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WHAT MOVES MEN TO SIDE WITH MURDERERS AND REBELS AGAINST THE SAVIOUR??

"Now at that feast he released unto them one prisoner, whomsoever they desired. And there was one named Barabbas, which lay bound with them that had made insurrection with him, who had committed murder in the insurrection. And the multitude crying aloud began to desire him to do as he had ever done unto them. But Pilate answered them, saying, Will ye that I release unto you the King of the Jews? For he knew that the chief priests had delivered him for envy. But the chief priests moved the people, that he should rather release Barabbas unto them," Mark 15:6-11

Both Pilate, the Roman Governor and Herod had found no fault in the Saviour. "And Pilate, when he had called together the chief priests and the rulers and the people, said unto them, Ye have brought this man unto me, as one that perverteth the people: and, behold, I, having examined him before you, have found no fault in this man touching those things whereof ye accuse him: no, nor yet Herod: for I sent you to him; and, lo, nothing worthy of death is done unto him. I will therefore chastise him, and release him," Luke 23:13-16.

Despite Pilate's remonstrance, 'all' 'the chief priests and the rulers and the people' (vv. 13 & 18), cried out in unity: "Crucify him, crucify him", verse 21.

There have been many individuals, families and nations who have acted in the same spirit throughout the ages. Verse 18 is the ultimate rejection of Christ which brought terrible and eternal consequences upon those involved in this dreadful act. They got their wish when it is said: "Then answered all the people, and said, His blood be on us, and on our children," Matthew 27:25.

I believe it all started with the decision of many in a synagogue in Capernaum as recorded in John 6:59-60. What the Saviour taught provoked this wicked response. "From that time many of his disciples went back, and walked no more with him" verse 66.

This was the spirit of rebellion which reached its height that day in Pilate's judgment hall.

The wicked direction taken by the Christ-rejector can impact upon believers. I think that may be seen in the case of the faithful band of disciples who did not share in the absolute rejection of Christ. However, as in the case of Peter, and we must remember, all the other apostles were also guilty, there was a forsaking of the Lord Jesus. "Then all the disciples forsook him, and fled," Matthew 26:56.

The rejection of the Lord Jesus by the multitude had a marked impact upon the disciples.

"But Peter followed him afar off unto the high priest's palace, and went in, and sat with the servants, to see the end," Matthew 26:58.

"And many women were there beholding afar off, which followed Jesus from Galilee, ministering unto him: among which was Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James and Joses, and the mother of Zebedee's children, Matthew 27:55-56.

"And all his acquaintance, and the women that followed him from Galilee, stood afar off, beholding these things," Luke 23:49.

The vehement rejection of the Lord Jesus by the multitude cowed the disciples and swept them along somewhat with the evil spirit of spurning Christ.

It is like the recent storms we here in Ulster experienced. They swept in from the Atlantic and hit Wales and southern England with great fury whereas we, in Ulster, being a little further north, felt only the outer edges of the winds which were much less in strength than those experienced by others in the southern areas of the United Kingdom. The same winds but to a much less degree of power and force. So it was in the storm that swept Jerusalem at that dark time of Christ rejection. Its power and impact were seen in the attitudes ad-



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opted by the believing disciples but to a much lesser degree than amongst the larger unbelieving population.

Please remember how this all began.

"Then Jesus said unto them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Except ye eat the flesh of the Son of man, and drink his blood, ye have no life in you. Whoso eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, hath eternal life; and I will raise him up at the last day. For my flesh is meat indeed, and my blood is drink indeed. He that eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, dwelleth in me, and I in him. As the living Father hath sent me, and I live by the Father: so he that eateth me, even he shall live by me. This is that bread which came down from heaven: not as your fathers did eat manna, and are dead: he that eateth of this bread shall live for ever. These things said he in the synagogue, as he taught in Capernaum. Many therefore of his disciples, when they had heard this, said, This is an hard saying; who can hear it?" John 6:53-60.

There are elements of Christ's teaching that the human heart instantly rebels against!

The 'spiritual diet' set forth by Christ as being necessary for spiritual life is not welcomed by carnal man!

The believer who would foolishly accommodate the world and seek to compromise with it and retain its favour, will be ashamed of such rigid exclusiveness as here propounded by Christ. Thus the drift away from the central truths of God's Word is evident in Christendom generally.

It is for that reason that the Saviour asked a question of the twelve: "Then said Jesus unto the twelve, Will ye also go away?" verse 67. Such a question can but mean that such a departure by the twelve was possible! They could be tempted to follow the crowd in order to avoid embarrassment! He was calling for a decision on their part.

Has this any bearing on our situation here in the Free Presbyterian Church of Ulster?

Yes, I think it does. I believe that there are those who have begun to distance themselves from the 'old paths' that our church joyfully espoused in days gone by, chiefly in the 60s and 70s, and which was evidenced in the statement issued by our Presbytery in 1998 condemning unequivocally the 'Good Friday' power-sharing agreement at Stormont.

The spirit of that statement has been utterly repudiated by those who presently engage in today's power-sharing arrangement in Stormont with those whose political credentials are much more reprehensible than the 'Nationalists' who were involved in the 'Good Friday' power-sharing agreement of 1998. Today we have those in Stormont who actually were part of the IRA terrorist organisation and who have the blood of the innocent upon their hands, and yet Free Presbyterians see fit to join with them in a political alliance!

I publish again, without apology, part of that statement by our Presbytery in 1998.

"The Free Presbyterian Church of Ulster recognising the Bible as our sole rule of faith and practice — vehemently opposes the recent April Agreement (the Good Friday Agreement). Our opposition to the Agreement stems from the fact that it is unscriptural, unethical and immoral. Scripture makes it abundantly clear in Romans 13:1-5 that it is the duty of the Government to punish evil and reward good. The fundamental principle which lies at the heart of any stable and peaceable society has been dispensed with in this Agreement. Set against a backdrop of lies and deceitfulness it ensures that those who have supported and advocated violence will sit in government over our people Such a position is contrary to the divine law of God where He commands punishment of an evildoer (1 Peter 2:14)."

But it is not only those engaged in politics who have been affected by the spirit of Christ-rejection and the repudiation of the former stand of our Church!

What of those Free Presbyterians who side with the 'power-sharers' and who seek to shelter them from any official Presbytery examination or censure?



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There have been complaints of the difficulties facing a free debate on these issues in Presbytery and the introduction of 'rules of debate' some years ago that forbid the naming of those against whom complaints are being made!

Such restrictions are not in keeping with the Spirit of Truth as is evidenced by such portions of Scripture as Galatians 2:11, 13; Philippians 4:2 and 3 John 9-10. Indeed, the Bible is filled with the records of those openly rebuked for their wrong-doing. That is God's way!

I believe that such is but part of the same spirit of 'distancing' themselves from the doctrines and then the person of Christ that was seen in those dreadful days surrounding the Saviour's crucifixion.

The shocking decision recorded in our text cost the Jewish nation dear as the history of the subsequent two millennia show. Many would have been the individual sorrows endured also by believers as a result of turning their back upon the Lord, as the 'bitter weeping' of Peter surely illustrates. "And Peter said, Man, I know not what thou sayest. And immediately, while he yet spake, the cock crew. And the Lord turned, and looked upon Peter. And Peter remembered the word of the Lord, how he had said unto him, Before the cock crow, thou shalt deny me thrice. And Peter went out, and wept bitterly," Luke 22:60-62.

Peter did not embrace the wholehearted rejection of Christ that is embodied in the words of our text at the beginning of this article but he was swept along with it to some degree. In consequence he felt, to a like degree, the bitter grief caused by his actions.

I wonder today, does the Saviour look toward us in the Free Presbyterian Church with the same reproach as that which must have been seen by Peter when he saw the Saviour turning and looking upon him? Tender would have been that look but reproachful also. It induced the bitter tears of Peter.

I cannot for one moment believe that the Lord Jesus looks upon us and welcomes our refusal to condemn the linking of His name and His witness and His honour with IRA terrorism and sodomite perversion that the involvement of some of our elders and members in the DUP's Stormont Assembly 'power-sharing' brings about.

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10th March 2020.