

In the midst of the trial of Christ, one man gave some advice. In John 18:12-14 we read, "Caiaphas was the one who had advised the Jews that it would be good if one man died for the people." Caiaphas knew that the Roman government would not tolerate riotous behavior on the part of any of its subject peoples. He therefore decided that rather than risk the lives of the people of his nation if things got out of his control he would sacrifice the one man Jesus Christ, no matter if he was innocent or not. Now this seems like a smart thing to do. But is it right? Is it right to sacrifice one for the sake of the group? Even if that one is innocent? Is this what we would do? Would Christ have done this?

If it doesn't work, then it doesn't matter how good it sounds it is not the best thing to do. In the case of the crucifixion, we know that Christ was not really the cause of the problem. The Jewish people's pride in their own value kept them hostile to any form of servitude. So the death of Christ for the sake of the nation did not prevent that same nation from dying by Roman hands in A.D. 70, when Jerusalem was destroyed.

What we're really doing is sacrificing someone for the sake of a structure. You might choose to save the group if you did not know the individual personally; but God knows each of us in a very personal way and will not sacrifice us like this. Christ did not operate in one place with a big building and a large permanent congregation; he went out and touched individuals. He spoke to masses, too, but he was deeply concerned with one-on-one interactions.

One story about him that illustrates this is found in John 9. Jesus was walking along and saw a man blind from birth. To demonstrate the power of God, he spit on the ground, made some mud with the saliva, and put it on the man's eyes. He then told him to go wash in the Pool of Siloam. When the man did this he went home able to see. His acquaintances asked how this happened, and told them that the man Jesus had healed him. When the Pharisees heard of it they were upset because this deed, even though it was a very good deed, was performed on the Sabbath. Of course we know that their real problem was their competition with the popularity of Christ. They argued with the healed man and even went to his parents to try to deny the healing power and truth of Christ. They were so incensed at the consistent testimony of the one who was healed that they hurled insults at him and threw him out of the congregation.

Now the interesting part is this. Jesus didn't care about the multitudes that he might have won by conforming to the ways of the Pharisees. Instead, when Jesus heard that they had thrown him out, he sought him out; when he had found him, he said (vss 35-38),

"Do you believe in the Son of Man?" "Who is he, sir?" the man asked. "Tell me so that I may believe in him." Jesus said, "You have now seen him; in fact, he is the one speaking with you." Then the man said, "Lord, I believe," and he worshipped him.

This was indeed what Christ was after; an individual interaction which led to true worship. The healed man worshipped Christ even though it meant the loss of fellowship with the community. Christ's ministry was to the weak who in their need responded to him with their whole heart! Large numbers were not his primary interest.

This principle of standing up for one rather than sacrificing them for the group was expressed by Jesus in a parable found in Matthew 18:12ff. After stating that his purpose was to seek and save the lost, Jesus has this to say,

"What do you think? If a man owns a hundred sheep, and one of them wanders away, will he not leave the ninety-nine on the hills and go to look for the one that wandered off? And if he finds it, I tell you the truth, he is happier about that one sheep than about the ninety-nine that did not wander off. In the same way your Father in heaven is not willing that any of these little ones should be lost.

It would be easy to argue that it is much better to let the single lamb be lost so that the shepherd could protect a larger number of sheep. But God wants to show us the individual nature of his love, how it points to you and me as we seem to be lost in a sea of humanity. Christ gave his life for each and every one of us, and he does not want a single soul to be lost. Too many people seek a place of honor and glory in a multitude. It is much better to have a quiet ministry which truly helps a small group of individuals than try to be loved by all.

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