The Real Jesus: Despised and Esteemed Not

The Lord Jesus hated iniquity and lived without sin. He made no compromise with unrighteousness. He did not merely preach the truth; He lived it in every detail, with nothing hidden, no deceit and no compromise.

He was light in the midst of darkness, pure in a filthy world, righteous in a corrupt society. It is no wonder that the Lord Jesus' command about not resisting evil and about paying tribute stirred up hatred against Him. He was despised precisely because He exposed sin and demanded a righteousness that goes beyond appearances, reaching the heart and the deeds of a man.

And today things are no different. **Genuine righteousness**, which condemns theft, lying and injustice, still provokes rejection and even hatred.

Many reject the real Jesus and embrace "another Jesus", an imaginary one who lets them cheat on their taxes, lie and live in unrighteousness without rebuke. But this "**Jesus**" is not the Saviour of the Scriptures. He is a comfortable illusion that cannot save.

Today many declare themselves born of God, yet they live in contradiction to that claim. Some steal, or accept tax evasion, and support injustice and compromise, while still counting themselves among His people.

But an unrighteous life is no proof of being born of God. Disregarding Christ's commandments reveals a heart that has not been transformed by God's righteousness. Scripture is clear: it is not religious activity but living in righteousness that confirms we belong to God. "In this the children of God are manifest, and the children of the devil: whosoever doeth not righteousness is not of God." (1 John 3:10)

True birth from God is preceded by a sincere hunger and thirst for righteousness, a deep longing that shows itself in deeds: in honesty, in truthfulness, in forsaking sin and in obeying His commandments. Any form of faith that does not produce a life lived in the righteousness of God is a great delusion.

It is a painful reality. Many say they love Him, but when it comes to obedience, to living out His commandments, they choose darkness. They choose comfort, they choose religion, they choose appearances, but they do not choose the Word.

The Lord Jesus is despised because of His Word, which accepts no compromise. The Lord says you cannot love Him and at the same time despise His commandments. **"He that loveth me not keepeth not my sayings." (John 14:24)**

This is not merely a question of morality. It is clear spiritual evidence of the condition of the heart. Disregarding His commandments, including those about honesty, justice, paying taxes,

self-denial and submission to authority, is not just a behavioural problem. It is proof that the heart does not love the Lord.

In fact, many despise the real Jesus. They do it not out of ignorance but out of deliberate resistance. They hate Him because He commands them to live in purity, to give up dishonest income, to submit and not to justify themselves.

Even though they say they love Him, sing to Him, pray and preach, the reality is that they hate Him, exactly as Scripture says: "For every one that doeth evil hateth the light, neither cometh to the light, lest his deeds should be reproved." (John 3:20)

They despise Him because He reaches into their pockets, because His presence threatens to shrink their profits and uncovers the greed of Judas hidden in their hearts. They set Him at nought by their deeds, living as though He had no claim on their lives.

The righteousness Christ demanded cost Him His life. Satan used this hatred of man for the light as his final weapon to have the Lord Jesus put to death. He knows that men love darkness rather than light (John 3:19), that they hate the light because it exposes their evil deeds, and that the truth stirs up resistance in the hearts of those who live in sin.

This can be seen clearly in **Matthew 22:15–22**, which describes Satan's carefully laid plan. He put into the minds of the religious leaders a seemingly legitimate question, meant to stir up the crowd's hatred not only against His teaching but against Christ Himself.

Although the question seems to come from men, the initiative is not purely human. Behind this trick question stands Satan, the author of the plan to discredit and eliminate Christ.

The question about paying tribute to Caesar was a double-edged challenge. The Jewish people loathed the Roman regime, not only for political reasons but also because of the crushing tax burden imposed by the occupation. It was a burden much like the compulsory produce quotas the Soviet-backed regime forced on Romanian farmers after the Second World War. Satan exploited this tension, knowing that a simple approval of paying tribute could inflame the crowd's hatred. He knew Jesus' teaching about not resisting the one who takes what is yours by force: "And if any man will sue thee at the law, and take away thy coat, let him have thy cloke also" (Matthew 5:40). So Satan sought to catch Him in a trap that would allow Him to be condemned.

Satan knew that Jesus' answer could not contradict His own teaching, and through this question he succeeded in stirring up the hatred of the Jewish people. When the Lord Jesus said that tribute should be given to Caesar, He was seen as a traitor to the Jewish cause. This bred hatred in the crowd, because His commands struck directly at their desire to avoid paying tribute, at their pride, their ambitions and their expectations, and above all at their pockets, touching their income and their financial comfort.

Satan got what he was after: the people's hatred and, through a lie, a seemingly legitimate political charge meant to justify the condemnation of the Lord Jesus. The lie spoken by the

religious leaders was that the Lord had said tribute should not be given to Caesar, which presented Him as an agitator against Roman authority. Although He had clearly declared, "Render therefore unto Cæsar the things which are Cæsar's," this twisting of His words was used to accuse Him of sedition and to force Pilate to condemn Him.

And today the situation has not changed. The hatred the people showed then towards this teaching of Christ is still present today. Whoever despises this teaching and refuses to render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's in fact hates Christ, because His message strikes exactly where that person's love lies: in dishonest gain. The Lord Jesus' teaching is radical, because it unmasks the one who loves the wages of unrighteousness. It demands a life lived in justice and in submission to the authorities, not in hiding income. It is a call to respect civil order, even when the authorities are not perfect.

Even when something unjust is demanded of us, the Lord Jesus teaches us "That ye resist not evil" (Matthew 5:39). It is an invitation to give up taking justice into our own hands, and to live a life in which righteousness and peace matter more than claiming our own rights. This teaching does not offer an easy road. It offers a narrow one that passes through self-denial and the cross.

Today many love **another Jesus**, not the true Jesus. They love Him for the healings He performs, for the heaven He offers, for the multiplied loaves and because He solves their problems. They accept Him as long as He does not disturb their dishonest gain.

But they reject Him when He asks for integrity, obedience, self-denial and submission. The reaction of the crowd in His day is the same today: from admiration to hatred. Many listened to Him in amazement, but they were deeply disappointed when they understood that:

- The Lord Jesus would not lead a political revolution against Rome.

- He was asking them to submit to an unjust regime.

- He was "betraying" them by telling them to pay tribute to Caesar.

In the eyes of the crowd, such a Messiah was a bitter disappointment. That is why their hatred grew, culminating in the cry, "Crucify Him!" Isaiah describes exactly this reaction: **"He is despised and rejected of men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief... and we esteemed him not." (Isaiah 53:3)** This hatred of the authentic Jesus is not only a historical fact. It is a constant trait of the human heart.

The Lord Jesus was despised because He did not live up to human expectations. He was hated not for any wrongdoing, but for His holiness, for the purity of His heart, and because He exposed people's sin and called them to a life of submission, even in the face of injustice. He Himself says in John 7:7, "The world cannot hate you; but me it hateth, because I testify of it, that the works thereof are evil." The truth Christ spoke was unsettling, because His light brought to the surface the darkness in men's hearts.

The same contempt persists today. Many admire the Lord Jesus for the sacrifice He made for our sin, but they despise His commandments, especially when those commandments touch their material interests.

It is easier to love a "Jesus" who asks next to nothing than to follow the crucified Christ, who asks for everything. When the truth touches personal gain, many prefer to stop their ears and look the other way.

The true Jesus, as Scripture reveals Him, is not just a symbol of unconditional love. He is the Lord and Master who calls us to repentance, to submission, to the cross and to a holy life. He did not seek popularity. He spoke the truth, even at the cost of hatred and the cross. Scripture is very clear on this: **"Light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil." (John 3:19)**

By contrast, the **false Jesus** promoted in many religious organisations is a convenient projection: a Jesus who does not condemn sin, does not demand holiness and does not speak of judgment, but only of salvation by grace, acceptance and blessing. He is a Jesus who loves unconditionally, who does not disturb, does not challenge and does not demand restitution.

This counterfeit image is loved because:

- It does not demand real repentance, only an emotional attachment.

- It does not confront sin, but ignores it or redefines it.

- It does not speak of the cross, only of grace.

- It does not call to submission, but to spiritual independence.

Yet choosing to keep what does not belong to us is a direct offence against the holiness of God. The Lord Jesus does not accept a partial repentance. He demands a complete break with iniquity, a total turning away from the works of darkness.

A true encounter with Christ produces a radical change, as it did with Zacchaeus, who did not look for excuses but chose to make right what he had done wrong. This is what genuine repentance looks like: it admits guilt, puts right the wrong and brings light where there had been darkness.

The Lord Jesus is hated because He calls us to live in all that is right. He is not manipulated by religious appearances. He goes deep into the heart and demands truth. And the truth demands self-denial, renunciation and restitution. He does not come to comfort us in our sin but to set us free from it. He calls us to give back what was stolen and hidden. For many, giving up what they have gained dishonestly over a lifetime seems almost impossible, a burden too heavy to bear.

The false Jesus is loved because he does not trouble the conscience and does not demand that stolen goods be returned. He does not insist that sin be made right. That is why many justify keeping what they gained dishonestly through a wrong understanding of grace, reasoning that

"the times of this ignorance God winked at" (Acts 17:30).

But this verse does not support keeping what was stolen. It proclaims the universal call to repentance: "And the times of this ignorance God winked at; but now commandeth all men every where to repent."

So grace does not cancel justice; it fulfils it through repentance and restitution. This restitution is not an act of bravery, nor a personal merit to be praised. It is evidence of sincere repentance. It is repentance for shameful things, for deeds that were a direct offence against the holiness of God. It is nothing to boast about. It is something to be done in humility, with tears, recognising how serious the sin is.

He calls us to give up the sin of Achan: the things stolen and stubbornly kept, excused with the claim that "it's too hard to give them back." Yet this very difficulty is the test of genuine repentance. Refusing to give up what does not belong to us shows that the heart has not truly broken free from iniquity. God is not looking for excuses but for full obedience.

True repentance does not look for excuses; it looks for the light. It does not bargain with sin; it condemns it and puts it away. It is not a boast about the courage to make restitution, but a painful admission that we have lived in darkness, in hidden sin, in iniquity. It is an admission that we have lived in a culture of stealing from the state, inherited from communism in Romania, when people stole from the collective farm and the factory, everything from potatoes, apples and grapes down to nails. True repentance means leaving behind, once and for all, the shameful deeds that are an offence to God.

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