

BIBLE EMPOWERED TEACHING

Series: Jesus Christ The Son Of God

Lesson 3

SINS THE CRUCIFIED THE SON OF GOD

Around thirty years after the initial proclamation that millennia of prophecy had been fulfilled in the coming of the Redeemer of mankind, a most disheartening thing began to occur with some of the first generation of believers. As national Israel neared its end in A.D. 70, the “signs of the times” began to appear over the western horizon as Rome was determined to silence forever the rebellious Jews of Palestine. In fulfillment of Jesus’ prophecy of the doom of Jerusalem (Mt 24), the rumbling march of Roman soldiers was heard who were on their way to the heart of Jewish patriotism, Jerusalem. The city would soon be doomed to fulfill the prophecy of Daniel that national Israel would come to a close (See Dn 12).

In Palestine, Jewish patriotism was reaching its climax. Judaism, the national religion, was revitalized in the early and mid 60s. Intimidation to the nationalism of all Jews who lived in Palestine became intense. Jews were recruited to maintain their faith in national Israel by joining in the rebellion against the foreign occupation of Rome.

On his final trip to the “mother city” of Jerusalem, Paul wanted to give a last chance to his “brethren in the flesh,” his fellow Jews (See Rm 9:1-3; 10:1). He arrived in Palestine first at the coastal city of Caesarea. Understanding the fearlessness of Paul, and the imminent danger in Jerusalem, the Jewish disciples in Caesarea “pleaded with him not to go up to Jerusalem” (At 21:12). Nevertheless, Paul persisted in his determination to give the Jews his last efforts to believe in Jesus. He comforted the disciples in Caesarea with these words: “*What do you mean by weeping and breaking my heart? For I am ready not to be bound only, but also to die at Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus*” (At 21:13). These were the words of a brave-hearted disciple for Jesus who had weathered the storm of persecution for two decades. However, not all the Jewish disciples at the time could make this statement. This was the problem in Judea.

When the apostle Paul eventually arrived in Jerusalem around A.D. 59, the Jewish elders of the church urged him not to do anything that would further inflame the irrational nationalism of overzealous Jews who were prevalent in the city. The elders advised Paul that he purify himself according to Jewish law, pay the temple expenses of four other men, and then enter the temple in order to make a show that he was not against Jewish customs (See At 21:17-25). But this was to no avail because God had plans to get Paul to Rome in order to testify before Caesar concerning Christ. God wanted the world to know that Christianity was not a sect of Judaism, but was the result of His sending of the Christ for the salvation of the world (At 23:11).

Regardless of all efforts of Rome to pacify the Jewish nationalists in their insurrection against Roman occupation of Palestine, the decade of the 60s eventually culminated with the destruction of Jerusalem and national Israel in A.D. 70.

Leading up to this date, the decade of the 60s was a time of intimidation for formerly converted Jews. Their fellow unbelieving Jews sought to intimidate believing Jesus away from Jesus in order that they return to the religion of their forefathers. As a result, some Jewish Christians in Palestine were forsaking Christ in order to return to the Sinai law. The letter of Hebrews was written in order to combat this apostasy. Hebrews 6:4-6 is one of the most disheartening passages that ever came forth from the pen of an inspired writer:

For it is impossible for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted of the heavenly gift, and have become partakes of the Holy Spirit, and have tasted the good word of God and the powers of the age to come, if they fall away, to renew them again to repentance, since they crucify to themselves the Son of God and put Him to open shame.

The apostasy that was taking place at the time this statement was made occurred because there were those who were not willing, as Paul, “*to be bound only, but also to die at Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus*” (At 21:13). Regardless of any individual reasons for forsaking Jesus in order to conform to a dead law, and particularly to a religion that was based on the traditions of the fathers (Mk 7:1-9), one can still crucify Jesus today. Modern-day crucifixion of Jesus continues when individuals “*crucify to themselves the Son of God*” with those sins that originally led to the crucifixion of Jesus in the first century.

A. Ignorance crucified Christ.

Jesus suffered on the cross as a result of the ignorance of the people. It was as said by Goethe: “There is no more terrible sight than ignorance in action.” Those who crucified Jesus really did not believe that He was the incarnation of God. It is the same problem that exists throughout the world today. In His final moments on the cross, Jesus requested of the Father on behalf of those who crucified Him, “*Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing*” (Lk 23:34).

When antagonistic persecutors were picking up stones to martyr Stephen, Stephen said almost the same words: “*Lord, do not lay this sin to their charge*” (At 7:60). It was a time again when, because of ignorance, people were opposing the way of righteousness. If those who drove the nails into the hands of Jesus, or lifted stones to hurl against Stephen, actually knew that Jesus was the Son of God, things would have been different. They would have been different, but not for our benefit. And thus, God used the ignorance of religiously misguided people to bring about the redemption of those who would later understand.

Not long after the cross and resurrection, Peter was

apologetic for the people who crucified Jesus. “*And now, brethren, I know that through ignorance you did it, as did also your rulers*” (At 3:17). In his former years, Paul (Saul) was one of those rulers who reacted out of ignorance to persecute all those who believed that Jesus was the Son of God. However, this changed when Jesus finally slapped him off his horse on his way to Damascus to imprison Christians. Paul wrote many years later of his former behavior, “*I was formerly a blasphemer and a persecutor and injurious. But I obtained mercy because I did it ignorantly in unbelief*” (1 Tm 1:13).

Under the Sinai law there was a provision for those who sinned “unintentionally” (Nm 15:27-29). But those who nailed Jesus to the cross intentionally crucified Him because of their willful ignorance. They were as their forefathers against whom God pronounced destruction because they willfully forgot the word of God (Hs 4:6). By the time Jesus arrived, all the prophecies concerning the Messiah had already been made. They had been fulfilled by the time of His ascension (See Lk 24:44). But because of the hardness of the hearts of many of the religious leaders of the day, most could not connect all the dots of prophecy with fulfillment in order to conclude that Jesus was the One for whom the Jews had hoped for centuries.

And then we consider those today who willfully remain in ignorance of Jesus as the Son of God. They are without excuse, for they not only have all the Old Testament prophecies concerning Jesus as the Redeemer, but they also have the New Testament that is a record of the fulfillment of the prophecies. John’s record of the gospel alone is enough to produce the belief that is necessary to accept Jesus as the Christ. John wrote,

And Jesus did many other signs in the presence of His disciples that are not written in this book. But these are written so that you might believe that Jesus is the Christ, and Son of God, and that believing you might have life through His name (Jn 20:30,31).

The Holy Spirit has given all the proof necessary that is required to move one unto obedience of the gospel. It is today similar to the situation about which the Hebrew writer wrote concerning some in the first century: “*For if we sin willfully after we have received the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins*” (Hb 10:26). There are some who willfully forget (2 Pt 3:5). There are others who have no love for the truth of the gospel (2 Th 2:10-12). But it is now as Paul said to his audience in Athens, “*And the times of this ignorance God has overlooked, but now He commands all men everywhere to repent*” (At 17:30).

We must not allow ignorance to lure us into complacency. If we do, then Peter’s exhortation of 2 Peter 3:5,7 is a warning of coming things that will come upon us as a thief in the night:

For this they willfully forget But the heavens and the earth that are now, are reserved by the same word, reserved for the fire until the day of judgment and destruction of ungodly men.

B. Envy crucified Christ.

When it came to the final hours of Jesus’ ministry, and prior to His crucifixion, Matthew recorded the true motives of the religious leaders. Even the unbelieving Pilate to whom the religious leaders delivered Jesus, knew their motives: “*For he knew that the chief priests had delivered Him because of envy*” (Mk 15:10; see Mt 27:18). The situation at the time of the crucifixion was as it was when Paul stood before resistant Jews in Antioch of Pisidia: “*But when the Jews saw the multitudes, they were filled with envy. And contradicting and blaspheming, they opposed those things that were spoken by Paul*” (At 13:45). The religious leaders of the day behaved as was stated by Aeschylus: “No man is a complete failure until he begins disliking men who succeed.”

If the multitudes believed that Jesus was truly the Messiah, then the bank accounts of the religious leadership would be emptied. The Sinai law would be nailed to the cross, and thus the obligation of the people to contribute to the priests would be nullified (Cl 2:14). In order not to send their “stock market” into a crash, the priests and Pharisees knew that Jesus had to go.

Paul identified envy as a work of the flesh (Gl 5:21; see 1 Tm 6:4; Ti 3:3). It was because of this work of the flesh that Joseph’s brothers sold him into captivity (Gn 37:11). These brothers allowed envy to destroy their love for their own brother, for their envy overpowered their love (See 1 Co 13:4). Even out of envy some preached Christ in Rome in order to stir up animosity against Paul (Ph 1:15). Envy is the motivation for doing all sorts of evil things in order to accomplish one’s own selfish goals (Js 3:14). Because the religious leaders of Jesus’ day envied Him, they were moved with evil motives to have Him removed from their midst.

We can be sure of one thing in reference to the attitude of envy. Where there is envy, there is always confusion and the implementation of evil works. James concluded, “*For where envy and strife exist, there is confusion and every evil work*” (Js 3:16). Envy produced an evil work by sending Jesus to the cross. It will do the same today.

C. Greed crucified Christ.

Greed is covetousness, or the love of having money. It is true what Paul wrote to a preacher, “*For the love of money is the root of all evils, by which some coveting after have strayed from the faith and pierced themselves with many sorrows*” (1 Tm 6:10). Would that more preachers in the religious world heeded those words.

It was the religious leaders of Jesus’ day who put Him on the cross. The historian Luke recorded of them, “*And the Pharisees who were lovers of money ... scoffed at Him*” (Lk 16:14). When Jesus overturned the tables of the money-changers, He overturned more than tables (Mt 21:12,13). He overturned the very foundation upon which the religious leaders based their financial security.

The Pharisees even used greed to accomplish their mission to dispose of Jesus. Judas, too, loved money (See Jn 12:1-6). So the religious leaders “*weighed out to him thirty pieces of silver*” (Mt 26:15). It was greed that moved the

religious leaders to remove Jesus from their economy, and it was greed they used to implement their plan through Judas to have Him betrayed, and eventually crucified.

Greed (covetousness) is the idolization of money (Cl 3:5). But we must remember that the one who is covetous cannot inherit the kingdom of heaven (1 Co 6:10). Nevertheless, we are often as Esau who was willing to sacrifice his birthright for a pot of food to satisfy the lusts of the flesh (See Gn 25). We are sometimes more concerned over the things of this world that will perish in the great bomb fire to come, than we are about those things that will permeate the end of all things (See 2 Pt 3:10-13).

The problem with greed is that it focuses our minds on things of this world. But when we are living the gospel of Jesus, we do as what Paul instructed the Colossians who were struggling with covetousness: *“If you then were raised with Christ, seek those things that are above Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth”* (Cl 3:1,2).

D. Cowardice crucified Christ.

John 12:42 is a record of many rulers who could have stopped the crucifixion of Jesus if they had enough courage to stand up for what they believed. But they were cowards, and thus allowed themselves to be intimidated by the “preachers” of the day who promoted the established religion of Judaism. John recorded, *“Among the chief rulers also many believed in Him [Jesus]. But because of the Pharisees they did not confess Him lest they should be put out of the synagogue.”*

The problem was—as is common among religious leaders—that *“they loved the praise of men more than the praise of God”* (Jn 12:43). Their cowardice, therefore, was based on selfish ambition and the preservation of their positions among the people. This is a very real scenario in which many religious leaders find themselves today. They would sacrifice the truth of Jesus for the sake of their positions and purse.

In fear for our physical well-being, cowardice may arise in our own hearts in order to preserve ourselves from harm. At the time of the arrest of Jesus, it was stated, *“Then all the disciples forsook Him and fled”* (Mt 26:56). Even Peter *“followed Him at a distance”* (Mt 26:58). However, we must understand this fear of the disciples in the historical context of what they believed at the time. To them, their leader who was supposed to establish a physical kingdom of Israel, was being arrested (See At 1:6). It was a time when they were still focusing on the physical restoration of national Israel (See At 1:16). However, after the resurrection of Jesus they would be convinced that Jesus was a king of a spiritual kingdom (See Jn 18:36; Rm 1:4).

After the resurrection of Jesus, and with the threat of beating and imprisonment, the same Peter who followed from afar off during the trial of Jesus, later stood boldly before the religious rulers and said, *“Whether it is right in the sight of*

God to give heed to you more than to God, you judge. For we cannot but speak the things that we have seen and heard” (At 4:19,20).

Nevertheless, we must not take lightly the intimidation that can come from the established religious leadership of religion. For example, consider the situation during Peter’s ministry in the city of Antioch. *“Before certain men came from James [in Jerusalem], he ate with the Gentiles. But when they came, he withdrew and separated himself, fearing those who were of the circumcision”* (Gl 2:12).

It seems that Peter could stand bravely before unbelieving Jews in Jerusalem, but he found it difficult to stand bravely before believing Christian Jews who came up to Antioch from Jerusalem. Because he openly denied living by the gospel in fellowship with Gentile brethren, Paul approached him with the statement that *“he stood condemned”* (Gl 2:11). If we are ever in a situation where we deny the gospel because we are fearful of standing for Jesus, then we too stand condemned. If we are ever ashamed of the gospel, we are in trouble (Rm 1:16).

For those who would allow their cowardice to deny the opportunity to believe in and obey the gospel, John has a message: *“But the cowardly ... will have their part in the lake that burns with fire and brimstone, which is the second death”* (Rv 21:8). We must, therefore, take courage in the following words of Jesus: *“And do not fear those who kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul. But rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell”* (Mt 10:28).

It takes courage to stand up for Jesus. It takes courage to stand for that which is truth. If we are afraid to let our light shine for Jesus, then we have succumbed to fear. But we must remember that *“there is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear”* (1 Jn 4:18). Therefore, we must *“be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might”* (Ep 6:10). It is through His power that we stand. If we trust in ourselves, we will fall. But if we firmly believe that God works mightily in us through His power, then He can through us *“do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think according to the power that works in us”* (Ep 3:20). The Canadian novelist, Charles William Gordon, put this strength into the following words:

Be sure you are right, and then stand. At first you will be denounced, then you will be deified. At first you will be rejected, then you will be accepted. First men will sneer at you, then if you wear well, they will swear by you. First the sneer, and then the cheer. First the lash, then the laurel. First the curse, then the caress. First the trial, then the triumph. First the cross, then the crown. For every scar upon thy brow, thou shalt have a star in thy diadem. Stand somewhere, and let humanity know where you stand. Stand for something, and let humanity know what you stand for. Be sure you are right, and then stand.