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Flying Upside-Down

John 7:53-8:1-11

CAPITOL BIBLE STUDY

202st General Assembly

- **TUESDAY (SESSION) @ 8:00 AM**
IN ROOM 421, IRVIS BLDG.
- **THURSDAY (EVERY) @ 1:00 PM**
IN ROOM 203, RYAN BLDG.

John 7:53-8:11 (ESV)

(7:53) They went each to his own house, (8:1) but Jesus went to the Mount of Olives. (2) Early in the morning he came again to the temple. All the people came to him, and he sat down and taught them. (3) The scribes and the Pharisees brought a woman who had been caught in adultery, and placing her in the midst (4) they said to him, "Teacher, this woman has been caught in the act of adultery. (5) Now in the Law, Moses commanded us to stone such women. So what do you say?" (6) This they said to test him, that they might have some charge to bring against him. Jesus bent down and wrote with his finger on the ground. (7) And as they continued to ask him, he stood up and said to them, "Let him who is without sin among you be the first to throw a stone at her." (8) And once more he bent down and wrote on the ground. (9) But when they heard it, they went away one by one, beginning with the older ones, and Jesus was left alone with the woman standing before him. (10) Jesus stood up and said to her, "Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?" (11) She said, "No one, Lord." And Jesus said, "Neither do I condemn you; go, and from now on sin no more."

Several years ago, a pilot was practicing high-speed maneuvers in a jet fighter. She turned the controls for what she thought was a steep ascent and flew straight into the ground. She was unaware that she had been flying upside down.

This is a parable of human existence in our times – not exactly that everyone is crashing, although there is plenty of that going on – but most of us as individuals, and world society as a whole, live at high-speed, and often with no clue to whether we are flying upside down or right side up.

But flying upside down is not something new to our own experience. We find that Jesus faced the same topsy-turvy –

dare we say “religious world” - in his day where down was up, and darkness was light.

Our study begins as the tone shifts dramatically. Jesus, the one who is flying right-side up, the light that shines in the darkness is now challenged by the religious establishment as one not holding to the law of Moses. John reminds us, at the beginning of his Gospel, that Jesus came full of grace and truth. While we desperately need truth in our lives to correctly orient ourselves to reality, the truth is more likely to make us flee, instead of making us free. It is only by stepping into a learning relationship with Jesus that we can stand the truth, because apart from Jesus and his grace the truth is simply too hard for us to handle.

As the account ends, those who were so sure of their right position depart from Jesus’ presence while the one who was accused stands before him and is offered the opportunity of life beyond sin.

Growing Hostility Toward Jesus

John 8:2: *All the people were coming to him - We find people coming and going in a constant procession, asking questions and receiving teaching from Jesus. But this session was rudely interrupted by a group of dignified men who pushed their way through to the front, leading with them a bedraggled woman. She was placed in the middle of the crowd and they announced to all that she had been taken in the very act of adultery.*

While this story most likely doesn't fit here, there is something to be said for its placement. In the previous chapter the crowds and authorities are increasingly interested in asking who Jesus is and what he's all about. In John 8, there is a significant shift and an altogether darker tone in which we find Jesus accusing the leaders of willfully misunderstanding him, wanting to kill him, and even says that their father is the devil. This is some of the harshest things that Jesus is ever recorded as saying.

John 8:2: *The scribes and Pharisees brought a woman - What Jesus has stumbled upon is the heart of the problem. It will be difficult to understand what follows if we think of the authorities as simply interested bystanders, those trying to make sense of this curious new teacher. You see, something*

Flying Upside-Down (cont'd) - *John 7:53-8:11*

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had caught Jesus attention, and it has made him realize how set in their own patterns of thinking they had become - and how devastatingly unlike God's pattern of thinking they were. We sense the tension rising in this account, and with it Jesus' anger. Here the leaders of God's people are using this woman, however guilty she might be of serious sin, simply as a tool in their attack of him. As they do this, they enjoy their moral superiority over her, as well as putting their adversary, Jesus, into a corner he can't easily escape.

Misusing the God's Law

John 8:7: *Let him who is without sin...be the first to throw a stone at her* - Now his answer, though apparently risky, was devastating to those who based this sense of superiority upon the actions of others and not upon their own actions under God. In this, Jesus didn't say the law of Moses was wrong, only that, if we're going to take it seriously, we should all find ourselves guilty. And one by one they get the point and go away. It's not that adultery doesn't matter, Jesus' last words here are extremely important. If she has been forgiven - being rescued from imminent death she must live on the basis of that forgiveness. Being forgiven doesn't mean that sin doesn't matter, on the contrary, forgiveness means that sin does matter - but that God is choosing to set it aside.

But we must be careful not to stop there, because the sin that matters even more is, as the rest of the chapter will make clear, the deep-rooted sin which uses God's law as a means of making oneself out to be righteous. Because what in fact should happen is that the light of God's law is meant to expose the dark places of our lives. When our lives do not in fact align with God's word - his thoughts, his character, and his purposes, we must allow the illuminating light of the living and written Word to do its work. We must allow it to expose the areas of our life God is graciously addressing.

Living Without Condemnation

John 8:11: *Neither do I condemn you; go, and leave your life of sin* - This is a striking example of Jesus' own teachings, "Judge not, that you not be judged...for with the measure you use, it will be measure to you" (Matt.7:1-2). In this, his method of addressing sin is contrasted with that of his foes. They brought her as a captive; he question her as a free person. They regarded her as an accessory to their plans; He respected her as a human being. They saw only the blackness of her past - "the very act"; he thought in-terms of her

future - "sin no more." They were eager to stone her; he was eager to save her.

If we want to help those close to us and dear, we must abandon the deeply rooted practice of condemnation and blaming. Jesus shows us by words and deed the power of being able to bless and guide those around us. When we condemn, we are communicating that an individual is bad as a whole, and is to be rejected. But this is not the biblical teaching, as Paul says in Galatians 6:1, if someone is really caught in sin, the spiritual ones among you are the ones to restore that person. Do it in a lowly and non-presumptuous spirit, considering yourself, lest you too be put to the test. Feel the weight others are feeling, and thus you will fulfill Christ's teaching.

The wisdom that comes from Jesus through these words of Paul is astonishingly rich. For correction is reserved for those who live and work in a divine power not their own. The aim is to bring others back on the path of Jesus, to establish them there so their progress in kingdom character and living can continue. This restoring work is done from the understanding that they could very well do the same thing, or even worse. One of the major lessons of the Gospels is how Jesus was with those easily condemned by others, he accepted them, touched them, and ate with them. He did this in a very natural way. It was for them, not to be a show for others or to make a point.

Of course these teachings were never intended to apply only to church fellowship or community. They are important for human life and apply to our closest relationships, to our mates and children, our close relatives and associates of all types. This is the place, in our twisted and upside down condition where familiarity so often breeds contempt.

Wright, NT. John for Everyone. Louisville, KY: John Knox Press, 2002

Willard, Dallas. Divine Conspiracy. New York, NY: Harper One, 1997

Tenney, Merrill. John: The Gospel of Belief. New York, NY: Harper One, 1997

Legislator Bible study: Tuesday (Session) at 8 AM on 1/29, 421 Irvis Bldg. & 2/5, 108 Irvis Bldg.

Open-To-All Bible Study: Thursday (Bi-weekly), at 1 PM, 203 Ryan Bldg. on 1/31 & 2/14