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The Big Questions: Is Homosexuality Sin? John 8: 1-11

Our Big Question this morning deals with homosexuality. Honestly, I have not looked forward preaching this sermon because, according to the best data, between 1-3% of the American population is gay which means that nearly every family in this congregation is touched by this issue in often painful ways. And because I have gay friends here this morning and, I'm sure, many others that I do not know about. This can be a painful topic no matter how you address it. But to avoid talking about it is cowardice. We have a responsibility to grapple honestly and graciously with this important matter and I pray that my message this morning will contribute to that effort. PRAY.

The passage I have chosen has, on the surface, nothing to do with homosexuality. But for reasons that I think you will understand it is a beloved story from the ministry of Jesus...and very appropriate for this topic.

Jesus was teaching in the temple when a mob of angry religious leaders scurried towards him, dragging a woman along. As you think about this humiliated woman standing before Jesus you might want to imagine her as a big piece of cheese. Because, to these religious leaders, she is bait. Nothing more. This is a trap to destroy Jesus. And they are just waiting to see if Jesus will bite.

The woman had been caught in the act of adultery. Which, of course, immediately begs a question, doesn't it? Where's the man? Either they winked and let him go...or he was part of the trap from the beginning. Already they were breaking the very Law they claimed to be upholding because the Law said that both parties were to be punished, not just the woman.

They ask Jesus whether or not she should be stoned to death for her sin. If he tells them to set her free, he breaks Law of Moses. If he agrees that she should be stoned to death, he breaks the law of Rome which does not allow the Jews to execute criminals. Either way, Jesus is in trouble. A very clever trap.

This text seems perfect for this morning's topic for many reasons. Here's one; the topic of homosexuality itself has become something of a trap. Just ask Carrie Prejean, the now dethroned Miss California. If you reply that homosexuality is not natural, not God's perfect plan for creation, not something to be embraced and encouraged by the church or by society, then you are homophobic. You are a hater. If you affirm homosexuality as a gift from God to be embraced and celebrated, then you are breaking with the clear teaching of scripture, with 3000 years of Judeo-Christian tradition and with the beliefs of most of the Christian Church around the world. It's a trap. So what can we learn from this story about how to deal with this trap?

First, we must **consider** carefully what we believe and how we respond. One of the favorite tidbits of this story is when Jesus leans down and writes in the dirt with his finger. It's the only time in the Bible that Jesus is recorded as writing anything and we have no idea what he wrote. But whatever it was, I think Jesus was using it as an opportunity to collect himself, to calm himself, **to consider carefully what he was going to do**. I think he was furious with the Pharisees for using this poor woman as a pawn in their scheme. I think he also knew that the way he responded in the next few moments would have huge implications for him. So he paused and considered before he spoke.

Somehow we have to get past the angry and sometimes vicious rhetoric that often seems to accompany this topic. We who believe that homosexuality is not God's best for humanity need to dial down the volume and avoid making it the centerpiece of conversation about what it means to be Christian. As for those in the gay community who insist on labeling as homophobic anyone who disagrees with them...well...it is not true and it ought to stop. It wasn't long ago in this country that the gay community was regularly on the receiving end of bullying, intimidation and harassment. How can so many of their supporters possibly imagine that it is now all right for them to become the bullies and the harassers?

So before you take the bait...before you strike out in anger from either position, consider carefully and prayerfully what you believe. One of the ways that I did that was to sit down with a gay friend who is a member of our church. I have known and loved him for years. Many years ago he entrusted this secret to me and I have always protected it. We both know where we stand; how we disagree on this issue. And yet I love him and I know he loves me.

Since I knew this would be one of the Big Questions, weeks ago, I asked him to meet with me and to share HIS questions with me. I really wanted to hear what my friend had to say. After many decades of self-loathing and of trying to change; after an attempted suicide, my friend has come to the point where he affirms that he is a gay child of God. He cannot remember a time in his life when

he wasn't attracted to men; he is NOT among the 49% of homosexuals that were abused as children. He believes he was created this way by God and that his homosexuality is something to be embraced and celebrated. And he was grateful for the opportunity to interact on this topic. I don't have the time to try and answer all 17 of his questions. But here are a few that I have answered for myself as I have considered this issue.

“Why do we consider Old Testament teachings about homosexuality to still be valid but ignore others that deal with eating shrimp or wearing mixed blends of clothing or getting tattoos?” Depending upon which commentator you read, the Bible mentions homosexuality as few as a hand full of times and as many as 21 times. And it is true that some Old Testament standards were changed or discarded in the New Testament. But homosexuality was not one of them. Every time the Bible mentions it, it is forbidden practice.

Furthermore, with the issues of slavery or divorce or the treatment of women, for instance, you can find verses in the Bible that lift up contrary views. But there is NO minority voice in the Bible on the topic of homosexuality. As one scholar has written, “there is not a single shred of evidence anywhere in the Bible that would even remotely suggest that same-sex unions are any more acceptable than extramarital or premarital intercourse, incest, or bestiality.” Robert Gagnon, *The Bible and Homosexual Practice*, pg. 439. Some commentators have attempted to reinterpret various Biblical passages, such as the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, as not actually being AGAINST homosexuality. But no commentator can argue FOR homosexuality from the scriptures because there is no explicit text, Old or New Testament, that speaks approvingly of homosexual practice. Not one. In other words, if you are going to affirm homosexual practice you must either reinterpret or ignore every single reference to it found in the Bible.

Another question: **“Jesus never said a word about homosexuality.”** This might be true, although Jesus' comments in Mark 7:21 seem to allude to the Levitical holiness laws that included homosexual practice. But this argument from silence is a dangerous one. Jesus also never said anything about incest or bestiality or alcoholism. No one uses that as an argument to claim that Jesus supported such practices. On the contrary, Jesus reaffirmed the Old Testament law in the Sermon on the Mount. Furthermore, Jesus had NO TROUBLE reinterpreting any law that he thought was being misunderstood or misused. In Matthew 5, he spoke about murder, adultery, divorce, the taking of oaths and revenge. And in every case, he didn't make it easier; he made it harder. Just lusting after a woman is adultery. Just being angry with your brother brings the same judgment as murdering him. Divorcing your wife for any excuse except unfaithfulness is sin. If Jesus had wanted to reinterpret the law regarding homosexual practice, he could have. He did not.

Another question from my friend: **“If science ever finally proves there is a ‘gay gene,’ will this destroy people’s Christian faith?”** Firstly, science has proven pretty conclusively that there CANNOT be a gay gene. Otherwise, the many studies done on identical twins would discover that there is a 100% correlation of homosexuality between identical twins. The highest correlation discovered so far in a study by Bailey and Pillard is 52% and some scholars question their scientific standards. There is no gay gene. But it is clear that there IS a biochemical and genetic predisposition towards homosexuality. I believe that. But there is also a genetic predisposition toward alcoholism, high cholesterol, extreme violence and countless other conditions and behaviors that no one considers healthy or desirable. All this does is remind us that we live in a fallen, sinful world and that our gene pool is hopelessly screwed up.

I am not trying to dismiss quickly what are in fact good and very complex questions from my questions. And you may not agree with my answers. But my point is I have taken great pains to **consider carefully** what I believe through a careful study of scripture and a great deal of research. Every thoughtful, mature Christian should do the same.

Another thing this story teaches us to do when facing this issue is to **confess**. After Jesus carefully considered what he would say, he stood back up and replied, “Go ahead. Kill her as the law requires. And the honor of throwing the first pitch will fall to the one who has never sinned. Go ahead. Have at it.” And then he knelt back down and started scribbling again. He didn't even look at them. It was so brilliant. So...so Christ-like. You can imagine all of them standing there just waiting, for SOMEONE to get the fun started. But no one could do it. And very tellingly, it is the older people who first dropped their stones and walked away. The ones who had lived longer. And sinned longer. And had more to be ashamed of.

Many of us have no right or reason to become righteously indignant over this particular sexual issue. Those of you who are sleeping with your girlfriends or boyfriends...will you toss the first stone? Those of you who are living together instead of getting married...how about you? Some of you are committing adultery right now; destroying two homes in the selfish pursuit of your own pleasure. Will you pick up a rock? What about those of you who divorced for unbiblical grounds and remarried. Jesus had way more to say about divorce than homosexuality. Would you like to be the first in line?

The most important Biblical passage dealing with homosexuality is Romans 1. Go home and study that passage. Paul condemns homosexuality as an example of what happens when we exchange the worship of God for the worship of things that God has created. Paul is very clear: homosexuality is sin. But he ends that passage with a long list of other offenses against God. Get ready to squirm. “Envy, strife, deceit, malice, gossip, slander, insolence, arrogance, boasting, disobedience to parents.” So...you enviers or trouble-makers or liars or gossips or backbiters or disobedient teenagers...think twice before you pick up a rock. I could never throw the first

stone at my gay friends because I am too aware of my own sinfulness. I am too aware of the things in my life that are shameful. Any conversation about **any** sin must begin with an honest **confession** of my OWN sin.

The third thing we learn is, **don't condemn**. After a while, every rock had been dropped and every man had walked away. It was only Jesus and the woman who remained. He stood back up from his doodling and asked, "What...does no one condemn you?" "No one, Sir." "Then neither do I condemn you..." Now let's be clear. "Condemn" does not mean "exercise judgment." Jesus spent his whole teaching ministry telling his disciples what was right and wrong; teaching them to judge the fruit of their own lives and of each other. Anyone who whips out, "Judge not lest ye be judged" as a way of saying, "You don't have the right to exercise any judgment about anyone's behavior," is not reading Jesus clearly. "Condemn" here means "execute." It means "condemn to death." What he was saying was, "Is there no one left here to throw the rock that will kill you? Well... I won't do it either." It is not for us to condemn the homosexual person...to execute judgment upon them...to self-righteously hold them up to public scorn or humiliation.

Don't condemn. But also, **don't condone**. Jesus final words must also be heard. "Go now, and leave your life of sin." You realize what this means, right? Jesus didn't withhold condemnation because the woman was innocent. He withheld condemnation because of his grace. She wasn't innocent. She was guilty as charged. She was living a life that was sinful and destructive to her, to the man she was sleeping with, to his family, to society. Jesus was the only one who could have thrown the stone. He was the only one without sin. Instead he offered grace. But then he said, "Now...you have a fresh start. You have grace and forgiveness. Don't squander it. Start over. Go in a different direction. Stop doing the things that are killing your soul."

It is neither Christ-like nor kind for Christians to condemn the homosexual. But it is neither Christ-like nor kind to condone behavior that is wrong in God's eyes and destructive to them.

So, don't condemn, don't condone and **DO compassion**. Compassion oozes out of this story. Isn't it clear that Christ had compassion on this woman? He read her soul. He knew her story. He knew her past of abuse or rejection or pain...or whatever the circumstances that had led her into the life she now lived. And his heart was moved with compassion toward her. He loved her.

Fred Phelps, that awful, evil man, carries signs that say, "God hates fags." It is not true. God adores every single one of us broken, confused sinners. Jesus is the proof of that. And the Jesus God sent to love and save his broken world told us that the greatest commandment was love. You have Christian brothers and sisters who are gay. Jesus said, "Love one another." You have neighbors who are gay. Jesus said, "Love your neighbor." You might have gays or lesbians who hate you. Jesus said, "Love your enemy." If you approach this issue with anything less than the overflowing compassion and love of Jesus Christ for every single person, you are not living in obedience to the one you call Lord.

A final word to my gay friends and to the other gay and lesbian persons listening to my words this morning--who I hope could still be my friend even if what I have said hurts your feelings: I am very sorry for the pain that you have experienced in your life. You wouldn't have chosen it. Maybe you can't figure out why you are the way you are. Maybe some of the stereotypes...neglectful father, smothering mother, sexually abused as a child... were realities in your own life. And maybe none of these things apply.

Let me say this. It is not your feelings and attractions that define you as a person. We all have feelings and attractions that are both good and bad. It is what you do with them...how you choose to behave...that matters. You do not have to surrender to your urges. For those who choose to break out of homosexual activity, the right kind of counseling and support ministries have proven to be very effective in helping highly motivated persons change. Statistics suggest that the treatment success rate is about 35%, much higher than the success rate for the treatment of alcoholism...despite everything you are hearing to the contrary. One lesbian woman had heard that Chapel Hill was not a safe place to be. But she took a risk, came to Celebrate Recovery and has now stepped out of that lifestyle. That same story has been repeated with 9 other gay and lesbian persons. If you long for victory in this area of your life, we can help you. Contact Lance Brown.

And to the teenagers who find themselves sexually confused at times, may I just tell you; this IS a confusing time for you. Sexuality can be a very elastic process. But one recent study indicated that, of teens who reported some same-sex attraction at the age of 16, something like 65% reported NO same-sex attraction at the age of 25. Don't you dare let anyone convince you that because you have confusing sexual thoughts or isolated sexual experiences or were abused, that you must be gay.

Others of you would say of counseling, "Been there, done that, it doesn't work. This is who I am and nothing will change that." All right, you can still choose to say No to sexual activity. I know, it isn't fair. It's easy for someone who is in a loving, sexual relationship to say, "Just don't have sex." But our culture has lied to us about the necessity of a sexual relationship to fulfill a person. Jesus never had sex. Paul was celibate. It is a decision that you can make and, like every single person who is fighting to resist sexual temptation, if you have a small group of friends who will hold you accountable for your life, it will make it easier. But if you surround yourselves only with friends who tell you to "Go for it," you will live in a constant state of guilt.

Or you might say, “You are all wrong about this, Mark. I am who I am and I will live the way God has created me.” I understand. There are many people here this morning who know that living together is sin and still live together; who know that most divorce is sin but are going to get divorced anyway; who know that greed is a sin but still hoard everything they have; who know that gossip is a sin but still love talking about other people. If you continue in your behavior, just know that it will catch up with you sooner or later. And when it does... when your life is so broken that you are desperate enough to seek and obey God in that area of life...just know that we will be here for you. Your fellow sinners; your broken brothers and sisters whose only hope in life and in death is the grace and compassion of Jesus Christ.

May his Holy Spirit forgive what you think can't be forgiven.

May his Holy Spirit change what you think can't be changed.

May his Holy Spirit soften your hard heart.

May his Holy Spirit fill you with hope if you are hopeless, courage if you are faint-hearted, joy if you are despondent and peace if you are harried.

Sermon Discussion Questions

1. First of all, because the issue of homosexuality is such a “hot button” topic, and because so many families are touched by this issue in one way or another...AND because we are followers of Christ, please, as you discuss this topic, do so with grace, kindness, humility and sensitivity.
2. Now, why IS the topic of homosexuality such a controversial one?
3. How would you reply to the person who says, “This is the way that God has made me?” To the person who says, “Jesus never talked about homosexuality?” To the person who views homosexuality as the unforgivable sin?
4. What is the difference between condemning and condoning? Is it possible to love persons whose behavior you disagree with? What would that look like?

Recommended Books

- [Welcoming but Not Affirming: An Evangelical Response to Homosexuality](#) by Stanley Grenz
The late Professor Grenz of Regent College provides a comprehensive but accessible treatment of the topic of homosexuality.
- [The Bible and Homosexual Practice: Texts and Hermeneutics](#) by Robert A.J. Gagnon
Professor Gagnon from Pittsburgh Theological Seminary has produced the single most important volume addressing the Biblical treatment of homosexuality. It is a serious and long work but if you can only read one book on the topic, this is the best of the best.