

The Great Sayings in the Gospels *158 - The Trial Begins*

John 18:12-24

- 12 Then the band and the captain and officers of the Jews took Jesus, and bound him,
13 And led him away to Annas first; for he was father in law to Caiaphas, which was the high priest that same year.
14 Now Caiaphas was he, which gave counsel to the Jews, that it was expedient that one man should die for the people.
15 And Simon Peter followed Jesus, and so did another disciple: that disciple was known unto the high priest, and went in with Jesus into the palace of the high priest.
16 But Peter stood at the door without. Then went out that other disciple, which was known unto the high priest, and spake unto her that kept the door, and brought in Peter.
17 Then saith the damsel that kept the door unto Peter, Art not thou also one of this man's disciples? He saith, I am not.
18 And the servants and officers stood there, who had made a fire of coals; for it was cold: and they warmed themselves: and Peter stood with them, and warmed himself.
19 The high priest then asked Jesus of his disciples, and of his doctrine.
20 Jesus answered him, I spake openly to the world; I ever taught in the synagogue, and in the temple, whither the Jews always resort; and in secret have I said nothing.
21 Why askest thou me? ask them which heard me, what I have said unto them: behold, they know what I said.
22 And when he had thus spoken, one of the officers which stood by struck Jesus with the palm of his hand, saying, Answerest thou the high priest so?
23 Jesus answered him, If I have spoken evil, bear witness of the evil: but if well, why smitest thou me?
24 Now Annas had sent him bound unto Caiaphas the high priest. KJV

Introduction:

In our last message from this series we discussed the three denials of Peter outside the residence of the High Priest. Inside the palace the first activities of a highly unusual and some say illegal trial against Jesus was beginning.

You will notice that two men are mentioned, Annas and Caiaphas. Both of them are called 'high priest,' Annas in v.19 and Caiaphas in v.24. One might wonder how that could be and why Jesus would have been led to Annas first and then to Caiaphas. It is certainly a matter which bears examination.

Annas had been high priest from 6 to 15 A.D. and then had been deposed by the Roman governor Valerius Gratus. But he was a clever politician and manipulator who, even though no longer high priest, continued to be the dominant personality behind the scenes in the Jewish political machine for many years. As a result, five of his sons, one son-in-law (Caiaphas) and a grandson all followed him as High Priest. He was, apparently, the real driving force behind the condemnation and execution of Jesus Christ. Therefore, he demanded to examine Jesus first.

Probably he wanted to formulate an opinion of Him so as to determine how best to proceed against Him. When Jesus was sent to Caiaphas, the acting High Priest, no doubt instructions were also given to him as to how to conduct the proceedings.

The trial itself was illegal and irregular on a number of grounds.

First of all, there was a peculiar rule in Hebrew law that a simultaneous and unanimous verdict of guilty rendered on the day of the trial was to be considered as an acquittal. The ruling principle was that such a verdict was considered to be lacking in mercy and to be the product of conspiracy and mob violence. Capital trials were always two day events with the judges having time to consider the issues over night and even to consult with one another before rendering a verdict. An execution was rare and the system had many built in safe-guards, none of which were followed in the case of Jesus Christ.

The witnesses against Jesus would commonly have been considered incompetent. Gentiles, slaves, the mentally disabled, deaf mutes, gamblers, illiterate, immodest, those convicted of irreligion or immorality, were all considered useless as witnesses. Those who appeared to witness against Jesus were obvious liars whose testimony did not agree.

Mark 14:56

56 For many bare false witness against him, but their witness agreed not together.
KJV

Bearing false witness was to make one worthy of death but none of these were even tried. In fact, Matthew tells us that the member of the Sanhedrin actively sought "false witnesses" to testify against Jesus.

Matt 26:59-61

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. KJV

Here is how one researcher described the normal activity of the Court. "The judges leaned always to the side of the defendant and gave him the advantage of every possible doubt. They went a step farther and sought pretext after pretext that would result in an acquittal. A sense of awful responsibility weighed upon the hearts and consciences of the judges. The services of the synagogue were not conducted with deeper fervor or greater religious solemnity than were the proceedings of a capital trial in the great Judgment Hall of the Sanhedrin. Certain sacred maxims flamed forever like beacon lights along the pathway of the members of the court during the solemn deliberations. "A judge," says the Talmud, "should always consider that a sword threatens him from above, and destruction yawns at his feet."... "When a judge decides not according to truth, he makes the majesty of God to depart from Israel, But if he judges according to the truth, were it only for one hour, it is as if he established the whole world, for it is in

judgment that the divine presence in Israel has its habitation.” Hebrew horror of capital punishment and dread of taking human life are well expressed in the celebrated maxim of the Mishna: “The Sanhedrin, which so often as once in seven years, condemns a man to death is a slaughter-house.”

There was a standing rule that if any of the witnesses could not agree on their accusation the accused one was immediately released. This rule, also, was not followed in the case of Jesus.

It is obvious from any fair reading of the trial of Jesus that the whole spirit of the event was completely out of character for the Court, and outside of all normal practice and behavior. The intensity of the hatred for Him by the highest officials of Jewish government forced an abnormal and unusual affair upon the Sanhedrin.

Capital trials were begun only in the daytime and had to be concluded during daylight hours. Acquittal might be announced on the same day that the trial began but condemnation required the sentence to be postponed to the second day. For this reason capital trials were not held (except in the case of Jesus) on the day before a Sabbath or a feast day. Regardless of which day you believe Jesus was tried, condemned, executed, and buried, it is obvious that the following day was a High Day of worship for the Jews.

Several authorities agree that the Sanhedrin could not legally meet until after the Morning Sacrifice, which was offered at daybreak. Obviously, the trial of Jesus violated that rule.

And, needless to say, the law prevented any accused one from abuse of any kind, especially before the verdict was rendered.

There is an observable reality here. When a government decides to violate even the rules which it has made to limit itself and not to protect the rights of its citizens, no one is safe and no true liberty exists any more.

Both Jewish and Roman law had many safeguards to protect the rights of those accused from having wrong done to them. But at the end of the day any laws are only as good as the collective morality of the governing bodies or individuals. And quite often those morals are a reflection of the general morality of the people.

Another of the lessons of these section is that almost every government has an ‘underground government’ which directs and controls, or at least manipulates, the official government. It is this ‘underground government’ that is most at war with God, His Son, and His people.

A marvelous example of this is found in the book of Ezekiel. After the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple and the carrying away of the people the prophet was carried backwards in time in a vision and shown the essence of the reason that God had brought judgment upon Judah.

Ezek 8:5-12

5 Then said he unto me, Son of man, lift up thine eyes now the way toward the

- north. So I lifted up mine eyes the way toward the north, and behold northward at the gate of the altar this image of jealousy in the entry.
- 6 He said furthermore unto me, Son of man, seest thou what they do? even the great abominations that the house of Israel committeth here, that I should go far off from my sanctuary? but turn thee yet again, and thou shalt see greater abominations.
- 7 And he brought me to the door of the court; and when I looked, behold a hole in the wall.
- 8 Then said he unto me, Son of man, dig now in the wall: and when I had digged in the wall, behold a door.
- 9 And he said unto me, Go in, and behold the wicked abominations that they do here.
- 10 So I went in and saw; and behold every form of creeping things, and abominable beasts, and all the idols of the house of Israel, pourtrayed upon the wall round about.
- 11 And there stood before them seventy men of the ancients of the house of Israel, and in the midst of them stood Jaazaniah the son of Shaphan, with every man his censer in his hand; and a thick cloud of incense went up.
- 12 Then said he unto me, Son of man, hast thou seen what the ancients of the house of Israel do in the dark, every man in the chambers of his imagery? for they say, The LORD seeth us not; the LORD hath forsaken the earth. KJV

So, here at the trial of Jesus the ordinarily very fair and just Court revealed that it was also a shadow government and had become a lynch mob meeting in secret to destroy One Whom they feared to take publicly.

Only the Great Judgment will reveal the horrors that have been perpetrated on the world by such secret meetings of powerful people.

There are exceptions but even the most corrupt governments are often chosen by the people at the outset.

One wonders how persecution starts in a civilized nation. The trial of Jesus is a wonderful example. When corrupt people are given power and authority and when the population of a country grows apathetic or fearful of its government, then rulers are free to intimidate and even murder whomever they please with no fear of repercussions.

What is there for us in the text, to help us, guide us, and encourage us?

I. First of all, we see the absolute Sovereignty of God controlling all of the events.

John reminded us in v.14 that Caiaphas had made a prophecy concerning Jesus.

After the resurrection of Lazarus in chapter 11, there had been a conference of the ruling elders of Israel concerning Jesus.

John 11:45-53

- 45 Then many of the Jews which came to Mary, and had seen the things which Jesus did, believed on him.
- 46 But some of them went their ways to the Pharisees, and told them what things Jesus had done.
- 47 Then gathered the chief priests and the Pharisees a council, and said, What do we? for this man doeth many miracles.
- 48 If we let him thus alone, all men will believe on him: and the Romans shall come and take away both our place and nation.
- 49 And one of them, named Caiaphas, being the high priest that same year, said unto them, Ye know nothing at all,
- 50 Nor consider that it is expedient for us, that one man should die for the people, and that the whole nation perish not.
- 51 And this spake he not of himself: but being high priest that year, he prophesied that Jesus should die for that nation;
- 52 And not for that nation only, but that also he should gather together in one the children of God that were scattered abroad.
- 53 Then from that day forth they took counsel together for to put him to death. KJV

John tells us that Caiaphas did not speak for himself but out of the role and office of the High Priest. It seems very strange to us but nevertheless it is a reality that an unregenerate man could prophecy the will and purpose of God, speaking words entirely consistent with God's Sovereign determination and not even be consciously aware that he was doing so.

There are those who object to the Doctrine of the Sovereignty of God because, they say, it violates man's free will. But here a man is shown to be speaking words intended by God and without being fully in agreement with the intent of them. God, as it were, caused him to choose these particular words and then motivated him to speak them. I am absolutely certain that Caiaphas, if asked, would have declared that these were his words, chosen freely in his own mind. Yet God left record in His Word that He was the author of this statement.

Another element of this was that the office of High Priest in Israel, even when it was occupied by an unbeliever, carried with it certain special characteristics. Otherwise the worship and especially the worship of the Day of Atonement, would have been rejected by God and He would have turned against the whole system until a godly man be selected for it. But the system, having been so ordained by God Himself, continued year to year and did not depend upon the personal faith of those men who occupied the various offices associated with it, even the office of the High Priest. So, even as these men plotted the most evil act that was ever carried out by a group of humans, God demonstrated that He was still in charge of the entire event.

Parenthesis: We see no continuation of this particular element of the Jewish worship. In the Christian era and in the church it really is necessary for the one who is ministering be truly a child of God. There is no evidence of God anywhere endorsing or blessing the wicked as they attempted to 'minister' God's Word. That being said, a couple of the pastors of the churches in Asia did seem to come pretty close, but you notice that God's warning of judgment is

immediately upon them. **End.**

But this was not the only demonstration of the Sovereignty of God. Jesus had declared that Peter would deny Him three times before the night was over and the rooster crowed the next morning. But in order for that to happen Peter would have to be in a place where he felt such pressure before he would do such a thing. Of course he had denied that he ever would, so the situation would need to be just right in order for that to happen. So, we find John following Jesus into the palace of the High Priest, apparently having initially run away. John was well enough known here that he could come in to this most solemn meeting of the ruling council.

There has been much discussion over the centuries about this particular text and how it could even have been that John, a Galilean fisherman, could have been well enough known at the very highest part of the Jewish government that he could have been given permission to come into this meeting. Some have suggested that he would have been known by coming there to market his fish but fish could not be transported from Galilee to Jerusalem to sell... (no refrigeration). Some others have even suggested that in this case John is *not* referring to himself but to some other disciple such as Nicodemus or Joseph of Arimathea who entered the palace and then returned to grant Peter entrance.

However it happened, we find Peter in the very courtyard of the High Priest, surrounded by the soldiers loyal to the government as well as the servants of the Priest and it cannot but be that his manner of speaking would betray him as a Galilean and subject him to the questioning which led to the denials. But Peter *freely chose* to follow Jesus here and had *no control* over his own admission to the courtyard, that place of the testing of his loyalty. It was that 'other disciple' who came to grant him access and **he** certainly had not intention or even thought that this would lead to the awful conclusion that it did. Here, again, the Hand of God is obviously controlling the events to move Peter into the situation.

But why would God ordain from all eternity past that Peter deny the Lord Jesus three times in the palace of the High Priest of Israel? The explanation can be found, I believe, in one of the strange things that Jesus had said to the man. The words are found only in Luke's gospel.

Luke 22:31-34

- 31 And the Lord said, Simon, Simon, behold, Satan hath desired to have you, that he may sift you as wheat:
- 32 But I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not: and when thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren.
- 33 And he said unto him, Lord, I am ready to go with thee, both into prison, and to death.
- 34 And he said, I tell thee, Peter, the cock shall not crow this day, before that thou shalt thrice deny that thou knowest me. KJV

Much like the story of Job, this testing of Peter was part of a much larger, and spiritual, event. Satan had involved himself in the situation, particularly 'desiring' to 'have' Peter that he might 'sift him as wheat.' In fact, the words that Jesus used indicate that the entire group was to be 'sifted.' Peter, though, was to bear the particular brunt of Satan's attack.

The sifting process in those days was a multi-stage event. First, the wheat, husk and all, would be loaded into a fairly large contained area and oxen would tread on it until the wheat and the husk were separated. Then the combination would be gently tossed into the air so that the husk was blown away and the wheat kernels could fall back into the container. The end product was wheat kernels only.

Now we are certain that Satan was not desiring to do something good nor create any good in Peter's life. He was desiring to crush him, grind him up, in a way analogous to the treading of the wheat. Jesus had not interceded to avoid the 'sifting' but to request that Peter's faith not be destroyed in the process. He did have a good outcome in mind, actually a two-fold outcome: (1) that Peter be 'converted,' and (2) that his conversion would lead to a strengthening of the brethren.

Notice that Jesus did not say, "if you are converted," but "when." There was no possibility that even this darkest moment of Peter's life was going to come to any other conclusion but that Peter would not only survive, but grow in grace and eventually become a strengthening force for his brethren and for the church.

And Peter was not the only one being 'sifted' by the Devil under the Sovereign Rule of God Almighty. Jesus also was being 'crushed' and that by people into whom Satan had entered. Certainly Judas was not the only one being motivated by the Evil One. And, we know that the purpose for Jesus was the ultimate good of His people.

And, why is that? For no other reason but that God was Sovereignly in control of all that was occurring, even the words of the wicked High Priest.

II. **Secondly, we must recognize that this crushing and sifting had Grand Purposes.**

In the case of Christ, it was for the salvation of His people.

Isa 53:10

10 Yet it pleased the LORD to bruise him; he hath put him to grief: when thou shalt make his soul an offering for sin, he shall see his seed, he shall prolong his days, and the pleasure of the LORD shall prosper in his hand. KJV

However, in the case of Peter, it was more specific, narrow, and direct.

Luke 22:32 "...when thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren." KJV

The two-fold purpose of God was that Peter be profoundly changed and that he, then, be an

instrument in the ‘strengthening’ of the other 10.

This flies in the face of the modern version of salvation that once a person asks Jesus into his heart all troubles are over and he instantly becomes all that God would have him be.

Here are 11 men who have been personally selected by the Lord of Glory, have spent 3 ½ years being trained by Him but who are still in need, on the one hand, of ‘conversion,’ and, on the other, of ‘strengthening.’ The subject of how and why a Christian would need to be *converted* is too large for this message and really needs a message of its own, but let me say this. The scripture is clear that we all come into spiritual life through a birth and that this birth is similar in some ways to human birth. We are an infant, a ‘babe in Christ’ as we start out, not really comprehending many of the great truths that we need to know. At some point great realities begin to dawn upon us concerning how we are to live and function in our world but these things call for a drastic re-ordering of our priorities and our lives. We need to be changed, converted, from a ‘babe’ into a functioning Christian adult...and that is a thing far different from what we ever expected or anyone else ever expected of us. At the same time, it is only by this conversion that we can be a real help to our brothers and sisters or the world in which we live. I am convinced that this was the reason for Peter’s conversion and the Purpose of God for him in the whole event.

III. Such a grand display of the Governing Power of God in our world should strengthen our faith as we look toward our own ‘sifting as wheat.’

John 15:18-20

- 18 If the world hate you, ye know that it hated me before it hated you.
19 If ye were of the world, the world would love his own: but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you.
20 Remember the word that I said unto you, The servant is not greater than his lord. If they have persecuted me, they will also persecute you; if they have kept my saying, they will keep yours also. KJV

As surely as Jesus Christ was treated cruelly and illegally, so has His church been persecuted and so will they before He comes again. Think about it, the church is already being persecuted in many places around the world, even in our own country.

Muslims are beheading them, the Chinese are arresting and torturing them, governments in different places are closing their borders to missionaries and we are seeing the beginnings of persecution here. Men have been arrested for preaching in England, preachers in Canada are being told that they cannot speak on certain topics, and Christian business people here are being fined for not doing things which violate their consciences.

I am convinced that there are people in our country today, even within our government, who would shut the door of every church, every Christian school, burn every Christian book, and silence all Christian witness if they but had the power. And just as certain as that there are cowards by the millions who would stand by silently and allow it to happen.

Persecution is coming. There is nothing that can be done to stop it. God has ordained it to be.

IV. And, every person must know that Satan has desired to sift YOU as wheat also.

If you are a child of God you must face the reality that you have an enemy who, like a roaring lion, is pacing about seeking someone of God's people to devour. You are not physically safe but as God protects you and you are not spiritually safe except in a place as near to the Lord as you can possibly be.

James 4:7-8

7 Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.

8 Draw nigh to God, and he will draw nigh to you. KJV

And, if you are not a child of God you must realize that he owns you and intends to drag you down with him into the eternal flames of the Lake of Fire.

Your wisest option is "RUN," get as far from him as you possibly can. Seek shelter in the mercies of God. Repent of your sins and trust in the Son of God as your only hope. Some pretenders came to John Baptist once and he responded to them in this way.

Matt 3:7

7 But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees come to his baptism, he said unto them, O generation of vipers, who hath warned you to flee from the wrath to come? KJV

We see from the text that John was indeed seeking to persuade people to run away to Christ in order to escape the wrath of God. Satan is going to fall under that wrath and he wants as many humans as possible to come with him. I urge you not to let him destroy you.