

O Lord our God and our Father, the word of the Lord is upright and all your work is done in faithfulness. The earth is full of the love and kindness of the Lord. You love justice and righteousness. By the word of the Lord, the heavens were made, and by the breath of your mouth, all of their hosts. You gather the waters of the sea together as a heap. You lay up the deepened storehouses. Let all the earth fear the Lord. Let all the inhabitants of the world stand in awe of you, O God. And we come this evening, or this morning, to stand in awe of you. For You're great and You are good. We come to drink from the streams of the river of life that You have cut out of Your own Son's heart upon the cross. His death brings life to a dying world. And we pray, our God, that You will speak to us this morning, give us eyes to see and hearts to receive the light of the knowledge of the glory of God that shines full in the face of Jesus Christ, our Savior. In His name we pray. Amen. Please take your seats. As you would, turn with me in your copy of the Word of God to the very end of John chapter 7. As you turn there, you'll see, if you've not read this before, you'll certainly read it this morning, There's a note in the ESV, the version we read from this morning, and it says, the earliest manuscripts do not include the story of the woman caught in adultery. I want to just speak briefly before we read the text this morning to give you some sense of why we're looking at this text this morning. The Greek text of the New Testament that we have, the New Testament's written in Greek, We don't have the original autographs that Peter and Paul and James and John and Matthew, Mark and Luke and so forth wrote. We don't have the original documents with their handwriting on it. What we do have though are thousands, almost 6,000. manuscripts of the New Testament, which makes the New Testament the best attested ancient document bar none. And if you want to go home this afternoon, you can listen to a fantastic sermon by Vodie Bockham. You can find it on YouTube called, Why I Choose to Believe the Bible. And it's an incredible sermon that would repay your time richly. But these manuscripts vary in size and quality. The earliest manuscript we have is the John Rylands fragment. It's in England somewhere at the moment. It's a tiny fragment of John's gospel. And it dates back to the early second century, within about 30 years of John actually penning those words. Now we also have many almost full copies of the New Testament. The two best ones are Codex Vaticanus and Codex Sinaiticus, and they date back to about 350 AD. And they've only really come to light in the last couple of hundred years. The Vaticanus one lay, as you might imagine, buried in the vaults of the Vatican. And the Codex Sinaiticus was found fairly recently within the last couple of hundred years. And those manuscripts were not available for the King James Bible when it was written in 1611. Right. And so Some of the manuscripts contain, many of the manuscripts contain this story, but those two most ancient ones do not, which begs the question, did John write those words? Now, There's no doubt, if you go back even to the late 4th, early 5th century when Jerome was translating the Greek text into Latin for the Vulgate, Jerome actually included this story in his copy of John's Gospel. And Augustine, too, he believed that scribes had excised this story from John's Gospel because they were concerned that maybe Christ was going soft on adultery. He's not, of course, as we'll hear in the sermon, but that was their concern. And all of that raises, that whole issue of textual variation raises concerns in the hearts of Christians as to, you know, how much of this can we believe? If you ask even a critical scholar, like Bart Ehrman, who's a professor at Chapel Hill at the other Carolina, He's a critical scholar, he's not a Christian, he's lost his Christian faith. Even he will admit that when you look at all of these different texts, what strikes you is not the variations but the

consistency. That we could be 98.7% sure that what we have as our Bibles today is and reflects the autographs written by the apostles. Just no getting away, the thousands of texts we have, the translation of those texts into Syriac and Latin and other Aramaic, and then the writings of the fathers who pretty much in their sermons quote the whole New Testament, it's been said. So you get all of this textual criticism. And yet you'll hear people like Bart Ehrman say there's 200,000 errors or variations in the Greek text. And that sounds a lot, that's like more errors than there are words in the New Testament. What those scholars don't tell you is the vast majority of those quote unquote errors reflect spelling differences like the name Neil. You can spell Neil N-E-I-L, N-E-A-L, or you can spell it properly N-E-I-L. That's the way you'll spell it in heaven. But when the scribes are copying names of people and places, they would often amend the spelling of those names and places to reflect the dialect of the people they were writing to. And sometimes a scribe would forget a word. He'd leave a word out, and that's pretty obvious because you compare the other thousands of texts that were available, and you can see which words have been missed out, which is a rare thing. And then sometimes they might forget a letter. And just like in English, the word your and our is only differentiated by one letter. That's the same also in Greek. And so if you have a text and it says, he forgive us your transgressions, or he forgives us our transgressions, it doesn't change the meaning of the text. It doesn't like shatter our theology, right? And you can compare which was the more likely translation or the more likely utterance of the apostles when you look at the other texts. What is important to note, though, as well, is that when these scholars say there are 200,000 variations, it's important that you know how they arrive at that number. Let's say they change the name of Herod to make a spelling difference. And let's say that spelling change was copied 1,000 times. The scholars don't count that as one variation. They count it as 1,000 variations, which is a bit sneaky. And it inflates the number and makes it seem much greater than I think it would otherwise normally be, right? Now, all that's to beg the question then, what are we to do with this passage? Well, there's no doubt scholars are agreed. There's a firm conviction this actually happened. There's records of it in the sermons of early church fathers like Papias that go back to the early second century. And there's And you have a sense when you read this text, it grips you. You know, the Bible is autopistos, we say. It's self-authenticating. There are some things you don't need evidence for to believe, like the sound of your mother's voice. When your mother calls you, you don't ask for ID, right? If you do, you're in trouble. Or when someone plays a guitar, if someone picks up an old guitar that's not in tune, they play a G chord, even the least musical person in this hall, it'll set your teeth on edge. And then they tune it the way they do, and they get all of it right, and they play it, oh, the B string's still a bit flat, and they tighten the B string, and they play the G chord, and it sounds sweet. And the tunefulness of the guitar is self-authenticating. And the voice of God is like that too. When God speaks, you don't need evidence. Now, of course, our human nature doesn't want to hear what God says, so we put our fingers in our ears and claim not to be able to hear Him. But the voice of God is self-authenticating. And I don't think there's a Christian alive who reads this verse and don't feel themselves coming face to face with the majesty of the incomparable Christ. And for that reason this morning, and without apology, we read this text to the praise of God. Please listen carefully. We'll pick up on the last verse of John 8. They went each to his own house, but Jesus went to the Mount of Olives. Early in the morning he

came again to the temple. All the people came to him, and he sat down and taught them. The scribes and the Pharisees brought a woman who had been caught in adultery and placing her in the midst. They said to him, Teacher, this woman has been caught in the act of adultery. Now, in the law, Moses commanded us to stone such a woman. So what do you say? This they said to test him that they might have some charge to bring against him. Jesus bent down and wrote with his finger on the ground. And as they continued to ask him, he stood up and said to them, Let him who is without sin among you be the first to throw a stone at her. And once more he bent down and wrote on the ground. But when they heard it, they went away, one by one, beginning with the older ones. And Jesus was left alone with the woman standing before him. Jesus stood up and said to her, Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you? She said, No one, Lord. And Jesus said, Neither do I condemn you. Go. And from now on, sin no more." Now, this is one of those stories that just preaches itself, so I want to get out of the way of it. But before we do, notice the context. The context falls in the midst of the Feast of Tabernacles. And that's important, because if you remember from last week, The whole idea behind the Feast of Tabernacles was celebrating God's willingness, the holy God of heaven, to dwell amidst a sinful people, which kind of begs the question, how low is God willing to go? What if there was a woman caught in the very act of adultery? Would God be willing to dwell with her? Well, the story tells us. We begin this morning with our first point, undeniable guilt, a woman caught in the very act of adultery. I'm sure it was, well, very embarrassing. Twenty minutes ago, she's alone with her lover in the bedroom, under the sheets, flesh against flesh, the warm embrace. enjoying the bitter and sweet pleasures of forbidden sex. And suddenly, the door bursts open and into the room rush, well, a Middle Eastern lynch mob. We've seen them on TV burning American flags. We know what they're like. You can imagine her fear, her horror. panic in her breast. The men rush in. One grabs her by the ankles. Another grabs her by the wrist. And they wrench her out of her lover's grasp, out onto the floor. As she goes, I imagine she grabbed a sheet to cover what's left of her decency. They pull her out of the bedroom, down the stairs, out into the street. She's surrounded by another mob, men looking at her with disgust, spitting in her face, women trying to hide the eyes of little children at their feet, teenage boys trying to catch a glimpse of her nakedness. And then they start pulling her. A man grabs her by the hair and pulls her through the streets, faster than she can walk comfortably. She loses her footing, falls. They don't stop, keep dragging her, toes dragged across the gravel and the stones, unforgiving, hard, sharp stones, tearing her feet, her nails. She's back on her feet again, and they're pulling her on through the crowd as the crowd gathers momentum and anger and fury. And can you imagine her heart when she realizes where they're taking her? They're taking her to the temple of the holy God of heaven, the most holy place of real estate on God's green earth. Up all those steps, dear knows how many there are up onto the temple mount. And inside the temple, in the courtyard, under the colonnades, the scene couldn't have been more different. Jesus is there with another crowd around Him, hanging on His every word. He's teaching them, never a man spoke as this man. And suddenly, into their midst comes this crowd, belching, vomiting their hatred, their animosity, and they threw this woman like a piece of meat down before Jesus. And she gathers herself up onto her feet again, clutching, I think, this sheet to her bosom, and probably felt about the size of a postage stamp. And it's just her and Jesus, the Lord of glory. Undeniable guilt. We caught her in adultery, in the very act And John, of course, wants you to see through

her. He wants you to see yourself. Because all of us in this room are united by the fact that God the Holy Spirit has caught us in the very act of sin this week. Which of God's commandments have we not broken? In thought, word, and deed. Undeniable guilt. And then secondly, we see an unavoidable trap. She's trapped, and so it seems is Jesus. We caught her in the very act of adultery. Moses, in the law, says we should stone her. What do you say? Now, it's likely this woman was a betrothed woman, and that was much more significant in those days than engagement is in our day. It was an inviolable promise, a commitment to be married, and specifically in the law, adultery carried the death sentence in all shapes, forms, and fashions, but only this sin was commanded to be dealt with by stoning. Now, before we jump into that a second, let me just pause and aside. You might be here this morning and you might think to yourself, that's why I hate the Bible. I mean, stoning a girl. Having, you know, a bit of sex while she's engaged, you know, it's embarrassing, and it's wrong. I certainly wouldn't want my fianc  doing that to me, but is it really worthy of death? And the reason we say that, or think like that, is because we think of sin very differently to God. We look at sin through a cultural lens, and we live in a culture of pornography. where many of our movies and our sitcoms paint and present fornication, extramarital sex, adultery as something that's good and beautiful and true and that should be encouraged. So our culture drips with sexual immorality, but also personally, we tend to be much more excusing about our own sin than other people's sins. If you're sharp with your wife or your husband, well, if you're in Walmart and you hear somebody else be sharp to their spouse, you think, they've got a real anger problem. I can't believe they would speak like that. But when you're sharp with your spouse, you've always got an excuse. I've told this story before, but there was a time in a previous ministry when I was witnessing to a friend who was not a member of our church, and didn't share our faith, and we're riding around a lake on bicycles. And I'm trying to share with him the gospel, and he just can't get sin. He thinks, I just can't believe that God thinks sin is that bad. I mean, it just doesn't make sense to me. And we're talking. I tried every illustration. I mean, everything I could try. Nothing would stick to him. And so we're going around the lake, and there are these three young girls, college student age girls, jogging around the lake in what I can only describe as exercise underwear. And I'm trying to get past him as quickly as I could, and he kind of follows me reluctantly. And as we get past him, he looks at me and says, it's times like this I hate being with a pastor. He said, because if you weren't here, I would slow down and enjoy the view. And suddenly it came to me. I said to him, what would your wife think if she heard you say that? And he jerked and looked down at his feet as he was cycling, and he said, oh, he said, it'd be very bad. I said, it would be, wouldn't it? Because for you, it's just a wee look. You're just enjoying the view, a bit of window shopping. But for your wife, that look would be a betrayal of your relationship, your love for her, so she thought, and her love for you. And she would view that sin very differently. So you see, two human beings can view the same act in very different ways. Now, if two human beings can view the same act in very different ways, is it a stretch to fly up through the heavens, the stars, past the moon and the sun and the Saturn and Uranus and the nebulae and the galaxies, far beyond the stars, up into the throne room of God, where the sun would appear like a dark spot? And we see God the Father and God the Son and God the Holy Spirit, as Isaiah saw Christ on a throne high and lifted up, surrounded by the seraphim, these blazing, burning, angelic spirits designed to live in the incandescent presence of God, to blaze in the holy fire of

God. And they cry out, holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty, who was and is and is to come. The whole earth is full of his glory. And you remember when they said that, Isaiah saw himself in a whole new manner. He's in the temple worshipping, doing his priestly thing, going about his business, quite happy. And then suddenly he sees God and everything changes. He views himself differently. He views his mouth differently. He says, woe is me, for I am undone. I'm a man of unclean lips. I live among a people of unclean lips. He remembers all of the ways he'd spoken with his wife, his children, his neighbors. And his words condemned him. And he felt as if his soul literally in the Hebrew was disintegrating. I am undone. I'm falling apart at the seams. And it's there, in the secret place of God's presence, that's where we bring our sins, and that's where we estimate their guilt. And God doesn't just say that adultery deserves the death penalty. The Bible actually says the wages of all sin is death, that sin is cosmic treason, that when you and I sin, we are denying God with all of our being. Isaiah 1 puts it to Israel in the Old Testament, they have despised the Holy One of Israel. They have forsaken Me. Can it be anything else? When we break God's commandments, can't we say we are honoring God and not despising Him when we do deliberately what we know to be wrong? When we sideline God and ignore God and betray God and defy God? The wages of sin is death. But it's an unavoidable trap, because Christ is kind of stuck. Damned if he do, damned if he doesn't. If he says, stone her, well, he's in trouble with Rome, because Rome reserves the right, the final say over the death penalty. And if he says, stone her, well, they'll tell Rome, and Rome will regard him as a January the 6th man. And governments don't like January the 6th men, insurrectionists. And if he says, spare her, well, he's equally in trouble. Because then the Pharisees will say, ah, he's not a Torah man. He doesn't believe the Torah. And so what does Christ say? He's stuck, an unavoidable trap. Which brings us to a third hook to hang the text on or the story on, unearthly wisdom, undeniable guilt, unavoidable trap, unearthly wisdom. They think they've got Jesus, and he bends down and starts writing with his finger in the ground, the very finger that wrote the Ten Commandments on the tablets of stone on Mount Sinai, the finger of God. He's writing in the ground. We don't know what he wrote. But I think I know why he was writing it. He was increasing the tension. The Greek says, they kept on asking him, go on. What do you say? What do you say? And it's like that scene in Star Wars. Darth Vader swooping in. There's helpless Luke Skywalker. And it's, I have you now. And they have got him. And he can't escape. We've got him, lad. We've got him. We've got him. We've got him. And then Jesus lifts up his head and says, let him who has no sin be the first to cast a stone at her. Oh, the wisdom, the wisdom. And the Holy Spirit is at work then. And the consciences of men are at work then. Because your conscience is the voice of God in your soul. It tells you how things stand between you and between God, right? Are you in the right with him? Are you in the wrong with him? How things stand between you and your neighbor, are you in the right with them? Are you in the wrong with them? That's the issue with conscience. Am I worthy of being rejected? The thing about conscience is that it's designed to function with the light of God's Word. It's like a sundial that only tells the time when the sun is shining on it. We have a new oven, new to us anyway, in our house in Blythewood, and it's attached to the internet. Who ever heard of an oven? attached to the internet. I'm like, who knew it was even such a thing? But the thing about our oven is it only tells the time properly if it's attached to the internet. And if it's not, it kind of does its own thing. It doesn't just lose time. It would randomly change the time during the day. It's 3

o'clock, and then it's 5 o'clock, and then it's 10 o'clock, and it's 2 in the morning. And it's like driving me crazy. And eventually I realized, thanks to Google, that it needs to be connected to the internet to tell the time correctly. And that's the way it is with your conscience. Your conscience needs to be connected to God's law to tell you the time correctly. And if you disconnect your conscience from God's law, you'll get all kinds of different things. Like, for example, girls. You've gone to school today, college, high school maybe, and you've gone to your sports practice, and your mom didn't shell out for the Lululemon Define Crop Top. She sends you in a Reebok top, which is all of the shape of a black plastic bag. And you're standing there with all your teammates, and they all have the Lululemon Define Crop Top, and it shows off their figure just beautifully, and you feel like a complete dweeb. And you look and you feel, they're going to reject me. And that's your conscience speaking, but it's a conscience disconnected. Because you've done nothing wrong, but you're connecting your conscience to the minds of men and to the eyes of men whenever our conscience is designed to be attached to the law of God and his mind and his eye. Well, the consciences of these people are alive. And the oldest, the most mature, are going down to the youngest. One by one, they leave. And Jesus is left standing with this woman before him alone. How's your conscience this morning? Can you say with the Apostle Paul, I do my best to keep a conscience void of offense before God and before men? Or is your conscience defiled? Is it alarming? And that voice isn't just designed to condemn you. It's designed to call you home to God, back to the cross where alone the alarm of an offended conscience can be dealt with. So you've got undeniable guilt, unavoidable trap, unearthly wisdom, and lastly, you have unguessable grace. Jesus says to her, "'Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?' She said, "'No one, Lord.'" Now, notice Christ doesn't say that adultery is okay. He doesn't say that what you did is not worthy of condemnation. He just says that on this day, I am not the one to condemn you. Because I've not come into the world to be judged. I've come into the world to be Savior. Remember John 3, is it 17? God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world might be saved through Him. There's coming a day when Christ will come and judge the secrets of men according to the gospel. On that day, he will render to each man according to their deeds. Eternal life to those who by patient continuance in doing good seek for glory and honor and immortality. But to those who are self-seeking and do not obey the truth but obey in righteousness, they'll receive indignation and wrath. That's the last, final, great day of judgment. But that day is not this day, then or now. Today is the day of mercy. And Jesus says to this woman, neither do I condemn you. And then he says, go, and from now on, sin no more. Literally in the Greek, go and stop sinning continually, which is an amazing statement, because Christ here is saying much more than just stop this sin. He's actually saying, stop your life of sin, because your whole life has been going away from God and towards sin. And for you to come home to God, you've got to turn around. Because you can't face both ways. You've got to turn away from your sin to come back to God. Now, it's important. The Bible calls that repentance. It's a spiritual U-turn. But it's very important. You don't earn the right to come back to God by repenting. It's very important. You don't earn the right to come back to God by repenting. But you can't come back to God without repenting. And lots of people worry about that. They think, have I repented enough to come back to God? No. If that was the case, none of us could come to God because none of us have repented well enough. As Luther said, even my repentance needs to be repented of.

We're not saved because we have repented. But you can't be saved without repenting. We're saved because of Jesus Christ and because of what he will one day, for her, do on the cross. He will climb up on the cross outside the city gates where the lepers live and the jackals howl and the felons die. And in that dirty place, in between two dirty, guilty men, Jesus will die literally as the chief of sinners, as all of the sins of all of his people throughout time. coalesce on his head and stain his soul to the core and sink him down to the lowest hell. He doesn't just bear our sins, he becomes our sins. And only because of his condemnation in our place can God look at a sinner like me, or a sinner like you this morning, or like you, or any of you here, and say, neither do I condemn you. Because all the condemnation I had to give, I gave to my Son as He hung in your place." Unguessable grace. And what can you do this morning to get God's grace? I love Wesley's hymn, What Can I Thy Grace to Move? What can I do to move God's grace towards me? And Wesley says, I lay aside, I give up every argument beside. Lord, I am lost. Oh, but thou hast died. I'm lost. I can't do anything to earn your grace, to attract your grace. But all I can say, Father, is I am lost, but thou hast died. And that's the Savior I present to you this morning. a Savior of unguessable grace for sinners caught in unavoidable, undeniable guilt. Come to Jesus, to the cross, and your sins, though they are many, you'll always find His mercy is more. Isn't he lovely? Let's pray together. Father, we thank you for Jesus. We thank you for his mercies. We thank you, Lord, for his grace, his willingness to eat and drink with sinners. And we pray this morning that you would draw near to us as we worship you at the table. Meet with us, cleanse us, forgive us, sanctify us, and draw us back from our sins. We might turn around and face our God. In Jesus' name, amen.