



JESUS
— & His —
ENEMIES

Herod the Great
Moneychangers
Pharisees
Judas Iscariot
Pontius Pilate
Simon Peter
and Others



PAUL YEULETT

JESUS

— and His —

ENEMIES

JESUS
—• and His •—
ENEMIES

PAUL YEULETT


P U B L I S H I N G
P.O. BOX 817 • PHILLIPSBURG • NEW JERSEY 08865-0817

© 2013 by Paul Yeulett

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means—electronic, mechanical, photocopy, recording, or otherwise—except for brief quotations for the purpose of review or comment, without the prior permission of the publisher, P&R Publishing Company, P.O. Box 817, Phillipsburg, New Jersey 08865-0817.

Unless otherwise indicated, Scripture quotations are from *ESV Bible*® (*The Holy Bible, English Standard Version*®). Copyright © 2001 by Crossway Bibles, a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

Scripture quotations marked (NIV) are from the HOLY BIBLE, NEW INTERNATIONAL VERSION®. NIV®. Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984 by International Bible Society. Used by permission of Zondervan Publishing House. All rights reserved.

Italics within Scripture quotations indicate emphasis added.

ISBN: 978-1-59638-832-1 (pbk)

ISBN: 978-1-59638-833-8 (ePub)

ISBN: 978-1-59638-834-5 (Mobi)

Printed in the United States of America

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Yeulett, Paul, 1969-

Jesus and his enemies / Paul Yeulett. -- 1st [edition].

pages cm

Includes bibliographical references.

ISBN 978-1-59638-832-1 (pbk.)

1. Jesus Christ--Adversaries--Biblical teaching. 2. Jesus Christ--Conflicts--Biblical teaching. 3. Enemies--Religious aspects--Christianity. I. Title.

BT361.Y48 2013

232.9'5--dc23

2013031116

CONTENTS

Foreword by Iain D. Campbell	7
Preface	II
1. Why Did Jesus Have Enemies? JOHN 3:19-20	15
2. Invisible Enemies in High Places REV. 12:4-7	29
3. Herod the Great MATT. 2:16	43
4. The People of Nazareth LUKE 4:22-24	57
5. The Cleansing of the Temple JOHN 2:14-17	73
6. The Pharisees MATT. 23:13	89
7. The Challenge to Jesus' Authority MARK 11:27-33	105
8. The Sadducees MARK 12:24-27	117
9. Caiaphas the High Priest JOHN 11:47-53	133
10. Judas Iscariot MATT. 27:3-5	149

CONTENTS

11. Pontius Pilate JOHN 18:36-38	165
12. Herod Antipas LUKE 23:8-12	183
13. The Jewish Crowd MATT. 27:22-25	197
14. The Roman Soldiers LUKE 23:33-34	213
15. The Climax of Jesus' Sufferings MATT. 27:39-46	227
16. The Crucified Robber LUKE 23:39-43	243
17. Simon, Son of John JOHN 21:15-19	259
18. Saul of Tarsus I TIM. 1:12-17	275
Appendix: The Herod Dynasty	291
Notes	295

FOREWORD

AS CHRISTIANS, we have the best news imaginable: the news of God's saving love, revealed in the sending of his Son on a mission to rescue a perishing world through atonement, victory and forgiveness. The message of the Bible is called "gospel" for that reason—it is good news for lost men and women.

So why don't more people respond to it? Why is the message of the Bible ridiculed, ignored, and rejected? Why are Christians often regarded and portrayed as irrational fundamentalists who mistakenly place their trust in a book that science and culture have long since discredited (or so we are told)?

Is there something about our twenty-first century culture that makes our present generation so hostile to the claims and promises of Jesus? Was it easier to communicate the message of salvation in the past?

The reality is that it was not; indeed, it never was easy to proclaim that message. No one communicated it better or more plainly than Jesus himself, the subject and object of salvation. Yet, as Paul Yeulett reminds us throughout this book, Jesus had enemies, people who were implacably opposed to him and all that he represented, from the moment he was born into the world until the moment he left it.

The opposition he experienced and endured he promised to be the lot of his followers too. That is the thrust of his teaching in John 15:18–25:

If the world hates you, know that it has hated me before it hated you. If you were of the world, the world would love you

as its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you. Remember the word that I said to you: "A servant is not greater than his master." If they persecuted me, they will also persecute you. If they kept my word, they will also keep yours. But all these things they will do to you on account of my name, because they do not know him who sent me. If I had not come and spoken to them, they would not have been guilty of sin, but now they have no excuse for their sin. Whoever hates me hates my Father also. If I had not done among them the works that no one else did, they would not be guilty of sin, but now they have seen and hated both me and my Father. But the word that is written in their Law must be fulfilled: "They hated me without a cause."

The message is clear: people will hate Christians *because* they follow Christ, and they will hate them *as* they hated Christ. If we are to maintain a constant and faithful witness to Jesus in the face of such opposition, we will do well to reflect on the enemies Jesus faced—the various manifestations of the darkness that opposed the light that had come into the world.

That is what Paul Yeulett does in this book. He examines the various streams of opposition that Jesus encountered—the demonic, political, religious, emotional, physical, and spiritual powers that combined against his person and against his gospel. In this book, Paul Yeulett helps us to understand these better, and in doing so reminds us that there is nothing new under the sun; God had predicted such opposition in Psalm 2, and it will go on until the end of time.

But alongside the experience of darkness is the marvelous illustration in the life of Christ himself that the darkness does not overcome the light. Christ has the victory. The Son of God triumphs. That, at last, is the reason why we can continue to proclaim the good news of God's salvation: because although he promises that "In the world you will have tribulation," he also says, "But take heart; I have overcome the world" (John 16:33).

FOREWORD

As we read through this book we will gain a greater understanding of the original context in which Jesus lived and ministered, the light coming into the darkness of the world. We will have a deeper appreciation of why people reject the gospel. But we will also be given the encouragement to continue going into all the world to preach the good news to everyone.

This is a great resource: a study by one of Jesus' friends of Jesus' enemies. Use it well, and you may yet have the joy of seeing many of Jesus' enemies in your own context become his friends!

Rev. Dr. Iain D. Campbell
Free Church of Scotland, Isle of Lewis
Moderator, General Assembly of
the Free Church of Scotland, May 2012

PREFACE

IN APRIL 2010 I was kindly invited by Iain Murray to give two addresses at the Banner of Truth Youth Conference, which takes place annually in Leicester, England, and which immediately precedes the Ministers' Conference. Both of these conferences have been greatly blessed by the Lord over a number of years. It was a rare privilege to be present, most of all because of the encouragement in seeing nearly one hundred and fifty young people listening so attentively to God's Word and responding with prayer and praise that warmed the hearts of everyone there.

I took the theme "Christian Living in a Dark World" for my talks and delivered a message from the text of John 3:19: "And this is the judgment: the light has come into the world, and people loved the darkness rather than the light because their works were evil." It was this address that eventually developed into the chapter beginning this work.

Soon after I returned from Leicester it became clear that this theme could be extended a good deal further. It occurred to me that the Gospels contain records of a certain number of enemies with whom Jesus had to contend during his life and ministry, and especially as his death approached. In most cases Jesus was involved in a specific conflict with these opponents, each of which would constitute a single study. Many of these individuals and groups are obvious at the first reading of the Gospels, for example Judas Iscariot, Pontius Pilate, the Pharisees, and the Sadducees.

The aim of this book, in short, is to draw theological and pastoral lessons from these various encounters. In order to do

that I have found it necessary to include a certain amount of theological and historical background in each case. Good pastoral work must always be rooted in good theology, and Christian theology is founded upon the historical fact of redemption. “When the fullness of time had come,” the Son of God stepped into this world of time and space to save a people for himself (Gal. 4:4). At the same time, the Bible teaches us timeless truths, and this is the case with Jesus’ confrontations with his enemies as much as any other biblical subject. Every reader of this book is personally implicated: we are all by nature enemies of God and of Christ because of our sin, but the Savior has come into the world to deliver us from that enmity. Therefore, an examination of the words, deeds, and motivation of Jesus’ various adversaries should seek to address the reader’s conscience.

To whom is this book addressed? Although the majority of these chapters are not transcripts of sermons, nor even adaptations of sermons previously preached, I have tried to keep the faces of my own congregation before my mind’s eye as I have written. I have not assumed any in-depth knowledge of the culture and traditions of first-century Israel. Such information is briefly introduced where it seems appropriate.

The subjects of each chapter tend to follow in chronological order, insofar as a chronology can be ascertained from the Gospels. In a few instances chronology is circumvented in order to achieve a more logical sense of progress. For example, the conversation between Jesus and the Sadducees about the resurrection is analyzed before we come to consider the high priest Caiaphas, even though Caiaphas’ words in John 11:50 were uttered quite some time before the challenge of the Sadducees, which took place during the final week of Jesus’ life.

The first two chapters are introductory, setting the scene. Chapter 1 examines the basic causes for the enmity between Jesus and his opponents, and chapter 2 is an overview of the cosmic conflict that underlies the hostility faced by the Savior. After

this the chapters deal with episodes recorded in the life of Jesus, and not surprisingly most of them are concentrated into the final days of his life and ministry. Chapters 14 to 16 are located at the cross of Calvary itself. My original intention had been to conclude the work at this point, but in order to show how the risen Lord Jesus drew one-time enemies to himself, I decided to include two more chapters, culminating in the apostle Paul, once Saul of Tarsus, who received mercy so that “as the foremost, Jesus Christ might display his perfect patience as an example to those who were to believe in him for eternal life” (1 Tim. 1:16).

The ultimate desire in this work is that men, women, and even children who pick up this book might have their hearts warmed with the love of Jesus Christ himself, the love “that surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God” (Eph.3:19).

I would like to express my gratitude to a number of people who have helped in making this project possible, even if in some cases they have not realized what a help they have been! First of all I must thank the staff at P&R Publishing for their professional assistance and very friendly advice. I would especially mention Amanda Martin, Ian Thompson, Kim McKeever, and Aaron Gottier. I am indebted to the kind and wise counsel of Brian Norton, Geoff Thomas, Eryl Davies, Iain D. Campbell, Ian Hamilton, Iain Murray, and Jonathan Watson, all of whom have spurred me on at different times. Particular thanks go to Keron Fletcher, who read through the first proof of this work and offered several thoughtful observations and suggestions, and to Brian Watt, whose painstaking patience and eagle eyes picked up many typographical errors. Additional thanks go to Will Alcock, who freely assisted me in cataloging the books in my study a few summers ago and more recently helped in producing the promotional video.

I want to put on record my high esteem and warm appreciation for all the members of Shrewsbury Evangelical Church,

PREFACE

faithful and prayerful brothers and sisters in our common Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Above all, none of this work could have been attempted without the love and support of my dear wife Ruth, who has not only encouraged me but also sought to apply some necessary brakes (and breaks) from time to time. It is a faithful saying that “he who finds a wife finds a good thing and obtains favor from the LORD” (Prov. 18:22). I thank the Lord for her and also for our children, Rebecca, Matthew, and Daniel, whose questions and observations about the Bible, and life in general, continue to keep us on our toes!

WHY DID JESUS HAVE ENEMIES?

And this is the judgment: the light has come into the world, and people loved the darkness rather than the light because their works were evil. For everyone who does wicked things hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his works should be exposed. (John 3:19–20)



JESUS OF NAZARETH, the Son of God, the Prince of Peace, and the friend of sinners, had many enemies. Pick up and read any of the Gospels and you will quickly see the theme of conflict emerging and stamping itself upon the scene.

Begin with Matthew's gospel and very soon you will read of the scheming of a bloodthirsty tyrant, Herod the Great, who seeks to snuff out the life of the infant Jesus. Mark tells us early in his record that "the Pharisees went out and immediately held counsel with the Herodians against him, how to destroy him" (Mark 3:6). Even the cozily familiar birth narratives of Luke contain Simeon's prophecy that the child Jesus was "appointed for the fall and rising of many in Israel, and for a sign that is opposed" (Luke 2:34). In John's gospel the theme of enmity is so prevalent that the author stops and dwells on it in his prologue:

He was in the world, and the world was made through him, yet the world did not know him. He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him. (John 1:10–11)

Moreover, the conversations between Jesus and his Jewish contemporaries, which dominate the central chapters of John's gospel, invariably culminated in the sharpest of disputes. Above all, see how all four Gospels devote such copious space to the sufferings and death of Jesus. His life ended in abominable cruelty, which the gospel writers recorded in considerable detail.

Before we begin to look at the opponents who confronted Jesus throughout the course of his life and ministry, we need to ask a most important question: why did Jesus have enemies? What caused this hostility and hatred? We need to answer this question correctly from the outset of our investigation.

CONFLICT RESOLUTION

Our three young children enjoy watching cartoons. However, they invariably become quite agitated whenever there is an onscreen argument between two characters. "Who's right?" they will ask. They need to know who is in the right and who is in the wrong. They feel it necessary to engage in a childish form of "conflict resolution." Today conflict resolution is big business across the world. In a variety of professional and commercial fields, considerable resources are expended in achieving agreement between disputing parties, aiming ideally for a "win-win" solution that will be to everyone's satisfaction. In the United Kingdom, for example, the Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service (Acas) seeks to resolve disputes between employers and trade unions. Although methods of conflict resolution vary across different cultures, the concept itself is a widespread one.

Now imagine that a team of specialists in conflict resolution were to be hired. Their brief: examine the evidence presented by the New Testament and seek to answer the question, "Why did Jesus have enemies?" They would quickly discover that a wide range of groups were gathered together in common cause against Jesus. The apostles of the early church listed

some of these parties: “both Herod and Pontius Pilate, along with the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel” (Acts 4:27). We have already seen that the Pharisees and the Herodians, two contrasting sects in Israel, held counsel against Jesus. What conclusions could be drawn from the observation that so many contrasting groups were opposed to this one man, Jesus of Nazareth? Surely the problem lay fairly and squarely with him. He had a habit of alienating people and often seemed to be in a minority of one. Might he not have been well-advised to address this issue as a matter of urgent importance? The way things look from a distance, a “win-win” solution would seem out of the question.

However, the argument presented in this chapter, and throughout this book, is that we have no need to call in today’s conflict resolution specialists because Jesus himself explains why these conflicts exist. He himself is the specialist. In John 3:19–20, towards the end of his conversation with Nicodemus, Jesus issues the pronouncement that is quoted at the beginning of this chapter.

And this is the judgment: the light has come into the world, and people loved the darkness rather than the light because their works were evil. For everyone who does wicked things hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his works should be exposed.

With these words, Jesus delivers the divine verdict upon the state of the whole human race. It is a verdict of resounding guilt, a conclusion of comprehensive condemnation. In verse 19, the word *judgment* means the divine ruling, God’s pronouncement. It could equally, and more pungently, be translated “this is the condemnation.” The reason for this enmity between Jesus and his opponents is then concisely summarized—people “loved the darkness rather than the light because their works were evil.”

LIGHT AND DARKNESS

When Jesus talks about light and darkness—and in John’s writings these are very recurrent themes—he is speaking in a way that is wholly consistent with the rest of the Scripture, both the Old and the New Testaments. The Bible has a knack of confronting us with a stark set of contrasts that is very much at odds with our contemporary view of morality. The categories of right and wrong, of good and evil, are nonnegotiable as far as the Bible is concerned. While today there are some actions that almost everyone in our society rightly regards as wicked—for example, cruelty to young children, institutional racism, and drug dealing—for the most part people are reluctant to speak in such absolute terms. Moreover, different generations have differing views as to what ought to be condemned and what ought to be condoned.

The Bible is the authoritative disclosure of the mind of God, and therefore it never shrinks from making clear pronouncements. Right at the beginning of human history Adam and Eve were faced with the exclusive choice between good and evil. They could obey God, which would lead to life, or they could disobey him, which would result in death. There was no middle ground, and there were no other considerations to bear in mind. It was either obedience or disobedience. In Deuteronomy 28 we read the long list of God’s blessings for obedience and his curses for disobedience. There is nothing that falls between these two categories. In the books of the kings of Israel and Judah we see that there were a number of kings who did “what was right in the eyes of the Lord” whereas others did “what was evil in the sight of the Lord.”

This is the general pattern of Scripture: there is light and there is darkness, there is life and there is death, there is heaven and there is hell. Therefore this passage in John 3 is wholly in keeping with this biblical pattern of dealing in contrasts. See how clear and exclusive the division is made in

verses 20 and 21: on the one hand there are those who come to the light, and on the other there are those who do *not* come to the light. There is nothing in between, no middle ground, no sitting on the fence.

Light and darkness are surely among the most obvious contrasts known to all of us, unless we have never been able to see. Light and darkness are opposites of which we are all deeply conscious from an early age. Moreover, they quickly take on added associations and suggestions; they become considerably more than the mere physical responses of our retinas. Children who are often afraid of the dark ask their parents to leave their bedroom door ajar so that some light will be admitted. As they grow up, light and darkness take on different, more mature associations, but the pattern continues. Light increasingly becomes linked with joy, gladness, all that is pleasant and lovely. Darkness signifies depression, gloom, sorrow, and despair. It is well known that Seasonal Affective Disorder (SAD) afflicts many people in countries like the United Kingdom, where the winters are long and dark. It is possible to purchase devices that create the appearance of sunlight in the dark mornings of early January; there is a market for such gadgets because so many people find the darkness oppressive. Further, light speaks of knowledge and understanding; darkness of ignorance and superstition.¹ Our conversations abound with colloquial expressions that illustrate these wider associations of the themes of light and darkness. “Her face lit up,” we say, or “A dark mood came over him.”

In Scripture the associations of light and darkness are amplified considerably more, so that there are the clearest moral and spiritual meanings attached to them. What is suggested by the human psyche is grounded in the revelation of divine character. For light is a major theme of the Bible. It is the first creation of God and the subject of God’s first recorded words (Gen. 1:3). We see that the presence of God

with his people in the wilderness was symbolized by the burning light (Lev. 24:2). A great light was prophesied by Isaiah to a people who dwelt in darkness (Isa. 9:2), a passage often read at Christmas.

Ultimately light symbolizes the presence of God himself and darkness symbolizes his absence. The apostle John brings this subject to a head in his first letter: “God is light, and in him is no darkness at all” (1 John 1:5). For this reason, light in the Bible is always very closely related to truth. Where there is light, there is the capacity to see what is real and true. The nineteenth-century Scottish Bible commentator, John Brown of Edinburgh, wrote that light is “truth, calculated to make men wise, and good, and happy.”² But darkness is the very opposite of these things: it prefers “ignorance to knowledge, error to truth, and sin to holiness.”³

LIGHT AND DARKNESS IN CONFLICT

There is a further, consequent aspect of light and darkness that we need to consider. They are not only opposites; they are opponents. The conflict between darkness and light is strong, violent, and bitter. The apostle Paul asked the Corinthians, “what fellowship has light with darkness?” (2 Cor. 6:14) Darkness seeks to overcome light. The late New Testament scholar Leon Morris wrote that “the strife between good and evil is no tepid affair, but one that elicits the bitter hatred of the forces of evil.”⁴

As we have seen, light and darkness are recurring and powerful features of John’s gospel, and so is the conflict between them. The light that is being spoken of in our passage is Jesus Christ himself. John has already said as much in the prologue to his gospel. “The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world” (John 1:9). Yet no sooner has John told us about this true light than he goes on to tell us about how this light has been rejected.

WHY DID JESUS HAVE ENEMIES?

He was in the world, and the world was made through him, yet the world did not know him. He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him. (1:10–11)

John is describing people who are walking around in darkness when the light is already shining all around them. Later in the same gospel, in 8:12 and in 9:5, Jesus refers to himself as “the light of the world.” Both these passages are located within contexts of bitter opposition, even hatred, from his countrymen.

This then is the point: Jesus Christ is in the midst of his people, showing himself by all his words and actions to be the true light, but the darkness of the people’s hearts means that they will not and cannot receive him as such. Jesus Christ is the very embodiment of light, of truth, knowledge, and love, but the vast majority of the people with whom he has come into contact have rejected him. They still do so today; and today, as two thousand years ago, this results in bitter conflict.

ACTORS, NOT SPECTATORS

This is not mythology; this is not fiction. Jesus’ words about the conflict between light and darkness are a present-day commentary on the natural state of the human soul. The Word of God always and directly addresses the conscience of those who are reading or hearing it. We are not in some kind of spectators’ gallery looking on at an evil world. We are all implicated; it is the evil in *us* that contributes to the evil of the world.

The trouble is that we are used to living in a spectator society. Many of the great dramas that intrigue us take place among people we have never met and are never likely to meet, or even among people who never existed. We may be fascinated by a television soap opera, or we may be caught up in real-life events going on in the public arenas of sport or politics, but the effects are the same. We sit in the closeted safety of our own living rooms and state our opinions at a safe distance. But if we bring

this mind-set with us to the Word of God, then we are guilty of a fatal error. We are participators, not spectators, in the unfolding events of this present world. We can't press the pause button or eject the DVD from its player. Neither can the DVD have its contents deleted. The DVD is about every one of us.

This is the terribly solemn fact—men and women are by nature on the dark side of the plot. They have taken up rebellious arms against the Sovereign Ruler of the universe. Jesus tells us plainly that men's deeds are evil. Our deeds are evil because they spring from evil natures.

The Westminster Shorter Catechism, put together by the leading British churchmen of the mid-seventeenth century, asks in Question 18, "Wherein consists the sinfulness of that estate whereinto man fell?" The answer given is that "the sinfulness of that estate whereinto man fell, consists in the guilt of Adam's first sin, the want of original righteousness, *and the corruption of his whole nature*, which is commonly called Original Sin; together with all actual transgressions which proceed from it" (italics mine).

This is the cause of the judgment, the condemnation, of which Jesus is speaking: original sin, which includes the corruption of the whole human nature. Troubled Job posed the question "Who can bring a clean thing out of an unclean?" and answered it, "There is not one" (Job 14:4). Man's whole nature is corrupted. He is unclean through and through; every aspect of his nature is both guilty and polluted. Why is all humanity affected in this way? It is because our very first ancestors chose disobedience rather than obedience. Adam, by his deliberate actions in disobeying God, introduced the poison of rebellion into the human race, and every one of us inherits this original sin. Like a polluting chemical introduced into a stream in the high Andes, the vast Amazonian basin of the whole human race is utterly contaminated. Not one of us is exempted. A toddler throws tantrums and acts out of pure

selfishness not only because of his immaturity, but primarily because of his sin.

LIGHT SHOWS UP EVIL FOR WHAT IT IS

Jesus speaks of the way people love darkness “because their works are evil.” A sinful, corrupted nature will give rise to evil deeds. Then in John 3:20 Jesus goes on to show that people hate the light because it shows up their evil deeds for what they are. The New Testament commentator William Hendriksen likens this behavior to that of “loathsome insects that hide themselves beneath logs and stones, always preferring the darkness, and terribly frightened whenever they are exposed to the light.”⁵ Perhaps you have lifted up stones in your own garden and seen this for yourself. Bugs and grubs of all kinds start scurrying and burrowing away for the comfort of darkness. The light blinds and terrifies them, but under the cover of thick darkness they are secure and can go on being “loathsome insects.”

This is stark and accurate biblical psychology. By nature people hate and fear God’s holiness, the brightness and purity of his moral law. Every encounter with God’s holiness makes sinful man want to shrink away in fear, shame, and terror. A life that is characterized by sin, whether that sin is open or secret, will by its very nature want to run away and hide from God.

Even at a merely human level it is a most fearful thing not only to know that I *am* guilty, but to discover that someone in legitimate and powerful authority *knows* that I am guilty. Perhaps you are familiar with that flushed sensation of desperate shame—like hot pins and needles in your head—that comes when you know that your wrong actions have been found out. Fallen human instinct dictates that we flee and hide from such a situation. We are most reluctant to expose our misdemeanors to people in authority because we hate that sense of shame.

If this is true in human relationships, how much more solemn this must be in the sight of God! This is just what motivated

Adam once he had sinned and knew that God was present in the Garden. He fled from God, he tried to hide from him, he covered up his nakedness. Nothing like this had ever happened before. Hitherto, Adam and Eve had enjoyed God's presence. They were created for joyful fellowship with God and had no idea what shame was. But as soon as they sinned, their entire relationship with God—and with one another—was upset, distorted, and characterized by shame and fear.

This history of Adam and Eve and its consequences for the entire human race set the scene for the ministry of Jesus in Israel two thousand years ago. Jesus spoke about light and darkness on a number of other occasions. The following passage has a strong relationship to the verses in John 3 that we have been considering:

No one after lighting a lamp puts it in a cellar or under a basket, but on a stand, so that those who enter may see the light. Your eye is the lamp of your body. When your eye is healthy, your whole body is full of light, but when it is bad, your body is full of darkness. Therefore be careful lest the light in you be darkness. (Luke 11:33-35)

Jesus uses the familiar picture of a lamp to demonstrate the meaning of his own presence in the world. What is a lamp for? It is for enabling the occupants of the house to see what is in the house or room where the lamp is situated. The lamp should be located where the people are found. This imagery stands the test of time, of long centuries and millennia; it really makes no difference whether we are talking about a candle or an electric lightbulb. If you were to put the light in the basement while there was no one there, or under a basket or bucket, you would be wasting the light, acting both illogically and foolishly.

Imagine a family living in an average-sized house, paying a substantial amount each month for electricity. And then imagine that the lights they switched on in the living room and kitchen

were always covered with bowls and buckets so that they could not be seen. The scenario would be absolutely absurd. People would be bumping around blindly, unable to see all the good and useful things in the house, endangering life and limb, health and safety, while they could simply uncover these lights so that all this inconvenience and danger could be avoided. Now we can see the point of this parable that Jesus told. The people he was contending with were extinguishing the light that they had been given. The light was among them; it was right in front of them; it had never shone so brightly—but they were covering it up, obscuring it. “The true light, which enlightens everyone” (John 1:9) was in the world, “and people loved the darkness rather than the light” (John 3:19).

SPIRITUAL BLINDNESS

Then Jesus develops the figure of speech somewhat in Luke 11:34. In case we failed to understand it the first time around he brings it closer to home and applies it more personally to the people. He moves from a lamp to the human eye, “your eye.” What is the eye? It is the bodily organ that admits light. The eye performs the function of a lamp as far as our bodies are concerned, and therefore the eye guides the rest of the body in everything that it does. Now imagine a slightly different situation. You are in a room that is dark and dim, and you find it hard to make out its contents. What might the problem be? There are various explanations. Maybe the light is not working properly; the bulb has gone, the fuse has blown, or the power is cut. Or maybe there never was any artificial light in the room at all. Or perhaps it is the middle of the night, or possibly daytime but for some reason it is dark outside—there could be a heavy thunderstorm, or even a total solar eclipse.

But then suppose that you have carefully eliminated all these possibilities one by one. There can be only one explanation remaining. Your sight is failing you. Think how disabling it

would be for any of us if our sight were rapidly taken away! The control, the freedom, the mastery we usually exercise over our surroundings would be removed. Although blind and partially sighted people may, in time and by various helpful means, be enabled to adjust very well to their disability, the fact remains that our capacity to function effectively in this world depends to a great extent on our sight. What if those of us who need glasses or contact lenses suddenly lost these accessories, or they became unavailable? Driving and many other activities that require excellent vision would be impossible.

We need to ask these important questions again: Why did the majority of people in Jesus' day resist and oppose him, ultimately plotting and carrying out his death? Why do men and women today shut their hearts and minds to the gospel of Jesus Christ and say they are not interested? The answers to these two questions are one and the same. People love darkness rather than light because their deeds are evil, and therefore they willfully shut out the light.

Although they will come up with all sorts of excuses why they do not want to be Christians, in the end it is only the Lord himself who gives the correct verdict. Why do people not want to follow Jesus Christ? Is it simply that they have not heard the gospel, and that if they did hear about Jesus they would immediately love him and follow him with all their hearts? Experience proves that they will not. They will say that they do not believe in Jesus or the gospel; certainly they will not submit to Jesus as their exclusive Lord and Savior.

Some will say that we simply lack proof. This, essentially, was the plea of the famous English atheist philosopher Bertrand Russell (1872–1970). There is insufficient evidence. God has not made himself clear enough. He should try to do a better job of convincing us. In a world with such a number of different religions there are simply far too many rival claims, and we cannot know what to believe or whom to believe. We could add

to this the great question of human origins which, for many, appears to cast doubt on the opening chapters of the Bible. The authority of the God of the Bible seems to be undermined as soon as we turn to its opening pages. And everyone surely knows that it is religion of various kinds that causes strife, war, and persecution—look at history, look at modern conflicts in the Middle East and, until recently, in Northern Ireland. On and on we could go; if there were a good God, he would not allow all the suffering that goes on. Therefore people refuse to believe in him.

Many of us are used to hearing protests of this kind. What they all have in common is that they say there is something defective in Christianity itself, that the claims of the Christian faith are weak, inadequate, contradictory, or untenable; or that Christians are ignorant, naive, perhaps bigoted and harsh; or even that God—if he exists—is unfair or unkind. All this can leave Christians with a sense of defeat and deflation. They run out of arguments, they feel squashed and wonder how they will ever persuade unbelievers of the truth. The unbelieving world says, “You Christians haven’t done a good enough job of convincing us—come up with some better arguments.”

But we need to say it yet again: the Lord Jesus Christ completely reverses the situation. The boot is on the other foot; the fault lies not with Jesus or with his message, but with the people themselves. That is why he speaks as he does in these verses. The problem is not with Jesus or the gospel but with the human heart. Why do so many people, then as now, reject Jesus and refuse to believe in him? Because of something lacking in him or in his message? No—because of their own dark and sinful hearts. That is the verdict.

CONCLUSION

We began with the question “Why did Jesus have enemies?” and we have reached the conclusion that we are all, by reason

of belonging to Adam's fallen race, Jesus' enemies. We need to see the universal extent of this condemnation. The whole world is the arena in which this light shines, and it is the whole of fallen humanity that is implicated in this charge of rejecting the light.

So this book is about Jesus' enemies, but it is written so that readers, who may be discovering for the first time that they *are* enemies, might learn how Jesus summons us to become his friends.

**Christians have, in the gospel, the best news imaginable for a dying world—
so why is our message ridiculed, ignored, and rejected?**

Jesus' own life answers this question. As soon as he came into the world, he had enemies too—and if *he* experienced hatred from the world his followers can expect no less.

Paul Yeulett examines the types of opposition Jesus encountered—demonic, political, religious, emotional, physical, and spiritual. He helps us understand why this opposition occurred in the life of Jesus and occurs in our own lives.

Yet Yeulett reminds us that Jesus didn't just endure opposition, he overcame it; and he examines Jesus' responses to help strengthen us to keep proclaiming Christ's victory to his enemies today.

“This is a great resource: a study of Jesus' enemies by one of Jesus' friends. Use it well and you may yet have the joy of seeing many of Jesus' enemies in your own context become his friends!”

—**IAIN D. CAMPBELL**, Senior Minister, Point Free Church of Scotland, Isle of Lewis; Moderator, General Assembly of the Free Church of Scotland, 2012

“Yeulett helps the reader to consider in a fresh way the claims and significance of Jesus by focusing on the very real conflicts between Jesus and his enemies. Those who ‘take up and read’ will be moved to consider the implications this has for our own day as well.”

—**BRANDON D. CROWE**, Assistant Professor of New Testament, Westminster Theological Seminary, Philadelphia

PAUL YEULETT is pastor of Shrewsbury Evangelical Church in Shrewsbury, England. He graduated from Highland Theological College and is ordained in the Evangelical Presbyterian Church in England and Wales. Previously he studied mathematics at Newcastle University and taught high-school math.

Cover image © istockphoto.com / Roberto A. Sanchez

PRP
P U B L I S H I N G
WWW.PRPOBOOKS.COM

BIBLICAL STUDIES / NEW TESTAMENT

ISBN: 978-1-59638-832-1

EAN



9 781596 388321