

The Shadow of the Cross Touches Me!

PART I – THE TRIAL OF JESUS

On paper the rules and regulations regarding the trial of Jewish prisoners were fair and balanced. The prisoner was in all cases considered innocent until proven guilty. In fact there was a saying that the Sanhedrin Court was **“to save life, not to destroy it.”** No prisoner could be tried and condemned in his absence and the accused was given every possible opportunity to be cleared of his crime. The Chief Priest or President of the court had the responsibility to remind each witness that human life was precious and that they should testify to everything that might weigh in favor of the prisoner. The accused was to be provided with counsel to assure that everything possible was done and all evidence was permitted to prove his innocence. After all facts were introduced and a decision was made, no member of the court who had spoken in favor of acquittal could change his mind and vote to condemn. To guarantee fairness in reaching a verdict the younger members of the Sanhedrin would vote first so they would not be swayed by the votes of the older members. In cases where the accused faced death the Sanhedrin required a majority of two to convict. If a prisoner was found innocent he could be released immediately but if found guilty the court could not pronounce a sentence until the following day. No prisoner could be tried during the night and the judges were required to fast the entire day before convicting anyone to death. And no one could be executed on the same day of their conviction.

The violation of these humane rules makes the trial of Jesus a mockery of justice. Yet this was the condition of justice and the Sanhedrin in the days of our Lord. The Jewish historian Josephus paints a grim picture of the Jewish judicial system during this period when he wrote **“Fictitious tribunals...were set up and men called together to act as judges though they had no real authority, when it was desired**

to secure the death of an opponent.” The trial of Jesus unfortunately illustrates this attitude all too well. The Sanhedrin may have looked like a righteous court but it was nothing more than a pretense. When no one appeared to accuse Jesus of a crime the President or judge of the Sanhedrin assumed the role himself. Witnesses against Jesus were eagerly provided by the judge himself, but the same judge did not allow a single witness in favor of Jesus despite the fact that defense witnesses were to be given the priority. Jesus was assigned no counsel to defend his rights to have witnesses on his behalf. And sadly, from the beginning the court sought to convict Jesus and not as the law required to acquit him! The witnesses’ hostile to Jesus were never reminded about the moral and legal implications of lying to the court. Truth was discarded for convenience. In the years to come the Jewish nation would feel the intense pressure of convicting Jesus as they did in violation of their own laws so much that the Talmud was amended to allow anyone who claimed to be a **‘false Messiah’** to be tried and condemned on the same day or even during the night.

It becomes obvious as we look back on history that the members of the Sanhedrin Council were going to have to find some means of accusing and condemning Jesus of a capital crime by which they could execute him. While they didn’t like his claim to be the Messiah, they knew that there was no provision in their law (the Old Testament) to punish someone for making such a claim. Often they made accusations against him for violating the laws of the Sabbath but in this too there was no justification for a death penalty. So, the chief priests and leaders were going to have to find some grounds on which they could push for a capital conviction and they knew this would have to be done through Roman law.

Time was of the utmost importance. It had become obvious to the Jewish leadership that they were in jeopardy of losing their power and livelihood if Jesus was allowed to continue to exert his influence upon the people. Never mind that his purity and morality exceeded anything this world had ever known. They were blinded by their own desires and they were bent on putting him to death. Yet to kill Jesus would just hasten that which they sought to prevent (their loss of power) and they couldn’t see it.

The beginning of the Jewish leadership's jealousy is easy to see. For centuries the priests had misused God's law to exert control over the people and now the son of a lowly carpenter dared claim superiority over the Law of Moses and to claim equality with God! So in an act of great hypocrisy the Jewish leadership formed unseemly friendships with their enemies for the sole purpose of destroying God's Son.

The Sanhedrin Court had become your typical 'National Court.' Factions had long existed within it and at times the fights between the groups it represented could be deadly. But in the case of Jesus the various factions (Sadducees and Pharisees in particular) had become allies to bring down their common foe.

As far as the Jews were concerned Annas was the rightful chief priest. He had been removed from that position by the Roman authorities but he was still recognized by the Sanhedrin as the chief priest. Later to make all proceedings legal in the eyes of the Roman governor Jesus would be sent to Caiaphas (the son-in-law of Annas). As chief priest or President of the Court, Annas would begin the proceedings against Jesus probably by asking questions about his disciples and his teachings (Jn. 18:19):

“Why and how did you gather so many followers?”

“Why do you send your disciples all over Galilee and Judea proclaiming the coming of the Kingdom?”

Why did you allow the crowds as you entered Jerusalem to fall down and worship you as the Messiah?”

Jesus quickly makes it clear that his entire life answers that question. **“I spoke openly to the world. I always taught in synagogues and in the temple, where the Jews always meet, and in secret I have said nothing. Why do you ask me? Ask those who have heard me what I said to them. Indeed they know what I said.”** Prove my guilt Jesus says (Jn. 18:20-21).

While Annas' questioning may have seemed a genuine start to a fair trial, it was no doubt his intention to manipulate the proceedings to secure the desired outcome. He simply wanted Jesus in the hands of the Roman authorities as soon as possible then when Jesus' supporters awoke in the morning Jesus would be beyond rescuing. The fact that Jesus wanted witnesses to testify outraged the court and an officer standing nearby slapped Jesus across the face and said **"Is this the way you answer the high priest?"** Still, Jesus maintained his composure and said **"If I have spoken something false prove that I have done so, but if I have spoken the truth, what right do you have to strike me?"**

Annas' attempt to provoke Jesus into providing just cause for condemnation had been futile and so Annas sends Jesus before Caiaphas and the entire council. All the priests had been united in their efforts to obtain false witnesses against Jesus so they could kill him. Some witnesses had come forward willing to testify how Jesus had promised to **'forgive sins'** something the Jews considered blasphemous, but this would not secure the death penalty through Jewish law let alone the Roman government. Up to this point all testimony against Jesus amounted to nothing and the high priest knew time was growing short.

Finally witnesses came forward who claimed to hear Jesus say **"I will destroy this temple made with hands, and within three days I will build another made without hands"** (Mk. 14:58; Cp. Mt. 26:61). But even their testimony did not agree (Mk. 14:59). Throughout the ordeal, Jesus remained silent. **"As a sheep before the shearers is dumb, so he opened not his mouth"** (Isa. 53:7). He knew the trial was bogus and to speak was undignified (cast pearls before swine). This silence began to wreak havoc on the nerves of Caiaphas and he finally jumped up and asked Jesus, **"Don't you have anything to say in your defense against all these things?"** Jesus still remained silent.

Why did Jesus remain silent? He could have easily defended himself against all the accusations. All the testimony had been discordant and thus worthless. Why not point it out? Clearly Jesus knew if his past life could not secure his innocence nothing

he could say would. Perhaps Jesus reflected a Kingly presence more in the course of this interrogation than at any other time. Throughout this illegal trial he bore a dignity that impressed even his judges. Jesus would not allow violence and lies to overcome his calm and gentle spirit. Besides, he knew they were determined to put him to death guilty or innocent.

The heat was on Caiaphas now. All accusations could be twisted to make Jesus guilty in the eyes of Jewish law but Caiaphas had nothing he could take to the Roman authorities that would fulfill his true intentions. Somehow he would have to make Jesus compromise himself. He hoped to get something out of Jesus that could be turned into a Roman crime and so he attacked the identity of Jesus. **“Who do men say that I the son of Man am?”** Jesus once asked his disciples. **“You are the Christ, the son of God!”** Peter had answered (Mt. 16:13-18). This was the point upon which all truth hinged and this is where Caiaphas attacks! **“I charge you under oath by the living God,”** Caiaphas says, **“Tell us if you are the Messiah (Christ), the Son of God.”**

The battle between right and wrong was about to erupt. Caiaphas knew that many of the Jews believed that Jesus was the Messiah. He also knew that Jesus had justified those who had believed this and had played the part of the victorious King on his entrance into the city of Jerusalem a few days before when he rode in on a small donkey to the praise and adoration of the people. Despite the fact that many people accepted him as the Messiah the Jewish religious leadership rejected that he was or possibly could be the Messiah so if Caiaphas could get Jesus to openly confess to be the Messiah he would in the eyes of the Jewish authorities be committing blasphemous treason against Jehovah.

Not surprisingly Jesus' answer to Caiaphas was simple and honest. **“Yes,”** said Jesus, **“it is as you say”** (Mt. 26:64).

It's easy to see that Caiaphas had succeeded in his plan. He jumps to his feet filled with passion and ardor at his supposed victory, ripping his royal white robe from his chest as if it restricted his breathing. **“He has blasphemed,”** cried Caiaphas, **“What need is there to hear more witnesses? You have heard the blasphemy from his**

own lips! What do you think? And they all condemned Him to be deserving of death” (Mk. 14:63-64). “Then some began to spit on Him, and to blindfold Him, and to beat Him, and to say to Him, ‘Prophecy!’ And the officers struck Him with the palms of their hands” (Mark 14:65).

The Jewish leaders had their wish. Now that Jesus had claimed that he was the Messiah, they could go to the Roman procurator and tell him that Jesus was a threat to the Emperor Tiberius. So, bound and beaten Jesus was led to the official residence of Pilate (the palace of Herod). And for the first time in his life Jesus entered the gates of a King’s palace. He was to stand before a man who was one of the most unrighteous, hateful and cruel men in history – the man known as Pontius Pilate.

Christ Before Pilate

This matter between the Jews and Jesus was a no-win situation as far as Pilate was concerned and if he had any sympathies they would probably lie with Jesus. But he was a politician and he understood the importance of placating the men in position to help or hurt him.

It was early morning now and the people of Jerusalem were awakening to a new day unaware that the Nazarene had been arrested by their leaders and turned over to their Roman enemies. Before the sun set on this day the people would witness an event that would change the entire course of human history.

Jesus was taken to the Judgment Hall where Pilate questioned him regarding the charges brought against him by the Jews. John makes it clear that the Jewish leadership brought Jesus to Pilate but refused to enter the Palace since it was the Passover week and all leaven would not have been removed by the Romans. This would result in Pilate moving from Caiaphas to Jesus and back again as he endeavored to learn the truth. (Not that the truth really mattered.) Nevertheless Caiaphas tried to reassure Pilate that he and his colleagues, being the cream of the Jewish crop, would never bring someone to the judgment hall unless they were sure of his guilt. Caiaphas said **“If he were not an evildoer we would never have brought**

him to you.” Pilate was not naïve or stupid. He knew what was going on in and around Jerusalem. It was his job to know. In the Roman world you didn’t attract large crowds as Jesus did without raising eyebrows. Pilate had heard of Jesus’ reputation among the people of Judea, how he healed their sick and calmed their fears. He also knew that the Chief Priest and Leaders resented Jesus’ success among the people and that Jesus only stood before him due to their envy (Mt. 27:18).

Allow me a few minutes of speculation. While the Jewish leaders refused to go into the Palace due to Passover restrictions, they remained in close proximity to the proceedings, close enough to have their say regarding their charges against Jesus. I have no doubt that Caiaphas or perhaps a special Jewish orator heaped flattering words of praise upon Pilate and mounds of ridicule upon Jesus. But Pilate wasn’t buying it. He hated these people and their superstition, bigotry, and greed and he didn’t want to involve the Roman court in their religious feuds. So Pilate tells them to **“take Him and judge Him according to your law”** (Jn. 18:31-a).

Pilate is about to learn the intention of the Jewish leadership. Up until this moment he had no inclination that they were seeking Jesus’ death but now Caiaphas comes right out and tells Pilate **“It’s not lawful for us to put anyone to death”** (Jn. 18:31-b).

We know that Pilate could have given them permission to put Jesus to death based upon their own law, but this is not what Caiaphas wanted. He wanted Jesus to die, but he wanted the stench of death to fall upon Pilate. Knowing the Jewish leaders as he did, it probably was no surprise to Pilate that they wanted Jesus dead. **“What accusation do you bring?”** asked Pilate (Jn. 18:29). Caiaphas had to present something to Pilate that would be considered a threat to Rome. To tell Pilate that Jesus claimed to be God’s Son wouldn’t matter. So he turned the religious accusations into political ones. **“He stirs up the people against paying their tribute to Caesar”** said Caiaphas **“and he claims to be the King of the Jews”** (Lk. 23:2).

This accusation must have grabbed Pilate’s attention because he immediately went into the Judgment Hall and asked Jesus **“Are you the King of the Jews?”** It may be that Pilate expected Jesus to deny such a charge. After all, Jesus did not exactly look

like a King (at least the way the world expects a King to look). But this was in a nutshell the real problem that existed in the world. Jesus didn't look like a King to Pilate. He wasn't the type of King that the Jews expected (wanted). Man has never learned that God's ways are not always the ways of man (Isa. 55:8). So Jesus looks at Pilate and declares **"It is as you say"** (Mt. 27:11). **"I was born to be a King. I came into the world to bear witness of the truth"** (Jn. 18:37). And Pilate responded **"What is truth?"**

Returning to the Jewish leaders Pilate says **"I can find no fault in this man"** (Lk. 23:4). But the Jews were more furious in their accusations **"This man stirs up all the people from here to Galilee."** That word 'Galilee' raised new hope in Pilate. Since Jesus was a Galilean he would send him to be judged by Herod Antipas who was in Jerusalem for the Passover. What better way to get out of a religious squabble. So Pilate ordered Jesus sent to Herod Antipas.

Herod resided in an old palace not too far from the official residence of Pilate. I can just imagine the Roman soldiers followed by the Jewish leaders escorting Jesus up the narrow streets to Herod's house. This would have made quite a spectacle and would have raised the interest of people along the way who would have fallen in behind to see what was going on. Herod was flattered that Pilate had sent such a well know figure to him for judgment. Antipas knew a lot about Jesus but he had never seen any of the miracles that Jesus was purported to have performed. And since Jesus was at his mercy Herod probably figured that Jesus would be more than willing to perform a miracle if he asked.

It was probably around six o'clock in the morning when Herod heard the commotion of the crowd approaching the palace. A few minutes later and the prisoner is marched into the court of Justice where Herod makes his appearance. This weak, worthless little man who had killed John the Baptist was very condescending. He asked question after question and probably demanded that Jesus perform a miracle but Jesus treated him with withering silence (See Lk. 23:8). Herod was not used to such treatment before his peers and was obviously annoyed by Jesus' silence. In

attempt to save face from his inability to deal with Jesus, Herod decided instead to humiliate Jesus. So Herod ordered his men to place a white robe on Jesus, the Jewish royal color as if to show that he had no fear of such a King and then sent Jesus back to Pilate.

The crowd in the courtyard of Pilate's palace was now much larger than before. Many of the Jews, who felt that Jesus was a danger to the temple in which they worshipped, were in the crowd waiting to see the outcome of Jesus' trial. **"I have examined this man,"** said Pilate **"and I find no fault in him."** In an attempt to pacify the people Pilate offers to have him scourged and released but this only serves to ignite the crowd. Growing more and more uncomfortable with the pressure exerted by the people, Pilate is looking for any reason to resolve the matter peaceably. So he reminds the Jews that it was a practice to release one prisoner to them during the Passover week. Pilate anticipated that the people would rather have a man released who claimed to be their king than a man who was a religious zealot (terrorist) and murderer, but Caiaphas and his party encouraged the people to call for the release of Barabbas. And the multitude cried out **"Release Barabbas"** with such fervor that Pilate began to crumble before their pleas.

I often wonder what was going through Pilate's mind at this time. He was gutless, we know that, but other things had occurred which must have made Pilate's decision more difficult. For example, his wife had a dream. In this dream she had seen things regarding **"this just man"** (Mt. 27:19) and she implored her husband not to have anything to do with his judgment. In all fairness, Pilate was in a real tug of war. On one side there were his wife and his conscience and his common sense all saying this man is innocent. On the other side there are Caiaphas and Annas and the Sanhedrin Court pushing for Jesus' destruction. He had a decision to make and unfortunately he made the wrong decision based on what was politically best for him and now his name stands as a testimony to selfish ambition.

At a loss as to what to do Pilate turns to the crowd and asks **"Who do you want me to release to you?"** And the crowd roars **"Barabbas, Barabbas."** "What shall I do

then with Jesus who is called Christ?" asks Pilate. And the mob cries out **"Crucify Him, Crucify Him!"**

Aware that he could not change the course of events, Pilate turns to a basin of water and washes his hands saying **"I am innocent of the blood of this just Person."** And the people cry out **"His blood be on us and on our children."**

Prisoners condemned to the cross first underwent scourging. Pilate ordered this as Jesus was led away. Seized by some of the soldiers standing nearby Jesus was stripped to the waist, bound to a short post in a stooping position with his hands tied behind his back. He was then beaten with leather straps containing small shards of pointed bones. He was beaten until the soldiers decided to quit or got too tired to continue. In the course of the beating the flesh of the chest, back, face, and arms were ripped open, teeth knocked out and often the eyes. Many prisoners died from the beating it was so severe.

With the scourging over Jesus was given to the executioners for his walk to the cross. Before they left the palace grounds the soldiers mockingly threw a purple robe over the shoulders of our Lord, wove a crown of thorns and placed it upon his head and placed a reed in his hand for his Kings scepter. As Jesus walked from the palace men began yelling **"All hail to the King of the Jews."** Others grabbed the scepter from his hand and beat him with it. Others hit him with their fist or spit on him as he walked by.

One last time before they left the palace grounds Pilate came out and turned to Jesus who was pale, worn and bleeding and told the people **"Behold the Man!"** Pilate had allowed Jesus to be beaten and the people to mock him and he thought this might appease the people, but the people were unmoved and continued their cries **"Crucify him, crucify him."** The people were in such a frenzy now that they were determined to kill Jesus with or without Pilates permission. The Priests told Pilate that Jesus must die if for no other reason because he claimed to be the **'Son of God.'** This caught Pilate's attention. So, once more Pilate takes Jesus to the Judgment Hall and he asks Jesus **"What was that they said about you being the Son of God."** But

Jesus would not speak. **“Do you refuse to answer me? Don’t you know that your life is in my hands?”** And Jesus finally answers **“You could have no power at all against me unless it had been given you from above. Therefore the one who delivered Me to you has the greater sin.”**