

LESSONS FROM THE Master



By Elder Marvin J. Ashton (1915–94)

Of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles

Marvin J. Ashton was ordained an Apostle on December 2, 1971. The following article is an excerpt of a Brigham Young University devotional address he gave on June 5, 1988.

For as long as I can remember I've had a special love for Jesus Christ. I was taught He was the Son of the living God. I was taught He was my friend, my teacher, and my strength. In years past, when the calling and responsibility and honor of bearing special witness of Him have come into my life, I have endeavored to be taught by His life and His ways. Truly, He is the Master Teacher. To assist me in my labors and commitment, I have found myself turning frequently to the eighth chapter of John in the New Testament for strength, for guidance, and for example. If you please, let us walk through some of the verses to strengthen our lives and our relationships with Jesus. These lines and words help me to better understand Him and give me the desire to do and be more like Him. . . .

[The scribes and Pharisees] brought unto Him the woman taken in adultery. These enemies . . . tried to trick Him. They sat her in the midst as an exhibit, as a sinner, as someone unclean. He didn't flee from her presence.

. . . She was taken in adultery—in the very act. There was no doubt about her guilt. They were setting Him up in what appeared to be an impossible situation. Moses's law says to stone her. "What sayest thou?" [John 8:5] they asked, tempting Him, trapping Him—putting Him in a no-win position.

Whatever He said, He would be accused of wrongdoing, wrong judgment. They were tempting Him to see if they could get Him to lose His patience and forget who He was. Stoning her would be cruel. Ignoring her would be wrong. . . . He stooped down and wrote on the ground as though He heard them not (getting their attention and preparing everyone within earshot to be taught). . . . And while it was silent, they continued asking. I can hear the questions of mischief: "C'mon, say something. We've got you. Are you afraid to answer?" But Jesus was in charge. . . .

Jesus lifted up Himself, in humble and meek majesty, and said these most powerful words: "He that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone at her" [John 8:7]. A perfect answer from a perfect person.

Today in our responsibilities, situations, and callings, we need to be reminded of this over and over again. In our dealings with all

people, let him who is without sin be the first to criticize or find fault or belittle. . . . He stooped down and wrote on the ground. They heard what He said. They felt the impact of His silence of spirit while He said nothing. Convicted by their own conscience, they left on their own, not driven away. They went out one by one—not to find stones but to nurse their spiritual wounds.

He was left alone with the woman. I'm glad that's recorded. Some of us are inclined to avoid being with those who have fallen. . . . He said, "Where are those thine accusers? hath no man condemned thee?" [John 8:10]. . . . Jesus Christ took time to ask and to listen. Oh, if we could do more of that! Our answers would be so easy, so much improved. . . .

The woman taken in adultery answered the Lord's question regarding her accusers by saying, "No man, Lord." And then this powerful declaration came: "Go, and sin no more" [John 8:11]. The Master was teaching in that day and also teaching in this very hour. His great message: despise the sin, but love the sinner. I hope that can give us strength and confidence and a closer relationship to our Savior, Jesus Christ. Jesus did not condone adultery. He gave the woman love instead of an authoritative lecture. She and the accusers needed a lesson in love. The situation called for mercy and compassion. How rewarding it is to know that Jesus believed that man is greater than all of his sins. Is it any wonder He was referred to as the "Good Shepherd"? He loved all of His sheep whether they were strays, hungry, helpless, cold, or lost.

At the conclusion of this great teaching experience, this lesson of love and compassion, is an important verse.



"Then spake Jesus again unto them, saying, I am the light of the world: he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life" (John 8:12).

Let us follow His light. Let us refer often to these few words. I bear witness to you that they were preserved for the good of everyone. ■

Spelling, punctuation, and capitalization have been standardized. For the full text of the address in English, visit speeches.byu.edu.