

Jesus the Whistleblower

In May of last year, Edward Snowden flew to Hong Kong. On June 5th, it was revealed that he possessed over a million documents that he had illegally obtained while working at the NSA, the National Security Agency. He charged that agency with breaking the fourth and fifth amendments of the US Constitution. ⁱ Whether you think of him as a hero or a traitor, Edward Snowden defines for us today the term “whistleblower.”

In April of 1887, Lord Acton, a former member of Parliament in England, wrote these memorable words:

“Power tends to corrupt, and absolute power corrupts absolutely... There is no worse heresy than that the office sanctifies the holder of it.” ⁱⁱ

A life-long Catholic, Acton was speaking out in a letter revealing his doubts about the wisdom of the Vatican Council’s new dogma of Papal Infallibility in 1870. Acton understood the biblical principle of human fallibility and saw no biblical reason why the Pope should be exempted from it. His criticism was fueled by his faith.

So, it should not surprise you to learn that in an address in 1877, ten years earlier, Lord Acton proclaimed that the concept of limited government and of liberty itself could be traced directly to Jesus Christ. In speaking about the history of freedom, Lord Acton concluded that before Christ...

“Popular governments had existed... but there had been no limited government, no State... had been defined by a force external to its own... But when Christ said: “Render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar’s, and unto God the things that are God’s,” those words... gave civil power, under the protection of conscience, a sacredness it had never enjoyed, and bounds it had never acknowledged; and they were the repudiation of absolutism and the inauguration of freedom. For our Lord not only delivered the precept, but created the force to execute it.” ⁱⁱⁱ

So, if Christ wasn’t the first whistleblower, He certainly was the most important. And here in the gospel of Mark, we see Jesus faithfully practicing His craft. With any whistleblower, the first question that is asked, is “Why, why did they do it?” We must ask this of Jesus. What was His motivation? First, we see that...

I. Jesus Blew the Whistle on Corrupt Power to Bring Glory to His Father.

Let me say first of all, that I don’t fully agree with Lord Acton’s statement concerning power and corruption. I don’t believe that his view is biblically accurate. Lord Acton is claiming that power is the cause of the corruption of men or women in positions of leadership. Is that what Scripture says? No! We saw Jesus state the truth on this matter very clearly in Mark 7 when He said:

...What comes out of a man is what makes him ‘unclean.’ For from within, out of men’s hearts, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, greed, malice, deceit, lewdness, envy, slander,

arrogance and folly. All these evils come from inside and make a man 'unclean.' (Mark 7:20-23)

Theologically this is known as the doctrine of Original Sin; we are not born innocent but guilty, tainted with the desire to sin. So, I believe, a biblical re-wording of Lord Acton's statement would be this, "Power magnifies our corruption and absolute power magnifies our corruption to truly frightening levels." But power is not universally corrupting. If that were true, then God would be the most corrupt of all beings since He has ultimate power. A redeemed heart can also be magnified by power to do great good. So, Lord Acton's famous statement isn't biblically accurate.

But his statement about liberty and the limits to government being built on the teachings of Christ are absolutely biblical! So, let's consider this: Jesus knew before He came into this world that He would be killed by corrupt people. That's what He was saying in the parable about the man who owned the vineyard. So, why did He come? Was vengeance His primary motivation? No. He had several reasons for coming, but His primary motivation was to bring glory to His Father. We know this from several other statements that Jesus made. Jesus said:

"My food... is to do the will of him who sent me and to finish his work."
(John 4:34)

When He came to the very end and faced death itself, He said: (Mk. 14:36)

"Father... Take this cup from me. Yet not what I will, but what you will."

But He most clearly stated His primary motivation in His prayer in John 17:

"Father, the time has come. Glorify your Son, that your Son may glorify you. I have brought you glory on earth by completing the work you gave me to do. And now, Father, glorify me in your presence with the glory I had with you before the world began." (John 17:1, 4, 5)

But let's dig a little deeper here. Yes, Jesus wanted to do His Father's will but what's beneath that? WHY does He want to do His Father's will? Think about this: God the Father didn't create this world alone. Jesus was involved in every part of creation. John 1:3 says, speaking of Jesus:

Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made.

Okay, so this marvelous, wonderful, beautifully intricate creation was co-created by Father, Son and Spirit (Gen. 1 says, "...the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters..."). And within days, it was all spoiled by sin. Death was not a part of God's intention for any part of creation but within days of its beginning, death entered through Adam and Eve's sin. How do you think Jesus felt about that?

Have you ever "created" something of wonder and beauty? A cake? A painting? A perfectly shoveled driveway? And then, some beast comes along and wrecks it! The dog eats your cake, someone spills coffee on your painting, someone drives on your driveway with snowy tires!! Someone wrecks your beautiful creation! How'd THAT feel? I believe that's how Jesus felt after that "little incident" in the garden. Jesus' primary motivation for coming into this world was to restore His Father's name, His Father's dignity, His Father's creation – to bring glory back to His Father.

You might say, "Wait a minute! I thought He came to save me?" Yes, that's also true. We'll talk about "YOU" in a minute. But first, the simple truth is, while Jesus loves you a whole bunch, without question, He loves His Father more.

Do you understand that this is what the first commandment is about?

"You shall have no other gods before me." (Ex. 20:3)

It's not wrong to love other people or even other things, but God is saying, "You need to love me as my Son loves me. You need to love me most." Is that true of you? If someone you loved asked you to do something that God has clearly told you not to do, OR they asked you NOT to do something that God definitely told you TO do, whom would you listen to? Whoever you please in that situation is the one you love the most. Jesus loves us dearly, but He always has and always will love His Father most.

But Jesus came into this world for a second reason as well...

II. Jesus Came As a Whistleblower So That Evil Wouldn't Win.

Some people envision Jesus as a very laid-back, non-competitive, meek and mild kind of guy. They believe that He shied away from conflict and avoided confrontation. They point to situations like when He was on trial and refused to defend Himself as proof of their theory.

But people who believe that are very wrong about Jesus. Jesus was able to relax and be at peace when He had the opportunity but when the bell of injustice rang, He went into "warrior mode." Justice, fairness is a huge thing with Jesus. HUGE! Jesus cannot tolerate evil's winning because that would mean we lose.

Think about it. Here are just a few examples of when Jesus "blew the whistle" on injustice:

- Jesus rescues the woman caught in adultery from the men who caught her in the act but who released the man who was with her and who demanded that only she be stoned. Jesus would not stand for such injustice.
- Jesus violently threw the moneychangers out of the Temple for trying to make money off of people who were buying sacrifices to repent of their sins.
- Jesus publicly pronounced seven woes against the Pharisees who He said *"...tie up heavy loads and put them on men's shoulders, but they themselves are not willing to lift a finger to move them."* (Matt. 23:4)
- Knowing that the Pharisees and the High Priest wanted to kill Him, Jesus walked right into their grasp. He knew what they would do to him: **...he said, "and the Son of Man will be betrayed to the chief priests and teachers of the law. They will condemn him to death and will hand him over to the Gentiles, who will mock him and spit on him, flog him and kill him."** (Mk. 10:33, 34)

Would you do that – walk right into the trap that was set for you by your enemies? And as for the charge that Jesus just went limp at His trial because He didn't want to fight: Are you kidding me? He was fighting with all His might but He was fighting to win, He was fighting smart. He had the power and authority to pull a Bruce Willis and call down 10,000 angels to come and set Him free. But then what? Then Satan would've won! Evil would've triumphed!! Satan didn't want Jesus – He

wanted us! He thought in killing Jesus he would get us. But Jesus knew the rules of the game better than Satan. Jesus knew that the only way for us to live was if He died! So he went to the cross willingly like a lamb to the slaughter, not out of weakness but out of super-human strength. From the Passover meal until His last breath on the cross, Jesus was fighting a ferocious, violent battle that was invisible to the naked eye. Invisible except for one piece of evidence – He sweat blood while He prayed in the garden. The wounds on the inside of Jesus in the garden were greater, if that can be believed, than the outward wounds on the cross. Your Savior was no patsy! He was and is the mightiest warrior this world has ever seen! Jesus came to blow the whistle on evil because He refused to let injustice win. Lastly:

III. Jesus Came to Blow the Whistle on the Pharisees' Lies Regarding Salvation.

The religious power structure in Jesus' day had four levels. At the top were the Roman occupiers, but in Jesus' day, Rome pretty much let the Jews govern themselves. Next were the priests and Levites who ran the Temple. Then came the Sanhedrin, which was a religious council that made the rules and passed judgment on day-to-day living. Lastly were the members of the various religious/political parties – the Sadducees, the Essenes and the Pharisees.

Now, while it was true then as it is today that all these groups were regularly bickering and fighting political turf wars, when anyone came along who represented a threat to their power, it was amazing how quickly they could all find common ground!

Not unlike what we've seen with Edward Snowden. The Republicans and Democrats had only months before been at each others' throats over the budget, but when Snowden threatened to reveal secret information that would put them all in a bad light, it was amazing how quickly condemnation came from both sides of the aisle. Republicans and Democrats alike were calling for his head on a platter!

Which is exactly what was happening to Jesus in Mark 12. When Jesus told the parable of the tenants, those in the audience were, "*chief priests, the teachers of the law and the elders...*" (Mk. 11:27). As He ended the parable by quoting the judgment of God upon them in the words of Ps. 118, they were livid and:

...they looked for a way to arrest him because they knew he had spoken the parable against them. But they were afraid of the crowd; so they left him and went away. (Mark 12:12)

"*They were afraid of the crowd...*" Pastor Warren Wiersbe makes this astute observation:

The Jewish leaders were caught in a dilemma of their own making. They were not asking "What is true?" or "What is right?" but "What is safe?" This is always the approach of the hypocrite and the crowd-pleaser. It certainly was not the approach of Jesus or John the Baptist. ^{iv}

Essentially, this is what irritated Jesus most about the Pharisees. They claimed to be strict disciples of Moses, of the Law, of the Torah - but they studied the Scriptures selectively. They used the Scriptures to remain in power! Jesus said to them in John 5:

You diligently study the Scriptures because you think that by them you possess eternal life. These are the Scriptures that testify about me, yet you refuse to come to me to have life. (John 5:39, 40)

This is the lie of the Pharisees that Jesus exposed. As the keepers of the written Law, they basically told people, "Come to us and be saved!" But Jesus pulled a Snowden and revealed to the people what the sacred documents actually said. They said that life was found in Him! In John 5:45-47 Jesus said to those in power:

But do not think I will accuse you before the Father. Your accuser is Moses, on whom your hopes are set. If you believed Moses you would believe me, for he wrote about me. But since you do not believe what he wrote, how are you going to believe what I say?

Where did Moses write about Jesus? I'll tell you where:

Gen. 49:10, Ex. 12:24, Lev. 16:5, Num. 24:17 and Deut. 18:15

All these Scriptures refer to the coming of Messiah! Look them up for yourselves!

When the ruling party heard this, they knew the jig was up. They knew what they had to do. They had to do what every corrupt regime does to whistleblowers:

Then the chief priests and the Pharisees called a meeting of the Sanhedrin. "What are we accomplishing?" they asked. "Here is this man performing many miraculous signs. If we let him go on like this, everyone will believe in him, and then the Romans will come and take away both our place and our nation. : (John 11:47b, 48)

They were not asking "What is true?" or "What is right?" but "What is safe for us?" Which side of this equation are you on today? We've called this study of Mark, "Handbook for a Jesus Follower." But now we've come to a decision point. Will we still follow Him when it no longer looks like it will be safe to do so? Jesus and John the Baptist both lost their lives because they spoke truth to those in positions of power. When Pilate tried to pull rank on Jesus and said:

"Do you refuse to speak to me? ...Don't you realize I have power either to free you or to crucify you?"

Jesus answered, "You would have no power over me if it were not given to you from above." (John 19:10, 11a)

Which path are you on today, the "safe, Roman" path or the "right and true Jesus" path? From the world's perspective, the Jesus path doesn't always end well because all the world sees is that Jesus followers sometimes end up in prison or exile or in an early grave. But what they don't see, because they don't have spiritual eyes, is that prison, exile or the grave is NOT the end of the Jesus path! Jesus told us this when He described His path. Speaking of Himself He said:

They will condemn him to death and... will mock him and spit on him, flog him and kill him. Three days later he will rise. (Mark 10:33, 34)

And the Apostle Paul adds:

If we died with him, we will also live with him;

if we endure, we will also reign with him. (II Tim. 2:11b, 12a)

Suddenly the "safe Roman path" doesn't look so safe, does it? Are you on that path? Get off! Get on to the "right and true Jesus path." It's the path that leads to great adventure before you die and great reward afterward. Let's pray...

ⁱ Wikipedia, “Edward Snowden”

ⁱⁱ Econlog.econlib.org/archives/2013/02/lord_acton_on_p.htm

ⁱⁱⁱ Acton Institute, www.acton.org “The History of Freedom in Antiquity,” Lord Acton, Feb. 26, 1877

^{iv} Warren Wiersbe, *Be Diligent* (Colorado Springs: David C. Cook, 1987), p. 138