

March 8, 2015

THE TRIAL

Matthew 26:57-68

They didn't care about anyone but Jesus. The disciples had all deserted. But Peter must have run only so far. He stayed out of view, away from the torchlight, quietly "*following at a distance.*" (v. 58) We know it was Peter who had brandished a sword, and cut off the ear of the First Servant of the High Priest. We know it because John tells us so in his gospel. (18:10) We even learn that the servant's name was Malchus. This violent act should have gotten Peter arrested, but... as I said... they were only concerned with Jesus.

They were taking Him to the house of Caiaphas, the High Priest. The Elders had gathered in order to *deal* with Jesus. Apparently, all of them were in on the conspiracy to arrest Jesus and bring Him to trial through the course of the night, ...during the hours of darkness ...where evil lurks about. In the gospel of John, John reports Jesus saying, "*This is the Judgment – that the light has come into the world, and people loved darkness rather than light because their deeds were evil. For all who do evil hate the light and do not come to the light, so that their deeds may not be exposed*" (John 3:19-20)

But the story of the trial exposes them. Peter lingered in the shadows, virtually unseen. After a while, he would be noticed. For now, he is simply a spectator. Matthew reports that he sat near the guards, "*in order to see how this would end.*" (58b) It's easy to wonder what Peter expected. Many scholars assume he may have held the view (at least partially) that the Messiah would become a great warrior-king, and perhaps at any time, now, the twelve legions of angels that Jesus mentioned back in verse 53 would come to the rescue. But...they never came.

Caiaphas' house was probably very similar to any house of a wealthy man of the day. There was the original building, where the patriarch probably lived. We know that to have been Annas, the father-in-law of Caiaphas. As the family grew, and the adult children married, they would build an addition, a connected home, architecturally "attached" to the first. Often there were other family members whose homes were likewise "attached", and a rectangular courtyard would eventually take shape in the center. It is not unlikely that a large room or "great hall" would be part of the floor plan where everyone would gather to eat. This was where the Sanhedrin gathered – 70 Elders. It was probable that they all had to stand – not enough chairs for everyone. The courtyard must have overlooked this great room – which would have been out of view from the street. Because Caiaphas was a public figure, people would have had access to the courtyard, so Peter was able to sneak in, blend in. The courtyard would have had several servants of the Elders watching in wait as the trial went on.

Matthew's perspective of the trial is blatantly present as he tells the story: "*Now the Chief Priests and the whole Council were looking for false testimony against Jesus so that they might put Him to death, but they found none, though many false witnesses came forward.*" (v. 59-60) Of course it was against the Law to offer false witness, so you can see how deeply in league with the darkness they had become. Through it all, *Jesus was silent.* (v. 63)

Finally, two witnesses testified to the same thing, which automatically made it true. They reported that Jesus had said, "*I am able to destroy this Temple of God and to build it in three days.*" What He actually said was in response to a request from the Jewish leaders for a sign in order to give legitimacy for His having cleansed the Temple courts of the moneychangers. Referring to His own Body,

Jesus said, *“Destroy this Temple, and in three days I will raise it up!”* However His words were misconstrued, it offended the best interests of the Sanhedrin. Still, *“Jesus was silent.”* (v. 63)

That ticked them off. Caiaphas railed: *“I put you under oath before the living God, tell us if you are the Messiah, the son of God!”* (v. 63b) So Jesus nailed it down. *“You have said so. But I tell you, from now on you will see the Son of Man seated at the right hand of Power, coming on the clouds of heaven!”* (64) Daniel had had this vision: *“As I watched in the night visions, I saw One like a Son of Man coming with the clouds of heaven. And He came to the Ancient of Days and was presented before Him. To Him was given dominion and glory and kingship, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve Him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion that shall not pass away and His Kingship is one that shall never be destroyed!”* (Daniel 7:7-13)

Jesus was claiming this vision for Himself. I imagine Peter’s heart was beginning to race, looking for the legions of angels to come right then..... I want to put a hushed pause and a great gasp in the Sanhedrin as they heard this. Did they fear the idea that twelve legions of angels might appear at any moment? Jesus did say *“NOW!!!”* But...when nothing happened, the cry of *Blasphemy* rose up.

Blasphemy is the claim to be God, or, to claim something or someone that is not God to be God. It’s usually so obvious that there is no mistake about it. It is blasphemy, plain and simple. And yet, we live in a time when new-age gurus and quasi-Christian speakers are compelling people to claim their god-hood, their own divinity, their *“true” nature*. Blasphemy is all around us, and we barely notice it. It’s in the idolatry that puts first anything that is not God. God *should* be first in all things.

Friends, we are on trial today. Christianity is on trial. The Church is on trial. Her witnesses lack integrity, Christianity lacks relevance, and all of us have watered down the truth. We need to rise up to meet the challenge of these days. Don’t ignore this challenge. The Church is still the Body of Christ to the world. And yet we are weak before the powers of secularism, of worldliness, of decadence. What is the verdict on the Church? The Church is irrelevant in an irreverent world.

The world is saying with the Elders, *“He deserves death.”* (66) And like the false phonies they were, *“they spat in His face and struck Him,”* and *slapped* Him around. (67) And today, His Body, the Church, is being slapped by the superficiality of those who claim faith so nominally. It is spit on with the words *irrelevant* and *hypocrite*. And what seems to strike us the hardest is the indifference of the world to Jesus.

Rise up! Rise up in hope! Believe that *“from now on you will see the son of Man seated at the right hand of Power, coming on the clouds!”*

Rise up! And look. Raise your expectations. Work for the Kingdom, and pray for the Kingdom to come!