

YOU MIGHT NOT GO FREE NEXT TIME!

Today's Text: Jn 8: 1-11

Extracts:

Then the scribes and Pharisees brought to [Jesus] *a woman caught in adultery* [and] they said to Him, “Teacher, this woman was caught in adultery, in the very act. Now Moses, *in the law*, commanded us that *such should be stoned*. But what do You say?”... . Jesus stooped down and wrote on the ground with His fingers, as though He did not hear. So when they continued asking Him, *He raised Himself up and said to them, “He who is without sin among you, let him throw a stone at her first.”*... Then those who heard it, being convicted by their conscience, went out one by one ... When Jesus ... saw no one but the woman, He said to her, “Woman, where are those accusers of yours? Has no one condemned you?” She said, “No one, Lord.” And *Jesus said to her, “Neither do I condemn you; go and sin no more”* [Jn 8: 3-11]

On July 15, 2008, Cindy Anthony of Orlando, Florida, USA, reported to police that her two-year old granddaughter, Caylee Anthony, had been missing for a month.¹ The following day, police arrested Casey Anthony, the mother of the missing child. Following more police investigations, leading to the subsequent recovery of Caylee's remains, Casey was indicted on murder charges. Her trial lasted for six weeks and attracted huge media and social networking audiences worldwide. Many pundits pronounced her guilty in the court of public opinion. However, on July 5, 2011, the jury acquitted her of murder but found her guilty on four charges of lying to the police, deserving of a year's imprisonment each and a fine. Since she had been in detention for over three years, she was released from jail on July 17, 2011.

Casey's acquittal shocked most people and she has not been seen in public since her release. That was a close shave that she might never want to experience ever again. Any of us could have been in her position, given our sinful adventures. We behave as if we may never be caught. Then one day, it happens! Two thousand years ago, a woman was caught in an act of adultery and faced instant death. Her accusers brought her to Jesus and she received a remarkable but undeserved reprieve. What can we learn from that story to guide us away from sin-provoked disasters? Let us find out.

¹ Story based on the following sources: “Casey Anthony acquitted of murder,” Jul 05, 2011; <http://content.usatoday.com/communities/ondeadline/post/2011/07/casey-anthony-jury-reaches-verdict/1> , and “Death of Casey Anthony,” From Wikipedia, the free Encyclopedia, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Death_of_Caylee_Anthony

1. Background: An adulteress has a close shave with death

The word of God says, “Surely, in vain the net is spread in the sight of any bird” [Prov. 1: 17]. In other words, you cannot set a trap for a bird that is watching you. Yet, most of us drive consciously into a ditch when it comes to moral issues! Even as so-called born-again people, we knowingly hold on to certain sins as if we do not know that every act has its consequences. Then, when we are caught and disgraced, we blame everybody else or circumstances but hardly ourselves. In this week’s Bible story, we have a unique opportunity to learn from an act of human brinkmanship, that is, deliberately taking risks that we know will have unanticipated bad consequences. The story line is as follows:

a) *A woman is caught in the act of adultery*

It was one early morning while Jesus was teaching in the temple in Jerusalem. The scribes and Pharisees brought to Him a woman *caught in adultery* [Jn 8: 1-3]. The operative words there are “caught in adultery.” What can we infer there from? That might not be the first time she was doing it or the first man (other than her husband) that she was sleeping with. This time, however, she was caught red-handed and there were witnesses.

Many of us are living that dangerously! The only commandment that we obey is the non-existent Eleventh Commandment which states “Thou shalt not be caught!” Sometimes, we first engage in our “favourite” sins secretly and guardedly. Then, we grow more daring and it becomes an adventure. Then, on the day that we least expect it, we get caught because, as the word of God says, “Be sure your sin will find you out” [Num. 32: 23]. That unfaithful woman was finally caught in the act and whatever lies and excuses that she had used in the past to cover her tracks could not work this time. So it can be with every reckless sinner.

b) *The law and public opinion condemned her to death*

Her accusers knew what to do but they brought the woman to Jesus because they wanted to test Him in order to find a basis for framing accusations against Him [Jn 8: 6]. According to the Law of Moses, if a man committed adultery with another man’s wife, both the adulterer and the adulteress would “surely be put to death” [Lev. 20: 10]. The manner of carrying out the judgment was also prescribed, namely, “You shall bring them both out to the gate of that city, and you shall stone them to death with stones, the young woman because she did not cry out in the city, and the man because he humbled his neighbour’s wife” [Deut. 22: 24]. We are not told what happened to the man that the woman had slept with but that was not important to the point that her accusers wanted to make with

Jesus. The woman was a consenting accessory to the act and that was what mattered to her accusers.

Whatever you do can be tried in the law court or in the court of public opinion. According to the Law of Moses, the adulteress could only be stoned to death on the testimony of two or three witnesses. Moreover, "the hands of the witnesses shall be the first against him [her] to put him [her] to death, and afterward the hands of all the people" [Deut. 17: 6-7]. The court of public opinion is shaped and controlled by those who have interest in a specific outcome. In this woman's case, the scribes and Pharisees shaped public opinion against the adulteress under the guise of upholding the Law of Moses!

Look at public debates when top religious leaders of today get caught in moral scandals. Denominational opponents or non-believers blow the loudest trumpets of condemnation. You are pronounced guilty even by those who have not read the media or other reports on your matter. Therefore, *the best policy is to avoid being dragged along the sleazy streets of public disgrace*. You can never win there.

c) *But Jesus sets her free*

Jesus knew His enemies' intentions and He was not about to be perturbed by their antics! So, He "stooped down and wrote on the ground with His finger, as though He did not hear." However, when they kept asking Him for His position on the case of the adulteress brought before Him, He said to them, "He who is without sin among you, let him throw a stone at her first." Then He went back to writing on the ground [Jn 8: 6-8].

What followed could have shocked the woman who was so sure that death was going to follow. Her accusers, "being convicted by their conscience" left one by one, beginning with the oldest [v. 9]! The Psalmist says, "There is none who does good; no, not one" [Ps. 14: 3] and Paul adds that "all have sinned, and fall short of the glory of God" [Rom. 3: 23].

But the woman was lucky that she was brought before Jesus. After everyone had left and she was standing alone before Him, Jesus raised Himself up and asked her where her accusers were and whether no one had condemned her. "No, my Lord," she replied. Jesus told her, "Neither do I condemn you; *go and sin no more*" [Jn 8: 10-11]. In other words, she was definitely guilty as charged. *She deserved to die in accordance with law. But she was saved by grace- the grace that only Jesus can give!*

That adulteress was lucky that she was dragged to the "court" of Jesus where cases are determined by grace, not facts. What if they had taken her to the chief priest? She was caught in the act, suggesting that there were witnesses.

But for Christ's intervention, she would have been stoned to death by hypocrites. However, the challenge that she now faced was whether to go and sin no more, as advised by Jesus, or go and sin more more in line with her human nature. What would you do if you were in her place? Before you can answer correctly, let us examine your case.

2. What are you doing about your case?

The adulterous woman's story is not far-fetched at all. The man that she had slept with could have been her neighbour or her husband's best friend. He could have been her prayer partner or her co-worker. He could even have been her little son's lesson teacher. Therefore, her story resembles that of somebody you know quite well! That is why you must pay serious attention to the challenge of righteous living on a daily basis. Can we do anything about it? Here are helpful steps that you can use to understand your own unique situation:

a) *Identify your Achilles' heel*

It is quite rare to find one person who breaks all the Ten Commandments [Ex. 20: 1-17]. Yet, whoever breaks one is guilty of all [Jam. 2: 10]! So, you should concentrate on identifying that sin that easily ensnares or besets you [Heb. 12: 1], that sin that seems to control or hinder your spiritual growth. It is your *Achilles' heel*, that is, ***a seemingly small but deadly weakness in spite of overall strength that can potentially or actually lead to your downfall.***² For example, a rich young ruler once came to Jesus to ask what good thing he needed to do in order to have eternal life. Jesus mentioned some of the Ten Commandments. The young man claimed that he had kept all those things from his youth. Jesus then challenged him to sell all that he had and give to the poor and come and follow Him. That was too much for the young man who "went away sorrowful, for he had great possessions" [Matt. 19: 16-22]. Idolatry (placing material possessions above love of God) was that young man's Achilles' heel.

So, do some self-appraisal. ***Anything that you do in secret that will embarrass you when it is exposed is your Achilles' heel.*** As a man, can you be trusted with women or money? As a woman, can you do with one man at a time? Are you an arrogant fool or an incurable liar? Do you use others as a ladder and throw them away when you reach the top? Do you have an unforgiving spirit? What is it that has imprisoned you?

David's problem was women [1 Sam. 25: 2-39]. In the end, the love of women lured him into adultery with Bathsheba [2 Sam. 11:1-5] and see the high price that he paid for that sin [2 Sam. 12: 10-14]. Moses had a big problem with anger [Ex. 32: 19]. Because of it, he struck the rock twice

² http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Achilles%27_heel

when God commanded him to speak to it. As a result, Moses was not allowed to enter the Promised Land [Num. 20: 7-12]. Judas Iscariot loved money and was a thief who stole from the money box that Jesus entrusted in his care [Jn 12: 6]. In the end, the love of money drove him to betray Jesus for thirty pieces of silver [Matt. 26: 14-15]. A critical analysis of your situation will reveal to you *the one sin* that seems to beset you *all or most of the time*. Get rid of it before it gets rid of you!

b) *Take it to Jesus*

You may have been to specialists or gurus. You may have tried self-effort. However, you find that you tend to relapse each time. That is because by definition, sin is an integral part of your human nature. Unless your mind is *totally* transformed after you have become born-again [Rom. 12: 2], you will not forget everything about your old self. That is why you must take it to Jesus, the author and finisher of your faith [Heb. 12: 2], who can sympathize and empathize with you. He said to the adulteress, “Neither do I condemn you but go and sin no more.” *He knows that you cannot do it on your own but when you accept Him as your Lord and Saviour, He will empower you to overcome your human weaknesses.*

Saul was a persecutor of believers. After his encounter with Jesus on the road to Damascus, he became an apostle of Christ to the Gentiles [Acts 9: 1-15]. That same Saul (Paul) has assured us, “If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold all things have become new” [2 Cor. 5: 17]. You can then do all things through Him who has strengthened you [Phil. 4: 13].

c) *Then go and sin no more!*

Just as sinning is habit-forming, so is holy living. You have turned away from that sin that easily besets you and turned to Christ who strengthens you. You must not stop there. You should go ahead and *add knowledge to your faith*; then, *self-control*, next *perseverance, godliness, brotherly kindness and love*. When you have all these and they abound in you, “you will be neither barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ” [2 Pet. 1: 5-8]. Then you are able to operate and be seen as *an ambassador for Christ*, the one who knew no sin but made Himself sin for us that we might become the righteousness of God in Him [2 Cor. 5: 20-21].

Clearly, this week’s story is a parable of our human conditions. Paul summarizes it well as follows [Rom. 7: 19-25]:

For the good that I will to do, I do not do; but the evil I will not do, that I practise...For I delight in the law of God according to the inward man.

But I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members. O wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? I thank God-through Jesus Christ our Lord!

3. Conclusion: Kill that urge before it kills you!

According to an African proverb, a person who uses his head to crack a coconut will not eat out of it! When you persist in a sin that you know will disgrace you among men and women and lead you to hell if you die unrepentant, you are putting yourself at risk. Must you turn every urge into an orgy? The harm to you physically, materially or spiritually could be irreversible, such that you may not have another chance. *The era of bravado is over. Christ's grace has an expiring date. If you do not repent and accept Him while you are still alive, no amount of prayers or masses for the dead will bring you out of the bowels of hell!*

Like the adulterous woman in this week's study, you might not go free next time.