

As I was planning out my sermons I knew that I wanted to focus in on the subject of the Cross for both last Sabbath and this Sabbath. Last week you will remember will looked at the sacrifice of Jesus and its relationship to the Sabbath. We saw that the Sabbath is not only a time when we acknowledge our Creator by resting from our work, but the Sabbath is also a time to rest in the sacrifice of Jesus. The cross of Jesus — His work of sacrifice — is to be highlighted in our spiritual life on the Sabbath day. The Sabbath is a day to rest in the redemptive work of Jesus.

Being desirous to speak about the cross and the sacrifice of Jesus again this Sabbath I obviously had many options, and Biblical passages to draw upon. But last Sunday morning as I was delivering for Meals on Wheels I was listening to a sports-talk radio program. The subject being discussed was an article which came out that morning in the magazine section of the New York Times. The article was about two professional basketball players on the New York Knicks — Charlie Ward, and Allan Houston.

Earlier in the springtime their coach was critical of the two because, according to the coach, they were taking too much time to have Bible Study and prayer together. Both Ward and Houston are strong Christians. In the New York Times article the writer spent some time with Ward and Houston. And at Easter time the writer even sat in on one of their Bible studies.

Being Easter time they were studying the crucifixion of Jesus. They read passages from their Bible which speak of the trial of Jesus before the Jewish Sanhedrin and the Roman court. One of the players — commenting in the context of the Jewish leaders rejection of Jesus as the Messiah — said, “The Jews are very stubborn”.

That is not exactly the way I would have said it, but this comment inflamed the talk on the radio and the listeners and callers to the programs. Many news articles have come out this week. And the topic moved beyond sports-talk radio to the political type radio programs. The general tenor of all the articles, comments, and editorials have been that Christians should not talk about the Jewish rejection of Jesus. It is wrong to say that the Jews put Jesus to death. And to say such things is inflammatory, bigoted, and anti-Semitic.

As often as I could in the car this week I tried to tune into programs talking about this article and the actions of Ward and Houston. What captivated me was the response. During the course of this past week I have read and heard that to believe that the ancient Jews rejected Jesus and put Him to death is a myth. To believe such a thing is somehow an indictment against present day Jewish people. And to believe such a myth is simplistic and moronic.

The Commissioner of the National Basketball League called Charlie Ward a “religious zealot”. The director of the Jewish Anti-Defamation League stated, “In blaming the death of Jesus on Jews and accusing the Jews of persecuting Christians, they have revived the historic myths which have been the source of anti-Semitism for centuries.”

Later on the same director stated — “We hope is that Mr. Ward will also consider meeting with mainstream Christian leaders, along with Jewish leaders, who can explain why his beliefs are part of historic myths that have been used to fuel anti-Semitism for centuries.”

Part of the assumption behind this last quote is that there are so-called Christian leaders

out there who would deny the accuracy and historical nature of the New Testament.

Let us for a minute consider the reaction and what has been said — that is to say — if we talk about the historical facts as found in the New Testament concerning the circumstances of Jesus' rejection and death — we are engaging in, belief in a myth, and hate speech.

Let me be very clear concerning my purpose this morning — my concern is the Word of God, and our belief in it. Society has been on a mission to hedge in Bible believing Christians. The Scopes monkey trial made it popular to consider belief in Creation a silly myth. With that went ideas like the Flood or the splitting of the Red Sea or Jonah in the Belly of the whale. Recently we have been told that morality, the ten commandments, cannot be used to judge or discern the behavior of people.

Corresponding to this rejection of the Scriptures is the fear and intimidation which is placed upon Christians who do believe. We're called silly or simplistic. The attempt is to make us feel foolish. And the clear attempt is to use fear to keep us quiet.

Now I have learned that same fear and intimidation is going to be used to try to keep us quiet about the historical nature of Jesus' death. Its all being done in the name of togetherness, and the fear of Anti-Semitism. Of course, togetherness is a good thing in any community. Of course, Jews should not be persecuted, or defamed in any manner. A correct reading of the New Testament does not lead to anti-Semitism. But we are being asked — yea, the intimidation is here — to shut us up, and stop us from preaching a message based upon Scriptures which can be considered true and accurate. We are being told to put away our silly myths and get along. But at the expense of truth. At the expense of the only hope of humanity found in the cross of Jesus.

Today I want together, to look at a series of Bible texts which speak of the plot to kill Jesus and the reaction to it.

John 1:11 —

He came to His own, and those who were His own did not receive Him.

John starts out innocently enough by simply stating that Jesus was not received by His own people. Let us now look at the reaction to Jesus after He healed a man at the pool of Bethesda. John 5:15-18

15 The man went away, and told the Jews that it was Jesus who had made him well.

16 And for this reason the Jews were persecuting Jesus, because He was doing these things on the Sabbath.

17 But He answered them, "My Father is working until now, and I Myself am working."

18 For this cause therefore 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.

A similar thing can be seen in Matthew 12:14 after Jesus healed a withered hand on the Sabbath.

14 But the Pharisees went out, and counseled together against Him, as to how they might destroy Him.

After a discussion with His disciples about being the Bread of Life, let us read the words of John in John 7:1 —

And after these things Jesus was walking in Galilee; for He was unwilling to walk in Judea, because the Jews were seeking to kill Him.

In John 7 Jesus attended the Festival of Booths in Jerusalem. Let us read the commentary given by John in John 7:25 —

Therefore some of the people of Jerusalem were saying, "Is this not the man whom they are seeking to kill?"

In John 8 we have one of those places where Jesus was trying to teach His apostles about His death. Jesus is having a discussion with the Jewish leaders. Let us look at the precision in which Jesus can speak of His impending death in John 8:28 —

Jesus therefore said, "When you lift up the Son of Man, then you will know that I am *He*, and I do nothing on My own initiative, but I speak these things as the Father taught Me.

This text is interesting because Jesus uses the phrase "Lifted up" — Jews did not crucify, but the Romans did. But Jesus indicts the Jewish leaders as the ones who will "lift Him up."

In John 8 we also have one of the most heated debates between Jesus and the Leaders. The argument in John 8 turns nasty to the point the Jesus is called a child of fornication — we have a word for that which I will not use. In John 8:37, 40 let us take note again of how much Jesus understood about His impending death and who would be responsible.

37 "I know that you are Abraham's offspring; yet you seek to kill Me, because My word has no place in you. . . 40 "But as it is, you are seeking to kill Me, a man who has told you the truth, which I heard from God; this Abraham did not do.

In John 11 Jesus goes to the house of His friends — Mary and Martha. Jesus has gone at a very sad time. They are in mourning because their brother, Lazarus, had died. Jesus demonstrated for all that He was the Resurrection and the Life, and woke Lazarus from his sleep. After raising Lazarus the leaders conspire. Let us read their words in John 11:47-53.

47 Therefore the chief priests and the Pharisees convened a council, and were saying, "What are we doing? For this man is performing many signs.
48 "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."
49 But a certain one of them, Caiaphas, who was high priest that year, said to them, "You know nothing at all,
50 nor do you take into account that it is expedient for you that one man should die for the people, and that the whole nation should not perish."
51 Now this he did not say on his own initiative; but being high priest that

year, he prophesied that Jesus was going to die for the nation,
52 and not for the nation only, but that He might also gather together into one
the children of God who are scattered abroad.

53 So from that day on they planned together to kill Him.

In Matthew 16 we have the very familiar story when Peter publically announced that Jesus was the Christ, the Messiah. When Jesus affirmed Peter's answer, notice the commentary Matthew adds in verse 21.

21 From that time Jesus Christ began to show His disciples that He must go to Jerusalem, and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised up on the third day.

And if the disciples had any doubt as to how the Jesus taught the apostles how He as the Messiah would die let us go to verse 24.

24 Then Jesus said to His disciples, "If anyone wishes to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me.

Jesus was telling them that He would die by a cross — a Roman instrument of death, but put there because of the actions of the Jewish leadership.

Let us read some texts concerning the trial of Jesus. Let us first read from John 18:28-32.

28 They led Jesus therefore from Caiaphas into the Praetorium, and it was early; and they themselves did not enter into the Praetorium in order that they might not be defiled, but might eat the Passover.

29 Pilate therefore went out to them, and said, "What accusation do you bring against this Man?"

30 They answered and said to him, "If this Man were not an evildoer, we would not have delivered Him up to you."

31 Pilate therefore said to them, "Take Him yourselves, and judge Him according to your law." The Jews said to him, "We are not permitted to put anyone to death,"

32 that the word of Jesus might be fulfilled, which He spoke, signifying by what kind of death He was about to die.

In John 19 Jesus has a discussion with Pilate concerning His death. Notice where Jesus saw the blame belonging. John 19:10, 11 —

10 Pilate therefore said to Him, "You do not speak to me? Do You not know that I have authority to release You, and I have authority to crucify You?"

11 Jesus answered, "You would have no authority over Me, unless it had been given you from above; for this reason he who delivered Me up to you has *the* greater sin."

Let us read two texts which concern Pilate's desire to release Jesus, and the response of the crowd and the leadership. First, John 19:15, 16 —

15 They therefore cried out, "Away with *Him*, away with *Him*, crucify Him!"

Pilate said to them, "Shall I crucify your King?" The chief priests answered, "We have no king but Caesar."

16 So he then delivered Him to them to be crucified.

And now in Matthew 27:19, 20, 23-25 —

19 And while he was sitting on the judgment seat, his wife sent to him, saying, "Have nothing to do with that righteous Man; for last night I suffered greatly in a dream because of Him."

20 But the chief priests and the elders persuaded the multitudes to ask for Barabbas, and to put Jesus to death. . . .

23 And he said, "Why, what evil has He done?" But they kept shouting all the more, saying, "Let Him be crucified!"

24 And when Pilate saw that he was accomplishing nothing, but rather that a riot was starting, he took water and washed his hands in front of the multitude, saying, "I am innocent of this Man's blood; see *to* that yourselves."

25 And all the people answered and said, "His blood *be* on us and on our children!"

There are only a few more texts I want to look at today. Let us read one text which concerns the reaction of the apostles after the death and resurrection, and ascension of Jesus. Let us read some words of Peter at the first Pentecost of the Church. Acts 2:22, 23

22 "Men of Israel, listen to these words: Jesus the Nazarene, a man attested to you by God with miracles and wonders and signs which God performed through Him in your midst, just as you yourselves know —

23 this *Man*, delivered up by the predetermined plan and foreknowledge of God, you nailed to a cross by the hands of godless men and put *Him* to death.

Peter, addressing the "men of Israel" indicts them as having just used the Romans — the godless men — as the instruments of Jesus' death.

The first martyr, Stephen, in Acts 7, makes a similar indictment.

What we have looked at today in a historical study of the facts which went on when Jesus died on the cross. The facts are not pretty. They are filled with violence, fear, corruption and conspiracy. But we are not talking about present day Jewish people. Nor are we indicting present day Jewish people. Our concern is the facts which surround a factual death of real Jesus.

Let me ask you — If we are asked to deny these facts, as being silly, as being a myth, as being simply made up — if we are asked to deny the story of the Scripture, how long is it before we are asked to deny the truth of the cross?

My concern as a pastor has always been for the people of my church family to thrive on the word of God. I try always to demonstrate that the word of God can be believed, it can be lived, and lives can be changed. I roar like a lion when I hear or see people trying to intimidate Bible believers. I get angry when I see movements to shame us because we

have found the Lord through His Word.

The historical facts speak. The Jewish leaders, and many in the nation, encouraged by their leaders made certain that Jesus would die. This indicts no Jew today. We do not believe in imputed guilt.

Now that we have looked at the historical facts let us take some time to consider the theological realities. In other words, what does the cross of Christ mean to us. To do this let us again look at some of the words of Jesus where He indicts the Jewish leaders for His death. Mark 8:29-31

29 And He continued by questioning them, "But who do you say that I am?" Peter answered and said to Him, "You are the Christ."

30 And He warned them to tell no one about Him.

31 And He began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders and the chief priests and the scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again.

Now let us look at one more verse in Mark 9:31

31 For He was teaching His disciples and telling them, "The Son of Man is to be delivered into the hands of men, and they will kill Him; and when He has been killed, He will rise three days later."

Jesus uses very similar language. But in this second example He does not say, "the elders and the chief priests and the scribes", instead Jesus simply said, "the hands of men." Jesus is generic after being particular. Jesus shows us a truism which must confront all humans. Jesus may have been put to death by the Jews, but it was the hands of all mankind who convicted and killed Christ.

All have sinned and fallen very short of God's glory. All human beings are responsible for the hammering of the nails, and the cries to crucify Him. Our hearts outside of a relationship with Christ relish the task of putting the innocent Christ to death. His innocence, His purity, and His humble character puts us to shame, and we lash out to condemn Him as guilty of the very wrongs we commit.

A stumbling block to the Jews; foolishness to the Gentiles — but we preach Christ and Him crucified. But praise be to God, and hope in Jesus, He convicts of us of our sin. He offers His pardon, and He tells us to have faith, and to rest in His works of righteousness. By His stripes we are healed.