

What's the Message – Lesson 105

Our lesson today is entitled, the victory of The Cross.

Greetings in the name of Jesus, our Savior. Oh, Lord, we pray that through our humble witness, the world may know Your love, a love so great that You went to The Cross on our behalf, and died that we might live with you forever. Amen.

We have previously discussed the wonderful truth that Jesus has saved us from the ultimate consequence of sin, the consequence of eternal death and separation from God. Today we look into a paradox, the claim that the death of Jesus on the cross was in fact a victory.

How could this be? The Roman punishment of crucifixion was reserved for only the worst of criminals, or enemies of the state. Our world today views the death of an enemy as the defeat of that person. How could someone who has been defeated be considered victorious in any fashion?

And why would anyone want to kill Jesus in the first place? Think of all the good things He had done for the people. Recall how Jesus answered the disciples of John the Baptist when they asked, *Are you He who is to come, or shall we look for another? And Jesus answered them, Go and tell John what you hear and see: the blind receive their sight and the lame walk, lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear, and the dead are raised up, and the poor have good news preached to them.* (Matt. 11:3-5)

In spite of all this, there were others, powerful men of the Jewish nation, who did not see the acts Jesus performed as being good, at least not for them. Dale, please read what Dr. Paul Maier says about this in his book, **In the Fullness of Time**.

“The conspiracy against Jesus had been building for at least three years, and the sources record seven instances of official plotting against Him, two efforts at arrest, and three assassination attempts before the events of Holy

Week. A formal decision to arrest Jesus had in fact been made several months earlier, probably at a secret session of the Sanhedrin, the great Judean senate. Jerusalem had been rocking with the news that Jesus had supposedly raised Lazarus of Bethany from the dead, and people were feverish with excitement over the fact that Jesus was performing exactly the great signs expected of the Messiah, that religio-political figure who, in the popular interpretation, was to deliver the land from foreign domination.

“So if Jesus is allowed to continue performing His signs, however He does them, opined one Sanhedrist, he will win over our entire population, and then the Romans will come and destroy our Temple and our nation. It was the high priest, Joseph Caiaphas, who quickly raised his hands to silence the growing hubbub that followed this comment, and now he skewered the mood of alarm with pontifical authority: You do not understand, my brothers, that it is better for you to have one man die for the people than to have the whole nation destroyed.

“For the public safety, the sacrifice of a single troublemaker was not too high a price to pay.”

So the Jewish leaders saw Jesus as a trouble-maker, a threat to them. Here is another contrast. In the Gospel of John, (8:12) Jesus says: *I am the light of the world; he who follows Me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.* But some people don't want the light to shine too brightly on their life. As Jesus also said (John 3:19), *And this is the judgment, that the light has come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil.*

And the light that radiated from Jesus was extremely bright, too much so for some because it challenged their power. As Rev. Harley Swiggum has expressed it: this light “lashed at evil's face (Matt. 23:13-37); struck out at self-righteousness (Luke 18:10-14); shook the very foundations of evil men who imagined themselves honorable (Matt. 5:20-48); exposed hypocrisy (Matt. 6:1-5, 7:21); put the label of uselessness upon some of the things which men treasure the most (Matt.6:19); enraged bigots (John 7:45-49); exposed the proud pretenders (Matt. 9:10-13); angered stubborn men who refused to see (John 9:1-41); and laid bare ugly motives (Matt. 21:12-13).”

“And sinful men, furious with rage over the invasion of God’s light into human affairs led the Christ to a cross and crucified Him.” And they thought – with this act – they had eliminated Jesus once and for all. But they had forgotten one important thing: God’s plan.

As Dr. Franzmann has written: “Jesus had explicitly foretold His death no less than three times before it took place: first at Caesarea Philippi after the disciples had confessed Him as the Christ, the Son of the living God (Matt. 16:21); again in Galilee, after the Transfiguration (Matt. 17:22-23); and for the third time as He turned His face for the last time toward Jerusalem (Matt. 20:17-19, Mark 8:31-38, Luke 18:31-33).”

And we should not forget what the prophet Isaiah had written centuries before in the glorious chapter 53 we have previously studied. The sacrifice of God’s Servant was clearly foretold. And we should also go all the way back to the beginning, to the Garden of Eden and Genesis 3:15 where God speaks to Satan: *I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her seed; He shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise His heel.*

In hindsight we see this as a prophecy of the sacrifice that God had already planned to reconcile mankind with its Creator. So it was not evil men who were the victor, and the death of Jesus on the Cross was not a defeat. Jesus had not been eliminated as they had hoped – Jesus rose from that grave and lives among us today. Through the cross and resurrection, He was victorious over death, and had accomplished the purpose for which He came to earth.

Next time we will begin our study of the new church.