

# Jesus Unites Mercy with Justice

By David Harrell

**Bible Text:** John 8:1-11  
**Preached on:** Sunday, July 20, 2014

It is my great joy to be able to minister the word of God to you again this morning so let's take our Bibles and turn to John's gospel. We are now at the very last phrase, actually the last verse of John 7 which ties together with verses 1-11 of John 8. I've entitled my discourse to you this morning "Jesus Unites Mercy with Justice." Let me read the passage and then we will examine it closely and apply it to our lives. Beginning in chapter 7:53,

53 Everyone went to his home. 1 But Jesus went to the Mount of Olives. 2 Early in the morning He came again into the temple, and all the people were coming to Him; and He sat down and began to teach them. 3 The scribes and the Pharisees brought a woman caught in adultery, and having set her in the midst, 4 they said to Him, "Teacher, this woman has been caught in adultery, in the very act. 5 Now in the Law Moses commanded us to stone such women; what then do You say?" 6 They were saying this, testing Him, so that they might have grounds for accusing Him. But Jesus stooped down and with His finger wrote on the ground. 7 But when they persisted in asking Him, He straightened up, and said to them, "He who is without sin among you, let him be the first to throw a stone at her." 8 Again He stooped down and wrote on the ground. 9 When they heard it, they began to go out one by one, beginning with the older ones, and He was left alone, and the woman, where she had been, in the midst. 10 Straightening up, Jesus said to her, "Woman, where are they? Did no one condemn you?" 11 She said, "No one, Lord." And Jesus said, "I do not condemn you, either. Go your way. From now on sin no more.

This is a very familiar passage of Scripture, one filled with the mysteries of God's character and the glory of God in the face of Christ. I'm certainly not equal to the task of expounding it but by the power of the Spirit, I will do the best I can. It should be noted from the outside that there is both internal and external evidence that indicates that it is highly unlikely that verse 53 of chapter 7 through verse 11 that I have just read, were originally in John's gospel. In fact, there is compelling evidence that John didn't even write this. This narrative is absent from virtually all of the early Greek manuscripts and it's not included in the earliest and most reliable manuscripts from a variety of textual traditions; all the early church fathers omit it in their commentaries and on it goes. However, there is overwhelming evidence that this incident actually did happen as it is described and, therefore, justified as being a part of the canon of Scripture. Similar stories are found in other sources and over time, they were written down and included in later manuscripts of the word of God. We know, for example, it circulated in a variety of the early Western church as a part of oral tradition; it's found in some of the later Western

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manuscripts and versions; it was even commented on and confirmed by Western church fathers.

So we rejoice that in the sovereignty of God, we have this passage of Scripture, this marvelous story. A beautiful story that really helps us understand and helps illustrate the gospel of grace. A story that helps us see how Jesus unites mercy and justice. A story that speaks to all of us because ultimately it's about all of us because we are all sinners, deserving the just wrath of a holy God, that we have received mercy through Christ our Savior. I wish to explain and apply this text under two headings: first, we're going to see the Savior seeking and then; secondly, the Savior saving because Jesus declared of himself in Luke 19:10 that "the Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost." I trust that this story will deeply humble every one of us here this morning resulting in greater adoration and worship of the lover of our souls.

By way of introduction, notice first the stark contrast that we see in verse 53 and verse 1 of chapter 8. There we read, "And everyone went to his home. But Jesus went to the Mount of Olives." Now, since we are unsure of the chronology of the events that precede and follow this narrative, we're not sure of the context, but we can be certain of the fact that there is a contrast here in these statements making them worthy of our meditation and consideration. Consider this: both friends and foes of Jesus had homes to go to but not so the Incarnate Lord of glory. He was basically homeless even though his family lived in Capernaum at this time. Jesus said of himself in Matthew 8:20, "The foxes have holes and the birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay His head."

Perhaps he went to spend the night with Mary, Martha and Lazarus because they lived in Bethany which was way over on the eastern slope of the Mount of Olives. The text does not say but given the obvious contrast between those who went to their personal home and Jesus going to the Mount of Olives, I believe it is fair to assume that he has left the temple area and if you know anything about the geography there: you have the Mount of Olives that slopes down to the Kidron Valley and then out of that flows the Temple Mount. So Jesus probably has left the Temple Mount, he's crossed the brook Kidron, he's gone then up into the Mount of Olives, that sacred place that he had been before. He has left that place of apostasy, his Father's house that he has cleansed in the past, and now he has come to a place of solitude to find comfort, to find strength given all that is going on in his life as he marches inexorably toward the cross. No doubt he knew that the garden on this mountain would soon be the scene of his great agony of soul when he would be tempted by Satan, when he would sweat great drops of blood. But it had been and would continue to be that secret sanctuary where he would find rest for his weary soul and companionship for his lonely spirit. As the day of sacrifice approached, certainly the companionship of mere human beings would be of no avail; no human being could

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possibly understand his sorrow and his grief. No one could conceive of the agonies of his soul. No one could even discuss the themes of his heart. To be sure, every pastor, every missionary, every soldier of the cross actively engaged in kingdom warfare understands the intense loneliness associated with ministry. But how much more so the sinless Savior? He needed to spend time alone with God.

So where does he go for comfort and strength? He goes to his Father in private prayer, in communion. Would that we all imitate our Master in this regard. Instead of going to our homes for comfort, instead of sometimes just staying in our homes and not engaging in the battle for the kingdom, would that we join the fight. Believe me, when you're in the fight, you will not need to be cajoled or coerced to go to prayer; you will run to that place of refuge and strength. It's easy to spot the Christian that spends little time at the Mercy Seat to find strength in time of need and comfort and help. Their counsel will be shallow. Their priorities out of whack. Their discernment will be pitiful typically. Their service for Christ will be hit-or-miss. They'll be self-absorbed, self-willed. Like a bee that refuses to feed on nectar and pollen, they will have no energy for God and very seldom will their sleep be interrupted by spiritual matters requiring them to ascend the mountain of prayer, so to speak. Their minds typically will be set on the things of earth, not the things above.

You know, folks, the battle for the sake of the cross is a violent one and as you get involved in that great battle, even though there will be many times when you will, as I say, run to the mountain of private prayer, you're not only going to run there to find that needed joy and strength that your soul is craving for but you're going to find an amazing blessing as you experience the presence of the Living God. Certainly sleep is necessary for the body but so too is prayer necessary for the soul and even more refreshing, I might add. So I hope you have a front porch or a back porch swing or a garden bench or some place that is your mountain where you can go often to meet with God.

So I'm sure that in the loneliness of that night vigil, our precious Savior came before the Father to intercede for the saints and to pray for those that the Father had given him. Isn't it amazing to know that he is our unfailing Protector. He is always on guard. He never sleeps nor does he slumber. So having prepared his heart for worship, notice verse 2, "Early in the morning He came again into the temple." As light follows darkness, so too long nights of pleading with God inevitably result in a morning, a dawning of praise to God. I cherish the Lord's words in Proverbs 8:17 where he says, "I love those who love me; And those who diligently seek me will find me." And so this is what the Lord does now: he goes early in the morning to the temple. It's interesting if you think about it: there is no pleasure on earth that in any way compares to the joy of worshiping the Lord our God, not only privately but even coming together corporately. And it's fascinating to understand that our soul is devised in such a way that it craves that which is outside of itself but so often because of our sinful nature, what we seek after are things that only

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provide temporary pleasure, they do not provide lasting joy and satisfaction. But not so when we come to our God in prayer. Private worship always animates the soul to public worship where we express the doxologies of our soul where we, like newborn babes longing for the pure milk of the word, can hear it, can live it, can sing it and so forth. This, of course, is the focus of our worship services here.

So he begins with a night of prayer. He goes now to a place of worship. Certainly the Lord understands that he needed the strength, the power of his Father, indeed, we are all invincible when we are on our knees and so now he comes to the temple. Here we see: 1. The Savior seeking. We know according to Scripture that he came first to the lost sheep of Israel and what better place to pursue them with his grace than in their central place of worship. Now let me give you the scene here. The Temple Mount was designed in such a way that the outer court of the temple was a very large area where the scribes would gather together to teach their students. The scribes were basically the theologians; they were the lawyers; they were the professors, you might say. They would exposit the law to the students. Most of them were Pharisees from that particular sect which existed in first century Judaism and, of course, they were notorious for their strict observance of the law, not only the written law but the oral law which included all kinds of things that they had made up.

So Jesus arrives. Mind you, he's been drawing crowds everywhere he goes so I'm sure that he draws a crowd here and he also draws the attention of the temple authorities who hate him. Notice what happens in verse 3, "The scribes and the Pharisees brought a woman caught in adultery." I would submit to you that this was a planned attack, if you will; they had thought of this ahead of time; they had devised a plan to trap Jesus. Think about it: they didn't just all of a sudden say, "Hey, look, there's Jesus. Hey, I've got an idea, why don't we go find some lady that's been caught in adultery and let's bring her to him and see what he says." No, they had all of this well planned out. They're looking for him. They see him arrive in the morning and he begins to teach in this large area as many other teachers would do but, no doubt, when the people saw him, they all left their particular scribe and came to Jesus because this guy is absolutely the talk of Israel. Perhaps they had even previously arranged some man to go in to some woman so that they could catch her, not him, in the act. Isn't it interesting that they bring the woman and not the man? Of course, this is typical of the chauvinistic hypocrites of that day who would thank God every morning that they were not born a woman. Obviously they have no concern for rule of law that would indict both partners, not just the woman. They have no real passion for justice. They have not been grieved because God has somehow been dishonored. They certainly have no compassion for this woman, no concern that she be restored. But I might add, dear friends, legalism is always this way. It's never really about the law, it's about appearances. It's about the veneer of religiosity. It's about wearing a mask to make you feel good about yourself inside because in reality there is a big hole in

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the inside. It's about manipulating others to see you in a way that is not really who you are. It's about exploiting the sins of others in order to exalt yourself and fulfill whatever evil plan you might have in your mind.

So knowing precisely when and where to get this adulteress, these enemies of Christ arrest her. At the end of verse 3 it says, “and having set her in the midst, they said to Him, 'Teacher, this woman has been caught in adultery, in the very act.’” So imagine the scene: Jesus is teaching, they interrupt him and publicly humiliate this woman. Obviously, they are trying to impale the Son of God on the horns of a dilemma. They are trying to trick him. They are asking him a question that, in their minds, they are certain will result in an answer where he will ultimately indict himself, what we might call in our vernacular a Catch-22 situation. Imagine the scene: there are probably several hundred people around Jesus and here these leaders bring this woman in front of him. I try to put in my mind what she would have looked like. I'm sure we would look upon her face and see the agony of embarrassment and humiliation, of confusion and, frankly, of sheer terror knowing that she is about to be executed. She never dreamed she would be in this kind of a position. I'm sure she was totally shocked because, like all of us when we sin, we really don't ever think about judgment; we don't think about the consequences. All we think about is our own pleasure and we can rationalize and justify virtually anything.

But here she is. Dear friend, what a picture of each of us. I hope you can see yourself there. Who among us could stand before a holy God in sinless perfection? What man or woman among us has not even committed this very sin of adultery? Maybe not physically, but certainly in your mind, in your imagination, which makes you equally guilty according to Jesus. In Psalm 130:3, we read, “If You, LORD, should mark iniquities, O Lord, who could stand?” The point is: no one. But then it goes on to say, “But there is forgiveness with Thee, That Thou mayest be feared.”

But, you see, this woman knows nothing of forgiveness. She knows nothing of what is about to happen. All she knows is that the law is unforgiving. It demands justice. The law only condemns. Moreover, she knows nothing about Jesus; knows nothing about repentance and faith in him; nothing of mercy and grace. She knows that ultimately according to the law, she is guilty and she is probably about to be executed. Now notice what her accusers say to Jesus in verse 5, “Now in the Law Moses commanded us to stone such women; what then do You say?” You know, when I was thinking about this, the first thing that came to my mind was, “I wish I had a penny for every time some hypocrite quoted Scripture to promote their own wicked agenda.” I've seen this so many times. Learn this well, dear friends, the most outwardly pious are typically the most inwardly pompous and that's what you have here. These white-washed tombs as Jesus called them, they have no compassion for sinners. They have no hungering and thirsting after righteousness, no real love for God. They have no sense of mercy or grace because

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they've never grieved over their own personal sin. They don't see their own sin. They have been blinded by their own inflated evaluation of themselves.

Now, indeed, the seventh commandment forbids adultery and according to the Mosaic law in Leviticus 20:10 we read, "If there is a man who commits adultery with another man's wife, one who commits adultery with his friend's wife, the adulterer and the adulteress shall surely be put to death." It's interesting, according to Deuteronomy 22, the method of execution is stoning if it is a betrothed virgin who is sexually unfaithful to her fiancé. By the way, this same execution method would be for the male counterpart. However, for all other unfaithful wives and lovers, there is no specific method of execution mentioned only that they be put to death. And according to the Jewish Mishnah which was the oral interpretation of the law, this particular category was less serious so the method of execution was strangulation. In light of this, since they say here in verse 5 that the law requires stoning, this tells us that the woman described here was probably a young woman betrothed but not married. However, I would add that there is very little evidence that this kind of execution actually happened in Jesus' day, nevertheless, this was the law.

But again, the authorities aren't interested in really how the law is applied to this woman, they just wanted to trap Jesus so that they could accuse him and hopefully get rid of him forever. John makes this clear. Notice verse 6, "They were saying this, testing Him, so that they might have grounds for accusing Him." Now, you must understand the brilliant dilemma that they have created here for Jesus. If Jesus upheld the law and supported a very much despised judgment resulting in this woman's death, the people would turn away from him. They would no longer believe his words about being a compassionate Savior full of grace and truth and mercy and forgiveness. Moreover, no doubt these Jewish authorities would instantly run to the Romans and say, "Hey, this Jesus has pronounced a death sentence in the name of Moses. That's a right that's only reserved for the Roman Prefect." So he was in a real dilemma here in their mind. Now on the other hand if he set her free, then he would be guilty of renouncing the law of Moses; he would be criticized as a man that has no regard for the law. But a very serious crime in Judaism and, of course, this would also immediately undermine his claims as the Messiah of Israel. Seemingly a no-win situation.

By the way, before we look at this any further: when I gaze upon this particular scene in my mind and I meditate upon it, my eyes immediately look over in the shadows and I can see something over there. Do you know what I see? I see the hideous head of a serpent. This is exactly the type of thing Satan loves to do. The prince of darkness exerting all of his power to somehow thwart the redemptive purposes of God by destroying the Lord Jesus Christ. Here we see him stirring up his fellow fiends, if you will, to work his diabolical plans through the agency of religious hypocrites who will eventually nail Jesus

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to the cross. Dear Christian, never underestimate the deadly arrows of the enemy and the way he tries to destroy your life, to destroy your family, to destroy your church. He'll stop at nothing to bring you to a place of despair, to discredit and dishonor Christ. My, don't we see that happening at alarming rates in our culture today? In fact, his inveterate hatred or, in other words, his habitual chronic hatred of Christ and all who belong to him is so severe, it is so powerful, that he will stop at nothing to destroy us.

Here in this scene, this vile accuser would love nothing better than to see this woman agonize in hopeless despair and die without mercy along with all of her accusers who foolishly believe that they're more righteous than she is. How thankful we need to be that Jesus has conquered sin, Satan and death, right? That he chose us by his uninfluenced grace to be redeemed by the blood of the Lamb, that however great our guilt, the mercy of the Lord is from everlasting to everlasting upon them that fear him? Let me pause for a second. You may be listening to the sound of my voice this morning and you may feel the intense pain of the guilt of maybe your own sins as well you should, but let me tell you the good news: Jesus is a forgiving, redeeming Savior. There is hope. There is forgiveness. There is grace when you place your faith in him.

Here we see the Savior seeking. We don't really know that fully until we see the end of the story but he's seeking certainly this woman and I'm sure others. But we also see the serpent doing the same thing; he always counterfeits Christ. He's seeking someone to deceive, those who unwittingly belong to him. But secondly, we see the Savior saving. Now this is something the serpent is powerless to do. It's fascinating: notice what Jesus does in response to their wicked question at the end of verse 6, "But Jesus stooped down and with His finger wrote on the ground." Naturally, the question comes up, "What did he write?" Well, we don't know. But we do know that this entire scene is a beautiful illustration of the gospel which may give us some idea, I don't want to be dogmatic on this at all, but it may give us some idea what he might have written with his finger. I want you to notice the scene more closely. Notice we have two opposing kingdoms: the kingdom of God and the kingdom of Satan. Notice that we see the schemes of Satan here, the murdering deceiver. As Paul said in 2 Corinthians 4:4, he is "the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelieving so that they might not see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ." That's what's happening here. He's that roaring lion seeking anyone he can devour in combination with those spiritual forces of wickedness that promote doctrines of demons through false religious teachers and religious systems.

We also the violated law and the penalty of death and then we see the guilty sinner standing there, unable to save herself, a slave to her own sin, incarcerated in the kingdom of darkness. And in utter helplessness, this guilty sinner is brought before the Savior, who himself was indicted by his enemies, a Savior full of grace and truth who will forgive and cleanse. Is this not a picture of law and grace united together in the gospel of God? But

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notice the great dilemma: how can mercy and justice be united? Think about it: the law is holy; all sin must be punished so the sinner cannot merely be forgiven. How can a holy and just God simply forgive sin and leave it unpunished? If he does that, then justice is in question. You see, God cannot exchange his wrath for love unless his justice is satisfied. That's the whole picture here. Of course, we know the answer, don't we? That is that God for his glory with great love for sinners, sent forth his Son to this earth to live a perfect life and then according to God's eternal plan, the Lord Jesus Christ bore the sins, the guilt, the curse of all who would trust in him. God made him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf that we might become the righteousness of God in him. We're going to see these staggering truths played out in this gospel picture as we move ahead.

Now, what did he write with his finger? Again, we don't know but I believe it is possible, I believe it is a tenable hypothesis to say that he wrote something related to what this whole scene is picturing, namely, the gospel. I don't believe he was just doodling on the ground. Where else in Scripture did we see God write with his finger? At the giving of the law to Moses on Mount Sinai. Exodus 31:18, "When He had finished speaking with him upon Mount Sinai, He gave Moses the two tablets of the testimony, tablets of stone, written by the finger of God." Would this not fit into the legal questioning of these scribes? And is this not the gospel in the sense that the gospel is meaningless unless you understand the offended law of God? And would this not provide the necessary contrast for law and grace, the uniting of mercy and justice through Christ? So I believe that it is possible that Jesus took his finger and that he wrote on the ground as he once did on those tablets of stone something that would have reference to the law as if to say, "How dare you speak to me about the very law that I gave to you?" Earlier, he has said, "Do not think that I came to abolish the law or the prophets. I did not come to abolish but to fulfill." Of course, his accusers wouldn't have understood this. They may have seen it and wondered, "Hm, that's interesting." By the way, I find it also fascinating that the ancient Rabbis and many of them to this day, can read as well upside down as they can standing before it or in the proper direction of the reading so they may have seen this.

We can't be for certain but obviously his would-be accusers were frustrated because they've asked him a question and he's writing something on the ground here with his finger. They want an answer so they can spring their trap. They want to hear what he has to say so they can accuse him but he continues to stoop over and write. I can almost see the smirk on their face. They're thinking, "You know, we've got him. We've got him here. He doesn't know what to say." And then suddenly, verse 7, "But when they persisted in asking Him, He straightened up." Can't you see that scene? Can you imagine the Lord Jesus Christ straightening up and looking at them? "And said to them, 'He who is without sin among you, let him be the first to throw a stone at her.'" What a brilliant answer. A supernatural answer. Certainly one they did not expect. Jesus did not disavow the law but he upheld it, in fact, he even expanded it by exposing the sins of all the accusers.

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Moreover, he avoided that potential accusation that he somehow pronounced a capital offense judgment upon somebody and overstepped the Roman boundaries and best of all, he showed mercy to the guilty consistent with his Messianic claims.

So think about it: the very one who gave the law, who came to fulfill the law, the one who alone has authority to judge on the basis of the law, suddenly exposes their self-righteous hypocrisy and places them all in the same place as this woman. What a powerful gospel truth, isn't it? We've all sinned. We've all fallen short of the glory of God. And none of us have the moral authority to condemn anyone or to demand legal justice be imposed upon anyone and here the Son of God unites mercy with justice. To be sure, the law demands justice and knows nothing of forgiveness. As I said earlier, every sin must be punished and as sinners, we could never appease the just wrath of a holy God so how can we ever be forgiven? Once again, the glorious truth of the gospel is that God provided the perfect substitute in our place, one who was a man to die for men but one who had to be God to be perfect and spotless, the spotless Lamb of God, the Lord Jesus Christ. Because of his infinite love, God has provided his Son as a means of placating, of satisfying his own wrath. In fact, John will later write in 1 John 4:10, "In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins." In other words, the one who could satisfy the demands of the law.

And there was Christ with this terrified, humiliated woman, once again, a picture of every one of us. Here is Christ who according to Hebrews 2:17 "had to be made like His brethren in all things, so that He might become a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people." It's interesting that later on and perhaps he was there, one of those Pharisees came to Christ. He was Saul of Tarsus and he would later write in Romans 3:24 as the Apostle Paul these words, "we have been justified," in other words, we have been declared righteous, "as a gift by His grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus; whom God displayed publicly as a propitiation in His blood through faith. This was to demonstrate His righteousness, because in the forbearance of God He passed over the sins previously committed; for the demonstration, I say, of His righteousness at the present time, so that He would be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus." So, not only does Jesus forgive but because of his righteousness, he reconciles as the Father declares a person righteous based upon the imputed righteousness of Christ.

So, friends, here we not only see Jesus seeking but Jesus saving. Oh, the unsearchable riches of Christ. What a Savior is Jesus our Lord. Amen? "He who is without sin among you, let him be the first to throw a stone at her." And then it's interesting, verse 8, "Again He stooped down and wrote on the ground." Well, what's the symbolic meaning of this? I'm not sure. I'll take a stab at it just for food for thought. We do know that when Moses came off of Mount Sinai with the law that God had written with his finger, he saw the

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idolatrous acts of the covenant people and according to Exodus 32:19, “his anger burned, and he threw the tablets from his hands and shattered them at the foot of the mountain.” Then we know in Exodus 34 that God renewed his covenant with his people and he wrote a second set which was then placed in the Ark of the Covenant and above the Ark of the Covenant was the Mercy Seat, the hilasterion, the place of propitiation which separated the violated law from the presence of God, the Shekinah, that hovered above the Mercy Seat between the wings of the cherubim. It was only through the shedding of blood sprinkled on that Mercy Seat could those who had violated the law ever enter into the presence of God. What a magnificent picture of the spotless Lamb of God that we read about here in this passage.

Perhaps this was Jesus' intention in his second writing. We simply don't know but in verse 9 we read this, “When they heard it,” in other words, his answer, “they began to go out one by one, beginning with the older ones.” Obviously, the exposure was too great for them. Their consciences were screaming at them. They had been bested by Almighty God. But isn't it sad that instead of bowing before him and confessing their sin, they left his presence. It's just a heart-breaking scene and sadly some of you will do the very same thing today. Your conscience is screaming at you; you know you are enslaved by your own sin; you know you are guilty before a holy God and there is mercy, there is grace in Christ and yet like these men, you will walk away from Jesus. What a tragedy.

Then we see, the end of verse 9, one of the most poignant scenes in all of Scripture. It says, “and He,” referring to Jesus, “was left alone, and the woman, where she had been, in the midst.” Dear friends, make no mistake: like this woman, we will all stand before God one day, the Judge of heaven and earth, and it will be Jesus who has been given that authority. We must all give an account. But can't you see the look of dismay on this young girl's face? The horror in her face as she stands there all alone guilty, condemned, terrified? But isn't it interesting that she didn't run away with the rest; she stayed there in the presence of the Savior. Obviously, the Father was drawing her. I believe the Spirit had already given her new life, given her that hunger for Christ, to drink from him.

In verse 10 we read, “Straightening up, Jesus said to her, 'Woman, where are they?'" By the way, in the ancient language, the term “woman” was a very polite form of addressing a lady. “Woman, where are they? Did no one condemn you?” I think it's remarkable that this is the first time in the narrative that we see the woman being addressed. She was merely the pawn for these wicked accusers and now she's addressed by the lover of her soul and you must understand that according to the law, you had to have two witnesses in order to condemn you. Moreover, according to the law in the case of a capital offense, these same witnesses were required to be the first to throw stones at the guilty person; you read about this in Deuteronomy 13. But now they're all gone. I'm sure some of the

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## Jesus Unites Mercy with Justice

By David Harrell

**Bible Text:** John 8:1-11  
**Preached on:** Sunday, July 20, 2014

onlookers were just afraid of what was happening, afraid of the authorities. Jesus is becoming increasingly toxic as he moves towards the cross.

But she knew she was guilty not only of adultery but many other violations of the law of God's righteous standard, certainly Jesus knew she was guilty. Again, isn't this yet another picture of what genuine conviction looks like? There's no place else to go but Jesus. And you're not just convicted of one sin, you're convicted of more sins than you can count. Then you're convicted over the fact that the ones that you can't count are still the tip of the iceberg that you don't even see. An overwhelming awareness of personal guilt will always precede genuine repentance. "Woman, where are they? Did no one condemn you? She said, 'No one, Lord.' And Jesus said, 'Neither do I condemn you. Go your way. From now on sin no more.'" What an amazing scene. Jesus forgives her but also he knows that he is soon going to give his life for her to satisfy the demands of the law, to satisfy justice on her behalf so that she could be declared righteous. You see, like all saints before the cross, she was saved on credit. He would condemn on her behalf.

I want you also to look closely and notice he did not say, "Go your way and sin no more and on that basis I will not condemn you." That would violate grace, wouldn't it? If so, she would be in no better place than she was. She would still be a slave to her sin. There is no way that she could not keep on sinning unless God did some remarkable thing. None of us can earn God's grace, otherwise it's not grace. He simply says, "Neither do I condemn you. Go your way. From now on sin no more." In other words, "You are forgiven. You have been forgiven. You have been acquitted of all of your sins past, present and future." We see this in many other passages. "There is therefore no condemnation," for who? "For those who are in Christ Jesus," Romans 8:1. So he's basically saying, "Now constrained by my love and the mercy that you have been granted, abandon your sinful lifestyle. You're no longer a slave to all of that stuff. Go and sin no more. You're now a slave unto righteousness." What a dramatic picture of the gospel of grace. Jesus seeking and Jesus saving, uniting mercy and justice. I'll be glad to meet this lady some day. Won't that be fun? And to hear her testimony of God's grace in her life. As Paul put it in Romans 3:24, she was "justified as a gift by His grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus whom God displayed publicly as a propitiation in His blood through faith."

Let me close. There are so many applications here. I'll give you just a couple. Certainly there are applications with respect to the importance of prayer, the dangers of self-deception and hypocrisy and Satan but I want to give you just two: 1. Learn to look deeply into the word of God for understanding. Don't merely harvest those little nuggets of truth that are laying out on the surface but learn to dig deep, to mine deep into the word to find those riches because superficial Bible study will result in superficial Christianity. Secondly, think often of the mercy that God has granted to you. See yourself

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standing there; instead of that woman, put yourself there, guilty, condemned, with no remedy in yourself, nothing to offer, solely dependent upon his grace, his mercy and think often of those words, “Neither do I condemn you.” And on the basis of that mercy, “Go and sin no more.” Cherish those words because the more deeply you are aware of God's mercy towards you, the more you will love and serve and worship him. May this be the passion of our souls for the glory of Christ who is coming soon to take us unto himself.

Let's pray together.

*Father, thank you for this narrative that speaks so directly to every heart. I pray that by the power of your Spirit you will use these truths to save sinners and to cause those of us who have been saved by your grace to rejoice and to go and sin no more. We thank you and we praise you in Jesus' name. Amen.*