

Jesus: The Man and the Message

Around this time of the year there is a renewed fascination with who Jesus was historically. It's a season where we really celebrate the humanity of Jesus. Jesus the Man is fascinating, inspiring, and compelling.

In this message, we will explore who Jesus historically and in His humanity. And will examine the political and religious landscape into which Jesus the man was born.

When we can better understand His CONTEXT, we can better understand His CONTENT.

When we don't understand His CONTEXT too well, we may misunderstand His CONTENT.

We can more accurately describe what Jesus meant, when understand who the world He grew up in and the people/mindsets He was speaking into.

Jesus was a Jew.

Jesus wasn't a Christian, that was an institution or religion created after His death. By the way, for 2000 years, there are many things that have been done by the Christian religion, Christian institutions, Christian members, Christian leaders, that is so contrary to the heart and intent of Jesus of Nazareth. In the History of Christianity, Christians have acted more like Hitler and Osama Bin Laden, than they have Jesus.

Ghandi said (photo 1)

“I like Jesus, His teachings, and seriously considered embracing the Christian faith. The gentle figure of Christ, so patient, so kind, so loving, so full of forgiveness that he taught his followers not to retaliate when abused or struck, but to turn the other cheek, I thought it was a beautiful example of the perfect man...I love Christ, but am not so keen on his followers.” and/or “I would have been a follower of Christ, if it weren't for the Christians!” - Mahatma Gandhi

Let's take a closer look at Jesus, what did He teach, what did He mean, what did He intend, what was He for, what was He against, what was He all about.

Jesus came into the world during a time of great division.

The Jewish people had been under foreign occupation and oppression for centuries since 586 BC, starting with the Assyrians, the Babylonians, the Medo-Persians, the Greeks, and now the Romans.

The Jews were confused, angry, resentful, blame shifting, creating doctrines out of their theories.

Now, they were trying to find answers to this nagging, painful, yet valid question:

“Why would God allow these pagan nations who worship false gods to oppress God’s chosen people who believe in the One True and Living God?”

By this time, the Roman emperors proclaimed themselves as God or divinity. This made them ask this question with even more fury.

In this prison of a predicament - there were four primary responses from the Jewish people. They built tribes around their conclusions. Which we still do today, by the way. They found their identity in their affiliations, of course they believed that their group was right, and everyone else was off.

- 1) **Zealots: THE TERRORIST.** (photo 2) They believed that the reason they were oppressed was because they were passive and cowardly. They rallied saying, "If we just have courage and rebel, God will give us the victory! Let's slit the throats of the Romans!" Their favorite stories were David and Goliath, Samson, and anything violent.
- 2) **Herodians: THE BUTT-KISSERS.** (Photo 3) They were those who supported the Roman puppet, Herod. Herod was employed by Rome to rule on their behalf. These were the Sadducees, they thought that the Zealots were out of their mind. They believed that to rebel was a waste of time and energy and was a death wish. They believed they needed to cooperate the best they could and make the most of the situation. They were more rational. They were given benefits for their cooperative ways and were the upper class.
- 3) **Essenes: THE HERMITS.** (Photo 4) They were the mystics, the monastics. They believed that the only way to please God was to leave the corrupt systems (religious and political) and create an alternative society in the desert. They established their own communes and sought to isolate themselves from the culture they were in. They gave up on the world.
- 4) **Pharisees: THE RELIGIOUS:** (Photo 5) They were the most religious group. While the Sadducees were the political butt-kissers, the Pharisees were religious hellfire and brimstone preachers. Similar to the fundamentalists of today, who can get quite angry and mean-spirited.

They believed that there wasn't enough holiness among God's people and if there were less prostitutes, drunks, and tax-collectors (Rome supporters) then God would step in and destroy the Romans on their behalf. So they had to keep the law, and try to be pleasing to God, so that God would step in. Don't do your righteous deeds and prayers before people.

They did not really get along.

Just like there are political wars today, there were battles among the four groups, bitter disputes, endless disagreements. They would bash each other too and even get violent with each other.

(Display photos as groups are mentioned)

- The Zealots would engage in terrorist acts.
- The Herodians would speak against the Zealots and preach allegiance to Rome.
- The Pharisees would preach against everyone:
 - The Zealots, saying, "Just get holy- keep the law, your fighting the wrong enemy- you should fight your sins."
 - They would fight the Herodians, saying, "You need to fast and pray more, not kiss butt."
- The Essenes thought they were the only one true church, the uncontaminated ones, and God was going to judge everyone, but them.

Then, Jesus comes on the scene and stepped on everyone's toes!

He didn't fit in any of those boxes.

He came to provide an alternative.

He came to lead a revolution.

Was Jesus a ZEALOT: A TERRORIST?

**“38‘You have heard that it was said, ‘Eye for eye, and tooth for tooth.’^h
39But I tell you, do not resist an evil person. If anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to them the other cheek also. 40And if anyone wants to sue you and take your shirt, hand over your coat as well. 41If anyone forces you to go one mile, go with them two miles. 42Give to the one who asks you, and do not turn away from the one who wants to borrow from you.” (Matthew 5:38-42)**

Jesus taught that if someone slaps you, turn the other cheek, and if someone asks you to go one mile, go with him two. By the way this had to do with their relationship to their oppressors. The Roman Soldiers could force any Jew by law, who wasn't a Roman Citizen, to carry their equipment for one mile. If he would say no, he would be put into prison.

43‘You have heard that it was said, ‘Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ 44But I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, 45that you may be children of your Father in heaven. He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous. 46If you love those who love you, what reward will you get? Are not even the tax collectors doing that? 47And if you greet only your own people, what are you doing more than others? Do not even pagans do that? 48Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.”

I'm sure there were some zealots in the crowd and this just infuriated them. He was teaching something completely contrary to what they have been trumpeting.

The Zealots saw the Romans as their enemies, and Jesus is saying, “Love your enemies...Love the Roman oppressors, pray for them.”

He would tell these angry men full of testosterone in the eye and say,

“Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.” (Matthew 5:5)

“Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.” (Matthew 5:9)

There was a time when Peter took out a sword and cut off the ear of a Roman soldier, and Jesus healed the ear and warned Peter that to live by the sword was to die by the sword (Matthew 26:52).

When his disciples wanted to call down fire on those who resisted Him, Jesus told that that is not His spirit/His teaching/His way (Luke 9:55).

Now, they may be thinking to themselves, *“Oh, Jesus is a Herodian, He’s a sadducee. Telling us to cooperate with Rome!”*

Now could Jesus have been a HERODIAN (Sadducee): BUTT-KISSER?

But He’s going to step all over their toes too!

He would warn people of Herod (Mark 8:15), calling people to watch out, don’t emulate him.

He would call Herod a fox in public (Luke 13:32) and refused to be intimidated by Herod.

**“At that very hour, some Pharisees came to Jesus and told Him, “Leave this place and get away, because Herod wants to kill You.”
32But Jesus replied, “Go tell that fox, ‘Look, I will keep driving out**

demons and healing people today and tomorrow, and on the third day I will reach My goal.” (Luke 13:32-33)

Jesus would speak of an afterlife, when they (specifically the Sadducees, who were Herodians) didn't believe in such. They didn't believe in eternal rewards and punishment, when Jesus suggested they was.

They didn't believe in a Resurrection, so they probably didn't like Jesus or the early followers of Jesus.

They didn't believe in spirits, and Jesus kept casting out evil spirits out of people on a regular basis.

They were really protective of their doctrine, and were infuriated by those who had a different perspective.

The Sadducees were rivals with the Pharisees, so loving your neighbor to the Sadducee meant loving a Pharisee who they saw as someone who were heretics, perverters of orthodoxy.

Also they didn't want to fight for social justice, but social peace.

Jesus calls us to fight for social justice- which was about treating people right and fighting for the less fortunate.

“Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness’ sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.” (Matthew 5:8)

They were rich, Jesus calls them to care for the poor, clothe the poor, feed the poor. I'm sure the poor were saying, “AMEN! HE IS A TRUE PROPHET”.

Now could Jesus have been a PHARISEE: THE RELIGIOUS?

So now, the Sadducees are probably thinking that Jesus was a Pharisee! He casts out demons. He speaks of an afterlife, that there would be no marriage in the afterlife, there will be on-going rewards for those who chose the way of love and humility.

But He's stepping on the toes of the Pharisees too, because He likes to dine with the "enemies" of the pharisees.

He spends time with immoral people and seems to like it.

- He lets an immoral woman, give him a foot bath.
- He's hanging with all of Matthew's wild friends.
- He has a meal with Zaccheus and having a meal with someone meant you embrace them as family.
- They called him a glutton and a drunk.

Now they think Jesus is now contributing to the problem, he's only nursing the cancerous tumor (the sinners) instead of cutting it (them) off.

We are supposed to stone adulterers, they believed, and Jesus is ministering to them, fighting for them, not against them. That is driving them crazy.

To the Pharisees, loving your enemies meant loving the Tax collectors, Prostitutes, Adulterers, and Samaritans.

We are supposed to shame the divorced and have disdain for who aren't pure-breed God's people, and Jesus is having a deep conversation with the Samaritan woman at the well.

If that wasn't bad enough, Jesus looks at them and says, ***“The prostitutes and tax collectors are closer to God than you are.” (Matthew 21:31)***

Then Jesus tells these parables, designed to expose the Pharisees.

- Two men go up to the temple to pray. One thanks God that he's not like the other sinners, one beats his chest and asks for mercy, and **IRONICALLY** the one who just bragged about himself in prayer is the one not the one who is justified, and the one who humbled himself IS.
- He tells one of two sons, the younger is a wild sinner, the old is a self-righteous man, who seems to make all the right decisions on the outside. The story ends with the outwardly sinful one, being joyously reconciled with the Father and the pious son being rebuked by the Father.

He's driving them insane.

Then He shoots straight with them too, and they are steaming.

“And when you pray, do not be like the hypocrites, for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the street corners to be seen by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward in full. ⁶But when you pray, go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father, who is unseen. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.” (Matthew 6:5-6)

(In other words, don't let use righteous deeds and religious devotion to FEED YOUR EGO...and you become a hypocrite if you only care about your reputation and care less about your character.)

If He didn't dig himself in a hole already, He's about to dig Himself deeper.

They had such a high view of God, and preached about His wrath and judgment. And Jesus says, **“I and the Father are one...” (John 10:30)**

They wanted to kill Him because they thought he was blasphemous. How can you as a man, claim to be one with God, and refer to Him as your Father? But, the Pharisees missed it on God’s intent, which was oneness with people.

Jesus understood that value of a human being...no matter where they are at, no matter how lost, off-course, broken, hurting, confused they are...so he tells the story of the lost sheep. The shepherd was willing to leave the 99 to go find the one (Luke 15).

The point was that the Pharisees wanted lost people to be condemned, but God wanted them to be reconciled with Him, re-united. That brought the Father the greatest joy.

Jesus so displayed God’s compassion, He’s even going to heal people who didn’t deserve it.

- There is a man on a stretcher and Jesus is declaring forgiveness over him (Mark 2:1-10). The Pharisees and who don’t deserve it, come on, that man in the stretcher didn’t go to the temple, offer a sacrifice and make restitution- how can Jesus declare that his sins are forgiven?
- And why should God heal him? They believed that physical problems were just evidence of spiritual problems- that’s why Israel was under captivity- they had sinned against God, and went after idols. They always saw sickness as the result of sin, just like they saw their oppression as the result of sin. So why would Jesus heal such sinners?

- It went against their entire theology, that we need moral and religious purity or perfection as a prerequisite for God to move on our behalf.

Now could Jesus have been an ESSENE: THE HERMITS?

Some scholars believe that that is where John the Baptist received his training. But, they were all about leaving the world, but Jesus calls people to be the light of the world, the salt of the earth.

“You are the salt of the earth, but if salt has lost its taste, how shall its saltiness be restored? It is no longer good for anything except to be thrown out and trampled under people’s feet. You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden.” (Matthew 5:13-14)

He withdrew for only 40 days, then came back in the Power of the Spirit and said, ***“The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.” (Luke 4:18-19)***

He definitely didn’t give up on the human race. He didn’t believe people were beyond reach, fixing, healing, delivering. He believed that you aren’t supposed to run from the world, but run into the world and transform it!

Jesus spent a lot of time mingling with people in the world: all kinds of people, from Gentiles, to Pharisees, to Political leaders, to the homeless beggars, from women and children. An ex-zealots is now His disciple! **“...Simon the zealot” (Mark 3:18)**

The Essense believed that God's promises only applied to them, and God was going to judge everyone else! They had a strong sense of elitism, as did every group/tribe. They were all very nationalistic.

But Jesus talked about a day where everyone, from everywhere would be invited to enjoy the Kingdom of God.

“People will come from east and west and north and south, and will take their places at the feast in the kingdom of God.” (Luke 13:29)

When it is suggested throughout the book of Acts records that it was the Jews that killed Jesus, it was these four Jewish groups that all wanted Jesus dead, because He wouldn't conform to their ways, He wouldn't join their tribe, and He was bringing a different message, and promoting a different way of life.

Jesus saw their way as the wide road that led to destruction, and that He was presenting the narrow road, through His teachings- the way of life.

Some people were unsubscribing to their ways and joining the way of Jesus. Jesus knew that those who did so would be persecuted because the people were so tribal. If you weren't for them, you were against them.

- If you weren't going to be an Essene anymore, you may lose your family.
- If you weren't going to be a Zealot anymore, you lost your community.
- If you didn't want to be a Herodian anymore, you could be disowned.
- If you didn't want to be a Pharisee anymore, well you know what happened to Paul, they tried to kill him immediately.

Now what did the four groups have in common?

- The Jews did have something in common, they wanted God to be their King again, not the Roman Emperor or his pawn in Herod.
- They wanted God to render judgment on their enemies. They were nationalistic- some more hopeful than others.
- They dreamed that Israel would be great again as in the day of David and Solomon.

Now, Jesus was calling people to go about it in a totally different way. He was saying there is a better way than the way of the Zealots, Herodians, Pharisees, and Essenes. He was calling them to a different way of life.

Why should these four groups of people listen to Jesus and follow His teaching?

Jesus was a very unlikely candidate to lead a revolution, he didn't own a home or land, some scholars think Jesus was illiterate, He probably did not have access to the best education, although he made the most of his opportunities, He was not from a wealthy home but from the slums, not the son of a priest or a prophet- but a carpenter, born under Roman rule and domination.

He calls them all to repent. He says that there is a way to invite God's Kingdom (peace and harmony) into our lives, and here is the way!

Josephus speaks of repenting as.

“(Repentance means) Give up your agenda and trust Me (Jesus) for mine...” - Josephus, first century historian.

Jesus was saying, “Give up your ideas of what God’s Kingdom looks like and how you are going to establish the God’s Kingdom, because your terrorism, butt-kissing/compromise, religiosity, and isolationism isn’t going to work...I’ll show you that there is another way, a better way! Aren’t you sick and tired of your terrorism, butt-kissing, religiosity, and isolationism, I will lead you to a life that is characterized by REST.”

- They wanted things to change circumstantial, but Jesus was calling them to change how they treat one another. (I think we say, “We want revival!” But Jesus is saying, “Can you change how you treat one another?”)
- They wanted God to do something great and mighty one day, Jesus was asking them to love their neighbor today.
- He was calling them to overcome evil with good, not retaliating evil with evil.
- When it comes to “sinners” don’t damn them to hell, interact with them, gently and kindly, invite them to your parties, be a good neighbor.
- Be welcoming and warm to those who may be from another social class, religion, or race.
- He was calling all the groups to love one another, their enemies. To live a life of humility that can forgive and serve one another.
- Then Jesus preached generosity as a way of life...**“give, and it will be given to you. Good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over, will be put into your lap. For with the measure you use it will be measured back to you.” (Luke 6:38)**

- Jesus preached Humility. To stop thinking that they are ahead of everyone, better than everyone, and in the front of the line...for: ***“And indeed, some who are last will be first, and some who are first will be last.” (Luke 13:29)***
- He taught them to stop fighting for prestige, but to serve one other.
- He taught them to look out for one another, care about social justice and engage in mercy ministries (for these are the more important matters- Matthew 23:23)
- He believed when they took His yoke, or His teaching, it would be easy and light and lead to life and life more than abundant.
- But He warned them that if they wouldn't repent and join His way, and stay in their respective camps, that they would perish, be destroyed by the Romans or one another. ***“unless you repent, you will all likewise perish.” (Luke 13:11)***

He was a true prophet, more than a prophet of course, but a true prophet. He knew the heart of God, He was the heart of God in skin. Inviting others to know and live from the heart of God!

- He knew if they would keep pursuing their own agendas, it would lead to their own destruction.
- He knew if they would live a life of love and humility, doing what it right, treating people rightly, it would enable them to experience life as God intended. That's what the Kingdom of God is about. That's what eternal life was about. Eternal life is not just the afterlife, but the God-kind of life in the now.

Some important questions to wrestle with are:

- **Was Jesus hoping to start another religion and grow an organization, or was He seeking to revolutionize our world by changing hearts and minds?**
- Jesus is not impressed by the religion of Christianity growing in membership, but by hearts being transformed and minds being enlightened. I sad, but through out the last few thousand years, Christians have acted more like the Zealots, the Herodians, the Pharisees, and the Essenes- than Jesus.
- It's been said that not everything that glitters is gold, and along those lines, not everything "Christian" is Jesus.
- **Did Jesus call people to worship Him or to follow Him, and what is the difference?**
- This is a challenging question, but we need to ask it. I know in Revelation, we see that Jesus is being worshipped, and that's amazing, but His call and challenge was not "worship me, but follow me."
- When we decide to worship someone, we may elevate them to a pedestal and not even dream of ever becoming like them. For example, we may worship Kobe Bryant, because he was able to do something we can't and something we never will do. So it's possible that we admire Him from a distance, and position ourselves as a fan, and not work on our basketball game on the court.

- We can do that with Jesus, being a worshipful fan, but not a devoted follower. Just worshipping, but not adapting to the way of life that He prescribed and modeled.
- **The way of Jesus is one of justice, harmony, forgiveness, generosity, righteousness, love, and humility.**