stone him outside the camp."

Somebody sent me an e-mail this last week who is reading the

Bible from cover to cover this year and they asked me about why God seemed so mean in parts of the Old Testament. I sent them a sermon I did on this topic so if you're interested let us know and we'll point you to that, but for now hold onto this idea of someone being stoned to death for sinning as it's going to come up again in the only other place Jesus says anything like this in the Gospels that we'll look at in a few minutes. When Jesus tells the man, "Stop sinning or else something worse might happen to you," I think he says it with a sparkle in his eye, some satire in his voice, and a head nod toward the disapproving and judgmental religious leaders.

Essentially Jesus tells the man with soft sarcasm: "Oh no! You carried your bedroll on the Sabbath! How could you do such a terrible thing! You sinner! Stop it! If you don't, they're going to have your head."

Of course, although Jesus was speaking to the man with satirical humor, the situation was deadly serious as well, and Jesus knew it. It was true that if the man was not careful, the religious leaders would try to kill him simply because he carried his bedroll on the Sabbath. In fact, in verses 15-18, their murderous rage gets redirected toward Jesus because he is the one who told the man to carry his bedroll. The text says they sought for a way to kill Jesus. The "something worse" which was going to happen to the man is now directed toward Jesus.

So, was Jesus telling the man to, "Stop sinning or something worse will happen to you"? Yes, but it is more like this: "Stop 'sinning' or the sin police over there are going to kill you." Not only that, but when you align with them, you are separated from God, the One who brought healing into your life! Here's something I have learned in my life and as I have met with many people over the years as their pastor.

SLIDE Religious rules and judgment keep us from God.

I want to be clear that boundaries are important, and I don't think we should do whatever we feel like doing, or whatever makes us

happy, because that is hedonism and does not lead to life. Jesus is reminding us in this story that just because some says they are Christian doesn't mean they are following Jesus. I remind you of this often when I say that just because we keep something in a garage does not make it a car. Sometimes, we keep the trash in the garage, at least we do at our house to keep the bears out of it. There's probably another sermon in there as well, but we'll come back to it some other time.

GRAPHIC Lover's Lane UMC Sanctuary

I went to a conference for pastors last week, and it was hosted by a large church in the Dallas area. One of the churches we visited was Lover's Lane United Methodist Church which has a beautiful and very large stained-glass sanctuary. I took this picture and thought you might like to see it because it's rather stunning. What I found most powerful was how the church was founded by Reverend Tom Shipp in the 1950s as a ministry to people dealing with alcohol addiction living on the streets. He himself had been through recovery and he is one of the people that helped develop the 12-step program that now is known as Alcoholics Anonymous. He was sent as a missionary from another large United Methodist Church in Dallas and eventually was honored as man of the year in Texas in 1958.

GRAPHIC Rev Tom Shipp

Tom started the church by meeting people on the street and bringing them to his home to get sober. The church grew to several thousand people, and their focus was on recovery. That still is one of their primary ministries and they just opened this beautiful 12 step ministry building which is now the largest faith based inpatient recovery center.

GRAPHIC Twelfth Step Ministry at Lover's Lane

GRAPHIC Twelfth Step Ministry Interior

We had a chance to tour the space, and it is beautiful, but what is

most powerful is the story about how Tom would bring people off the streets to worship in the small Chapel they had at the time and people would often stop at the door and freeze. They would tell Tom that they couldn't come in the church because they were a sinner and Tom would lovingly put his arm around them and tell them that this is exactly where they needed to be. He didn't want the church to be a barrier, and he didn't want those who were in recovery to be caught in the middle between God and religious expectations. Unfortunately, part of Tom's story is that he died during a church finance meeting. Those of us who came to this conference were reminded not to allow ourselves to be destroyed by religious expectations and the institution of the church which can be both beautiful and create barriers.

It could also lead to death which is what we find in the next story that I want us to look at from John eight. I don't often take time to address some of the more technical issues regarding the trustworthiness and integrity of the Bible, but our text today is unique and calls for some additional comment.

In most of your Bibles you will see an explanation either in a footnote or in a sub-heading that precedes the passage that reads something like: "The Earliest Manuscripts do not include 7:53-8:11." In addition, the entire paragraph can be set off in brackets, again pointing to the fact that this portion of John is probably not part of the original gospel account that he wrote.

I am persuaded that this incident probably occurred. Let us remember that John tells us in chapter 20, verse 30 that we read earlier: **"Jesus did many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book."** The last line of John's gospel, John 21:25 reads...

BIBLE

²⁵ Jesus also did many other things. If they were all written down, I suppose the whole world could not contain the books

that would be written.

I strongly suspect that this story of the murderous men, a silent crowd, and the woman caught in the middle is one of them. But it's important that we understand why most scholars think that this narrative was not part of the Gospel of John when it was first written but was added centuries later.

This story is missing from all the Greek manuscripts of John before the fifth century. All the church fathers omit this passage when they comment on John's gospel. They move directly from 7:52 to 8:12 because it flows seamlessly. What we are dealing with here is known as the science of **textual criticism**. I'm not going to bore you with any additional details about the nature of this discipline. Let me simply say that we do not possess any of the actual original manuscripts of the New Testament. By "original manuscripts" I mean the actual papyrus document on which John and other biblical authors wrote. I think this is actually a good thing that we don't have any of those original documents. If we were in possession of the very document that John wrote we would be inclined to turn it into an idol and perhaps even charge money for people to see it, touch it, and even worship it.

Instead, the books of the New Testament were preserved for us by faithful, hardworking copyists. We shouldn't be bothered in the least by the fact that we don't possess the original manuscripts of the books of Scripture. Julius Caesar's *Gallic Wars* were composed between 58 and 50 years before the time of Christ. There are only ten existing manuscripts of the *Gallic Wars* and all of them date from the tenth century AD or later, in other words a thousand years after the time of Christ. There are twenty manuscripts of *Livy's Roman History* written roughly during the time when Jesus was alive. The famous historian Tacitus is known for his treatises called *Histories* and *Annals*. Yet only two manuscripts exist for each of them and one of them dates from the ninth century and the other from the eleventh! There are only eight manuscripts of the *History* of Thucydides who lived 460–400 BC.

No one doubts the authenticity of these documents. No one rejects them because copies of the original are few in number and date from centuries after they were written. Now, compare that with the manuscripts and partial manuscripts for the New Testament. We have a total of **5,801 manuscripts** of the NT documents. This enables textual critics to examine the variations and determine with a high, high degree of probability which stories are original and authentic, and which are not. And the best judgment of most textual critics is that our story today was most likely not part of John's original gospel record. The bottom line is this. We have good, solid reasons to have more confidence in the integrity and truthfulness of the Bible than we do for any other document from the ancient world.

GRAPHIC The New Testament Documents

One of my required texts in seminary was this one by FF Bruce on the New Testament Documents. He is seen as the foremost expert on our what we have in our Bible today and he writes.

“While most scholars agree that the beginning of John 8 was not in the original manuscripts of the Gospel of John, we should not think: ‘Oh my, everything is up for grabs now,’ or ‘How can I count on any text?’ The evidence for our New Testament writings is ever so much greater than the evidence for many writings of classical authors, the authenticity of which no one dreams of questioning...If the New Testament were a collection of secular writings, their authenticity would generally be regarded as beyond all doubt.”

Although this story was probably not part of John's original gospel record, there is a strong likelihood that it occurred precisely as written here. Many preachers and teachers choose to skip over the text, but we should not. I believe there is much for us to learn from it. Furthermore, even though it is unlikely that this was a part of the original gospel account that John wrote, what if it really was? To ignore it, to not

preach it, runs the risk of us losing out on the profound lessons we find.

GRAPHIC Feast of Tabernacles

Let's set the scene. For seven days the holy city of Jerusalem had been flooded with pilgrims from all over the ancient world, gathered in Jerusalem to celebrate Sukkot, also called the Feast of Tabernacles. For seven days they had all lived in makeshift huts or booths, while giving thanks to God for having blessed them with a bountiful harvest.

On the eighth day John 7:53 tells us that many of the people had either returned home or were making plans to leave Jerusalem. But Jesus went to the Mount of Olives, perhaps to pray, and then made his way to the Temple early in the morning. It was customary for scribes and teachers of the Law to sit on the outer court steps and gather their students around them.

Abruptly and quite rudely, the religious leaders interrupted Jesus, bullied their way through the crowd, and placed at the feet of Jesus a woman who they claimed had been caught in the very act of committing adultery. No one likes to be interrupted. It is disruptive. It breaks concentration. It makes others feel uncomfortable. But here they were and there she was. They looked at Jesus, pointed at the woman, and said:

BIBLE

⁴“Teacher,” they said to Jesus, “this woman was caught in the act of adultery. ⁵The law of Moses says to stone her. What do you say?”

It's important to know that under Jewish law at the time it was very difficult to prove adultery. They insisted on far more rigorous standards of proof than most people. I remember several years ago when a prominent TV evangelist was seen walking out of a hotel in Europe holding hands with another prominent, female TV evangelist. The internet exploded with accusations of adultery, since both were

married to someone else at the time. That would not have passed muster in the first century. It wasn't enough back then to have seen two people leaving a room together or even to have seen them kissing. There had to be at least two eyewitnesses who could testify that they simultaneously observed the bodily movements of the people that allowed for no other interpretation than that they were engaged in sexual intercourse. The motivation of these religious leaders is not left to speculation. John tells us exactly what they had in mind.

BIBLE

⁶They were trying to trap him into saying something they could use against him, but Jesus stooped down and wrote in the dust with his finger.

Clearly, they were not there because of moral outrage over what they believed to be sin. They were not there because of their concern for the growing laxity of morals in the community. They were not there because of their commitment to justice. Their only motive was to trap Jesus. They wanted to find grounds on which to accuse him, not the woman. They couldn't have cared less about the woman. It was Jesus they were after. He was on trial, not her.

Jesus seemed to know this immediately. How do we know this? Because they only brought the woman to him. Where was the man? The scripture they were quoting Leviticus 20:10 and Deuteronomy 22.

BIBLE

²²“If a man is discovered committing adultery, both he and the woman must die. In this way, you will purge Israel of such evil.

The possible reasons the man was not there are limited.

- Perhaps he had escaped. When caught in the act, he jumped up and ran away before they could apprehend him.
- Perhaps they deliberately let him go.
- Maybe he bribed them to gain his freedom.

- They may have intentionally set him up with the woman so they could use her against Jesus.
- They may have believe that only women who committed adultery were morally accountable. Just like Adame blamed Eve, it was always the woman's fault.
- Or maybe the woman was set up and didn't even commit the act but was just being used to get to Jesus.
- The worst option is that she was sexually assaulted.

There are other unanswered questions. Was she single and the man was married? Was she betrothed or engaged to be married? If she was married, where is her husband in the story? I have heard some people assume she was a prostitute, which also is not in the text. What's most important is that their intent was to entrap Jesus on the horns of a dilemma and thereby obtain grounds on which to accuse him of a crime. They wanted him dead and we see this rage in this group of religious leaders in every one of the gospels.

We also know from [John 18:31](#) that Rome had forbidden the Jews from putting anyone to death. The Jewish people could pass sentence on a capital crime, but they did not have the right to execute someone. Rome reserved that right. If Jesus were to insist that this woman be executed, this could be twisted into an illegality that might serve as the basis for an accusation against him in a Roman court. Combined with Jesus' implicit claim to be a king, the Romans would feel justified in acting against him.

On the other hand, if Jesus refused to demand that she be executed for adultery, the Pharisees could twist this so that Jesus would appear to be in defiance of the Law of Moses. His authority as a teacher would be destroyed and his reputation among the people would be undermined. If he upheld the Law of Moses and insisted that she be stoned to death, he would be supporting an unpopular position as far as the crowds go and would appear to them to be calloused and

uncaring and unforgiving. What was he to do? Strangely, Jesus, “bent down and wrote with his finger on the ground.”

So, why did Jesus write in the dirt and what did he write? There are several possibilities. Some believe it was to **imitate the Roman magistrate** who would first **write down the sentence** of the criminal and then read it aloud. But if that is the case, why does he write it again, as verse 8 indicates that he did?

Others say that he wrote Jeremiah 17.

BIBLE

¹³ O Lord, the hope of Israel, all who turn away from you will be disgraced. They will be buried in the dust of the earth, for they have abandoned the Lord, the fountain of living water.

There is also the possibility that what was important isn't what Jesus wrote, but the mere **fact that he wrote**. We read these words in Exodus 31.

BIBLE

¹⁸ When the Lord finished speaking with Moses on Mount Sinai, he gave him the two stone tablets inscribed with the terms of the covenant, written by the finger of God.

Writing with his finger, Jesus is making an implicit claim to be God, the author of the law that was given to Moses. Some respond by asking, “What purpose would that serve? How would it address the question of whether the woman should be killed?” The answer is that it would be Jesus' way of saying that **he now is greater than the Law** of Moses, that he is the ultimate standard for determining what is right and wrong in the age of the new covenant.

There are a few who argue that Jesus was merely **doodling**, perhaps to calm his anger and to collect his thoughts. He was buying time to think. It may also be that Jesus was **writing down the sins** of his accusers. Another scholar says that the first time he wrote it was the

words of Exodus 23

BIBLE

² “You must not follow the crowd in doing wrong. When you are called to testify in a dispute, do not be swayed by the crowd to twist justice.

When he wrote the second time it was the words of verse 7.

BIBLE

⁷ “Be sure never to charge anyone falsely with evil. Never sentence an innocent or blameless person to death, for I never declare a guilty person to be innocent.

The honest answer is that we simply don't know, and probably never will know what he was writing in the dirt. More important than his writing was his speaking. These have become perhaps the most well-known, and possibly misused, words in the Bible. Non-Christians especially like to quote them! What did Jesus mean when he said...

BIBLE

⁷ They kept demanding an answer, so he stood up again and said, “All right, but let the one who has never sinned throw the first stone!”

I'm pretty sure the phrase, “Be careful what you ask for,” comes from this story! The brilliance of the response of Jesus in his response can't be understated. It's a vivid reminder that we ALL do things we wish we hadn't done or say things we wish we hadn't done. We ALL get stuck in the middle of what it means to be human, causing harm sometimes on purpose, and sometimes when we don't intend. It's easy to read these stories and think of ourselves as separate from them, but Jesus invites us ALL into the story at this point. Just to let that sink in, Jesus gives them and us space to digest what that phrase might mean as the story continues.

BIBLE

⁸Then he stooped down again and wrote in the dust.

⁹When the accusers heard this, they slipped away one by one, beginning with the oldest, until only Jesus was left in the middle of the crowd with the woman.

Let's stop here again in this story to note an important detail. We tend to read this story, and portray it in film, in ways that it's just Jesus and the woman. Many translations also make it seem that way, but I have spent lots of time this week studying this text in the Greek and looking at what scholars have written, and reading 20 different translations, and I believe that when this moment in the story happens, Jesus and the woman have company. I mean, someone had to be there to write down the story! There is this idea of "the crowd" in this story which is a layer John wants us to get.

Let's not forget that it will be the crowd that shouts, **"Give us Barabbas? Crucify him!"** It's the crowd that **mocks Jesus** and shouted at him to **save himself**. It's the crowd he speaks ABOUT when he says, **"Father, forgive them. They know not what they are doing."** Remembering those important moments helps us understand and make sense of the end of this story.

BIBLE

¹⁰Then Jesus stood up again and said to the woman, "Where are your accusers? Didn't even one of them condemn you?"

¹¹"No, Lord," she said.

And Jesus said, "Neither do I. Go and sin no more."

Let's remember that in the original Greek text there are no punctuation marks or quotations. What we find in each translation is based on how each translator reads the text and the story. One of the reasons SOME early church leaders did not want to include this story in the text is not just because it was from a later time, but also because at

its face it doesn't sound like Jesus. That phrase "go and sin no more" is not used by Jesus anywhere in the gospels but here. Early church leaders argued that not only did this not sound like Jesus, but this story would be USED by others to push people away from Jesus, separating them from the church and healing.

They recognized that yes, Jesus says something SIMILAR in John 5 that we looked at earlier to the man who was healed when he told the man to pick his mat and walk. It seems the same, but it is very different.

BIBLE

¹⁴ But afterward Jesus found him in the Temple and told him, "Now you are well; so stop sinning, or something even worse may happen to you."

¹⁵ Then the man went and told the Jewish leaders that it was Jesus who had healed him.

This is a very different phrasing in a different context. Notice that right after Jesus says this to him, he goes looking for the Jewish leaders, separating himself from God and the healing he just received. The religious leadership comes between this man and Jesus, taking him right back to the place of brokenness. So that still begs a question, even when reading the direct translation from the Greek as Jesus speaks to the woman caught in the middle.

SLIDE How do we read, "Go, and no more sin"?

We know Jesus was not requiring absolute sinlessness before one can rightfully participate in a criminal proceeding. If he were, there could never be any civil justice or church discipline. As the apostle Paul reminds us, all of us are sinners. If absolute sinlessness is required, there could never be a court of law or witnesses, no juries, no attorneys. If Jesus is here demanding that you be sinless before you can testify against a person in a courtroom, you have a wonderful way to justify your refusal to serve on a jury. "I'm sorry Your Honor, but I'm not

without sin, so I am not permitted by Jesus to speak concerning the alleged criminal acts of the accused.”

Others have taken this to mean that if you are a sinner you should refrain from ever judging or criticizing others. But Jesus gives explicit instructions on how to respond to those who have sinned against us, and he doesn't require that we remain silent. Furthermore, the statement in Matthew 7, “Judge not, that you be not judged,” is not ruling out all judgment. It is ruling out hypocritical judgment. He goes on in Matthew 7:15 to tell us to be alert to the presence of false prophets, something that would be impossible if because of our own sin we are prohibited from making such moral evaluations.

This leaves us with only a few possible explanations. First, Jesus may be saying, “He who is without the sin of adultery, let him cast the first stone.” In other words, before you condemn someone for a particular sin, be sure you haven't committed it yourself. Or perhaps he means that an adulteress cannot be condemned and executed by other adulterers. However, is it likely that all her accusers were guilty of adultery? I doubt it.

Another possible explanation is that Jesus is questioning their competence to serve as legal witnesses against her. He is saying, “He who has not failed to meet all the qualifications of a witness, let him be the first to cast a stone.” Or again, “He who has fully complied with the Law of Moses, let him cast the first stone.” Thus, he would be challenging them to demonstrate that they were qualified as witnesses to bring charges against her. The point Jesus is making is that none of those present who were charging her with adultery were legally competent witnesses because both the man and the woman had to be executed. And the man in this case is absent.

There is one other possibility. Jesus is not just talking to her, but also to the silent “crowd.” Yes, her accusers had left, but not the crowd. They were still standing there watching. Some had probably been

hoping for a good old-fashioned stoning. Some may have silently questioned the proceedings. Some may have felt sorry for the woman because they understood this was a set up to get Jesus and she was caught in the middle. They may have just been glad THEY were not the ones caught in the middle!

Let me suggest that this story is NOT about the woman. It's not about the crowd, or even the murderous men. This story is about where Jesus stands when the people he came to love and serve are caught in the middle.

SLIDE The Mercy of the Master in the Middle

We are reminded that any attempt to be holy on any basis other than the grace of God and the forgiveness of sin he offers will produce hypocrisy and arrogance. Legalism is not the answer. It is because God has provided grace in and through Jesus that we are to pursue holiness of life. We receive God's grace and we then respond by living different, both as religious leaders, the crowd, and men and women who all fall short and get caught in the middle of life.

What was this woman feeling as they dragged her into the crowd, accusing her publicly of immorality, placing her life on the line, treating her like a dog, without regard for personal dignity? They showed her no respect. They had no concern for her reputation or her feelings. They were hardened toward her and cared nothing at all for the shame they were heaping upon her.

Someone once defined **shame as "a hemorrhage of the soul."** It is a dreaded, deep-seated sense of personal worthlessness. It is the fear that what we have tried so hard to conceal is now out in the open for everyone to see. We've been found out. Whatever dark secrets we thought were hidden from sight are now exposed for all to see and for all to mock. All our efforts to keep it from the public eye have failed. To feel shame is to be caught naked, metaphorically speaking, and defenseless.

This woman must surely have been **crushed with shame**. Even if she was innocent of the charge, her reputation was destroyed. She was emotionally vulnerable, helpless, and exposed to public rebuke. But **Jesus did not exploit her condition**. He did not cry out, “Shame on you for your part in this!” No, he sought to **cover her**. He gave her hope. Basically, Jesus is saying, “**My beautiful daughter**, I am sorry you got caught up in this. They were after me; not you. They framed you to get at me. I want to protect you from them. **I want to stand with you in the middle of this mess.**”

SLIDE Don't cast stones

Let me finish by sharing what the next best steps might be for us considering this story. First, please, please, please ... don't be a religious bigot. If Jesus is the only one who has the right to condemn and judge a person, but chooses not to twice in this story, then we all better think twice (or seventy times seven!) before we cast the first stone. Don't call for people's jobs, or pray for their house to burn down, or tell them that because of their life choices or circumstances they are headed for hell. That's not our job and we make ourselves into God when we treat people that way, and no one responds well to self-righteousness. That sort of behavior looks less like Jesus and more like the religious leaders who sought to kill Jesus.

SLIDE Don't cast stones
God NEVER turns away from us

Second, recognize what sin is (and isn't). Sin damages our relationship with God and with one another and with our selves. Sin destroys our lives and causes emotional, financial, physical, spiritual, and psychological harm. The reason God wants us to stop sinning is simply because God wants what is best for us, and sin does not result in God's best. God came in the person of Jesus to restore us to a right relationship with God and others, and that begins with us allowing Jesus to be Lord and Savior.

Our sin doesn't cause God to turn away from us, reject us, hate us, or cast us out. Our sin grieves God because God knows how much sin hurts, and as our loving Father, God doesn't want us to hurt. God is not concerned with our sin as much as God is concerned with US. God made us to love us, not to condemn us.

SLIDE **Don't cast stones**
God NEVER turns away from us
Invite God into the messy middle spaces

Finally, let me suggest that we stop sinning not by TRYING to stop sinning, but by walking with Jesus and inviting God into the dark places of our life. When a room is dark, we don't chase away the darkness by talking against it, praying against it, and commanding the darkness to leave. No, darkness naturally recedes when light enters the room. That's probably why the very next line in John 8 is...

BIBLE

¹² **Jesus spoke to the people once more and said, "I am the light of the world. If you follow me, you won't have to walk in darkness, because you will have the light that leads to life."**

If we want to stop being separated from God, others and ourselves, we invite God into the darkness and watch the light of God's love cast out all sin. We then can hear this variation on these words Jesus said to the woman caught in the middle.

SLIDE **Go, sin is no more...**

Let's pray...

SLIDE **Prayer**

March 7-8 Order

1. Ryan welcomes people.
2. Song – “Good News”
3. Song – “Glorious Day”
4. Jeff welcomes and shares:
 - A. QR Code
 - B. Invites people to greet each other.
5. Sermon Video Intro
6. Sermon
7. Med Moments
8. Offering
9. Song – “No Longer Slaves”
10. Prayer and Lord’s Prayer
11. Care Ministers
12. The Bridge
13. Prayer Quilt for Carrie Forsythe
14. Closing Prayer