

Jesus Transforms



Gary Wilkerson June 29, 2015

It was the Passover season and Christ was teaching in the temple. A large crowd gathered because Jesus had a reputation for speaking profound words of love and performing powerful works of God. Yet no sooner had this crowd of commoners gathered than the religious leaders showed up.

“As he was speaking, the teachers of religious law and the Pharisees brought a woman who had been caught in the act of adultery” (John 8:3, NLT). These leaders saw Jesus as a threat to their authority. He represented a new phenomenon whose teachings exposed their rigid, self-justifying practices. Now “they were trying to trap him into saying something they could use against him” (8:6). They asked him whether the woman should be stoned according to the law.

The scene unfolds dramatically: “Jesus stooped down and wrote in the dust with his finger. They kept demanding an answer, so he stood up again and said, ‘All right, but let the one who has never sinned throw the first stone!’ Then he stooped down again and wrote in the dust. When the accusers heard this, they slipped away one by one, beginning with the oldest, until only Jesus was left in the middle of the crowd with the woman. Then Jesus stood up again and said to the woman, ‘Where are your accusers? Didn’t even one of them condemn you?’ ‘No, Lord,’ she said. And Jesus said, ‘Neither do I. Go and sin no more’” (8:6-11).

What a powerful moment. Not only had Jesus defused a highly charged situation, literally saving a person’s life. Everyone on the scene was transformed by what happened—not just the *accused*, but also the *accusers* and even the *audience*.

Jesus used the moment to deliver one of his most famous teachings: “I am the light of the world. If you follow me, you won’t have to walk in darkness, because you will have the light that leads to life” (8:12). God’s light in that moment transformed everything.

Jesus transformed more than a lethal situation; he transformed every heart present.

The first group transformed in this scene was the audience. This crowd was made up of the community believers in Israel who had traveled to the temple in Jerusalem for Passover. What role did they play in the scene? Judging by their passivity, they remained spectators. They didn’t condemn the woman the way the religious leaders did. But they didn’t advocate for her, either. They were content to sit silently on the sidelines while something very important – a person’s life! – was at stake. I would identify this crowd as “the comfortable middle.”

As the family of God, we gather in church to worship, sing, listen and give. But if we’re not careful, we can end up being spectators when it comes to living as Jesus would have us live. Often when we see people in sin, rather than helping them out of it, we harbor a secret hope they’ll be caught. And when they are, we feel justified, thinking, “I knew it. That person’s life always seemed a little *off*.”

Why do we do this? It could be because we feel guilty about our own sin. We all have something in our lives that others could throw a stone at. The truth is, those Pharisees in the scene could have dragged anyone out of the crowd and stoned them. Nowadays, accusing people do that very thing, through social media. I know a hardworking young pastor who took a vacation and Instagrammed a picture of himself relaxing on the beach.

Immediately his post was deluged with hateful comments like, “It’s awful when preachers take their congregations’ money and spend it on luxurious living.”

Jesus’ way is different. “Then Jesus stood up again and said to the woman, ‘Where are your accusers? Didn’t even one of them condemn you?’ ‘No, Lord,’ she said. And Jesus said, ‘Neither do I. Go and sin no more’” (John 8:10-11).

As a preacher of the gospel, I love those three words: “Neither do I.” Jesus didn’t condemn her. And that was a radical thing for him to do. It still is today, when he tells each of us who repent, “Neither do I condemn you.” Yet Jesus got even more radical when he told the religious leaders, “I have much to say about you and much to condemn, but I won’t” (8:26). Wow! That sounds like an insult, but in fact Jesus had a whole laundry list of things he could condemn them for. He has a similar list about our lives today. But instead of condemning, he says, “Neither do I condemn you.”

What an amazing moment. It revealed the powerful love behind God’s grace— that “while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us”

(Romans 5:8, KJV)

. In the crowd’s eyes, this was a miracle. Nobody had ever considered this. And it immediately transformed them. They began to see what Jesus’ ministry was all about – overwhelming grace – and that changed the way they saw God. It also changed the way they saw their own sin – as mercifully forgiven by a loving, gracious God!

Jesus used that stunning moment to teach about the cross: “So Jesus said, ‘When you have lifted up the Son of Man on the cross, then you will understand that I am he. I do nothing on my own but say only what the Father taught me. And the one who sent me is with me—he has not deserted me. For I always do what pleases him.’ Then many who heard him say these things believed in him” (John 8:28-30, my emphasis). Suddenly, Jesus had an army ready to follow him—soldiers of the cross of grace!

Here is the contagious love contained in the gospel we preach. It moves a complacent congregation from audience to activists. People everywhere are tired of dead religion. And when they see Christ’s radical grace in action, they say, “I’m all in! I want to be part of a movement like this one. Not only will I give myself to it fully, I’ll invite everybody I meet. Where do I sign up?”

The second party transformed in this scene was the accused.

Jesus turned the *accused* into the *accepted*. Instead of rejecting the adulterous woman, whose life hung in the balance, he accepted her. And he does the same for us today. He takes everyone pushed to the margins by their own sin and tells them, “You are mine. You’re right in the center of the Father’s love.”

This gesture by Jesus was crucial for the adulterous woman. Why? She still had to live in her community with the reality of what she’d done. You see, while it’s true there is no longer any condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus, there are still real- life consequences to sin. Ask any addict who’s gone through a recovery program. There are broken bonds to mend with family, friends, children, coworkers. In the case of adultery, there can be unwanted pregnancies, broken love with a spouse, strained relationships with children, betrayals of trust within a community—matters that can take years to be repaired.

That’s why there is very real mercy in Jesus’ two distinct statements to the adulterous woman: “Neither do I [condemn you]. Go and sin no more” (John 8:11). I would not be a faithful minister of God if I didn’t say that while, yes, Jesus loves you, accepts you and forgives you, there is very real fallout to sin. As a pastor I see it all the time. That’s why our sin is of great concern to God beyond moral reasons of law-breaking. Paul says, “Run from sexual sin! No other sin so clearly affects the body as this one does. For sexual immorality is a sin against your own body” (1 Corinthians 6:18). This is all the more reason to bring any and every sin to Jesus. Only his powerful, redeeming grace can fully heal and restore.

There is a third group transformed by God’s grace: the *accusers*. The Pharisees’ heartless, accusing plan backfired on them. Ultimately, the sinful woman wasn’t condemned but instead was rescued and healed. And

when that kind of radical grace manifests, evil is forced to slink away in shame. “They slipped away one by one, beginning with the oldest, until only Jesus was left in the middle of the crowd with the woman” (John 8:9).

Which of these transformations describes your faith community?

Is your church the kind that stands by impassively as sinners lead self-destructive lives? Or maybe it’s the kind that points out sinners to expose their bad behavior. Hopefully it’s the kind that rescues, delivers and redeems people from their sin.

Throughout his ministry, Jesus was asked two kinds of questions by the people he encountered, questions that revealed everything about the hearts of those asking. The first type of question was accusatory. Time after time, religious leaders asked Christ, “Why do you eat and drink with sinners? How could you be sent by God with a reputation like that?”

The second kind of question came from people bearing the problems of life: “Would you heal my sick daughter?” “Would you deliver my son, who’s thrown into the fire by demons?” “Would you heal my bleeding issue, which has plagued me my whole life?” “Jesus, would you help me?”

Do you see the difference between the two kinds of questions? Both kinds seek an answer about the nature of God. The first asks, “Do sinners deserve God’s love?” while the second asks, “Does God want to help me?”

Jesus answered both questions with his actions. First, he transformed the outcasts, bringing them from the farthest margins of society to the very center of God’s love. He told them, “You’re on center stage now. You’re at the very heart of my Father’s kingdom.” Second, Christ revealed that the accusers were not at the center of God’s kingdom. He told them very clearly, “You have no say in my Father’s kingdom.”

Do you want a meaningful, significant role in God’s kingdom? Then be willing to lay down your stones and pick up the cross of his grace. Every time you act as Jesus did, extending grace to those marginalized by sin, you take part in a great transformation. You will be changed by your actions, the accused will be changed, and those accusing will be changed. Meanwhile, passive believers will be stirred by the manifestation of God’s grace.

May we all become his army of grace—drawing to his kingdom both the addicted and the clean-living, the grieving and the carefree, the damaged and the blessed, the poor and the wealthy, the lonely and the lively, the pretentious and the guileless, the tattooed and the preppy. Let every soul be loved and belong. And may we all be transformed by the amazing grace of our Savior.

[Download PDF](#) [1]

Links

[1] <http://worldchallenge.org/printpdf/13/>