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1911 East Joppa Road
Baltimore • MD • 21234-2795
<http://kinshipministries.org>

Dare We Throw The First Stone?

*"He who is without sin among you, let him be the first to throw a stone at her" (John 8:7 *).*

Have we ever heard the old saying? "One can be so right they are wrong"? The pedestrian may have the legal right-of-way but if the car does not stop in time, the person is dead! The person is "right" but nevertheless, is just as dead.

When the church leaders brought a woman caught in sin to Jesus one day, he turned to them and said, *"He who is without sin among you, let him be the first to throw a stone at her" (John 8:7 *).*

The account begins as Jesus was in the temple teaching. *"And the scribes and Pharisees brought a woman caught in adultery, and having set her in the midst, they said to Him, Teacher, this woman has been caught in adultery, in the very act" (John 8:3-4 *).* They were quick to use the Law for their own purpose.

The woman did not try to deny the accusation. Jesus did not try to say the Law was wrong.



Jesus knew all about the Law, its statutes and its judgments. Being God in the flesh, He knew the real story. The hearts of the woman and the hearts of her accusers were no secret to Him.

Jesus saw through the hypocrisy of the accusers and the real reason for them bringing the woman to Him. *“And they were saying this, testing Him, in order that they might have grounds for accusing Him”* (John 8:6*).

That day was the beginning of events that led to Jesus’ fateful night years later. The Lord knew the situation with the woman and leaders was not the time to be falsely accused and sentenced to death. In God’s time, that day would come and Jesus knew that in the end, all would desert Him.

Knowing all these things, what did Jesus do when the leaders brought the woman? *“... Jesus stooped down, and with His finger wrote on the ground”* (John 8:6 *). Scholars have long debated regarding his writing.

One wonders if Jesus wrote words from the Law, given the audience of religious leaders. *“But when they persisted in asking Him, He straightened up, and said to them, ‘He who is without sin among you let him be the first to throw a stone at her.’”* (John 8:7 *)

Jesus knew the Law. He knew that He was being “set up”. He understood the motives of the accusers. The woman was caught in sin, but something was missing. If she had, indeed, been *“caught in adultery, in the very act,”* where was the man who must have been caught with her? According to the law, he was just as guilty. He, too, was subject to the penalty for breaking the law.

The account identifies those who were testing Jesus. The scribes were an influential group. The word ‘scribe’ means a writer or secretary. The scribes had become “experts on the law.” They were expert in matters concerning the traditions observed in that day.



On another occasion, Jesus told the same group, *“Rightly did Isaiah prophesy of you hypocrites, as it is written, ‘this people honor Me with their lips, but their heart is far away from Me. In vain do they worship Me, teaching as doctrines the precepts of men. “*

*"Neglecting the commandment of God, you hold to the tradition of men. He was also saying to them, you nicely set aside the commandment of God in order to keep your tradition" (Mark 7:6-9 *).* Was this the reason the woman was accused?

The other group of accusers on that morning was as influential in their day. Jesus had strong words to say to them on other occasions because of the traditions added to the Law by their ancestors.

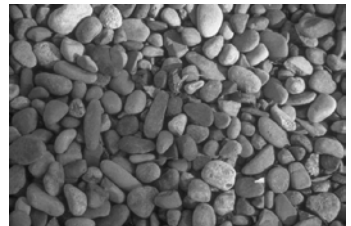
Jesus was displeased with the leaders who gathered that day in the temple. For perhaps this reason, He warns us, *"unless your righteousness (right living) surpasses that of the scribes and Pharisees, you shall not enter the Kingdom of heaven" (Matthew 5:20 *).*

Self-righteousness comes so quickly to humans, unless we are very careful. It happened to Job. *"Then these three men ceased answering Job, because he was righteous in his own eyes" (Job 32:1 *).*

This caused one of the three men, Elihu, to become angry, *"because he (Job) justified himself before God."* (Job 32:2b *) Later, Job recognized that Elihu was correct, *"Therefore I (Job) have declared that which I do not understand, things too wonderful for me, which I did not know."* (Job 42:3 *) *"I retract, and I repent in dust and ashes."* (Job 42:6 *)

*"All of us have become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous deeds are like a filthy garment" (Isaiah 64:6 *).* Man, without God, is in a bad state. On his own, he can do nothing. It is only through the indwelling Holy Spirit that man can become clean and do good deeds.

Jesus told the accusers that the one among them, who was without sin, should cast the first stone, *"and again. He stooped down, and wrote on the ground" (John 8:8 *).*



The story goes on to relate that, *"when they heard it, they began to go out one by one, beginning with the older ones, and He (Jesus) was left alone, and the woman, where she was, in the midst" (John 8:9 *).*

Jesus was the only person on the scene without sin. *“For we do not have a high priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but One who has been tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin.”* (Hebrews 4:15)

Jesus had the power to condemn the woman to a horrible death. Stoning has the additional quality of inflicting intense suffering before death. Such a death is cruel and painful. Some writings note that the stones used for execution should be of a certain size. They should not be too large so that the person dies on being hit by one or two of them, nor too small to be defined as stones.

“And straightening up, Jesus said to her, ‘Woman, where are they? Did no one condemn you?’ And she said, ‘No one, Lord.’” (John 8:10-11a *). Were the ones who left the scene unwilling to pass judgment on themselves by throwing the first stone? Did they know there was sin in their lives for which forgiveness was yet to be accomplished? Did they ‘get’ what Jesus was saying?

Then Jesus spoke the most welcome words that a sinner can ever hear! *“And Jesus said, ‘Neither do I condemn you; go your way. From now on, sin no more.’”* (John 8:11b *).

We need no longer carry the weight of sin that the evil one would constantly have us remember. The woman was not condemned by Him. Her load of sin had been lifted. She could forever thank the One, who did not condemn her to the death called for in the Law.

We can also thank Him for the same reason. He paid the price for our sins. We can, *“draw near with confidence to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and may find grace to help in time of need”* (Hebrews 4:16 *). Amen.

Comments by Harry Bain

- (New American Standard Bible; i.e., NASB)*