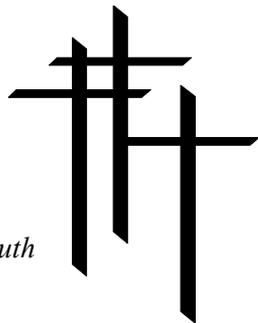


Timely Messenger



*Rightly Dividing the Word of Truth
Speaking the Truth in Love*

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JESUS CHRIST THE SAME

By John LaVier

(Written May 1953)

A verse that has been much misunderstood is Hebrews 13:8. There we read: “Jesus Christ the same yesterday, and today, and forever.” Along with this verse we ought to read the verse following, which says, “Be not carried about with divers and strange doctrines,” for many divers and strange doctrines have been taught using Hebrews 13:8 as a proof text. There are those who say that since Jesus Christ is the same, we should expect Him to work in the same manner today as He did in the days of yore. They are trying to duplicate the miracles of Jesus of Nazareth and the result is confusion and fanaticism.

Jesus Christ is ever the same insofar as His essential

character and deity are concerned. He is the unchanging One, reminding us of Psalm 102:25-27, “Of old hast Thou laid the foundation of the earth: and the heavens are the work of Thy hands. They shall perish, but Thou shalt endure: yea, all of them shall wax old like a garment; as a vesture shalt Thou change them, and they shall be changed. But Thou art the same, and Thy years shall have no end.” Yes, He is ever the same, and He could truly say, “I am the Lord, I change not.” He is the Eternal Christ, the first and the last, the beginning and the end, the Alpha and the Omega, the Lord God Almighty.

But though Christ is the same as to His Person, even the most casual study of the Word ought to convince us that His program for His people is not always the same. When Christ was here upon earth He was a minister of the circumcision (Rom. 15:8), sent only to the

lost sheep of the house of Israel (Matt. 15:24). If He is still in this character today there is not much hope for the Gentiles. He was in the midst of Israel as their Messiah and King, and they were preaching the gospel of the kingdom and all the kingdom signs were being manifested. However, Israel would not receive Him as King, and so the kingdom program was postponed. After the death and resurrection of Christ, and after Israel refused the offer of repentance in the book of Acts, God turned away from the Jew and turned to the Gentile. Then He brought in the dispensation of grace, the Secret made known through Paul, and what He is doing today is something far different than what He was doing when the Lord Jesus Christ was here upon earth.

In Matthew 9:35 we read that Jesus went about preaching the gospel of the kingdom. Then in Matthew 10:5-7 He commissioned the disciples, commanding them not to go to the Gentiles, but only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel, and they were to preach that the kingdom of heaven was at hand. Now this is certainly not God's message for the present dispensation. Instead of preaching the gospel of the kingdom today we are to preach the gospel of the

grace of God, and that is an entirely different thing. The gospel of the kingdom had to do with the establishment here upon earth of the visible, Messianic kingdom that was promised in the Old Testament Scriptures, with Israel in the place of supremacy as the head and not the tail. The gospel of the grace of God is God's good news that while Israel is for a season set aside, He is reaching out to all mankind, and that today "there is no difference between the Jew and the Gentile: for the same Lord over all is rich unto all that call upon Him, and whosoever (Jew or Gentile) shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved" (Rom. 10:12). God is willing to save by grace any sinner who will put their trust in His Son. We are saved by grace, apart from Israel's law and apart from human works of any kind, and it is through faith, without sight or signs of any kind.

When the Lord was here on earth He was presented as King, the promised Messiah and Redeemer of Israel. When He came into Jerusalem in lowly humiliation, riding on an ass's colt, the people went forth to meet Him, and cried, "Hosanna! Blessed is the King of Israel that cometh in the name of the Lord" (John 12:13). Now we

see Him in a new position, in heavenly exaltation, at God's right hand, and He is not there as King of Israel but as Head of the Church, His Body. Now those who are saved are likewise made to sit at God's right hand, as members of Christ's Body, with a heavenly hope and calling. There is assuredly a big difference between the kingdom to be established here on earth, and the Body of Christ completed and caught up in the rapture to meet the Lord in the air and to be forever with Him in glory.

Yes, Jesus Christ is the same, yesterday, today and forever, and He never changes, but He has surely changed His program for His people in this dispensation.

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Gregg Bing — Editor

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11:00 AM	Morning Worship
6:00 PM	Evening Worship

Mid-Week Services:

Tues. 10:00 AM	Ladies Class
Wed. 7:00 PM	Bible Study

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in this matter!*

THE CRUCIFIXION OF CHRIST

By Gregg Bing

The Passion Week: Continued

Having heard the accusations the Jewish rulers brought against Jesus, and having examined Jesus himself, the Roman governor, Pontius Pilate, declared, "I find no fault in Him" (John 19:4). Nevertheless, the chief priests and officers of the Jews cried out, "Crucify Him! Crucify Him!" (John 19:6). Knowing Jesus was not deserving of death, Pilate sought to release Him, but the Jews asserted, "If you let this Man go, you are not Caesar's friend" (John 19:12). When the Jews would not be persuaded, Pilate bowed to the political pressure and delivered Jesus into the hands of the Roman soldiers, who "put His own clothes on Him and led Him away to be crucified" (Matt. 27:31).

The custom was for the soldiers to lead the condemned criminal, carrying his own cross, through the crowded streets to the place of crucifixion outside the city. This public humiliation was considered part of the punishment. The cross Jesus bore was likely just the

crossbeam, though, by itself, it likely weighed between 75 and 125 pounds. Jesus was in a weakened condition from the sufferings He had already endured, which included a beating with a rod and a vicious scourging. As He began His journey toward the place of crucifixion, Jesus staggered under the weight of the cross, so the soldiers "laid hold of a certain man, Simon a Cyrenian, who was coming from the country, and on him they laid the cross that he might bear it after Jesus" (Luke 23:26).

The Via Dolorosa *The Way of Suffering*

As Jesus made His way slowly through the streets of Jerusalem, "a great multitude of the people followed Him," including many "women who also mourned and lamented Him" (Luke 23:27). Jesus turned toward them and said:

"Daughters of Jerusalem, do not weep for Me, but weep for yourselves and for your children. For indeed the days are coming in which they will say, 'Blessed are the barren, wombs that never bore, and breasts which never nursed!' Then they will begin to say to the moun-

tains, 'Fall on us!' and to the hills, 'Cover us!' For if they do these things in the green wood, what will be done in the dry?" (Luke 23:27-31).

The multitudes in Israel reviled Jesus and considered Him worthless, yet there were some in Israel who genuinely mourned for Him, knowing He was undeserving of such cruelty and injustice. Jesus was grateful for their concern and grief, but He knew it was misplaced. Jesus was going just "as it had been determined" for Him by the Father (Luke 22:22). His approaching death was necessary if sinners were to be saved and brought to God.

The women who mourned for Jesus should have been weeping and mourning for themselves and their children. The Jewish multitudes had told Pilate, "His blood be on us and on our children," and it soon would be. The Jews' rejection and crucifixion of Christ would shortly bring about God's judgment upon their nation and upon their capital city of Jerusalem. Jesus, as He made His way toward Jerusalem at the beginning of the week, had wept over the beloved city for this very reason, saying,

"If you had known, even you,

especially in this your day, the things that make for your peace! But now they are hidden from your eyes. For days will come upon you when your enemies will build an embankment around you, surround you and close you in on every side, and level you, and your children within you, to the ground; and they will not leave in you one stone upon another, because you did not know the time of your visitation" (Luke 19:42-44).

The prospect of this coming judgment from God, to be carried out by the hands of the hated Romans, is what these women should have been weeping and mourning about. This judgment would be particularly difficult for women who were pregnant or nursing babies, yet days in which even mighty men would seek to hide themselves from God's wrath. Jesus warned them of the unrelenting cruelty that was coming with this proverb: "If they do these things in the green wood, what will be done in the dry?"

The common understanding of this proverb is that green wood, being alive, is hard to burn and symbolizes the innocent, whereas dry wood, which is dead, burns easily and pic-

tures the guilty. Jesus was like the green wood, an innocent Man. The Jews, on the other hand, were like the dry wood, spiritually dead inside, as pictured by the fig tree that became “dried up from the roots” after Jesus cursed it (Mark 11:20). If the Romans treated Jesus with such cruelty, a Man in whom they found “no fault at all,” what would they do to the Jews, who openly despised the Romans and whose hearts were filled with evil?

Golgotha—Place of a Skull

The soldiers led Jesus outside the city walls of Jerusalem to a place called “Golgotha,” an Aramaic word meaning “the Place of a Skull” (Matt. 27:33); the Latin word for this place is “Calvary” (Luke 23:33). Once there, they offered Jesus “sour wine mingled with gall,” a bitter drink to help dull the pain of crucifixion. “When Jesus tasted it, He would not drink” (Matt. 27:34). He wanted to ensure His mind and spirit would remain alert and unaffected while He laid down His life for us on the cross (John 10:17-18).

It was the third hour of the day (9:00 A.M.) when they nailed Jesus’ hands and feet to the cross, lifted up the cross, and dropped it into the ground.

Along with Jesus, “they also crucified two robbers, one on His right hand and the other on His left” (Mark 15:27), fulfilling the prophecy of Isaiah 53:12: “He was numbered with the transgressors.”

Inscription Over the Cross

Pilate placed a title over Jesus’ cross that said: “JESUS OF NAZARETH, THE KING OF THE JEWS.” He had it written in Hebrew, Greek, and Latin to make sure everyone could read it (John 19:19). The place where Jesus was crucified was near the city, where many of the Jewish people passed by and could read the title. This infuriated the chief priests of the Jews who said to Pilate, “Do not write, ‘The King of the Jews,’ but, ‘He said, ‘I am the King of the Jews’”” (John 19:21). Pilate, unwilling to bow to any more of the Jews’ demands, answered, “What I have written, I have written” (John 19:22).

Soldiers Divide Jesus’ Clothes

After nailing Jesus to the cross, the Roman soldiers who were in charge of His execution “took His garments and made four parts, to each soldier a part.” Jesus had a tunic that was

“without seam, woven from the top in one piece.” They could have tried to divide this garment as well, by tearing it into four pieces, but that would have ruined what was likely a valuable piece of clothing, so they said, “Let us not tear it, but cast lots for it, whose it shall be” (John 19:24). While the soldiers acted according to their own will, in doing so they fulfilled God’s will as spoken through the Psalmist David:

“They divide My garments among them, and for My clothing they cast lots” (Psa. 22:18).

Then, sitting down, the soldiers “kept watch over Him there” (Matt. 27:36).

Throughout His trials, particularly those before the Jewish rulers, Jesus said very little. However, as He hung on that cruel cross for six hours, the Scriptures record that Jesus spoke seven times. Each statement gives us insight into the mind and heart of our Savior and helps us understand the meaning of the Cross.

#1 “Father, Forgive Them”

Jesus looked down from the cross at all the people who

stood nearby watching Him: the Roman soldiers, the chief priests, scribes, and elders of the Jews, as well as crowds of Jewish people who passed by and stopped to stare. Though despised and rejected by these people, Jesus was moved with compassion for them and prayed, “Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do” (Luke 23:34).

The first words that Jesus spoke show the gracious heart of our Savior. Even as He endured such cruel sufferings at the hands of these wicked men, Jesus prayed to His Father to forgive them. Jesus’ words emphasize that the Cross is all about forgiveness. Jesus shed His blood and died to provide forgiveness for sinners (Heb. 9:22); not just for those who nailed Him to the cross, but for us as well. Our sins were just as responsible for Jesus’ death as those of the Jewish rulers who condemned Him. Jesus’ intercessory prayer demonstrates His unconditional love for us, that “even while we were still sinners, Christ died for us” (Rom. 5:8).

Jesus’ prayer for forgiveness was especially offered in behalf of the nation of Israel. They were chosen by God to be His own special people, but, throughout their history, this

nation had proven themselves to be a stubborn and disobedient people. They rejected God the Father as He spoke to them through the Old Testament prophets. When God the Son became flesh and presented Himself to Israel as their Messiah, they rejected and crucified Him. From the cross, Jesus acknowledged the Jews had acted in ignorance and unbelief (Acts 3:17), thus He prayed for their forgiveness. Israel would be given another opportunity during the Acts period, this time through the ministry of God the Holy Spirit; an opportunity to repent of crucifying Jesus and to receive Him as Messiah and Lord. Jesus had alluded to this earlier in His ministry, saying:

“Therefore I say to you, every sin and blasphemy will be forgiven men, but the blasphemy against the Spirit will not be forgiven men. Anyone who speaks a word against the Son of Man, it will be forgiven him; but whoever speaks against the Holy Spirit, it will not be forgiven him, either in this age or in the age to come.” (Matt. 12:31-32)

These verses do not address an unpardonable sin that can be committed by individuals; they

speak of a sin that would be committed by the entire nation of Israel. Their blasphemy against the Son of Man, which resulted in His crucifixion, would be forgiven. This is what Jesus prayed for from the cross. Their ignorance and unbelief in crucifying their Messiah led God to be longsuffering toward the nation and give them another opportunity to receive their promised King and kingdom. However, their subsequent blasphemy against the Holy Spirit throughout the Acts period was not forgiven them, and, at the close of that period, Paul pronounced blindness upon Israel one last time; the nation was set aside “for a season;” and their kingdom promises were postponed (Acts 28:25-28).

As Jesus hung on the cross through the morning hours, the people who surrounded the cross added to His humiliation by taunting Him. It was to be expected that the Jewish rulers and the hardened Roman soldiers would mock Jesus, but even those who were just passing by “blasphemed Jesus, wagging (shaking) their heads” in disbelief and disgust, saying, “You who destroy the temple and build it in three days, save Yourself! If You are the Son of God, come down from the cross” (Matt. 27:39-40).

The chief priests, scribes, and elders ridiculed Jesus, saying, "He saved others; Himself He cannot save. If He is the King of Israel, let Him now come down from the cross, and we will believe Him. He trusted in God; let Him deliver Him now if He will have Him; for He said, 'I am the Son of God'" (Matt. 27:41-43).

The soldiers echoed this challenge, "If You are the King of the Jews, save Yourself" (Luke 23:36-37).

Even the two robbers who were crucified next to Jesus, "reviled Him with the same thing" (Matt. 27:44).

It is part of our human nature to lash out at those who make fun of us; to seek to prove them wrong when they challenge us; but Jesus did neither. Throughout the entire ordeal, we see a Man:

"Who committed no sin, nor was deceit found in His mouth; who when He was reviled, did not revile in return; when He suffered, He did not threaten, but committed Himself to Him who judges righteously." (1 Pet. 2:22-23)

Jesus could have proved these people wrong by coming down from the cross; He cer-

tainly had the power to do so. But, Jesus had come to do His Father's will: to suffer and die for our sins, "the Just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God" (1 Pet. 3:18). Jesus' response to His sufferings provide an example of how we should respond when we are persecuted for His name's sake.

Even if Jesus had come down from the cross, they would not have believed in Him. Jesus had already been "attested (approved) of God" among them "by miracles, wonders, and signs which God did through Him" in the midst of these Jews (Acts 2:22). But, "although He had done so many signs before them, they did not believe in Him" (John 12:37). They also had the testimony of their own Scriptures, prophecies of the coming of their Messiah, detailed prophecies which were fulfilled in Jesus of Nazareth, yet they refused to believe in Him.

#2 "Today, You Will be With Me in Paradise"

As the day wore on, one of the two thieves continued to blaspheme Jesus, saying, "If You are the Christ, save Yourself and us" (Luke 23:39). The other thief, by this time, had experienced a change of heart.

He answered the first thief saying, “Do you not even fear God, seeing you are under the same condemnation? And we indeed justly, for we receive the due reward of our deed; but this Man has done nothing wrong” (Luke 23:40-41).

As they hung there on their crosses, these two thieves had no opportunity to hear a sermon preached or a Bible lesson taught. Moreover, there is no record that Jesus said anything to either thief about their spiritual condition. What caused the change in this second thief? He was in the presence of the Son of God. He listened as Jesus was taunted and insulted by the crowds, yet Jesus never threatened, retaliated, or uttered one word of complaint. Instead, He looked down into the faces of those who hated Him so and prayed for their forgiveness. This brought about a genuine change in this thief’s mind and heart.

This second thief acknowledged he was a sinner, deserving of his punishment, but he knew this was not true of Jesus. Pushed to the limits of endurance, physically, mentally, and emotionally, Jesus never sinned, in word or deed. Jesus was no ordinary man; He could only be the Lord of glory. The repentant thief saw that the words over

Jesus’ cross were true; He was “the King of the Jews.”

This sinful man realized that his eternal future rested in Jesus’ hands, so he asked Him for mercy, “Lord, remember me when You come into Your kingdom.” Jesus promised him, “Assuredly, I say to you, today you will be with Me in Paradise” (Luke 23:43). Though the thief would physically die that day, he now knew that when he did, that very day he would be with Jesus in Paradise; he now had the hope of eternal life in Christ. This man had no opportunity to do any good works. He didn’t join a church, answer an altar call, shake a preacher’s hand, or submit to water baptism. He simply put his faith in the Lord Jesus Christ and was saved.

The other thief had the same opportunity to be saved. He witnessed everything the repentant thief did. He saw Jesus’ actions and heard Jesus’ words, but he rejected Jesus as the Christ, the Son of God. He chose to side with the worldly men and women who stood by mocking Him. Because of his unbelief, he remained spiritually dead in his sins, and when his life ended, he was separated from God for all eternity. Dr. C. I. Scofield, in his study notes on Luke 23:43, observed:

“One thief was saved, that none need despair; but only one, that none should presume.”

These two thieves represent the entire world; a world divided over one issue: Jesus Christ. John’s gospel describes it this way:

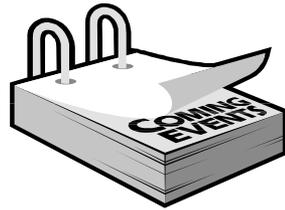
“He who believes in Him is not condemned; but he who does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God.” (John 3:18)

There are only two choices: either you believe in Jesus Christ or you don’t. You are on one side or the other. There is no sitting on the fence and no putting off the decision to a later time. If you have never trusted Christ as your Savior, you are already condemned because of your sins; you are spiritually dead, separated from God. However, you need not spend eternity in this condition. You can trust Christ as Savior right now, just as the repentant thief did. You don’t have to do anything; you simply trust in what He has already done for you. When you believe Jesus Christ died on Calvary for your sins and rose again, you are freed

from the condemnation of sin and “passed from death unto life” (John 5:24).

On which side are you?

Next Issue: We will examine the other statements Christ uttered while He endured the shame and sufferings of the cross of Calvary.



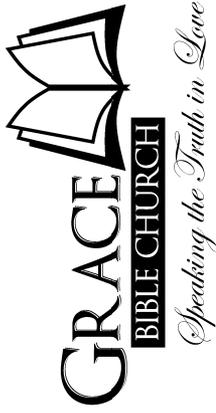
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