

Exalting Jesus Christ

"Letters in the Sand"

INTRODUCTION:

- I. In the Garden of Eden, God not only placed the first man and woman whom He had created, He also instituted the marriage relationship.
 - A. When Eve was brought to Adam he said:
 1. **Genesis 2:23** – *"This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man."*
 2. God through Moses then added: **Genesis 2:24** – *Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and they shall become one flesh.*
 - a. The act of leaving behind ones father and mother and being joined to his wife in marriage makes them "one flesh."
 - B. Some four thousand years later Jesus quoted this passage from Genesis and provided some additional insight concerning the marriage relationship.
 1. Speaking to the Pharisees, Jesus said: **Matthew 19:4-6** – *"Have you not read that He who made them at the beginning 'made them*

male and female,' 5 and said, 'For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh'? 6 So then, they are no longer two but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, let not man separate."

- a. From this statement Jesus reaffirmed that the marriage relationship as God designed it is when a man leaves his father and mother and is joined to his wife, becoming one flesh – just as Moses said.
- b. But Jesus also shows that God intends this marriage relationship to be permanent when the Lord said: *"Therefore what God has joined together, let not man separate."*

II. Unfortunately, what God desires and what mankind does are often at odds with one another.

A. The sanctity of the marriage relationship is not always honored in the way God intended.

- 1. In societies where sexual immorality is rampant, the sanctity of the marriage relationship suffers the consequences.
- 2. Under the Old Testament Law of Moses God demanded that marital unfaithfulness – or adultery – be punishable by death.

a. **Leviticus 20:10** – *"The man who commits adultery with another man's wife, he who commits adultery with his neighbor's wife, the adulterer and the adulteress, shall surely be put to death."*

(1). Putting to death those guilty of adultery solved the problems of divorce and remarriage.

(2). The guilty parties were put to death, thus freeing the innocent parties from that marriage and making it possible for them to remarry.

3. However, under the New Covenant Law of Christ, Jesus provided a different solution – divorce – but under very strict and very narrow circumstances.

a. **Matthew 5:32** – *"But I say to you that whoever divorces his wife for any reason except sexual immorality causes her to commit adultery; and whoever marries a woman who is divorced commits adultery."*

(1). Jesus authorized only one reason for divorce – sexuality immorality.

(2). Anyone who puts away, or divorces, their mate when sexuality immorality is not involved will most likely cause

that divorced person to eventually commit adultery – simply because of the weakness of the flesh.

(3). And anyone who marries the person who is put away or divorced under those circumstances also commits adultery.

b. **Matthew 19:9** – *"And I say to you, whoever divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, and marries another, commits adultery; and whoever marries her who is divorced commits adultery."*

(1). Once again, Jesus authorized only one reason for divorce – sexual immorality.

(2). He also said the person who commits adultery is **NOT** free to remarry. Therefore, anyone who marries them is also guilty of adultery.

(3). But what about the innocent person? What about the person who remained faithful?

(4). Jesus provides the one and only exception. He said, *"whoever divorces his wife, **EXCEPT** for sexual immorality, and marries another, commits adultery."*

(5). By inference, Jesus said the one and only **EXCEPTION** is when sexual immorality is involved – only then may a

person put away their sexually immoral mate and remarry.

- III. As we continue in our studies of the gospel of John we come to the eight chapter where we find Jesus caught in the midst of a controversy.
 - A. It is here that Jesus is challenged by His critics to solve the dilemma of a woman who was actually caught in the very act of adultery.
 - 1. Should she immediately be put to death according to the Law of Moses?
 - 2. Or could there be extenuating circumstances that would give this adulterous woman a reprieve?
 - B. In the midst of this controversy Jesus does something extraordinary. He stoops down to write some "Letters in the Sand."
 - 1. We're not told what He wrote, but it apparently played a major role in the surprising ending to this story.
 - 2. So let's turn to John chapter eight and take a closer look at this amazing story.

BODY:

- I. Let's begin by understanding something of the setting in which this story takes place.

- A. The setting is established in the first two verses of chapter eight.
1. **John 8:1-2** – *But Jesus went to the Mount of Olives. 2 Now early in the morning He came again into the temple, and all the people came to Him; and He sat down and taught them.*
 2. If you recall, Jesus had come to Jerusalem during the Feast of Tabernacles, and while there sparked quite a lot of controversy over His teaching.
 - a. The religious leaders wanted Jesus arrested and charged with Sabbath-breaking for healing a man on the Sabbath, and blasphemy for claiming He was the Son of God.
 - b. However, the crowds who heard Jesus were divided. Some felt He might be the Christ, while others were convinced Jesus was just an ordinary man from Galilee, and not the Messiah.
 3. And so, as the controversy swirled around Jesus, He chose to retire for the night to the quiet solitude of the nearby Mount of Olives.
 4. But as morning broke over the hills of Judea, Jesus returned to the city and went directly to the Temple where He sat down to teach those gathered there.

II. Suddenly, the peace and serenity of the Temple is shattered as an angry mob comes to Jesus dragging a woman along with them.

A. It's a scene filled with outrage and righteous indignation.

1. **John 8:3** – *Then the scribes and Pharisees brought to Him a woman caught in adultery.*

a. By the way, the word "*brought*" used by John in this verse tells us a lot about the attitudes of the scribes and Pharisees.

b. It's the same word that is used to describe someone pulling along a reluctant animal with a rope around its neck.

c. In fact, there is good reason to believe the scribes and Pharisees actually bound this woman with a rope, and were forcefully dragging her to Jesus as one would pull a squirming dog on a leash.

2. We can only imagine what this scene must have looked like.

a. No doubt, she is disheveled, perhaps hastily clothed, maybe even barefoot – but for certain, humiliated.

b. She had been taken abruptly from the bedroom, where she had been some man's sexual object – and now she was being used once again as bait to set a trap for Jesus.

3. As far as these self-righteous scribes and Pharisees were concerned, they had completely dehumanized this woman by treating her as a thing rather than a person.
 - a. Sadly, when we treat those caught in sin as something less than a person, we fall into the same trap of these scribes and Pharisees.
 - b. Fortunately, we have the wonderful example of Jesus here.
 - c. As we will see in a moment, the Lord forces this self-righteous angry mob to see her as the person she is – frightened and trembling, and worthy of being treated with love and compassion rather than hatred and harsh judgment.
- B. The charges against her seemed irrefutable.
 1. **John 8:3-5** – *And when they had set her in the midst, 4 they said to Him, "Teacher, this woman was caught in adultery, in the very act. 5 Now Moses, in the law, commanded us that such should be stoned. But what do You say?"*
 - a. There was no question about her guilt – she has been *"caught in adultery, in the very act."* **(v. 4)**
 - b. She had absolutely no defense whatsoever. She was guilty – caught in the very act of committing adultery.
 - c. The Law of Moses was clear – she must be stoned to death.

- d. But in an attempt to test Jesus' loyalty and faithfulness to the Law, they said, "*But what do You say?*"
2. To show the real motive of the scribes and Pharisees, John adds this brief caveat: **John 8:6** – *This they said, testing Him, that they might have something of which to accuse Him.*
- a. The scribes and Pharisees obviously felt they had Jesus on the horns of an impossible dilemma.
 - b. If Jesus condemned the woman, no doubt the crowd would have questioned the Lord's decision. After all, where was the man she had been with? Why didn't the mob bring him to Jesus as well?
 - (1). Did he escape in all the confusion?
 - (2). Or, was this woman simply a pawn? Had this whole thing been a set-up to entrap this woman and thus trap Jesus?
 - c. But, if Jesus didn't condemn the woman then the scribes and Pharisees would have all the ammunition they needed to charge Jesus with ignoring the Law of Moses.
 - (1). They had been trying to charge Jesus with being a lawbreaker from the moment He healed that man on the Sabbath.

(2). Now, the Lord's critics were sure they had Him in a quandary.

C. However, what happens next not only surprised the Lord's critics, but shocked them into silence.

1. **John 8:6b** – *But Jesus stooped down and wrote on the ground with His finger, as though He did not hear.*

2. We're not told what Jesus wrote, but I can imagine whatever it was, those in this mob leaned forward to read those words.

a. Some have suggested Jesus may have written a list of the sins that lay concealed in the hearts of those accusing this woman.

(1). Words like hatred... bitterness... bearing false witness.

(2). Or, perhaps words like covetousness... lust...

fornication... uncleanness.

D. While some continued to press for an answer, Jesus told them to go ahead and do exactly what the Law of Moses commanded – but with one exception.

1. **John 8:7-8** – *So when they continued asking Him, He raised Himself up and said to them, "He who is without sin among you, let him throw a stone at her first." 8 And again He stooped down and wrote on the ground.*

2. The Law of Moses was clear – those guilty of adultery must be put to death.
 - a. **Deuteronomy 22:22** – *"If a man is found lying with a woman married to a husband, then both of them shall die — the man that lay with the woman, and the woman; so you shall put away the evil from Israel."*
 3. Plus, the Law of Moses not only required at least two or three witnesses in cases demanding the death penalty, it also required those witnesses to be the first to cast stones at the condemned.
 - a. They were to show no pity: **Deuteronomy 13:8-9** – *". . .you shall not consent to him or listen to him, nor shall your eye pity him, nor shall you spare him or conceal him; 9 but you shall surely kill him; your hand shall be first against him to put him to death, and afterward the hand of all the people."*
- E. But did you notice that no one had come forward saying they had personally witnessed this act of adultery?
1. Where were those two or three witnesses? Who were they?
What had they seen?
 2. And most importantly, where is the man she was with?
 3. By all rights – according to the Law of Moses – this woman should be released.

4. But to make sure no one could charge Jesus with ignoring the Law, the Lord simply said: *"He who is without sin among you, let him throw a stone at her first."*
 - a. In other words, Jesus is essentially saying, "If you caught her in the act of adultery, then go ahead and stone her. But before you do, take a long, hard look into your own lives and tell me you're not also guilty of sin – perhaps even the sin of bearing false witness in capital cases."
 - b. You see, the Law of Moses also taught this:
 - (1). **Deuteronomy 19:16-21** – *"If a false witness rises against any man to testify against him of wrongdoing, 17 then both men in the controversy shall stand before the Lord, before the priests and the judges who serve in those days. 18 And the judges shall make careful inquiry, and indeed, if the witness is a false witness, who has testified falsely against his brother, 19 then you shall do to him as he thought to have done to his brother; so you shall put away the evil from among you. 20 And those who remain shall hear and fear, and hereafter they shall not again commit such evil among*

you. 21 Your eye shall not pity: life shall be for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot."

(2). In other words, if someone testifies falsely in a case demanding capital punishment, then the false witness shall be put to death.

F. The words of Jesus, *"He who is without sin among you, let him throw a stone at her first,"* must have cut through the hearts of those present like a hot knife through butter.

1. We know that by their reaction: **John 8:9** – *Then those who heard it, being convicted by their conscience, went out one by one, beginning with the oldest even to the last. And Jesus was left alone, and the woman standing in the midst.*
2. The key words here are *"being convicted by their conscience."*
 - a. Those words suggest this whole thing was a set-up from the very beginning.
 - b. To entrap Jesus, the scribes and Pharisees had apparently entrapped a hapless woman into committing adultery so they could catch her and drag her to Jesus.
 - c. Does that excuse what she did? Certainly not. But it does show those who were behind this conspiracy were just as guilty of immorality as the woman herself.

G. I also find it interesting that those who dropped their stones and left the scene began with the oldest down to the youngest.

1. The truth is simply that those of us who are older have a much longer list of sins to wrestle with than those who are younger.

a. We've lived longer – we've been around a lot longer – and have had more occasions to transgress the will of God than those who are much younger.

b. That alone should make those of us who are older the last to stand and condemn others for the sins in their lives.

2. Nothing is more humbling than to be forced to look into our own lives and admit we are just as prone to sin as anyone else.

a. However, there are always those self-righteous few who are quick to say, "I would never even think of committing the sins you've committed."

b. And yet, in making that bold assertion, they are committing one of the most grievous sins of all – the sin of pride.

III. Just as suddenly as the peace and serenity of the Temple had been interrupted by an angry crowd, it is restored again as the echo of the final stone falling to the ground faded into silence.

A. Jesus is now standing alone with the woman accused of committing adultery.

1. **John 8:10-11** – *When Jesus had raised Himself up and saw no one but the woman, He said to her, "Woman, where are those accusers of yours? Has no one condemned you?" 11 She said, "No one, Lord." And Jesus said to her, "Neither do I condemn you; go and sin no more."*

2. In the introduction to his gospel, John said this of Jesus.

a. **John 1:14-17** – *And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth. 15 John bore witness of Him and cried out, saying, "This was He of whom I said, 'He who comes after me is preferred before me, for He was before me.'" 16 And of His fullness we have all received, and grace for grace. 17 For the law was given through Moses, but grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.*

b. "Grace and truth" – John mentions these wonderful attributes of Jesus twice in these four verses.

(1). Jesus is "full of grace and truth."

(2). And "grace and truth came" through Jesus.

3. Grace and truth are not only inseparable; they must always balance the other.
 - a. Grace without truth leads us to simply ignore the wrongs of others without any concern for the truth that condemns those wrongs.
 - b. But truth without grace leads us to be harsh, judgmental, unloving, unmerciful and unforgiving legalists.
 - c. Jesus and His teachings are the perfect balance of both grace and truth.
 4. The grace of Jesus said, "*Neither do I condemn you.*" And yet, the truth of Jesus said, "*Go and sin no more.*"
 - a. Jesus didn't excuse nor ignore this woman's sin – in fact the statement "*go and sin no more*" shows Jesus knew she was guilty.
 - b. However, since no one came forward as a witness, and since this whole affair had obviously been a set-up to entrap an unsuspecting woman, how could He condemn her?
- B. No doubt, this had been the darkest hour in the life of this woman.
1. She had clearly been caught committing a sin worthy of death, and was sure she was about to suffer one of the most painful and humiliating form of execution imaginable – stoning.

2. But, ironically, in dragging this woman caught in the darkness of sin to Jesus, her accusers were bringing her to the "Light of the World."
3. Later, Jesus would make another claim to deity that would set off another firestorm of controversy: **John 8:12** – *"I am the light of the world. He who follows Me shall not walk in darkness, but have the light of life."*
4. This woman, caught in the very act of committing adultery, suddenly found her life and her sin bathed in the radiant light of the Lord's grace, mercy and forgiveness.

IV. From this wonderful story of God's grace there are at least three great truths that emerge that we can apply to situations today.

A. First, we need to remember that the practice of confronting wrong calls for humility, not pride.

1. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus exhorts us to look closely at our own lives before we look critically at the lives of others.
 - a. **Matthew 7:3-5** – *"And why do you look at the speck in your brother's eye, but do not consider the plank in your own eye? 4 Or how can you say to your brother, 'Let me remove the speck from your eye'; and look, a plank is in your own eye? 5*

Hypocrite! First remove the plank from your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother's eye."

2. The apostle Paul reiterates the same truth in his letter to the Galatians.
 - a. **Galatians 6:1** – *Brethren, if a man is overtaken in any trespass, you who are spiritual restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness, considering yourself lest you also be tempted.*
3. When we refuse to consider the plank in our own eye and fail to consider ourselves, we fall into temptation – the temptation of pride.
 - a. If you take the least glimmer of satisfaction in confronting someone else about their sin, that's an indication of pride.
 - b. And never forget the admonition: **Proverbs 16:18** – *Pride goes before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall.*

B. Second, it only takes knowledge to condemn others of sin. But it takes righteousness to restore the one caught in a trespass.

1. How many times have you felt justified in casting the first stone at someone caught in sin? How many times have you ignored the plank in your own eye in condemning others who have mere specks in theirs?

2. Again, the apostle Paul reminds us: **Galatians 6:1** – *Brethren, if a man is overtaken in any trespass, you who are spiritual restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness, considering yourself lest you also be tempted.*
 - a. It takes no special talent to condemn the sins of others.
 - b. But the Lord's desire is not to condemn, but to restore. And only those who are "*spiritual*" can do that awesome work.
 - c. Why? Because they balance grace with truth – they restore one caught in sin "*in a spirit of gentleness,*" taking into account their own weaknesses and their own sins.
- C. And finally, correcting wrong starts with forgiveness, not rebuke.
 1. Notice the pattern in the way Jesus deals with the guilty woman: **John 8:11** – "*Neither do I condemn you; go and sin no more.*"
 2. Most who have been caught in a sin already know they're guilty.
 - a. They don't need to be reminded of the wrong they've done – not unless they're in total denial, like David in his sin with Bathsheba.
 - b. What the sinner needs most is pardon – forgiveness.
 3. How much better it would be to say, "I've not come to tell you you've sinned. You already know that. I've come to tell you there is forgiveness and restoration through the blood of Jesus Christ."

CONCLUSION:

- I. Just imagine a world free from condemnation and judging – a world marked by forgiveness, grace and mercy?
 - A. Just as the journey of a thousand miles begins with the first step, so the task of a world free from judging and condemning begins with one person willing to take the first step of compassion and forgiveness.
 1. Can you be that person?
 2. Can you be more like Jesus in the way you deal with the sins of others?
 - B. I'm glad we have such a loving, compassionate Savior – a Savior full of grace and truth, and you should be too.
 1. Loving, compassionate, forgiving Jesus wants nothing more than to say to you the same thing He said to that woman caught in the sin of adultery: *"Neither do I condemn you. Go and sin no more."*
 - a. You can make that possible by coming to Him right now in faith, repenting of your sins, and by being baptized into Christ for the remission of all your past sins.
 - b. Or, you can make that possible right now by coming back to Him as your first love, repenting of your sins and confessing them to your Father in heaven, and have those sins washed away once again by His blood.