

YOU ARE THERE!

Few if any of us have stood on the Mount of Olives located about a mile directly east of the city of Jerusalem in the early part of the first Millennium when Jesus Christ walked on this earth. Yet, in a real sense we were there. While Jesus is dealing with real people in real time in reality He is also dealing with each of us in our daily lives. You were there! I was there!

Many of you are familiar with the story in The Gospel of John chapter 8. The setting for this event is the Feast of Tabernacles. This feast was celebrated on the fifteenth day of the month “Tisri”, answering to the last half of our September, and the first half of October. This month was the seventh of the ecclesiastical, and first of the civil, year. The feast took its name from the tents which were erected about the temple, in public places, in courts, and on the flat roofs of their houses, and in gardens; in which the Jews dwelt for eight days, in commemoration of the forty years during which their fathers dwelt in the wilderness. It was one of the three solemn annual feasts in which all the males were obliged, by the law, to appear at Jerusalem.

For more information you can check with any commentary on the Old Testament such as Adam Clarke's Commentary, which can be found in almost any library or go to an Electronic Database such as “Biblesoft”.

Note the story as it unfolds in the Gospel of John 8: 1-11.

[But Jesus went to the Mount of Olives] The mountain is located about a mile directly east of Jerusalem. See the notes at Matthew 21:11. This was the place in which he probably often passed the night when attending the feasts at Jerusalem. The Garden of Gethsemane, to which he was accustomed to resort (John 18:2), was on the western side of that mountain, and Bethany, the home of Martha and Mary, on its east side, John 11:1. (Adapted from Barnes' Notes, Electronic Database, Copyright (c) 1997 by Biblesoft)

Jesus has been teaching in the Temple all day long to crowds of people including many people who scoffed at his ideas. The religious leaders (The Pharisees) tried to have him arrested because they did not like what he was saying and especially because of the influence he was having on the many people who had come to Jerusalem for the Feast of Tabernacles. Nicodemus who was a ruler of the Jews and who had an encounter with Jesus as recorded in John chapter 3, challenged the Pharisees by asking a tentative question: “***Does our law condemn a man without first hearing him to find out what he is doing?***” This was enough for them to let him go for the time being. At the close of the day he departs to the Mount of Olives for the night.

Were you their? There are four groups that seem to be present at this point in time.

1. There were those who heard Jesus and were convinced at some level that this must be the Messiah.
2. There were those who were curious but had not made up their minds to follow Jesus.

3. There were the religious leaders who were being threatened by his teaching and wanted to find a way to silence him before too many people followed him and turned away from their religious teachings and their source of power and income.
4. There was a person name Nicodemus who had the courage to stand up against his fellow Pharisees and challenge them with their interpretation the Law (the existing Scriptures).

Where do we find ourselves in this group? We were there?

As Jesus appears the second day early in the morning he returns to the Temple and begins teaching the people. There appears to be some evidence that a trap was being set to catch Jesus and challenge his teaching. While he is teaching to a group of people suddenly the scribes and Pharisees pose a question to Jesus as a woman is dragged into the midst of the people setting at the feet of Jesus. The accusation is that she was caught in the very act of adultery and deserved to be stoned to death. Note Leviticus 20:10, ***“If a man commits adultery with another man’s wife – with the wife of his neighbor – both the adulterer and the adulteress must be put to death.”*** In Deuteronomy 22: 22-24 we read, ***“If a man is found sleeping with another man’s wife...you shall take both of them to the gate of that town and stone them to death.”***

There is little doubt that this was the truth by which the Jewish nation lived and that Jesus knew these Scriptures better than the scribes and Pharisees who posed the question. It seems that Jesus has no choice but to agree with the teaching of the Scriptures which have been inspired by God who moved holy men of old to record them for all men to know and understand the truth.

The question of the Pharisees is empathic: ***“You there! What do you say?”*** You are there, what do you think? How would you answer the question put to Jesus? How do you answer the question today?

Jesus simply stooped down without even looking at those accusing him and began to write in the ground. Wouldn’t we like to know what he was writing? Did the accusers look and if so what did they see? What they did in fact was ignore his writing and disregard what he was writing and demanded that he respond to them by continuing to press him for an answer. .

Have you found yourself yet in this group of people? What about parents who may have neglected their daughter so that she turned to others to find the love she needed in life? Were you a brother who may have tormented her so that she had no self esteem? Were you a grandfather, cousin, neighbor or other acquaintance that may have molested her as a child so the only love she knew was to let men use her? Were you a church leader who ignored the value of a female child and made her feel that she was inferior to others so she looked else where to find meaning in life? If 50% of a persons life attitudes are established by the time a child is 5 years of age, what kinds of experiences did she have in the first years of her life that may have led her down this life path? Perhaps you were a teacher who shared in the training she experienced from age 5 to 12 by which time 75%

of a child's life attitudes are shaped. Of course you could be another group of people in life so that by the time she is 16 years of age 90% of her life attitudes have been shaped.

So here she is made a spectacle by the religious leaders. Jesus ignores their clamor for justice and stands up, looks around at those with the stones in their hands and simply says, "*If any one of you is without sin, let him cast the first stone.*" In an instant the entire scene shifts away from the woman to every one who stood ready to put her to death. What basis did they have for their judgment? Each man begins to contemplate his own life to see if he could in effect cast the first stone. If you are standing there why are you unable to cast your stone? Who are you thinking of right now? Who would you like to cast your stone at in an attempt to destroy them in some way? Are you a father who has neglected your responsibilities to treat your wife with respect and dignity? Have you failed to love your wife as Christ loved the church and died for her? Have you allowed your own personal goals and ambitions to cloud your thinking so that you do not spend time with your family as the head of the home in a true Christ-like manner? Mother, have you failed to show respect to your husband by putting your own needs before the family needs? Are you so committed to getting ahead in your job outside the home that you have forgotten to focus on the needs of your family? Children are you stepping outside of your parents vision for a Christian home and dabbling in drinking, drugs, other many cheap ways of finding fun so that you are no longer in a mode to love people in a healthy manner? Teacher's are you trying to make your place in the world so you can receive the recognition you think you deserve and have lost sight of meeting the needs of the children and young people you are teaching? Has your job become a means to meet your own needs of self-esteem? Church leaders are you more concerned about building a congregation than preaching the Gospel to meet the needs of people who are lost without Jesus Christ?

How heavy is the stone in your hand? Stop for a moment and feel the weight of the stone in your hand. How would it hurt the person you are ready to throw it at? Is it heavy enough to do a great deal of damage? What are we going to do with the questions posed by Jesus? Which one of us can throw our stone in all honesty? Every one of us needs to look at the stones in our hands and examine our lives to see if we can in fact cast the first stone. Who gives us the right to look down at another person? If you and I are without sin in our lives than perhaps we can cast that stone in our hands? However, I suspect that I need to drop my stone and walk away from the crowd. Everyone there was so eager to stone the woman to death until they looked in their own hearts and realized that in effect they were as sinful as the woman caught in adultery.

God help me to drop my stones and look at people through the eyes of Jesus Christ who came into this world to seek the lost. I am that lost person. Will you join me in dropping our stones and follow Jesus Christ in redemptive love and compassion?

Let us stand at the foot of the cross and look to Jesus who paid the ultimate price that all of us might find meaning and purpose in our lives through him. Romans 3:21-26
But now righteousness from God, apart from law, has been made known, to which the Law and the Prophets testify. This righteousness from God comes through faith in

Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus. God presented him as a sacrifice of atonement, through faith in his blood. He did this to demonstrate his justice, because in his forbearance he had left the sins committed beforehand unpunished - he did it to demonstrate his justice at the present time, so as to be just and the one who justifies those who have faith in Jesus.

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WILL YOU JOIN HANDS WITH ME SO THAT TOGETHER WE CAN EMBRACE THOSE WHO ARE HURTING, DROPPING OUR STONES AND SPEAKING WORDS OF LOVE AND ACCEPTANCE? DO WE HAVE ANY OTHER CHOICE IF WE ARE GOING TO FOLLOW JESUS CHRIST? THINK OF YOUR SPOUSE, CHILDREN, FAMILIES, FRIENDS, NEIGHBORS, ACQUAINTANCES AND EVERYONE WE COME IN CONTACT WITH EVERY DAY.

NOTE THE GREAT SPIRITUAL FROM SLAVERY DAYS!

Within its traditional seven verses, this soulful, powerfully moving, yet nobly restrained spiritual encapsulizes the entire story of the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus as described in the four Gospels of the Bible's New Testament. It is one of several spirituals, in which the people who suffered through the tragedy of American slavery would draw a dramatic parallel between their experience and that of the persecution and torture of the great spiritual master and man of peace. Written sometime before 1865.

**Were you there when they crucified my Lord?
Were you there when they nailed Him to the tree?
Were you there when they pierced Him in the side?
Were you there when the sun refused to shine?
Were you there when they laid Him in the tomb?
Were you there when they rolled the stone away?
Did you know He is risen from the dead?
(Repeat) Oh! Sometimes I want to shout, "Glory, Glory, Glory!
Did you know He is risen from the dead? ~**