

In His Father's House

by G.W. North

G.W. North's sermon emphasizes the themes of mercy, grace, and the call to true discipleship through Jesus' encounter with the woman caught in adultery.

Scripture: John 8:7-31

Topics: "Grace and Mercy", "Discipleship"

Description

G.W. North preaches on the profound encounter between Jesus and the woman caught in adultery, illustrating how Jesus masterfully navigated the conflicting laws of Moses and Rome while embodying grace and mercy. He emphasizes that Jesus did not condemn the woman but instead offered her forgiveness and a call to a transformed life, highlighting the importance of believing in Him as the light of the world. North stresses that true discipleship requires a continuous commitment to follow Christ and abide in His word, which leads to freedom from sin and the promise of eternal life in the Father's house. The sermon challenges listeners to reflect on their own beliefs and actions in light of Jesus' teachings, urging them to embrace the light and truth He offers. Ultimately, it is a call to recognize the necessity of personal commitment to Christ for true freedom and discipleship.

Transcript

The Lord set the background for His further teaching by a stroke of genius and an act of mercy. It was so typical of Him. The day it happened He was in the temple teaching all who came to Him when bursting in as rudely as ever, the scribes and Pharisees brought unto Him a woman. She had been taken in adultery they said, and they set her in the midst and accused her of her crime before all. It was an unusual ploy even for the Pharisees and, whatever everybody else thought about it, Jesus acted as though He did not want to listen to the accusations. He appeared to wish to totally ignore the whole thing, for He stooped down and wrote on the ground with His finger. What He was doing did not seem to communicate itself to those men; His attitude did not please them at all and they became so incensed against Him that they pressed their accusations further, demanding an answer; what they were wanting was to accuse Him to the authorities for seditious teaching. But the Lord was far too wise for them, He knew their purpose, they were not as clever as they thought; it is foolish of men to try and pit their knowledge and wits against the Lord's. Armed as they were with their knowledge of the law and Roman laws and having a clear-cut case, they thought they had Him cornered, but they were no match for Him.

With one word He fulfilled Moses' law, kept Roman law, perfected the law of human being and revealed the law of God in Christ. Moses' law said she should be stoned, Roman law forbade stoning, the law of human being demands that we love our neighbour as ourselves, and the law of God, that is God's law governing His own being and words and works in Christ, forbade Him condemning anybody. The Lord's word, 'he that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone at her' was absolutely masterly. It was a word of wisdom, a word of mercy and justice, of love and righteousness; it completely floored them; they were shamed and silenced and totally exposed. Stunned and conscience-smitten, one by one, from the eldest to the youngest, man and woman, everybody (perhaps even including the elect apostles also) except the adulteress and Jesus, went out. God was left alone in His temple with a sinner.

Behold our God! Let us see Him high and lifted up in the temple with nothing but His train filling it, His train of glory. No throne can ever exalt Him higher than this, for His throne is not of ivory or of gold or precious stones; they are all too cheap and mean for Him. His throne is of grace and love and of white righteousness and everlasting mercy; even His chariot was paved with love for this daughter of Jerusalem that day, for a greater than Solomon was there. He did not sit for judgement on the woman, He did not even pass sentence on her shabby accusers, neither did he send them away but, without counter-accusation or condemnation let them all go. As He had once told Mary, His hour had not yet come, it was a time of forgiveness and grace to all. When He pointed His finger it was not at her or them, it was to write on the ground. They had pointed the finger of accusation at her, having already condemned her in their hearts; but not He -- His finger was pointed to the earth to write something there. What He wrote we do not know; what we do know is that the word of God through Jeremiah is 'they who depart from the Lord shall be written in the earth' -- and they all went out one by one.

Perhaps also He was pointing us to the earth and thereby saying, 'I know your frame, I remember you are but dust, you are of fallen man and cursed earth, I don't condemn you. How can I condemn anyone for sinning or call any man or woman a sinner? Had I not been born from heaven of a virgin mother and the sinless Father I would have been a sinner like everyone else'. In dealing with this woman Jesus was not only being gracious to a guilty sinner, He was being honest and true to Himself. If He had been anything other than loving and gentle He would not have been righteous. A person can only be condemned after refusing to believe on and come to Jesus -- 'this is the condemnation that light is come into the world and men love darkness rather than light, neither do they come to the light lest their deeds should be reprov'd' This woman had been brought to the light -- almost certainly against her will, but having come she remained when all others had fled; that is her commendation. Her reward was, 'neither do I condemn thee, go and sin no more', it was wonderful; she was un-condemned, free, she was also at crisis point. Jesus' next words were of critical importance to her as they are to everyone who has undergone an experience similar to this woman's. When that happens it is the time to hear His declaration, 'I am the light of the world, he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness but shall have the light of life'. The Pharisees said that, because He bore record of Himself His record was not true; but it was true -- the preceding episode with the woman proved it to be true. We can afford to ignore perversely ignorant men, but what did His word do to her? Did she follow Christ? With all sincerity we must hope she did, for her own sake -- to be brought to the light to meet the Lord and then depart from Him and it is to bring upon ourselves greater condemnation.

She was not called by name to follow the Lord, but the declaration and claim of the Lord was unmistakably and openly made for all to heed; He is still on the subject of discipleship -- come out of darkness, follow Me, have the light of life. If she heard it did she heed it? The Pharisees did not do so, but surely she had

no desire in her heart to be as they; they had proved themselves to be her enemies, and she knew she could believe and trust Christ, she had every reason to. But what a commandment He had given her -- 'go and sin no more', what a promise and what a possibility, and what a prospect for a life. Could she really believe Him? Should she venture all on His word? Was she among those Jews who believed on Him to whom He said, 'if ye continue in my word then are ye my disciples indeed and ye shall know the truth and the truth shall make you free'?

Believing is action, it is an inner commitment of the heart to something -- 'I think that is true'. But no-one can be saved except he or she commits self; salvation is by believing in a person. The word or truth or idea must be continued in. Believing in order to be true must bring the life compulsion: believing is continuous action. Believing is the only way to discover truth; by continuous believing comes knowledge of truth to the point of certainty, this is the way of believing. This way of believing, or 'the believing way', is perhaps a better and more expressive phrase than 'the life of faith'. The word faith is a noun: John rarely uses it and never in his Gospel, where he uses the word believe, the word of action; it is simpler. Faith considered as a word can induce speculation and contemplation in a heart struggling for definition, but the word 'believes is readily understood, even by the most irreligious. Jesus Himself used the word 'believe' in its various forms more than the word faith, preferring rather to reduce everything to the point of active response than to introduce talking-points to men's hearts.

It is certain that the Lord never thought about Himself and His mission and manhood in other than the simplest of terms. A glance back over this chapter with this in mind is most illuminating. Here is a selection of the phrases He used at this time which could be helpful to anyone wanting to know how He lived: 'I am', 'I know', 'the Father sent me', 'I came', 'I go', 'I speak', 'I do'. With the exception of the first one, these phrases are all expressions of some form of action: properly understood they supply much information about our Lord and the simplicity of His life to hearts willing to learn. This basic element of simplicity is one of the hallmarks of true disciples -- we all must continue in truth and light into perfect freedom by the way of believing; there is no other way to be free.

The freedom the Lord wants us all to enjoy is His own freedom, namely the freedom of son-ship. Believers must become disciples and sons. This is the message the Lord is declaring here. It is strange and horrifying to discover as we read on that within a few minutes many who started out by believing on Him took up stones to stone Him. Jesus prevented the murder by hiding Himself from them, but to those who desire to be wholly His, who will believe Him fully and continually follow Him into all truth, His words are spirit and life and utmost liberty. Naturally by contrast we associate the word freedom with bondage, and seeing He uses it when speaking of knowing truth, its meaning is freedom from error and ignorance and lies. What bondage lies in the power of these three contenders for the heart of man and how many are bound by them. Only Jesus can make us free from them and then only as we continue in His word; we cannot be disciples indeed unless we do. One liberating stroke is sufficient to make us free, but it is not sufficient to keep us in liberty if we will not continue in what He says. What He does is insufficient to maintain us in the personal liberty He creates for us, unless from that moment we go on with Him.

At this point the Lord reveals His main objective in calling each one of us to a continual believing walk with Him, it is to free us from the servitude of sin and bring us into 'the house'. He does not specify the house, but just refers to it; we have to read a little further to discover whose house it is. Even then He does not say where it is, but simply tells us to whom it belongs -- 'My Father's House'; this can be no other than the place where God lives, His home. The Lord's commission and therefore His main concern was to fulfil the charge God gave Him. This was not merely to go before His people as a leader, He also had to prepare a

place for them that finally they may be received by Him into His own eternal position in the presence of the Father to live with Him there. The Son abideth in the house for ever, He said, servants do not. They all understood what He was saying, it was common enough social practice and therefore general knowledge, but whether many fully grasped all He meant is doubtful. The implications of His words are startling: He is talking very directly about committing sin and says he who does so is the slave of sin. There can be no doubt that He intends us all to infer from His words that if we are bond-slaves of sin we shall not abide in His Father's house for ever. We have to be made free by the Son from the bond-slavery of sin if we wish to abide with the Son.

Only if believers of His day continued in His word would they be disciples indeed He said, for only thereby could they know the truth that would make them free from having to commit sin. It was a great time of teaching; truth can only be discovered through following Him. They stood listening to the heavenly Teacher's further words on this theme and learned much about murder and fatherhood; He spoke of the devil and his lies and of seeing death, and then of Himself. There was great contention between the Lord and the Jews about these things. So great was their hatred that Jesus was denounced as a devil-possessed Samaritan, a child of fornication, and they attempted to murder Him. It seems impossible that hearts can so quickly switch from belief to unbelief and hostility and murder, yet here is evidence that they can and did. How is this possible and how so quickly? Jesus had exposed their false position. They actually believed that being Abraham's earthly progeny they were not in bondage to any man, when all the time they were slaves to sin. They had believed in Jesus over the top of personal sin and false beliefs. No man can be a true disciple on these grounds.

The Lord had shown this earlier when speaking about the living bread. Many had left Him then, preferring their own ideas to His, but this did not deter Him from speaking the truth. He did so at the cost of losing followers then and He did so again, and still does so. To be a disciple a man must forsake all He has; in no other realm is this more true than in the realm of truth. Conversion to Jesus Christ entails rejection of all former beliefs about Him and self, especially on the points introduced in this section of scripture. A man must believe without reserve that: (1) Jesus is the Son of God; (2) he must continue in Christ's word; (3) he himself is from beneath; (4) he must be made free from sin; (5) his father is the devil. This is the truth every man must know in order that knowing it he will do something about it. But they did not hear His word or understand what He was saying, but true to His calling He told them the truth and those who rose superior to fear and followed Him to the end were led to the place He prepared on earth for His people at Golgotha. By the cross He prepared and sanctified them to His own use: He prepares all who have since followed Him there en route to Father's home; all they who go to the cross have learned of Him and have known the truth, no-one else has. This is what He implied when He said, 'take up the cross and follow me'. Only those who have done so are His disciples; He sought to discipline people to this, and being disciplined by Him to this degree and experience, the disciple, by common consent of the Godhead, has been renamed 'saint', for as the disciple makes the cross of Christ his own personal cross he is freed from the bondage of sin.

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