

TESTIMONY TO JESUS FROM HOSTILE SOURCES

Our friends often kindly overlook our faults. When they talk about us to others they sometimes describe us as they would like us to be rather than as we really are. Our enemies, however, sometimes come closer to the truth about us. There is some truth in the old adage, 'There is more likely to be some truth in solid criticism than in unqualified praise. However, Jesus' enemies expressed a good deal of truth about Him, sometimes unwittingly.

During His passion, Jesus' enemies conceded things about him that were quite true. Caiaphas, the leader of the Jewish Council, occupying the role of judge, put Jesus under oath, "Tell us whether You are the Christ, the Son of God!" When Jesus replied, "It is as you have said", the Jewish council did not examine His claim, but simply assumed that He had incriminated Himself as a blasphemer by making the claim. The patently unjust procedure pointed to the fact that Jesus' claim had been left unexamined.

Members of the Jewish Council spat in Jesus' face and struck Him with their fists, and others slapped Him, saying, "Prophecy to us, You Christ, Who is the one who has hit You?" Some Jews used to comment on the fact that, since the prophets Zechariah and Malachi, the Spirit of God had been silent in Israel. There had been no more prophets. The accusation, "Prophecy to us" mocked Jesus' claim to be the Messiah, the One whom the Spirit of God anointed in an exceptional degree. His claim became the basis of unjust mockery. However, the mockery did not disprove His claim. The Spirit was indeed at work in Him, and He was the promised Prophet.

Herod and his soldiers put a splendid garment on Jesus, although Jesus had remained silent. The accusation as it had come to Pilate, that He was making Himself a king, was left unexamined. His claim was simply mocked.

Pilate's wife sent her husband this message "Do not have anything to do with that innocent Man."

Pilate was both cruel and weak. However, three times Pilate testified to Jesus' innocence. He told the Jews, "I find no basis for a charge against this man." When Jesus was brought back from Herod, Pilate said, "You have brought me this Man as one who was inciting the people to rebellion. I have examined Him and your presence and have found no basis for your charges against Him." When the crowd cried out for His crucifixion, he answered, "No, what wrong has He done?" He insisted that he had not found any grounds for the death penalty. The injustice of having Jesus scourged and then sent to crucifixion is against testimony to Jesus from hostile or cruelly uncommitted sources. In this, Pilate indicated much about himself, and much about Jesus.

Those who going past the place of crucifixion kept insulting Jesus, shaking their heads, and saying, "You, who are going to tear down the temple and build it in three days, save Yourself. If You are the Son of God, come down from the cross!" They did not bother to examine what Jesus had meant by building the temple in three days. For them, His claim was enough evidence to condemn Him. Indeed He was the Son of God. If He had wished, He could even then have come down from the cross and inflicted terrible revenge on His enemies. But then, His enemies would have had no Saviour

The chief priests, together with the scribes and elders, also kept making fun of Him in a similar way, saying, "He saved others: He cannot save Himself." On many occasions, when Jesus had healed someone, like the woman with a haemorrhage, He had said, "Your faith has saved you." He could simply have said, "cured you", or "healed you", out there was an eschatological hint in the word "saved." The words, "Your faith has saved you" had meant, "Your faith in Me has saved you." Jesus was not making a modest and half-hearted claim. He was the One whom God had chosen, and through whom God would save His people, from sin and death. Everyone who knew Hebrew also knew that Jesus' name meant "The Lord saves." In the home of the tax contractor, Zacchaeus, Jesus had said, "The Son of Man has come to search for, and to save, what has been lost." Even His enemies did not try to deny that He saved others, even if they would have denied that He could bring God's salvation from death and damnation. At the very time when He was being mocked for claiming to save, He was in fact paying the price, as God and man, for the salvation of every sinner, including His enemies.

The mockery of the soldiers, with a purple robe, the crown of thorns, and a reed as a sceptre, lampooned the charge that Jesus was the king of the Jews. The title that Pilate wrote announced the reason for Jesus' crucifixion. It said, "Jesus of Nazareth, the king of the Jews." For him it was a way of mocking the Jewish leaders, that this Man, who looked so unlike a king, was their King. He wanted to say that the Romans were in control, and no one should challenge Tiberius. Although, during Jesus' trial, the Jewish leaders had said, "We have no king but Caesar," they would never have conceded that at other times. They would have defended the statement that only God was the King of the Jews. They would have said that the Lord, who had brought the nation out of Egypt, was still Israel's King, as He had been when Israel still had kings like Saul and David. The truth was that Jesus, who was crucified as King of the Jews was, and is, the very God who had created heaven

and earth, and had redeemed Israel from Egypt to be His own people. He was King of the Jews, as charged!

Those who went past the cross and the Jewish leaders mocked, “He is the King of Israel; He should come down from the cross now, and we shall believe in Him.” The irony of it, again, was that they will eventually have to acknowledge Him as the King of kings and Lord of lords. The Jewish leaders were offended by Pilate’s accusation, and tried to get Pilate to change the title to “He said, ‘I am the king of the Jews.’” However, Pilate’s insistence that the accusation should stand as he had written it was another testimony from a hostile source. His sign confessed the truth with a meaning that Pilate himself had not intended.

While Jesus was on the cross there was a series of references to Psalm 22. That psalm contained the verse, “All those who see Me ridicule Me; they make wry lips, they shake their heads, saying, ‘Commit it to the LORD! Let Him rescue Him! Let Him deliver Him! For He takes pleasure in Him!’” Jesus’ enemies were so certain that He was not their Messiah that they took up the words of the Psalm and threw them back at Jesus in mockery, “He trusts in God; let God rescue Him now if He wants Him, for He said, ‘I am the Son of God.’” Though they rejected the application of this to Jesus, their words were absolutely true.

When the Roman captain, who had charge of the squad that had been detailed to crucify Jesus, and those who were watching Jesus with him saw the earthquake and the other things that happened, they were terrified. They said, “Truly, this man was the Son of God!” How the Roman captain understood the words he used is debatable. However, it was another testimony; if not from a hostile source, at least from a neutral but official source. Christians see in the centurion’s the confession an echo of the Father’s statement at Jesus’ baptism, “This is My Son”, and of Peter’s confession at Caesarea Philippi, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God!” They also remember Jesus’ own reply before the Jewish Council to Caiaphas, the judge turned prosecutor, who put Jesus under oath, “Tell us whether You are the Christ, the Son of God!” Jesus answered him, “It is as you have said, but I tell you all, from now on you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Power, and coming on the clouds of heaven.” Jesus told the ones who were then judging Him that one day He would be judging them.

He saved others. We have squandered our lives badly. Sin and death have ruined God’s image in His creation of human beings. However, we affirm the truth, for ourselves, of what Jesus’ enemies mocked in Him, “He saved others.” Jesus Himself had said, “And I, if I am lifted up from the earth, shall draw all people to Myself.”