

Yet Saul grew more and more powerful and baffled the Jews living in Damascus by proving that Jesus is the Christ. After many days had gone by, the Jews conspired to kill him... But his followers took him by night and lowered him in a basket through an opening in the wall. Acts 9.22-25.

Last time we looked at the famous account of the conversion of Saul of Tarsus as he went to Damascus that fateful day to arrest yet more Christians. We know that he was deadly, because the Christians in Damascus actually thought it was a trick, 9.21... and v26... Barnabas, the 'son of encouragement' risked his life by taking a chance on Saul, v27... What I want us to look at today is the complete reversal in Saul's fortunes. One moment he was the man of the Jewish establishment, admired by his fellow rabbis and Pharisees. Now, after meeting the living Lord Jesus on the Damascus Road, asking 'Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?' he is a man on the run. He's lost everything: his friends and reputation. Now his former Jewish friends have turned on him, and he has to be sneaked out of Damascus in a basket by night, vv23-25...

I have asked you before now to consider if Saul would *really* have made up this account of his conversion to Christ. Why would he want to lose his friends and position in Jewish society for something he knew was false? *His* testimony to the reality of Christ's resurrection is the most powerful because he was a *hostile* witness who didn't want it to be true.

Saul/Paul went at a stroke from establishment-man to subversive on the run, once he became a Christian. This isn't really what we think being a Christian involves, especially here in GB, is it?. Being a Christian is about respectable and helpful and nice. How could that possibly threaten anyone?

But then, why did people froth at the mouth to kill *Jesus*? Didn't *he* also go around doing good, helping people, being nice and loving? Why would people want to *murder* him? Why are they murdering his *followers* 2,000 years later? The answer came to me when I started to think about three simple words: 'Jesus is Lord'. That was the first creed, the earliest statement of belief of Christians, and it is still the heart of the matter. 'Jesus is Lord' is dynamite, because it's saying, 'Jesus is in charge, not you'. Who do we mean by 'you'. Well, you personally, for a start. It means that you can't do just what you want; you have to do what *Jesus* wants you to do. Who wants to hear *that*? Most people want to believe that *no-one* has the right to tell them what to do. So of course people will rubbish *Jesus*, the church, Christianity, because they resist *Jesus's* claim to be Lord of their lives. They answer to no-one. That's what they need to believe.

'Jesus is Lord?' 2,000 years ago only *Caesar* was Lord. So again, it's not hard to see how being a Christian set you against the Roman State and *its* claim to rule your life. No wonder those first Christians were thrown to the lions. And the *Jews*, they had their vested interests. A whopping 10% of all the people in the Roman Empire were *Jews*, so the Jewish religious body was very powerful. *Jesus is Lord? Never!*

So following *Jesus* as *Lord* is about far more than just being nice, decent and respectable. It's about nothing less than a titanic battle for truth: who will sit on the throne? When you sign up to being a Christian, what you're saying is that you don't accept what the powers-that-be *tell* us is

reality. Let me give you a few easy examples. The French Revolution which began in 1789 developed into an all-out onslaught against Christianity. The 7-day week was abolished for a 10-day week. Sundays were abolished together with all saints' days. Bishops, priests, monks and nuns were sacked, imprisoned, and often guillotined. 1793 saw the start of a vicious programme actually to '*dechristianise*' France. You see, if Jesus was Lord, then the State could not be Lord, and the Revolutionary State was determined to have total power.

So the battle for the truth is really about power. Napoleon wanted total power. So did Hitler, *and* Stalin, *and* Mao Tse Tung. Christians were really hammered under these totalitarian regimes. As Patrick Sookhdeo reminded us, Christians are being hammered under *Islamic* regimes today. Why? Because they're *also* totalitarian regimes. Muslims cannot *possibly* accept Jesus as Lord. They must deny his lordship in order to keep their power. It's vested interest.

The same thing is going on in GB today, but far more subtly. Certain '*truths*' become dominant because certain people gain power. Ideologies come and go, because their function is to legitimate whatever power-group happens to have seized power. Until the 17thC atheism was unthinkable. Today the situation has been completely reversed. To speak openly of the God of the Bible is now considered laughable. We may not use the guillotine in our dechristianisation programme, but we use more subtle instruments like Human Rights legislation, Political Correctness (which is just censorship of anything the State doesn't approve of), equality and anti-

discrimination laws. They are very powerful means of denying Jesus' claim to be *Lord*, because the *State* wants to be Lord. If the 20thC saw all manner of totalitarian regimes legitimated by ideologies like nationalism, fascism, Marxism, the 21stC has seen our *own* State here in GB using legislation to tell us exactly what we can or cannot say or think. We laugh at Political Correctness but it is an attempt to gain lordship over our lives *and* minds, and that is why the present secular regime rubbishes Jesus as Lord. It's a power-struggle.

Being a Christian is being 'respectable'? When Paul gave himself to Jesus as *Lord*, he went from respectable establishment-man to man-on-the-run. Jesus challenges the claims of others to be in ultimate control, to be The Truth. The Napoleons, Hitlers, Stalins, secularists, know that. *That's* why they killed Jesus and hammer us, Christ's body.

Well, what can we do? We can understand what it means to confess 'Jesus as Lord'. To say 'Jesus is Lord' is an act of defiance against those in power who want to sit on the throne. Paul describes this when he speaks of 'strongholds' of resistance to Jesus' lordship at 2 Cor 10.3-5, p1164... We need to get back to the Word of God. All else is false. They might have power for a while. Napoleon, Hitler, Caesar were mighty once. Today's PC will go the way of all flesh. But God's Word, his Truth, keeps bubbling up subversively through the prevailing falsehood. Just keep the faith. Truth is truth. We don't need to scream it out. Truth always prevails and Jesus alone is the Truth. Make Jesus your Lord and be a subversive. There's nothing 'respectable' about being a Christian.