

Attitudes Around The Cross

Introduction. The death of Christ for the sins of mankind is the central doctrine of the Bible. By his own deliberate rebellion against God, man is hopelessly lost in sin. He cannot save himself. It is only through God's mercy and obedience to Christ's commands that salvation is available to man.

A wide display of insightful attitudes toward Jesus can be seen around the cross. We must be cautious lest the wrong kind of attitude be found in us. There are four different groups which we will study in this lesson.

I. The Attitude Of The Soldiers

- A. We first see the Roman soldiers during the scourging of Jesus. They were no strangers to torture and death. Their governor had said that He was innocent of any crime, the only possible crime being that He claimed to be the King of the Jews. As they looked at Him, His appearance was far from royalty.
- B. Due to Jesus' claim of being the King of the Jews, the soldiers were provided a source of entertainment. How could they abuse the Son of God (Matthew 27:27-31; Mark 15:16-20; Luke 23:11; John 19:1-5)? How could they mock Him (Luke 23:36)? We cannot excuse their actions, but we can understand their position. The Romans did not regard life as a valued resource. If one was so badly in debt that he was unable to pay his debts, it was considered honorable if that person would take their own life.
- C. Their indifference is especially noticeable in the irreverent manner in which they cast lots for His garments, apparently the only possessions He had of any worth (Matthew 27:35; Luke 23:34; John 19:23; cp. Luke 9:58).
 1. The Romans had no concept of religion. Their honor went to Caesar. However, what these Roman soldiers did not know was that they were part of a divine plan (Psalm 22:16-18). Prophecy was fulfilled!
 2. When one of the Roman soldiers witnessed all the supernatural events surrounding His death on the cross, he expressed his faith in Christ (Matthew 27:54; Mark 15:39; Luke 23:47). Whether they did anything with their faith in Christ, we do not know; but they came to know that He was the Christ.
- D. You may care about your job, politics, possessions, or children, but how much do you really care about your destiny and about Jesus? How much less indifferent are you than those hard-hearted Roman soldiers who gambled for the Savior's few garments (cp. Luke 8:12; 11:7; 14:20).

II. The Attitude Of The Leaders

- A. The chief priests and scribes were the religious leaders of the nation. They read the scriptures on a daily basis, they studied the revelation of God. All of the Old Testament was before their eyes, yet they were blind.
 1. The Jews who were mocking Christ admired Moses, Samuel, and David, but the One at their side was greater than these! The blind could see, but the priests and scribes who had their sight could not. All they saw was a crusader who dared to challenge their authority.

2. From the start of Jesus' ministry, the chief priests and scribes persecuted Him. They followed Him everywhere, searching for error. Much to their dismay, they found none. In fact, He turned the people against them, revealing their error.
- B. The Jewish leaders remind me of our modern denominational evangelists.
1. They were hypocritical.
 - a) Scripture reveals a number of instances of their hypocrisy (Matthew 15:1-9; 22:18; Mark 12:13-14; John 8:4-9; 9:24; 19:15).
 - b) They were reproved by John (Matthew 3:7-10) and Jesus (Matthew 6:2-8, 16-18; 15:1-9; 16:1-12; 21:33-46; 23:2-33; Luke 11:14-54; 12:1; 15:1-9).
 2. They were hungry for power.
 - a) They were accustomed to the attention of the people in religious affairs. Jesus of Nazareth was changing that. He taught new doctrine.
 - b) The people were captivated by His ability to expound the scriptures (Matthew 7:28-29; 22:33). So taken by His teachings were they, that many departed from listening to the Jewish leaders.
- C. We may have faith in Christ, and may profess to be His, but cannot rebel against His control of our lives (Galatians 2:20; 5:24). The chief priests and scribes wanted the power and control of the nation. When we give ourselves to Christ, He reigns as King. All of us, whether teacher, preacher, member, elder, or deacon, are ultimately are subject to Him.

III. *The Attitude Of The Crowd*

- A. The people of Jerusalem are an interesting group. They had seen Jesus on several occasions, and had come to believe that He was the Messiah (Luke 19:38; cp. Matthew 21:9; Mark 11:9-10).
1. They had been awaiting the time that God would send His Deliverer. They had been subject to evil authorities for too long, and now, Jesus of Nazareth would arm the people of God to fight and free them from all oppression.
 2. The people believed Jesus came to fight a physical war, to sit on a physical throne, and to reign as a physical King.
- B. Jesus taught otherwise. He taught of a heavenly kingdom, a home beyond the skies. Some of the people may have understood, but if there were any, they were few. Even His own disciples struggled with the idea of a spiritual kingdom.
1. They could not comprehend that victory over and freedom from oppression would be found in humility and surrender.
 2. During the morning hours of that Friday the multitudes were swayed. The chief priests and scribes persuaded the people that they ought to ask for Barabbas to be released, and for Jesus to be crucified. They called forth to Pilate, "Let Him be crucified" (Luke 23:21).
- C. Pilate spoke back, "Shall I crucify your King?" and "We have no king but Caesar" came the reply (John 19:15).
1. Days before, Jesus was a man of God in their eyes, but now, He was a mere criminal, a fraud, worthy of being mocked (Matthew 27:39-40; Mark 15:29-30). What happened?

2. Mankind is fickle, and while a lot of time has gone by, mankind is not very different from these people in Jerusalem (Ecclesiastes 4:13-16). If we are not careful, we can fall to the same fate as they.

IV. The Attitude Of The Women

- A. Jesus, as He hung on the cross, saw many people. Although most were cruel to Him, there were some whom He saw that caused gladness in His heart: Mary, the wife of Cleophas; Mary Magdalene; Mary, the mother of Jesus; and his mother's sister, who likely was Salome, the mother of James and John (Luke 23:49; Mark 15:40-41; Matthew 27:55-56; John 19:25-27).
 1. The pain that Mary must have felt is unimaginable. As Jesus grew older, Mary looked on as He talked with the religious leaders. As He began His ministry, she too was with Him.
 2. She was witness to His first miracle, and no doubt many more to follow. Mary reminds us of the great cost of our redemption.
- B. These were not disciples of great stature or popularity. They were the quiet workers who had deep convictions and great courage (Luke 8:1-3).
 1. The women would have had the same growing despair, the same sickening disappointment the disciples felt on seeing the cause collapse to which they had given themselves for time and eternity (Luke 24:21; cp. 1:68; 2:38).
 2. When the going got tough, they stuck by Him. That is perseverance and courage. The chosen ones had run off in the face of danger (Matthew 26:56; Mark 14:50), they did not. Will you face danger, embarrassment, and mocking to be faithful to Him (Matthew 5:10-12)?

Conclusion. Has it occurred to you to ask in which group you would have been a part of had you been there? Of course, it is easy now to say which were right and which were wrong. It is always easy to admire the heroes and the causes of bygone days.

In striking contrast with the emotions and attitudes of these different groups, is the sublime serenity of the One crucified. When Jesus asked that we bear our cross, it is for but a moment that we might gain everlasting life (Matthew 16:24). Simon was willing to bear the Lord's cross (Matthew 27:32; Mark 15:21; Luke 23:26) — are you?