

JESUS, THE RIGHTFUL JUDGE

JOHN 7:45 – 8:11

Introduction:

Good morning everyone! I hope you are doing well and trying to stay safe and healthy. And let us pray for peace in the world. This week we have seen a superpower overrunning a smaller country that doesn't have the means to defend itself. This is a story that is repeated far too often.

Jacobo Arbenz Guzman, a President of Guatemala, back in 1,954 said, "the truth is the sovereignty of a people can not be maintained if it doesn't have the material elements to defend it". This he said after US mercenary aircraft bombarded Guatemala City and the International Airport as the people of Guatemala had no way to defend itself. Arbenz, a president elect in fair and clean elections was overthrown by the superpower that be. It is easy to point fingers at what others are doing and it is really hard to look introspectively and see our complicity in the violent events that have been unleashed before our eyes last week.

Let's pray for the people of Ukraine and let's pray for the people of Russia. Let us pray for the churches there. Let us pray for western Europe and the US and Canada. That the people of these countries will stand up and say no to war and violence. No to unnecessary death and misery. Let us pray that the violent leaders will decide to stop the war and turn to diplomacy and peace. Let Ukraine be a nation of peace and that they will turn to God. Let us pray that the whole world will turn to Jesus. For it is in Jesus and in Jesus alone that people will find peace with God and with one another.

The Sermon

I have titled this sermon, Jesus Our Rightful Judge. This sermon is based mainly on John 7:45 through 8:11. But I will also refer to John 7:1-44.

But before we continue, let us pray,

LORD, here we are together this morning. Yes, in different geographic locations, but one in this moment. Thank you for giving us this time, we in turn give it back to you. Do with it what only you can do. We pray that your Holy Spirit will open

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our hearts and minds to your Word, not my words, but yours as we read it this morning. Lord I pray that the words of my mouth and the meditation in my heart may be acceptable to you, Oh Lord, for you are my Rock and my Redeemer. We pray this in the name of Jesus! Amen.

First let us talk about the passage. Biblical scholars say that the passage from 8:1 – 8:11 is not found in older manuscripts of the gospel of John. It is found in some manuscripts but in other places. They also say that the greek is different and the style is more like Matthew, Mark and Luke. Some agree that this passage is authentic in the life of Jesus and it was placed in this place later on, or even after the gospel was completed. This morning, I am taking this passage as it comes to us in our Bibles currently and I hope that we can find some connections in its literary context.

Starting in Chapter 7, Jesus had gone to the Festival of the Tabernacles or booths. This is the festival that commemorates Israel wondering in the desert. Verse 14 says that about the middle of the festival Jesus went out to the temple and began to teach.

It was here where Jesus said “My teaching is not mine but his who sent me. Anyone who resolves to do the will of God will know whether my teaching is from God or whether I am speaking on my own”. Jesus is saying that people will find whether his teaching is true or not in obedience to the will of God.

Jesus’s opponents can find the truth in Jesus teaching by obeying his teachings. I find it so interesting that Jesus doesn’t spell a set of believes or dictates a creed to memorize and to which people can intelectually agree with. Instead he challenges them to obey in order to test whether his teachings are from God.

I think it is true for us today, we can only find the power of the Gospel in obedience to God. We can claim to have all we want to claim that we have, but if live our lives in disobedience or not by the words of Jesus, we will not experience the power of his teaching. The power of his teachings to change our lives, our households, our communities, our nations, and the world.

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It is here in the temple where Jesus asked the people, “did not Moses give you the law? Yet none of you keeps the law. Why are looking for an opportunity to kill me? (John 7:19). This infuriated people because they truly believed that they were keeping the law, when in fact they were not, as we will see later on.

One of the ways to brake all the commandments of the law is to seek ways to harm and murder others. A big purpose of the law was to teach the people how to love God and one another. The people missed that and so even today, we miss this.

It was here at the festival that Jesus said, according to John 7:37-39:

On the last day of the festival, the great day, while Jesus was standing there, he cried out, “Let anyone who is thirsty come to me, and let the one who believes in me drink. As the scripture has said, ‘Out of the believer’s heart shall flow rivers of living water.’” Now he said this about the Spirit, which believers in him were to receive; for as yet there was no Spirit, because Jesus was not yet glorified.

(John 7:37-39 NRSV)

And remember the festival of the booths was to commemorate the Israel’s wonderings in the desert. Just like God provided water for his people in the desert, God, in Jesus, is providing water for his people. For John, the water Jesus is talking about is Jesus, who, with the Holy Spirit, would satisfy their thirst for God forever. They would know God as revealed by Jesus. This is so beautiful and amazing! We can only praise God for giving us the Holy Spirit who sates our thirst for God every day!

When the chief priest and the Pharisees heard all the muttering about Jesus going around, they had decided to send the temple police to arrest him. But the police came back without him.

“Then the temple police went back to the chief priests and Pharisees, who asked them, “Why did you not arrest him?” The police answered, “Never has anyone spoken like this!”

(John 7:45-46 NRSV)

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And it is here where the chief priest and the Pharisees make some revealing statement about how contemptuous they are towards the people.

Then the Pharisees replied, “Surely you have not been deceived too, have you? Has any one of the authorities or of the Pharisees believed in him? But this crowd, which does not know the law—they are accursed.

(John 7:47-49 NRSV)

How can the political and spiritual leaders of a nation have such a contemptuous view of their people? No wonder the people turned to Jesus and listened to him. Jesus view was that the people was like sheep without a shephard. That was true and unfortunately, the people today are more and more like sheep without a shephard.

Our political and spiritual leaders have failed to us. Inflation has gone up at historical heights, groceries, gas, rental prices are going up and even though it has been acknowledged, whatever they are doing doesn't seem to be working. And as I mentioned in the beginning, we have superpower Russia run over Ukraine, which doesn't have the proper means to defend itself.

We've been going through a pandemic and the world leaders have failed to us. Some of them seem to use COVID-19 as an excuse to use and abuse people with disinformation and contempt. Some governments have used the pandemic to control and consolidate their power over the people.

In answering to the question, “Has any one of the authorities or of the Pharisees believed in him? We are introduced again to Nicodemus, a member of the Sanhedrin who had come to Jesus by night and who, with Joseph of Arimathea, “took the body of Jesus and wrapped it with the spices in linen cloths, according to the burial custom of the Jews” (John 19:39b-40 NRSV).

He said, “Our law does not judge people without first giving them a hearing to find out what they are doing, does it?” They replied to him,

“Surely you are not also from Galilee, are you? Search and you will see that no prophet is to arise from Galilee.”

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So, now they are attacking those who also know the law. In fact it seems that they don't really care about the law. They are careless with the law and weaponize it at their convenience. After this everyone went home while Jesus went to the Mount of Olives.

Questions worth asking, why the Mount of the Olives? Was it because he wanted to pray there? Or was it because he didn't have a place to stay in Jerusalem, so this is the only place he could stay? Was Jesus homeless in Jerusalem? John's narrative of these events finds Jesus alone, without his disciples. Why had not the disciples reunited with him at the temple? We don't have the answers, but I think it is worth to ponder about those questions.

And the next portion reveals what the opponents of Jesus are really after. They are after Jesus. They, like the people they accuse of not knowing the law, do not know the law. They may know the letter of the law, but they have not understood the purpose of the law.

What was the purpose of the law? We may ask. Well, one of the purposes was to be our guardian until Jesus came. The law could not impart life (Galatians 3:21-22), it could only form Israel as a nation, but the law had to be obeyed. The law didn't replace God and his promises, and it wasn't to be **instead** of Jesus and the promise of God to Abraham. The law also was not to be an idol and be used to oppress people. It wasn't to be changed. But the spirit of the law was to encapsulate this "love God and your neighbor as yourself"

A lawyer asked Jesus which commandment was the greatest,

"37 He said to him, " 'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.' 38 This is the greatest and first commandment. 39 And a second is like it: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' 40 On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets."

Mt 22:36–40 (NRSV)

When the next scene opens, we find Jesus teaching in the temple.

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“Early in the morning he came again to the temple. All the people came to him and he sat down and began to teach them. The scribes and the Pharisees brought a woman who had been caught in adultery; and making her stand before all of them, they said to him, “Teacher, this woman was caught in the very act of committing adultery. Now in the law Moses commanded us to stone such women. Now what do you say?” They said this to test him, so that they might have some charge to bring against him. Jesus bent down and wrote with his finger on the ground’

(Jn 8:2–6 NRSV)

The scribes and the Pharisees come to Jesus with a ridiculous question. And there are several problems with this:

First: They come to Jesus in bad faith and with ulterior motives.

If they caught her in the act of adultery, where is the man? This is a legitimate question to ask. The parts of the Law they may have had in mind are in Leviticus 20:10; this is what it says:

If a man commits adultery with the wife of his neighbor, both the adulterer and the adulteress shall be put to death.

(Lev 20:10 NRSV)

And

If a man is caught lying with the wife of another man, both of them shall die, the man who lay with the woman as well as the woman.

(Dt 22:22 NRSV)

In their rush to frame Jesus, they bring the woman but not the man. The law says the man and the woman should die.

Second: When did they caught her in adultery? That morning as they were coming to listen to Jesus? Or was it the night before? How were they treating the woman in the meantime? Can you imagine the guilt and shame of this poor woman?

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They had no concern whatsoever for the woman. They made her stand in front of everybody. No trial, and no man. It takes two to commit adultery and they decided to bring the one without a voice and without agency. The one who had no one to speak up for her.

They did one thing right. They brought her to Jesus. Ironically, Jesus was the right person to bring her to be judged. Jesus is the rightful judge.

So, Jesus started to write on the ground, which very likely, was dusty. Jesus didn't say a word.

Let us not abuse the Bible and use it as a weapon against others. It is sad to see how many Christians use, no, let me correct, abuse the Bible and use it against other people. Know this, this doesn't please God.

The scribes and the Pharisees have used the Law to keep people out of the temple. They have been bad shepherds of the people. They accuse the people of not knowing the law and of being accursed, but they have greater condemnation, because they know the Law but do not apply correctly.

May the Lord save us and keep us from ever doing such a thing. We need to treat the Bible with care and respect and never rush to interpret it in ways that condemn people instead of offering it as truly good news. We love the verse,

For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life. Indeed, God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him.

(John 3:16-17 NRSV)

The woman caught in adultery was someone in need of forgiveness and in need of salvation. We read John 3:17 correctly, "Indeed, God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him. Jesus had compassion on the woman.

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The scribes and the Pharisees kept questioning. They wanted an answer. They wanted to trap Jesus. Scholars in general agree that people were not being stoned for adultery in the times of Jesus. The Romans were the only ones who could say “stone this one” or “crucify him”.

If Jesus had said stone her, they would accuse him before the Romans, if he said no, they would accuse him of breaking the Law of Moses. They really had no interest in stoning the woman. They knew that they were not allowed. People could not just start stoning others.

Remember when Nicodemus told the high priest and the Pharisees, “Our law does not judge people without first giving them a hearing to find out what they are doing, does it?” The accusers are the ones breaking the law, not Jesus. Upon their insistence, Jesus stopped writing on the ground and said to them:

“Let anyone among you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her”.

And he continued writing on the ground. They were astounded. They went silent. They had nothing to say. They knew they were the ones breaking the law. They knew they could not stone the woman. They walked away, one by one convicted, guilty, but not repented. They missed the purpose of Jesus, yes, even for them, God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him.

Jesus straightened up and said to her, “Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?” She said, “No one, sir.” The woman, the unnamed woman in this passage has remained in front of Jesus. She didn’t have a place to go back to while guilty. She probably does feel convicted and guilty, but waits for Jesus’s final verdict. It is here, in front of Jesus that she feels safe.

Has no one condemned you? No one, sir! Even though Jesus did not say the words “Your sin is forgiven”, he said, “Neither do I condemn you”. For God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him.

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What a beautiful words. God loves you and me so much. In the woman and in the scribes and Pharisees Jesus saw people in need of forgiveness and salvation. The men walked away convicted, guilty and perhaps angry. The woman walked away forgiven and with the call from Jesus saying, “from now on, do not sin again”. She had sinned and was in need of forgiveness and salvation from the power of sin. There are probably a lot of things that she will need to address in her life. But she is forgiven.

Sin is a serious offense, why? Because it destroys our relationships with others and with God.

If there is ever sin in your heart, bring it to Jesus. Do not let Satan stand accusing you. Just come to the Lord. Jesus is the rightful judge. He is the only one found worthy. Yes, worthy is the Lamb who was slain.

Paul, writing to the Romans, says,

But God proves his love for us in that while we still were sinners Christ died for us.

(Romans 5:8 NRSV)

God sent his Son Jesus to prove his love for us. While we were still sinners Christ died for us. God sent his son to prove his love for the chief Priests, for the Pharissess, for the scribes and for the woman caught in adultery.

Let us be students of the Bible and let us treat it with respect. Let us not make it say what it doesn't say, especially when we try to use it in detriment of others or diminishing the love, grace and mercy of God.

Jesus took sin seriously. That is why he wanted people to change their ways and be saved from the power of sin. He did all he could including his death in order to free us from the power of sin. And He has given us the Holy Spirit which help us and lead us to all truth (John 16:13).

May this be so in our lives!

Amen!