

Time to Check Your Halo
John 8:1-11

By Dave Urbanski

The very well-known story we studied this past Sunday — the Woman Caught in Adultery, which begins at the very end of John chapter 7 and continues in chapter 8 through verse 11 — has not been found in the earliest manuscripts of John's Gospel.

What does that mean for us as Bible-believing Christians?

The bottom line is we don't know for sure if this famous passage is something the Apostle John wrote when he was being inspired by the Holy Spirit. Maybe he didn't write it, and instead someone copying John's letter thought it would be a good story to include. (Which would be incredibly aberrant, since the Jewish traditions of scribes who preserved the integrity of the Old Testament would have sooner died than add to or change Scripture!) So, we don't know. Over 25,000 manuscripts of the Bible have been found ... but does that mean ALL manuscripts have been found? Maybe. Maybe not.

Either way, Pastor Scott emphasized to us that Jesus meeting with the woman caught in adultery isn't a passage that fundamentally changes the basic tenets of our Christian faith. It actually reinforces the love and mercy of Jesus — and so many other faith areas — that it's worth taking a look at. But also we must do so with honesty and both eyes open, realizing that this amazing account may not have been part of John's original Gospel.

In this passage, the scribes and Pharisees come to Jesus to test him by saying, "Teacher, this woman has been caught in the act of adultery. Now in the Law, Moses commanded us to stone such women. So what do you say?"

What a brilliant trap! If Jesus says to let her go, he's disobeying the law; if he says to kill the woman, he's a merciless murderer.

But instead Jesus challenges the self-righteousness of the Jewish leaders with a proposition that has echoed down through the halls of time: "Let him who is without sin among you be the first to throw a stone at her."

Wow! Jesus' words, as they always do, cut to the very core of human ears and hearts and souls, and the men gathered around the woman with stones just started dropping them one by one — a scene that's been recreated numerous times in movies about Jesus ... but nothing could substitute for witnessing the real thing.

Pastor Scott reminded us, significantly, that while it's popular to wag our fingers at the self-righteousness and hollow hearts of the scribes and Pharisees and the men holding the

stones, this passage really is about YOU and ME. That's correct. Who among us can't say it isn't attractive to be right all the time? Some of us are better at this trait than others, but we all share it. And Pastor Scott added that whenever we think we're right about something, we're dangerously close to becoming self-righteous.

Remember, we can speak boldly about our salvation experience because we didn't earn it — but we have to be careful about coming across to others as if we're somehow "better than you because I know how to get to heaven." Ouch. May that never be so!

Pastor Scott brought to our attention a related passage from the Gospel of Luke, chapter 18, which talks about a Pharisee and a tax collector at the temple — and their awareness of their own sin. The Pharisee prayed, "God, I thank you that I am not like other men, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I get." Ewww! In contrast, the tax collector — arguably the most hated human among the Jews during this period of time — uttered a very simple prayer: "God, be merciful to me, a sinner!" Is there any doubt which person is on the right track in a relationship with God?

Jesus went even further during his Sermon on the Mount, obliterating any shot we have at our own righteousness: "Everyone who is angry with his brother will be liable to judgment; whoever insults his brother will be liable to the council; and whoever says, 'You fool!' will be liable to the hell of fire." (Luke 5:22) Who among us has a clean slate in that regard? None of us! We're all guilty enough to earn a one-way ticket to hell due to our sins.

Fortunately there's Jesus, who will deal with us as mercifully as he dealt with the woman caught in adultery.

Jesus asks her, "Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?" And she replied, "No one, Lord." After which Jesus told her, "Neither do I condemn you; go, and from now on sin no more."

First, as Pastor Scott emphasized, Jesus calls her "woman," which is an endearing term he also used with his mother. It was a signal that this would be a very intimate, one-on-one meeting — something Jesus desires from us every single day. What's more, unlike the scribes and Pharisees who call Jesus "teacher," this woman calls him "Lord." Clearly something is taking place in her heart that's telling her this man isn't any ordinary fellow.

One thing some folks easily forget (or ignore) from this passage is that while Jesus tells her he doesn't condemn her, he also commands her to not sin anymore. For Jesus, the main enemy is still human sin, and while the Jewish leaders are guilty of it, so is the woman — and for that matter, the man with whom she committed adultery.

Pastor Scott encouraged us to always be humble in our approach with others, to remember that we're often close to self-righteousness, and to consider mercy on the same plane as justice. Finally, he told us that the gulf between God's wrath and God's mercy has been bridged by

Jesus dying on the cross — making a way for "me, a sinner" to experience the Lord's forgiveness.

So let us remember that ALL of us are the scribes and Pharisees ... ALL of us are the woman caught in adultery ... ALL of us are the men getting ready to stone her to death. Jesus has forgiven us for those sins and more. Let us thank the Lord, as the tax collector did, for being merciful to us as sinners. Then let us ALL be Jesus and show love and mercy to those just like us.

"There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus." (Romans 8:1)