

# What Shall I Do With Jesus?

M. W. Bassford, 8-28-11

In Matthew 27:22, Pontius Pilate asks a question that was important to him and even more so to us. The Jews have brought Jesus to Pilate, demanding that Pilate sentence Him to be executed. There's one hitch, though; after questioning Jesus for a few minutes, Pilate quickly realizes that Jesus is innocent of the charges of treason that have been leveled against Him. From all we know of Pilate, he was a cruel, corrupt man, but even he shrank back from the thought of condemning the innocent. However, the Jewish priests and elders are much cleverer politicians than Pilate is, and bit by bit, they box him in, to the point now where they have forced Pilate to free the robber Barabbas instead of Jesus. In one last-ditch effort, Pilate asks them what they want him to do with Jesus, they cry out "Crucify!", and Jesus is doomed.

Even today, 2000 years after the events of that fateful trial, we are asked the same question. The record of the gospels presents Jesus to us much like He was presented before Pilate. Just like Pilate was, we are forced to make a decision. Neither God nor the devil is going to allow us to play spiritual Switzerland. We have to do something, either take a stand for Christ in the only way that He will accept, or take a stand against Him in any of the number of the ways that is possible. Even though this decision seems like a no-brainer when we put it this way, most people will make the wrong decision. They will allow Satan to convince them that Jesus is not right for them.

There's nothing about this that's unique to our time and place. 2000 years ago, when Jesus still walked this earth, most people rejected Him even then. In fact, they rejected Him in the same ways that they reject Him today. However, that failure gives us an opportunity. It can teach us the right answer to the question, "What shall I do with Jesus?"

## Hatred, Rejection, Denial, Deferral

The first and perhaps the most visceral answer to this question is to **HATE HIM**. In the first century, there were many people who hated Jesus. We see just a few of them described in Luke 6:10-11. Here, Jesus does an indisputably good thing. He heals a man with a withered hand. However, because He performs this healing on the Sabbath, He violates the tradition of the Pharisees. They become enraged because Jesus did good.

Today, there is no shortage of people who hate Jesus too. Some of these people hate Him because of the evil that others have done in His name, but some are enraged by Him personally. There are scientists and religious scholars out there who have given their lives to disproving the notion that Jesus is the Son of God. However, there are also ordinary people who lash out at the idea that anybody, even Jesus, has the right to tell them how to live their lives.

Sadly, in reacting with anger to our Lord, people like this have chosen to make the worst enemy it is possible to make. They can rail and rage against Jesus all they want in this life, although they're unlikely to find much happiness in so doing. However, when their lives are over, so is any hope of resistance. On the day of judgment, just like every other member of the human race, their knees will bow to Jesus. Their tongues will confess Him as Lord. The only thing that their lifetimes of hating Jesus will gain is that they will spend eternity separated from Him in the outer darkness.

Other people **REJECT HIS TEACHING**. Once again, there are plenty of examples of this, but for the sake of illustration, we'll look at John 10:19-20. Jesus taught these people the truth, that He would lay down His life to protect His sheep, but the Father would allow Him to take up that life again. Some people believed Jesus because of the miracles that He had already worked, but others were determined that anyone who would say such things was out of his mind.

Of course, there are millions today who refuse to listen to the teaching of Jesus also. This comes in a multitude of different forms. Some deny that the Bible is the inspired word of God altogether. Still others acknowledge the inspiration of Scripture, but they refuse to obey it. Even though the Bible clearly teaches otherwise, they choose to believe that if they are good people who don't go to church, that will be enough to save them.

Jesus points out the problem with this in John 12. The word that these people reject is the word that will judge them on the last day. When we deny that His law applies to us, that's about as effective as denying to the state trooper that the speed limit applies to us. Either we obey the law and share its rewards, or disobey it and face its punishments.

Another popular course is to **DENY THE EVIDENCE**. We see an example of this in John 12:28-29. God literally speaks from heaven to affirm that Jesus is His Son, but many of the people who hear it convince themselves that it only thundered instead. The twentieth-century atheist Bertrand Russell was once asked what he would say if there were an afterlife and he had to stand before God in judgment. He replied, "I would say, 'O Lord, why did You not provide more evidence?'" In reality, of course, there is no amount of evidence that will convince someone who is determined not to believe. In the wilderness, God fed the children of Israel with miraculous manna on a daily basis, but He was still forced to destroy them because of their unbelief. Even today, there are many who simply cannot be persuaded.

In reality, the evidence for God and Jesus is enough to win over any honest heart, and perhaps the best evidence of all is the story of Jesus itself. Everyone must acknowledge that two millennia ago, on the Sunday morning after Jesus

was crucified, something happened that changed the world. The same disciples of Jesus who fled for their lives mere days ago now were willing to endure poverty, imprisonment, and death for His sake. They went throughout the whole world proclaiming Jesus as the risen Lord. There are many explanations for this amazing phenomenon, but the only good one is that the apostles were right, that Jesus did indeed die and was indeed raised from the dead. From that, all else follows.

Instead of obeying, however, many prefer to **LET OTHERS DECIDE** for them. Pontius Pilate was one of these spineless souls, as we see from Matthew 27:17. He could have said, "I refuse to crucify an innocent man" and walked away from the tribunal, but instead, he allowed the Jews to manipulate him into condemning Jesus. Similarly, there are many people today who believe in Jesus, but allow others to keep them from obeying Him. Years ago, my mother spent several sessions studying with her next-door neighbor, whom we'll call Millie. My mother said by their final study, Millie believed and was ready to obey the gospel. However, the next discussion my mother had was with Millie's husband, who informed her that Millie and he were members of a certain denomination, that they were going to worship with a church of that denomination, and that my mother was not to study with Millie anymore. Sadly, that was the way things ended. Millie wasn't willing to go against her husband to do what she knew was right. She let him decide for her. How bitter it will be on the last day for Millie and the countless thousands like her, when they realize that they could have obeyed, but let others keep them from it! We can't trust others with that decision. We need to care for our souls first.

### **Excuses, Manipulation, Abandonment, Obedience**

Other people prefer to **MAKE EXCUSES** instead of doing what they know is right. Of course, there were excuses at the very beginning too. Look with me at Luke 9:59-60. To us, this seems like a good excuse. We can't expect the man to miss his own father's funeral, can we? However, it's clear from the story that that's exactly what Jesus did expect. In the eyes of Jesus, there was literally no good reason for refusing to do God's will.

One of the saddest things that I do in my work as a preacher is to talk with sick and dying Christians who are on the verge of falling away if they haven't crossed the line already. Know what? Every single one of those weak Christians has got an excuse. "The people at church don't want to be friends with me." "They were rude to me." "I'm too busy with school." "My work schedule keeps me from assembling." "My family situation is too hard." And on and on the excuses go. I don't know what these people are trying to accomplish with their excuses. Sure, they can get me off their back for a month, or get the elders off their back, but at the end of the day, I'm not the problem, and the elders aren't the problem. The problem is that for whatever reason, they are choosing to disobey God, and God will judge them for it.

Still others respond to Jesus by trying to **USE HIM**. Jesus Himself cites an example of this behavior in John 6:26. There are just as many people today who follow Jesus in hopes that He will be their meal ticket. Men like Joel Osteen preach the so-called prosperity gospel, that if we obey God, He will bless us materially in exchange. That certainly would have been news to men like the apostle Paul, who lived in abject poverty for decades for Christ's sake.

God does promise His servants that He will provide for them, but if we obey because we think that godliness will be a means of gain, don't we think that God is smart enough to see through that? The whole point of being a Christian is to lay up treasures in heaven, not on the earth, and if we get that mixed up, we will end up losing our souls over it. After all, Jesus tells us that where our treasure is, there our hearts will be also, and if our hearts are with this world and its riches, the devil will surely use that to destroy us. If we try to manipulate Jesus, Satan will end up manipulating us.

There are also many people who serve Jesus for a time and then **ABANDON HIM**. We see this explicitly described in John 6:66. In fact, the New Testament is filled from beginning to end with stories of those who have faith in Jesus but then suffer the shipwreck of that faith. And yet, amazingly enough, there are millions of self-professed believers out there who deny that falling away is even possible. They say that those who appear to fall from grace were never really Christians to begin with. Supposedly, this idea that the true believer can never fall away will give us great certainty in our salvation, but in reality, it seems to me that this teaching would lead to great uncertainty. I've never known a Christian who stopped coming to church who wasn't at some point convinced of his own salvation. How can I be sure I'm saved, then, simply because I'm convinced of mine? In reality, we don't need to place our faith in this fairy tale that falling away is impossible. Instead, we need to place our faith in the word. I know that I'm saved today, and I know it because I obeyed the gospel and continue to strive to please God by following His word. As long as I seek Him, I need not fear.

Finally, now that we've dismissed all the wrong answers, we can deal with Jesus by choosing to **FOLLOW HIM**. We see this done quite simply in Luke 5:11. There were no excuses from these four apostles. There was no hesitation. They literally dropped everything and went with Jesus. That's the way that we need to be. Jesus wants our interaction with Him to be simple, and here's the way it's supposed to go: He tells us to do something; we do it. The end.

As human beings, though, we like to complicate things. We want to negotiate with God. We imagine that we can strike deals with Him where we give up Sin A as long as He promises to leave Sin B alone. We look at our situation and all the things that we think make following God so hard, and we complain because we think the Christian in the next pew over has it easier than we do. In response, Jesus would tell us as He told Peter, "What is that to you? You follow Me."