

John 8:1-11

Remembering Our Deliverance from the Condemnation of Sin

Neither do I condemn thee – v. 11

We know nothing about the lady mentioned in our text except that she was an adulteress. She was apprehended in the very act of her sin in order to serve the purpose of the scribes and Pharisees in seeking cause against Christ. Her sin meant little or nothing to the band of Jews that caught her in her sin. The embarrassment and humiliation they would cause her meant nothing to them either. They saw in her an opportunity – an opportunity to exercise leverage over Christ.

If they could manipulate Christ into condemning her – they would gain leverage over Christ with the Roman government. The Jews didn't have the right under the Roman empire to carry out executions. On the other hand if Christ would not condemn her then they gained leverage over Christ with the law of Moses. They were right, you see, when they said in v. 5 – *Now Moses, in the law, commanded us that such should be stoned.*

They knew the law of Moses. They knew the words of Lev. 20:10 which says *And the man who committeth adultery with another man's wife, even he who committeth adultery with his neighbor's wife, the adulterer and the adulteress shall surely be put to death.*

Deuteronomy 22:22-24 elaborates the same thing but specifies the means of execution to be stoning. And the purpose for the precept is given twice in the space of those 3 verses – *So shalt thou put away evil from among you.*

It's good for the Lord's people to note the sin and its penalty in such a day as ours when this sin has become commonplace. You find it in the world – and unfortunately you find it to a great degree in the church. It's so widespread that it's not uncommon for preachers to be named as those who fall into it. And such is our lack of sensitivity to it that you can find preachers that have fallen into it and still occupy their positions. *It's only a little sin* – they reason – *because it is so common.*

But as these verses from the Old Testament reveal – it's a sin that God deems worthy of death. And so we find the scribes and Pharisees bringing this adulteress woman to Christ – looking for a way not so much to pass condemnation over the woman – but they're searching for a way to pass sentence of judgment upon Christ.

They obviously didn't know who they were dealing with when they sought to exercise their treachery. They were dealing with one who spoke and taught – not like them – not like the scribes (Mt. 7:29) but as one having authority. When Christ spoke – His word was attended with power. We see that most plainly here when in a single sentence the entire group is smitten with conviction – *He that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone at her* – He says in v. 7.

They had no authority to condemn her – they fell into the same category as she did. The scribes and Pharisees were sinners – some commentators suggest they were guilty of the very sin they were bringing against this woman. But now the scene intensifies. The other guilty sinners are dispersed following their conviction.

But now she stands alone in the presence of the One who does have the power to condemn her. The story certainly foreshadows an awful scene that awaits every sinner. Every sinner, you see, will occupy the same place as this woman. Every sinner will stand before Christ when Christ sits on His throne in judgment. And just like this woman – every sinner’s sins will be exposed.

There is, however, a marked contrast between that day to come and the story we’ve read in John 8. On that day to come judgment will be executed – *Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels* (Mt. 25:41). In the story we’ve read, however, judgment is stayed. *Neither do I condemn thee* – Christ says in v. 11.

What a tremendous manifestation of grace we find in these words. It really doesn’t matter that much who else does condemn you – if Christ be for you who can be against you? If the One who has all power and authority committed unto Him says He doesn’t condemn – then it matters little who else thinks they can.

This is a word, then, we need to hear from Christ – *neither do I condemn thee*. And in the gospel it comes to us as a promise. *He that believeth on him is not condemned* – Jn. 3:18; *Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that heareth my word, and believeth on him that sent me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation; but is passed from death unto life* – (John 5:24).

Christ’s word to this adulteress – and His promise to believers is not a word that He could speak arbitrarily. He could not simply, based on the prerogative of His deity, forgive and forget this woman’s sin. It would cost Him His life blood to make this pronouncement to this woman. And it cost Him no less – to hold out the promise to you and me.

And so this morning I would like to consider the blessing of Christ’s words:

Neither do I condemn thee

Neither do I condemn thee – Christ says to you and me. Would you consider with me, first of all that in order to know the blessing of these words:

I. We Should Remember The Strength of the Sentence Upon Us -

This woman was taken in the very act of adultery according to v. 4. Look at what it says - *They say unto him, Master, this woman was taken in adultery, in the very act.*

The verse serves to remind us that the sentence of condemnation is upon us for our actions. In speaking of the day of judgment and referring to God Paul writes in Rom. 2:5,6 *But after thy hardness and impenitent heart treasurest up unto thyself wrath against the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God; Who will render to every man according to his deeds.*

The word *deeds* refers to the things we do. It’s sometimes translated by the word *works*. And this brings to mind that fearful passage in Revelation which refers to the final judgement:

Revelation 20:12,13 *And I saw the dead, small and great, stand before God; and the books were opened: and another book was opened, which is [the book] of life: and the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books, according to their works. And the sea gave up the dead which were in it; and death and hell delivered up the dead which were in them: and they were judged every man according to their works.*

The sentence of condemnation is strong upon us when weighed by our deeds. Every transgression is noted and will be revealed. The sinner will be accountable for every misdeed – for every time he has broken one of God’s commandments. It only takes a single instance of breaking one of God’s commandments to be judged as a guilty sinner. We shouldn’t suppose, however, that only that one sin will be judged. They will all be scrutinized and judged.

But we also see from another passage depicting the judgment day that men are also judged for the deeds they fail to perform. You may recall from that passage in Mt. 25 that the nations are gathered before the throne of Christ’s glory. The sheep are divided from the goats. And when those on Christ’s left hand are judged – Christ condemns them for their failure to serve Him. The passage reveals that service to Christ is rendered by service to believers in Christ. Those on His right hand fed and gave drink and took in and clothed those that are called *Christ’s brethren* (Mt. 25:40). And in so doing their service is viewed as being performed toward Christ Himself.

Those on His left hand, however, failed to do any of these things – and Christ’s word to them is *inasmuch as ye did it not to one of the least of these, ye did it not to me*. He goes on to say that *these shall go away into everlasting punishment, but the righteous into life eternal*.

So the sentence of condemnation is strong upon us if weighed by our deeds. But the strength of the sentence is stronger still when you add to it your words – *I say unto you that every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give account of it in the day of judgment. For by thy words thou shalt be justified, and by thy words thou shalt be condemned* (Mt. 12:36,37).

This would take in every lie – every form of slander – every falsehood uttered by the sinner. Men think that they’re so clever with the use of words. Sinners think they can wiggle their way out of any tight situation if they’re clever enough with the use of words. The shrewdest lawyers may succeed in acquitting the guilty in human courts – but God can’t be fooled.

He knows every idle word. He knows the real intention behind every idle word. He knows how to recognize malicious slander and damaging gossip. So when we add to our sentence of condemnation not only the deeds we perform but the words we speak we may conclude that the sentence is very strong upon us. We’re guilty of more than we can calculate.

And it doesn’t end there. In Mt. 12 Christ cites two instances of others who will rise up to condemn a generation. *The men of Nineveh shall rise in judgment with this generation*

and shall condemn it... The Queen of the South shall rise up in the judgment with this generation and shall condemn it.

In both cases the reason for the judgment is cited as abusing privileges of grace. A greater preacher than Jonah was among them – a wiser ruler than Solomon was among them and yet they wouldn't hear His message or give heed to His wisdom. What a privilege to have the very Son of God in their midst – but they completely abused the privilege – and for that they'll be condemned.

I can't help but think that the most tormented sinners in hell will be the ones that heard the gospel and failed to respond to it. It's a dreadful thing to contemplate – how many we'll know that sat constantly under the preaching of the gospel – and yet failed to come to Christ. They knew about Him – but remained indifferent to Him.

There's only one reason for their failure. Christ defines the very concept of condemnation in terms of such a failure. *This is the condemnation* He says in Jn. 3:19 and then He goes on to define the condemnation – *men loved darkness rather than light because their deeds were evil.*

What a strong sentence is upon the sinner then. He's condemned for what he does. He's condemned for what he says. He's condemned for what he loves (he loves darkness). He's condemned for his failures.

We can't leave the point without noting that sinners are not only condemned for their words, deeds, and affections – they're also condemned simply for what they are. What they do, of course, reveals what they are – but what they are also adds to the strength of the sentence against them.

We're sinners by nature. *Wherefore as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin, and so death passed upon all men, for all have sinned* (Rom. 5:12). Adam's sin plunged us all into sin. His action stood for us all. When he became a sinner – we also became sinners. And hence the Psalmist could say – *Behold, I was shapen in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me* (Ps. 51:5).

What a strong sentence, then, has passed upon us all. We're all guilty – we're all extremely guilty. We might feel sorry for a man in a human court who lived a life by human standards that was upright and then tragically fell into a crime – perhaps by desperate circumstances.

But we wouldn't feel sorry for a man who habitually broke the law at every turn until he was finally caught. We feel no sympathy for a serial rapist or murderer – for those who habitually and deliberately commit terrible crimes. And yet our state before God is no better than such sinners before men. We're not just a little bit guilty – we're plagued with much guilt and with great guilt. The sentence upon us is strong. And the more we realize this then the greater our appreciation will be for the next thing we must contemplate to draw the blessing from Christ's words:

For not only must we remember the strength of the sentence upon us but:

II. We Should Appreciate The Means Through Which this Sentence was Removed –

In my introduction I pointed out that Christ could not arbitrarily say *neither do I condemn thee*. He must be true to Himself. He cannot and will not merely overlook sin. He could not merely go along with the scribes and Pharisees and follow the crowd so to speak.

They weren't qualified to condemn the adulteress – but Christ was. And so for Christ to not pass sentence upon this sinner for her sins – there must be a just basis. And so there was a just basis for Christ to say to her that He would not condemn her. That basis would be the work that Christ Himself would soon accomplish.

And here is one of the great ironies of scripture. We know of Christ that there was no basis for Him to be condemned. He did no sin – He knew no sin – In Him there was no sin – and yet He would be condemned. *Behold, we go up to Jerusalem, He would say to His disciples and the Son of man shall be betrayed unto the chief priests and unto the scribes, and they shall condemn him to death* (Mt. 20:18).

And what Christ foretold came to pass – so we read in Mark 14:64 *Ye have heard the blasphemy: what think ye? And they all condemned him to be guilty of death*. It was no easy task condemning Christ to death. The scribes and Pharisees were very much bent on it – but that didn't make it any easier. How could one be condemned who went about doing good? How could one be condemned who had demonstrated time and again through the miracles He performed that God was with Him? How could He be condemned for His teaching? He taught as One having authority and not as the scribes. He taught as one who acknowledged the authority of the word of God and He never crossed any of God's words.

But in spite of His reputation the Jews in their hatred would exert every effort to condemn one who was righteous. One false witness after another stood up to bring charges against Him – but so ludicrous were their charges and their contradictions that Christ simply ignored them.

The whole façade might have failed were it not for the chief priest out of a sense of desperation adjuring Christ – i.e. calling on Him to swear by the living God whether or not He was indeed the Christ, the Son of God. You remember the verse I cited earlier. Christ Himself said that by your words you'll be justified and by your words you'll be condemned. Christ would now be condemned for His words. And what were His words? His words consisted in the confession of His identity. He should have been justified – but for His confession of His true identity – an identity that had been vindicated many times over – Christ was condemned.

Here, then, is the irony – man – exceedingly sinful – possessing guilt that is so great as to defy calculation – condemning Christ – One who was altogether righteous. In a verse that encapsulates this irony and explains its purpose Paul writes to the Corinthians – *For he hath made him, who knew no sin, to be sin for us, that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him*. (2Cor. 5:21).

This was in keeping with His purpose of grace and salvation. So we read in John 3:17 *For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved.* And the way that salvation was accomplished was for Christ to bear that condemnation Himself – through the shedding of His blood on Calvary’s cross.

For this reason the hymn-writer could write – *Bearing shame and scoffing rude, in my place condemned He stood, sealed my pardon with His blood, Hallelujah! What a Savior.*

The blessing of His statement, then, reaches our hearts when we realize and appreciate what was behind His statement. It was in keeping with the curse of the law and the payment of that broken law that His blood was shed. He willingly gave Himself to be smitten. He willingly allowed His back to be scourged. He willingly allowed a crown of thorns to be pressed into His brow. He willingly allowed nails to be driven into His hands and feet. In each instance His blood was shed. All this was in keeping with Romans 8:3 *For what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh.*

And so by remembering the strength of the sentence of condemnation against us we magnify His grace. By appreciating the means through which He delivered us from that condemnation we magnify His love – *Greater love has no man this that He lay down His life for His friends.* It remains for us consider:

III. The Success of His Accomplishment –

Neither do I condemn thee – Christ said to the adulteress woman. Now when Christ says *no condemnation* it means far more than other convicted sinners saying it who one by one drop out of the scene because they have no authority to condemn.

Such is the accomplishment of Christ’s atoning death that when He says *no condemnation* it not only means pardon – but it means acquittal. It means justification. I love the way Paul – under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit interprets Psalm 32:1,2 –

Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven – the Psalm reads *whose sin is covered. Blessed is the man unto whom the LORD imputeth not iniquity, and in whose spirit there is no guile.* What is the Psalmist describing? It would seem on the surface of the words that he’s describing one who has received pardon – his transgression (or his iniquities – to use Paul’s term in Rom 4) is forgiven. The Lord will not charge him with the guilt of his sin.

That is indeed a great blessing but the verse means much more. And so Paul interprets the verse in Rom. 4:6 by saying that David is describing not only a man whose sin is pardoned but the man *unto whom God imputeth righteousness without works.*

We’ve seen the strength of the sentence of guilt upon us. Such is the strength of Christ’s accomplishment by the shedding of His blood that when He says *no condemnation* we may well ask as Paul asks in Rom. 8 – *Who shall lay any thing to the charge of God’s elect? It is God that justifieth. Who is he that condemneth?* When once the ruler of the universe has passed sentence of justification there is no living being in heaven, earth, or hell that can change it. There is no higher court of appeal. The sentence of justification can never be nullified because it was accomplished by the shedding of Christ’s blood.

And so we have good cause to rejoice in this word of Christ this morning *neither do I condemn thee*. To draw from the blessing of such a saying remember the contrast between the Holy, harmless, lamb of God and the poor, vile, guilty sinners that we are. Remember the strength of the sentence against you. You were not just a little bit guilty of sin – you were altogether lost and steeped in sin and guilty of countless crimes.

And because of those crimes Christ's blood must be shed. The penalty called for the shedding of His blood. When we think of His blood then we must ever be mindful that our sins brought forth the shedding of His blood. But thank God for what was accomplished when He shed His blood. Divine justice was satisfied. Condemnation was wrought upon One in our place and there is therefore now no condemnation to those who are joined to Christ.

The humility of knowing that our sins called for the shedding of His blood – and the knowledge of what He accomplished by the shedding of His blood should certainly light a fire in our hearts that will make us desirous of hearing and heeding the word He gave to this adulteress. After He told her He would not condemn her – He also said to her *go and sin no more*.

As we leave this house this day may it be our desire from hearts filled with thanksgiving to go forth from this place determined that we will *Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, that ye should obey it in the lusts thereof. Neither yield ye your members as instruments of unrighteousness unto sin: but yield yourselves unto God, as those that are alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness unto God* (Rom. 6:12,13).

This is basically what Christ tells us when He says to us – *neither do I condemn thee – go and sin no more*.