

## ***What Was Jesus' Message?***

We have looked at who Jesus' is and why He had to suffer. In that lesson we learned that His earthly life was for our redemption. The evidence points to Him being God in a human body. What exactly did His followers record His message to say? What were the basics of His teaching?

Jesus began His message saying that mankind needed to repent. This was the same message John the Baptist preached. (Matthew 4:17) This means to have a revolution in your way of thinking. It is not only to be remorseful about the way you were going, but to turn toward a whole new way. Jesus said that He was the Way. (John 14:6) His very life was an example of the perfect man, what man was intended to be. In that sense Jesus was asking us to be like Him, to follow Him. (Matthew 4:19) That makes perfect sense, because His life has had more of a positive influence on this world than any other single life. If He is indeed the manifestation of a God that loves His creation, then He was showing us the best way and purpose for which to live.

Jesus taught that the world (those who did not yet have a revelation of truth) lives as a servant of sin, not really knowing what they are doing. (John 8:12,34; 12:46) He taught that man's natural state is inclined to darkness, but that He had come as a light to give man a choice. (John 1:5) Anyone reading this is either in darkness or in light. Jesus said those that live by truth come to the light. Jesus said, "I am the Light of the world." So Jesus was saying truth seekers will end up coming to Him.

Jesus taught that to believe in Him was to have eternal life. (John 3:16,36) He also taught that those who reject Him would face the wrath of God. If He were a man, these would be the words of an egomaniac, but since He is God, since His life provided such evidence of His utter goodness, we should seriously consider this claim. Since He claimed His life was given to ransom us from evil, (Matthew 20:28) it seems that we have a chance to accept or reject what He did for us. That is not harshness, on the contrary, it is the complete freedom to choose as we will.

If we had to jump through hurdles of performance, the mentally, emotionally or physically handicapped might not be able to perform. If we had to be "good" or earn heaven, what of those who are raised in dysfunctional home? As we see with the thief on the cross, no performance is necessary. That man may have grown up in a dysfunctional home, or as an orphan, and had a propensity toward crime. That did not change God's love toward Him. All He needed to do was to seek the truth and come to the light and ask. Eternal life was his at that moment, not based on his actions, but on His choice to trust in Jesus.

So then we could sum up the message as Jesus did, to love God with all your heart soul mind and strength and to love your neighbor as yourself. Believing in Jesus' sacrifice for you secures eternal life. To reject the love of God in Jesus is to invite the wrath of God. He also taught that after His sacrifice He would send

His Spirit to live in us to enable us to represent Him in the earth and to increasingly change us into His likeness.

### **Why is Christianity so Exclusive?**

One objection to this simple message is its exclusivity. We could complain about the injustice of those who have not heard of Jesus, but remember, they have neither accepted nor rejected. There must be some kind of presentation to reject. John wrote that Jesus gives light to everyone that comes into the world. (John 1:9) We can be sure of one thing, God will be just.

Why can't we come to God through Buddha or Mohammed? First we must understand that no other prophet claimed to be the incarnation of God. They would say they were pointing the way, but never claimed to BE the way.

Then we must see that Jesus was God's provision for our righteousness. If God provided a payment for our debt, how can we try to pay in some other form? If the sentence is \$100, a chicken will not suffice. A hundred marbles will not suffice. God has set the payment. The payment meets the requirements of God's justice and righteousness. He provided the payment. It is at the least ungrateful if not arrogant to argue that some other way should suffice when God has freely given us what He has decided is sufficient.

So are all other religions wrong? Jesus said that any other way into the sheep pen, that is the safety of God's protection, was being a thief. Other teachings have elements of the truth, but Jesus said, "I AM the Truth!" Why should we accept that as the final word? Who else can speak to the wind and waves? Who else can restore physical deformity, turn death into life, command spirits, and most of all, raise themselves from death. These miraculous acts are common to all four Gospels and have never been done by any other man, Mohammed, Buddha, Confucius, you name it. No other life comes close to that of Jesus.

If Jesus had not said, "No man comes to the Father but by me", we might argue that some other way is possible. But His words challenge us to consider the truth of His all-sufficient sacrifice.

### **What Should I Do in Response?**

Jesus invites us to come to Him and receive freely of what He has done for us. The Spirit of God draws us to accept the gift of salvation. First we must repent. That is to recognize the need to change the way we think and to be remorseful over living a life of selfish rebellion against God. Then we invite Christ to be the Lord of our life. That means we realize we need Him to direct us, and that we owe all to Him. We need to feed upon His words to learn of Him. He makes His home in our hearts, so we should look to Him for our direction and purpose. The book *Purpose Driven Life* will get you off to a good start in this new life. You also might want to read *Ten Keys to Understanding the Bible*, which will help you to understand what you are reading.

It is also important to find a church home. Look for one where the Bible is believed to be the truth. Without the plumb line of the Bible, there is no standard. Religion descends into every man's personal opinion. Jesus often quoted from the Old Testament stories as being factual events. He obviously believed them to be a revelation from God to man through His prophets.

A church home will offer Bible studies to help you grow and opportunities for fellowship. It is important for us to fit into the Family of God for our own growth and so that we can serve others. It is not easy, because we all have personalities and problems. Sometimes, being with other Christians can be quite painful, but it teaches us to love and helps us grow up.

Talk to God in prayer, read His revelation to us, the Bible, and meet with other Christians. Finally, speak to others about what Christ has meant to your life. God will give you opportunities to encourage others to come to know Him. You will have a natural desire to share what you have found. Jesus will come to mean so much to you that you will want to tell those you love. Some will be open, and others will not. Lovingly and patiently share your experience. It is hard for anyone to deny what has happened in your life. Be patient. For some people it takes years to come to a decision.

Last but not least, endure. Old habits and lifestyles will try to pull you back into your old patterns. Recognize the benefits of the change and remember how it will affect your eternity. Remember the price Christ paid for you, and keep on keeping on. If you have questions, first pray and try to find the answer in the Bible. If you can't find the answer, ask someone who has been a Christian for many years, someone whose life is loving and gracious like Jesus' life. May God bless you as you mature in Him.

Let me pray for you as we end this study. Dear Lord Jesus, I ask that you would bless the reader of this study with new life in You. Help them to take the time to read your word, the Bible. Direct them to a place where they can meet with believers in You. Help them mature in their faith and be a blessing to others. Help them to remember the price You paid for them, and help them to keep on keeping on. Fill them with your Holy Spirit and help them to know You are present with them. In Jesus' name I pray. AMEN