

Church History – Jesus and the Church

Matt 16:18 And I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it.

The Old Testament is sprinkled with reminders of God's interest in time. 'When he established the Passover for the children of Israel, he said, "Tell your son . . . it will be like a sign . . . that the Lord brought us out of Egypt" (Exod. 13:8, 16, Niv). And when he provided the manna in the wilderness, he commanded Moses to keep a jar of it "for the generations to come" (Exod. 16:33, NIV).

Christianity is the only major "religion" to have as its central event the humiliation of its God...Crucifixion is was an awful death reserved for 'agitators, pirates, and slaves.' Jewish law cursed those hung on a tree Roman statesman *Cicero said "Let the very name of the cross be far, not only from the body of a Roman Citizen, but from his thoughts, his eyes, his ears."* – When someone was crucified a notice was raised above the condemned heads giving name and crime – Jesus' said INRI: Iesus Nazarenus, Rex Iudaeorum (Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews). Pontius Pilate, Jesus' Roman judge, intended it to be a thrust of malice at the Jews – but like the cross, Jesus' followers found special meaning in the message.

Did Jesus have anything to do with the formation of the Christian church? And if he did, how did he shape its special character? – For two years: he worked with a faithful band of disciples; **he taught them about life in what he called "the kingdom of God" and he introduced them to the "new covenant" that bound them together in forgiveness and love.**

Jesus made a persistent point about the special kind of life that separated "the kingdom of God" from rival authorities among men. His disciples came to see that following him meant saying "no" to the other voices calling for their loyalties. This was the birth of the Jesus movement and in a larger sense Jesus' "founding" of the church.

Palestine was a cross-roads of culture and peoples. Its 2,000,000 or more people—ruled by Rome — were divided by region, religion and politics.

The Jews represented half the population and despised their foreign overlords and deeply resented the signs of pagan culture in their ancient homeland. The prophets of Israel (for 100's of years) had promised a day when the Lord would deliver his people from their pagan rulers and establish His kingdom over the whole earth.

Out of the distaste for life under the Romans 4 major factions arose among the Jews, each interpreting the crisis in a differently **Pharisees ("separated ones" and they prided themselves on their strict observance of every detail of Jewish law and their extreme intolerance of people whom they considered ritually unclean).** This piety and patriotism made them respected leaders among their people.

Sadducees: Jews found Roman rule a distinct advantage They controlled the High Jewish Council (the Sanhedrin)...but they had little influence with common people. No record of any Sadducee ever becoming a Christian.

Zealots: They were bent on armed resistance to all Roman's on Israeli soil.

Essenes: No interest in politics or warfare. They withdrew to the Judean wilderness and lived in isolated monastic communities...the studied scripture and prepared for God's kingdom

Jesus had to call for the loyalty of His followers without confusing the purpose of His mission with the objectives of these other groups – it was very tough ***All 4 groups band together to get rid of Jesus in the end***

JESUS' MINISTRY

Jesus **chose** to begin his ministry by going to the Judean wilderness and going to his freaky cousin the prophet John Many thought John was the promised Messiah but he vehemently denied any such role.

He explained his mission in the words of the prophet Isaiah, *“The voice of one crying in the wilderness: Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight”* (Matt. 3:3). *“I baptize you with water.. .“ he said, “but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire”* (Luke 3:16).

Jesus, didn't remain in the desert, he began his mission in Galilee (gentle hills, warm, green valleys). He traveled from village to village throughout Galilee, preaching in synagogues in the evening and on the Sabbath. **Carrying a bundle of bread, (gasp) a wineskin and a walking stick, he hiked along the dusty highways.** At sunset he would enter a village and proceed to its synagogue. *Daniel Rops “There he probably received a warm welcome from the townspeople, who often had no resident rabbi and relied on the services of wandering teachers like Jesus. When the lamps had been lit and the men of the village had taken their places, Jesus would seat himself on the raised central platform”* and begin reading a passage from the sacred Scriptures.

The main theme of Jesus' teaching was **the kingdom of God.**

- The dramatic intervention of God in the history of the world
- The kingdom that is already here available to us in our daily life.

“But if it is by the finger of God that I cast out demons, then the kingdom of God has come upon you” (Luke 11:20). He knew his cures would be misinterpreted (another magician) so he cautioned those he healed to be silent.

JESUS' MESSAGE

Jesus told about two men who went to the temple to pray. One was a Pharisee; the other, surprisingly, was a despised tax collector (surprisingly because *“Tax collectors wouldn't pray”*). *Luke 18:11-12 The Pharisee stood up and prayed about himself: ‘God, I thank you that I am not like other men--robbers, evildoers, adulterers--or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week and give a tenth of all I get.’* Pharisees excelled in those “works of righteousness”— fasting and tithing—that set them apart from wicked men.

The fault of the prayer was in its spirit of self-righteousness and its cruel contempt for others. *V13 “But the tax collector stood at a distance. He would not even look up to heaven, but beat his breast and said, ‘God, have mercy on me, a sinner.’“*“I tell you,” said Jesus, *“this man went down to his house justified rather than the other”* (Luke 18:14). The contrast between the piety of the Pharisees and the attitude of the Jesus movement could hardly be greater.

- One was based on the observance of the hundreds of religious laws of the Jews
- The other rested upon a denial of self-righteousness and a trust in the mercy of God.

THE LAST WEEK –

The Sunday before Passover, Jesus rode into Jerusalem on a donkey in fulfillment of Zechariah's prediction (*Zech 9:9 Rejoice greatly, O Daughter of Zion! Shout, Daughter of Jerusalem! See, your king comes to you, righteous and having salvation, gentle and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey.*) Crowds threw palm branches in his path and shouted: *“Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.”* This is the only occasion when Jesus openly identified himself with the Messiah of Jewish prophecies. **The next day Jesus led a procession through Jerusalem to the temple.** There, in an act of protest reminiscent of the Old Testament prophets he *“entered the temple of God and drove out all who sold and bought in the temple, and he overturned the tables of the moneychangers, and the seats of those who sold pigeons”* (Mark 21:12). He said to them, *“It is written, ‘My house shall be called a house of prayer’; but you make it a den of robbers”* (Mark 21:13).

Talk of a messiah alarmed the temple authorities (Sadducees). They held their privileged position with the support of the Roman authorities- they concluded Jesus had to be silenced before he sparked an uprising, which the Romans would crush with brutality.

Thus, their common fear of Jesus brought about an unusual alliance between the Sadducees and their rivals, the Pharisees.

THE NEW COVENANT – Jesus new what was about to take place and showed the NC

“The next day was the first day of the Jewish Passover, and Jesus and his disciples prepared for the ritual dinner that evening. At sundown they gathered secretly at the appointed place. Their mood was solemn as they ate the meal, commemorating the Exodus of the Jews from Egypt. Reclining on couches arranged around a low table, they drank wine and ate the bitter herbs and unleavened bread.” Toward the end of the meal Jesus took a piece of bread, gave thanks to God, broke it, and said, *“This is my body which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me”* (Luke 22:19). In the same way he took a cup, saying, *“This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me”* (1 Cor. 11:25).

The “new covenant” in his own blood. His words were an echo of the prophet Jeremiah who had promised a day when the covenant on tablets of stone would be replaced by a covenant written on the hearts of men: *“This is the covenant which I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the Lord: I will put my law within them, and I will write it upon their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. . . for I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more”* (Jer. 31:33-34).

The time of the new covenant, said Jesus, has come. A new people of God, enjoying the forgiveness of sins, is now possible through the shedding of his own blood.

After the meal Jesus led the disciples to a familiar meeting place at the foot of the Mount of Olives. *“While he was still speaking, Judas came. . . and with him a great crowd, with swords and clubs, from the chief priests and the elders . . .”* (Matt. 26:47). They seized Jesus and dragged him away to the palace of Caiaphas, the high priest, in the western section of Jerusalem.

THE TRIAL AND DEATH

The Sanhedrin swept aside all tokens of justice and hastily secured two witnesses who testified against Jesus. The Court charged him with blasphemy and voted to put him to death. At dawn the Jewish authorities led Jesus out of Caiaphas’ palace and through the streets to the Antonia, a palace-fortress where the Roman governor, Pontius Pilate, was staying during the Passover.

It seemed to him that the chief priests had approached him to settle a petty religious dispute, Yet if he ignored their accusations and this Galilean eventually proved to be a traitor to Rome, his own position would be endangered. **Fearful of offending Caesar, Pilate delivered Jesus to his soldiers for crucifixion.**

When the execution party reached a hill outside Jerusalem called Golgotha, Bruce Shelly *“Each prisoner was then placed on his cross. Jesus suffered in silence as the soldiers nailed his wrists to the crosspiece with large iron spikes and drove another spike through both ankles. As they lifted his cross upright, his weight was supported by a peg jutting out from the cross between his legs.”* Then, the soldiers fastened over the cross that sign describing his crime: “Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews.”

A small group of his despairing followers watched in silence as his life slipped away, As he grew weaker and weaker Jesus cried out, “It is finished,” and yielded up his spirit. *Within hours a friend, Joseph from Arimathea, carried Jesus’ body into his garden.* There he had a tomb hewn out of a large rock. Inside near the rear of the tomb was a couch, also of stone, and Joseph gently placed the corpse upon it. Then he rolled a heavy stone across the entrance and went home.

A STRANGE AND REVEALING PRELUDE TO THE HISTORY OF CHRISTIANITY.

3 Days later – Jesus rose from the dead – conquered our enemies of Satan sin and death...and a new creature was born on this earth NEVER before seen: a Christian.