

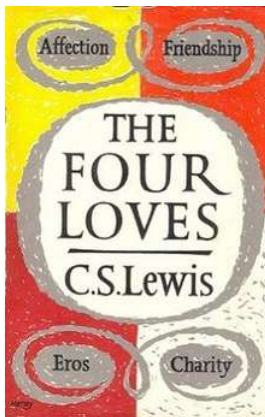
JESUS, THE FRIEND OF SINNERS

John 8:1-11

Good morning!

What a joy it is to be preaching again today! Thank you to Pastor Matt for asking me to step in today. He is away on vacation right now but will be back next week.

Have you read the book by CS Lewis, “The Four Loves”?



In it, Lewis outlines four types of love:

1. Storge ... Affection Love
2. Phileo ... Friendship Love
3. Eros ... Romantic Love
4. Agape ... Divine Love / Charity

I spoke once before on this topic and it's not my intention to repeat it. But it is helpful to recognize there are different types of love.

It's also helpful to recognize that there are different types of friendship. In fact, there are three Hebrew words in the Old Testament for friendship. Granted there is much crossover, but there are some distinctions worth noting.

The first word is “rayah”. An associate, someone you keep company with, someone you know fairly well. An acquaintance is probably the best English translation. People you feel comfortable with.

The second word is “alooth”. To be gentle with, to be familiar with. It takes friendship to a deeper level. Close friends. People with whom you can have good heart-to-heart conversation.

The third word is “ahave”. An intimate, close companion. Someone you trust with your closest secrets, with your very life. Your very best friend. If we have more than two of such people in our entire lives, we are blessed.

Think of David and Jonathan in 1 Samuel 18:

“...the soul of Jonathan was knit to the soul of David, and Jonathan loved him as his own soul.”

1 Samuel 18:1 ESV

Not a romantic love at all. But a deep, profound love.

The kind of love in which an intimate friend would be willing to tell you the truth even when it hurts you both:

“Wounds from a friend can be trusted”
Proverbs 27:6

That is, from an “ahave” type friend.

This is also the kind of intimate friendship about which the Lord Jesus said,

“Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one’s life for one’s friends (ahaves)”.
John 15:13

We need to ask ourselves: in our walk with Jesus, which one best describes our friendship with him?

Is He our friend at all?

Is He our “rayah” – our acquaintance? Do we keep him at arm’s length, connecting with him just occasionally?

Is He our “alooth” – a close friend? But do we try to keep things hidden from him. Secret sins we really don’t want to give up?

Or is He our “ahave” – our closest friend with whom there are no secrets.

Regardless of the state of our friendship with Him, He wants to be our “ahave”. And He proved it.

Hear now the reading of God’s Holy Word from the Gospel of John, Chapter 1, beginning in verse 1 ...

John 8:1-11

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

⁹At 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. ¹⁰Jesus 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.”

The Word of God. For the people of God. Thanks be to God!

Let us pray:

Almighty God, to Whom all hearts are open,
All desires known, and from Whom no secrets are hid.
Cleanse the thoughts of our hearts
By the inspiration of Your Holy Spirit,
So that we may perfectly love You
And worthily magnify Your Holy Name,
Through Christ our Lord.
Amen

Before I delve into the real meat of this passage, there are a couple of things that need to be addressed for clarification purposes.

First, a technical matter ... most of know about the science of hermeneutics. That is, the way we read and understand Scripture. Specifically, taking out of Scripture what God has put in it, reading the text of Scripture in the way it was intended. For example, poetry is to be read as poetry, not historical narrative. When Jesus said, “I am the door”, he was not saying he was a piece of wood with hinges for arms. He was using the literary structure known as a metaphor. We get that, right?

In the formulation of the canon of Scripture, we don’t possess the original documents written by the author. Scribes back in the day copied the original documents numerous times and inevitably slight textual errors were generated: typos, etc.

What is used – and was used – to determine the substance of the canon of Scripture is the science of Textual Criticism. Rigorously evaluating text after text after text, copy after copy after copy, to figure out what the original text of Scripture was. Whether something is genuinely apostolic or not.

Textual Criticism is a field of science in and of itself. And it’s not my purpose here to say much about it here, just to note it in passing. Because some of you will note that this passage of Scripture for today has a notation in some translations of the Bible that says something along the lines of:

[The earliest and most reliable manuscripts and
other ancient witnesses do not have
John 7:53 – 8:11]

It just means there is some question as to the actual authorship of this particular text, does it belong here or somewhere else? Not every copy had this text. The same thing is found at the very end of the Gospel of Mark – Mark 16:9-20. And while some people use this to condemn the Bible, as well as the process by which the Bible came to be, there's no real doubt about it being apostolic in origin. As we delve into the text in a few minutes, you'll see it fits **perfectly** with what we know of Jesus and his ministry.

Secondly, there's a distinctly Jewish tradition that's easy to miss. In verse 2, it says Jesus sat down to teach the people in the temple courts. Sitting in this manner is a declaration of a position of authority – in this case, teaching authority.

You see it several times elsewhere, notably when Jesus gave the Sermon on the Mount:

“Now when he saw the crowds, he went up on a mountainside and **sat down.**”

Matthew 5:1

And again, when Jesus taught the people from a boat:

He got into one of the boats, the one belonging to Simon, and asked him to put out a little from shore. Then he **sat down** and taught the people from the boat.

Luke 5:3

And notably when Jesus began his public teaching ministry:

“The spirit of the Lord is on me, because he anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of the sight for the blind, to set the oppressed free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor” Then he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant and **sat down.** The eyes of everyone in the synagogue were fastened on him.

Luke 4:18-20

Sitting down was also the posture of authority of the courtroom judge – just as it is in our own courtrooms:

The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being, sustaining all things by his powerful word. After he had provided purification for sins, he **sat down** at the right hand of the Majesty in heaven.

Hebrews 1:3

After the Lord Jesus had spoken to them, he was taken up into heaven and **he sat at the right hand of God.**

Mark 16:19

“To the one who is victorious, I will give the right **to sit with me** on my throne, just as I was victorious and **sat down** with my Father on his throne.”

Revelation 3:21

The LORD says to my lord: "**Sit at my right hand** until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet."

Psalm 110:1

To which of the angels did God ever say, "**Sit at my right hand** until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet"?

Hebrews 1:13

It's interesting to note that the one standing in the courtroom is the accused or the defense attorney. And when Stephen was stoned after he gave his sermon in Acts 7, what did he see?

When they heard this [Stephen's sermon], they were furious and gnashed their teeth at him. But Stephen, full of the Holy spirit, looked up to heaven and saw the glory of God, and **Jesus standing at the right hand of God**. "Look," he said, "I see heaven open and **the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God**."

Acts 7:54-56

What an image! The Judge of heaven and earth was standing as Stephen's defense attorney. Talk about having it made! Your judge is also your defense attorney.

And that's what we have. When we come to Christ confessing our sins, He stands as our defense attorney before the Father defending us to the hilt.

Mind blowing when you really think about it, isn't it, having the judge as your defense attorney!

Thirdly, and what's strikingly obvious – where was the man caught in adultery? Most of us will inevitably get visibly upset or angry over this point. Where in the world was the man? Perhaps stronger language comes to mind, right?

It's a good question. And it reeks of injustice. But as much as we may see it that way – and rightly so – it's not the point of this passage. This woman was being used, disgraced and humiliated for an entirely different purpose.

As much as we may want to stay focused on the injustice here, I don't want to lose focus on the real thrust of this passage.

Okay, that being said, let's delve into at the meat of this passage...

So here we have Jesus, in a position of teaching authority about to expound the Old Testament Scriptures to the people in the temple courts when the teachers of the law and the Pharisees – acting as prosecuting attorneys – brought in a woman caught in adultery, putting her in front of the crowd and directly in front of 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?"

John 8:4-5

Whether they intended it or not, they affirmed Jesus' authority here.

But plainly, they intended it to be a trap to accuse Him as the text explicitly tells us in verse 6:

They were using this question as a trap, in order to have a basis for accusing him.

John 8:6

This is why the adulterous man wasn't present. It wasn't about obedience to the Law. It was all about trapping Jesus on the horns of a dilemma. They weren't interested in this woman at all. The fake moral outrage was nothing more than setting a trap for Jesus.

What was that trap?

First of all, we need to remember that at this time, Israel was under Roman rule. Rome allowed a certain measure of home rule, as they did for all those they conquered. For example: religion, a vassal king, law and tradition. But it was all subservient to Roman law which reigned supreme. And one thing retained by Rome was the death penalty. It could only be performed or permitted under Roman law.

The Jewish practice for the death penalty, according to the Law of Moses, was by stoning.

The Roman practice for the death penalty at that time was – what?

Right ... crucifixion.

Later on in John 18, the Jewish leaders were before Pontius Pilate:

Then the Jewish leaders took Jesus from Caiaphas to the palace of the Roman governor. By now it was early morning, and to avoid ceremonial uncleanness they did not enter the palace, because they wanted to be able to eat the Passover. So Pilate came out to them and asked, "What charges are you bringing against this man?"

"If he were not a criminal," they replied, "we would not have handed him over to you."

Pilate said, "Take him yourselves and judge him by your own law." "But **we have no right to execute anyone**," they objected.

John 18:28-31

They were acknowledging they had no authority to execute anyone because Roman law reigned over them.

And here in John 8, they were demanding of Jesus to put this woman to death by stoning in accordance with the Law of Moses.

And that **is** what the Law says:

“If a man commits adultery with another man’s wife—with the wife of his neighbor—both the adulterer and the adulteress are to be put to death.”

Leviticus 20:10

There’s no getting around it.

We also need to remember that Jesus was passionately in love the Law of God. His meat and his drink was to do the will of the Father.

Of Jesus, it can be said with passion:

But his delight is in the Law of the LORD, and on His law he meditates day and night.

Psalm 1:2

Oh, how I love your law! I meditate on it all day long.

Psalm 119:97

Jesus loved the Law of God with His whole heart because He loved the God of the Law with His whole heart. Remember, He came to fulfill the Law, not destroy it.

Let us not forget that the salvation of anyone from the wrath of God yet to come depends utterly on Jesus keeping the Law of God perfectly. Our salvation requires the sinlessness of Christ and without it nobody, including Jesus Himself in His humanity, could ever be saved.

Jesus is now being put to the test: side with the Law of Moses or side with Roman law.

The trap lay in that if Jesus sided with the Law of Moses, the leaders would run to the Roman rulers or to Pontius Pilate and report that He was subverting Roman justice.

But if Jesus had said “don’t stone her”, He would be defying the Law of Moses, shown to be a heretic and thus be discredited before all the people.

We need to see here that Jesus didn’t duck it.

He made a decision – no question. The Law unambiguously states that such should be stoned. Go ahead and stone her.

But before he gives them that answer, Jesus writes in the ground. It doesn’t tell us what he wrote, only that he wrote.

It’s dangerous to speculate when interpreting Scripture – we don’t have the freedom to engage in eisegesis; that is, reading into scripture what we want it to say. So, we need to be exceedingly careful here.

But whatever He wrote, it was followed by the famous verse:

“If any one of you is without sin, let him be the first to throw a stone at her.”

John 8:7

[A favorite of all those who like to infer that Scripture declares ubiquitously: “Judge not!”]

And then Jesus began to write in the ground again.

At this, they began to go away one at a time, beginning with the older ones first until only Jesus and the woman were there.

What DID Jesus write in the ground?

Some commentators suggest Jesus was just doodling, letting the weight of the matter convict the leaders of their own hypocrisy and sin. Others have various opinions. We’ll never know for sure what Jesus wrote in the ground this side of heaven.

I am going to make an educated guess, though. Borrowed partially from Theologian RC Sproul...

Remember, one of Jesus’ tactics when dealing with people, especially the teachers of the law and Pharisees, was to take them back to the original texts. For example, regarding divorce in Matthew 19, they told Jesus that Moses **commanded** them to divorce their spouse, but Jesus took them back to Creation and replied that God created us male and female, that a man and a woman will leave their parents and be joined together as one flesh. And that in the Law of Moses, divorce was **permitted** (not commanded) because of their hard hearts – it was a concession of grace by God because of our sinfulness, not a ruthless dictate to condemn someone.

What was the original penalty for sin?

That’s right, death. The day you eat of it – the forbidden fruit – you die ... that day! (Genesis 2:17), and was restated by Ezekiel:

“The soul that sins shall die”

Ezekiel 18:4

Every sin is a capital offense. Do we really appreciate that? It’s why we all die! And it’s why for our sin to be truly dealt with, Jesus had to **die** for us. It’s what the cross is all about.

And here, it may very well be that the first time Jesus wrote in the ground he was writing out the 10 Commandments. Or maybe just that single verse in Ezekiel:

“The soul that sins shall die”

Ezekiel 18:4

Maybe even both!

So, again, Jesus made a decision – go ahead and stone her. But he also appointed her executioners. The one who is without sin should throw the first stone.

And then He began to write in the ground a second time.

What happened?

They began to leave, one at a time. And in doing so, they were acknowledging they were NOT without sin, that they were indeed sinners and as sinners were worthy of the very same punishment as the woman they dragged in.

I think it very likely that the second time He wrote on the ground He may be spelling out the specific sins of each of the accusers, beginning with the oldest who then had the proverbial “come-to-Jesus” moment and fled.

You can just see it, can’t you? Eyeball to eyeball, Jesus to accuser ... and let’s put it in the vernacular, shall we?

- Pharisee David: Sarah...
- Teacher Levi: Embezzled \$15,962...
- Pharisee Isaac: Lying and gossiping about Caleb...
- Pharisee Benjamin: Jealous about Levi’s boat...
- Teacher Caleb: Jacob...
- Teacher Aaron: Gambling debt of \$23,671...
- Pharisee Samuel: Affair with Miriam...

...and so on.

Obviously, I don’t know for sure, but I do think it fits the passage here, and we’ll have to wait for heaven to know for sure.

Regardless, what happens next?

Everyone had left except the woman was standing before Jesus alone. Again, standing. Just like in the courtroom before the seated judge.

What does Jesus do next?

Don’t miss this ... verses 10-11:

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.”
John 8:10-11

The woman was standing before the Sinless One. The only one present who was without sin. And, therefore, the only one present who was just – and would be perfectly justified in throwing the first stone. Again, He loved the Law of God with His whole being.

But the heart of God is also full of mercy and compassion:

“I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion”

Exodus 33:19 (Romans 9:15)

Mercy is given at the prerogative of the giver, not on the demand of the receiver. It is freely given by pure grace at the choice of the mercy-giver. Mercy is never, ever owed. If it was owed, it wouldn't be mercy, it would be justice. We understand that don't we?

“Neither do I condemn you”

Pure grace-given mercy.

Jesus never said what she did was not an egregious sin. He never diminished its seriousness. He didn't pull her close, pat her head and say, “there, there; don't worry about it – God understands and loves you unconditionally”.

That's a modern approach. It wasn't that of Jesus.

In His role as judge, He pronounced the verdict: “Neither do I condemn you – go now and leave your life of sin”.

We need to note also that Jesus did not make obedience to his command a prerequisite of His forgiveness of her.

He **did not** say, “Go now and leave your life of sin and I will not condemn you”.

Standing before Jesus, the woman didn't deny her sin or try to defend it. She could have left, just like the teachers of the law and Pharisees – nobody was stopping her. But in her total humiliation, she stays with Jesus. And in so doing was confessing her sin to be true and had no place else to go. Her one and only hope was grace and mercy of Christ.

“There, there; don't worry about it – God understands and loves you unconditionally” is cheap grace.

It's worthless. Powerless.

But God's grace is not cheap grace. It's costly grace.

God cannot simply dismiss sin. It would be a violation against His own nature, against His Holiness. Sin **must** be punished.

How can God be a God of justice and at the same time forgive sin?

How can God be a God of love and punish sin?

God IS just. And God IS merciful. But mercy does not come at the expense of Holy Justice.

God's justice demands her death.

God's mercy grants her life.

And it is the Grace of God that marries the two together. Satisfying the justice of God and the flow of mercy to the sinner.

Jesus, looking at the woman, **KNEW** there would be justice fulfilled – in His own body on the cross – in order to grant her the forgiveness she so desperately needed.

Her sin would **NOT** go unpunished! He was willing to die for it.

On the cross, her sin, my sin, the sin of all those who are contrite was put on Jesus who willingly took it.



God the Father looked down from heaven and saw the most concentrated mass of sin and evil the world has ever known and unleashed His Justice. He poured out His wrath on His own Son, and Jesus howled out from the pit of hell "My God, my God. Why have you forsaken me?"

Because He really was forsaken. As our real scapegoat, He was sent into the outer darkness taking the punishment for sin.

And when it was done, when there was no more sin to punish, Jesus cried out "It is finished", gave up his Spirit and died.

And at the same time, the Lamb without Blemish – the Sinless One – provided us with what we can never achieve for ourselves. Perfect righteousness.



We can now stand in God's presence as forgiven sinners, wearing the cloak of Jesus' perfect righteousness, with Jesus standing at our side declaring: "Justified" not condemned.

Now **THAT** is a love that is stunning in its capacity.

THAT is Jesus being a friend to sinners.

The teachers of the law and Pharisees left the scene unforgiven. And unless they repented and came to faith later, they would have died in their sins ready to face the wrath of God alone on Judgment Day.

Think of it – had they simply confessed their sin right then and there, admitted they were egregiously wrong in what they did to the woman and to Jesus himself – what would Jesus' response have been?

They were standing before the One who would have – without doubt – declared to them, “Neither do I condemn you – go now and leave your life of sin”.

Instead, they left and remained in their sin. What a tragedy!

It's no surprise, though, is it? They hated Jesus with everything in them. And just like the devil in his hate came to tempt Jesus, failed in that attempt and left him for a season, the teachers of the law and Pharisees who hated Jesus – after they failed to trap Jesus – left for a season.

They didn't stop, did they? They returned to falsely accuse and convict Jesus before Pontius Pilate to have Him put to death.

Hate is such a powerful force, isn't it? Throughout history.

We see it in action all around us.

- In the political scene where lies and false accusations abound.
- Where free speech is a threat to the authoritarians.
- Where people are assaulted or killed simply for being different, for being of a different race, religion, culture or nationality.
- Where justice is inverted so that an offensive online meme is worthy of jail and criminals are set free ... this is really happening in England.
- Where abortion is celebrated and praying for the unborn at an abortion facility is not tolerated.

There are so many examples, it's heartbreaking!

But Jesus tells us:

“In this world you will have trouble. Take heart, for I have overcome the world”

John 16:33

He IS coming again.

He is coming as Judge to all those who reject Him, who die in their sins, to cast them into the outer darkness, into hell for all eternity.

And He is coming as defense attorney for all those who believe, who have repented of their sins and look to Him for grace and mercy.



Do you truly believe in Jesus? Right now, do you stand in His presence justified?

If not, He is here today with His arms wide open to receive you and forgive you. It cost Him His own life, but He did it in love for you.

To be your best friend – your real “ahave” - throughout all eternity.

Are you His true friend?

Jesus:

... friend of lepers.

... friend of harlots.

... friend of tax collectors.

... friend of liars.

... friend of the greedy.

... friend of those with foul thoughts, words, and deeds.

... friend of sinners.

Oh, what a friend we have in Jesus.

Amen.

Let us pray...