

John 8:1-12  
Sticks and Stones  
February 28<sup>th</sup>, 2016

I want you to help me start this sermon by finishing saying this proverb from our childhood, “Sticks and stones will break my bones but words will never \_\_\_\_\_ me!

Not true isn't it? Sticks and stones will indeed break our bones and rend our flesh; but words are just as deadly. They will break our hearts, crush our spirits and make us despair of life itself, and drive us over the edge.

Today I am talking about words and their power to heal and forgive and set free. I am talking about words and their power to crush and destroy.

My mother's upbringing was rather unusual in some respects. Her father, my grandfather was a man who was very cruel and abusive with his words. He never physically abused my mom and her 8 brothers and sisters, but he regularly and daily assaulted their minds and souls with words. And so all 9 siblings were married and divorced at least once, including my mom. Some of them divorced and remarried multiple times. Many battled alcoholism.

My uncle Clyde died of alcoholism. He quit drinking later in life, but it was too late. He had developed stomach cancer as a result of his drinking and died an early death. My grandfather's name for him was “stupid”. He hardly ever called my uncle by his real name, Clyde. “Stupid” was used and stuck. He dropped out of school in the 3<sup>rd</sup> grade and never did much with his life. My grandfather's cruel and careless words were a curse.

Now on the other hand I want to share with you the story of Cheryl Prewitt. This is a true story, a story of blessing.

*When Cheryl Prewitt was four years old, she hung around her father's small country grocery store. Almost daily, the milkman would come into the store and greet her with the words, "How's my little Miss America?"*

*At first she giggled, but eventually she became comfortable with that title...and even liked it a little. Soon the milkman's greeting became a childhood fantasy...then a teenage dream. Finally, it became a goal...and in 1980, she stood on a stage in Atlantic City where she was crowned...Miss America.* Youth Specialties Hot Illustrations 1.0

Here is a picture of Cheryl Prewitt



An amazing part of this story is that she overcame a car wreck at the age of 11 that left her in a wheel chair with a scarred face. The doctors had told her she would never walk again or have children. But she learned to walk and went on to become a Christian evangelist and the mother of three.

Our words have tremendous power to bless and to curse, which brings us to our story today. In last week's message I pointed out Jesus' encounter at the dinner table ended this way, *"When Jesus left that place, the scribes and the Pharisees began to criticize him bitterly and ask him questions about many things, trying to lay traps for him and catch him saying something wrong."*

Just think of the myriad of political candidates and the "gotcha moments" in interviews we have seen lately. We see more of candidates' trip ups than we see of any positive statements they have

made. I have listened to a lot of interviews where a reporter or “talking head” has done everything they could to get a gotcha moment. Jesus was placed in such a situation here today where the consequences were not just a temporary embarrassment, or a lost election; they were deadly.



The woman involved here was simply a pawn. She is unnamed. Hauled half naked if not completely naked in front of Jesus and crowd listening to him teach in the most Holy place in the world for the Jews, the temple. Scholars feel she was snared in a trap set up by the scribes and Pharisees. She was probably a prostitute deliberately set up to be caught with a married man. She was a tool being used to trap Jesus in his words.

In the eyes of the Law both the man and the woman were guilty of adultery and both faced the same penalty of death. But the man was probably in on the trap. The Scribes and Pharisees simply needed a pawn for the man was nowhere to be found.

*“Now the dilemma with which they sought to trap Jesus was this. If Jesus said that the woman ought to be stoned to death, two things followed.*

*First, he would lose the reputation he had gained for love and mercy and would never again be called the friend of sinners.*

*Second, he would come into conflict with the Roman law, for the Jews had no power to pass or carry out the death sentence on anyone.*

*And third, if Jesus said that the woman should be pardoned, it could immediately be said that he was teaching people to break the Law of*

*Moses, and that he was condoning, and even encouraging them to commit, adultery.”* They thought they had Jesus no matter what he did.

But Jesus bent down and started to write on the ground with his finger.



What a simple, none verbal way of rejecting their arguments,... rejecting their self-righteous,... their judgmentalism,... of rejecting them. Can you imagine how uncomfortable it must have been getting for all that morning in the Temple Courtyard with Jesus' silence? The woman who could not look up for shame, the crowd and the disciples not believing what they were seeing in this Holy place, and the Scribes and Pharisees who were wickedly, gleefully thinking now we got him, now we got him. No they were simply, uncomfortably ignored.

Oh Jesus knew them and he knew this woman who had been used in such a callous and calculating way. She meant nothing to the Pharisees her worth to them was nothing and they would destroy her to destroy Jesus. He wrote in the ground with his finger. Maybe the same finger of God who inscribed the 10 commandments on stone. Thou shalt not commit adultery. Thou shalt not kill.

There is much speculation as to what Jesus was writing, but the one I like best is this, which comes from an Armenian translation of this passage, *“He himself, bowing his head, was writing with his finger on the earth to declare their sins; and they were seeing their several sins on the stones.”*

And the Greek word translated “without sin” can also be translated “without sinful desire”. So Jesus stood up and finally looked these evil men in the eye and said in essence,

**“All right! Stone her! But let anyone among you that hasn’t had the same sinful desire to do the same thing cast a stone.”**

All these men, with stones clasped firmly in their hands started to drop them. Can’t you just hear the thuds as the rocks fell to the ground? These men starting from the oldest to the youngest left this lynching field. The older you are the more evident your flaws and sins are to you. These men though deeply flawed did not have their hearts softened, but had them convicted; so they left the temple courts. The rocks falling to the ground must have sounded like a hail storm.

And Jesus and the woman were left alone. Even the crowds who had gathered to hear Jesus teach were too embarrassed to stay. Shame was felt by everyone. Words brought to curse and condemn to death--frightened and offended everyone. So Jesus and the woman stood alone.

We will all one day come face to face with Jesus, the only sinless One, the only One who can judge. And here was his judgement that day.

*“Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?”*

*“No one, sir,” she said.*

*“Then neither do I condemn you,” Jesus declared.*

*“Go now and leave your life of sin.”*

This Bible story has a strange history in terms of its placement in the Bible. All most all early versions of the New Testament don’t have it. In some it actually is placed in the gospel of Luke. But it was known and referred to by ancient Bible scholars. It really disturbs the Pharisee in us all especially when it comes to adultery. Some believe, ancient editors may even have taken it as Jesus being soft on sexual sins, so

they tried to leave it out. But was Jesus really being soft on sin when he said, **“Go now and leave your life of sin?”**

He condemned the sin, but saved the sinner. Isn't that what Jesus, whose name means Savior does?

I want us all to note the blessing in these words. When Jesus said, **“Neither do I condemn you.”** We all can see the blessing of forgiveness, but do we see the blessing when Jesus said, **“Go now and leave your life of sin?”** Jesus wasn't rebuking her for her past. He was giving her opportunity and power for a future!! We live down to our curses and up to our blessings. This woman now knew she could leave her life of sin.

Being a woman caught in adultery, publically humiliated she probably saw no possibility of escape from that lifestyle, but now, Jesus the Messiah said she could if she wanted too, and find a new life. *‘Jesus is sure everyone has a future as well as a past.’*

*‘Jesus method was not to blast men and women with the knowledge—which they already possessed—that they were miserable sinners, but to inspire them with the unglimped discovery that they were potential saints.’* Barclay John Vol. 2 p. 9 & 10

That's why I included the first verse of the next section of the Gospel of John, **“When Jesus spoke again to the people, he said, “I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.”**

Now how do we apply this to our lives? First, watch your words of criticism. Watch what you call people. Do you speak to help build someone up, or simple to punish, or even worse to tear down. Do you gossip? If you have nothing good to say about someone be as silent as

Jesus as he stooped to write the sins of the Pharisees in the sand. Scary to think when we are listing out loud the presumed faults of others Someone else, the Someone else, might just be writing ours down.

Much more importantly seek to bless your own children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren. We become what we are called. **We live down to our curses and up to our blessings.** I am encouraging you to actually bless those you know and love. Lay your hands on them and bless them. Think hard about what you can say to children, even adult children that can bless them.



Think of when and how you can say it long before your death beds. I just read through again Jacob's blessings of his 12 sons while on his death bed. They lived up and down to his blessing. Your words are powerful. God made them so.

And personally, forgive and forget whatever past you have had. Move onto the future. Find the light of Jesus Christ to guide you.

Today as you came in you picked up a black stone. It represents the words that you've spoke that you shouldn't have, the words that have hurt others. And the pain you have carried. Today I want you to offer your past to God and reach for your future in the light of Christ!

The ushers are going to take up two offerings today. First, I want you to drop your stones in the offering plates as they are passed. That is your' past literally, passing away. Offer the sins of your' past to God. The ushers will deposit these stones at the foot of the cross.

They will then take up “the offering”, which is not just a financial offering. It is the offering of ourselves to the future God has open for us to walk into. It is an offering and a commitment to bless others. It is a commitment to walk in the light of Jesus Christ.

Let us pray: O God, as we drop these rocks in the plates may you wipe away our past and open up to us your future. In Jesus’ name. Amen.