

HEARTBEATS Staying Connected 12/9/2022

Dear Friends in CHRIST,

There is an interesting statement that John makes at the end of his gospel that can be helpful for thinking about the Bible. In chapter 2, verse 25, John says, “*JESUS did many other things as well. If every one of them were written down, I suppose that even the whole world would not have room for the books that would be written.*” John is telling us something important about his gospel and, in doing so, also about the Bible. John intentionally chose what stories and teachings he wanted to include in his gospel. That may seem rather obvious until you start asking, “Why? Why did John pick these stories? What did John want us to know?” The same is true for all that is included in the Bible. It was selected by the various writers because they wanted their readers—they want us to know some significant things. And it’s good to ask that and to think about it. Rather than tackling the whole Bible, though, let’s look at just one story from John.

In Chapter 8, John tells the story of the woman caught in adultery. The Pharisees and teachers of the law bring a woman to JESUS who was caught “*in the act of adultery.*” The Jewish law states that she was to be put to death by stoning. Actually, the law said that both of the adulterers were to be stoned, but they’ve only brought the woman. What happened to the guy? Why wasn’t he brought? Well, we can consider that another time, but back to why John chose this narrative. Indeed, the Jewish leaders want to trap JESUS. If HE says to stone her, HE will lose favor with the common people—you know, the people who were always being criticized and condemned by the Pharisees and teachers of the law, but who liked that JESUS kept turning these religious leaders’ words back on them. But if HE said to let her go, HE would be in violation of the Law of Moses. A nice little trap, isn’t it? But JESUS answers by saying that whoever is without sin can throw the first stone to kill her. Now, they all recognize that they are sinful just like they have accused her of being, and they all leave so that it is just her and JESUS left. After acknowledging that there is no one left to condemn her, or really no one left but HIM, JESUS says, “*Then neither do I condemn you. Go now and leave your life of sin.*”

I think that this is what John wants us to know. Certainly, there is the hypocrisy of sinners condemning other sinners as though there is nothing wrong in their own lives. And it also shows how JESUS again challenges the understanding of what the law means and how it should be used. Oh, and you can also throw in that JESUS treats a woman with respect and that HE knows how to get the best of those who try to trap HIM. But I think what John really wants us to hear are those words, “*Neither do I condemn you.*”

If you think about it, the one person who really could condemn her without being a hypocrite is JESUS. JESUS is the only person who can sit in judgement of her, and of us. JESUS knows she is sinful. “*Go now and leave your life of sin.*” And JESUS knows our life of sin, too. But what does JESUS say? “*Neither do I condemn you.*”

Those are words of hope and promise for all of us. Just like that woman, JESUS knows the reality of our lives. Yet, JESUS will not condemn us. And we see that ultimately in HIS sacrifice on the cross to remove all sin from the lives of believers. But what matters most, what John wants us to absolutely know and believe and to allow to change the way we think and live and treat others is that—that HE does not and will condemn us.

In CHRIST'S love,
Pastor Jeffrey