

Do you trust your Advocate or your accuser?

Rebecca Thompson fell twice from the Fremont Canyon Bridge. She died both times. The first fall broke her heart; the second broke her neck. It happened the night of September 24, 1973. Rebecca was only 18 when she and her 11 year old sister Amy were kidnapped by two men near a store in Casper, Wyoming. The men had slashed a tire on the girl's car and then offered to take them home.

They drove the girls 40 miles southwest to the Fremont Canyon Bridge, a one-lane, steel beamed structure rising 112 feet above the North Platte River. The men brutally beat and raped Rebecca - somehow she convinced them not to do the same thing to her sister, Amy. But the men threw both of them over the bridge into the narrow gorge. Amy died when she landed on a rock near the river. Rebecca slammed into a ledge and was ricocheted into deeper water. With her hip fractured in five places, she struggled to the shore, naked from the waist down. To protect her body from the cold, she hid in the split of two rocks, covering herself with her long brown hair and sagebrush while hearing her abductors' voices above. There she waited until dawn!

But the dawn never came for Rebecca. Oh, the sun came up, and she was found. The doctor's treated her, and her attackers were put in jail. Life continued, **but the dawn never came.**

The blackness of that night never went away. Her spirit never was able to climb out of that canyon. So on July 31, 1992, 19 years later, she returned to the bridge.

With her two year old daughter and her boyfriend at her side, who was pleading for her to stop, she drove 70 miles per hour to the North Platte River. She sat on the edge of the Fremont Canyon Bridge and wept while retelling the story. The boyfriend didn't want the child to see her mother cry, so he carried the toddler back to the car. That's when he heard her body hit the water - and that's when Rebecca Thompson died her second death. The sun never did dawn on Rebecca's dark night. Why?

Was she **afraid**? Maybe! She had testified against the men, pointing them out in the courtroom. One of the murderers had taunted her by laughing at her and sliding his finger across his throat. On the day she died, the two had been up for parole, so maybe she was afraid of them. Was she **angry** at these men, the parole board, herself, God? Was it **guilt**? Some think so. Her friends say that she struggled with the ugly fact that she had survived and her little sister had not. Or was it **shame**? Everyone she knew and thousands she didn't had heard the humiliating details of her tragedy. They had read in the newspapers and seen on T.V. how she had been raped and violated and shamed. And try as she might to outlive and outrun the memory - she never could. So 19 years later she went back to the bridge.

"She was raped and murdered 19 years ago, but she just died Friday," said Natrona County Sheriff Dave Dovala.

Shame and guilt can run very deep! They can draw us back and keep reminding us over and over again about what happened to us or what we did, making us feel the shame again and again.

Sometimes our shame is private - abused by our spouse; molested by a perverted parent; seduced by a compromising superior. No one else knows. But we know. And that's enough. Sometimes its public. Some feel shame and guilt because of a divorce they never wanted; or because of a disease they never expected; or a handicap they didn't ask for.

Some feel shame and guilt because of some sin they committed – they behaved improperly, committed adultery, etc. And whether it's justified or not, we have to deal with it - we feel that we are marked, and everyone is looking at us. Whether private or public, shame is always painful. And unless we deal with it, it is permanent. Unless we get help - the dawn will never come.

You're probably not surprised when I say there are Rebecca Thompson's in every city and Fremont Bridges in every town. And you probably already know that there are quite a few Rebecca Thompson's in the Bible - almost every page. But there is one woman whose story sums all of them up. It's a story of sin, failure, abuse, shame and guilt - but it is also a story of the grace of God.

I. The Adulterous Woman

John 8:1-4: "But Jesus went to the Mount of Olives. Now early in the morning He came again into the temple, and all the people came to Him; and He sat down and taught them. Then the scribes and Pharisees brought to Him a woman caught in adultery. And when they had set her in the midst, they said to Him, "Teacher, this woman was caught in adultery, in the very act."

The Pharisees were the main religious leaders of the day. They considered themselves "**custodians of conduct,**" the conduct police of the day.

Picture this - the doors are slammed open, the covers jerked back, she was caught in the act, in some man's arms. They probably said something like, "*Aha! What have we here? This man is not your husband. Get up, you harlot. What kind of woman do you think you are? Put on some clothes! We know what to do with women like you! Shame on you!*"

In that instant, she is yanked from private passion to public spectacle. From this second on, she'll be known as an adulteress. When she goes to the market, women will whisper and heads will turn. When her name is mentioned, the people will think about her committing adultery. You see, people do not forget about moral failures very easily.

What the woman did is shameful and sinful, but what the Pharisees did is despicable. This woman had been caught in the very act of adultery and according to the Law of Moses, she should be stoned, but only if two people witnessed the act. How likely are two people to be eyewitnesses to adultery? What are the chances of two people stumbling upon this scene? How long did they watch from behind the curtain before they stepped out? And what about the man? Adultery requires two participants. What happened to him? Did he slip out, or was he let out?

The evidence leaves little doubt. She had been set up, maybe by one of the Pharisees, so they could have a way to trap Jesus. She's been caught. But she'll soon see that she is not the catch - she's only the bait.

John 8:5-6: "Now Moses, in the law, commanded us that such should be stoned. But what do You say?" "This they said, testing Him, that they might have something of which to accuse Him..."

Pretty cocky and proud of themselves, don't you think. This will be a moment they long remember, because this is the day they finally trick the mighty Nazarene. As for the woman? Who cares, she doesn't matter - she's just a pawn in their little game. They don't care about her future, she's unimportant to them. Her reputation? Who cares if it is ruined? She is a necessary part of their plan - a casualty of war.

The woman by now is probably staring at the ground, sweating, crying, heart breaking. She knows she has been framed - there is no need to look up, because she knows that she will find no kindness. Maybe she thinks of running, but where could she go? She could claim mistreatment - but to whom? She could deny the act, but she was caught in the act. She could beg for mercy, but these men aren't about to offer her any. From God? His spokesmen were the ones holding the stones and snarling their lips. No one would speak for her! She had nowhere to go and no one to stand up for her! **But someone would stoop for her!**

John 8:6 – "...But Jesus stooped down and wrote on the ground with His finger, as though He did not hear."

At this point, you would expect Jesus to stand and proclaim judgment on these hypocrites. You might expect Him to perform a miracle, or that an angel would come and snatch her away, but that's not what happens either. What does Jesus do?

He stoops down and writes in the dirt! He's stooped before - to wash feet, to embrace children, to pull Peter out of the sea, to pray in the Garden. He stooped before the Roman whipping post, to carry the cross. Here He stooped to write in the dirt.

Maybe Jesus wrote in the soil for His own benefit, maybe it was for the woman, to divert gaping eyes from staring at her.

John 8:7-9: “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.’” And again He stooped down and wrote on the ground. Then those who heard it, being convicted by their conscience, went out one by one, beginning with the oldest even to the last. And Jesus was left alone, and the woman standing in the midst.”

The only sound now is the shuffle of feet and rocks hitting the ground, until Jesus and the woman are left alone. The woman awaits his verdict.

Maybe she thinks He will preach a sermon at her, or demand an apology for bothering Him, or even pick up the stones Himself. **John 8:10-11:** “When Jesus had raised Himself up and saw no one but the woman, He said to her, “Woman, where are those accusers of yours? Has no one condemned you?”

What a question, not just for her, but for us as well. Voices of accusation and condemnation scream at us as well: **“You aren’t good enough, you will never make it, you failed – again.”**

Some of you are trapped, stuck and bound by your guilt. You keep beating yourself up over some past failure. You think that no one anywhere is as bad as you are, that no one could love the real you, and that no one could ever forgive you for the terrible things that you have done. That simply isn't true!

As Christians, we have been pardoned, but sometimes we think we are guilty. Why? Because we keep listening to the words of our accuser! Satan has noticed every sin and wrote down every mistake. Try to forget your mistakes and he will remind you; try to undo your mistakes and he will try to stop you. Even his name (**devil/diabolos**) means “accuser” or “slanderer.”

Satan is relentless and tireless with his accusations and condemnation, day after day, hour after hour, he never shuts up.

He has a host of demons and people to help him. Friends dredge up your past; preachers preach **all guilt** and **no grace**. Those who do not like us are anxious to point out our flaws.

Satan wants to steal your peace, kill your dreams, and destroy your future. **John 10:10** – “The thief does not come except to steal, and to kill, and to destroy...”

Satan does not have the power to accuse us before God – he lost that: **Revelation 12:9-11:** “So the great dragon was cast out, that serpent of old, called the Devil and Satan, who deceives the whole world; he was cast to the earth, and his angels were cast out with him. Then I heard a loud voice saying in heaven, “Now salvation, and strength, and the kingdom of our God, and the power of His Christ have come, for the accuser of our brethren, who accused them before our God day and night, has been cast down.” “And they overcame him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, and they did not love their lives to the death.”

Revelation 12:12 – “Therefore rejoice, O heavens, and you who dwell in them! Woe to the inhabitants of the earth and the sea! For the devil has come down to you, having great wrath, because he knows that he has a short time.”

Revelation 12:17 – “And the dragon was enraged with the woman, and he went to make war with the rest of her offspring, who keep the commandments of God and have the testimony of Jesus Christ.”

In this Great War for our souls, the devil will not be discouraged very easily. First, he will do everything in his power to keep you from obeying the gospel and becoming a Christian. If he fails in this first battle, he will then attempt to make you useless as a Christian through your sin. If he fails in the second battle, he will try to make you miserable before God. Satan will keep throwing your past up in your face, he will try to overwhelm you with doubts and fears and guilt – he will try and make you feel lost, unloved by God, worthless!

However, in the presence of the Lord, the accusations of Satan sputter and fall like a deflated balloon. **Romans 8:33-34:** “Who dares accuse us whom God has chosen for his own? No one—for God himself has given us right standing with himself. Who then will condemn us? No one—for Christ Jesus died for us and was raised to life for us, and he is sitting in the place of honor at God’s right hand, pleading for us.”

Let that sink in for a moment: “*In the presence of God, in defiance of Satan, Jesus Christ rises to your defense.*”

1 John 2:1 – “My dear children, I am writing this to you so that you will not sin. But if anyone does sin, we have an advocate who pleads our case before the Father. He is Jesus Christ, the one who is truly righteous.”

So why do we still hear his voice? Why do we, as Christians, still feel guilt? Do you know and understand the God-given purpose of guilt? God uses guilt to correct us through His Spirit when we are wrong. That’s called “conviction.” And conviction hurts! **John 16:8** – “...when He comes, He will convict the world of its sin, and of God’s righteousness, and of the coming judgment.”

The proper response to **guilt** is **repentance!** Once we repent and accept Christ’s perfect forgiveness and turn from our sins, as far as God is concerned, guilt’s purpose - to make us feel bad about what we did in the past - is finished.

But we like to hold on to our guilt and beat ourselves over the head—repeatedly—with it! That’s **condemnation**. But it’s not from God, it’s from the devil and ourselves. Jesus trumps the devil’s guilt with God’s grace: **Romans 8:1** - “**T**here is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus...”

Not all guilt is bad. God uses appropriate doses of guilt to wake us up. God’s guilt brings enough regret to change us. Satan’s guilt, on the other hand, brings enough regret to enslave us. Don’t let him lock his shackles on you.

It boils down to this choice: **do you trust your Advocate or your accuser?** *Your answer will determine the course of your life!*

Friends, it’s time to stop listening to Satan’s voice! **James 4:7** – “So humble yourselves before God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.”

It’s time to start listening to God’s! **Hebrews 8:12** – “And I will forgive their wickedness, and I will never again remember their sins.”

In Christ we have a clear conscience, a clean record, and a clean heart. Free from accusation and condemnation – not just from our past mistakes, but our future ones as well:

Hebrews 10:21-22: “And since we have a great High Priest who rules over God’s house, let us go right into the presence of God with sincere hearts fully trusting him. For our guilty consciences have been sprinkled with Christ’s blood to make us clean, and our bodies have been washed with pure water.”

So the next time Satan reminds you of your past, you remind him of his future! **Revelation 20:10** – “The devil, who deceived them, was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone where the beast and the false prophet are. And they will be tormented day and night forever and ever.” **Take that, Satan!**

II. Conclusion

Within a few moments the courtyard was empty. Jesus, the woman, her critics – they all left. But let’s linger. Look at the rocks on the ground, abandoned and unused. Look at the scribbling in the dirt. It’s the one sermon Jesus ever wrote.

Church tradition says Jesus was writing the verse in **Jeremiah 17:13** – “...Those who depart from Me shall be written in the earth, because they have forsaken the Lord...”).

Even though we don’t really know the words, I’m wondering if they read like this: *Grace just happened here!*

John 8:10-11: “When Jesus had raised Himself up and 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.”

If you ever wondered how God reacts when you stand before Him with your failures, shame and guilt, then you need to read these words over and over again. Frame them and hang them on the wall.

Or better still, take Jesus with you to your canyon of shame, and let Him stand beside you as you retell the events of the darkest night of your soul. Today, there is no one here to accuse or condemn you. Satan can’t do it and we won’t do it. If you come to Jesus face to face with your sins, guilt, and shame, He will say the same thing to you as He did to this woman - **“Not guilty.”**

Or you can carry it with you until it destroys you, like it did Rebecca Thompson. The choice and the message are yours.