

Sermons on Matthew

The Trial of Jesus

By The Church

Matthew 26:57-68

With Study Questions

*Pastor Paul Viggiano
Branch of Hope Church
2370 W. Carson Street, #100
Torrance, CA 90501
(310) 212-6999
pastorpaul@integrity.com
www.branchofhope.org
8/3/2008*

The Trial of Jesus

By The Church

Matthew 26:57-68

And those who had laid hold of Jesus led *Him* away to Caiaphas the high priest, where the scribes and the elders were assembled. ⁵⁸ But Peter followed Him at a distance to the high priest's courtyard. And he went in and sat with the servants to see the end.

⁵⁹ Now the chief priests, the elders, and all the council sought false testimony against Jesus to put Him to death, ⁶⁰ but found none. Even though many false witnesses came forward, they found none. But at last two false witnesses came forward ⁶¹ and said, "This *fellow* said, 'I am able to destroy the temple of God and to build it in three days.' "

⁶² And the high priest arose and said to Him, "Do You answer nothing? What *is it* these men testify against You?" ⁶³ But Jesus kept silent. And the high priest answered and said to Him, "I put You under oath by the living God: Tell us if You are the Christ, the Son of God!"

⁶⁴ Jesus said to him, "*It is as* you said. Nevertheless, I say to you, hereafter you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Power, and coming on the clouds of heaven."

⁶⁵ Then the high priest tore his clothes, saying, "He has spoken blasphemy! What further need do we have of witnesses? Look, now you have heard His blasphemy! ⁶⁶ What do you think?"

They answered and said, "He is deserving of death."

⁶⁷ Then they spat in His face and beat Him; and others struck *Him* with the palms of their hands, ⁶⁸ saying, "Prophecy to us, Christ! Who is the one who struck You?" (Matthew 26:57-68)

Introduction

Is it not obvious that the decisions made in the so-called halls of justice do more to both:

- Reveal the ethical mettle of cultures, and
- Fashion their futures

than any venue available to humanity? What happens in the courtroom reveals everything and changes everything.

Socrates was put to death for what he taught (399 B. C.); Galileo was tried for his scientific convictions (1633); John Peter Zenger's trial paved the way for freedom of the press (1735); the Lincoln Conspiracy Trial saw eight men hanged (1865); the Nuremburg Trials tested any concept of international ethics and appeals to authority (1945-49); the Scopes Monkey Trial ignited the removal of creation instruction in the public schools (1925); the Susan Anthony Trial began woman's suffrage (1873); the Rosenbergs' conviction and execution was an unprecedented display of technological treason (1951)...

And the list goes on: President Clinton's impeachment trial, the O. J. trial, the Rodney King trial, the Salem Witchcraft trials, the Roe v. Wade decision, and today's judges making single-handed decisions regarding what constitutes a legitimate marriage – all these should make it glaringly obvious that courtrooms, housing the judges who are to serve as ministers of justice (Romans 13:4), are perhaps the single most powerful human force for both good and evil.

And there never was, nor will there ever be, a greater miscarriage of justice than the one we read of this morning. Nor was there ever a trial which revealed the dark heart of man – while simultaneously redeeming the course of human history forever.

It is not merely with a sense of irony, but instruction, that Jesus would utilize that which is designed to protect and praise the innocent (the courtroom – 1 Peter 2:14) as the means by which this nefarious plot would be enacted.

Surely the wrath of man shall praise You (Psalm 76:10).

His own people received Him not (John 1:11), His closest friends and companions in ministry betrayed and deserted Him (Matthew 26:49, 56), and the high priest who served to prefigure the Mediator between God and men and the church council who represented the whole Church of God would reject the very cornerstone (Psalm 118:22) of redemption. Soon the only remaining institution – the state – would deal the final blow to humanity's sole innocent citizen.

We thus emphasize the *solas* of true deliverance – that man is saved by grace *alone*, through faith *alone*, in Christ *alone*, who is revealed through the Scriptures *alone*, to the glory of God *alone*. Jesus would have no advocates – nor would He need one.

Laying Hold of Jesus

They “**laid hold of Jesus and led Him away to Caiaphas**” (Matthew 26:57). Jesus had numerous times predicted this (Matthew 16:21; 17:22; 20:17). It makes you wonder who laid hold of whom. Who’s the cat and who’s the mouse? Let us ponder and enjoy that our Savior’s love is expressed in that He employs His mighty power to orchestrate, not His own deliverance, but His own betrayal, bondage, and suffering so that we might not face these horrors ourselves.

What parent doesn’t appreciate the efforts of Vance Flosenzier, who in 2001 in Pensacola, Florida saw his eight year old nephew being attacked by a shark? He exercised all his might, not to run away, but to grab the shark by the tail and wrench it from the water in order to save his nephew.

Jesus would face no mere shark; He set His face like flint toward Jerusalem, to the condemnation of death and hell that we might be free from such fears.

Conspiracy Court

And here we see conspiracy court. I hope you agree that daytime television reality courtroom shows are a supreme embarrassment to our system of justice. Other than the service of worship, it can be easily argued that nothing should be more sacred than a courtroom where guilt and innocence is decided.

In the Bible, spontaneous crimes of passion are dealt with in a more lenient fashion than crimes of premeditation (Numbers 35:20-24). But a conspiracy is corporate premeditation and perhaps the greatest evil of all!

We read here of God’s ministers of justice – of vengeance – seeking liars – those who would offer “**false testimony against Jesus to put Him to death**” (Matthew 26:59). And there was no shortage of those willing to lie – “**many false witnesses came forward**” (Matthew 26:60). They were, for the most part, unusable because (as Mark indicates in 14:56) their testimonies were in conflict with each other.

Finally **“two false witnesses came forward” (Matthew 26:60)** who manufacture a serviceable lie. They have now met God’s standard for a conviction for death – two or three witnesses (Deuteronomy 17:6; 19:15). Conveniently the subsequent passage from the law is ignored. The one which reads:

And the judges shall make careful inquiry, and indeed, if the witness is a false witness, who has testified falsely against his brother,¹⁹ then you shall do to him as he thought to have done to his brother (Deuteronomy 19:18, 19).

Apparently a false accusation is extremely offensive to God. So what is the accusation?

The Accusation

“This fellow said, ‘I am able to destroy the temple of God and to build it in three days’ (Matthew 26:61).

Where is the capital offense? From this accusation they likely made the assumption (as we learn from Stephen) that Jesus was speaking about destroying the temple and changing **“the customs of Moses” (Acts 6:13, 14).**

These were people who had truly lost the sense of their religion. Jesus was the point of Moses (Romans 10:4) – Jesus was the point of the temple – Isaiah records **“He will be as a sanctuary” (Isaiah 8:14).** When the church loses its commitment to the preeminence of Christ, it does not fall into a position of neutrality but hostility to God and the things of God.

This half-truth of an accusation (consider Jesus’ predictions of the destruction of the temple [Matthew 24:2] and His explanation of the destroyed temple being rebuilt as His own body [John 2:19-21]) was all that was needed for the ensuing drama and robe ripping.

The Silent Christ

The high priest expects an answer to the accusation but stands against a silent Christ.

He was oppressed and He was afflicted, yet He opened not His mouth; He was led as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before its shearers is silent, So He opened not His mouth (Isaiah 53:7).

Christ opts for silence in the presence of hard-heartedness. Luke records Jesus saying, **“If I tell you (that I am the Christ), you will by no means believe” (Luke 22:67b)**. God ministers only where hearts have been tilled for faith. The rancor of man puts God on trial for those many souls who have not yet heard the gospel. But understand the sovereignty of God thus – if there is but one soul who, by the grace of God, would say ‘yes’ to Christ, God will provide the voice of Christ’s gospel.

It is not until the high priest puts Jesus under oath that Jesus fulfills His legal responsibility (Leviticus 5:1). And His answer is loaded!

The Answer

Jesus said to him, “It is as you said. Nevertheless, I say to you, hereafter you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Power, and coming on the clouds of heaven” (Matthew 26:64).

“It is as you said.” Jesus could have as easily have said, “It is as you know” for they had seen sufficient proofs of His being the Christ. There is a biblical maxim that to whom is given much, much is required (Luke 12:48). And there is no greater possession than the knowledge given by the words of Christ. Like all things of God, the words of Christ are either a treasure or a curse to those with whom they are trusted.

In this case Jesus will pronounce the curse. They want to know if He is the Son of God. The answer is ‘yes’ but He is also the Son of Man. This is a reference to Daniel 7 where the Son of Man is given an eternal kingdom.

I was watching in the night visions, and behold, *One* like the Son of Man, coming with the clouds of heaven! He came to the Ancient of Days, and they brought Him near before Him. ¹⁴ Then to Him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve Him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion,

which shall not pass away, and His kingdom *the one* which shall not be destroyed (Daniel 7:13, 14).

This passage Jesus combines with Psalm 110:

The LORD said to my Lord, “Sit at My right hand, till I make Your enemies Your footstool” (Psalm 110:1)

He then speaks, not of coming to the Ancient of Days, but of coming to them on the **“clouds of heaven”**.

Not immediately apparent in the English is the word Jesus chooses to use. In the accusation against Jesus, He is said to have boasted that He is **“able”** (*dunamai*) to destroy the temple. When Jesus tells them how they will see Him coming on the clouds of heaven, He prefaces that by telling them they will see Him sitting at the right hand of **“Power”** (*dunameos* – the noun form of **“able”** [*dunamai*]). In other words, they accuse Jesus of saying He has the *power* and Jesus responds by saying He will be sitting in the seat of *power*.

What does this all mean? For clarity let us structure this:

- Jesus is the Son of Man who, according to Daniel 7:13, 14 receives a kingdom when He ascends to His Father after the resurrection (Acts 2:29-31).
- When Jesus ascends to the Father He sits at the Father’s right hand and begins His reign which will continue **“till He has put all enemies under His feet. ²⁶ The last enemy *that will be destroyed is death”* (1 Corinthians 15:25, 26).**
- The immediate effects of that authority will be experienced by the nation of Israel (which is represented here by the council condemning Jesus) by the destruction of the temple by Roman armies (Matthew 22:7; Luke 21:20). This is what is meant by Jesus coming on the clouds of heaven.

The Clouds

In the Old Testament God used the imagery of clouds to describe military conquest. God expresses the Assyrian siege of Egypt as His judgment: **“Behold, the Lord rides on a swift cloud, and will come into**

Egypt; The idols of Egypt will totter at His presence, and the heart of Egypt will melt in its midst.” (Isaiah 19:1) Cross-referencing this with Matthew 16 makes it clear that Jesus was speaking of the judgment of Israel and vanishing of the obsolete Old Covenant (Hebrews 8:13).

For the Son of Man will come in the glory of His Father with His angels, and then He will reward each according to his works. ²⁸ Assuredly, I say to you, there are some standing here who shall not taste death till they see the Son of Man coming in His kingdom” (Matthew 16:27, 28).

B. C. was coming to an end.

Then the high priest tore his clothes, saying, “He has spoken blasphemy! What further need do we have of witnesses? Look, now you have heard His blasphemy! ⁶⁶ What do you think?” They answered and said, “He is deserving of death.” ⁶⁷ Then they spat in His face and beat Him; and others struck *Him* with the palms of their hands, ⁶⁸ saying, “Prophecy to us, Christ! Who is the one who struck You (Matthew 26:65-68)?”

Unrighteous Righteous Indignation

Is there anything more pathetic than an unrighteous righteous indignation? I prefer to understand the emphasis here not so much as the debasement of Jesus (though it certainly includes that) as the utter darkness of man.

When sin becomes emboldened it takes the offense. Observe today’s progressive and atheistic forums. Unnatural lifestyles and ungodly systems of thought begin as a plea for tolerance, then morph into a demand for acceptance. In the end the Christian and his archaic allegiance to the “unpleasant”¹ God of the Old Testament is the evil problem from whom the children must be protected.

Let us never underestimate how dark we can get. And it is only the grace of God by the blood of Christ that keeps anyone of us from the abyss of absolute moral and spiritual corruption.

¹ How God is described by atheist Richard Dawkins.

Christ's Power of Redemption

Yet again we behold the power and grace of a sovereign God at every turn. God's hand is not too short (Numbers 11:23). **"The king's heart is in the hand of the LORD, like the rivers of water; He turns it wherever He wishes" (Proverbs 21:1).** Even these pathetic priests and their blind followers become a tool in the hand of God for reconciliation and restoration.

That which was designed to protect, because of the darkness of sinful human hearts, became that which destroyed. And Jesus, being the righteous, loving and Almighty God that He is, takes that which men meant for evil and transforms it into redemption.

Aptly stated by a great reformer:

But this insolence was turned by the providence of God to a very different purpose; for the face of Christ, dishonored by *spitting* and *blows*, has restored to us that image which had been disfigured, and almost effaced, by sin.²

²Calvin, J. (1998). *Calvin's Commentaries: The Harmony of the Gospels : Calvin's Commentary on Matthew, Mark, and Luke* (electronic ed.). Logos Library System; Calvin's Commentaries. Albany, OR: Ages Software.

Questions for Study

1. Why is the courtroom significant (pages 2, 3)?
2. What conclusion can we draw by Jesus' being betrayed and abandoned at every turn (pages 3, 4)?
3. How did Jesus use His mighty power (page 4)?
4. Why is a conspiracy particularly evil (pages 4, 5)?
5. What was the accusation against Jesus? Was it true (page 5)?
6. Why is a silent Christ dangerous (pages 5, 6)?
7. Discuss how Jesus answered Caiaphas. What events does His answer include (pages 6, 7)?
8. How is evil emboldened (pages 8, 9)?
9. In what way does Jesus use evil hearts in a redemptive way (page 9)?