

DELIVERED HIM FOR ENVY

Not everyone has a favorable view of politics. Prussian General Carl von Clausewitz, said, “War is the continuation of politics by other means.” (*On War*, page 87) Mao Zedong, founder of the People’s Republic of China said, “Politics is war without bloodshed while war is politics with bloodshed.” British author Ernest Benn said of politics, “Politics is the art of looking for trouble, finding it whether it exists or not, diagnosing it incorrectly and applying the wrong remedy.” (27 July 1930, Springfield [MA] Republican, pg. 10A, col. 3) George Orwell, wrote, “In our age there is no such thing as ‘keeping out of politics.’ All issues are political issues, and politics itself is a mass of lies, evasions, folly, hatred and schizophrenia.” (“Politics and the English Language”) American economist Thomas Sowell wrote, “No one will really understand politics until they understand that politicians are not trying to solve our problems. They are trying to solve their own problems—of which getting elected and re-elected are number one and number two. Whatever is number three is far behind.” (Orange County Register, November 26, 2009) Jesus was a victim of politics. Both the Jewish court and the Roman courts that tried Him had no interest in justice, but only in their political careers. Jesus, however, is the perfect example of self-sacrifice and patient submission to God’s providence.

When God made the first man, Adam, He would have Adam govern himself, and He gave him a prohibition. He told him not to eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, and that, if he did eat of it, then he would die. Adam rebelled against God, and ate from the tree. So, God made good on His threat, and punished Adam with death. Not only did Adam die, but all his posterity come into the world in the same state of sin and death as Adam was in after he rebelled. Adam’s son, Cain, killed Abel his brother, and all men were so violent that God finally]-destroyed them with a great flood. He did spare Noah and his household, and began the world anew with them. Because every man would not govern himself, God gave men the right to govern each other. God gave them the right of capital punishment, the foundation of civil government. He said to Noah and his sons:

And surely your blood of your lives will I require; at the hand of every beast will I require it, and at the hand of man; at the hand of every man's brother will I require the life of man. Whoso sheddeth man's blood, by man shall his blood be shed: for in the image of God made he man.
(Genesis 9:5, 6)

God instituted civil government, not to concern itself with men’s health and safety, not to plan utopia, but to be God’s avenger. Of the civil magistrate, Saint Paul wrote to the Romans, “For he is the minister of God to thee for good. But if thou do that which is evil, be afraid; for he beareth not the sword in vain: for he is the minister of God, a revenger to execute wrath upon him that doeth evil.” (Romans 13:4)

When the Israelites demanded that Samuel give them a king like the other nations had, God told Samuel to warn them that a human king would enslave them for his own aggrandizement. The people had rejected God as king, so God in His wrath gave them what they wanted. He gave them a king. (1 Samuel 8; Hosea 13:11)

The first king of Israel, King Saul, did not obey God. So, God replaced Saul with David, a man after His own heart who did obey Him in all things, except in the matter of Uriah the Hittite. (1 Samuel 13:14; 16:7; 1 Kings 15:5; Acts 13:22) God made a covenant with King David that one of his descendents would inherit his throne and reign forever. (2 Samuel 7:12-16) Not only would this anointed king, this Messiah, this Christ, reign forever, but he would also reign in righteousness. Isaiah the prophet prophesied of the Christ, “Of the increase

of his government and peace there shall be no end, upon the throne of David, and upon his kingdom, to order it, and to establish it with judgment and with justice from henceforth even for ever.” (Isaiah 9:7) Again Isaiah says:

He shall not judge after the sight of his eyes, neither reprove after the hearing of his ears: But with righteousness shall he judge the poor, and reprove with equity for the meek of the earth: and he shall smite the earth with the rod of his mouth, and with the breath of his lips shall he slay the wicked. And righteousness shall be the girdle of his loins, and faithfulness the girdle of his reins. (Isaiah 11:3-5)

Jeremiah the prophet prophesied, “Behold, the days come, saith the LORD, that I will raise unto David a righteous Branch, and a King shall reign and prosper, and shall execute judgment and justice in the earth.” (Jeremiah 23:5) In the Forty-fifth Psalm it says of Him, “Thy throne, O God, is for ever and ever: the sceptre of thy kingdom is a right sceptre. Thou lovest righteousness, and hatest wickedness: therefore God, thy God, hath anointed thee with the oil of gladness above thy fellows.” (Psalm 45:6, 7) The Christ would come, and He would do what no other had done before: reign in perfect righteousness.

When the Son of God did finally appear, the political establishment of Israel considered Him to be a threat to their power. When the magi from the east arrived in Jerusalem to worship the Christ, King Herod was troubled, and all of Jerusalem with him. He asked the chief priests and scribes where the Christ should be born. They told him that Micah the prophet prophesied that the Christ would be born in Bethlehem. He, after calculating when the Christ was born, ordered the massacre of all the children in Bethlehem two years old or younger. (Matthew 2) Herod was so mad with power that he attempted to assassinate the man he believed to be the Christ, the Son of God.

The Son of God was a threat, not only to the political establishment of Israel, but also to the religious establishment. When Jesus, in the beginning of His earthly ministry, found in the temple men selling animals and changing money, He made a whip of cords and drove the men out, poured out their money, and turned over their tables. To them that sold doves, He said, “Take these things hence; make not my Father's house an house of merchandise.” (John 2:16) When the Jews demanded some sign of His authority to do such a thing, so Jesus said, “Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.” They scoffed, because they did not understand that He was speaking of His death and resurrection. (John 2:18-22)

The Pharisees, the strictest sect in Israel, cared nothing for the spiritual well being of the people. They cared only for fame and fortune. On one occasion a Pharisee invited Jesus to dine in his home, and he was astonished to see that Jesus did not wash before dinner. Jesus proclaimed a number of woes against him. He told him that he washed the outside of the cup and ther platter, but inside himself he was unclean. He said, “Woe unto you, Pharisees! for ye love the uppermost seats in the synagogues, and greetings in the markets.” (Luke 11:43) After this, the scribes and Pharisees tried many times to trick Jesus into saying something wrong. (Luke 11:43, 54) On another occasion, a Pharisee invited Jesus to dine at his home on the Sabbath. Jesus, when he arrived at the man's home, took note of how the lawyers and Pharisees took all the places of honor at the table, and he told two parables to shame them. (Luke 14:1-14) After this, Jesus told the people a number of parables, and with one of them he taught no one can serve God and money. Saint Luke comments, “And the Pharisees also, who were covetous, heard all these things: and they derided him.” (Luke 16:14)

The Pharisees also resented that so many people were following Jesus and not them. Jesus, early in His earthly ministry, gained many followers, and He, through His disciples, baptized many. Saint John records, “When therefore the Lord knew how the Pharisees had heard that Jesus made and baptized more disciples than John, (Though Jesus himself baptized not, but his disciples,) He left Judaea, and departed again into Galilee.”

(John 4:1-3) The Pharisees heard the report of Jesus's thriving ministry, they surely discussed how to stop it. As Herod the tetrarch had recently cast John the Baptist into prison for preaching against his adultery, and as Jesus's time to die had not yet come, He withdrew from Judea to avoid the grasp of the jealous Pharisees. Some time later, Jesus went up to the temple for the feast of tabernacles, and there He taught the people, and many believed in Him. When the Pharisees and the chief priests heard, they sent officers to arrest Him. When the officers heard Jesus teach, they left Him alone, and returned to their rulers without Him. The rulers asked them why they did not arrest Jesus, and they said that they had never heard any man speak like Jesus. The Pharisees said to them, "Are ye also deceived? Have any of the rulers or of the Pharisees believed on him? But this people who knoweth not the law are cursed." (John 7:47-49)

The religious rulers in Israel were frustrated that the people were listening to Jesus and not to them. They were concerned that the people would try to make Jesus king. After Jesus, early in His ministry, fed five thousand people with five loaves of bread and two fish, desired to take Him by force and make Him king. (John 6:15) After Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead, the chief priests and Pharisees met at council to discuss what to do about Jesus. They were concerned that the people would make Jesus king, and then the Romans would crush the rebellion by destroying the city of Jerusalem and massacring the people. Caiaphas, the high priest, said that Jesus would have to die, so they all plotted His murder. (John 11) When word spread that Jesus had raised Lazarus from the dead, many abandoned the religious rulers, and believed in Jesus. So, the chief priests agreed to put Lazarus to death.

The Pharisees were always trying to cause Jesus to say something that they could use against Him. He, in turn, baffled them with his questions. On one occasion, after avoiding a trap laid by the Pharisees, and a trap laid by the Sadducees, He laid His own. He said to the people:

How say the scribes that Christ is the Son of David? For David himself said by the Holy Ghost, The LORD said to my Lord, Sit thou on my right hand, till I make thine enemies thy footstool. David therefore himself calleth him Lord; and whence is he then his son? (Mark 12:35-37)

Saint Mark comments, "And the common people heard him gladly." (Mark 12:37) Then Jesus said:

Beware of the scribes, which love to go in long clothing, and love salutations in the marketplaces, And the chief seats in the synagogues, and the uppermost rooms at feasts: Which devour widows' houses, and for a pretence make long prayers: these shall receive greater damnation. (Mark 12:38-40)

Jesus then watched people casting money into the treasury, and he took note of how the rich would cast in much, and a poor widow cast in very little. He told His disciples, however, that, from a certain point of view, the widow gave more because she gave all she had. (Mark 12:41-44) The contrast between the Pharisees who loved money, and the widow who gave all of hers away was striking.

Two days before the Passover feast, the chief priests, the scribes, and the elders of the people, all the rulers of Israel, gathered to conspire to murder Jesus. They sent their soldiers to arrest Jesus and bring Him before to the Sanhedrin, the supreme court, for trial. A number of men bore false witness against Jesus, but their statements did not agree. (Mark 14:46) Then some testified, saying, "We heard him say, I will destroy this temple that is made with hands, and within three days I will build another made without hands." (Mark 14:59) Like the statements of the other false witnesses, however, their statements did not agree. Finally, the high priest asked Jesus, "Art thou the Christ, the Son of the Blessed?" (Mark 14:61) Jesus, referring to the Messianic

prophecy of Daniel, answered, “ I am: and ye shall see the Son of man sitting on the right hand of power, and coming in the clouds of heaven.” (Mark 15:62) The council had heard enough. They sentenced Jesus to die. Then they spit on Him, and struck Him, and mocked Him, ordering Him to prophesy who had struck Him. The Sanhedrin’s trial of Jesus was a fraud.

In the morning, they brought Jesus to Pontius Pilate, the Roman governor of Judea, to have Him executed. They said to Pilate, “We found this fellow perverting the nation, and forbidding to give tribute to Caesar, saying that he himself is Christ a King.” (Luke 23:2) This was a serious charge, a charge of rebellion, and a capital offense. So, Pilate asked Jesus, “Art thou the King of the Jews?” (Mark 15:2) Jesus answered in the affirmative. The chief priests brought many accusations against Jesus, but He said nothing in His defense. Pilate told the Jews that he found no fault in Jesus, but the Jews insisted. When Pilate learned that Jesus was from Galilee, under the jurisdiction of Herod, he sent Jesus to Him. Pilate desired to have no part in Jesus’s case. Herod had always desired to see Jesus, and have Him perform some miracle, but Jesus disappointed him. So, Herod and his men of war mocked Jesus and sent Him back to Pilate. It was Pilate’s custom to release a Jewish prisoner on the Passover. The Jews demanded that they release Barabbas, a man who was in prison for insurrection and murder. Pilate instead offered Jesus, and he did so because, Saint Mark records, “For he knew that the chief priests had delivered him for envy.” (Mark 15:10) Three times Pilate protested Jesus’s innocence, but the chief priests stirred up the crowd to demand that he release Barabbas. Pilate knew that Jesus was innocent. He was no threat to the state. He had been part of no insurrection, like Barabbas had. The Jews could produce no credible witnesses. Moreover, Pilate’s wife had told him that she had a dream of Jesus’s innocence. Nevertheless, the Jews kept crying out for Jesus to be crucified, and were ready to riot, so Pilate, whose political objective was to maintain control over the people, sentenced to death a man he believed to be innocent.

So, the Roman soldiers dressed Jesus in a purple robe, and, having twisted together a crown of thorns, they pressed it upon His head. They mockingly saluted Him, saying, “Hail, King of the Jews!” and they bowed before Him. Then they took Him away to be crucified.

As Jesus hung on the cross, His enemies mocked Him, saying, “Ah, thou that destroyest the temple, and buildest it in three days, Save thyself, and come down from the cross.” (Mark 15:29 = Matthew 27:39, 40) The chief priests, and the scribes, and the elders mocked Him, saying, “He saved others; himself he cannot save. If he be the King of Israel, let him now come down from the cross, and we will believe him. He trusted in God; let him deliver him now, if he will have him: for he said, I am the Son of God (Matthew 27:42, 43)

After several hours of torture, Jesus cried with a loud voice and gave up His spirit, and so He died. The veil of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom. (Mark 15:38) Saint Mark records, “And when the centurion, which stood over against him, saw that he so cried out, and gave up the ghost, he said, Truly this man was the Son of God.” (Mark 15:39) The Roman officer, in command of one hundred soldiers, confessed that Jesus is the Son of God.

The way of sinful man is selfish ambition and violence. The way of Jesus is humble and patient submission to God for the good of others, and He has given an example to follow. Saint Peter wrote:

For even hereunto were ye called: because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow his steps: Who did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth: Who, when he was reviled, reviled not again; when he suffered, he threatened not; but committed himself to him that judgeth righteously. (1 Peter 2:21-23)

Because Jesus obeyed God, even dying on a cross, He has atoned for the sins of His people. Moreover, God has made Jesus king of the world, and He will one day judge the world in righteousness.

Let us do nothing from selfish ambition and conceit. Let us pray to God, and humbly submit to His will. Let us be glad that the Lord Jesus did not save Himself so that we might be saved.

Blessing, and honor, and glory, and power, be unto Him that sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb,
for ever and ever. Amen.