

WEEK THREE

DAY ONE

“A man who was merely a man and said the sort of things Jesus said would not be a great moral teacher ... Either this man was, and is, the Son of God: or else a madman or something worse.” - C.S. Lewis

Today, most people don't have much of a problem with Jesus. While they may not like the church or get along with Christians, most people believe that Jesus was a good, moral teacher who had many wise things to say about how to live.

The story we will read today about Jesus occurs during an annual Jewish religious gathering called the Feast of Tabernacles. During prominent moments in Old Testament history, God called his people to observe religious celebrations as a means of remembering the ways he had worked in their lives. This festival originated as a celebration to remember how God had rescued his people from slavery in Egypt. The people would celebrate with sacrifices, refraining from work and living in temporary shelters (tabernacles) for seven days.

Many Jewish people in the crowd were in awe of Jesus's teaching, amazed at his knowledge. Despite the fact that there were things about Jesus they didn't quite understand, their hearts were drawn to him, recognizing that he was the Son of God. However, the Pharisees vehemently disagreed with his teaching. They were even looking for opportunities to trap Jesus, catching him in the act of breaking a religious law to make a case that he should be executed (we will see another example of this in John 8).

Jesus never offered the option to categorize him as a good, moral teacher. This is as true today as it was when these words were written. This story reveals that we serve a God who challenges us to grapple with Jesus and pick a side. The life Jesus offers is one that can only be experienced by placing him at the very center of our lives. We all have been given the choice to believe him or reject him. But when we see Jesus for who he really is, we can no longer remain neutral.

READ

John 7

REFLECT

1: How is it possible for someone to know a lot of information about the Jesus or the Bible and still not understand it?

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2: What behaviors do you judge harshly in others but are sometimes guilty of yourself?

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3. What evidence or experience convinces you that Jesus really was sent from God? If you are still trying to figure out Jesus, what evidence seems to convince the people in the crowd in today's reading?

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RESPOND

If you are a believer in Jesus: What is one thing that you could do this week to recommit yourself to placing Jesus at the center of your life?

If you are still exploring faith: What questions do you have that would help you move closer to making a decision about who Jesus is?

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PRAY

Listen to this worship song, focusing on the lyrics as your prayer today. If you are unable to listen to the song, just reflect on the lyrics. (The song can be accessed on iTunes, Spotify or YouTube)

Center II By Matt Redman & Charlie Hall

You're the center of the universe
Everything was made in you, Jesus
Breath of every living thing
Everyone was made for you

You hold everything together
You hold everything together

Christ, be the center of our lives
Be the place we fix our eyes
Be the center of our lives

We lift our eyes to heaven
We wrap our lives around your life
We lift our eyes to heaven, to you

WEEK THREE

DAY TWO

“Shame says that because I am flawed, I am unacceptable. Grace says that though I am flawed, I am cherished.” - Michelle Graham

No one is perfect, but few of us will be remembered by the worst decision we ever made. This is not the case with the woman we will meet today. She is nameless and identified only by her sin—“the woman caught in adultery.”

When you reach John 8 in your Bible, you might notice that this story is written in italics. Most Bibles also contain a note between John 7 and John 8, explaining that the earliest dated manuscripts of the book of John do not contain this story, or that it’s found in other places in the book of John or Luke. Regardless of its placement, there is enough consensus amongst the earliest copies of the New Testament that the best placement of this story was in John 8.

One major purpose of this interaction was for Jesus to turn the tables on the Pharisees who were trying to trap him into breaking the religious laws, which stated that a woman caught in the act of adultery should be put to death (Leviticus 20:10, Deuteronomy 22:22). Jesus pointed out that not only were the Pharisees just as guilty of sin as she was, they were exploiting her instead of caring for her. Jesus shows that the proper response to sin is not condemnation and public ridicule, but a truthful acknowledgment of the mistake wrapped in compassion and grace.

While there is much about this woman’s story no one will ever know, her anonymity provides us with the opportunity to place ourselves into her story, experiencing Jesus’ response to move toward us when the very worst parts of ourselves are exposed. And while this woman was saved from execution that day as she heard rock after rock hit the ground, Jesus would not be. On the cross, Jesus would take on the punishment we all deserve for our sin, providing us all with unlimited access to God’s forgiveness and unending grace.

READ

John 8

REFLECT

1: What mistake in your life do you still feel ashamed about? How does this story encourage you today?

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2: What do we learn from Jesus about how to respond to sin in the lives of others?

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3: As you think of your own failures and shortcomings, how do the words of Jesus to this woman— “Neither do I condemn you” — impact you today?

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RESPOND

This week, practice committing this Bible verse to memory: *“Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.”* (Romans 8:1). You can use the space provided to rewrite the verse a few times to help with memorization.

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PRAY

Thinking back to a previous mistake in your life and reflecting on the story of the woman caught in adultery, complete the following statement including that moment: *“The Man/Woman _____.”* Spend some time in prayer today thanking God for his forgiveness through Jesus and acknowledging all of the ways that he has changed your life.

"The only thing worse than being blind is having sight but no vision." - Helen Keller

In the Old Testament, the people of God understood their world to be divided into *blessings* and *curses*. It was common for obedience to God to be connected with financial wealth, physical health and overall prosperity. Curses, which came in the form of suffering, illness, infertility and financial hardship, were handed down to those who did not follow the laws of God. The impact of those choices would also carry into the generations to come (Exodus 34:7, Deuteronomy 7:9-10).

Simply put, people understood God in terms of a formula. Do the right things and earn God's favor. Disobey, and expect punishment.

In today's reading, we find that this way of thinking was still commonplace, even amongst Jesus' disciples. When they encounter a man who was born blind, their initial response is to ask Jesus, "Who sinned, this man or his parents?" (9:2)

How Jesus responds to this question would completely revolutionize the way people understood God. Jesus exclaims that the spiritual blindness of the Pharisees would be their downfall, although they were prosperous by external standards. The blind man, while bearing the "curse" of God, would be the one who displayed the glory of God.

Jesus turned the traditional understanding of God completely upside down. Jesus claimed that adversity would no longer be an indication of God's disapproval. Even more, prosperity would no longer be considered a token of God's favor. Jesus was leveling the spiritual playing field, and those who gained access into a relationship with him would all receive it the same way—by his grace alone.

READ

John 9

REFLECT

1: Have you ever thought of God in the obedience = good life, disobedience = bad life formula? How has today's reading impacted your thinking about this?

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2: Where have you seen the goodness of God in the life of someone who would not be considered influential by the world's standards?

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3: Who can you identify in your life or in the world today who is materially wealthy, but spiritually blind?

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