
The Gospel of John

Part 7 - by: Ronald L. Dart

I must confess, I was a little puzzled at the reaction of the Jewish community to the new movie about 'The Passion of Jesus,' but when I reflected on some of the persecution of Jews by Christians down through the centuries, well it did make a little bit of sense. You would think though, that in the modern world, we would be passed all that. What Mel Gibson was doing in his movie was portraying as honestly as possible, at least that's what he said, the last 12 hours of Jesus' life as a man. What some would call 'His Passion,' but because Jesus was being condemned by the Jewish leadership, some people, some fools, have blamed all Jews for what happened and I can guess I can understand why some Jewish leaders would be worried that people would bring this all up again and begin to blame all Jews down through time for what a handful of people, who happen to be Jews, did in the first century. It is an ignorant and foolish mistake, but people make it.

Jesus Lived in A Jewish World

I suppose, most readers of the Bible, forget that Jesus' mother was a Jewish maiden. That Joseph, Mary's husband was a Jew. They forget that Jesus' apostles: Peter, James, John, and all the rest of them were Jews. They forget that Nicodemus who was a Jewish leader became a disciple of Jesus. They forget that Joseph of Arimathea, who gave his tomb to Jesus was a Jew. And they forget that a great multitude of Jews, if you took a Zogby poll, it would have given Jesus favorable ratings.

Jesus Challenged the Jewish Religious Establishment

So, what went wrong? Well, what went wrong was that Jesus was challenging the Jewish religious establishment, from the Pharisaic rabbis to the Sadducees and priests, but there was nothing new in this. Every single prophet in the Old Testament was an Israelite who spoke to Israelites. Isaiah, Jeremiah and Ezekiel were all Jews, at least in the broad sense and they spoke to Jews. In every single case they were condemning the Jewish religious establishment, along with most of the people. Jesus was merely the last in a long string of people who had done that.

Every time it happened someone got in trouble. Isaiah was killed. They say he was cut sawn in two. Jeremiah was dumped in the dungeon and left to die, and we don't know exactly what happened in the end of Ezekiel's life. But the people who heard what they had to say didn't like it one little bit.

Jesus, one day, said this in Matthew 23 verse 29, "Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites, because you build the tombs of the prophets and garnish the sepulchers of the righteous {30} And you say "If we had been in the days of our fathers, we wouldn't have been partakers with them in the blood of the prophets."

Now who Jesus is talking to here are the Pharisees and the scribes, the Jewish sages, the ones who interpreted the law for the people. The leaders of the religious elements and sects of the Jews.

And they said, "If we had been in the days of our fathers we would not have been partakers with them in the blood of the prophets," and therefore Jesus said, {31} "Your witness of yourself, that you are the children of the people who killed the prophets." You acknowledge that, you know that, you accept that. {32} "Fill you up then the measure of your fathers. You serpents, you generation of vipers, how can you escape the damnation of hell."

Now it is not real hard to figure out, exactly why these people were somewhat upset with Jesus, because He called them 'snakes in the grass' to their face.

Jesus asked, "How can you escape the damnation of hell? I'll tell you what I'm going to do,"

Jesus said, {34} "I'm going to send you prophets and wise men and scribes. Some of them, you shall kill and crucify, some of them you'll whip in your synagogues and you'll persecute them from city to city."

Why are we going to do all this? {35} "So that upon you may come all the righteous blood that has been shed upon the earth from the blood of righteous Abel, to the blood of Zacharias, whom you slew between the Temple and the altar. {36} I'll tell you the truth, All these things are going to come on this generation."

And of course, they did! They did in the person of Jesus Himself. The person of the apostles who went about doing the work. Some of them got killed, many of them were persecuted and so it went.

And then Jesus said "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you that kill the prophets and stone them that are sent to you. How often would I have gathered your children together, like a hen gathers her chicks under her wings and you wouldn't have it. {39} Behold your house is left to you desolate."

So we've got the picture here of what is going on. Jesus is challenging, as every prophet before him, had done. The leadership of the Jewish people who were supposed to be God's people, and who had a task, a God given task, to carry out a task which they, in Jesus' eyes, had not done and this is painful for Jewish people to contemplate.

Naturally so, the first of those I said that Jesus would send to these people, was Himself. From the Sermon on the Mount forward, Jesus challenged the traditions of the Jews, who according to Jesus, taught for doctrines the commandments of men and overruled, ignored the

Commandments of God. He challenged their silly rules about the Sabbath by deliberately healing on the Sabbath day. In one case He deliberately spit on the ground and make clay to put on the eyes of a man who had been born blind.

Now you would think that a man who was able to heal a man who had been born blind, so he could see, might have something useful to say about the Sabbath day, something that you might want to listen to. But the religious leaders, they took the man who could now see and threw him out of the synagogue and condemned Jesus for healing him.

And Jesus said in John 9 verse 39, "For judgment I am come into the world, so that they who see not, might see, and that they who see might be made blind." {40} And some of the Pharisees who were with Him heard him say that, and they said, "Well, are we blind also?" {41} And Jesus said to them, "If you were blind, you would have no sin, but now you say we see, therefore, your sin remains."

What Jesus is telling the religious leaders who were on His case is, "You have no excuse!"

The Good Shepherd

What follows in chapter 10 is often looked at in isolation, but it should be considered in the light of what has just come before, the conflict with the Jewish religious establishment, about taking care of God's people, God's sheep. They were the shepherds of God's people, and so Jesus goes forward with an analogy about a good Shepherd.

Jesus said in John 10 verse one, "I'll tell you the truth. He that enters not by the door into the sheepfold, but climbs up some other way, the same is a thief and a robber, {2} But he that enters in by the door, that's the shepherd of the sheep. {3} To him the doorkeeper opens, and the sheep hear his voice, and he calls his own sheep by name and leads them out."

Now the picture being developed here only makes sense if you really begin to understand, if you understand that the existing shepherds of the sheep, until the time that Jesus came, were the Pharisees, the scribes, the sages, the people who were leading the Jewish people spiritually. They were their shepherds.

Jesus said, "I am the good Shepherd." He said in verse 4, "This one puts his own sheep out to pasture. He goes in front of them and the sheep follow him, for they know his voice. {5} A stranger, Oh they won't follow a stranger, they will run away from him. They don't know the voice of strangers."

Now that's the parable and then John tells us in verse 6, "This parable spoke Jesus to them but they didn't understand what He was saying."

That's not surprising, because I think most modern readers, just read through this account and don't quite get what Jesus is saying.

Jesus said to them again, {7} "I'll tell you the truth, I am the door of the sheep, {8} All that ever came before me are thieves and robbers, but the sheep did not hear them."

He just basically said to His disciples, these men who are generally recognized around the countryside is the shepherds of Israel, these men, the rabbis, the Sadducees, the Pharisees, the leaders of the religious sects.

Jesus is saying, "These who came before me are not good shepherds. They are thieves. They are robbers. {9} I am the door," Jesus said, "If anybody's going to come in, he will be saved and shall go in and out and find pasture. {10} The thief comes to steal and kill and to destroy. I am come that they might have life and that they might have it more abundantly. {11} I am the good Shepherd; the good Shepherd gives his life for the sheep."

Think about that! The good Shepherd is the one who fights for the sheep, who defends the sheep, who will go out and try to challenge a lion if he needs to or a wolf or anything that is going to tackle and take away his sheep. It's also interesting that Jesus draws through this analogy the fact that his sheep know his voice and won't follow a stranger, that there are people in this world who are His sheep and they know His voice and when they finally do hear His voice, not necessarily the timber of it, but the message of it. They know it. They hear it and follow it.

"I'm the good Shepherd," verse 11, "The good Shepherd gives his life for the sheep, {12} But he that is a hireling, and not the shepherd, whose own the sheep are not, sees the wolf coming, leaves the sheep and runs, and the wolf catches and scatters the sheep. {13} The hireling flees because he is a hireling and cares not for the sheep."

The most important thing perhaps in all this section here is, becoming aware of the fact that there are shepherds who are nothing but hirelings, who don't care for the sheep, who will not lay down their life for them and who will run when they are challenged. You see in many ways this is the problem that Jesus faced, not with Jews as a whole, but with a narrow slice of Jewish religious leadership that was in power at the time when He came on the scene and who were leading the flock of God astray.

"I am the good Shepherd," Jesus says in verse 14, "I know my sheep and I am known of mine. {15} As the Father knows Me, even so I know the Father and I lay down my life for the sheep."

Then Jesus says something truly astonishing. Jesus says in verse 16, "Other sheep I have, by the way, who were not of this fold. I must bring them and they will hear my voice and there shall be one fold and one shepherd."

What on earth did Jesus mean by that? Well, file it away in your memory, because we will be back to this theme later on. He seems to be talking about the sheep He was getting around Him out of the Jews in Jerusalem and Galilee at this time.

Then Jesus says of this fold, "I've got other sheep not of this fold. I will bring them together and there is going to be one flock, one-fold, one shepherd."

Most commentators think Jesus is talking about the Gentiles, and indeed, I think He is.

"Therefore." verse 17, Jesus says, "My Father loves Me, because I lay down my life, that I might take it again. {18} Nobody can take it from me. I'm laying it down of myself. I have the power to lay it down. I have the power to take it again. I have received this commandment from my Father." {19} There was a division among the Jews about these sayings, {20} And some of them said, "He has a devil, he is crazy, why are you listening to him?" {21} And other said, "These are not the words of him that has a devil. Can a devil open the eyes of the blind?"

Quite a question, isn't it?

I and My Father Are One

Let's continue in John chapter 10 verse 22, "And it was in Jerusalem at the feast of dedication. It was winter time. {23} And Jesus walked in the Temple in Solomon's porch. {24} Then came Jews round about Him and said, "How long are you going to make us doubt? If you are the Christ, tell us plainly. {25} And Jesus answered them, "I told you and you don't believe, the works that I do in my Father's name, they bear witness of me."

I would think that for most people that would be enough, and I expect for Jesus' sheep who recognized His voice, it was enough.

Jesus says, {26} "But you don't believe, because you are not of my sheep, as I said to you. {27} My sheep hear my voice. I know them, and they follow me," so obviously, you aren't one of them. {28} "I give to My sheep eternal life. They shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand. {29} My Father, that gave them to me, is greater than all, and no one is able to pluck them out of my Father's hand, {30} I and my Father are one."

Well, what a statement. Now on one hand you could look at that and say, "Well, that just simply means that He's on the same wavelength as his Father or that He's listening to his Father, doing what his Father says. You can find all kinds of things that might mean that wouldn't be a problem, but the Jews knew precisely what Jesus meant, when He said, "I and the Father are one." He meant He was saying that He was God.

Verse 31, "Then the Jews took up stones again to stone Him. {32} And Jesus said, "Wait, I've done a lot of good works for my Father, which of these works are you stoning me for? {33} The Jews answered and said, "We are not stoning you for a good work, but for blasphemy and because you being a man make yourself God."

So how did the Jews understand what Jesus said? They understood it clearly enough and I find it difficult to go off in another direction. Jesus said that "His Father was God," and He said, "I and the Father are one" and they said "It is time to stone this guy, He's claiming to be God when He is only a man." Jesus answered them, {34} "Isn't it written in your law, I said, quote "You are gods?" {35} Now if He called them gods, and to whom the word of God came, and the Scripture cannot be broken. {36} How is it that you are going to say of Him of whom the Father has sanctified and sent into the world, you blasphemed because I said, "I am the Son of God?" Here

it is, in your own Scriptures and you can't live with that? {37} "If I don't do the works of my Father, then don't believe me. {38} But if I do, if you can't believe me, at least believe the works, so you can know and believe that the Father is in me and I in Him," {39} So they sought again to take Him, but He escaped out of their hand. {40} And went away again beyond Jordan to the place where John had first baptized, and He stayed over there. {41} A lot of people came out to see Him there and they said, "John never did a miracle but all things that John spoke of this man are true." {42} And many believed on Him there."

And they were all, as far as we know, to a man, to a woman, Jews. They believed on Jesus. So there is no reason for us to think that because Mel Gibson's movie, "The Passion," shows that a segment of the Jewish religious leadership killed Jesus, that this is somehow anti-Semitic, because a very large number of Jews believed in Jesus, followed Jesus, and many of them thought He was a great man even though they didn't accept him as the Messiah.

Lazarus, Come Forth!

John chapter 11, "Now a certain man was sick, named Lazarus, of Bethany, in the town of Mary and her sister Martha. {2} (It was this Mary that anointed the Lord with ointment, and wiped his feet with her hair, whose brother Lazarus was sick.) {3} So his sisters sent to Him, saying, "Lord, behold, he whom you love is sick." {4} When Jesus heard that, He said, "This sickness is not unto death, it's for the glory of God, that the Son of God might be glorified thereby."

Now Jesus knew what was coming down, bear this in mind, He knew it right from the start. He said, "This sickness is not unto death," even though He knew Lazarus was going to die. He said, "That is not what it is all about.

"Now Jesus loved Martha, and her sister, and Lazarus, {6} When He heard Lazarus was sick, he stayed two more days in the same place where He was."

Now think about this. This is a man who could just say, "Be healed!" and the person would be healed. It's a person who could send word and somebody would be healed. In this case, a man whom He loved was sick and He stayed around in the same place.

Continuing in verse 7, "And then later Jesus said to His disciples, "Let's go to Judea again. {8} His disciples said, "Master, the Jews of late sought to kill you, to stone you there, and you want to go back again? {9} Jesus said, "Well, there are 12 hours in a day. If a man walks in the day he can see what he's doing, {10} But if a man walks in the night, he is going to stumble, because there is no light in him." {11} These things said He and after that He said to them, "Here's the point, our friend Lazarus sleeps, but I go that I may wake him out of sleep.""

His disciples still are not with it. We can feel sorry for them looking back with all of our hindsight.

"Jesus' disciples said, {12} "Lord if he is sleeping he must be getting better," {13} However Jesus spoke of his death, but they thought He spoke of taking rest and sleep. {14} Then Jesus said to them plainly, "NO, Lazarus is dead," {15} And I'm glad for your sakes that I was not

there to the intent that you may believe. Nevertheless, let's go to him," {16} Then said Thomas, called Didymus, to his fellow disciples, "Well boys, we might as well go and die with him."

I want to tell you something truly remarkable about what happened when Jesus came to where Lazarus was buried.

Let's continue in John 11 verse 17, "When Jesus got back down to Bethany, He found that Lazarus was not only dead but had laid in the grave for four days already. {18} Now Bethany was near Jerusalem about 2 miles away. {19} Many Jews came to Martha and Mary to comfort them, {20} Then Martha, as soon as she heard that Jesus was coming went out and met him, but Mary stayed in the house. {21} Then Martha said to Jesus, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died."

There is almost an implicit accusation involved in all that, a reproach for Jesus.

She said, {22} "I know that even now whatever you will ask of God, God will give it to you." {23} Jesus said, "Your brother shall rise again." {24} And Martha said to Him, "I know that he shall rise in the resurrection of the last day."

Now there is a little question mark hanging over this conversation.

Jesus said to her, {25} "I am the resurrection, and the life. Whoever believes in Me, though he were dead, he will live and whoever lives and believes in me shall never die. Do you believe this?"

Here is a man and a woman standing there talking, very intently together. Her brother is in a tomb not far away and has been dead for four days and Jesus is talking to her about where her heart is.

She said to Him, {27} "Yes, Lord. I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God, who should come into the world." {28} And when she said that, she went and called Mary, her sister secretly, saying, "The Master has come, and He wants to see you. {29} As soon as Mary heard that, she got up quickly and came to Him. {30} Now Jesus was not in the town, He was in that place where Martha had met Him, {31} The Jews that were with her in the house comforting her, when they saw her get up and go out quickly, they followed her saying, "She's going to the grave to weep and we had better go with her. {32} Then when Mary came to where Jesus was, and saw him, she fell down at his feet, saying, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died.""

I have very little doubt that both of these sisters had a little bit of reproach in their heart for Jesus. They are saying to Him, "You really should have been here, you know, we sent word to you. Why didn't you come?" He didn't come for a special reason.

"When" {33} "Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews also weeping that came with her, He groaned in the spirit and was troubled." {34} He said, "Where have you laid him?" And they said, "Come and see." {35} Jesus wept, {36} Then said the Jews, "Behold how He loved him."

I've heard a lot of odd explanations of this. I've heard people who said, "Well Jesus knew that He was going to raise him from the dead. There's no reason for Him to cry about that. He was just weeping because of the hardness and the unbelief and the callousness of these people's heart." These comments don't seem to work for me, because He had faced hardhearted hearts from the very beginning. Why in the world would He now be surprised because people didn't get it.

I never really quite understood this until I was sitting at my mother's bedside as she died. I knew she was dying. There was no question about that and I thought in my heart of hearts that I was ready for her death. I was prepared for it. I was accepting of the fact that the time had come for her to go. Her body was shutting down, one organ at a time and it was essentially over. I sat by her bedside and watched the little line on the monitor become irregular and then finally go flat and when it went flat, I wept like a child. It was totally unexpected to me. I knew I would grieve at my mother's death, but I did not expect my reaction and I realized when it happened to me that there is something inside a human being that is affected by death, especially the death of one close to them. It is not something you can control. It is not something that you can shut off the switch in your mind. Not if you are normal. If you are a normal human being, being in the presence of death of someone you love, cuts very deep.

I believe that Jesus was human. He was a man and when He came to the tomb, when He came to the sisters and He felt with everyone that was there, the death of Lazarus, He wept, even in the face of knowing He was going to raise him from the dead. And so, you know there's nothing wrong, there is no tragedy in your weeping and grieving at the death of a loved one. There's no lack of faith there. It's not because you don't expect the resurrection, it is not because you don't believe in the resurrection, it's because of a sense of the loss of someone you loved and there's not a thing in the world you can do about it. You should weep.

Continuing in verse 37 of John 11, "And some of them said, "Could not this man, that opened the eyes of the blind, have caused that even this man should not have died?" {38} And Jesus came again, groaning in Himself, and He comes to the grave. It was a cave, and a stone lay across the front of it. {39} Jesus said, "Take away the stone!" And Martha said, "Oh Lord, it's been four days, the body will be stinking because he's been dead this long." {40} Jesus said to her, "Didn't I say to you, that if you would believe you would see the glory of God?" {41} So they rolled back the stone and Jesus, after a brief prayer, so they would know that it was God who did this, Jesus cried with a loud voice, "Lazarus, COME FORTH!" {44} And after a moment a man came staggering out of the cave, bound hand and foot with his head covered in is grave clothes. Lazarus was alive."

The late Ronald L. Dart was a Christian evangelist whose teachings still inspire thousands of people around the world. His legacy spans decades. For more information about the teachings of Ronald L. Dart, visit RLDEA.com where you will find booklets, articles, sermons, Bible studies, and books by Mr. Dart.

Discussion Questions

1. What other instances in history have people blamed a whole race just because the leaders did something evil and wrong?
2. Is it a common problem with human nature to blame a whole group of people rather than just the ones that are causing the problems?
3. If so, why do we act that way?
4. Jesus was speaking to the religious leaders of his time, what can we make sure that we learn from all of this so that we do not repeat their actions?
5. The leaders of that time said that they would not have made the same mistakes as their ancestors if they would have been there in that time. Do we sometimes think the same way? Could this idea actually be pride?
6. What are your thoughts about Mr. Dart's explanation of why Jesus wept for Lazarus?
7. Why do you think Jesus waited four days after the death of Lazarus to resurrect him?
8. Do you ever wonder if Lazarus had to die again after being resurrected?
9. How do you think the religious leaders of that day would explain Lazarus' resurrection?
10. Have you ever wondered how emotionally hard it must have been for Jesus to see that still many didn't believe who He was?