

A few years ago, Christian author and speaker Liz Curtis Higgs started talking about how God had reached into her life, and despite all the things she had done as a very bad girl, he saved her, and she turned her life around. Out of that testimony came her book series, “Bad Girls of the Bible.” Lent is the season for us to reflect on why Easter was necessary—it’s necessary because we all have enough bad in us to require a savior. Over the next few weeks we’re going to look for life-lessons in God’s work in the lives of the “Bad Girls of the Bible” for application in our walk with God and with one another. And by the way, these reflections are totally stolen from Liz Curtis Higgs.

OPENING PRAYER

JOHN 8:1-11

Jesus went to the Mount of Olives. ²At dawn he appeared again in the temple courts, where all the people gathered around him, and he sat down to teach them. ³The teachers of the law and the Pharisees brought in a woman caught in adultery. They made her stand before the group ⁴and said to Jesus, “Teacher, this woman was caught in the act of adultery. ⁵In the Law Moses commanded us to stone such women. Now what do you say?” ⁶They were using this question as a trap, in order to have a basis for accusing him. But Jesus bent down and started to write on the ground with his finger. ⁷When they kept on questioning him, he straightened up and said to them, “Let any one of you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her.” ⁸Again he stooped down and wrote on the ground. ⁹At this, those who heard began to go away one at a time, the older ones first, until only Jesus was left, with the woman still standing there. ¹⁰Jesus straightened up and asked her, “Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?” ¹¹“No one, sir,” she said. “Then neither do I condemn you,” Jesus declared. “Go now and leave your life of sin.”

We read, “**Jesus went to the Mount of Olives. ²At dawn he appeared again in the temple courts, where all the people gathered around him, and he sat down to teach them” (vv.1-2).**

How lovely it must've been to begin the day with the Lord, to watch the sun rise over the shoulders of the one who said, **"I am the light of the world"!** (John 8:12)

The woman of the hour wasn't on the scene yet, but you can be sure she was already wide awake that morning.

Following rabbinical tradition, Jesus went to the temple where he found a location for himself and his followers, and he sat down to teach. How eager they must've been to hear his words. No PowerPoint, no whiteboard and markers, but just his presence and his words.

But then came a well-timed disturbance by men who knew better than to interrupt a rabbi's time with his class. We read, **"The teachers of the law and the Pharisees brought in a woman caught in adultery. They made her stand before the group" (v.3).**

Adultery in any time, in any place, in any culture has always been a bad thing. You can never make it cool or acceptable. On a scale of accidentally bad to really bad, our girl in this story was a REALLY BAD GIRL!

But the rabbis and Pharisees weren't very virtuous either. The whole thing feels like a setup. I mean, how could a group of men catch a couple in bed without some sort of prearrangement with one of the parties involved, in this case, the man?

The way they involved the whole community in this little melodrama is telling. It wasn't necessary. So what was their true agenda?

We read that the rabbis and Pharisees **"said to Jesus, 'Teacher, this woman was caught in the act of adultery'" (v.4).**

"This woman"? What happened to the man? After all, the law of Moses reads that **"both the adulterer and the adulteress must be put to death" (Leviticus 20:10).**

So where was the dude? To be **"caught in the act"** means exactly that; the rabbis and Pharisees didn't nab the woman slipping out the door of her lover's home

quietly, like in the movies. But they found her in the man's arms nekkid. So they set up the catch, drug her out of bed and through the streets to the temple, probably nude, and threw her before Jesus.

She was not a human being to them. She was an object, a pawn in their hands, a means to an end, to draw a crowd for their confrontation of the Lord.

They said to Jesus, **“In the Law, Moses commanded us to stone such women. Now what do you say?” (v.5)** It was blasphemy for them to hide their intentions behind God's words. They knew the punishment was for the man and the woman, and they knew that they themselves rarely enforced this law. But stoning the woman was not their goal. Rather, they wanted to create a stumbling block for Jesus.

Jesus was being squeezed into a no-win situation. If he agreed with the law, he would condemn the woman to death, and all his teaching about grace would fly out the window. If he disagreed with the law, then he would be in direct opposition to the Word of God and he would be branded a heretic.

We read **“They were using this question as a trap, in order to have a basis for accusing him. But Jesus bent down and started to write on the ground with his finger” (v.6)**. The woman was merely bait to catch a bigger fish. Well chosen bait too, since Jesus had a reputation as a man more concerned with people than with practices. After all, he didn't say, “law one another,” but he said, **“love one another.”**

Imagine the pin-drop silence in the temple as the Pharisee waited, the adulteress wept, and the crowd watched, all straining to hear how Jesus would respond.

What was he writing? “Don't go away mad, just go away?” This is the only record of Jesus writing and yet we don't know what it was. But maybe the better question is not what but why.

Was he buying time for himself or for the woman? Was he contemplating his response while he doodled in the dust? Was he trying to relieve the tension of the moment?

But whatever Jesus wrote in silence didn't keep the rabbis and Pharisees from speaking out. We read, **“When they kept on questioning him, he straightened up and said to them, “Let any one of you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her” (v.7).** I bet that move put an end to their yapping! When he stood up, he met them eye-to-eye. What an awesome savior!

Another translation makes his words very direct. He said to the Pharisees, **“All right, stone her.”**

Indeed, the law dictated that the witnesses themselves had to throw the opening pitch—they had to take personal responsibility for their accusations. But Jesus added one little requirement: innocence.

Consider how Jesus is the only one in history who was and is without sin, the only person who could have tossed that rock in her direction in innocence. But he didn't!

For us, this means when you hear an accusing voice taunting you with a litany of your mistakes or shaming you with a review of your weaknesses or belittling you with your failures, it could never be the voice of Jesus. **“For God did not send his Son in the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him” (John 3:17).**

We read, **“Again he stooped down and wrote on the ground. ⁹At this, those who heard began to go away one at a time, the older ones first, until only Jesus was left, with the woman still standing there” (vv.8-9).**

Jesus did not throw a stone, but he stooped again and conquered their foolish pride with his silent witness.

For them to **“go away one at a time”** points to personal conviction of sin. The men arrived as an angry mob bent on challenging the authority of Jesus yet they departed one by one after he challenged them. The older, wiser ones left first—maybe they had a longer list of sins and more guilt to go with them. The younger men followed suit.

With no one left to hold her prisoner, to force back her arms or shackle her wrists, the woman stood there alone awaiting her sentence as you and I will someday: **“For we will all stand before God’s judgment seat” (Romans 14:10).**

Though her accusers were gone, the rest of the crowd hung around, curious to see what would happen to this woman who was pinned in place by her fear, her guilt, her shame, and maybe, just maybe her hope.

But with her detractors gone, things were looking up. She who had sought love in the arms of the wrong man—whether one time or a hundred—now found herself in front of a man who seemed genuinely concerned about her welfare.

Fact is Jesus cared about everyone who was gathered in the temple that morning. They were all sinners. Though the adulteress was the one whose skin was bared, the patient Christ had stripped bare the souls of everyone present, that they might come to repentance.

We read, **“Jesus straightened up and asked her, “Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?” (v.10)** Again, Jesus stood, but this time it was just him and the woman face-to-face, eye-to-eye, heart-to-heart.

“Woman” he called her, not sleazebag nor any one of a number of other nasty words you and I could offer very easily, I’m sure.

“Where are they?” he asked. I hear a smile in his voice. The question was rhetorical, because we know the rabbis and Pharisees were history, sent away humbled with their tails between their legs. Maybe he wanted her to savor what had just happened if even for just a moment.

And notice the second question he asked: **“Has no one condemned you?”** They had accused but not condemned. Satan is **“the accuser of our brothers, who accuses them before our God day and night” (Revelation 12:10)**, but even he cannot condemn us to death. That is Christ’s power and authority alone. Indeed, he could personally send the woman to hell with a pummeling of rocks against her soft skin himself.

But the passage closes with these words: **“No one, sir,” she said. “Then neither do I condemn you,” Jesus declared. “Go now and leave your life of sin” (v.11).** Did this mean she wasn’t guilty? No. It meant that she wouldn’t be paying for her sins. There was no penalty, no punishment for her.

But if she was guilty, the law said stoning was the penalty. She deserved to die. In our own country, 40 states still use the death penalty with hanging, the electric chair, lethal injection, or the firing squad. But not in the state of GRACE. In that sacred place, there is but one means of capital punishment—a wooden cross—where Jesus bore the death penalty on this woman’s behalf. By refusing to punish her, he gathered her guilt to himself.

Indeed, we all deserve fire and brimstone. But **“there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, ²because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit who gives life has set you free from the law of sin and death” (Romans 8:1-2).**

Jesus’ command to the woman to **“Go now and leave your life of sin”** was a gentle release, not a rebuke. He was not sending her away, but he was setting her free. Free to make her own choices. Free to live a new, clean life. By doing so publicly, he restored her to the community and spared her further humiliation.

She had definitely sinned; she was definitely guilty as charged. But we knew that. We’re all guilty of something. The past—hers and ours— isn’t the point. The Lord is more interested in our future. “Go,” he says. “Now. Do it. Move forward, put your past behind you. You are free.”

This week let’s check ourselves if we find ourselves on the side of the rabbis and Pharisees who were too quick to judge and condemn, for none of us is as perfect as we like to think we are; we all need a savior.

This week let us forgive ourselves, for Jesus has already forgiven us, and let us live for the Lord.

And this week let us share this Good News with another person who really needs to hear it, in the name of Jesus. Amen.