

6-30-24

And Justice for All

John 8: 1 – 11

I want to tell you about the time I briefly toyed with the idea of studying Law. I was a senior in high school, and our Civics / History / Government teacher reported that our class would be taking a field trip to the county courthouse so we could learn more about how our local government worked.

To be honest, the prospect of spending an afternoon in an old, musty building sounded like a real snoozer to me.

But my ears perked up when my teacher, Mr. Boyle, said that prior to our visit, we would hold elections to see who would play the different roles at the mock trial that would be held that day. We had to elect a sheriff, a DA, a public defender, and a judge, among others.

Hmmm ... I thought, a judge. That's interesting. I could be the judge. So, what if I hadn't the slightest clue as to the duties of a judge, I'd look good in a long black flowing robe towering over the courtroom with gavel in hand. So, I made up my mind right then and there: I'd run for judge.

The only obstacle in my way to attain this goal would be my classmate, Christine Fick. Christine Fick, a tall, skinny, pretty blonde with blue eyes, and a farm girl to boot. She would be my strongest competition, But I was confident. I had a plan. I could use her outstanding attributes and abilities against her - to my advantage – I could be a real jerk back then.

You see, I knew something about my other classmates. They were jealous of Christine. After all, she had everything going for her: She was pretty, smart, and on the cheerleading squad.

All the teachers liked her too, because she had a great attitude about school and a very likeable personality. She was rarely if ever considered a troublemaker. She was the perfect candidate to be judge.

But I knew that all these positive traits would ultimately work against her when election day finally arrived.

Her classmates would never allow her to have this victory too. She couldn't have all the glory! They would vote for someone else just out of spite, and that someone else would be me!

Sadly, it turned out that I was absolutely correct in my prediction!

I received the sympathy votes and won the election hands down. It wasn't even close! But as the old saying goes, be careful what you wish for because it'll come back to bite you, and sure enough that's exactly what happened.

So, there I was on the day of the trial, sitting up there alongside the real and officially elected county judge, looking quite smug, I must say, in my black flowing robe when I was directed to swear in the first witness.

And so, began the end of my brief and undistinguished career as a judge. At that moment, I opened my mouth and out came the words of Elmer Fudd...

"Do you *swolemnly swear* to tell the *twuth*?"

In John chapter 8, we find Jesus in a bit of an ordeal. He is put in the position of being judge, a position that I'm sure he felt quite comfortable fulfilling. But in this case, he was presiding over an impromptu court hearing. And the scene is quite interesting on different levels.

First, it's interesting because the earliest and most reliable manuscripts of the New Testament that we have, do not include this account.

What most Biblical scholars believe is that it was inserted later into the original text of John. They believe this based on a couple of observations:

One, the writing style is unlike that of John's.

John, one of Jesus' closest disciples, who describes himself as the one whom Jesus loved, had a much more flowery and poetic way of writing, while this passage seems to be more direct and to the point.

Two, this story of the woman caught in adultery interrupts the preceding narrative.

It doesn't quite fit in. In the preceding verses, the chief priests and the pharisees have sent the temple guards out on a mission to arrest Jesus, but on their return, Jesus is not with them. Their excuse when asked why they failed to bring him in? *"No one ever spoke the way this man does."* John 7:46

So, this informs us that Jesus was never at the meeting of the Sanhedrin which is described in verse 45 – 52 of chapter 7. But the last verse of chapter 7 seems to imply that Jesus was at that meeting: *"Then each went to his own home. But Jesus went to the Mount of Olives."*

So, what likely happened is that some editor attempted to splice this story in at the beginning of chapter 8 using the last verse of chapter 7. But as it turned out, it wasn't the smoothest of transitions.

Be that as it may, these observations don't make this account any less authentic. In fact, the central idea of this passage simply re-emphasizes what scheme the Jewish religious leaders had been up to all along since Jesus came on the scene - namely to trip Him up by finding some fault in his teaching concerning the Mosaic Law.

We see this scenario played out repeatedly throughout the Gospels. (Check out Matthew chapters 12, 19, 21 and 22 for similar examples.)

The religious leaders thought that if they could somehow pin some sort of alleged heresy on him, they could then criminally charge Him and arrest Him or at least request that the Roman government do so. But I'm no lawyer.

But here's what's sad about the whole situation: In their attempt to entrap Jesus by having him say something contrary to the Mosaic Law, they're willing to distort, twist, and pervert the very law they're supposedly trying to preserve.

We shouldn't be surprised by their tactics.

It happens frequently, even today. When people are opposed to the truth - and they know it to be the truth - they have no alternative but to desecrate the truth and put forth an alternate reality.

When you're an enemy of the truth and have no leg to stand on, you're only option is to distract and redirect your audience away from the truth in hopes that the truth will fade far back into the recesses of our minds and get lost and replaced by some distortion of the truth that you're trying to sell.

But here's the thing, Jesus knows exactly what they're up to. (The religious leaders should have known better than to pick a fight with someone who knows the Mosaic Law inside and out.)

He's sees right through their ploy and uses it to dismantle their argument.

He reminds everyone within earshot that no one is without sin: *"He who is without sin, let him be the first to throw a stone at her."*

And more importantly, He reminds his audience that His mission to the world will not be deterred, sidetracked or perverted by some power-hungry self-righteous hypocrites.

It has and always will remain the same – to offer truth and love, mercy and forgiveness, and yes, even justice to the world.

Now you might be thinking to yourself and questioning, “Where’s the justice?”

I can see the love and mercy and forgiveness in this wonderful story, the story of this woman who looks like she’s going to have the full force of the Mosaic Law come crashing down on her, only to find forgiveness and hope and a new lease on life because of Jesus’ profound insight into the truth.

But what about her sin?

Jesus never, for a moment, denies that she is without sin. In fact, His final words to her make this abundantly clear: *“Go now and leave your life of sin.”*

Is she guilty of adultery or something else?

We can only guess, and we don’t need to dig too deep into the Old Testament Law to see what the penalty was for adultery, in fact, this is what she was guilty of. Leviticus 20:10 and Deuteronomy 22:22 say virtually the same thing: *“The adulterer and the adulteress must be put to the death. The evil must be purged from among you.”*

But truthfully, when we think about it, the form the sin takes on, doesn’t really matter either to Jesus or the pharisees.

In Jesus’ mind, His righteousness blood can and will cover the gravest of sins, and in the Pharisees’ minds, the woman was merely a pawn in a larger scheme to trap Jesus anyway.

The Pharisees thought that if Jesus let's this woman go, then he would be guilty of breaking the Mosaic Law, and no good Jewish person would want to be guilty of this, especially Jesus who is now spending vast amounts of time teaching, explaining and interpreting the Law to all who would listen, and declared, *"Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them, but to fulfill them. I tell you the truth, until heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from the Law until everything is accomplished."*

On the other hand, if Jesus allows for the prosecution to move forward with the stoning, he could be charged with defying the Roman government which states that the Jewish people had no authority to carry out death sentences.

But again, I go back to my recent question: Where is the justice?

Can you see in this short account the many ways justice has been completely betrayed, ignored, defiled, and dispensed with?

Justice, the first thing God, our Maker calls his people to protect, preserve, and carry out: *"He has shown you, O man, what is good. And what does the Lord require of you? **To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God.**"* Micah 6:8

Justice is the first thing on God's list of the things we are to do! Even before love and humility!

But in this brief account in John 8, justice seems to have left the building a long time ago!

For example, where is the woman's partner in crime? As the old saying goes, it takes two to tango. But he is nowhere to be found! He's conspicuously and conveniently missing! Where's the justice in this?

The Mosaic Law makes it clear that both the man and the woman must be punished for their sins: *“Both the man who slept with her and the woman must die.”* Deuteronomy 22:22.

I see no justice whatsoever in bringing forth only the woman.

And where are the witnesses to this crime?

Again, Missing in Action!

Deuteronomy 19:15 says that *“One witness is not enough to convict a man accused of any crime or offense he may have committed. A matter must be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses.”*

And yet, no witness seems to be willing to come forward at this gathering which is beginning to look more and more like a complete sham and fabrication.

And what if these accusations against this woman are false?

Are not the liars to be held responsible for their deceptive and ungodly words and actions? Proverbs 19:9: *“A false witness will not go unpunished, and he who pours out lies will perish.”*

Wow! All this is a lot to take in, especially if you’re not a lawyer, but guess what?

Doesn’t this all sound so familiar? We’ve all watched a myriad of TV shows that depict the courtroom scene and the behind-the-scenes jury debates.

What’s going on here in John 8 is not at all foreign to us.

Our American judicial system is built upon the foundation of the Mosaic Law! And it’s just another poignant reminder that God has made humanity with an innate desire and capacity to demand and seek and carry out justice, because that is who our God is – a God of justice!

Deuteronomy 32: 3 – 4: *“I will proclaim the name of the LORD. Oh, praise the greatness of our God! He is the Rock, his works are perfect, and all his ways are just. A faithful God who does no wrong, upright and just is He.”*

Even as we Americans pledge allegiance to our flag which represents the ideals of sacrifice and loyalty and purity, we conclude it with the principle of justice:

I pledge allegiance to the flag

Of the United States of America

And to the Republic for which it stands

One nation under God, indivisible with liberty (and what?)

Justice for all!

Today, many people, not just in this country, but around the world are crying out for justice. Some of it, I’m sure, is legitimate. Others maybe not so much. Only God knows a person’s heart.

But I say this to everyone within earshot of my voice:

Be careful what you wish for!

It may come back to bite you. It’s easy to see injustice in society out there and cry out for reform and demand justice especially when it doesn’t pertain to us personally.

We see this wrong or that wrong and we’re quick to label it as injustice and desire for it to be put straight. But how about when we see the flaws and failures and sins and crimes in our own personal lives?

Then, what is our appetite for justice?

1 Samuel 6:20 asked the question we all need to ask ourselves: *“Who can stand in the presence of the Lord, this holy God?”*

The fascinating thing about John 8 is that the exact representation of the Holy God was there in the person of Jesus Christ, and after he had stooped down and wrote in the sand, not once but twice, in midst of the people arguing and questioning and hounding and the plotting and scheming and self-righteousness, and I’m sure crying, and who knows what else, he stood up and basically said in so many words to that single individual:

I am the solution to all your worries.

I am the answer to this great and troubling dilemma you find yourself in – this lack of justice and righteousness and fairness and this continual angst and pain that cries out for resolution and purpose and meaning and ... salvation and life.

I am your friend, your Savior, your Lord.

2 Corinthians 5:21: *“God made Him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in Him we might become the righteousness of God.”*

Where is the justice?

It’s the same place we can find love and mercy and forgiveness and hope and freedom, purpose and meaning.

It’s found at the cross and in His broken and bloodied body given for us, to pay for our sins, and in His resurrection, to give us new and eternal life.

And it’s now to be found in His church, if we choose to live for God in the power of his Holy Spirit.

Moses wrote in Deuteronomy 9:10, *"The Lord gave me two stone tablets inscribed by the finger of God. On them were all the commandments the Lord proclaimed to you on the mountain of fire, on the day of the assembly."*

In John 8, we see God's finger move once again to bring justice and righteousness to the world through Jesus Christ.

Where's the justice?

It's found in the person of our Lord Jesus Christ in whom we've place our hope and trust and life.

Think about this as you celebrate, this week, the cherished principles upon which this country was founded. Amen.