

***The Great Sayings in the Gospels***  
***Message 156***  
***The Arrest and Trial of Jesus***  
***Part One, Religious Insanity***  
***Matt 26:57-68***

**Introduction:**

We will read the text in a few minutes but I want to begin this morning by giving you some information concerning this trial that Jesus underwent the night of His arrest.

The Sanhedrin was the most distinguished body of officials in Israel. It was composed of 23 priests, 23 scribes or Rabbis, and 23 of the elders of the people. Together with a ruler and a vice-ruler, this made 71 men in all. These had all been carefully examined and tested by experience to be knowledgeable both of the Law of Moses and the ‘traditions of the fathers,’ those interpretations of the law that had been given by previous rabbis and scholars in Israel, together with the past rulings and decisions of the court.

Ordinarily, it was one of the most careful deliberative bodies that the world has ever known and certainly was more profoundly careful than almost any of the legal bodies of the ancient world. One of the most difficult things to extract from this group of men was a ‘guilty’ verdict of a capital offense because there were so many safeguards in place to protect the innocent from being wrongly convicted.

Before testimony could even be given by a witness before the Sanhedrin, he was first interrogated privately by a small committee of the court. He was asked very specific questions concerning exactly what he had seen or heard and precisely what day and time of day that he heard it. At least two, and most of the time, three, witnesses were required to give testimony to the same offense and their details had to exactly agree or the case would be dismissed out of hand. For example, if two witnesses agreed and the third gave different details, the testimony would be considered insufficient and the accused would be released without prejudice.

The witnesses themselves were solemnly enjoined by reminders of the Law of God concerning bearing false witness and the consequences of being responsible for having a brother put to death wrongly.

The court was to meet only during daylight hours, beginning after the morning sacrifice and concluding before the evening sacrifice. Capital cases were always two-day affairs and, so, were never begun the day before a Feast or a Sabbath. Even if the case ended on one day with a guilty verdict, the judges went home, discussed the case between themselves, and met again on the next day to review their decision and express their verdict a second time before sentence was given. A judge who had voted ‘guilty’ could change his vote to ‘innocent’ if he chose, giving his reasons for doing so, but one who had voted ‘not guilty’ could not change his vote to ‘guilty.’ Every opportunity was given for an acquittal of the case.

If the Council voted ‘guilty’ by a majority of only one, the accused was released. A guilty

verdict required a majority of at least two. Even after sentencing, while the prisoner was being led to his death, family or friends could stop the proceedings to offer new testimony. Even the prisoner himself, if he had something new to say, could stop the execution and offer fresh testimony.

And the history of the Jewish people records that these men were by no means anxious to put a Jewish man to death. It was a solemn responsibility to them and the proceedings were always conducted with the utmost of dignity and respect to the accused. Well, I should say “almost always.”

Matt 26:57-68

- 57 And they that had laid hold on Jesus led him away to Caiaphas the high priest, where the scribes and the elders were assembled.
- 58 But Peter followed him afar off unto the high priest's palace, and went in, and sat with the servants, to see the end.
- 59 Now the chief priests, and elders, and all the council, sought false witness against Jesus, to put him to death;
- 60 But found none: yea, though many false witnesses came, yet found they none. At the last came two false witnesses,
- 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 unto him, Answerest thou nothing? what is it which these witness against thee?
- 63 But Jesus held his peace. And the high priest answered and said unto him, I adjure thee by the living God, that thou tell us whether thou be the Christ, the Son of God.
- 64 Jesus saith unto him, Thou hast said: nevertheless I say unto you, Hereafter shall ye see the Son of man sitting on the right hand of power, and coming in the clouds of heaven.
- 65 Then the high priest rent his clothes, saying, He hath spoken blasphemy; what further need have we of witnesses? behold, now ye have heard his blasphemy.
- 66 What think ye? They answered and said, He is guilty of death.
- 67 Then did they spit in his face, and buffeted him; and others smote him with the palms of their hands,
- 68 Saying, Prophesy unto us, thou Christ, Who is he that smote thee? KJV

Here we have this well-respected body, meeting at night, which they never did, behaving like a kangaroo court. This scene has all the dynamics of those bloody and insane courts of the French Revolution, if you know anything about that time of history.

“Public executions were considered educational. Women were encouraged to sit and knit during trials and executions. The Revolutionary Tribunal ordered the execution of 2,400 people in Paris by July 1794. Across France 30,000 people lost their lives.

“The Terror was designed to fight the enemies of the revolution, to prevent counter-revolution from gaining ground. Most of the people rounded up were not aristocrats, but ordinary people. A man (and his family) might go to the guillotine for saying something critical of the revolutionary government. If an informer happened to overhear, that was all the tribunal needed. Watch Committees around the nation were encouraged to arrest "suspected persons, ... those who, either

by their conduct or their relationships, by their remarks or by their writing, are shown to be partisans of tyranny and federalism and enemies of liberty" (Law of Suspects, 1793). Civil liberties were suspended. The Convention ordered that "if material or moral proof exists, independently of the evidence of witnesses, the latter will not be heard, unless this formality should appear necessary, either to discover accomplices or for other important reasons concerning the public interest." The promises of the Declaration of the Rights of Man were forgotten. Terror was the order of the day. In the words of Maximilien Robespierre, "Softness to traitors will destroy us all."

So, what would bring a group of 71 of the most dignified, responsible, and respected rulers of Israel to the point that they would behave like we find them behaving at the first trial of Jesus where they treated Him contrary to all of their own rules and laws?

This is nothing short of madness, but why?

Paul was accused of being insane by one of the Roman governors before who he presented his case when wrongly accused by the Jews.

Acts 26:24-25

24 And as he thus spake for himself, Festus said with a loud voice, Paul, thou art beside thyself; much learning doth make thee mad.

25 But he said, I am not mad, most noble Festus; but speak forth the words of truth and soberness. KJV

Now, we know that Festus was wrong, that Paul was not mad, driven insane by his massive knowledge and his relentless pursuit of knowing more of God through Jesus Christ. But we should not discount Festus too lightly. He, no doubt, in his position and through his experience, had encountered many, and some of them from the Jewish nation and religion, who had indeed been driven to the point of insanity by their religion.

In fact, religion apart from an absolute faith in God, and a true devotion to Him, is a sort of insanity in which lies are believed as if they were truth and all things are viewed through a prism that distorts everything, skewing it according to a wrong set of beliefs and an erroneous world view.

Think with me. Any time a person's world view is so at odds with reality that he will murder people who contradict him and question his distorted sense of what is real, that person had gone mad.

Now, realize this. Wrong religion, even true religion wrongly held (which was the case of many of the Jews of Jesus' day), causes a person to believe that the world is something other than it really is. There is a group of people in our world who believe that if they can provoke a world war against themselves a magical being will come from somewhere and rescue them, put down all who oppose them, and establish a world kingdom with their religion at the forefront. So, they are committing the most horrible atrocities they can imagine hoping to provoke this conflict with the Western World.

It is not difficult for us to see that they are ‘mad,’ driven insane by a religion conceived in the mind of a madman and seemingly advanced in the world by nothing less than Satan himself.

Given our exposure to this monstrosity of lies masquerading as ‘religion’ it is not difficult for us to look back at that trial of Jesus and the madness that reigned in the minds of normally sober and dignified men and realize that something of the same thing was going on with them as is going on now in the hearts and minds of many in what we call the Middle East.

At the same time, we should not assume that only Jews and Muslims are susceptible to this sort of deception and insanity.

### **From the 17<sup>th</sup> Century, Spain, The Inquisition. From Foxe’s Book of Martyrs, Chapter 5.**

“When the person impeached is condemned, he is either severely whipped, violently tortured, sent to the galleys, or sentenced to death; and in either case the effects are confiscated. After judgment, a procession is performed to the place of execution, which ceremony is called an AUTO DE FE, or act of faith.

“The following is an account of an auto de fe, performed at Madrid in the year 1682.

“The officers of the inquisition, preceded by trumpets, kettle-drums, and their banner, marched on the 30th of May, in cavalcade, to the palace of the great square, where they declared by proclamation, that, on the 30th of June, the sentence of the prisoners would be put in execution.

“Of these prisoners, twenty men and women, with one renegade Mahometan, were ordered to be burned; fifty Jews and Jewesses, having never before been imprisoned, and repenting of their crimes were sentenced to a long confinement, and to wear a yellow cap. The whole court of Spain was present on this occasion. The grand inquisitor's chair was placed in a sort of tribunal far above that of the king.

“Among those who were to suffer, was a young Jewess of exquisite beauty, and but seventeen years of age. Being on the same side of the scaffold where the queen was seated, she addressed her, in hopes of obtaining a pardon, in the following pathetic speech: "Great queen, will not your royal presence be of some service to the in my miserable condition! Have regard to my youth; and, oh! consider, that I am about to die for professing a religion imbibed from my earliest infancy!" Her majesty seemed greatly to pity her distress, but turned away her eyes, as she did not dare to speak a word in behalf of a person who had been declared a heretic.

“Now mass began, in the midst of which the priest came from the altar, placed himself near the scaffold, and seated himself in a chair prepared for that purpose. The chief inquisitor then descended from the amphitheatre, dressed in his cope, and having a mitre on his head. After having bowed to the altar, he advanced towards the king's balcony, and went up to it, attended by some of his officers, carrying a cross and the gospels, with a book containing the oath by which the kings of Spain oblige themselves to protect the catholic faith, to extirpate heretics, and to support with all their power and force the prosecutions and decrees of the inquisition: a like oath

was administered to the counsellors and whole assembly. The mass was begun about twelve at noon, and did not end till nine in the evening, being protracted by a proclamation of the sentences of the several criminals, which were already separately rehearsed aloud one after the other.

“After this, followed the burning of the twenty-one men and women, whose intrepidity in suffering that horrid death was truly astonishing. The king's near situation to the criminals rendered their dying groans very audible to him; he could not, however, be absent from this dreadful scene, as it is esteemed a religious one; and his coronation oath obliges him to give a sanction by his presence to all the acts of the tribunal.”

Can anyone call such actions as anything but insanity? Yet it was repeated all over Europe in the name of Jesus Christ thousands of times, causing the hideous deaths of millions of people whose only crime was to believe something contrary to the Roman Church and the Pope.

One cannot read Foxe's Book of Martyrs or the accounts of the Waldensian persecutions without realizing that those who committed such vile acts of horror upon sincere and godly people were men driven insane by a false religion with a false world view. Some of these people were brilliant people in government and philosophy, just as many of the Jewish members of the Sanhedrin were incredibly intelligent men. But natural intellect when misdirected by a false set of religious beliefs, becomes madness and irrationality and sometimes it becomes a dangerous and murderous tool in the hands of Satan against the True Church of Jesus Christ.

We have seen the same things on a different scale over the past century when ideological systems have risen to the level of religion in the minds of people and multitudes have been murdered in the name of Facism, Socialism, Communism, and now Islam. It is a disease to which all people are susceptible. False religion plays into all that is worst in man: selfishness, hedonism, covetousness, jealousy, hatred, and the general love of evil.

Never have we seen goodness arise out of such a system. Never has the general condition of the human race been raised by such corrupt systems. Oh, physical prosperity and elegant philosophies have been created but they have been to no lasting good for the race. The only times that men have truly been lifted out of degradation, wickedness and corruption have been those times when God has been pleased to bless the preaching of the Gospel and great movings of His Spirit have converted multitudes to Christ. **There** we have seen the situation of man rise and lasting governments be established. **There** the God-given rights of human beings have been recognized, affirmed, fought for, and defended with the blood of heroes.

Humanity stands today at the proverbial 'fork in the road.' Either we are going to descend, as a race, one again into madness which will strip away all of the hard-fought victories of the past and plunge us once again into the Dark Ages or God is going to be gracious to us once again and send an Awakening upon us.

But you and I must know that no victory comes without labor and sacrifice. An Awakening is not going to 'just happen.' If it comes, it will be, at least from the human side, because godly people have labored with tears in prayer, night and day to lay hold on the heart of God and pull down His Power once again upon our race. And it we plunge into darkness, it will be, at least in

human terms, because those who called themselves 'Christian' failed in their mission and allowed wickedness to rule unhindered in our world once again.

So, here in this picture of the first stage of the trial of Jesus, we see our choices, either the simple and elegant godliness of the God-man Jesus Christ or the raging lunacy of men driven mad by wrong ideas that have become a religion to them, a religion so demonic in its' character that even the One Who has proven Himself Lord by miracles and wonders that He did is the target of their murderous hatred. And, here we stand at a moment of decision. To decide for Christ means hard work, sacrifice, toil without notice and without recognition or reward, tears and pain, heartache and struggle, laboring for a New Awakening upon our sad world. To decide for the rampages of insanity to sweep over our world and rob our children and grandchildren of all of the dearly won liberties that True Religion and the sanity that it creates has wrestled from the jaws of monsters, is merely to decide not to act, not to labor, not to suffer, and not to pray.

This is our world. We did not choose it but it has been thrust upon us and while many seek for military and political solutions, I am here to tell you that there are none. The enemy has already won, at least in human terms. Our institutions of government, education and religion are already infected with enemies of the Cross of Christ that have burrowed themselves in so deeply that no human power is going to remove them.

What will history record of us who lived here in the first two decades of the 21<sup>st</sup> century? Will it remember us as brave souls who fought a battle from their knees and won their world back by the Grace of God, or will it remember us as those who betrayed the generations to come and did nothing? The insane ones of our world, those who have been driven mad by wrong ideas and fallacious conclusions, will make the decisions for us should we decline to make the decisions that we know that we must make.

2 Chron 7:14

14 If my people, which are called by my name, shall humble themselves, and pray, and seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways; then will I hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin, and will heal their land.

KJV