

A Tribute to the Lamb – Guilty!

The Passion of Christ – Part IV

John 18:1-24; Matthew 26:57-68

Introduction

For centuries children have been singing nursery rhymes that, over the course of time, have lost their original context – contexts of horror and suffering. I recently came across a rhyme that originated from the streets of London, England.

Ring around the roses,

a pocket full of posies.

A-tishoo! A-tishoo!

We all fall down!

The rhyme arose around 1665, during the epidemic that was referred to as the “black death”. Each phrase of the rhyme referred to symptoms that revealed the clutches of this plague.

- “Ring around the roses” – the small, red, rash-like areas that developed on people infected with the plague.
- “a pocket full of posies” – a reference to the ancient belief that evil smells were really the poisonous breath of demons that afflicted people with the disease. It was thought that sweet smelling herbs and flowers would drive the demons away, so infected people would fill their rooms and their pockets with flowers.
- “A-tishoo! A-tishoo!” – a reference to the sneezing that was a symptom of the plague.
- “We all fall down” – a reference to falling down in death – the black death.

Today, it is a well-known, innocent rhyme. Centuries ago, however, it was a gloomy chant that sang of unparalleled horror.

In our study of the gospel by John, we are approaching a chapter in the final days of our Lord that are no longer recognized for their horror. The trials of Jesus are typically skipped over in our rush to Mount Calvary.

Yet, as I thought about it, I have never studied the subject of Christ’s trials in any detail, and frankly, I have never heard a sermon on them. I am not saying

that because I cannot wait to hear what I have to say, but as an observation that preachers and Christians in general are prone to avoid the unfamiliar in our often shallow approach to Scripture.

We are therefore, going to study these mock trials. And, I want you to know that they were written, in detail, not to be overlooked, but to reveal the wonder of what it meant for Jesus to be rejected and condemned; to know what it means, in Isaiah, chapter 53, verse 7, to go to the cross, “. . . like a lamb that is led to slaughter . . .” and, “. . . yet He did not open His mouth . . .”.

By the way, Isaiah did not mean that Jesus never said a word in court, because He said some rather powerful things, as we will learn. He meant that Jesus offered no argument for innocence! He did not seek to vindicate His rights – and you will not believe how His legal rights were “swept under the rug”. Instead, He was literally unstoppable in His desire to become your substitute and mine – to become, as Philippians, chapter 2, verse 8, says, “. . . obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.”

Jesus Stands Before Annas!

So today, let us walk into the estate of Annas and through the torch lit courtyard of Caiaphas, the high priest, and watch, with sheer amazement, what happened.

We will pick up this tribute to the Lamb in John, chapter 18, verses 12 and 13.

So the Roman cohort and the commander and the officers of the Jews, arrested Jesus and bound Him and led Him to Annas first, for he was father-in-law of Caiaphas, who was high priest that year.

Now, imagine with me for a moment, the interesting imagery of this scene. As I explained in a previous discussion, the Lord would go across the Kidron brook to enter the garden of Gethsemane – and now, He is led away, bound and captive, back across the Kidron brook. The waters of this brook were already stained red with the blood from the lambs that

were being sacrificed during this annual festival of Passover. Now, it was almost time for His blood.

Furthermore, Gethsemane was at the foot of the Mount of Olives and on the east side of Jerusalem. So, the Lord would be taken through the sheep gate into the city – that very city gate through which all animals destined for sacrifice in the temple were obligated to enter. Imagine – they are bringing, bound, the Lamb of God, who would be the final sacrifice.

Now, you may have noticed that instead of taking Jesus to the current high priest, they first go to the wealthy estate of Annas. Evidently, Annas had ordered that he get the first “crack” at this Galilean.

It is not hard to understand why! Let me explain. Annas was the most powerful Jew in Jerusalem. He had served as the high priest about twenty years earlier, yet still had control of virtually everything religious in Jerusalem. Annas controlled the temple system, the selling of sacrificial animals, and the money changing, where exorbitant rates of exchange were charged.

In Christ’s day, you could not even get into the temple to worship God without paying priests, what amounted to, nothing less than illegal fees. And Annas had set it all up; his family controlled it all. In fact, Jewish historians commonly referred to the temple as the “Bazaar of Annas”. He had become enormously wealthy off the peasants of Judea.

Then – Jesus pulled the mask off! Matthew, Mark, and Luke record for us that it was Jesus who publicly called the “Bazaar of Annas” a “den of thieves” – and it was. It was Jesus who overturned the tables and threw the money changers out of the court of the Gentiles. What Jesus was doing was exposing and condemning the corruption of religion in His nation’s day – and religion’s corrupt leader was Annas.

Now notice in John, chapter 18, verse 19a,

The high priest therefore questioned Jesus . .

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Skip to verse 24,

Annas therefore sent Him bound to Caiaphas the high priest.

No, we do not have two high priests. The discrepancy can be explained by simply understanding that once you had served as a high priest, you were referred to as a high priest for life. This is similar to

the way we, in America, refer to living, former presidents as “Mr. President”.

Frankly, Old Testament Law required that a high priest serve for an entire lifetime. However, by the time of Christ, the Romans had begun appointing the priest, every so often, as a way to control who served in Israel’s highest position. In fact, by the time of Christ, the very fact that you served as a high priest meant that your soul had been purchased by the Roman government.

Although Annas had been replaced, he had enough influence in Rome to ensure that the next ones appointed were his own sons – five of them, one after another, and now his son-in-law Caiaphas.

So, Annas “wanted at” this carpenter/teacher, this man who had caused him, no doubt, many sleepless nights, probably a case of high blood pressure, and, I am sure, who had become, to him, a nightmare that he longed to get rid of.

There can be nothing more cruel than organized, corrupt religion!!!!

Notice how Jesus stands with dignity and control in front of the most powerful and corrupt man in Israel. Look back again at verse 19 and continue to verse 20.

The high priest therefore questioned Jesus about His disciples, and about His teaching. Jesus answered him, “I have spoken openly to the world; I always taught in synagogues, and in the temple, where all the Jews come together; and I spoke nothing in secret.

In other words, “Annas, what you are doing right now is illegal. You are holding a midnight inquisition apart from due process.”

Let me put it into my words. Jesus looked Annas square in the face and said, in effect, “Just who do you think you are? You have no business taking Hebrew Law into your own hands. You, Annas, are dead wrong.”

Everybody tuned in now! Can you imagine the men in that room who knew they were corrupt; who knew Annas was a dirty old embezzler who had, probably, treated everyone around him with contempt. Everyone in that room had probably been bribed, threatened, and “jerked around” by this rich, pompous old hypocrite. Now they see a calloused, plainly dressed carpenter with control, dignity, and courage,

putting Annas in his place?! Nobody did that to Annas!

I want you to understand that Annas was pope and president all rolled into one – he owned the nation – you did not cross this old man and survive!

Don't you just love it when somebody has the guts at work or school to look that foul talking, intimidating, ruthless teacher, co-worker, or boss in the eyes and tells them, "I don't care who you are and what you can do to me, you are out of line. And furthermore, I don't appreciate it!"

That does not happen very often, does it?!

Annas probably recoiled and maybe gasped with surprise. Look at verse 22.

And when He had said this, one of the officers standing by gave Jesus a blow, saying, "Is that the way You answer the high priest?"

Here is some loyal officer, knowing the high priest has just been royally embarrassed, turning and literally, punching Jesus in the face. Notice Jesus' response, in verse 23.

Jesus answered him, "If I have spoken wrongly, bear witness of the wrong; but if rightly, why do you strike Me?"

When you think about it, this was really unbelievable. I called to ask a question, in relation to this, of a gentleman in our church who is a judge. After an extraordinary game of phone tag, we finally connected. I asked him, what would happen if a accused criminal talked back to him and then, the bailiff turned and savagely punched him in the face? His answer was basically, "In my courtroom, if that happened, the bailiff would be held in contempt. He'd have a trial all for himself in the near future."

Jesus Stands Before Caiaphas!

But that did not happen here! Continue to verse 24.

Annas therefore sent Him bound to Caiaphas the high priest.

In other words, Jesus has proven to be too much for old Annas. His words have pierced through the façade of hypocrisy and greed. Annas will try to erase this embarrassing scene – he will get rid of Jesus. So Jesus, bound, perhaps with a bloody nose, is taken, in the middle of the night, to a man, equally corrupt, for another illegal trial.

As I have read and studied the lawlessness of this whole episode, I feel a lot like a kid named Michael. He was in his Sunday school class in Rochester, New York. Pastor Evans, the pastor of Michael's church, retold this story as reported by his Sunday school teacher. She was teaching through this passage of scripture. She noticed that she had Michael's undivided attention throughout the whole story. When she finished, she asked, "Does anyone have any questions?"

Michael shot his hand up. "I just want to know one thing," he said, "where in the blue blazes were the state police when all this was going on?!"

The truth is, the state police were in on it too. It was literally, Jesus against the whole world – or better yet, Jesus for the whole world.

There have been several trials throughout history that have captivated the minds of the world.

One such trial was that of Socrates before the senate of Athens. He was condemned for perverting the morals of the youth and for refusing to recognize the gods of Greece. Refusing any defense, Socrates simply accepted the verdict. One month after the trial, he was forced to drink hemlock – bringing about execution by suicide. After his death, the Greek world recognized their error and condemned to death the three men who had brought the accusations.

In our own American culture, the trials of Watergate captured the mind. This involved the 1972 break-in at the Democratic campaign headquarters in the Watergate complex in Washington, D.C. There was a cover-up, then the hearings, and the ultimate resignation of Richard Nixon in 1974. The nation almost stopped its regular work schedule to follow the televised hearings. In the evenings, the Public Broadcasting Service reran portions of the day's hearings for the nighttime television audience. As a result, it experienced the greatest response to any programming in its history. It gained over one and a quarter million in new memberships and contributions. The Ervin Committee, which investigated the crimes, received an average of five thousand letters a day. By the time it was over, it had sifted through more than a million responses.

But nothing, over the course of the last two thousand years, compares to the trial of Jesus before Caiaphas. More people have read its transcripts than any other trial in human history. And rightly so, for

this trial and verdict represents the hinge of history – and the whole world will be affected.

Matthew gives us the details that John’s narrative did not record. Let us turn there to chapter 26.

While you are turning, there are several things that you need to understand about Hebrew Law in order to appreciate and marvel at what will happen next.

The Jews prided themselves on their legal system – their councils and supreme court – the Sanhedrin. The Sanhedrin, sometimes referred to as the Senate, or the Council of the Elders, was composed of seventy one men – twenty three priests, twenty three scribes, twenty three elders, plus the current high priest, appointed by the Romans, and the true high priest, Annas, who would serve for life.

It is interesting that, in Mark, chapter 10, verses 32 through 34,

[Jesus] began to tell [His disciples] . . . saying, “. . . we are going up to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man will be delivered to the chief priests and the scribes; and they will condemn Him to death, . . . and kill Him . . .”

He was telling them that He knew He would soon stand before the supreme court of Israel and be condemned to die.

Yet, the purpose of the Sanhedrin was not to condemn people to death – even when they were guilty of terrible crimes. The rabbinical maxim was well known in capital cases, “The Sanhedrin is to save, not destroy, life.”

And yet, in the trials of Jesus, it was clear the Sanhedrin’s intent was not to save, but to destroy Jesus’ life. So, through the course of these two proceedings, at least six principles, or Laws, relating to due process were intentionally broken in the Sanhedrin’s hell-driven desire to crucify Jesus.

Six Hebrew Laws . . . Six Laws Ignored

There were six things that Jewish Law demanded . . . and there were six Laws broken!

Law #1 – Trials were not to be held secretly at night, but publicly during the day

1. Law number one – trials were not to be held secretly at night, but publicly during the day.

Notice Matthew, chapter 26, verse 57.

And those who had seized Jesus led Him away to Caiaphas, the high priest, where the scribes and the elders were gathered together.

Here you have the picture of the members of the Sanhedrin coming by torchlight in the middle of the night to the house of Joseph Caiaphas. They were illegally gathered together – convened at night to illegally try a man who had still not even been indicted. Why? Because their single, compelling desire was to get rid of Him.

Law #2 – The accused was not required to speak

2. Law number two – the accused was not required to speak.

This Law was already broken by Annas, who demanded that Jesus explain His discipleship and His teachings. Yet, whenever questioned, as it related to giving an answer, the Lamb stood there silent. Notice verses 62a and 63a.

And the high priest stood up and said to Him, “Do You make no answer?” . . . But Jesus kept silent. . . .

It was the silence of innocence; the silence of integrity; the silence of unwavering trust in the Father, who had handed Him this cup.

What is your greatest insult? Where lies your deepest injury? Look at this Lamb – He was right – He was being wronged – and it was an infuriating silence to judges who were desperate to end the trial before dawn revealed their depravity. So the Sanhedrin became the prosecutor – and they berate the accused for not speaking.

How frustrated Joseph Caiaphas was – anyway, where do you get reliable witnesses in the middle of the night?!!!!

Law #3 – Two witnesses must come forward and agree exactly on the charges

3. That leads me to Law number three – two witnesses must come forward and agree exactly on the charges.

Under normal procedures, the witnesses would present their evidence and then, be questioned separately to ensure their testimony was correct.

You need to understand that there were never any prosecutors in Hebrew court – the witnesses served as the prosecuting attorney and the Sanhedrin served as the defense.

Normally, the Sanhedrin would carefully remind the witnesses of the preciousness of human life and also, the high priest would remind them that their testimony must be true. If their testimony was false, the Law required them to pay the penalty that the accused was to receive. This certainly took care of perjury!

But notice verse 59.

Now the chief priests and the whole Council kept trying to obtain false testimony against Jesus, in order that they might put Him to death

Did you notice, “. . . [they] kept trying to obtain false testimony . . .”?

Can you imagine?! “Hey, we’re looking for someone to step forward and lie about this man so we can put Him to death.”

The comical thing is, they could not find even two men who could lie consistently.

Notice verses 60 and 61.

and they did not find any, even though many false witnesses came forward. But later on two came forward, and said, “This man stated, ‘I am able to destroy the temple of God and to rebuild it in three days.’”

The gospel of Mark adds that these two witnesses could not even get the story straight. Mark, chapter 14, verse 58b, records that one of the witnesses said,

We heard Him say, “I will destroy this temple made with hands, and in three days I will build another made without hands.”

But, the verse in Matthew recorded that Jesus had said that He could tear down the temple and rebuild the same one in three days.

So, as Mark, chapter 14, verse 59, records,

And not even in this respect was their testimony consistent.

Caiaphas is at his wit’s end. Caiaphas, whose name means “inquisitor,” senses that the trial is slipping from his grasp; even the deceitful Council would find it hard to indict without consistent testimony against the accused.

Law #4 – The Sanhedrin was never allowed to initiate charges nor require the accused to testify against himself

4. Law number four – The Sanhedrin was never allowed to initiate charges nor require the accused to testify against himself.

We call this, “pleading the fifth”. Even our courts have special considerations for self-incrimination.

One of the reasons Jesus refused to testify was that He was holding the Sanhedrin to their own Law. It infuriated Annas and Caiaphas as well.

It is here that Caiaphas violates another principle of Hebrew Law. He stands and takes the position of judge, jury, and prosecuting attorney and does something risky, and unusual – it is his last chance before dawn! Notice Matthew, chapter 26, verse 63.

But Jesus kept silent. And the high priest said to Him, “I adjure You by the living God, that You tell us whether You are the Christ, the Son of God.”

Caiaphas placed Jesus under oath; he set due process aside – so, in effect, Caiaphas is asking Jesus to incriminate Himself!

Jesus could have remained silent – it was an illegal requirement. But instead, it was only now that Jesus spoke. Just as He helped the soldiers arrest Him, He will now help the Sanhedrin condemn Him. This courtroom drama reveals the unstoppable love and purpose of Christ to bear “. . . our sins in His own body on the tree . . .”, as I Peter, chapter 2, verse 24, tells us.

Continue to verse 64.

Jesus said to him, “You have said it yourself; . . .”

(You have said what? Look back at verse 63c, “. . . tell us whether You are the Christ, the Son of God.” – or the Messiah, God in the flesh. Jesus said, “That’s who I am!” Then He adds . . .)

“. . . nevertheless I tell you, hereafter you shall see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of Power, and coming on the clouds of heaven.”

This is what they had hoped to hear. Yes, He was guilty – by reason of Deity!

Imagine – they asked Him, “Are you the Messiah?”

He answered, “Yes.”

And His miracles and teachings were undeniable evidences that He was, yet they would still not believe.

Maybe today, you are thinking, “If I had more evidence that Jesus was the Messiah, I’d believe.”

No, you would not!

“If I could have seen a miracle or two, I wouldn’t have any trouble believing.”

Yes, you would!

No matter what you have seen or heard, salvation is God’s act of grace toward you – and you, without having seen, touched, or tasted, respond. In the words of Ephesians, chapter 2, verse 8a,

For by grace you have been saved through faith . . .

Now, I want you to see that what Jesus said to that supreme court was very powerful. It was actually the combination of three Old Testament Messianic prophecies rolled into one.

- In Matthew, chapter 26, verse 64a, He says, . . . ***hereafter you shall see . . .***

The Old Testament prophecy of Isaiah, chapter 52, verse 8b, says,

. . . For they will see with their own eyes when the Lord restores Zion.

There will not be any denying it then!

- In verse 64b, He says, . . . ***you shall see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of Power . . .***

The Old Testament prophecy in Psalm, chapter 110, verse 1, says,

The Lord says to my Lord: “Sit at My right hand, until I make Thine enemies a footstool for Thy feet.”

- In verse 64c, He says, . . . ***and coming on the clouds of heaven.***

The Old Testament prophecy in Daniel, chapter 7, verse 13a, says,

. . . in the night visions, . . . with the clouds of heaven One like a Son of Man was coming . . .

Jesus is saying, “You are judging Me, but I will judge you one day. You may condemn Me now, but if you do not believe in Me one day, you will be condemned.”

The truth of the matter is, Jesus is not on trial here – the Sanhedrin is on trial.

Law #5 – A verdict was passed only after a day of fasting

5. Law number five – a verdict was passed only after a day of fasting.

No one ate anything, no one drank anything on the day after the trial. The Sanhedrin was supposed to be agonizing over the future of a man condemned to die.

The *Mishnah* says, “The Sanhedrin, which so often as once in seven years condemns a man to death, is a slaughterhouse.”

But, for this Sanhedrin, the verdict would bring about a celebration – at last, Jesus will die!

Look at Matthew, chapter 26, verses 65 and 66.

Then the high priest tore his robes, saying, “He has blasphemed! What further need do we have of witnesses? Behold, you have now heard the blasphemy; what do you think?” They answered and said, “He is deserving of death!”

By this theatrical display, Caiaphas is giving the appearance of defending God’s honor, but inwardly, he could not care less for the honor of God!

So, the court responds with a unanimous call for death!

Law #6 – A unanimous vote by the court allowed the accused to go free.

6. Law number six – a unanimous vote by the court allowed the accused to go free.

A unanimous vote is our Western procedure; but the oriental custom was that a unanimous vote implied the lack of critical thinking. The rabbis taught that, if the court voted unanimously in condemning someone to death, there was the obvious lack of mercy. So, a unanimous vote of the Sanhedrin immediately allowed the prisoner to go free.

But notice instead, their reaction in verses 67 and 68.

Then they spat in His face and beat Him with their fists; and others slapped Him, and said “Prophecy to us, You Christ; who is the one who hit You?”

Mark adds, in chapter 14, verse 65a,

And some began . . . to blindfold Him, and to beat Him with their fists . . .

There are certain scenes that always turn my stomach – it is the news item or newspaper article about a policeman beating a defenseless person. It happens in America, it happens around the globe.

Can you imagine, the Supreme Court of the United States condemning a criminal to die, and then, robes and all, descending upon the accused and spitting in His face, blindfolding Him, and, with bitter anger and hatred, punching Him with their fists?

The supreme court of Israel degenerated into a crude, vicious mob of seventy one men – spitting, hitting, cursing, and mocking.

Who were the blasphemers that day? Who were the accused? The Sanhedrin and the nation they represented? Yes! And everyone who has ever heard the story of Jesus and refused to bow and worship Him as well.

Have you heard this prisoner? Do you understand that this Lamb, innocent and pure, is being tried before Israel's high court so that you and I would never have to be tried before the court of heaven? He is condemned to die by earth's justice, so that you and I will never be condemned to die by heaven's justice. He faced that anger, hatred, and hostility of religious men, so that all who believe in Him will never experience the wrath of a righteous God.

This He did for you. Do you see Him here?! Will you reject Him, as they did, or will you worship Him? This lovely, pure, righteous, merciful, unblemished Lamb!