

GIVE IT UP: JUDGING OTHERS

JOHN 8:1-11

John 8:1–11 (NIV84)

¹ But Jesus went to the Mount of Olives. ² At dawn he appeared again in the temple courts, where all the people gathered around him, and he sat down to teach them. ³ The teachers of the law and the Pharisees brought in a woman caught in adultery. They made her stand before the group ⁴ and said to Jesus, "Teacher, this woman was caught in the act of adultery. ⁵ In the Law Moses commanded us to stone such women. Now what do you say?" ⁶ 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. ⁷ 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.*" ⁸ Again he stooped down and wrote on the ground. 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.

¹⁰ Jesus straightened up and asked her, "*Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?*" ¹¹ "No one, sir," she said. "*Then neither do I condemn you,*" Jesus declared. "*Go now and leave your life of sin.*"

Today, we continue our sermon series on Give It Up. We have been sharing the past six weeks about things that God wants us to give up – Control, Greed, Pride, Success, Enemies, and False Security – not just for forty days of Lent, but as a way of living in our day-to-day lives. This week, I will focus on "Judging Others" and we will look more closely at what His Word teaches us about having a judgmental attitude towards others, those interact with in our lives. Those, who may behave, or live, in ways that don't necessarily sit well with us.

When I reflect on our passage in John 8 today, I can't help but think about my lifelong journey alongside my sister, Brenda, who passed away and went to be with the Lord on August 31, 2016 at the young age of 48. Her body could no longer fight off infection as her immune system had shut down. The result of decades of abuse as she battled drug addiction most of her life. As her brother, I had many seasons, and I thought many reasons, over 35 years to stand in judgement and condemn my sister for the stronghold addiction had taken on her life.

In my times of disgust and judgement, the Lord would remind me that Brenda was also battling mental health issues as she suffered with bipolar disorder. My sister faced anxiety, depression, episodes of anger, aggressiveness, moodiness, and impulsiveness.

The Lord would convict me to stop judging and start praying. The Lord would call me to stop pulling away and start engaging in compassionate, loving ways to speak truth into her life. The Lord would guide me to look not at her sinful behavior but the broken daughter that He loved and desired to be reconciled to Him...

The Most Important Take-Away

As we consider what it means to give up judging others, the most important point I want you to leave with today is simply this:

We are called to live out and stand strong for His truth, and to do so in a spirit of humility, tenderness, and kindness as we seek Christ's ultimate goal bringing about **repentance, reconciliation and restoration** – in our own lives and in the lives of those God brings into our path.

God's Word calls us clearly to recognize that The Lord has anointed one supreme Judge of all—Jesus Christ—and that He alone has the authority to weigh our right and wrong motives and behaviors. When we look towards others with a judging heart, our purpose should center primarily on restoration and reconciliation. For those who have not yet responded in faith to Christ, we need to show the love of Christ and guide them to His Word so they may repent and be reconciled to Him. Within the body of Christ, we need to help one another grow in God's truth, helping each other to recognize when we have strayed, and speak truth in love to bring forward a heart of repentance, restoration and reconciliation – both, in relation to God and in connection with each other in Christian fellowship.

As we go through any given day, Christ guides us to make judgements between right and wrong on the basis of biblical discernment. He draws us to His Word for guidance on principles, morals and truth. He seeks for us to align to His teachings and commands. To make this simple, we should not judge others based on our own sentiments or personal beliefs. We are called by Christ to examine our lives by His biblical values. The same biblical principles we so easily use to challenge as sin in the lives of others. We are called to live out these principles ourselves, and to do so in a spirit of compassion and love as we seek Christ's ultimate desire, for each of us and those around us – **repentance, reconciliation and restoration**.

When we look more closely at the passage in John 8 as Jesus comes alongside this adulterous woman, we are brought into a scene where the Jewish religious leaders are trying to trap Jesus. Their purpose was not to enforce the law Moses brought forward. Their purpose was to use this woman as a pawn to achieve their wicked plans to have Jesus violate Roman law by ordering them to stone her. You see Jews, in this time, were not permitted to carry out executions on their own, even for religious purposes.

In response to their question, Jesus' turns the tables on them and shows the accusers that they are in no position to judge unless they hold themselves up to the same law. *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."* Jesus' in His answer disarmed them.

He spoke of throwing a stone, and therefore could not in any way be accused of failing to uphold the law of Moses. The qualification He gives to those surrounding the woman, for them to throw their stones, prevented any one of them from acting. By saying that only a person without sin could throw the first stone, Jesus highlights the need for each of us to show compassion and forgiveness before passing judgement on anyone.

In Matthew 7:1 as Jesus gives His sermon on the mount, he tells his followers "Do not judge, or you too will be judged." We can see some strong parallels to the teaching Jesus brings forward to his disciples, as he also does to those condemning the woman who committed adultery. Many times people use this passage in Matthew and pull it out of context to argue that God desires us to take a hands off approach to holding each other accountable to His moral standards.

A former pastor I served under during my time in seminary, Eric Bargerhuff wrote a book entitled, *The Most Misused Verses in the Bible: Surprising Ways God's Word is Misunderstood*. Pastor Bargerhuff points out, "when we take a closer look at the context of Matthew 7 and the teachings of the rest of Scripture, it is clear that this verse cannot be used to substantiate unrestrained moral freedom, autonomy, and independence. This was not Jesus' intent. He was not advocating a hands-off approach to moral accountability, refusing to allow anyone to make moral judgments in any sense.

Quite the opposite, Jesus was explicitly rebuking the hypocrisy of the Pharisees, who were quick to see the sins of others but were blind and ***unwilling to hold themselves accountable*** to the same standard they were imposing on everyone else."

When we see others caught or trapped in sin, are we quick to pass judgement? Are we quick to call them out and condemn them? If we do so, Jesus shows us that we must hold ourselves to the same standards. We cannot act as though we never sin. We need to recognize God's role to judge the sin and the sinner. We cannot expect to be held to a different standard. We cannot look for repentance, reconciliation and restoration from the Lord for our own sin if we cannot offer the same to someone else.

We are called to look to the Holy Spirit at work within us as He guides us towards mutual encouragement and accountability relationships. We are called to spur one another on and encourage each other in love... to live out our lives in obedience and in alignment to His Word.

In James 5:19–20, His Word highlights the need for accountability and the call on our lives to do so. It reads, ¹⁹ *My brothers, if one of you should wander from the truth and someone should bring him back,* ²⁰ *remember this: Whoever turns a sinner from the error of his way will save him from death and cover over a multitude of sins.* And then in Galatians 6:1–2, we are given additional guidance, ¹ *Brothers, if someone is caught in a sin, you who are spiritual should restore him gently. But watch yourself, or you also may be tempted.* ² *Carry each other's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ.*"

Returning to our passage in John 8, I love the insight we are given as to what happens next with the Jews who surrounded the adulteress woman. And after hearing Christ convict them, we are told *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 accusers slip away, one-by-one, with the oldest going first. Sometimes, our stage in life and experience can help us temper our self-righteousness. The older men may have been more aware of the sin that was penetrating their lives and begrudgingly admit that they must turn from their judgement because of their own sin. But regardless of our age in life, we need to look closely at where sin may be taking a foothold, recognize our sinful nature, turn from our sinful behavior and seek God's forgiveness and mercy.

After everyone has departed, Jesus now rises alongside the woman. We could easily expect this to be a moment for the Lord to pass judgement and condemn her as only He can. Instead, we are given a firsthand perspective as Jesus models for us how we are to behave. ¹⁰ *Jesus straightened up and asked her, "Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?"* ¹¹ *"No one, sir," she said. "Then neither do I condemn you," Jesus declared. "Go now and leave your life of sin."* Rather than condemning her, Jesus allows her to realize that her sin is no worse than the sins of others. He washes over her with a recognition that all have sinned.

He then turns back to her sinful behavior and offers "truth in love." He speaks boldly into her life calling her to confession and repentance looking for her to be transformed by His Word and expecting her to leave behind her sinful ways. Jesus shows her grace and mercy, but He still calls her to a life of holiness and obedience. He does this by giving her the spiritual awareness she needs to go and leave her sin behind. He offers her an opportunity to seek repentance, and in return receive His reconciliation and restoration.

Max Lucado in his devotional entitled *Six Hours One Friday* speculates that if we could somehow transport the adulteress woman to Calvary and let her stand at the base of the Cross . . . she would have seen Christ and said, "Yes, That's Him." She would have recognized His voice. Although raspier and weaker on the cross, His words would have been very similar, "Father, forgive them. . ." And she would have recognized His eyes. Eyes that saw her not as she was, but as she was intended to be.

There will be times in our lives where we are called to be just like Jesus. Where we will rise up alongside someone who has drifted off the path of righteousness and wander down the streets of darkness. Showing the love Christ within us, we are called to share the truth of Jesus' Words and help save them from the destructive power of their sin. From his own example, we know Jesus does not prohibit us from offering moral guidance or mutual accountability. What he forbids is our being condemning, prideful, and hypocritical by passing judgement in condemnation of others.

Discerning right from wrong in our lives is not always black and white, it is sometimes hard to discern. So how should we respond to those who have made wrong choices? How should we judge others? Let's follow Jesus as our model... we should all be slow to condemn, bold enough to share His truth, and quick to show compassion as we move our ourselves and others towards a heart of atonement -- knowing we can receive His grace, knowing we can be reconciled and restored through His Spirit of love.

Like Jesus, we need to be able to offer "truth in love" to those around us. While at the same time, we need hear His voice speak into our own lives as He is asking the same of us. Jesus stands ready to forgive any sin in our lives when we respond with a change of heart and come to Him in true confession and repentance. With His help and guidance, we can walk away from our sinful ways. In His power, we can turn from any wrongdoing in our lives. Let us pray...

Worship song... First Service: "God of Mercy, God of Light" Hymn 425 in your green hymnal.

Second Service (during our offering): "Jesus We Love You"