

**THE
BAPTIST HOUR**

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**Our Ancient
Contemporaries**

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OUR ANCIENT CONTEMPORARIES

It was in the South Pacific during World War II. Tony, an Italian boy, delighted in humiliating a Jewish lad, who because of his good nature never retaliated. One day Tony came into the mess hall to find every table crowded. Seeing the Jewish lad he pushed in beside him saying, "Move over, Christ-killer, and give a white man room." Sadly the Jewish lad asked, "Tony, why do you call me 'Christ-killer'? Jesus died over nineteen hundred years ago, and I am only twenty-two years old. Now, how could I have killed Christ?"

Scornfully, Tony replied, "Well, your fathers did it, and everybody knows that it was the Jews who crucified Jesus."

In bewilderment the Hebrew lad asked, "Am I to blame for what my fathers did?"

"Certainly," answered Tony, "everybody knows that we are all to blame for anything our fathers did."

At this point a third person interrupted the conversation.

"Tony, I wouldn't go so far with that idea if I were you. You see, it was not the Jews who nailed Jesus to the cross; it was the Romans. The Romans were the forefathers of the Italians, and if we are to blame for what our fathers did, then every Italian is under the condemnation of nailing Christ to the cross."*

The point of this story is that no group or race can point the finger of accusation at another. For in the larger sense history records that both Jews and Gentiles were involved in the death of Jesus.

Who then actually are the "Christ-killers"? Not the Jews alone. Or the Romans. Jesus did not die by the hand of nor for the sake of the ancients alone. The death of Jesus is related to all men. Those gathered about the cross are "our ancient contemporaries." This truth should bring us all to our knees in repentance, confession, and a cry for mercy.

**Voices From Calvary*, Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, 1945, pp. 12ff.

Let us look at "our ancient contemporaries" as we note, first, the time; second, the type; third, the trial.

THE TIME

When did Jesus die for the sins of the world? The obvious answer is that He was crucified on Friday of Passion Week in 30 A.D. But does the obvious tell all of the story?

The Bible teaches that the crucifixion of Jesus was an event in time which had already occurred in eternity. Revelation 13:8 speaks of "the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world." I Peter 1:19-20 speaks of our redemption through "the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot: who verily was foreordained before the foundation of the world, but was manifest in these last times for you." So, we see God working in eternity that which was wrought out in time.

Now, what may we infer from these scriptures? Simply this. If you would trace the redemptive love and work of God back to its source, you must go back into the very council chambers of eternity, and there listen to the beat of the heart of the omniscient triune God, beating with love for a lost humanity which He had not yet created.

So the death of Jesus stems from the infinite love of God, the beat of a broken heart which knows not the bounds of time, but which is the eternal nature of a righteous and merciful God.

This truth does not in any sense lessen the significance of the event which occurred on Calvary almost two thousand years ago. It enhances its meaning beyond measure.

Some time ago a listener wrote to ask me how it is that Jesus' suffering on a cross for a few hours could possibly save the world from sin. My answer is twofold.

It was the infinite suffering of an infinite God paying in Himself the infinite price for sin which is death, not merely the death of a man but death within the revelation of the In-

finite God. Furthermore, it was the expression in a few hours of time of the suffering which sin brings to the heart of God in all ages and at all times.

But more to the point in our present purpose: the concept of the death of Christ means that no one generation, group, or person is exempted from the responsibility for His death. The sin of all met in Jesus on Calvary. (Isaiah. 53:6)

Often I am asked, "How were people saved in the Old Testament period?" They were saved even as you and I are. They were saved by grace through faith looking forward to the cross (cf. Rom. 4), even as you and I are saved by grace through faith looking back to the cross. (II Cor. 5:21)

As you may look back to the cross and rejoice in faith, so Jesus said, "Your father Abraham rejoiced to see my day: and he saw it, and was glad". (John 8:56)

Thus the death of Christ was God working out in time that which He had already experienced in eternity. And you were there when they crucified my Lord!

THE TYPE

Yes, you were there. Not in person, but in spirit. As the love of God cannot be confined to any one time and place, neither can we do the same for sin. No one generation is sealed off to itself. Therefore, all who went before us are "our ancient contemporaries" in sin.

At the cross all sin and sinners meet. And at the cross I see four distinct types of those whose sins of attitude nailed Jesus to the cross. In the words of Russell Bradley Jones they are the *Calvary Attitudes*.*

There is Pilate, the coward. With the power of Rome behind him, he played the coward. Recognizing Jesus' innocence, suspecting that He was the Messiah, yet he lacked the moral and spiritual courage to espouse His cause.

There is no evidence that he was

**Baker Book House, Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1958.

lacking in physical courage. One did not become a Roman governor by being a physical coward. Probably he would have willingly died in physical combat with the Jewish mob. But Thomas Carlyle reminds us that "the courage we desire and prize is not the courage to die decently but to live manfully." Pilate was lacking in the latter.

The crux of the matter for Pilate came when "the Jews cried out, saying, If thou let this man go, thou art not Caesar's friend . . ." (John 19:12) That did it. Pilate had to choose between Christ and Caesar. And he chose Caesar. Thus when his soldiers should have been protecting Jesus, they were crucifying Him.

But Pilate is not alone. How often have you chosen Caesar above Christ? Now "Caesar" suggests many things: a man, a government, a way of life. Each of these is suggestive. Instead of placing your supreme loyalty in Christ you give it to some man, maybe a friend, your employer, or even the ruler of your nation.

Or perhaps you rely upon government as the source of help and salvation in your life. Or greater still, you are wedded to a way of life which conflicts with your allegiance to Christ.

Some of you out of fear of ridicule from the crowd reject Him altogether. Or maybe your rejection stems from your unwillingness to part with your sin. Many of you fail to realize full happiness and usefulness in your Christian experience because in the crisis you choose to serve Caesar in the manifold meaning of the term rather than to lose yourself in a full commitment of yourself and your powers to Christ.

It is not easy to say "Lord Jesus" rather than "Lord Caesar." (Rom. 10:9) Many early Christians died a martyr's death to do so. Sadly many modern Christians choose rather to nail Jesus to the cross as they say, "Lord Caesar." To do so is to play the coward. Like Pilate you may endeavor to wash your hands of the whole matter. But like him you find that it is impossible. Which shall it

be for you—Lord Caesar or Lord Jesus?

Then there is the Sanhedrin, the skeptics. They too are "our ancient contemporaries" at the cross. Their attitude is that of those who sit in Moses' pedagogical seat, but who become a stumbling block rather than a stepping stone to those for whom Christ died. Matthew says, "Likewise also the chief priests mocking him... said, He saved others; himself he cannot save. If he be the King of Israel, let him now come down from the cross, and we will believe him." (27: 41-42)

Note two things which they said: First, suffering is no part of God's plan; therefore, a suffering Saviour is not for us.

Second, they put a price tag on their faith—a crossless Christ. They sought to rationalize away the very heart of God's redemptive revelation, and thus joined in ridicule about the cross. "Crucifiers—then and now"—indeed!

It is my conviction that if people are given the simple facts concerning the Biblical teachings about Jesus, they will find their way to Him. Much of the skepticism and doubt concerning Christ and His redemptive work come not from the Society for the Advancement of Atheism, but from certain learned Doctors of Religion in classrooms, pulpits, Sunday schools, and through the printed page, who seek to rationalize away the heart and core of God's redemptive message in Christ.

To deny the unique deity of Christ, His virgin birth, miracles, vicarious atonement, bodily resurrection, and continuing force in life, is to judge Him by pagan Greek philosophy.

But because many of the learned do so, multitudes join with them unwittingly in continuing to nail Jesus to the cross of doubt and unbelief. Fortunately not all of the learned did so in Jesus' day, nor do they do so today. And they are our hope in finding our way to Him who is "the Way, the Truth, and the Life."

Again, there are the soldiers who gambled for Jesus' clothes at the cross. They are "our ancient contemporaries," the materialists. In their consuming passion for a few material things they lost sight of Jesus on the cross. Someone has suggested that they accepted the "by-products" of Calvary, but cared nothing for the true Product of Calvary.

Are you any better than they were? You are content to live in a society made possible by our redeeming Saviour, but ignore Him as your Redeemer. In that atmosphere you are so concerned with *things* that you miss the main thing. For a few paltry threads you ignore the scarlet thread which runs throughout God's redemptive revelation. Early and late you pursue the dollar but miss the true riches. In your scramble for bread, you fail to take note of the Living Bread. You may gain the whole world, yet lose your own soul.

I do not know who won Jesus' tunic in this ancient game of chance. But I do know that, despite the fancy of fiction, within a few years it was cast aside as a useless, threadbare thing. And the soul of its owner was naked before God.

Choosing materialism instead of the Master you may languish in luxury for a season. But after that, what then? Before the judgment it will not matter what you owned or what fame adhered to your name. Only one thing will matter. "What did you do with Jesus?" God forbid that your record will show that you nailed Him to the cross of materialism!

Finally, there are "our ancient contemporaries," the indifferent. Matthew describes them only as "they that passed by." (27:39) Passing by on the nearby road they took scarce note of the Crucified One, jauntily jeered, and then hastened on to what they considered more important matters.

Perhaps it was business, a social engagement, or pleasure. Innocent within itself. But so vicious, as it left Jesus nailed to a cross, without pity, without concern. Need I labor the

picture further? Do you find yourself in this number? You say that you neither condemn Jesus nor nail Him to a cross. You simply do not care.

THE TRIAL

When Pilate asked, "What shall I do with Jesus . . ."? he admitted that he was on trial before Jesus. And so are you. What will you do with Him? You with your "ancient contemporaries" nailed Jesus to the cross.

But some of "our ancient contemporaries" believed on Him through the cross to the resurrection. Thus they came to know Him, not as a victim of death, but as the greatest force in life, yea, even life itself.

Our world desperately needs to go beyond Calvary to the empty tomb. For there we learn that our Saviour is not merely a dead man on a cross but our Lord who liveth, was dead, and, behold, is alive forevermore.

He is more than merely one fact in history. He is the divine Force of history. With and through us He would come to grips with the many and perplexing problems of our world and life.

So long as we leave Him on the cross of our cowardice, skepticism, materialism, and indifference He cannot do so. But once He becomes a living, acting, overcoming Person in our lives, the fog of the pall of death will vanish as the Sun of Righteousness rises with healing in His wings.

This sermon leaflet is free. However, if you wish to share in the cost of printing and distribution our address is: THE BAPTIST HOUR, P. O. Box 12157, Fort Worth 16, Texas.

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