

Was Jesus a Patriot?

Did Jesus love His country? That He loved its people there is no doubt, Matt.23:37; but He also loved the Gentiles, Samaritans, and even the Romans, Matt.9:10-13. Was He a *patriot*? The answer likely depends on exactly how one would define “patriot.” Did He love His country? Yes, but not exclusively or to the sacrifice of loving everyone else as we have already noted. Was He *pro-Israel*? Yes, but only to the degree that it *repented*, became *pro-God*, and did what was right *spiritually*. Did He *promote national interests*? Only in the sense that “*righteousness exalts a nation, but sin is a disgrace to any people*,” Prov.14:34.

To what *political party, trade union, or religious sect* did Jesus belong? Was He a Pharisee, Sadducee, Herodian, Zealot, or Publican? Let’s consider each of these briefly and see if we can learn something of or for ourselves from it.

- **Publicans** were Jews who gathered taxes from their countrymen on behalf of Rome. They were typically *corrupt* and *rich*, gathering more than Rome required to line their own pockets and feather their own nests. Thus, they were viewed as *traitors*, and very roundly despised, Matt.18:17. And yet Jesus chose one of them (Matthew) to be His disciple, Matt.9:9; ate and socialized with them, Matt.9:10; and, converted some of them, Luke 19:2ff (Zaccheus).
- **Zealots** (Cananaean) were “described by Josephus as the ‘fourth philosophy’ among the Jews (*BJ* 2.117; *Ant.* 18.23).” They were “founded by *JUDAS the Galilean, who led a revolt against Rome in AD 6 (*CENSUS). They opposed the payment of tribute by Israel to a pagan emperor on the ground that this was treason to God, Israel’s true King. These men were called Zealots because they followed the example of Mattathias and his sons and followers, who manifested zeal for the law of God when Antiochus IV tried to suppress the Jewish religion (1 Macc. 2:24–27), and the example of Phinehas, who showed comparable zeal in a time of apostasy in the wilderness (Nu. 25:11; Ps. 106:30f.). When the revolt of AD 6 was crushed they kept its spirit alive for 60 years.... Zealots were active throughout the war of AD 66–73; the last Zealot stronghold, Masada, fell in May AD 74, but even then the Zealot spirit was not completely quenched. (*ASSASSINS.)¹” But was Jesus a *Zealot*? His disciples seemed to have thought He might be when He *cleansed the Temple* with a *whip*, cf. John 2:17. And one of the Twelve, *Simon*, is listed as “*the Zealot*” in each of the lists, Matt.10:4; Mk.3:18; Luke 6:15; Acts 1:13. But Jesus certainly did not *assassinate* anyone; nor did He in any way encourage others to do so, Matt.5:38-48.
- **Herodians** were, in some ways, the opposite of the *Zealots*. They sought to placate Rome by supporting the *Herods* (kings appointed by Rome in an effort to give the Jews a sense of *self-government*, even though the men they appointed were either only nominally *Jewish* at best, or not at all.) Generally, the *Herodians* were the “peace at any price” people of Jesus’ time. Thus, their involvement with the *Pharisees* and the *Sadducees* to *entrap* Jesus in Matt.22:16-46 was likely because

¹ Bruce, F. F. (1996). *Zealot*. In D. R. W. Wood, I. H. Marshall, A. R. Millard, J. I. Packer, & D. J. Wiseman (Eds.), *New Bible dictionary* (3rd ed., p. 1263). Leicester, England; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press.

they saw Him as someone who would further disrupt Israel's relationship with Rome. Obviously, Jesus was not a "peace at any price" placater, Matt.10:34-39.

- **Sadducees** were the aristocrats. They were comprised mainly of the *ruling class* and *priestly families* (i.e. "*chief priests*" and were in charge of the Temple and its service). They viewed only the Pentateuch (first five books of the OT) as "Law," and opposed the *oral* (more later) *law* of the Pharisees. Sadducees were very *materialistic* in their views (didn't believe in *angels, spirits, or resurrection*, cf. Acts 23:8). They were much more concerned about *political power* and *control* than principles and piety, John 11:47-48. It seems that they didn't really care much about what a person believed or did religiously, as long as it didn't interfere with their own *positions of power* and *control*. They viewed themselves as *intellectually superior*, but seemed to be dispassionate, dissociative, and dismissive rather than controlling *arbiters of thought* and *practice* (as the Pharisees). Though surely "*the King of the Jews*," Jesus was neither *aristocratic* nor dissociatively dispassionate.
- **Pharisees** saw themselves as *guardians of the Law*. Obviously, they were opposed to the Sadducees in that Pharisees *acknowledged angels, spirits, and resurrection*, Acts 23:8. And they were very much supportive of *oral law*, or "*the tradition of the elders*," Matt.15:2ff (rabbinic teachings passed on orally down through the centuries originally intended as a *hedge* about the Law to prevent violation which eventually became "Law" itself, at least to them). They saw themselves very much as not only the *guardians of the Law* itself, but also of all *thought* and *practice* of it. They considered themselves as the *religious elite*, cf. Phil.3:4-6 and Acts 26:5. Obviously, Jesus saw them differently, cf. Matt.23. They were *arrogant, self-centered, self-righteous, and hypocritical*. Far from dissociative dispassion, they were all about not only telling everyone what to think and do, they sought to enforce their ideology on them. By contrast, Jesus certainly knew and taught "Truth" (being the very embodiment of it!), and was also willing to *correct* errors regarding it (cf. Matt.22:29), He was unwilling to *force* anyone to accept or obey it, cf. John 6:45. Final note on *Pharisaism*: Though the Pharisees were *zealously committed* to their ideas of "truth" and "righteousness," they were blatantly wrong in the *attitude* and *application* of it, cf. Matt.9:10-13.

Some truths we need to realize from these things:

1. **These groups (and probably others that could/should be included) are fairly representative of ideologies of today.** We have **Publicans** who are only concerned with money, even it makes them *traitors*, Matt.6:24. We have **Zealots** who view themselves as *patriots*, ready and willing to *use force* to overthrow and install government (or forms of it) they deem appropriate, Matt.17:27ff (Jesus did what He could *not to give offense*). We have **Herodians** willing to *support any government* that affords "peace" (the *peace at any price* group), John 14:27; 16:33. We have **Sadducees** viewing themselves as *educated elites* whose "religion" is all about *power, control, and position*, John 13:1-20. And we have **Pharisees** (likewise viewing themselves as *educated elites*, though perhaps more in the *spiritual* realm) who think they know what everyone ought to *think* and *do*, and view themselves as the *sole arbiter* of "truth" (even above and beyond what God has said), Luke 18:10-14.

2. **Zeal for our nation, or our interest in it, can easily become consuming.** For whom Jesus did vote, campaign, endorse, or support? Annas or Caiaphas as High Priest? Pilot as Governor? Herod as King? Didn't He realize how "important" these things were "for the future of Israel (or America)"? I'm not saying that being concerned and active in politics is necessarily *improper*, just emphasizing the relative *unimportance* as compared to **spiritual** things.
- a. **We can't serve God and Mammon, Matt.6:24.** We need to stop trying to prove this untrue. It is true. Jesus said so. Think about it: Are your *political views* and *activity* shaped more by what is "right" according to God, or about preserving our national or your personal wealth (*i.e.* "the economy")? While it is not wrong to be *politically active*, it is wrong to allow *money/politics* or *politics/money* to become our "religion," to unduly influence it, or to even overshadow it.
 - b. **Neither can we allow Country (and allegiance, duty, and honor to it) to supplant God in our hearts, minds, and lives.** Jesus clearly stated *His mission* to "seek and save that which is lost," in Luke 19:10. What is *your life's mission*? To save our nation, or to lead others to being *God's people*, 1Pet.2:9-10? To save our country from other forms of government that you view as inferior or destructive, or help others *bow* and *pledge allegiance* to the King of Kings, Rom.14:11; 1Tim.6:13-16? To save yourself and your posterities' prosperity, or *lay up treasure in heaven*, Matt.6:19-20? To preserve "our way of life," or God's, Matt.10:39?

Conclusions:

In Matt.13:57 Jesus said, "A prophet is not without honor except in His hometown and in his own household." Surely at least a part of the reason for the truth of this statement (Him being *without honor*) was due to His refusal to become embroiled in the "politics" of His time and place- He simply refused to be the "King" they sought. He furthermore refused to save the "nation" as they desired. **Don't let your politics supplant your affections, duties, and allegiance to God!**

In John 11:48, the *chief priests* (Sadducees) and *Pharisees* were overly concerned with losing "*both our place and our nation.*" So much was this the case that they rejected and spurned Jesus, and subsequently their salvation and spiritual relationship with God.

In Luke 19:10, Jesus stated that His *mission* was to "seek and to save that which is lost." Our *mission* is to "seek first **His kingdom and His righteousness,**" Matt.6:33. **EVERYTHING ELSE, including politics and even our nation, must be secondary to this.**

Was Jesus a "patriot"? Only to the *kingdom of God*. And "His" *country* killed Him for it.