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GRACE IN THE GUTTER

John 8:1–11

One Main Thing

No matter where we are, Jesus meets us there and offers us grace.

Introduction

In Albanian it is *hir*; in Italian it is *grazia*; *gracia* is the Spanish word; and in Welsh it is *gras*. Of the over seven thousand languages spoken today they all have a word for grace. And in every language it is a powerful word. It has been said that freedom or love are the most powerful words in the world. As believers we would say that grace tops them all. Because grace is the demonstration of God's love to humanity and through grace we can experience freedom. The New Testament is full of grace language. One amazing account is found in John 8:1–11. Twelfth-century scholar Eustathios of

Thessaloniki called it a "great pearl of the gospel."[1] It is a priceless account of a costly gift.

Going Deeper

Palestinian women in the time of Christ lived a hard and heavy life. They were marginalized by the general culture. They were further ostracized in Judaism via a blatant disregard of Jewish law. They did not survive unless connected to a man in some way. Society of that day was patriarchal, and here men are driving this woman to her execution. With all of this in mind it stands to reason that this woman's treatment, throughout this ordeal, would have been less than gentle. You can imagine her being dragged through the streets of the city; pushed, jerked and man-handled, literally. She is then brought to a very public place, likely the Court of the Women in the temple. This woman, whose testimony was not accepted in a court of law, was now having a host of witnesses use her to pass judgement on our Lord.

She was caught in the act which indicates this mob, or at least some of them, were witnesses to the event. The man is conveniently absent from this scene. Leviticus

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[1] Quoted by Jennifer Knust, "The Woman Caught in Adultery (John 8:1–11)," *Bible Odyssey*, https://www.bibleodyssey.org/en/passages/main-articles/woman-caught-in-adultery (accessed April 4, 2019).

20:10 says both are guilty. From the onset we see that this was never about truth but about treachery. The mob wanted to catch Jesus and the woman was the bait.

The horde of holier-than-thou men had already assumed all the roles in this kangaroo court: witnesses, arresting officers, prosecuting attorneys, judge, jury, and they were standing at the ready to play the part of the executioner.

With the snare in place and all things at the ready they asked Jesus what he thought. What Jesus says is always important but in addition to his words in this narrative, his stance communicates much as well. When the crowd approaches Jesus, he is seated; however, when they pose the question, he does the exact opposite of what we might think: he stoops instead of standing. Why? We cannot say definitively. However, could it be that although he had been questioned by the crowd, he was more interested in the one caught?

If we return to our consideration of how the woman was treated through this ordeal, how do we envision her "placement" at the end when they arrive at their destination? Do you think she was given a seat? Or

allowed to find her own place? At least one translation does say she "was made to stand before the group". However most translations say they "set" or "placed" her in the middle. Knowing the culture, the situation, and mob mentality, it is difficult to think this was in any way a gentle process. It is logical to conclude that she was thrown to the ground when she was dragged in by the mob. This means that when Jesus stooped he put himself at eye -evel with the woman. In this moment of chaos—public arena, class interrupted, mob with his destruction as their agenda—Jesus focused on the woman. John R. Stott said that grace is love that cares and stoops. Philippians 2:7 tells us he set aside the privileges of deity and took on humanity; that is a long way down. His entire life and ministry was one big stoop, and he carried it through all the way to the cross. After kneeling down the mob presses him even more. Finally, he stands up and speaks, but he says very little in the later part of verse 7. Then verse 8 tells us he kneels once more. The words of Jesus penetrate the hearts of those comprising the mass and they leave. They slip out of the Court of Women and back to their lives, hopefully changed because of their encounter with The Master. Jesus then stands up again and asks the woman where her accusers are. In this moment he seeks not information—he knew they were gone—but recognition from the woman, recognition that although they had tried to destroy her and him, they could not.

Application

The question, where are your accusers, is still relevant today. We all have people in our lives that will not let us live down a moment, an event, a word. They are always there to try and remind, reignite, and reinjure. Maybe our worst accuser is ourselves, constantly reliving the past, rehashing a mistake, or reliving a poor choice. Just like with this woman, our accusations are always with us. We long for relief but it will not come in this age. That is because of who is behind the accusations. Satan is identified as the accuser in Zechariah 3. He loves to get us and keep us prisoners of our past. We all have things in our past we wish we could redo, but we cannot, and we do not have to because of Jesus. Satan's favorite tool in his toolbox is guilt. But the blood of Jesus washes all that away.

So if you are struggling with that, this text is for you. It is preserved through the ages not only to show what Jesus did on that day but to show what Jesus does today. The Christ who saw her and put himself where she was will do that for us today. He sees us, regardless of where we are, and he loves us. And today he defends us. He is with the Father in heaven defending us against the one who accuses us daily. We must let the defense of Christ silence the slurs of the devil. We are not who we used to be before we came to Jesus. As Paul wrote "I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live,

but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me" (Gal 2:20).

When we come to Christ, he moves us to a place of grace, he reclaims his rightful territory. Juan Carlos Ortiz said that watching a trapeze show is breathtaking. We wonder at the dexterity and timing. We gasp at near-misses. In most cases, there is a net underneath. When they fall, they jump up and bounce back to the trapeze. In Christ, we live on the trapeze. What happens when we slip? The net is surely there. The blood of our Lord, Jesus Christ, has provided forgiveness for all our trespasses. Both the net and the ability to stay on the trapeze are works of God's grace. Of course, we cannot be continually sleeping on the net. If that is the case, I doubt whether that person is a trapezes artist or not.[2]

Just like the woman our Lord offers his grace to us when we least deserve it. When this transpires the acceptance of such grace should move us to another place in our lives. Not that we will never sin again but that through prayer, study, and focused living we will sin less frequently, and when we do we will recognize it and repent of it more quickly.

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[2] Juan Carlos Ortiz, *Living With Jesus Today* (Creation House, 1982), 160.

In the end, we are left with many questions. However, there is one certainty that is beyond doubt. This woman experienced what every human longs for today: a second chance. This teaching has been used and abused through ages. It has been and is used as proof text of for opinions and arguments of a broad variety. Beyond all the arguments, this text is a powerful demonstration and testament to why Jesus came—to pick us up out of the dirt of our sins and give us an opportunity for a real life.

Discussion

1. What do you think happened to the woman from this moment on? How was her life different?
2. What do you think happened to the members of the mob? Were their lives changed because of what happened here?
3. What do you think those were listening to Jesus teach when the mob appeared, understood and took away from this event?
4. If you had to describe the grace of God, what one word would you use?