

Have you ever felt exposed, vulnerable and unprotected? Accusations can do that, harsh words of allegations can surround us, threaten and isolate us...leading us to feel powerless.

A few years ago my wife and I were falsely accused of spreading a rumor about a fellow church leader (from another church we attended). This charge became a rumor itself and in its wake, destroyed a few friendships and tarnished our reputation for a season. Once words are released...it is impossible to get them back. It is the same with accusations.

There are life events embedded in your past, my past, everybody's past that are filled with accusations...packed with blame and condemnation. This past sometimes evades our present doesn't it? It comes kicking and screaming into our "today"... feelings of shame, pain and fear, caused by our own sin or the side affect of somebody's else's sin.

Accusations are powerful tools used by the enemy to isolate us, condemn us and separate us from a God who loves us...but there is hope. We can leave sin, the shame, the mark, the hold of sin in the dust and walk in the freedom of living in Him.

***Let's pray...***

In the Gospel of John is a powerful story of a life and death struggle. There is a woman's life hanging in the balance and depending how Jesus handles this situation, His life and reputation are at stake as well. The woman in the story is being used as bait, both cruel and devious, to get Jesus...to trap Him into making a mistake and give the authorities a reason to do away with Him. There is two scenes in this story, first the accusation (of sin) and the offer (of redemption).

**Let's turn to John 8:3-11**

*(3) The scribes and the Pharisees brought a woman who had been caught in adultery, and placing her in the midst*

*(4) they said to him, "Teacher, this woman has been caught in the act of adultery.*

*(5) Now in the Law Moses commanded us to stone such women. So what do you say?"*

*(6) This they said to test him, that they might have some charge to bring against him....*

This woman's life is in Jesus hands, she has been caught in the act, and Jewish law (Lev. 20:10 7 Duet 22:22-24) condemned her to die by stoning. Depending on Jesus' answer, His life would be danger as well...because Roman law commanded that all capital crimes be tried by their courts...not public opinion. Adultery was the perfect trap, it was an open and shut case...if Jesus forgives her then His message of unconditional love and mercy contradicts Mosaic Law. If He allows her to be stoned by the crowd, he offends Roman law and His message of love towards sinners is inconsistent and easy to dismiss. The scribes and the Pharisees thought they had Him...he was between a rock and a hard place. They hoped to force Jesus to openly speak and act in opposition to God's law and Roman law...and discredit Him.

**However...there is a problem with this story presented by the scribes and Pharisees.** Whenever someone was caught in adultery, both the man and the woman would be brought to the Nicanor (Ni-can-dor) gate, (the women's entrance to the temple) and accused. By Law, two eyewitnesses must be

present, and there is no mention of the witnesses' presence in this scene. The Scribes and Pharisees just say she was caught in the act...no other witnesses are produced. This was a violation of the Oral Law of God.

### **Messiah's response is priceless...**

*(6b) ... Jesus bent down and wrote with his finger on the ground.*

Jesus responds with silence, stoops down and begins writing in the dust...this is the action of a man who is not interested in winning a debate but with winning souls. This humble act of stooping down to the woman's level amazes me and reflects the heart of Jesus towards us.

### **Did you ever wonder why Jesus wrote in the dust?**

The priest was required to then stoop down and write the law that had been broken, along with the names of the accused, in the dust of the floor of the Temple (the priest could write the law and the names anywhere, as long as the marks were not permanent - and the dust of the floor of the Temple was the most common place). Jesus, acting as priest, does this. By doing this, Jesus showed these accusers that THEY were not keeping the law, but He would anyway.

**In Numbers chapter 5, there is a test for unfaithfulness.** The priest brings the woman accused of adultery and has her stand before the Lord and has her take an oath. He also takes some dust from the tabernacle floor and puts that dirt into cup of holy water (made bitter with herbs) from the tabernacle. The priest also pronounces a curse that if she is guilty, then when she drinks the dirty water, she will get deathly sick but if she is innocent, then she will not be harmed by drinking that cup of dirty water. But before she drinks that cup, the priest also writes down the curses that he pronounced on a scroll. Then he takes some holy water and rinses the scroll of curses into the cup of dirty water. So now the dirty cup of water has the curses in it as well. Then she is made to drink that cup of dirty water.

Although this seems harsh...I believe that it was a safeguard for women unfairly treated by their husbands. Men held all the power and could divorce their wives quite easily and an accusation of unfaithfulness was one way to deal with getting out of a marriage they no longer wanted to be in. This dirty water was quite harmless and would eventually leave the woman's virtue unblemished. But there is a larger point to be made here.

Jesus does not perform this ceremony...because He knows He will be drinking from a cup soon enough. **Jesus drinks our dirty water...Jesus bore our curse!** Jesus knew that very soon he would have to drink the cup of sin. This cup would contain not only this woman's sin of adultery, it would contain your sin and my sin, and it would contain all sin of mankind. Jesus drains this cup on Calvary and separates our sins from us as far as the East is from the West. In the previous chapter (7) Jesus was in town during the Jewish annual observance of the Feast of Tabernacles. On the last day of this feast...worshippers would have sung a song from Isaiah 12:3 which says...

*"With joy you will draw water from the wells of salvation."*

During this celebration...Jesus makes a huge proclamation...in verses 37-38

*On the last day, that great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried out, saying, "If anyone thirsts, let him come to Me and drink. 38. He who believes in Me, as the Scripture has said, out of his heart will flow rivers of living water."*

Jesus (Yeshua, name means salvation) declares that the true living water would come from Him. He was inviting them to drink of Him, taking in water that would satisfy all thirsts...and knowing the dirty water He would have to drink to make this possible. What a Messiah!

So Jesus writes in the dust...He's writing the offense, the passages violated, the names of the accused and accusers in non-permanent dust. He's acting as a priest would and yet the crowd is not satisfied.

*(7) And as they continued to ask him,*

Condemnation is the enemy's currency. He will play your "caught" moment over and over again, hoping to catch you again. Not necessary in the same sin but the web of shame, fear and hopelessness. He will drag your past out and threaten to expose you, throw you under the bus, condemn you...(and here's the real threat) even if you are the only one that believes the accusations.

Jesus shows us how to handle accusations...

*(7b) he stood up and said to them, "Let him who is without sin among you be the first to throw a stone at her."*

Jesus stands up...He stands up for the oppressed, the accused! This is not only a brilliant response but an unarming one as well. The first stone was supposed to be cast by the two witnesses to the act...which the scribes and Pharisees failed to produce. Where are they? Jesus knows they are not there and challenges the crowd to act on their own righteousness...then, Jesus goes back to writing in the dust.

*(8) And once more he bent down and wrote on the ground.*

Some scholars think Jesus might have written a powerful answer in the dust to make the crowd think before they acted. Yom Kippur (the atonement) was the feast before the Feast of Tabernacles. During this celebration the High Priest would immerse up to 11 times in a Mikveh (a baptismal tank) in order to be ceremonially cleansed between each separate portion of the day's sacrifices.

When it came time to end the feast the Priest would proclaim a verse from Jeremiah 17:13. Any devoted Jewish man had heard this verse quoted by the High Priest every year since he was 12 years old. At 50, he would have heard it 39 times! Listen to this verse and perhaps see why the crowd changed its hunger for blood. The way it reads in Hebrew is:

*"Oh YHVH, the Immerser of Israel, all those who leave your way shall be put to shame (publicly embarrassed), those who turn aside from my ways will have their names written in the dust and blotted out, for they have departed from YHVH, the fountain of Mayim Hayim (the waters of life).."*

In plain English...

*"You are a spring of water giving Israel life and hope. But if the people reject what you have told me, they will be swept away like words written in dust."*

## **The crowd responds**

*(9) 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.*

They heard the Spirit of God bringing back all the times they heard the High Priest quote the verse in Jeremiah - but instead of repenting, they departed from Him (just as it was prophesied!).

Now...The courtyard is empty...the crowd has left...all accusers gone. Only Jesus, the woman and a pile of scattered stones are left behind...unused stones of destruction but reminders of grace.

## **Jesus' offer of redemption doesn't stop with the crowd...**

*(10) Jesus stood up and said to her, "Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?"*

*(11) She said, "No one, Lord. (supreme in authority)" And Jesus said, "Neither do I condemn you; go, and from now on sin no more."*

Jesus stands up and asks...where are your accusers? Is there anyone left to condemn you?

Our Messiah uses a word the rabbis all used to describe Satan the enemy of our soul to challenge the hold sin had on this woman. Jesus does not condone her actions or dismiss her sin but He does offer a new way to live without the grip of sin...and the accusation of the enemy.

Jesus affirms rather than condemns...sin is exposed so that restoration can happen. The way Jesus handle this event didn't make the woman any less guilty...she was. Caught in sin, condemned by the law...there was no excuse for her sin...but the way a way out. Jesus is that way.

**She called him Lord (supreme authority)** a title used for God...somehow this woman recognized her Messiah and accepted His judgment.

## **Jesus asks us the same question He asked that woman...where is your accusers?**

We can answer the enemy's accusations with God's Word and the truth of the Messiah covering. **The question is...do we believe the words of our accuser or our advocate?** How we answer that question determines the level of freedom we walk in.

## **Romans 8:1-2**

*"Therefore there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. (2) For in Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit of life has set you free from the law of sin and death."*

## **Romans 8:33-34**

*"Who will bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies. (34) Who is there to condemn us? For Christ Jesus, who died, and more than that was raised to life, is at the right hand of God—and He is interceding for us."*

Next week...How do go and sin no more?