

## March 16<sup>th</sup>, 2008 “Why Jesus Died”

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**Matthew 5:16**

**16 Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven.**

Thank you very much for coming to hear the message for today. Before we begin our next lesson, let us reiterate our reason for attending Church.

We attend Church to obtain the mind of Christ, meaning, to have the Bible illuminated in our minds so that we can clearly understand the principles that Jesus taught and base our daily personal decisions on those principles.

We come to Church because we want to be obedient to the Bible, which is the doctrine of Jesus Christ, in an informed, insightful and intelligent manner.

We are going to suspend our discussion of the proper upbringing of children during their first five years of life for the next two Sundays, today being Palm Sunday and next Sunday being Easter, to focus on the life of Jesus Christ.

Palm Sunday commemorates the Triumphant Entry of Jesus Christ into Jerusalem the Sunday before His crucifixion. The people were hailing Jesus as the Messiah, and they strewed the fronds of palm trees on the road over which He traveled as a carpet so that the King Jesus would not have to touch the dirt of the road. **John 12:12-13** records:

**12 The next day a great multitude that had come to the feast, when they heard that Jesus was coming to Jerusalem,**

**13 took branches of palm trees and went out to meet Him, and cried out: “Hosanna! ‘Blessed is He who comes in the name of the LORD!’ The King of Israel!”**

By contrast, it is fascinating to me to consider that God sent Jesus Christ to a group of people to facilitate their salvation from sin, and those people crucified the Christ rather than accept the mercy and the grace that He came to bring them. **Matthew 13:54-58** says:

**54 When He had come to His own country, He taught them in their synagogue, so that they were astonished and said, “Where did this Man get this wisdom and these mighty works?**

**55 Is this not the carpenter’s son? Is not His mother called Mary? And His brothers James, Joses, Simon, and Judas?**

**56 And His sisters, are they not all with us? Where then did this Man get all these things?”**

**57 So they were offended at Him. But Jesus said to them, “A prophet is not without honor except in his own country and in his own house.”**

**58 Now He did not do many mighty works there because of their unbelief.**

Jesus’ countrymen acknowledged that Jesus was displaying both wisdom and mighty works, but they nevertheless rejected Jesus because they could not understand the origin of His power. Jesus had the same humble beginnings that they themselves had. They knew his family, and it seems obvious to me by their reaction that Jesus probably did not stand out in the community during his youth, being known only as the carpenter’s son. The fact that his

countrymen designated Him the carpenter's son implies that, in their opinion, Jesus should be knowledgeable about carpentry, but not about much else.

During this period of history, before the advent of the university, skills and trades were generally passed down from father to son, and if you wanted an education in a skill other than the skill of your father, you had to attach yourself, as an apprentice, to someone that had the skill that you wanted to learn. Jesus, however, worked in Joseph's carpentry shop for thirty years, and then, one day, went to the Jordan River, was baptized by John, and just began doing the miracles and teaching the lessons that led Him to the position in which He found Himself during this lesson with no other formal training.

Jesus did not have the pedigree of a holy man, having the background of a simple carpenter. Not only that, but Jesus was a carpenter from the town of Galilee, a place that did not get any respect as a place in which a holy person could grow up.

When Jesus traveled from Galilee to Jerusalem for one of the designated feasts, He performed miracles and taught with great wisdom in the Jerusalem Temple. In so doing, Jesus caused a great controversy, as is recorded in **John 7:40-53**:

**40 Therefore many from the crowd, when they heard [Jesus speak], said, "Truly this is the Prophet."**

**41 Others said, "This is the Christ." But some said, "Will the Christ come out of Galilee?"**

**42 Has not the Scripture said that the Christ comes from the seed of David and from the town of Bethlehem, where David was?"**

**43 So there was a division among the people because of Him.**

**44 Now some of them wanted to take Him, but no one laid hands on Him.**

**45 Then the officers came to the chief priests and Pharisees, who said to them, "Why have you not brought Him?"**

**46 The officers answered, "No man ever spoke like this Man!"**

**47 Then the Pharisees answered them, "Are you also deceived?"**

**48 Have any of the rulers or the Pharisees believed in Him?"**

**49 But this crowd that does not know the law is accursed."**

**50 Nicodemus (he who came to Jesus by night, being one of them) said to them,**

**51 "Does our law judge a man before it hears him and knows what he is doing?"**

**52 They answered and said to him, "Are you also from Galilee? Search and look, for no prophet has arisen out of Galilee."**

**53 And everyone went to his own house.**

The controversy surrounding Jesus had nothing to do with His teaching or with His ability to work miracles, but with the location of His hometown. It seems incredible to me that the chief priests, the scribes and the Pharisees would be aware of the prophecy that the Messiah would be a descendent of David from the town of Bethlehem, and chose to persecute the person who clearly displayed the correct signs to be considered the Messiah without inquiring as to whether or not He was born or had been raised in the city of Bethlehem.

But did Jesus actually display the signs of the Messiah?

Was there any question in the minds of the chief priests, the scribes and Pharisees that Jesus worked sufficient works to be considered the Son of God? Well, let us look at the episode that preceded Jesus' arrest and trial for heresy.

The episode begins with Jesus receiving a message from two women that He had befriended, those being, Mary and Martha. The message indicated that their brother Lazarus had fallen deathly ill, and they wanted Jesus to come and heal him. Jesus procrastinated for a couple of days after receiving their message, and then decided to act. **John 11:11-15** reads:

**11 These things [Jesus] said, and after that He said to them, “Our friend Lazarus sleeps, but I go that I may wake him up.”**

**12 Then [Jesus’] disciples said, “Lord, if he sleeps he will get well.”**

**13 However, Jesus spoke of his death, but they thought that He was speaking about taking rest in sleep.**

**14 Then Jesus said to them plainly, “Lazarus is dead.**

**15 And I am glad for your sakes that I was not there, that you may believe. Nevertheless let us go to him.”**

Lazarus lived and died in Bethany, a little town just outside of Jerusalem. When Jesus arrived there, He met with the bereaved sisters. **John 11:23-27** records:

**23 Jesus said to [Martha], “Your brother will rise again.”**

**24 Martha said to Him, “I know that he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day.”**

**25 Jesus said to her, “I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me, though he may die, he shall live.**

**26 And whoever lives and believes in Me shall never die. Do you believe this?”**

**27 She said to Him, “Yes, Lord, I believe that You are the Christ, the Son of God, who is to come into the world.”**

The exhibition of the power of God working through Jesus had convinced Martha, as Jesus had raised other people from the dead. Raising dead men from their graves is a singular sign of the presence of the power of God. Martha is confessing her belief in Jesus Christ’s ability to raise her brother.

Jesus they met with Mary, Martha’s sister, and together they and the mourners all went to the site of Lazarus’ tomb. **John 11:39-44** records the events.

**39 Jesus said, “Take away the stone.” Martha, the sister of him who was dead, said to Him, “Lord, by this time there is a stench, for he has been dead four days.”**

**40 Jesus said to her, “Did I not say to you that if you would believe you would see the glory of God?”**

**41 Then they took away the stone from the place where the dead man was lying. And Jesus lifted up His eyes and said, “Father, I thank You that You have heard Me.**

**42 And I know that You always hear Me, but because of the people who are standing by I said this, that they may believe that You sent Me.”**

**43 Now when He had said these things, He cried with a loud voice, “Lazarus, come forth!”**

**44 And he who had died came out bound hand and foot with graveclothes, and his face was wrapped with a cloth. Jesus said to them, “Loose him, and let him go.”**

This ability to raise a man from the dead who has been dead and in the tomb for at least four days is a certainly a singular sign of a powerful relationship with God. However, that is not the way that the Jews saw it. **John 11:45-53** records:

**45 Then many of the Jews who had come to Mary, and had seen the things Jesus did, believed in Him.**

- 46 But some of them went away to the Pharisees and told them the things Jesus did.**
- 47 Then the chief priests and the Pharisees gathered a council and said, “What shall we do? For this Man works many signs.**
- 48 If we let [Jesus] alone like this, everyone will believe in Him, and the Romans will come and take away both our place and nation.”**
- 49 And one of them, Caiaphas, being high priest that year, said to them, “You know nothing at all,**
- 50 nor do you consider that it is expedient for us that one man should die for the people, and not that the whole nation should perish.”**
- 51 Now this he did not say on his own authority; but being high priest that year he prophesied that Jesus would die for the nation,**
- 52 and not for that nation only, but also that He would gather together in one the children of God who were scattered abroad.**
- 53 Then, from that day on, they plotted to put [Jesus] to death.**

Notice that the Jews did not deny the actual resurrection of Lazarus, nor did they deny that Jesus was responsible for it. There is no controversy about that which Jesus has done. I would, however, like you to focus on two phrases used in the argument justifying the execution of Jesus. **John 11:48** says:

- 48 If we let [Jesus] alone like this, everyone will believe in Him, and the Romans will come and take away both our place and nation.”**

The Jewish leaders were in cahoots with the Romans. The Romans preferred to use local leadership rather than military force to keep conquered populations in line. The Romans were not particularly interested in changing the day-to-day life of the people in a conquered land, but were generally satisfied to receive the tax revenue that they commanded that the people of the conquered land pay. Rome could collect taxes by military force, but preferred to collect taxes with the cooperation of the local leadership acting as Roman administrators. As the Jewish religious leaders were interested in maintaining their leadership status, they took on the job of Roman administrators, and they saw Jesus and His preaching of the Kingdom of God as a threat to their administrative leadership.

As Jesus’ demonstrations of power eroded their status in the eyes of the people, the Jewish leadership felt much less sanguine about their ability to collect the taxes and keep their jobs, so, from their perspective, Jesus, miracles notwithstanding, had to go. **John 11:49-50** tells us:

- 49 And one of them, Caiaphas, being high priest that year, said to them, “You know nothing at all,**
- 50 nor do you consider that it is expedient for us that one man should die for the people, and not that the whole nation should perish.”**

In verse 48, the Jews talk about how Jesus’ death will allow us to keep “our place.”

In verse 50, the High Priest talks about Jesus’ death being “expedient for us.”

While it is true that, from God’s perspective, Jesus died as a sacrifice for our sins so that our sins could be forgiven at the Judgment, it is also true that, from the perspective of those that put Jesus to death, Jesus died because of the their personal selfishness.

The Jewish leaders decided to put Jesus to death because His good works threatened their positions of power. Even the Roman procurator, Pontius Pilate, knew that Jesus was innocent of any crime but assented to Jesus' crucifixion because the Jews implied that to allow Jesus to live was being unfriendly to the emperor. **John 19:12-15** and **Matthew 27:24-26** reads:

**12 From then on Pilate sought to release [Jesus], but the Jews cried out, saying, "If you let this Man [Jesus] go, you are not Caesar's friend. Whoever makes himself a king speaks against Caesar."**

**13 When Pilate therefore heard that saying, he brought Jesus out and sat down in the judgment seat in a place that is called The Pavement, but in Hebrew, Gabbatha.**

**14 Now it was the Preparation Day of the Passover, and about the sixth hour. And he said to the Jews, "Behold your King!"**

**15 But they cried out, "Away with Him, away with Him! Crucify Him!" Pilate said to them, "Shall I crucify your King?" The chief priests answered, "We have no king but Caesar!"**

**24 When Pilate saw that he could not prevail at all, but rather that a tumult was rising, he took water and washed his hands before the multitude, saying, "I am innocent of the blood of this just Person. You see to it."**

**25 And all the people answered and said, "His blood be on us and on our children."**

**26 Then he released Barabbas to them; and when he had scourged Jesus, he delivered Him to be crucified.**

There is something extremely negative about an agendized group with an ax to grind. When individuals form themselves into an association for the advancement of some cause, it is extremely important that the members maintain their individual morality. Do not allow the advancement of the group itself to become more important to you than the advancement of the cause for which the group is striving.

Morality is largely an individual trait, one that each of us must have for ourselves. When we become part of a group, it becomes easier for us to justify immorality in order to advance of the objectives of the group than is for us to justify immorality for our own personal advancement. God ordains that each of us must be saved individually and have a personal relationship with Jesus Christ; our affiliation with the church group is not the same as our affiliation to God.

Although Jesus walked the streets of Palestine for three and a half years doing nothing but good, the good that Jesus did focused on helping individuals, not the Jews as a group. The Jewish leadership conspired with the Roman authority to have Jesus crucified because Jesus was a threat to the leadership class as a group, not as individuals. **John 18:19-23** records:

**19 The high priest then asked Jesus about His disciples and His doctrine.**

**20 Jesus answered him, "I spoke openly to the world. I always taught in synagogues and in the temple, where the Jews always meet, and in secret I have said nothing.**

**21 Why do you ask Me? Ask those who have heard Me what I said to them. Indeed they know what I said."**

**22 And when He had said these things, one of the officers who stood by struck Jesus with the palm of his hand, saying, "Do You answer the high priest like that?"**

**23 Jesus answered him, "If I have spoken evil, bear witness of the evil; but if well, why do you strike Me?"**

Jesus was struck because He failed to bow to the group authority of the High Priest. Jesus answered the question posed by the High Priest simply as one man answering another, without the deference that the man that struck Him anticipated that Jesus should have used to speak to a group leader. Jesus pointed out that the record of His activities and His doctrine was public; that He had done nothing in secret; that the details of His ministry were available to anyone that wished to know them. Even more importantly, Jesus' answers pointed out to the High Priest that the High Priest should have had some compelling reason to arrest Him; it is not good form to arrest a man unless you have some good evidence that the man has done something wrong, and you can only obtain this evidence from the testimony of those who had witnessed the wrong that the man has done. Without witnesses to the evil, you have no reason to arrest a man.

But the Jews did not arrest Jesus because of the evil that Jesus had done, because Jesus had not done any evil.

The Jews arrested Jesus because Jesus upset the tyranny of the Jewish religious leadership.

Jesus proved that a person that loved God could eat with tax collectors and sinners, even though the Jewish leadership instructed the people that it was a sin to do so.

Jesus proved that a person that loved God could talk to and minister to people that did not pay homage to the Jewish leadership, like the Samaritans, the Syro-Phoenician woman and the Roman centurion.

Jesus proved that individual devotion to God was more important than group affiliation, and that the Jewish leadership was a group of sinners because they drew their power, not from the Word of God, but from their group affiliation. Individually, the members of the Jewish leadership had no power; their power was in their robes; in their collection of the temple tax and selling animals for sacrifice; in their presiding over the ceremonies; in the status that they cultivated for themselves in the community as leaders.

Jesus' authority, however, did not come from His affiliation with any group or society, but Jesus came in the authority of God, which Jesus proved demonstrations of God's power and by using God's Word to justify everything that He said and did.

God's Word is the only real and permanent authority; every man made organization is destined to deteriorate and fall at the point at which the men involved decide to deviate from the teachings of the Word of God. Jesus went to the Cross quoting the Scripture, and the Word of God was the blueprint from which Jesus lived His life.

Marie and I were at our Weight-Watchers meeting a week ago Saturday, and as we were leaving, a woman that is a member of both Weight-Watchers and one of our dance classes stopped us to ask a question. She related that she wanted to come out to Club 621 on Thursday night to dance and listen to the music with the group of us that frequent that particular night spot, but that someone from her church told her that it was a sin to go to a nightclub, which Club 621 certainly is; people go there to drink alcohol and to pick up partners for immoral activities, so Christians shouldn't go there.

I told her that I agree that she shouldn't go to Club 621 to drink and to pick up a partner for immoral activities, but that everyone that goes to Club 621 does not go to participate in those activities, although some certainly do. I related that I go to Club 621 to eat rather than drink alcohol, and to dance with my wife rather than pick up a partner for an immoral activity, and that

I have the individual moral ability to not commit sin but to positively influence those who are committing sin; being the light that Jesus talks about in **Matthew 5:14-16**, in which He says:

**14 “You are the light of the world. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hidden.**

**15 Nor do they light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a lampstand, and it gives light to all who are in the house.**

**16 Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven.**

To be the light of the world, you have to be in the world. The world will not see your light in this Church building, regardless of how brightly you try to shine in here. Individual morality on the world stage is more important than group morality in church, because we are saved individually, not in a group.

We have more influence in the world shining our lights individually than we have in an insulated group; our group affiliation only insulates us from the world, and, as a consequence, insulates the world from us.

But insulation is not Jesus' commandment. Jesus says, in **Matthew 28:18-20**:

**18 And Jesus came and spoke to them, saying, “All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth.**

**19 Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,**

**20 teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.” Amen.**

The admonition of the Scripture is to go into the world, not to barricade ourselves in our little Christian enclaves until the world decides to come in and meet us. Salt has to mix with the food to provide flavor; salt in the saltshaker does nothing until it comes out. Of course, it is risky to come out, because you have to be absorbed by the world before you can change its' flavor. You have to really be the salt of which Jesus Christ is speaking, because the world may be trying to change your flavor just as much as you are trying to change the flavor of the world. Jesus says, in **Matthew 5:13**:

**13 “You are the salt of the earth; but if the salt loses its flavor, how shall it be seasoned? It is then good for nothing but to be thrown out and trampled underfoot by men.**

Jesus was the ultimate example of salt. He entered the city of Jerusalem on that first Palm Sunday, healing the sick, raising the dead; doing deeds that changed men's hearts. But the Jewish leadership did not appreciate the seasoning that Jesus brought, because His flavor challenged theirs; His tastiness threatened to replace the blandness with which the Jews seasoned the city. So they killed Him, nailing Him to the Old Rugged Cross. Jesus hung on that Cross from the sixth to the ninth hour, quoting the Scripture and suffering, paying the penalty that you owe and that I owe for the sins that we have committed.

Jesus lost His life on the Cross, but, even to the end, He did not lose His flavor.

Jesus lived in sinful circumstances among sinful men, but did not allow the sins of others to affect His flavor.

Jesus died at the hands of jealous men, but He did not allow their jealousy to affect His flavor.

They beat Jesus and spit on Him, but He did not allow their mistreatment to affect His flavor.

Ultimately, they killed Jesus, but Jesus was salt. Nothing affected His flavor.

Not even death. They killed Him and buried Him and sealed up His tomb, but even death could not affect His flavor, because early, on that first Easter Sunday, God raised Jesus from the dead, and Jesus walked once again, providing salt and light for those whom He deputized to preach the Gospel. The Jews that had Jesus executed were ultimately executed themselves, but the Church that Jesus Christ founded is still producing individuals that are salt and light, even as was Jesus.

Jesus is still calling for us to be salt and light. Jesus is not nearly as interested in our organizations as He is in us individually. He is still calling for us to go, to be salt and to be light. You may not be able to sing like an angel, and you may not be able to preach like Paul, but you can be salt and light in the corner of the world with which you have influence. Your evangelistic field is only as wide as your circle of acquaintances; Jesus only had eleven men as disciples when He died. But those eleven were able to influence others to realize the reality of the Resurrection and the deity of the Christ, and the group of the disciples grew individually and effectively as more and more individuals were convinced that although the wages of sin is death, that the gift of God is eternal life in Jesus Christ.

Jesus died so that we would believe in Him, and then become salt and light to those with whom we come into contact. He could have affected the whole world, but He chose to only have a few faithful disciples so that we would be encouraged by His example to touch the few with whom we come into contact, and not become discouraged simply because our reach is not as wide as that of the Jewish and Roman leadership. So, let us emulate the example of Jesus, live in the real world, and not in our little artificial church bubbles, and, as Jesus instructs us, in

**Matthew 5:13-16:**

**13 “You are the salt of the earth; but if the salt loses its flavor, how shall it be seasoned? It is then good for nothing but to be thrown out and trampled underfoot by men.**

**14 “You are the light of the world. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hidden.**

**15 Nor do they light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a lampstand, and it gives light to all who are in the house.**

**16 Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven.**

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