

...For They Know Not What They Do

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The love of Jesus shown by His death is astounding. When the Gospel of John introduces the events leading to the cross, the text says, “Now before the Feast of the Passover, when Jesus knew that his hour had come to depart out of this world to the Father, having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end” (John 13:1).

Everything Jesus endured and gave was about His love for His Father and His love for us. The gift of His love at the cross would complete His Father’s will and offer salvation to the world. Yet, no one in the world knew this. Despite the Scriptures and His ministry, the world was ignorant of who Jesus was and what He came to accomplish.

While unjustly dying in agony on the cross, Jesus outpoured His heart to His Father on behalf of the people crucifying Him. Suspended between Heaven and earth, Jesus cried, “Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do” (Luke 23:34). Even while suffering, Jesus maintained the presence of mind and disposition of heart to beg forgiveness on behalf of His murderers. Astounding!

Ignorance contributed to the death of the Messiah; yet, the people were held accountable for their sins. The apostle Peter explained, “And now, brothers, I know that you acted in ignorance, as did also your rulers. But what God foretold by the mouth of all the prophets, that his Christ would suffer, he thus fulfilled. Repent therefore, and turn back, that your sins may be blotted out, that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord, and that he may send the Christ appointed for you, Jesus, whom heaven must receive until the time for restoring all the things about which God spoke by the mouth of his holy prophets long ago” (Acts 3:17-21).

The people did not know what they were doing when they demanded Pilate release Barabbas instead of Jesus. The people did not know what they were doing when they shamefully paraded Jesus through the streets of Jerusalem. The people did not know what they were doing when they mocked Jesus. The people did not know what they were doing when they killed the Lord of glory.

But, are we better than them? Ignorance of Jesus abounds in the world. Sin abounds in the world. Yet, the forgiveness of God in Jesus is available. Rather than indict history, let’s try to learn from the past.

The Dangers of Ignorance

1). Ignorance is inexcusable. Characterizing someone as “ignorant” is a sure-fire way to start a fight. However, ignorance can be dealt with through education. For generations, Israel had misread the Old Testament. This contributed to their rejection of Jesus as the Messiah. Having participated in the miseducation himself, Paul once said, “For those who live in Jerusalem

and their rulers, because they did not recognize him nor understand the utterances of the prophets, which are read every Sabbath, fulfilled them by condemning him” (Acts 13:27).

Like the Jews, the Gentiles were ignorant of Jesus. Paul addressed this problem in the city of Athens. They worshipped the UNKNOWN god. In response, Paul taught them about the Creator and the Messiah. He concluded by saying, “The times of ignorance God overlooked, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent, because he has fixed a day on which he will judge the world in righteousness by a man whom he has appointed; and of this he has given assurance to all by raising him from the dead” (Acts 17:30-31).

If we are unaware of the Messiah, we are without excuse. God raised Him from the dead. God sent the Spirit to reveal the knowledge of human salvation (Eph. 3:1-4). When we stand before the Messiah in judgment as Paul described, we will not get to plead ignorant. Therefore, we must read, study, and learn the Scriptures. We must learn and obey the Gospel of Jesus.

2). The seriousness of sin. If the people had known they were killing the Author of Life, they would not have killed Him. However, if we only point our fingers at those who crucified Jesus, we will miss a greater lesson. Like them, we too are sinners. When we sin, we do not realize what we are doing. If we knew what we were doing when we sinned, we would stop sinning.

When we sin, we share in putting Jesus to death. Our sins made His death necessary. Our sins cost Jesus everything. Therefore, sin is far more serious than we typically realize. For example, some may rationalize their sin by thinking, “*I’ll sin tonight, but ask forgiveness in the morning.*” If we could take one look at Jesus being tortured to death, we would stop thinking like this. If we could know the full implication of having the sins of humanity placed on Him, we would repent without hesitation. Looking at the cross of Jesus will change our hearts and minds about sin.

3). Receiving forgiveness. Jesus petitioned His Father’s forgiveness on behalf of the people killing Him. This illustrates Jesus acting as both our High Priest and sacrifice. He was administering Himself as a sacrifice for the ignorant and the wayward (Heb. 5:1-3).

Ultimately, God’s forgiveness for the people who killed Jesus and for us was offered at the cross. Paul explained, “For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith” (Rom. 3:23-25). While forgiveness was offered, it can only be received by faith. They and we must believe in Jesus and obey Him.

When Peter first preached to those responsible for the death of Jesus, he told them, “Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit” (Acts 2:38). While we share in the death of Jesus by our sins, we can be forgiven.

Conclusion

Truly, Jesus loves us. He does not want us to be condemned. He wants us to be informed about the Gospel. He wants to save us from our sins. He wants to transform our hearts. He wants to receive us to His Father. We must believe and obey. We do not have to live in ignorance. We can know the truth and be set free.