



WEEK FIVE

HOW WOULD JESUS RESPOND?



an IVU Member Society

Sponsored by : CHRISTIAN VEGETARIAN ASSOCIATION



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The Slaughter of the Innocent

By J.R (Regina) Hyland

The relationship between the sacrifice of animals at the Jerusalem Temple, and the crucifixion of Jesus.

Most of those who have been raised in the Christian tradition are aware of the events of Holy Week -- the period of time that begins with Palm Sunday and extends through Easter Saturday. The biblical account of this last week of Christ's life is very important to scholars as they try to understand the political and religious events that took place.



What changed the cheering, well-wishers of Palm Sunday into the jeering mob that mocked Jesus as he stumbled under the weight of the cross? What finally brought the leaders of the religious establishment to the point where they felt compelled to take action against him?

Jesus had been inveighing against the priests, the Pharisees and the Sadducees from the time he began his ministry and had always been aggressive in his condemnation of their legalistic practices and pious pretensions. And large numbers of people had always been willing to listen to what he said. But the religious leaders in Jerusalem were used to dealing with dissenters and were generally tolerant of them. There had always been itinerant preachers and reformers who felt the need to proclaim their message in the Holy city, and they came from all over Palestine to do that.

It was not what Christ said during the week before he died that brought the wrath of the Establishment down on him. It was what he did that led to his crucifixion. The Gospel account of that event follows:

When it was almost time for the Jewish Passover, Jesus went up to Jerusalem. In the Temple courts he found men selling cattle, sheep and doves, and others sitting at tables, exchanging money. So he made a whip of cords and drove all from the Temple area, both sheep and cattle; he scattered the coins of the money changers and overturned their tables. To those who sold doves he said, Get these out of here! How dare you turn my Father's house into a market? (John 2:13-16 NIV)

The Synoptic Gospels (Matthew, Mark, and Luke) as well as the Gospel of John, record this event. It is the only time that Jesus is reported to have committed an aggressive act. And it was the slaughter of animals, in the name of God, that led to this uncharacteristic action.

Most Christians know about this incident which is euphemistically called "the cleansing of the Temple." But few realise that it is the pivotal event of Holy Week. It set in motion the arrest, trial, and death of Jesus because in trying to end the slaughter of animals, he was attacking the economic foundation of Jerusalem.

The Holy City had become the centre of sacrificial religion 600 years earlier when the Temple there had been declared the only legitimate place for sacrifice.

The entire city and all its inhabitants were dependant upon the Temple for their survival. Labourers, artisans, craftsmen and farmers were as committed to the maintenance of the sacrificial cult as were the priests, Levites, and others directly involved in its daily activities. In modern terms, ancient Jerusalem would be classified as a tourist-dependent city.

There were always many pilgrims in the Holy City and three times a year, during the major religious observances of Judaism, the many became a multitude. And never more so than during Passover. Because such great crowds would be gathered in Jerusalem, it was the perfect time for Jesus to carry out his assault on the sacrificial system. Not only would there be many witnesses to what he did, thousands more would hear about it as the story of what took place was passed around among the pilgrims lodged in and around the city.

Mark's Gospel makes it clear that the attack on the sacrificial system was a planned event, not an impulsive act. After describing the triumphal entry into the Holy city when the crowds called "Hosanna," his gospel reports that "*Jesus entered Jerusalem and went to the Temple. He looked around at everything, but since it was already late, he went on to Bethany with the twelve.*" (Emphasis added)

The action Jesus planned was to be a very public spectacle. But by the time he had got past the cheering crowds who thronged the entry road to Jerusalem, most people had returned to their homes or to the overcrowded inns that housed them during the Passover season. So he went on to Bethany, where he would spend the night at the home of Lazarus.

But before Jesus left the city for the night, when he "looked around at everything," he would have seen the animals who were jammed into the Temple enclosure. The next day was the 10th of Nisan, the traditional day that the male head-of-the-household picked out the animal who would be killed in honour of its Creator.

The victim was chosen according to a strict protocol: the number of people eating together dictated the size of the animal they could eat. But the animal purchased on the 10th of Nisan would not be killed until the 14th - the eve of Passover. Because each man killed his own animal at this season, the number of sacrificers and the number of their victims was so great that the purchase and the killing could not be carried out on the same day.

From ancient records, scholars have reconstructed the events that took place on the day of sacrifice. The killing began at three p.m. and by sundown about 18,000 animals would be dead. Because the Temple could not accommodate all the "worshippers" at the same time, the victims had to be killed in three shifts.

Approximately 6,000 people comprised each shift and since the sacrifice was a yearling, the men usually carried the lambs on their shoulders. Once in the place of slaughter, they lined up in long rows next to a row of priests. The shofar would sound and the men would wrest the lambs to the ground, slitting their throats. As they bled to death, the priests standing next to them would catch the blood in large buckets. When these were full they would be passed up the line to those who stood

by the altar. They would throw the blood against the side of the altar. The empty buckets would be recycled and refilled with the blood of more lambs.

Although it was set up efficiently, neither the human nor the non human creatures who were part of the slaughter process always behaved efficiently. Sometimes the knife was not sharp enough, or the lamb struggled too hard, and although the blood had started to flow from its throat, a frantic yearling had to be wrestled into submission before a better cut could be made.

Of course the slaughtered animals lost all control of their bladders and kidneys. The smells, the frenzy of the dying creatures, and the endless buckets of blood thrown on the altar in the name of God, make it obvious that this ritual of terror and violence was the worship of an idol. This god-of-the-slaughter was created by human beings in their own, fallen image.

Because this slaughter of the innocent was idolatrous worship, Isaiah and the other Latter Prophets had called for the end of sacrificial religion. But they had not taken action against the Temple cult. Now, hundreds of years later, Jesus Christ, who began his ministry claiming to be the fulfilment of Isaiah's prophecy (Luke 4:16-20) took direct action against that system.

From the time that Christ began his ministry, neither he nor his followers offered animal victims at the Temple. But although the repudiation of animal sacrifice by Jesus is undeniable, scholars direct attention away from this fact by inventing counterfeit issues to explain his cleansing of the Temple. Among these non-issues is the claim that the Lord was annoyed at the policies of the money-changers, whose tables he overturned. But Matthew's Gospel (22:17-21) shows that Jesus was not concerned with the monetary practices of his time. He even had a tax-collector among his disciples at a time when such men were despised by the Jewish people.

The subsequent development of Christianity attests to the fact that it was the slaughter of God's creatures in his "Father's House" that led Jesus to free the animals who were to be killed. His disciples always understood this prohibition; even after his death, animal sacrifice was never a part of Christianity.

Faced with the reality that Christ, and the Christians who came after him, refused to take part in sacrificial worship, theologians have found a way to "explain" this refusal. They tell us that the slaughter of countless animals, over thousands of years, was not enough to satisfy God's "justice." But when His son became the victim --"The Lamb of God who taketh away the sins of the world" --the Creator was finally satisfied. So there is no longer any need to sacrifice animals.

And mainstream Christianity still teaches that in the past it was legitimate to kill God's creatures on His altars; that it was God who commanded this violent, murderous worship. This perverse characterisation of a loving Creator who demanded the murder of both human and non human beings, is blasphemous. These modern descendants of the Scribes and Pharisees make a mockery of the loving God whom Jesus came to reveal. And they make a mockery of his attempt to end the horror of animal sacrifice; an attempt that ultimately led to his death.

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Preaching against the religious establishment was one thing; trying to overthrow the sacrificial system which was its foundation, was another. After he did that, nothing would be forgiven him. Jesus disrupted the Temple worship on 10 Nisan. By the 14th, he was dead. Like the innocent animals he tried to free he, too, was killed -- in the name of God.

The Jerusalem Temple was simultaneously a religious, political and economic institution. And inasmuch as it was the place of sacrifice it was the centre of sacred violence. Jesus was revolutionary, calling the temple radically into question in the light of a new vision of God as love... In this regard [His] disruption of the temple activities is a crucial episode. This action was not simply the cleansing of an institution that was to be reformed; It represented an attack on the entire sacrificial system.

*Excerpt from "The Bible, Violence & The Sacred" by James G. Williams.
Harper San Francisco. C 1991.*

The multitude of your sacrifices-- what are they to me? says the LORD. I have more than enough of burnt offerings, of rams and the fat of fattened animals; I have no pleasure in the blood of bulls and lambs and goats.... Your hands are full of blood; wash and make yourselves clean. Take your evil deeds out of my sight! *Isaiah 1 v 11,15,16 (NIV)* At the time I brought your ancestors out of Egypt, I didn't command them to offer sacrifices to me.

Jeremiah 7 v 22 (CEV)

I hate, I despise your religious feasts; I cannot stand your assemblies. Even though you bring me burnt offerings and grain offerings, I will not accept them.

Amos 5 v 21,22 (NIV)



Has not my hand made all these things, and so they came into being?" declares the LORD. "This is the one I esteem: he who is humble and contrite in spirit, and trembles at my word. But whoever sacrifices a bull is like one who kills a man, and whoever offers a lamb, like one who breaks a dog's neck; whoever makes a grain offering is like one who presents pig's blood, and whoever burns memorial incense, like one who worships an idol. They have chosen their own ways, and their souls delight in their abominations.

Isaiah 66 v 2,3 (NIV)

His Eye Is On The Sparrow

By J.R (Regina) Hyland



In the past few years there has been a steady increase in the number of religious spokesmen who try to alter Christ's teaching about God's concern for sparrows. They claim that the text of Matthew 10:29-31 validates man's claim of dominion over the "lesser" creatures of the earth.

That interpretation has been popularised as the issue of animals as beloved creatures of God, has come to the fore. This understanding has challenged the self-serving theology which taught that animals were created to be utilised by humans, in whatever ways they thought desirable or necessary.

When Christ said to his disciples, "*ye are of more value than many sparrows,*" he was speaking about a fact of economic life, not about heavenly priorities. And his followers knew precisely what he meant. In the time in which they lived, the buying and selling of human beings was as much an accepted part of everyday life as the buying of stocks and bonds in our own time. And although physical condition, gender and other factors affected the sale price of humans, the value of the cheapest slave was far beyond that of any bird. And among birds, the sparrow was the least valued by men.

Jesus told his disciples of God's love for all creatures just after he warned them that the world in which they would preach his Gospel was a hostile place. They would face persecution, and even death, but they were not to be afraid: "*Behold I send you forth as sheep in the midst of wolves beware of men for they will deliver you up to the councils ... but fear not them who can kill the body.*" (Matt.10:16,28)

They were to be secure in the knowledge of God's care. And in order to insure that they understood the all-encompassing nature of Divine love, he told his disciples that even those creatures upon which men placed little value, were loved and watched over by God. "*Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? Yet not one of them will fall to the ground apart from the will of your Father*" (Matthew 10:29)

When Jesus said God was concerned about the fate of something they considered as trivial as a sparrow, it was a remarkable revelation. Then, as now, human beings assumed that the value they place on something is a reflection of its actual worth. And the price men set on the buying and selling of their own species was far above that of any other: "*You are worth more than many sparrows.*" In the hierarchy of human values this was, literally, true. But the scriptures warn that the value systems of men do not reflect God's values.

"*For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, declares the lord. As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts*" (Isaiah 55:8,9). But

as in so many other matters, this warning is ignored. Instead of accepting the Good News that God cares about the fate of all creatures, during their lives and at their death, there are still those who claim that the rest of creation exists to be used by man, as he sees fit.

In the time of Jesus, the religious establishment tried to nullify his message of God's all-encompassing love and mercy, but the spiritual truths he taught escaped their control. The same is true today. The religious establishment tries to counteract the growing understanding of God's concern for all His creatures. Preachers preach the message of man's right to his dark dominion of the earth and theologians develop theories to uphold it. But even as they do this, Christ's revelation of the unlimited nature of Divine love brings hope to those who are discouraged or feel unworthy. Above the sound and the fury of those who demand belief in a God whose concern is limited to certain groups, or religions, or species, comes the sound of voices raised in gratitude for Christ's revelation of a God whose love is unlimited.

Why should I feel discouraged.
When hope within me dies...
His eye is on the sparrow,
and I know He cares for me;
His eye is on the sparrow,
so I know God cares for me.



Animals in the Life of Jesus.

By May Tripp

There are three crucial junctures in Christ's earthly life; His birth, the beginning of His ministry, and the final week that leads to his death. At each juncture He is in the presence of and identifies with the meekness and humility of His animal creation:

1. He is born in a stable (in the presence of animals. Luke 2 v 7)
2. After His baptism, before starting His ministry. He is in communion / fellowship with the wild beasts. (Mark 1 v 13).
3. He begins His final week on the back of an unbroken colt (Luke 19 v 30). This event is significant for it shows that the untamed colt recognised that the one riding him was his creator; the colt would not have permitted anyone else to ride him.

Additionally, when as a victorious Christ / Lamb He returns to earth, HE and His "army" are on the backs of white horses from heaven (Rev 19 v 11-14). When Christ assumes His Lordship in heaven, He is called "the Lion", and, "the Lamb", and as the whole redeemed creation worships God, Christ is once again in the presence of animals, the angelic cherubim (Rev 5)."

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Is Meat Consumption Compatible with Christianity ?

By Antony Neesham



There are many compelling reasons for considering a vegetarian diet. There are the health considerations: A vegetarian diet tends to correspond closely with current dietary advice for healthy eating. Vegetarians are, on average, healthier than those who consume the typical Western diet and enjoy a lower incidence of heart disease, diabetes, obesity and diet related cancer. There are the environmental considerations: Pollution, global warming and deforestation can all be linked to livestock farming. Since 1970, cattlemen have destroyed 20 million hectares of rain forest and produced 1.4 billion tons of carbon dioxide. There are the humanitarian considerations: It takes ten kilos of vegetable protein to produce just one kilo of meat. Resources wasted in meat production could be channelled into establishing viable grain distribution networks. It's officially estimated that should Westerners reduce their meat consumption by as little as 10% that would free enough land, water and energy to adequately feed at least forty million starving people.

Compelling reasons indeed to eliminate, or at least drastically reduce, meat consumption. However, the intention here is to explore a further consideration. Whether in fact vegetarianism is a Christian obligation. Let's return to the central question: Is meat consumption compatible with Christianity? A provocative question no doubt. Nevertheless, considering there exists no honest means of reconciling the routine violence of the meat industry with the inherent Christian ethos of non-violence expressed through mercy and compassion, a wholly legitimate one. Each year millions of defenceless animals are mutilated before being butchered. Lambs are castrated, piglets tail-docked and hens and turkeys de-beaked nearly always without anaesthetic. Even the most superficial investigation into the meat industry would expose disturbing evidence of cruelty and violence. No Christian could possibly condone, not to mention perpetuate, the suffering inflicted upon those condemned to the factory farm and/or slaughterhouse. It's all too easy to turn a blind eye to suffering when it is neither we nor our families who suffer. Nevertheless, lest we forget, Christ implores us to alleviate suffering, regardless of the sufferer. Where there is suffering there is Christ too, amid the misery and pain: "I was hungry ... Thirsty ... a stranger ... naked". As we do unto the least we do unto Him.

No Christian can dispute the fact that scripturally, humanity has God-given dominion over non-human species. However, nailed to the Cross, Christ demonstrably redefined our definition of dominion. No longer would dominion be so readily equated with oppression or exploitation of the vulnerable. Christian dominion, exemplified by Christ, would be defined by service. Not symbolic service motivated by self-interest, but self-sacrificing service motivated by genuine love and compassion for all. Indeed, the Passion bears witness that Christ's

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love, which Christians are called to emulate, knows no bounds. In contrast, the meat industry is based upon an un-Christian definition of dominion; oppressing, exploiting and butchering the vulnerable simply to indulge an unhealthy lust for their flesh.

Standing firmly against cruelty and violence, vegetarianism provides Christians with the practical means of fulfilling Christ's call for greater mercy and compassion as opposed to meat consumption which perpetuates an industry no more compatible with Christianity than murder, slavery, child exploitation or female inequality. Christ, the Lamb of God, brings us a new kind of flesh and a new kind of blood. Christ offers us His flesh and His blood; the flesh and blood of self-sacrifice and Perfect Love. Christians are duty-bound not to corrupt the sacred flesh and blood of Jesus Christ with the flesh and blood of cruelty and violence. We can live healthy lives without perpetuating the horrors of the meat industry. At the dawn of the new millennium let's bring Isaiah's vision of Christ's peaceable kingdom, where the wolf dwells with the lamb and all creation lives in harmony, a step closer. Let us say no to the slaughterhouse and yes to the Lamb of God, Jesus Christ.

The religion of Jesus Christ originated in the mercy of God; and it was the gracious design of it to promote peace towards every creature on earth, and to create a spirit of universal benevolence or goodwill in men. And it has pleased God therein to display the riches of His own goodness and mercy towards us; and the revealer of His blessed will, the author and finisher of our faith, hath commanded us to be merciful, as our Father is also merciful, the obligation upon Christians becomes the stronger, and it is our bounded duty, in an especial manner, and above all other people, to extend the precept of mercy to every object of it. For, indeed, a cruel Christian is a monster of ingratitude, a scandal to his profession and beareth the name of Christ in vain...

Humphrey Primatt



Questions

1. Would Jesus condone our cruelty to, & destruction of, other sentient beings?
2. How would Jesus respond to the cruelty & violence of today's meat industry?
3. Did Jesus die on the cross to save all of God's creation?
4. When Jesus returns will He introduce a kingdom free from all violence?
5. Should not we as the body of Christ, proclaim in both words and actions, that Jesus has the answer 'sacrificial love'?
6. Discuss with the group, any passages in the last five studies that influenced your answers to the above questions.

I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep.

John 10 . 11.



The Spirit immediately drove him out into the wilderness. And he was in the wilderness forty days, tempted by Satan; and he was with the wild beasts; and the angels ministered to him.

Mark 1 . 12-13.

A righteous man has regard for the life of his beast, but the mercy of the wicked is cruel.

Proverbs 12 . 10.



Man and beast thou savest, o Lord.

Psalms 36 . 6b.

Prayer

Extract from “Animal Rites” Andrew Linzey ISBN 0 334 02760 8

Almighty God
you have given us
temporary lordship
of your beautiful creation.
But we have misused our power,
turned away from responsibility
and marred your image in us.



Forgive us, true Lord
especially for our callousness
and cruelty to animals.

Help us to follow the way
of your Son, Jesus Christ,
who expressed power in humility
and lordship in loving service.
Enable us, by your spirit,
to walk in newness of life,
healing injury, avoiding wrong
and making peace with all your creatures.

Amen.

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God of everlasting love,
who is eternally forgiving:
pardon and restore us,
and make us one with you
in your new creation



Amen

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Songs of Fellowship No 120
Kingsway Music ISBN 0 85476 771 1
From Heaven you came
(The Servant King)
By Graham Kendrick

From heaven you came,
Helpless babe,
Entered our world,
Your glory veiled,
Not to be served
But to serve,
And give your life
That we might live.

*This is our God,
The servant King,
He calls us now
To follow Him,
To bring our lives
As a daily offering
Of worship to
The servant King.*

There in the garden
Of tears,
My heavy load
He chose to bear;

His heart with sorrow
Was torn,
'Yet not my will
But yours' He said.

Come see His hands
And His feet,
The scars that speak
Of sacrifice;
Hands that flung stars
Into space
To cruel nails
Surrendered.

So let us learn
How to serve,
And in our lives
Enthroned Him;
Each others needs
To prefer,
For it is Christ
We're serving.

