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#100

“Condemned by the Jews”

John 18:12-14, 19-24

Introduction

Trials are intriguing events. TV series revolve around lawyers. Real live small claims court proceedings are broadcast. I guess people like to watch other people fight. There's a whole network called Court TV that is dedicated to the judiciary – especially where it touches celebrities and breaking news. John Grisham is a very wealthy man because he can write fiction about tort law in such a way that people will stay up all night reading it.

Historically trials have touched and shaped nearly every area of life. The Salem Witch Trials dealt with religion. The Trial of John Brown was one of the lightening rods for the slavery issue. Trials have influenced sports (The Black Sox Trial), science (The Scopes Monkey Trial), world peace and justice (The Nuremberg Trials), and issues of private versus public morality (The Clinton Impeachment Trial). Some trials were monumental not only because of the issues but because of the personalities – the trials surrounding Watergate, Charles Manson, the OJ Simpson, and Saddam Hussein.

And history usually helps us see if the courts got it right or got it wrong – although sometimes the debates linger on for generations. But without argument, the greatest trial that ever took place, that has done more to shape the history and the lives of individuals around the world from one generation to the next, is the trial of Jesus Christ. Jesus was

convicted of blasphemy and sentenced to execution by crucifixion. In the first of two trials, Jesus was condemned by the Jews. They rejected his claim to be the Messiah and the Son of God.

But as we will see during our study of the trials and the judgment against Christ in these coming weeks, the issue here is not the Jews rejecting and putting Christ to death – or the Romans doing the same – the issue will always come back to our response to Christ. This is the thing that makes the trial and the life and death of Jesus unique among all others. What is the verdict in our hearts and minds? Who is Jesus? What did He do? For anyone who does not acknowledge the person and work of Christ as the only means of salvation, that person stands condemned before God.

[John 18:12-24]

If you read the accounts of Jesus' arrest and trial, it seems as though the timing was a little off. There was so much that happened in such a short period of time that you have to wonder if the Jews were well prepared for these things, or if they were caught up in the emotion and circumstances so much that it forced their hand to move forward before they were truly ready. There were clear illegalities in the trial proceedings. There were no pre-screened, prepared witnesses to testify in a cohesive fashion against Christ. There was no time to get everything done and secure a conviction and a sentencing and an execution before Passover was under way. But they had one thing – they had Judas as one who was willing to betray Jesus and begin the process. So when he came forth, everything was set in motion.

First, things first. Let's set in order the events of this 24 hour period that began on Thursday evening with the Lord eating the Passover meal with his disciples. It was that evening that Jesus was arrested in the Garden of Gethsemane. That evening, probably around midnight, he was taken to the courtyard of the High Priest where the trial by the Jews began. There were three phases to this trial.

- The Preliminary questioning or hearing before Annas as described here in the gospel of John. John is the only one who gives us this detail. Annas was the former high priest (who was replaced by the Romans with Caiaphas. The Old Testament said that the high priest would serve for life, but the Romans began to dictate many changes for political reasons, one of those changes being the regular replacement of the high priest. Consequently, the Bible sometimes refers to Annas the high priest because the Jews would have still viewed him this way, even though he'd been replaced.
- The trial in the night before Caiaphas the Council. Only the Sanhedrin could hold a capital offense trial. The other gospels record the many details of this midnight affair.
- The Confirmation Trial at daybreak before the Sanhedrin. A sentence of death could not be given without an overnight waiting period so the judges could "sleep on it" before taking the life of another.

Next came the Roman trial. It likewise had three parts. First Jesus was sent to Pilate so that the sentence of death might be confirmed. The Jews

could not enforce capital punishment without Roman approval. But Pilate hesitated, and sent Jesus to Herod – either trying to abrogate his responsibility or to get confirmation and help. When Herod sent Jesus back, Pilate finally condemned Him to die.

The final event then, was His crucifixion which began at 9:00 that morning. So there was an incredible amount of things that took place in a very short period of time.

Three things to notice this morning.

I. The Hatred of the Jews.

They say hatred blinds people. And certainly that can be the case. The animosity and hostility of the Jewish leaders toward Jesus is well documented in the gospels. It's not hard to understand why Jesus couldn't receive a fair trial. As early as Mark 3, when Jesus healed the man with the withered hand on the Sabbath, the Pharisees reacted with venom. Mark 3:6 says *The Pharisees went out and immediately began conspiring with the Herodians against Him, as to how they might destroy Him.* Many times they tried to seize Him but failed. And after Jesus had raise Lazarus from the dead, the council formally met to strategize what to do. It was in that meeting that Caiaphas made the statement *it is expedient for one man to die on behalf of the people.* But John 11:53 adds this important detail. *So from that day on they planned together to kill Him.*

Obviously, those who were in charge of giving Jesus due process and fair trial had already reached a verdict and a sentence. It's no wonder there were so many illegalities in the trial itself. Jewish law was one of the most well developed and thought out in history. It had as its backbone the Old Testament

Law of God. There was also the Talmud (2 versions actually) of case law and commentary to work out the particulars. This was the law code. The trial of Jesus violated both. Here are just a few of them:

- He was arrested without any formal charges.
- He was tried at night.
- The 23 priests, 23 scribes and 23 elders (plus 2 others) that made up the Great Sanhedrin or Council were to be men of integrity and character charged with doing everything they could to prove a man's innocence. They were not allowed to question or accuse the man. Other witnesses were to bring the charges and substantiate them with consistent testimony. Any variance in the details of witnesses would render their testimony invalid.
 - The high priest violated the law by questioning and accusing Jesus.
 - The witnesses were inconsistent in their charges and details
- Jesus was not given any opportunity to bring defense. No witnesses were called on his behalf.
- He was tried on the day before a holy day. This was prohibited.
- He was condemned by His own testimony.
- There was no waiting for a second day to allow the Council to pray and meditate on their decision.

The condemnation of Jesus can only be attributed to the fact that those responsible had already settled the issue in their hearts. Jesus was guilty so there was no use in looking at the evidence.

Sadly, this is the position of many people today. They have decided their position about Christ without every considering the evidence. They've never read the Bible or taken the time to consider the person and work of Christ. They are at enmity with God. One of the greatest services we can offer to family and friends, if they are willing, is to show them who Jesus is and what He has done.

II. They Understood Jesus.

That may seem like a strange statement to make after all we've just said about those conducting the trial. And in spite of the fact that many today in our world have decided against Christ without ever even considering Him, the Council and the high priest understood the issues at hand. You can see this in their line of questioning. There were two ways that they went after Jesus.

1. The issue of His teaching. This was the line of questioning taken up by Annas here in John. Verse 19 – *The high priest then questioned Jesus about His disciples and about His teaching.* He was looking for heresy. Jesus rightly would not answer his questions. He had taught in public. And His teaching had been examined on multiple occasions. In fact, the gospels tell us how often the Pharisees and scribes confronted Jesus publicly and tried to prove Him wrong. Never, on one occasion could they do so. Matthew 22 gives one example.

Matthew 22:15 says *the Pharisees went and plotted together how they might trap Him in what He said.* At the end of the day (and the chapter) their conclusion was this: *No one was able to answer Him a word, nor did anyone dare from that day on to ask Him another question.* There was no way to prove Jesus guilty of heresy, because He wasn't.

2. The issue of His identity. Later in the night, when Caiaphas began to interrogate Jesus out of frustration, Matthew records these words from the high priest - *I adjure You by the living God, that You tell us whether You are the Christ, the Son of God.*

You see, Caiaphas knew. This was the crux of the issue. Was Jesus the Christ – was He Messiah, the Promised One? And did He claim to be God – the second person of the Godhead? The gospel of Luke gives us the simplest answer Jesus offered. *Yes I am.* At that point Caiaphas tore his robe and declared *He has blasphemed! What further need do we have of witnesses? Behold, you have now heard the blasphemy; what do you think?” They answered, “He deserves death!*

III. The Sin of the Jews.

The problem with the Jews was not that they determined that He claimed to be the Messiah and the Son of God. The problem was they didn't believe it. Nor did they take the next step to examine the evidence to see if His claim was true. Had they contemplated the prophecies of the Old Testament they would have seen the strong testimony from the Scriptures that Jesus is the Messiah. Had they found others, as Jesus suggested, who had heard Him teach they could have systematically studied His teachings and seen that they offered hope and life and were altogether consistent with the Word of God. Had they listened to the blind man, the leper, Jairus' daughter, the mother whose son was raised from the dead, the lame man, the mute, to the demoniac, or the woman who'd been hemorrhaging, or to Lazarus . . . or countless others – they would have had undeniable proof that the One standing before them that day was in fact the Savior of the world

The Pharisees in fact had the right charge, but they came to the wrong conclusion. Jesus was not a blasphemer; He was and is the Lord of all.

This is the heart of the gospel. This is the issue that divides men today. It is not just an interesting historical court case. The issue is the most important one that any man can contemplate today. Who is Jesus? If He is the Lord, then believe in Him. Trust Him. Follow Him with all your heart.

If you've not believed, consider the evidence that Jesus is both Lord and Savior.

If you have believed, then evaluate how you live. Do you walk in daily submission to Christ? Are you making decisions that are consistent with His ways and His will?

The teachings and the person of Christ – the issues that were examined and brought forth at the trial of Jesus – should not simply be historically interesting to you. They should drive your life.