

GOD WITH US

Part 8: JESUS

Message 10 – Tradition-Crasher: Why the Religious Leaders Hated Jesus

Introduction

Jesus went to the cross because God His Father sent Him into the world to die a sacrificial death for the sins of the world. Yet, God allowed *human agency* to be the means by which Jesus was taken to the cross. While the Roman leaders were involved because their authority was required to impose the death penalty, it was the Jewish religious leaders in that day who sought to do away with Jesus. They saw Jesus as a threat to their authority, their beliefs, and to the tenuous stability they had managed to broker with the Romans. At the deepest heart level, they rejected Jesus because they were unwilling to acknowledge that God the Father had sent Him into the world. Jesus said this of their hatred toward Him:

“He who hates Me hates My Father as well. If I had not done among them what no one else did, they would not be guilty of sin. But now they have seen these miracles, and yet they have hated both Me and My Father. But this is to fulfill what was written in their LAW: ‘They hated Me without a cause’” (John 15:23-25)

In this study, we will look at six primary factors that led to their rejection of Jesus.

1. Jesus crossed their lines.

The Pharisees were the largest and most influential religious party in Jesus’ day. They had great sway over the common people. As their name implies (“Pharisee” means “separate ones”), they believed that righteous people should *separate* from unrighteous people. They ‘drew lines’ between themselves and those they regarded as ‘sinful.’

Jesus crossed lines instead of drawing lines. He spent time with ‘irreligious’ and/or ‘unrighteous’ people. This disturbed the religious leaders greatly, causing them to unjustly label and mock Jesus. Nowhere was this clearer than when Jesus called Matthew (Levi), a Jewish tax collector, to be one of His twelve disciples.

As Jesus went on from there, He saw a man called Matthew, sitting in the tax collector's booth; and He said to him, "Follow Me!" And he got up and followed Him. Then it happened that as Jesus was reclining at the table in the house, behold, many tax collectors and sinners came and were dining with Jesus and His disciples. When the Pharisees saw this, they said to His disciples, "Why is your Teacher eating with the tax collectors and sinners?" (Matt.9:9-11).

To dine with another person in that day was an indication of friendship. Jesus' constant association with such people caused the Pharisees to malign Him as 'a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners' (Matt.11:19). Jesus' reply shows how little they understood His mission and His methods, and His definition of the word 'sinner.'

But when Jesus heard this, He said, "It is not those who are healthy who need a physician, but those who are sick. But go and learn what this means: 'I desire compassion, and not sacrifice,' for I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners" (Matt.9:12,13).

His mission was to bring the healing message of God's love and forgiveness to people who knew that they needed it. The problem with the Pharisees was not only that they 'drew lines;' but also the fact that they were *blind to their own sin and need for a Savior*. They did not recognize that from God's perspective *they, too, were on the wrong side of 'the line.'* The apostle Paul was a self-righteous Pharisee before he saw his own sin and became a Christian. He gave his testimony to King Agrippa; "*The Jews all know the way I have lived ever since I was a child, from the beginning of my life... that according to the strictest sect of our religion, I lived as a Pharisee. I too was convinced that I ought to do all that was possible to oppose the name of Jesus of Nazareth*" (Acts 26:4,5,9). He wrote in the book of Romans what he came to understand after his conversion:

"There is none righteous, not even one . . . All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:9,23).

The parable of the tax collector and the Pharisee, found only in Luke's gospel, powerfully illustrates the principle: *mercy from God will flow to the person who cries out for it.*

"He also told this parable to some people who trusted in

themselves that they were righteous, and viewed others with contempt: 'Two men went up into the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. The Pharisee stood and was praying this to himself: 'God, I thank You that I am not like other people: swindlers, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week; I pay tithes of all that I get.' But the tax collector, standing some distance away, was even unwilling to lift up his eyes to heaven, but was beating his breast, saying, 'God, be merciful to me, the sinner!' I tell you, this man went to his house justified rather than the other; for everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but he who humbles himself will be exalted" (Luke 18:9-14).

A 'holier-than-thou' attitude is disgusting in God's sight. We should all recognize our spiritual poverty ('poor in spirit' as Jesus said in Matt.5:3) which is to realize how unworthy of God's love and forgiveness we are, in light of His holy standards. Ask God to reveal any traces of spiritual pride within you. Pride comes when we compare ourselves with other people and think we are much better. Other people are not the standard! What matters is what Jesus sees. His mercy is available to each of us, yet we need to see ourselves like the tax collector—one in need of His mercy and forgiveness. Then, realize that God wants to use us to become a messenger of mercy to people who recognize their need for it. Are there people you have been avoiding because they are 'bad people?' Ask God to reveal how He might want to use you to bring the message of His amazing grace to someone near you who needs God's love and forgiveness desperately.

2. Jesus rejected their male arrogance.

Rabbis (teachers) in Jesus' day did not have female disciples. Jesus, in contrast, welcomed women to play key roles in His life and mission. Women supported His mission out of their private means (Luke 8:1-3). Mary of Bethany was given the honor of anointing Jesus in preparation for His death and burial (John 12:1-8), being defended by Jesus when His disciples rebuked her; "*Leave her alone. It was intended that she should save this perfume for the day of my burial*" (12:7). Women, particularly Mary Magdalene (John 20:10-18), were the first witnesses to the resurrection of Jesus. His value of women and their equal opportunity to be acknowledged and forgiven, was illustrated one day at a meal in a Pharisee's home.

Now one of the Pharisees was requesting Him to dine with him,

and He entered the Pharisee's house and reclined at the table. And there was a woman in the city who was a sinner; and when she learned that He was reclining at the table in the Pharisee's house, she brought an alabaster vial of perfume, and standing behind Him at His feet, weeping, she began to wet His feet with her tears, and kept wiping them with the hair of her head, and kissing His feet and anointing them with the perfume. Now when the Pharisee who had invited Him saw this, he said to himself, "If this man were a prophet He would know who and what sort of person this woman is who is touching Him, that she is a sinner" (Luke 7:36-39).

The Pharisees must have been shocked at several things: 1) That this 'sinful woman' dared to walk right in on a private meal in a Pharisee's home; 2) That Jesus dared to give her respect and attention when He had been invited to *their feast*; 3) That He allowed a 'sinful woman' to touch Him in such a personal manner. In response to their disdain, Jesus told a parable about two debtors, one that had been forgiven a great debt, and one a lesser debt (Luke 7:40-50). He made the point that the one who had been forgiven a greater debt was far more moved with gratitude and loved more. Then, Jesus honored this 'sinful woman' above the Pharisees:

Turning toward the woman, He said to Simon, "Do you see this woman? I entered your house; you gave Me no water for My feet, but she has wet My feet with her tears and wiped them with her hair. You gave Me no kiss; but she, since the time I came in, has not ceased to kiss My feet. You did not anoint My head with oil, but she anointed My feet with perfume. For this reason I say to you, her sins, which are many, have been forgiven, for she loved much; but he who is forgiven little, loves little" (7:44-47).

It was customary in that day to provide 3 things for a visiting guest: 1) Water to wash the dust off their feet, 2) a kiss on the cheek as a sign of welcome, 3) perfumed oil to act as a deodorant. Simon the Pharisee had not provided any of these 3 things for Jesus! But the woman, in her own way, had provided all 3. He was saying, in effect: *She loves Me far more than you (and all of your friends) do!* Jesus concluded by sending the woman away with 3 powerful, redeeming statements: *Your sins have been forgiven. Your faith has saved you. Go in peace.* (Don't you wonder how the rest of that visit to Simon's home played out as Jesus had a meal with them?)

MEN: We live in a day when women are being dishonored and abused by men. As a result, women are crying out for the respect and dignity that is their due. Both male and female have been equally endowed with God's Divine image (Genesis 1:27). How does Jesus' example of honoring women challenge you to honor the women in your world? In the home, at work, at school, on the team, in the community? Are there ways that you have been mistreating or disrespecting women? How can you elevate women in your sphere of influence? Remember, the way that you treat women will send a loud message to those who are watching you. Walk in the footsteps of Jesus and "grant honor to women, as fellow-heirs of the grace of life" (1Peter 3:7).

3. Jesus nullified their traditions.

The Pharisees honored a body of laws called "the tradition of the elders." These were teachings of rabbis that had been memorized and transmitted verbally over several hundred years, as various teachers sought to interpret and apply the ancient laws of Moses to new situations. The Pharisees held these oral teachings to be of equal authority with the written word of God. Jesus had a very different view of this body of extra-biblical traditions. (See Mark 7:1-13 for the fullest explanation of this issue.)

In particular, Jesus broke the 'extra Laws' of the Sabbath Day. It was emphasized as a key issue throughout His ministry. Many extra-biblical regulations had been added to the Sabbath day. The original commandment was that "no work" should be done on the Sabbath (Exodus 20:8-11). But the rabbis focused a great detail on what constituted any form of "work." They specified how many steps one could take on the Sabbath before it became "work." They said that you could eat grain, but if you hand-picked the grain and rubbed it in your hand to get rid of the chaff, that constituted "threshing" and that was "work" (see Mark 2:23-28). They also said that no healing could be done on the Sabbath. Jesus rejected this notion because He saw healing someone as 'doing good' on the Sabbath—which brings delight to our soul. They hated Him for it:

He entered again into a synagogue; and a man was there whose hand was withered. They were watching Him to see if He would heal him on the Sabbath, so that they might accuse Him. He said to the man with the withered hand, "Get up and come forward!" And He said to them, "Is it lawful to do good or to do

harm on the Sabbath, to save a life or to kill?” But they kept silent. After looking around at them with anger, grieved at their hardness of heart, He said to the man, “Stretch out your hand.” And he stretched it out, and his hand was restored. The Pharisees went out and immediately began conspiring with the Herodians against Him, as to how they might destroy Him (Mark 3:1-6).

Above all, they hated Jesus because He called Himself “*the Lord of the Sabbath*” (Mark 2:28). He claimed to have divine authority over *the very day that was made to honor God!*

One of the 8 marks of a disciple at Oak Pointe Church is that we LISTEN to God’s voice. In particular, this means that we give great attention to the Word of God, the Bible. Both in Jesus’ day and today, people accumulate extra-biblical teachings and hold them to be of equal or greater value than the Word of God contained in the 66 books of the Bible. When we add to (or subtract from) the accepted canon of Scripture, we fall into the error of the Pharisees. How about you? Do you tend to read other ‘religious’ or ‘spiritual’ literature more than actually reading the Bible? It is rare in our day to spend time reading the Bible. Are there sources of authority that you have elevated to be on par with or greater than God’s Word? Or, have you ‘subtracted from’ the Word of God in some way? Are you LISTENING daily to the voice of God, as He comes to you through the sacred Scriptures?

4. Jesus rebuked their hearts.

Jesus showed compassionate mercy toward most people, including those who did not choose to follow Him (eg. the rich, young ruler, Mark 10:21). Yet, He was very forceful in His condemnation of the religious leaders because they were responsible to shepherd people in the ways of God. Instead, they were leading people astray and operating out of evil, selfish motives. They were even excommunicating people from the Jewish synagogues if they believed in Jesus (see John 12:42). In Matthew 12 the conflict between Jesus and the Pharisees came to a head when, after one of His miracles, they accused Him of being an agent of the devil.

“This man casts out demons only by Beelzebul the ruler of the demons” (Matt.12:24).

In response, Jesus pulled back the curtain on their hearts and condemned them. 1) He said that “*the kingdom of God had come*

upon them” even though they were too stubborn to accept it (12:28). 2) He warned them that they were on the verge of committing the “*unforgivable sin – blasphemy of the Spirit of God*” (12:31,32). 3) He told them they were a “*brood of vipers filled with evil and unable to speak good words*” (12:34). 4) He called them an “*evil generation that craved signs, but would be given no more signs except the resurrection of Jesus from the dead*” (12:38-40). 5) He told them that the ancient “*men of Nineveh, who repented at the preaching of Jonah, would condemn them on the day of judgment*” (12:41). 6) He told them that it was they, not He, who were “*inhabited by evil spirits, and their demon-filled condition was getting worse, not better*” (12:43-45).

Did Jesus have *no love* for Pharisees? Yes, He did. We have already seen His conversation with Nicodemus (John 3). We also noted that both Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea believed in Jesus and gave His body a proper burial (John 19:38-42). It was the hard-hearted Pharisees that were leading people astray that Jesus was so hard on. We should not be surprised at this. In the Old Testament, God had harsh words for the false shepherds that were leading His flock astray (Ezekiel 34), and in the New Testament the apostle James warned that those who step up to be spiritual teachers “*will incur a stricter judgment*” (James 3:1). (Matthew devoted an entire chapter to Jesus’ sermon on the hypocrisy of these leaders; ch.23).

Spiritual ‘hardness of heart’ is a condition that occurs over time as people repeatedly refuse to heed God’s words. The book of Hebrews was written to warn people about hardening their hearts against God (see Heb. 3:8,15; 4:7). God is patient with people, but at a certain point He will give us over to our own desires (see the repeated phrase, “gave them over” in Romans 1:24,26,28). It is the people in our life who know us the best, and usually care about us the most, who try to get us to pay attention to areas where we have become ‘hardened’ and ‘unaware’ of how we are thinking and acting, impacting ourselves and others. Is there any area of your life where you know that God has been trying to get your attention, usually through someone who loves you? How have you been resisting His voice through their gentle prodding? What is He asking you to do?

5. Jesus stirred their envy.

Jesus’ popularity with the common people was a great threat to the

religious establishment. Multitudes had been flocking to Jesus for 3 years (just as they had flocked to John the Baptist before Him). In the final weeks leading up to His crucifixion, Jesus had raised Lazarus from the dead, causing a massive crowd to lead Him in a triumphal procession into Jerusalem for the Passover festival (John 12:12-18). The religious leaders realized they were losing control. They needed to act quickly to stop Jesus.

The chief priests and the Pharisees convened a council, and were saying, “What are we doing? For this man is performing many signs. If we let Him go on like this, all men will believe in Him, and the Romans will come and take away both our place and our nation” (John 11:47,48).

It was Caiaphas the High Priest who declared that Jesus must die, lest the Roman army come in to silence all the commotion.

“It is expedient for you that one man die for the people, and that the whole nation not perish” (John 11:50).

Thus, Jesus ended up standing before Pontius Pilate, the Roman governor, on Friday morning of the Passover festival. The Jewish leaders made up a false charge that they thought would carry weight with Pilate: Jesus was leading *a revolt* against Caesar. Yet, Pilate saw beneath their maneuverings. He knew what was stirring in their hearts. So, he did something that forced them to reveal their true designs against Jesus. He examined Jesus and found *no basis to their charge* that He was an insurrectionist stirring up opposition to Caesar. He then proposed a choice: He would either release a Jewish prisoner named Barabbas, *who was in jail for insurrection and murder*, or He would release Jesus *whom he had found not guilty of the charge of insurrection*:

Pilate answered them, saying, “Do you want me to release for you the King of the Jews?” For he was aware that the chief priests had handed Him over because of envy. But the chief priests stirred up the crowd to ask him to release Barabbas for them instead (Mark 15:9,10).

Pilate knew their real issue with Jesus was envy, not insurrection. Otherwise, why would they ask that a convicted insurrectionist be released so that they could crucify an un-convicted insurrectionist? They did not care about a threat to Caesar. They cared only about a threat to themselves!

Envy - the desire to have what someone else has - takes root when we look at other people and start comparing. Then, we conclude that life is "not fair;" that we deserve our share of what they have. Envy leads to complaining about unfairness and scheming ways to get our fair share. 1Corinthians 13:4 says: "Love is patient and kind; love does not envy or boast; it is not arrogant". Is there envy brewing in your heart? What do you complain to God about the most?

6. Jesus claimed to be their God.

Jesus continually made claims about Himself that outraged the religious leaders. He constantly talked as if He was GOD. The gospel of John highlights Jesus' claims to be divine.

"My Father is working until now, and I Myself am working." For this reason the Jews were seeking all the more to kill Him, because He not only was breaking the Sabbath, but also was calling God His own Father, making Himself equal with God (John 5:17,18).

"Truly, truly, I say to you, if anyone keeps My word he will never see death." The Jews said to Him, "Now we know that You have a demon. Abraham died, and the prophets also; and You say, 'If anyone keeps My word, he will never taste of death.' Surely You are not greater than our father Abraham, who died? The prophets died too; whom do You make Yourself out to be?" (John 8:51-53).

"Your father Abraham rejoiced to see My day, and he saw it and was glad." So, the Jews said to Him, "You are not yet fifty years old, and have You seen Abraham?" Jesus said to them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was born, I am." Therefore, they picked up stones to throw at Him, but Jesus hid Himself and went out of the temple (John 8:56-59).

"My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me; and I give eternal life to them, and they will never perish; and no one will snatch them out of My hand. My Father, who has given them to Me, is greater than all; and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father's hand. I and the Father are one." The Jews picked up stones again to stone Him.³² Jesus answered them, "I showed you many good works from the Father; for which of them are you stoning Me?"³³ The Jews answered Him, "For a good work we do not stone You, but for blasphemy; and because You, being a man, make Yourself out to be God" (John 10:27-33).

Concerning the astounding self-claims made by Jesus, C.S. Lewis (a British professor at both Cambridge and Oxford Universities, who was an atheist before he came to believe in Christ) wrote the following insightful (and oft-quoted) comments:

“I am trying here to prevent anyone saying the really foolish thing that people often say about Him: I’m ready to accept Jesus as a great moral teacher, but I don’t accept his claim to be God. That is the one thing we must not say. A man who was merely a man and said the sort of things Jesus said would not be a great moral teacher. He would either be a lunatic — on the level with the man who says he is a poached egg — or else he would be the Devil of Hell. You must make your choice. Either this man was, and is, the Son of God, or else a madman or something worse. You can shut him up for a fool, you can spit at him and kill him as a demon or you can fall at his feet and call him Lord and God, but let us not come with any patronizing nonsense about his being a great human teacher. He has not left that open to us. He did not intend to.”
C.S. Lewis – *Mere Christianity*

Discussion Questions

1. What have you learned about Jesus in this lesson that you did not know before? From which of these 6 categories of Jesus crashing through established traditions do you find inspiration and personal challenge?
2. Have you ever been hated or rejected for no good reason (without a cause)? What did that feel like?
3. Have you ever been envied by another person who tried to take you down or ruin your reputation? Have you done it to someone else? How does learning that God - our Savior Jesus - personally experienced envy and suffering from leaders, draw your mind and heart toward Him?
4. Jesus did and said a lot of things that shocked the religious leaders of His day. As you have been, or are coming to know Jesus in your own life story, what has shocked, puzzled, or delighted you the most about Him?

Eg: I, Bob, was totally surprised by the message that Jesus had died on the cross to take away all of my sins; that I could not work hard enough or do enough to “earn” God’s amazing grace; that it was a free gift of love from Jesus to me. And, I am humbly reminded that Jesus continues to love me and even use me in spite of my on-going short-comings. He indeed is a God worth living my life for!