

When Mankind Meets Its Maker

Study 1—We Are Not Very Nice People

Why is the cross of Jesus so important to Christians? It appears to be tragic and useless but Paul says it is God's way of working powerfully among us (1 Cor. 1:17-18).

Just before Jesus is arrested, he says the time has come for this world to be judged (John 12:30).

- ❑ God will set up his court, expose wrong doers, and pronounce judgement. Jesus is speaking about his death.
- ❑ This is the exact opposite of what seems to be happening. Jewish leaders agree Jesus must die. Pilate sentences him to death. He is nailed on a cross.
- ❑ But Jesus says this is the judgement of the world.

This happens when Jesus is 'lifted up' (John 8:26-28).

- ❑ He is lifted up on a cross. But he is also going to be lifted up in victory.
- ❑ The judgement is not just a verdict. The sentence is carried out.
- ❑ Satan will be 'driven out', and Jesus will be revealed as the world's true leader—he will draw all people to himself (John 12:32).

The cross is not just something that happens to Jesus. It is a revelation of us.

- ❑ There's some local content to how this is happening—as below.
- ❑ The implications involved in Jesus being killed are global, historic and final.
- ❑ Effectively, the whole race is being assembled by its Maker—ahead of the final judgement day—and we are finding out where we stand. Cf. Acts 17:31.
- ❑ These local Jews and Romans represent all of us. It is the judgement of the world.

The immediate setting.

- ❑ Jesus has spent three years attending sick and troubled people.
- ❑ He has shown that God is working in him powerfully.
- ❑ He's made it clear that whatever people think of him is what they think of God.
- ❑ Many have welcomed Jesus because of this.
- ❑ Israel's leaders are jealous. They can't deny what he is doing, or the attitude of many people to him, but they decide to destroy him.

Jesus either attracts or repels us. We can't be neutral.

- ❑ Christ is in charge. He's revealing God.
- ❑ If we don't want what God can do, we'll end up hating his Son, even if we think he's 'nice'.
- ❑ The world's evil is shown most clearly in its denial of its Maker, and rejection of his Son.

Jesus has explained this reaction.

- ❑ If we believe he is God's Son we won't be condemned, and, that if we don't, we are condemned already (John 3:18-21).

- ❑ This is explained. 'Light has come into the world, but men love darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil.' If we don't come to his Son, we're hiding something.
- ❑ Then, we must destroy the evidence that he is who he is. We have to 'kill' the Son of God all over again (Heb. 6:6).

If we know we are sinners, we come to God and to the Son he has sent because he's promising to do something about our problem. As in 1 John 1:8-9.

- ❑ We know we're not very nice!
- ❑ We've played with the word 'sinners' too much for it to register!
- ❑ If we say we don't need that kind of help, we're exposing something about ourselves that's sinister and dark.
- ❑ Our friends might think we are wonderful, but this won't make much difference when we have to stand before God.

How this is working out now.

- ❑ Jesus says the Holy Spirit will come and convict the world of sin, righteousness and judgement (John 16:7-10).
- ❑ The accusation that we are sinners is because we don't believe in his Son (v. 9).
- ❑ This judgement of the world that happens when Jesus is killed is now administered by the Holy Spirit through the preaching of the apostles.
- ❑ When Peter preaches the first Christian sermon, his proof that they are sinners is, 'You killed him' (Acts 2:23, 36).
- ❑ Peter does not accuse others to justify himself. He has failed Jesus badly himself.
- ❑ We are not told this so we can blame the Jews. Rather, the apostles are telling us what all humanity is like.
- ❑ These accusations continue throughout the book of Acts (3:14; 4:10, 27; 5:30; 7:52; 10:39; 13:27).

If Christ's death is the judgement of this world—and we are the accused, we should be very interested in how the 'trial' proceeds.

- ❑ Jesus is dying—nailed to a cross. The first things he says is, 'Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing' (Luke 23:34).
- ❑ We are watching 'the judgement of the world'. We are found guilty. And the Son of God is asking his Father that we not be condemned for the crime!

When God shows us how wrong we have been, he's not wanting to condemn us but to warn us. It's a wake-up call!

- ❑ God is asking us to look up—at him. He is showing us how horrible, inexcusable, miserable and poor minded our attitude to him is.
- ❑ And he is saying there is time to change our minds.
- ❑ This is what Peter does in his sermon: 'Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins' (Acts 2:38).

This is what Jesus does in his letter to Laodicea (Revelation 3:17).

- ❑ Christians go on having the same problem as the world.
- ❑ Our problem is not that we are pitiful, poor and naked but that we don't know it.
- ❑ Jesus says, 'Those whom I love I rebuke and discipline. So be earnest, and repent.'
- ❑ He's standing at their door and knocking. If we open up to him, we will have rich fellowship—immediately. The same order is happening in 1 John 1:7-10.

Through the cross of Jesus, God has us before him, exposed and guilty. If we think we don't need his Son, we are in the dark. We have a deadly ailment and will die from it if it's not exposed and treated. But if we hear his cry from the cross, and his letter from heaven, the judgement of this world will turn out to be good news.

It is to this that we must turn in the following studies.