

## **THE FRIEND OF SINNERS**

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John 8:1-11 (KJV)

Many names have been given to Jesus.

Son of God.

Son of Man.

Rose of Sharon.

Lily of the Valley.

Bright and Morning Star.

But none of these is as real and precious to me as that name which was first meant to be a slur.

A curse.

A putdown by the Pharisees.

But, which to their surprise, was the name which Jesus quickly and happily accepted to be true:

The Friend Of Sinners.

This was the accusation they hurled at Him.

He ate with tax collectors.

He consorted with sinners.

He wasn't sufficiently concerned with purity and the keeping of the law.

If anyone had said that of the Pharisees, they would have been insulted. They would have pulled their self-righteous robes tightly around themselves and stalked haughtily away.

But to Jesus, it was the kindest, dearest, truest word they could have said. For He, himself described His mission as having

“come to seek and to save the lost” (Matt 18:11).

This morning I’m not going to talk about sin. All of us know the fury of this plague. All of us know the natural bent of our humanity toward this spiritual malignancy.

Perhaps you have heard the story of the boy who stuttered. One day a speech teacher heard him trying to speak, and feeling deep concern for the lad she said,

“You should come over to our college. We have a special class in stuttering.”

To which the young man replied,

“I d-d-d-don’t n-n-n-need a c-c-c-c-class, I  
d-d-d-do t-t-t-t-this na-na-na-naturally.”

Well, when we hear a sermon on sin we are all deeply aware of the fact that the finger of accusation is pointing at us. We are by nature children of wrath and disobedience. That’s what Paul was getting at when, in the seventh chapter of Romans he said,

“For the good that I would, I do not: but the evil  
which I would not, that I do” (Romans 7:19).

No, I’m not going to talk about sin.

Nor am I going to talk about sinners, because each of us is aware that we have been weighed and found wanting. As the Scripture says, we “have come short of the Glory of God.” No, I’m not going to talk about sinners. Rather, I would have you think with me for a moment or two about the one who called himself:

#### The Friend Of Sinners.

It is a beautiful story John has recorded for us here in the eighth chapter of the fourth gospel. As he describes it, it’s early morning in Jerusalem.

The eastern sun casts short, purple shadows among  
the great pillars of the Hebrew temple.

Off to the side of the steps leading up to the entrance of the temple sits Jesus, teaching a large

company of His faithful followers.

Suddenly, there is a stir at the edge of the crowd and with a surge, a group of the Pharisees pushed their way into the center of the people. Behind them—dragged roughly along by the hands of men whose faces are hard with hate and whose eyes are filled with fury—is a woman whose painted lips, scarlet robe and jangling jewelry are the badge of her profession.

Her head is bowed. Fingers that fairly drip with cheap jewels spread across her face as she tries to hide her shame. A wisp of disheveled hair falls across her eyes. Her dress is torn and stained with the dust of the city streets along which she has been dragged.

With all the fury of their contempt, the Pharisees hurl her at the feet of Jesus. As she lies there like a pile of limp rags, they spew out their accusations. She has been taken in the very act of adultery.

For a moment, the eyes of Jesus fill with pain as He looks down at the huddled heap of broken humanity at His feet. A gray cloud of compassion drifts across His face as He sees her wince and cringe at the sound of the vile names her captors hurl at her.

And then, the leader of the Pharisees speaks.

The disciples watch the face of Jesus as they begin to realize these men have not brought this woman to Jesus because they are concerned with keeping the law.

They have little, if any, concern about that. They have come in a bold and heartless effort to trap Him. They are using her to get at Him.

If He answers the Pharisees' question as to what they should do with her having caught her in the act of adultery, by telling them to set her free, He will be transgressing the law of Moses which requires that she be stoned to death.

If, on the other hand, He sentences her to death He will be going against the authority of Rome,

who, by right of occupation alone, has the power to pass judgement upon the Jews. But more to the point is the fact that any such action on the part of Jesus will show Him up to be something less than The Friend Of Sinners he claims to be.

It's a clever trap—and the disciples press forward as if to be of help—but the hand of Jesus motions them back. And while they watch, He who has claimed to be The Friend Of Sinners proves Himself to be just that.

I'd like you to witness several things with me this morning.

Several things the disciples witnessed that confirmed their faith in the Nazarene.

Several things the Pharisees witnessed that reinforced their hatred of Christ and their determination that He be put to death. But, most especially -- Several things the woman witnessed that convinced her that this man from Galilee was, indeed, The Friend Of Sinners. First of all, I want you to see --

### **The Fairness Of Jesus.**

He did not deny the charge.

The Pharisees had hoped to trick Him into making light of the woman's sin, but the fairness of Jesus would not permit Him to do that.

“He is fair to the men who brought the woman. He is fair to the woman they brought. And, He is fair to Himself. He did not deny the charge.”

Make note of that my friend. When the Holy Spirit gently lays a finger on a sore spot in your life, do not deny the charge. Do not rise up to the height of your self-righteousness and buy off your conscious by comparing yourself to --

The miserable occupants of skid row.

The poor lad caught in the clutches of dope addiction.

The heathens in the dark jungles of Africa.

The young woman pregnant out of wedlock.

Do not suppose that because you are not so bad as they, you are without guilt.

Do not deny the charge.

Jesus didn't.

And then notice this about the fairness of this Friend Of Jesus—

He did not limit the charge.

The accusers of the woman wanted it limited to one woman and one sin. But Jesus would not have it that way. And, as they watch, He slowly stooped down and, with great deliberation, began writing in the sand.

This is the only time we have any record of Jesus writing and no one knows what He wrote.

Some have suggested that He traced the Ten Commandments in the dust, and I tend to agree. I think that as His eyes passed from one to the other, He looked beyond the surface stuff people use as a basis of judgement, and saw inside their souls. Without ever taking His eyes off of them, he looked at first one and then another, and the moving finger wrote what He saw:

Liar.

Thief.

Gossiper.

Hypocrite.

Then those words which cut like a rapier through to the very core of their secret self:

“He that is without sin among you, let him cast the first stone” (John 8:7).

And the silence is broken by the dull thud of stone after stone falling into the dust as, convicted by their own conscience, the Pharisees turn silently and slink away.

They wanted to limit the issue to one woman and one sin, but the fairness of Jesus would not let them do that.

They wanted judgement! And so Jesus let them feel its hot blast as he focused it back upon them.

The fairness of Jesus demanded that each man see his own guilt in the light of his own kind of sin. He did not limit the charge.

Perhaps, as I began reading this text this morning, you said to yourself, “That doesn’t touch me. Adultery isn’t my problem. I have no need for The Friend Of Sinners.” But you see, my friend, Jesus does not limit the charge.

I wonder if this incident had happened in this church this morning, how many of us would still be here with a stone in our hand? The Fairness Of Jesus! He is absolutely fair.

I also want you to see --

### **The Forgiveness Of Jesus.**

John tells us that when Jesus finished writing and looked up again, the men are gone. He is alone with the woman. The sinner and the Friend Of Sinners. And then --

With the tenderness of a Mother who seeks to comfort her child, who, with tear-stained cheeks and heartbroken sobs asks to be forgiven --

With infinite tenderness this one who really is The Friend Of Sinners said:

“Woman, where are thine accusers? Doth no man condemn thee?”

Accepting His emphasis, aware that already her case had been taken to a higher court, she answers: “No man, Lord.” God might condemn me, but no man can condemn me after what you’ve just said.

And that, of course, was his reason for saying it. Jesus had to get men and their way of judging out of the way before he could really deal justly with the woman.

And so it is with you.

If you are to be honest in your judgement of your own sin, you must get society’s ideas of sin out

of the way.

“Your ways are not my ways,” says the Lord (Isa 55:8).

In His translation of Romans 12:1-2, Moffet refers to “The sin that doth so easily beset us” as “the sin that is in good social standing.” The world’s way of thinking about sin is simply not the same as God’s way. Jesus made this clear when, in the Sermon on the Mount, He declared the sins of the soul are much deeper and more pervasive than the sins of the flesh.

Jesus has to get people, and their way of judging sinners, out of the way before He can really help this sinner. Luke 2:10 says:

“When Jesus lifted Himself up (He) saw nothing but the woman.”

That is to say, Jesus was alone with her.

Oh, how tender is the forgiveness of The Friend Of Sinners.

He did not subject her to humiliation.

He did not make her grovel in the dust at His feet.

He did not parade her guilt before the ghoulish eyes of lustful men.

He dealt with her alone. Just the two of them. The sinner and The Friend Of Sinners.

If I’m going to have my sin dealt with—and I am, surely, someday!—that’s how I want it to be.

Just this sinner named John, and The Friend Of Sinners, named Jesus.

Just John and Jesus, together in the purging silence of a moment alone with God.

“Woman, where are thine accusers? Doth no man condemn thee?” “No man, Lord.” And then the soft voice of Him who knew no sin, spoke those words which broke the bondage which had enslaved her:

“Neither do I condemn thee.”

How unexpected.

It would have been natural to have expected mercy from the Pharisees for they had known sin.

It would have been natural to expect condemnation from Jesus, for He knew no sin.

But the reverse is true.

She received judgement from her fellow sinners.

She received mercy from The Friend Of Sinners who is holiness itself!

Nowhere in the New Testament do we find anything but love and tenderness from Jesus toward a sinner who comes to terms with his or her sin and makes even the slightest move toward repentance.

Some folks have listened to Jesus say: “Neither do I condemn thee,” and have taken that to mean the judgements of Jesus are soft and spineless. No, No, No. Again, our ways are not God’s ways. God sees what we cannot see. We look at the outward appearance. God looks at the heart. He sees a vision of His masterpiece.

A sinner become a saint.

A soul redeemed in the image of His Son

No! The tenderness of Jesus is not to be confused with spinelessness.

His forgiveness is equaled by His holiness.

So the final thing the woman saw was --

### **The Faultlessness Of Jesus.**

Just as His fairness is matched by His forgiveness, so too, both, in turn, are matched by His faultlessness as He gives her this

post-healing,

post-liberation,

post-deliverance directive:

“Go, and sin no more” (John 8:11).

That word sin” is proof positive Jesus did not minimize her guilt. But, instead of a scathing

denouncement such as we would be prone to give, Jesus, in His wise and wonderful way went much deeper.

He demonstrated to the woman just how penetrating was His gaze. How well He knows her heart.

He did not and cannot condone sin in any fashion. More than anyone who ever lived, Jesus knew it's cruel hate, it's biting pain, for He felt it all in those agonizing hours on the cross.

No! Jesus did not skip over her sin as if it had no importance. But in a far more lasting way, He wrote the message of judgement upon her heart in the quiet words: “Go...and sin...no more.”

The fairness of Jesus would not allow Him to deny or limit the charge.

The forgiveness of Jesus would not allow Him to keep her groveling in the dirt once she has acknowledged her need.

The faultlessness of Jesus would not allow Him to let her forget, even for a moment, that that which was past, was past.

Indeed, this was the climax of Christ's revelation of the holiness of God:

“No more...no more...no more.”

Is this God's message to you this morning? As you stand at a crossroad, is God saying:

“No more...no more. Be done with foolish things.

Be done with the sin that is in good social standing!

Be done with the sin that doth so easily beset you?”

In the closing moments of this encounter with The Friend Of Sinners, will you take the pen from the hand of Jesus and write across whatever sin there may be in your life, two words?

“No more. No more.”

It will mean that finally and forever you are finished with it. That you have played with it long

enough. But now, you are ready to say: “It’s finished. It’s over. No more. No more.”

If you do, you will experience the divine forgiveness of The Friend Of Sinners about whom the hymn writer wrote:

“Oh hope of every contrite heart,  
O Joy of all the meek.  
To those who fall how kind thou art,  
How good to those who seek.”

Listen as Jesus speaks to you now:

“Neither do I condemn you. Not now. Oh, perhaps, when you first  
came into church this morning wearing your robe of pretense—  
hiding behind the cloak of your own self-righteousness—maybe  
then I would have condemned you.

“But now that I know your heart, now that you no longer deny the  
charge, now that I see the true desire of your soul, neither do I  
condemn you. Go -- and sin – no more...no more...no more.”