



Jesus: In The Sand

Let me ask you something. If you knew that God was coming to meet you personally, what would you do to get ready? How would you prepare the moment? What kind of environment would you want to meet him in? What kind of face would you want to present when you met him? Wouldn't you want to leverage everything to where he would see you at your best?

Imagine if you had a one time, first time encounter with God and that encounter happened at the most humiliating and shameful moment of your life. It was the one moment when you really wouldn't want to meet anyone, much less God. That's what we find in the second place where we will look at Jesus; in John, chapter 8, beginning in verse one.

John 8:1 but Jesus went to the Mount of Olives.

John 8:2 Now very early in the morning, he came again into the temple, and all the people came to him. He sat down, and taught them.

John 8:3 The scribes and the Pharisees brought a woman caught committing adultery. Having set her in front of Jesus,

John 8:4 they told him, "Teacher, we found this woman in adultery, in the very act.

John 8:5 Now in our law, Moses commanded us to stone such women. What then do you say about her?"

John 8:6 They said this testing him, that they might have something to accuse him of. But Jesus stooped down, and wrote on the ground with his finger.

John 8:7 But when they continued asking him, he looked up and said to them, "**He who is without sin among you, let him throw the first stone at her.**"

John 8:8 Again he stooped down, and with his finger wrote on the ground.

John 8:9 They, when they heard it, being convicted by their conscience, went out one by one, beginning from the oldest, even to the last. Jesus was left alone with the woman where she was, in front of him.

John 8:10 Jesus, standing up, saw her and said, "**Woman, where are your accusers? Did no one condemn you?**"

John 8:11 She said, "No one, Lord." Jesus said, "Neither do I condemn you. Go your way. From now on, sin no more."

John 8:12 Again, therefore, Jesus spoke to the people saying, "I am the light of the world. He who follows me will not walk in the darkness, but will have the light of life."

Of all the stories we read about in the bible that have to do with encounters with Jesus this is one of my favorites because it shows us God's true attitude. It dispels some of the things we hear about God, at least through rumor, and many times from our own actions. It seems that most of the time, when you hear stories about God, they're about wrath, judgment, and condemnation. And rarely does God get presented the way he really is. But in this moment you get a snapshot into the real heart and person of God.

Here's this woman, caught in the midst of adultery, forced out into the street and dragged down to the temple to where Jesus is teaching. The Pharisees and teachers of the Law were feeling the weight of Jesus' influence. They could feel their own influence diminishing as people flocked to hear what Jesus had to say. But Jesus wasn't fighting them for their power, or for status among the religious elite, but simply by the force of his character, by the depth of his spirituality, and by the power of his teaching, people were leaving the teaching of the Pharisees and Sadducees, and moving in droves to hear the liberating words of Jesus.

While he sits in the temple teaching these words of life, the Pharisees see this as an opportune moment to trap Jesus in his own words. As the story unfolds we discover some things about ourselves, and some things about God, but I think the backdrop of all this is that when we condemn others we are least like God.

Here you have two forces pressing against one life. One force brings judgment, and condemnation, and wrath on a human being who truthfully **is** absolutely guilty of a sin. And another force that, in this encounter, brings an opportunity for compassion and mercy, forgiveness and new beginning. If you listen to so many of the stories and teachings about God you'd think it would be God coming down with wrath, judgment and condemnation, wouldn't you? And it would be human beings saying, "No, God, moderate yourself, temper yourself, God. Hold yourself back." After all, when we sin, don't we fear what God might do, and don't we try to hide our sin? When we hear the stories about God, especially in the Old Testament, and when we hear stories about religion and Christianity, it's as if you and I are really the compassionate, merciful ones, and God is the one ready to judge us and just toss us into an eternal flame of fire. But in this encounter it's actually quite the opposite. It's human beings who are the most ready to condemn, and God who is most ready to forgive.

Now, something strange is happening in this scenario. It says the teachers of the Law and Pharisees brought in a woman caught in adultery. And not just prone to adultery, or known to commit adultery, or having been caught a week ago, but caught at that very moment in the very act. They make her stand before Jesus and tell him she was **caught in the act** of adultery. Perhaps I'm a little cynical, but what are the chances of all these circumstances and events happening at precisely the same moment in the same area, and close enough, distance wise, that they could all come together in front of Jesus?

I mean, think about it. The Pharisees and teachers of the Law just happened to be walking around and suddenly peak into a window or door of just the right home where a woman is actually in the act of committing adultery while Jesus is in the temple teaching at that precise moment. The Pharisees, who were supposed to be above such actions, know precisely when and where this is all taking place, walk into the place and find these two people conveniently committing adultery, and think, “Oh my! There are two people committing adultery! What a great time to catch Jesus in his own words, since he’s teaching in the temple right now, and the temple is just a couple blocks away! Grab the girl and let’s drag her to him and see how we can shut him up once and for all!”

I don’t think so. This looks like a setup. Which I think leads me back to the condition of our own hearts. It says they threw this woman in front of Jesus because they were trying to trap him in his own words. It had nothing to do with the woman; it had nothing to do with the holiness of God; it had nothing to do with their outrage against adultery; it had nothing to do with them preserving their culture; but it had **everything** to do with fulfilling their agenda against Jesus.

What happens to a human heart when it can see another human being as having so little value that they would readily and easily use her as a tool to accomplish their own end? I mean, what happens to the heart of a person who knows the scripture, is at the center point of religion, is the religious teacher and leader, and yet is so callous and so hardened that they have absolutely no sensitivity to the humiliation and brokenness of another human being?

You might be thinking, “I’m not like that. I would never do that!” But has there ever been a time in your life when you’ve used someone for your own good, for your own purpose? Have you ever told someone that you love them just so you could keep them in a relationship so you could satisfy your own sexual or physical desires? Have you ever manipulated someone, or lied to someone so you could accomplish what you wanted to accomplish, or to get what you wanted to get? Have you ever treated people as material things just to be used for your benefit?

Because this is what we see at the core of the Pharisees. Human beings devaluing human beings, and valuing more their own agenda, their own purpose, above the image of God. When you condemn others you are least like God; when **I** condemn others **I** am least like God. In fact, the one who had the right to condemn was the one who resisted it the most.

Just a few chapters before in John, chapter three, starting with verse 16, he tells us something important, but I want you to pay attention to what comes after that verse.

John 3:16 For God so loved the world, that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish, but have eternal life.

Now, verse seventeen. I want you to see this declaration that follows that famous verse 16.

John 3:17 For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world should be saved through him.

The one who could condemn the world; the one who can condemn the world didn't make that his agenda. Why would a God who is holy, who walked among us, **not** make condemning us his agenda? How is it that that's not what he came to do but that's precisely what so many of us come to do at times? How is it God did **not** come to condemn the world through his son, but religion **is** known for judging and condemning people? Way too often Christianity is known for condemning people. Why is it we don't have the reputation of God, as the ones least likely to condemn?

The scriptures continue:

John 3:18 He who believes in him is not condemned. He who doesn't believe stands condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the one and only Son of God.

The irony of all this is that all of us know that sense of condemnation. We know that we fall short, we know that we've messed up, and we know that we've blown it. And if you ever become aware of God's presence you will become infinitely aware of your own inadequacy before God.

John 3:19 This is the judgment, that the light has come into the world, and men loved the darkness rather than the light; for their works were evil.

John 3:20 For everyone who does evil hates the light, and doesn't come to the light, lest his works would be exposed.

John 3:21 But he who lives the truth comes to the light, that his works may be revealed, that they have been done in God."

Have you ever just felt naked before God? Have you ever done something and gotten caught, and just felt this incredible sense of shame? Not so much because you did it, but because you got caught doing it? I know of this guy who said he was home taking a shower, and when he finished, he realized he'd forgotten to get a towel, and he'd left his clothing in the bedroom. He was alone, but just at that moment he heard the door open and his mother came into the house with some of her lady friends from church.

He figured he could run quickly down the hallway and into the bedroom and they wouldn't even see him, but that's not what happened. When he took off out the bathroom door he slipped on the hard-wood floor and went sliding out, on his back side, right in front of the ladies. As he put it, there really wasn't much he could say. He just jumped to his feet and ran to his bedroom, totally embarrassed at what had just happened to him.

I don't know if you've ever had a moment like that in your life, but you can multiply that a thousand times and get a sense of what the woman who the Pharisees dragged in front of Jesus must have felt like. But not just embarrassment, but also utter humiliation.

You would think that the individuals who were closest to God, supposedly, the most knowledgeable in his word, those who were the epicenter of the faith God started, if they

caught a woman in adultery would be concerned about her emotional, physical, and spiritual health and wellbeing. You would think that somehow they would connect the dots and say, "Here's a woman who's broken and desperate, and just a short distance away is the son of the living God, who brings hope and life." You would hope that somehow religion would create compassion, but it rarely seems to do so.

It also shows that they misquoted the scriptures. They said that "... women like these are to be condemned." Well, that's partially true. It never said stoned but it did say put to death. But it never said just women. The Law said, "If **a man** and a woman are caught in adultery..." So immediately you need to ask yourself, "Where's the man?" There's only a woman being dragged there. Last time I checked, and I think this was true even thousands of years ago, when adultery, as described in the Law, is committed, it takes two; both a man and a woman, together, at the same time. It was one of those sins that required the participation of another human being. So here's the woman caught in adultery, but no man at all.

I'm not saying this is always the case, but overwhelmingly, when men commit adultery it's because of their refusal to commit themselves properly to their wives or to control their own lust. But when women commit adultery it is often times a desperate cry for love; an expression of despairing loneliness and brokenness. It's usually because the man pursues the woman, and not the other way around. It's a sin on both accounts, but I generally find that men are more proactive in the sin. The man is usually more darkened, and more of the fuel in adultery than women.

If these spiritual leaders were really concerned about cleaning up the city where was the guy? Where was the man? Maybe he was wearing a priest's robe. Maybe he was holding a rock. Because what I find, just like those who were ready to condemn her, is that people who are justifying their own sin (men or women) are the ones most ready, and the ones who are quickest to condemn others.

Have you noticed that if someone is innocent and has to go to court they feel the need to try the facts; to build the argument on facts. But if they're guilty and they have to go to court, or somehow defend themselves, the strategy is to attack the credibility of the accuser. Because there's something demented in the human mind; something broken and evil, sinister in the human heart that says it's okay if I'm guilty as long as there's someone else guiltier than me. Isn't that how we justify ourselves? Well, I'm not that bad! Look at what they did! I mean, we search the world over for someone more corrupt than us so **we** can feel good. We seek to expose someone more wicked, more sinister, more evil than we are. It's not about innocent and guilty anymore; it's about guilty and guiltier. It's like, "Well, yeah, I did that. But look at them. They're worse!"

All we have to do is attack the credibility of the other one. If you're a person who is prone toward judgmentalism, if you have a natural tendency to condemn others, it is most likely a defense mechanism to deflect from your own hypocrisy, and refusal to deal with your own sin. People who are clearly aware of their own short-comings are generally very slow to condemn others.

When we condemn others we are least like God, but strangely enough, and here's the paradox, its counterintuitive, that these Pharisees dragged this woman to what they were certain was the most dangerous place for her. But what you find is that the safest place for a guilty person is to be at the mercy of God.

So, they dragged her in front of Jesus, and because she'd just been caught in adultery she may have been either naked or just barely covered. They throw her down there and said to Jesus that a woman caught in adultery is supposed to be stoned, what do you say we should do? The only thought that could possibly have been reeling through her mind was, "My life is ending at this moment of utter shame and humiliation." How strange it must have been for her to feel the silence of that moment, and begin to discover, that in the silence, she did **not** find God's disdain, but God's mercy.

It says that Jesus stooped down and started writing in the sand. So they kept pressing him for an answer. It was as if he was ignoring them, so they pressed the point, and they became really insistent that he give them an answer. So he finally did. He said to them, that whichever of them was without sin could throw the first stone at her. Then he started writing in the sand again. This gave them a moment to reflect on his answer. As it turns out, he used that moment to convict the accusers instead of the accused.

Then it says that from the eldest on down they began to leave until all of them were gone.. A study of this passage shows that the eldest doesn't refer to the oldest in age, but the one of highest prestige and authority; the person of highest leadership; the position of highest hypocrisy. In that moment they began to walk away. Couldn't you just hear them? One stone after another, after another, after another dropping; powerless to condemn, powerless to destroy. Can you see the woman nervously twitching as each stone landed, not knowing when one might land on her?

I know this may seem impossible to believe, but the safest place for you to be when you're guilty is in the presence of Jesus. But the natural instinct, when you're guilty, is to run; to run from God, run from truth, run from getting caught. Its just an instinct inside us all, that when you've done something wrong, to run. We run physically or we run emotionally and spiritually, by lying or somehow deceiving someone. It started with Adam and Eve in the garden when the hid from God after eating the forbidden fruit, and its still a part of us even now.

But the thing we need to do is not to run **from** God, because the further we get from God, the more in danger we are when we're guilty. If we could just go against that counter-intuitive drawing of your flesh that says, "Run from God! He's going to judge you and make you feel his wrath. He wants to condemn you and destroy you." If you would just trust God and run **to** him you'll find that the only safe place for a guilty person to be is at the feet of Jesus Christ. What you'll find is that, given the opportunity, God always chooses the path of forgiveness.

So Jesus looked at this woman and said, "Who condemns you?" Then she said, "No one." And, because when God walked among us he did not come to condemn us, Jesus looked

at her and said, “Neither do I condemn you... go and sin no more.” When given the opportunity, God always chooses the path of forgiveness.

You see, the intersection between you and God is not supposed to be an encounter where you experience the wrath, and judgment and condemnation of God. But here’s the difficulty. God gives you the right to choose, and if you do **not** choose the path of forgiveness, what is a holy God to do with you?

There was a TV show on a religious channel that was teaching people how to share God with those who are not Christian. By the time I was 5 minutes into the show I was practically sweating bullets! They took this camera out onto the street to talk to people they met, and was asking them questions.

They asked, “Have you ever lied?” And of course the person said, “Yes.” So the interviewer went on and said, “And what does that make you?” They know the camera is on them, so what do you expect them to say? They said, “A liar?” And they kept doing this with people, asking them if they had ever stolen anything, or used God’s name improperly, or lusted after someone, and of course the people said yes, and admitted they were thieves, blasphemers (nobody got that right, they had to be told what blasphemy was), and lusters (?) – okay they told them lusting meant they were adulterers. I just couldn’t resist telling you how one of them responded.

So they were saying that the way to get someone to listen to the Gospel message was to tell them they’re liars, thieves, blasphemers and adulterers! And once you get them to that point then they will think, “WOW! No wonder its good news!”

We don’t seem to get it, that our job is not to condemn the world, but to bring the world hope. You might say, “Yeah, but they don’t know they’re condemned. They don’t get it.” Okay, so I’ve had a few people say to me, “I don’t need forgiveness.” That happens doesn’t it? I’ve had people tell me, “I’m sinless.” What are you going to do? Say, “No your not.” “Yes I am.” “No you’re not.” We’d kind of look a little stupid wouldn’t we? Because, you see, then we become the self-righteous, condemning religionists.

Its not our job to make them honest. When a person tells me I’m sinless, I just tell them, “Then Jesus didn’t come for you, because Jesus only came for sinners.” Then I tell them, “You know what? You’re doing better than me, because I started real early in life. I’m kind of a prodigy, so to speak. I got an early start and messed up my life a long time ago, so Jesus came for **me**. But you’re spectacular! However, if you live long enough, you’re bound to trip up, do something wrong, and at that moment, on that day, Jesus came for you.”

You don’t have to spend your life convincing people they’re sinners. Just go find people who know they’re sinners and convince them there’s hope; that God is not their enemy, but their way to life. Show them that, given the opportunity, God will always choose forgiveness.

Let them see what Jesus said to the woman. "Is there no one to condemn you? Then neither do I. Go and don't sin anymore."

Which leads us right into verse twelve.

John 8:12 Again, therefore, Jesus spoke to the people saying, "I am the light of the world. He who follows me will not walk in the darkness, but will have the light of life."

Which, by the way, is exactly where John 3 leads us. John 8 moves from God not condemning the world to God moving the world to light. John 3 moves from God not condemning the world to God moving the world to light.

John 3:17 For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world should be saved through him.

John 3:18 He who believes in him is not condemned. He who doesn't believe stands condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the one and only Son of God.

So if you chose not to embrace the forgiveness God offers you, what is he to do with you?

John 3:19 This is the judgment, that the light has come into the world, and men loved the darkness rather than the light; for their works were evil.

John 3:20 For everyone who does evil hates the light, and doesn't come to the light, lest his works would be exposed.

John 3:21 But he who lives the truth comes to the light, that his works may be revealed, that they have been done in God."

Here's the deal. The light of God is our only hope of change, but the light of God is a terrifying place to be if you've been living in the dark. And the dark is a place where we live under a lie. I've been trying to remember back to my first lie, but I can't seem to find it; it was way too early in my life. Like I said, I was a prodigy. And I think most people would be hard pressed to find their first lie. But I know this about you, even though I have no idea who is reading this right now. That first lie was probably NOT your first sin. The first lie was probably your second sin; it was told to cover up whatever your first sin was, whatever you did before that was wrong, and you didn't want to get caught, or for someone to find you out.

You see, lying is the darkness we create to hide our evil deeds. And you may even know what the evil deed was. It's like the small child who got into the cookie jar, or went into a room they shouldn't have, or snuck out of bed when they weren't supposed to. Some really horrific crime at the age of two, right?

What's strange is that we step over some minor infractions; misdemeanors at their worst. Some command our parents gave us. We violated it and our parents look at us and say, "Did you eat that cookie?" And because we're really not all that self-aware, and don't really get that we've got chocolate chip all over our face and all over our hands; we haven't really connected all the dots yet that we were the only ones in the room (what do

we expect at that age?), we answer that we didn't do it, it wasn't us. Then we're upset because they don't believe us. "You think I'm lying!" Which is lie number two. It's deceit.

And we start living in a veil of darkness created by our own deceit. We lie to ourselves, we lie to others and we lie to God. Here's the crazy thing about it. As long as you and I choose to live in a lie we can never live in the light. If you are not yet a follower of Jesus Christ, a large part of the turbulence in your life is that you are used to living in the dark. You think that somehow God doesn't see your life, or see your heart, or know your thoughts, or know your motives. And what happens when you begin to have an encounter with Jesus Christ is that his light begins to expose your darkness, and it creates a turbulence because you don't like, not just what he sees, but you don't even like what **you** see, because you don't want to be exposed. The turbulence is going to be that you're going to have to trust God with your life, because it feels like the most dangerous act in the world to step out of the darkness and into the glorious light of the holy God who has the right to condemn you, and yet, to believe that he will not if you ask him to forgive you and change your life.

Why would God act like that? We don't know love like that; we don't know mercy like that; we don't know compassion like that.

And the difficult thing is that after you become a follower of Jesus Christ we are not exempt from running to dark places, are we? It happens in the most subtle ways; just a small lie, or just a small sin, a small compromise, then we begin covering it because we don't want anyone to see it. So, before we know it, we've created another veil of darkness around us. And we become afraid to be exposed. We don't want to be dragged out naked into the streets. We don't want the crowds to mock us, or stone us, or condemn us.

But the beautiful thing about Jesus is that no matter how badly you've messed up, no matter how badly you've blown it, if you will just step into the light Jesus will remove everyone who wants to condemn you and set you once again before the one who offers you forgiveness and life.

That's why, remember in the 70's and 80's when all those famous preachers started falling left and right? Whether it was to adultery, embezzlement, or both, I was just too cynical to believe they were sincere. I'm saying this as a person who has preached before, who has attended many churches of various faiths, and have become personal friends with many pastoral ministers. Because, when a person's caught, I just don't really trust their confession. When a person gets caught and dragged out into the light I'm kind of cynical about even their tears.

You see, when you turn yourself in, that's the best evidence that you genuinely long to live in the light. When you're dragged out into the light its humiliating, but when you step out into the light its liberating. I know this. I've been in those places where I've spent way too much energy trying to cover my sins rather than living in freedom. The

fear of humiliation was so powerful to me that it trapped me and kept me, and yet that one moment when I would just humble myself, and come clean, and ask for forgiveness, and step back into the light, even though at first it was so blinding, I found it to be the most healing act of my life.

And it will be for you too, if you'll trust the God who writes in the sand, who will always defend, not the perfect, but the sinful. He will come to your defense and my defense if we just come clean. We don't have to cover our nakedness. We don't have to hide our shame, or act like we're not guilty. We just need to come to his feet and trust him, that when he has the chance to throw the stone, he won't, because what he longs to do is look at you face to face and forgive you and give you life, if you will just follow him.

Our God, who writes in the sand, is a god of mercy and forgiveness.