



A SCENE FROM THE PASSION OF THE CHRIST. © 2004 ICON DISTRIBUTION INC.

JESUS & THE STONE THROWERS

*W*oman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?
She replied, "No one, sir."
Then Jesus said "Then neither do I condemn you. Go now and leave your life of sin" (John 8:10-12).

*J*esus spoke these words after the religious leaders of the day tried to trap him in a legalistic quandary. Many can probably quote the words that immediately follow Jesus' compassionate declaration. Yet we often hurry to add Jesus' command to "go now and leave your life of sin" without first pausing to consider his words, "neither do I condemn you."

In this familiar story, Jesus was teaching in the temple courts when the Pharisees and teachers of the law brought before him a woman caught in the act of adultery. How they caught her, we do not know. No doubt,

by Martin M. Davis

THE PLAIN TRUTH

that would be an interesting story! Upon bringing the woman to Jesus, the Pharisees were quick to quote the law of Moses, which required that the woman be stoned to death. The Pharisees were zealous to cite the rules because law—not love—was the driving force of their religion.

The Pharisees wanted to hear what Jesus had to say about the matter, hoping they might find a way to trick him. Jesus was not one, however, to be easily led into a legalistic quagmire. Rather than immediately address the issue, Jesus merely scribbled in the sand with his finger. When his antagonists pressed the point, however, Jesus stood up and said, “If any one of you is without sin, let him be the first to throw a stone at her.” Silenced by a response that had clearly outmaneuvered them, the Pharisees and teachers of the law walked away, one-by-one. Finally, only Jesus was left, with the woman standing before him. He asked, “‘Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned

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you?’ She replied, ‘No one, sir.’” Then Jesus said, “Then neither do I condemn you. Go now and leave your life of sin” (John 8:10-12).

This event was briefly portrayed in Mel Gibson’s film, *The Passion of the Christ*. In the movie, a beautiful young woman—her dark, long hair loosed around her shoulders—is cast roughly to the ground before Jesus. Pushing herself up with her slender, delicate fingers, she looks up apprehensively at the

young rabbi, eyeing him through the dark waves falling provocatively across her face.

At this point, I must ask myself what I would do in a similar situation. As a heterosexual male, if an attractive woman were cast down at my feet, I probably would not think of stoning her! In fact, I might find it easy to be compassionate and nonjudgmental.

A Different Sin?

What if the story had a completely different twist, however? After all, adultery is not the only sin from which Jesus came to save us. How would I react if the person cast down before me was a practicing homosexual, caught in the act with one of his many partners? Would I find it easy to be noncondemning? I mention homosexuality, not because it is a worse sin than adultery, but because evangelicals rail against it with such unrelenting energy—in fairness, some may say that part of the consistent rhetoric about homosexuality is in response to the belligerent attitude of militant gays.

We Christians are sometimes highly selective in our righteous indignation. Gay activists have fairly criticized Christians for our double-standard on family values. Although we persistently, and rightly, decry the homosexual lifestyle and its threat to the traditional family, we evangelicals are just as likely to divorce as non-believers.

Moreover, having served many years as a family counselor in a large evangelical megachurch, I assure you that extramarital sex is common enough among us. Please understand—I am not endorsing a homosexual lifestyle. Not only do I find the behavior distasteful; I believe it is sinful. Yet should we be more judgmental toward a particular act because we find it personally distasteful while we overlook, or even justify, our own sinful behaviors?

We make much of the fact that the apostle Paul states emphatically that homosexual offenders will not inherit the kingdom of God

(1 Corinthians 6:9). Yet we fail to note that in the same passage, Paul also says that the sexually immoral—not to mention idolaters, adulterers, thieves, the greedy, drunkards, slanderers and swindlers—will not inherit the kingdom of God. Probably many of us, at least occasionally, can find

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a place to fit in one or more of these categories.

To bring the matter closer to home, what would we do if a practicing homosexual came to our church? How many of us would rise in righteous indignation to condemn such a person? How many would sit near that person or shake his hand after the service?

We often forget that, in the words of the great fourth-century Christian thinker Augustine, the church is not as much a society of saints as a hospital for sinners. Moreover, Jesus taught us that it is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick.

He did not come to call those who, like the Pharisees, think they are righteous and, therefore, see no need of God’s saving grace. He came to call sinners to repentance (Luke 5:31-32).

A Spiritual Hospital Dispensing Grace

I once attended a small gathering of pastors and counselors where I had the privilege of hearing a talk by the late, great preacher, E.V. Hill. Pastor Hill made it clear that he was a Bible-believing Christian.



JESUS CAST NO STONES AT THE WOMAN CAUGHT IN ADULTERY. INSTEAD, HE MADE IT QUITE PLAIN THAT HE DID NOT CONDEMN HER. THEN, AND ONLY THEN, DID HE ADMONISH HER TO LEAVE HER LIFE OF SIN.

As he put it, “I believe the axe did swim and the donkey did talk!” According to Pastor Hill, at the end of his sermons at Mt. Zion Missionary Baptist Church in Los Angeles, he would often cry out, “Now, I want all my crack addicts to line up on this side of the sanctuary. I want all my alcoholics to gather in the center, and I want all my hookers over on that side.”

After the various groups had taken their prospective places, Pastor Hill would order counselors—former drunks, prostitutes and addicts—to meet with the appropriate groups. Truly, this was a spiritual hospital ministering to the needs of sinners.

How many drunks, addicts and hookers populate the pews of our churches? I am afraid that, for most churches, the answer must be “none.” Why are our churches not hospitals for sinners? Why, in fact, are our churches the last place they would go for help? Is it because we often fail to extend the hand of love and compassion and, instead, quickly pick up stones?

Jesus cast no stones at the woman caught in adultery. Instead, he made it quite plain that he did not condemn her. Then, and only then, did he admonish her to leave her life of sin.

MANY EVANGELICALS HAVE DEVELOPED A FORTRESS MENTALITY IN WHICH THEY CLOSET THEMSELVES AWAY FROM THOSE WHOSE SINS THEY FIND DISTASTEFUL—WHETHER HOMOSEXUALS, ADDICTS, PROSTITUTES OR EX-CONS. JESUS, ON THE OTHER HAND, NEVER CLOSETED HIMSELF AWAY FROM SINNERS; RATHER, HE WAS CONSTANTLY AVAILABLE TO THEM.

Many evangelicals have developed a fortress mentality in which they closet themselves away from those whose sins they find distasteful—whether homosexuals, addicts, prostitutes or ex-cons. Jesus, on the other hand, never closeted himself away from sinners; rather, he was constantly available to them. What

was it about Jesus that attracted so many social outcasts of his day? Surely it was his compassion and love for all who came near him—whether they were paralytics, lepers, thieves, beggars or even the sexually immoral.

Evangelicals would do well to emulate Jesus’ way of compassion for others, including those whose sins we find distasteful. We must be slow to cast our stones. After all, God’s righteousness is antagonistic to all forms of sin, not merely the ones we dislike. Rules, strict standards of behavior and ethical prescriptions do not transform sinners into saints; rather, it is love, channeled from the Father to the Son through the Holy Spirit and manifested in us through our relationship to others. We must follow Jesus’ way of love and open both our arms and the doors of our churches to those who stand in need of God’s transforming love. As we seek to love as he loved, we will become slow to throw stones. □

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