The Unreasonable Jesus - Part One

# DO NOT SIN

# (John 8:2-11)

Welcome to Christ’s Community Church. Today we’re beginning a brand-new message series entitled, “The Unreasonable Jesus”. And over the next few weeks we’re going to be exploring some well-known passages of Scripture that may have always left you wondering, “Jesus, are you serious?” As we look at these challenging and sometimes just plain unreasonable teachings of Jesus, my hope is that during these next few weeks that we’ll let these difficult words of Jesus transform us.

How many of you have noticed that sometimes Jesus just says things that are difficult to understand, things that are unreasonable?

For example, in Matthew chapter 5, when Jesus got up in front of a large crowd and says,

"If you call someone an idiot, you’re in danger of being brought before the court. And if you curse someone, you’re in danger of the fires of hell” (Matthew 5:21-22, NLT).

Or, “If your right eye causes you to sin, gouge it out and throw it away” (Matthew 5:29).

Or how about, “If your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away…” (Matthew 5:30).

And while you’re at it, just “love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you” (Matthew 5:44).

You see, this is shocking, it can seem unreasonable, in fact it doesn’t sound like good news at all. These sayings, these teaching of Jesus, make me uncomfortable, because it’s not like I’m some kind of ax murderer, nor am I St. John or Mother Teresa, but I’m just a normal guy somewhere in the middle. And so, what am I supposed to do with these teachings of Jesus that just don’t make sense?

Well, what I want to do over the next few weeks is look at how we’re supposed to respond when Jesus says something that doesn’t make sense, or that’s completely unreasonable. Because the whole point of this series is to move towards becoming the person he’s made you to be. And so, we want to seize this opportunity and take advantage of the second chances that God offers to each of us, because we need his grace. And this undeserved favor, this grace is available to you, as much as you need, as often as you need it, and as long as you need it, because you can never exhaust God’s grace.

In fact, the book of Lamentations tells us that this is what God does every single day. Jeremiah tells us that there is no end to the love of God, he says,

“Because of the Lord’s great love we’re not consumed, for his compassions never fail. They’re new every morning…” (Lamentations 3:22-23).

And I believe that every word of the Bible is true, and so this verse has two words that are so very important. “Never”, as in his compassions never fail; and “every”, as in his compassion is brand-new every morning. And so, it’s my prayer that each one of you would experience God’s great love and compassion in a new way every single day. But not just as it applies to yourself, but as it applies to others as well.

Today, what I want to do is take a look at what the Bible teaches about grace so that we can better understand how it works in our lives. In fact, this is how John introduces us to “The Unreasonable Jesus” in chapter 1, he said in verse 17,

“The law was given through Moses; (but) grace and truth came through Jesus Christ” (John 1:17).

And it’s as we look at the gospel in these upcoming weeks, that we’re going to discover stories overflowing with the grace, mercy, and the goodness of God.

In fact, the text that we’re going to look at today was actually censored in the early days of the church. I’m talking about the first part of John chapter 8 and if you’re following along in your Bible it’s likely that there’s a notation there next to this passage saying,

“The earliest manuscripts and many other ancient witnesses do not have John 7:53 through 8:11”.

And what’s interesting is that we have thousands of New Testament manuscripts from the first several centuries of church history and some of those that don’t include this text also have a blank space on the scroll indicating that it had been left out.

In other words, the scholars and scribes edited it out, they decided not to include it because they considered this story to be unreasonable, it was just too hot to handle. Apparently, these well-meaning scribes, scholars and theologians believed that this story suggested a lenient attitude toward immoral behavior and so they determined to be God’s editor and just leave it out. But the truth of the matter is, that it’s not our job to protect anyone from the truth of God’s Word. It’s our job to proclaim the glory of God’s grace and truth that came through Jesus Christ, even as unreasonable as it may seem.

And so, let’s look together John’s gospel, John chapter 8, and we’re going to read a story that has incredible power and the potential to transform every single one of us today. Beginning at verse two of John chapter 8, the story begins this way:

“At dawn he appeared again in the temple courts, where all the people gathered around him, and he sat down to teach them. The teachers of the law and the Pharisees brought in a woman caught in adultery” (John 8:2-3).

Right here from the very beginning, as these religious men interrupt Jesus’ Bible study, dragging this woman in front of him, this woman who had been caught in the act of adultery; in other words, she’d been unfaithful, cheating on her husband; and as these men brought her to Jesus there’s something wrong. There’s something missing here, there’s a great injustice being done, because it takes two to commit adultery and her accomplice was nowhere to be found. It would appear as if he’d escaped their grasp, but she was on trial and so where was their proof, where was exhibit A?

Here we’re given a glimpse of the hypocrisy of these religious leaders as they chose to condemn one and not the other. And yet, one thing is very clear, there’s a simple truth that we can’t ignore, a principle when it comes to sin, when it comes to your sin, number one, you’re absolutely alone.

## 1. You Stand Alone

Now, I can’t help but think that this woman, having been caught in the act, being forced to stand in front of these men, might have wanted to protest, “Hey, wait a minute. What about the guy I was with? This isn’t fair.” But the reality is that there’s no room for excuses, you can’t shift the blame to someone else, you’re on your own. Each one of us will stand alone, each of us will individually accept the responsibility for our own actions.

And so, here’s this woman, who’d been deceitful and unfaithful, standing alone in what would’ve been the lowest, most humiliating moment of her life. And the Bible says that bringing her before the group they said to 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).

Now, according to the law of Moses, to be exact, the law states that both the man and the woman should be put to death. And we don’t know where the man is in the story, but these guys were willing to overlook that discrepancy because they were intent on seeing this woman pay the price for what she’d done. And so, they demanded a response from Jesus, they asked him what he thought should be done, and the Bible says that,

“They were using this question as a trap, in order to have a basis for accusing him” (John 8:6).

In other words, these men didn’t care about this woman, they didn’t care about justice, they were just using her as a tool to get to Jesus.

You see, if they could back him into a corner, if they could get him to either contradict the Word of God or to agree with the execution of this woman, whichever option he chose they’d use it against him. And so, Jesus is in a no-win situation, because if he says, “Go ahead and kill her”, he loses his reputation for being loving. But if on the other hand he says, “Let’s make an exception for her,” then he’s breaking the law of Moses and overlooking her sin. And so, instead, the Bible tells us in verse six that,

“Jesus bent down and started to write on the ground with his finger” (John 8:6).

Now, John doesn’t tell us what he wrote, but some have suggested that maybe he wrote the 10 commandments. Others say that Jesus was writing the sins of these teachers of the law and Pharisees on the ground. I tend to think that this was more personal, that maybe Jesus wrote, Joe the Pharisee did this and this, and Fred did this, because whatever it was that he wrote, it was something against someone. That’s what the Greek word used here means, that Jesus wrote a word against someone, and so your sin, first and foremost, is against God. And so, number two, it’s just a matter between you and God.

## 2. Just You and God

And for us to understand grace, we must first learn to take our own sin seriously, but many times we’re more interested in being told that it’s not our fault, that we didn’t do anything wrong, or that someone else is to blame. But the people who refuse to take responsibility for their own sin, for their own unfaithfulness to God and others, never truly experience God’s grace because they’ve never acknowledged their own sin. And so, as these men kept questioning Jesus, verse seven says, 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” (John 8:7).

In the original language, what Jesus was saying is that not only did you not sin, but you didn’t even want to sin. And so, Jesus raises the standard, he raises the bar once again, and I’ll admit that there have been lots of times when I didn’t sin, but honestly there was a part of me that wanted to. You know what I mean, sometimes you might not sin, but you wanted to?

And so, Jesus says, “Whoever is without sin, without even wanting to sin, you can throw the first rock, you can be the first to inflict justice on this woman who’s standing here shamed and humiliated. And then in verse eight,

“Again, Jesus stooped down and wrote on the ground. 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. Jesus straightened up and asked her, "Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?" "No one, sir," she said. "Then neither do I condemn you," Jesus declared. "Go now and leave your life of sin" (John 8:8-11). And here’s what he wanted her to understand…

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What this woman came to understand was that the opinions, accusations, and condemnation of others are secondary, they may judge you and refuse to forgive you, but God never does. And so, when you come before him, owning up to what you’ve done, he pours out his mercy upon you and washes away every wrong thing. Jesus response to this woman wasn’t condemning, his words were full of love and grace, and so thirdly, when it comes to you and your sin you never have the luxury of ignoring it or looking away.

## 3. Looking Away

Now, I’ve never understood why early church fathers, theologians, and scribes thought this story might lead the sheep astray, being understood as a license to sin, because it’s really just so beautiful. I mean, I could understand if Jesus had said, “Neither do I condemn you. Go now and have a nice day!” But that’s not what he said, in fact the literal translation is rather unreasonable, intimidating, like mission impossible; because Jesus said,

“I don’t condemn you, either. Go. From now on sin no more" (John 8:11, NASU).

But Jesus wasn’t saying, “You better not sin anymore because this is your last chance.” What he was saying is that, “I know that you found yourself in this place because of careless, seemingly innocent steps, one insignificant decision after another, and yet now you’ve found yourself in the most publicly shamed moment of your life, but I’m giving you the chance to start a new life, to live a new way.”

And so, Jesus is encouraging her to “Go” with a sense of urgency, because she’s not held hostage to her old life anymore. She’s free to go and walk in truth, and so he wants her to escape the fleeting pleasures of sin, because it may be pleasurable for a little while, but the consequences of disobedience aren’t worth the eventual pain and hardship. You see, it’s not like God’s trying to withhold something good from us; he’s trying to protect us from the consequences of our choices, and yet many of us are looking for happiness in all the wrong places.

This morning, if you find yourself wondering why you’re not happy, you’re struggling and discontent, it’s because you weren’t created for this world. You were created by God, to live for God, and to live for things that aren’t of this world. That’s why true contentment comes from knowing God, serving God, and living for his glory. And, that’s why Jesus taught us to pray, “Your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven” (Matthew 6:10). In fact, I love the way David said it in Psalm chapter 16, he said in verse 11,

“You’ve made known to me the path of life; you’ll fill me with joy in your presence, with eternal pleasures at your right hand” (Psalms 16:11).

Not the fleeting pleasures of sin, not things of this world, but the eternal pleasures at God’s right hand.

And that’s why when Jesus looked at this woman who was just as guilty as you and I are guilty, he didn’t look at her and say “I’m embarrassed by your behavior.” He didn’t say, “after all I’ve done for you and this is the way you choose to live?” No, what he said was that there’s something so much better. I want you to be free, to walk in truth, and so, go now and live for those things that really matter.

You see, we need to recognize that Jesus gives us a way out, when you’re trapped, he says because of my grace you can be set free. And so, Jesus comes in and says “I’ve got a better plan, I’m not going to let anyone else throw stones at you, go now and leave your life of sin.” It’s an invitation to walk in grace and truth, because that’s where you find everlasting joy, it’s in his presence.

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