

**Grace to You :: *Unleashing God's Truth, One Verse at a Time***

## **The Ultimate Miscarriage of Justice**

Scripture: Mark 14:53-65

Code: 41-77

We return tonight to the fourteenth chapter of Mark, but I don't want you to turn to that right now. Instead, I want you to turn to the sixteenth chapter of Deuteronomy...the sixteenth chapter of Deuteronomy.

The book of Deuteronomy was basically a reflection of a brief period of time, about a month, in which Israel was on the brink of entering into the promised land after being delivered from Egypt. It's called the Second Law, that's what Deuteronomy means, because on the brink of entering into the promised land, God gave instruction to Moses to give to the people to prepare them as to how they would live when they entered into the land of Canaan, took over the land and became the nation that we know as the nation of Israel. There is all kinds of instruction in the book of Deuteronomy about their conduct, a reiteration of the law that God gave on Mount Sinai, a reiteration of many of the requirements for spiritual life and social life, how they were to live among the nations, how they were to conduct the feasts, the festivals, the Passover, all of that. And then there is tucked in to chapter 16 a very important portion in verses 18 to 20 where God lays out to the people of Israel the responsibility they have to function as a society in a just way.

Verse...well let's start at verse 18, verses 18 to 20. "You shall appoint for yourselves judges and officers in all your towns which the Lord your God is giving you according to your tribes, and they shall judge the people with righteous judgment. You shall not distort justice, you shall not be partial, and you shall not take a bribe for a bribe blinds the eyes of the wise and perverts the words of the righteous. Justice, you shall pursue, that you may live and possess the land which the Lord your God is giving you."

Through the history of Israel, there was an effort to take this instruction seriously. Through the years, the Jews developed a very sophisticated system of jurisprudence, a system of justice. They were proud of it. You know, of course, the Jewish society of our Lord's time was fastidious about observance of the Law. That fastidiousness was basically led by the Pharisees and the scribes who made sure that people adhered to divine Law. The divine Law, not only in Scripture, but divine Law that had been passed down in tradition, but was nonetheless, they believed, from God. That is why our Lord said in the last week of His life, on the Wednesday in the Passion Week, "The scribes and Pharisees have seated themselves in the chair of Moses. Therefore all that they tell you do and observe."

In other words, when they speak what Moses wrote, observe it because what Moses wrote came from God. One of the things they were very proud about adhering to was the Mosaic call given here in Deuteronomy chapter 16, to be a just society. To have a system of Law and a system of courts and judges and court officials, prosecutors and defenders who would be able to maintain justice. By the time we come to the life of our Lord, we have enough information historically about that time to know how that system was operating.

I'll give you a little rundown. The Law was applied in every locality. There were no frontiers in Israel which could be defined as lawless. There were synagogues virtually in every place and every town and the synagogue essentially was the center of justice. If a town had 120 men in the town, they would have a local court called a Sanhedrin from *sunedrion*, which means sitting together, gathering together. That court would be composed of 23 men, 23 so there was always an odd vote to avoid a stalemate. The twenty-three men who made up a court in any place where there were 120 men were designated as elders. They sat as judges on that court. One of them was designated a ruler and sometimes we read about rulers, don't we, in Israel. They were not political rulers, they were not monarchical rulers, they were judges and essentially all judgment was rendered out of the religious establishment, thus they were elders in the synagogue.

Smaller locals than 120 would still be required to choose some of the elders out of their little village and appoint them as judges. There had to be three of them, there had to be five of them, or there had to be seven of them, always an odd number.

These councils, or courts, essentially were responsible for governing every community. They were the ones who made the decisions about legal matters of every kind. Jerusalem had the Supreme Court, the Great Sanhedrin it was called, seventy-plus one, the High Priest. Essentially it was broken down this way. There were 24 Chief Priests, 24 elders and 24 scribes and Pharisees. So essentially that, minus one, to make the number odd.

Further, looking into their system, laws of jurisprudence were absolute and binding. They were unequivocal. Once there was a law, there were no exceptions. Furthermore, all trials had to be public and all trials had to provide both a prosecution and a defense, and no accusation could be accepted against anyone without the familiar two or three witnesses which was also established in Deuteronomy. False witnessing was a very serious crime, we would call it perjury today and it is still a very serious crime, even if you simply say you didn't take steroids.

Listen to what it says in Deuteronomy 19:16, "If a malicious witness rises up against a man to accuse him of wrong doing, then both the men who have the dispute shall stand before the Lord before the priests and the judges who will be in office in those days, the judges shall investigate thoroughly and if the witness is a false witness, and he has accused his brother falsely, then you shall do to him just

as he intended to do to his brother. Thus you shall purge the evil from among you.”

If a man accuses someone falsely of a crime, whatever the penalty is for that crime that the man would receive if he were guilty is to be enacted against the false witness. That is to say, if someone accuses a person of murder falsely, and it is determined that it is a false accusation and a false testimony, the one giving the false testimony is to receive the sentence that would be given to a murderer. And in the original Law of Moses, he gets the death penalty. Pretty serious then to go into a court and be a false witness, because if the penalty of death was the verdict, then that’s what you would receive for your false witness.

Some more things about the courts in Israel, when the penalty of death was given, it had to be a period of 24 hours intervening before the execution took place. One full day was required. That’s time to transpire before the execution in case of further evidence coming forth. Witnesses whose testimony determined guilt, you’ll find this interesting, also had to inflict the first blows of execution. The Jewish form of execution was...what?...stoning. If someone was convicted by the testimony of witnesses, those witnesses had to then first throw the stones. That was intended to add the last degree of authenticity to the trial. This is a very carefully thought out system of Law.

Here’s some more things. No criminal could be tried at night. No criminal could be tried through the night when it began during the day. In fact, no criminal could be tried in the afternoon. Judges had to fast through the trial, taking seriously their responsibility. Trials were never allowed on a Sabbath, never allowed on a feast day such as a Passover, and never allowed on the day before a feast day. If the judges were unanimous, the criminal was given freedom.

You say, “Why is that the case?”

Because the Jews said it lacked mercy. Sanhedrin members in the Great Sanhedrin in Jerusalem were chosen from the lower courts, just as our system works. They were either chosen because of their success in the lower courts, or occasionally they were the disciples of the members of the Great Sanhedrin.

That gives you a little bit of a feeling for the system of justice that rose out of the instruction of Moses in the sixteenth chapter of Deuteronomy. Having said that, let me say this. The Jewish trial of Jesus violated all those laws...all of them. It violated all principles of justice and perpetrated the greatest miscarriage of justice ever. It was illegal from the beginning to the end in every possible way. That’s the Jewish trial.

The Gentile trial was equally unjust. It was a secular tribunal but it was a travesty of injustice, a violation of truth. There was a Jewish trial, and then a Gentile trial. The Jewish trial had three phases, the Gentile trial had three phases, in the case of our Lord Jesus Christ, so six times He stood before

a judge or judges, six different times in a period of less than five hours. All the phases of trials were accelerated in the few hours ending just after dawn on Friday morning, leaving time for the mockery, the scourging and the crucifixion by 9 A.M. Mark 15:25 says He was crucified at 9 A.M.

The religious Sanhedrin trial had three parts; the arraignment before Annas, the trial before Caiaphas, and the public retrial by the Sanhedrin in the morning. The secular trial had three parts. Jesus was brought before Pilate, then sent to Herod, then brought back to Pilate for the final death sentence. The whole trial was over before dawn. There was only one little part that was done in the daylight and that was the third part of the Jewish trial which was simply a repeat in the daylight hours as if to give some legitimacy to the travesty of injustice.

They reenacted their trial in a hurry-up fashion in daylight to pretend fidelity to the Law. Jesus is crucified by nine, the judgment of God falls between 12 and 3. He is dead at 3, He is buried before sundown.

The series of trials are one of the most fascinating parts of the accounts of the gospels concerning the last day of our Lord's life. Justice could have done no worse. They're going to be compelling to us as we go through them in the next few weeks. Let's pick it up at verse 53. Jesus has been arrested and bound in the Garden of Gethsemane by the coalition of the Sanhedrin, the temple police, and the Roman soldiers. Verse 53 says, "They led Jesus away to the High Priest and all the Chief Priests and elders and scribes gathered together. Peter had followed Him at a distance, right into the courtyard of the High Priest and he was sitting with the officers and warming himself at the fire."

"Now the Chief Priests and the whole council kept trying to obtain testimony against Jesus to put Him to death and they were not finding any. For many were giving false testimony against Him, but their testimony was not consistent. Some stood up and began to give false testimony against Him saying, 'We heard Him say I will destroy this temple made with hands and in three days I'll build another made without hands.' Not even in this respect was their testimony consistent. The High Priest stood up and came forward and questioned Jesus saying, 'Do You not answer? What is it that these men are testifying against You?' But He kept silent and did not answer. Again the High Priest was questioning Him and saying to Him, 'Are You the Christ, the Son of the Blessed One?' And Jesus said, 'I am and you shall see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of power and coming with the clouds of heaven.' Tearing his clothes, the High Priest said, 'What further need do we have of witnesses, you have heard the blasphemy, how does it seem to you? And they all condemned Him to be deserving of death. Some began to spit at Him and to blindfold Him and to beat Him with their fists and to say to Him, 'Prophecy,' and the officers received Him with slaps in the face."

The illegalities here are just blatant and consistent. Let's start with an illegal arraignment, okay? An illegal arraignment...the verdict was in before the procedure began. The decision was made as to what they were going to do with Him, they were going to kill Him. The procedure was formality,

looking for some reason to explain why they were killing Him.

So verse 53 says, "They led Jesus away to the High Priest and all the Chief Priests and the elders and the scribes gathered together." That's the composite of the Sanhedrin. They have come together already in the middle of the night because Judas got them together to point out where He was. They've been to the Garden, they have Him under arrest. And now they've got to come up with some reason to execute Him.

Matthew and Mark give us a record of His main trial before the Sanhedrin in the house of Caiaphas. John adds the first phase. So we have to leave Mark at this moment and go to John 18 for just a minute. John 18, because here you have the first phase of our Lord's trial which is the arraignment. Before He was led away to the High Priest and the Sanhedrin, as verse 53 says, something else had happened and John 18 tells us what it was. Verse 12, "So the Roman cohort and the commander and the officers of the Jews arrested Jesus and bound Him," and then verse 13, "and led Him to Annas first, for he was the father-in-law of Caiaphas who was High Priest that year." They led Him first of all to Annas. Annas was the father-in-law of Caiaphas. They led Him to Annas first.

Why? He was the evil brain behind the Sanhedrin. He was the real power. That's why the temple operations were called the Bizarres of Annas. He was the one who was going to come up with an indictment, an arraignment. He was like a one-man Grand Jury. He had been High Priest for five or six years, twenty years earlier. He's now in his eighties. For whatever reason, the Romans had forced him to step down so the next five High Priests were sons of Annas and now his son-in-law Caiaphas. High Priests kept their title for life, like Presidents do in our country. And he could have served for life except for the fact that the Roman powers forced him to step down. But he was behind the scenes orchestrating everything. He was hated for leading the temple corruption. He and his sons had passed on this power to sequential people in the family, and thus they had solidified that power and become greedy and filthy rich. Our Lord, of course, had attacked the very heart of his operation on Tuesday when He went into the temple and He did it once at the beginning of His ministry as well. Annas was a racketeer, a mafia boss who saw Jesus as a very serious threat to his financial empire and, as well, to his power.

His job is to come up with an indictment. We've got to have a crime here if we're going to have an execution. He's the smart one. He's the brains behind the operation. Give him the job. While Jesus is before Annas, the Sanhedrin is gathering at the house of Caiaphas to plot their course in their mock trial. While Jesus is before Annas, the Sanhedrin is gathering together and also, chapter 18 of John describe something else that's going on, Peter is denying Jesus cause he's there at Caiaphas' house warming himself, as we read in Mark, by the fire.

So you have some scenes going on here. Sanhedrin gathering, Peter denying, Annas to come up with an indictment. Verse 19, "The High Priest then questions Jesus." This is Annas about His

disciples and about His teaching. This is illegal. This is self-incrimination. Even we know that in our courts, no man can incriminate himself. We have that in the fifth amendment. No confession without evidence is admissible as an indictment. You can't come up with an indictment against someone by something they confess to without evidence. He is asking Jesus to admit something for which He can be executed. That's essentially what He is saying. "Tell me about Your disciples. Tell me about Your teaching. Let me see if I can find something to indict You for."

Jesus answered him, "I have spoken openly to the world. I always taught in synagogues, in the temple where all the Jews come together. I spoke nothing in secret." It's all out there. "Why do you question Me? Question those who have heard what I spoke to them, they know what I said." Jesus essentially is saying this is illegal. I demand a legal process. He knows that He is not allowed to self-incriminate. Where are the witnesses? I've said nothing in secret, ask those who heard Me. Call witnesses. Why do you question Me, verse 21? Question those who have heard what I spoke to them, they know what I said.

Well, Annas didn't like that. And he said this, "One of the officers standing nearby struck Jesus saying, 'Is that the way You answer the High Priest?' Jesus answered him, 'If I have spoken wrongly, testify of the wrong. But if rightly, why do you strike Me?'"

Annas can't cope with Him so verse 24 says, "Annas sent Him bound to Caiaphas the High Priest and that's where the main trial takes place." The religious trial is a sham. The religious trial is fraud. The decision is already made. The whole indictment attempt is illegal. They have no crime. They have no witnesses, no testimony is given. The whole thing is out of bounds. First of all, there is no crime. Second of all, there are no witnesses. Thirdly, it is the middle of the night. Fourthly, it isn't in a court. Fifthly, there aren't any judges, duly appointed judges and there are no legal authorities, prosecutors or defenders. The whole thing is a sham. Without a crime, without any testimony to corroborate a crime, they want Him dead and they're trying to figure out how to do it.

So they ramp up the violations of justice in a mad dash to get it done before the light breaks and the people start to show up. Matthew 26:57 says they sent Jesus to Caiaphas, as it says here in verse 24, and by the time Jesus arrived at the house of Caiaphas, the entire Sanhedrin had gathered out of their darkness and collected at Caiaphas' house and that is another breach of vertical, John 18:15 says, "They met at Caiaphas' house and the Sanhedrin was required to meet in the hall of judgment at the temple complex and not in the middle of the night but in daylight and the trial was to be public. They were in the wrong place and at the wrong time.

Furthermore, by Law, by Jewish Law, the Sanhedrin could not initiate charges. They could only investigate charges. That's what courts do today. You have to have an indictment before you can have a trial. You can't investigate the charge until the charge has been established. There had been no establishment of charges, therefore the Sanhedrin were following up the illegality of the phony

indictment before Annas. There was nothing to investigate. So more illegalities take place. And they are doing it on Passover which also was illegal, along with the day before Passover.

Well let's go back to Mark. Now before we go to the trial in the house of Caiaphas, Mark gives a glimpse of Peter. "Peter had followed Him at a distance right into the courtyard of the High Priest and he was sitting with the officers and warming himself at the fire." You know, there's something very, very like Peter about his being there, isn't there? Immense curiosity, really good intentions, strong intentions for Christ, "You know I love You...You know I love You," he says to Him later.

But he's in a dangerous place and he's prayerless. Slept through the prayer meeting. For the moment, Mark just locates Peter, that's all he does, he just locates him. He's in the courtyard of the house of Caiaphas, the High Priest, sitting with the officers warming himself at the fire. He's trying to blend in and stay warm. He's on the side stage. But, boy, is he in a vulnerable spot, as we will see next Sunday morning when we get to verse 66 and Peter's denials are there recorded by Mark. But for the moment, we just know he's there.

Now the Sanhedrin's inside. One of the rooms in this courtyard, typically the house would be built four sides around a center courtyard. The Sanhedrin is going to need to work fast. This trial's got to be done and over before dawn. Peter's denials actually took place before the cock crow, that would be 3 A.M. and it's still ahead of us in Mark's accounting. So this trial has to be happening before Peter's denial which is before 3 A.M. They shouldn't be even meeting in the middle of the night.

Jesus is in a large room, Peter outside in the dark courtyard near a fire with Roman guards, temple police and other servants. He's caught between curiosity and cowardice, isn't he? So you have an illegal arraignment, an illegal arraignment, and then it's followed by a series of illegal testimonies...illegal testimony follows.

"Now the Chief Priest, verse 55, and the whole council kept trying to obtain testimony against Jesus to put Him to death." They had determined the outcome. They had determined the sentence, death. They just had to find a crime. In order to find a crime, they had to have somebody give testimony to a crime. The execution is set, they need to make it look like it's just. So here you have these religious people, so fastidious about the Law, trying to find liars in the middle of the night. Matthew 26:59 says, "They were bribing them," the very thing that Deuteronomy 16 forbid. They were going around in the middle of the night trying to drum up false witnesses who would lie so they could kill Jesus on false pretenses. And they were not finding any. That's a bad time to be looking for people, in the middle of the night. Eventually they found some. In fact, they found many because many were giving false testimony against Him. Why? Because they did...what? They bribed them. They paid them money out of their massive amounts in the temple treasury, same money they paid Judas, same money they paid later to the Roman soldiers who were guarding the tomb to lie about His resurrection, all came out of the temple treasury.

But first, they couldn't find people that would lie. At least they didn't give any kind of testimony that would be connected to a death penalty. They found some false witnesses but they, while they would do it for the money, were not consistent. Some, it says in verse 57, stood up, began to give false testimony against Him, but verse 59 says, even in this respect, their testimony was not consistent. They had no time to get together. They had not time for collusion. They had no time to meet with people and get the same story. They had no time to plot everything out.

And by the way, no one was seeking witnesses in defense of Jesus. That's another illegality. Although Jesus said, as we read in John 18, ample testimony about I have said and what I have done is available. They didn't want anybody who would defend Jesus. They wanted Him dead in hours. By the way, the reality of this has been a stigma on Jewish people. It was in the early century so that there is a strange, medieval, Jewish fable that tries to rewrite history. And in this strange, Jewish fiction, it says that the Sanhedrin made proclamation for a period of 40 days trying to find witnesses to affirm the innocence of Jesus and found none...a little revisionist history to get off the hook for their illegalities.

The witnesses that did show up were bribed. And their stories were garbled. Their malicious stories were confused. Some of them mangled it so badly, we find in verse 58, they came up with, "I will destroy this temple made with hands and in three days I will build another made without hands." That is a confusion of what our Lord said three years before, recorded in John 2:19 to 22 when He said, "Destroy this temple," meaning His body, "and in three days I'll raise it up." He never said that He would destroy THE temple, that He would destroy the temple and three days later build another one without using His hands." In other words, miraculously raise another one. They had that confused. That was garbled. And by the way, Matthew 26:60 says, "There were two witnesses who came up with that spin."

He did not say that. He did say, however, back in the thirteenth chapter, to His disciples that God was going to bring judgment on Jerusalem, and the temple would be destroyed. But it would not be built again. Confusing, garbled, concocted, bribed liars couldn't come up with a sufficient crime.

Still bent on killing Jesus, they will not relent. They will not relent. This is not a trial. This is a conspiracy. They can't come up with a legitimate crime that they can sell the Romans, so the Romans will execute Him. So you have an illegal arraignment, and an illegal trial, essentially...illegal testimony. Thirdly, you have an illegal interrogation...an illegal interrogation. This is quite interesting in verse 60. "The High Priest stood up," it's getting frustrating now, their first effort, bringing in these bribed witnesses, collapses. "The High Priest then stands up, came forward, questioned Jesus saying, 'Do You not answer? What is it that these men are testifying against You?'" As if Jesus had any legal duty to respond to liars who, by virtue of their own law should have all been executed. As if He had some legal duty to respond to bribe false witnesses and liars whose testimony was confused

and inconsistent and purely fabrication. These contorted concoctions required no reply from Him. There was nothing to the accusations, therefore there was no reply necessary. Verse 61 says, "He kept silent and didn't answer."

He understands the legal order. Isaiah 53 verse 7 says, "He was oppressed and He was afflicted, yet He did not open His mouth. Like a lamb led to slaughter, like a sheep that is silent, so He did not open His mouth." Listen, He had no obligation to make sense out of their lies. Nothing legal going on at all. By the way, this must have been deafening silence...deafening silence. And we will read also later in the trial Luke 23 that He was silent before Herod and in John 19 that He was silent before Pilate. And in the deafening silence in this moment before Caiaphas, all they could hear in the room were the reverberations of the false witnesses' lies, filling the thick air with yellow guilt, the echo of their own evil hatred.

Jesus had unmasked their lying hearts, left them fully exposed to each other. He is majestic in His silence...majestic in His silence. And they don't know it, but God is using them in spite of themselves. Caiaphas said, according to John 11:49, "It is expedient...verse 50...that one man die for the people and that the whole nation not perish." In other words, we've got to kill Jesus, he said, before He starts an insurrection and the Romans come down and take away all our freedoms and our power. We've got to kill Jesus to save the nation.

Then the Scripture says in John 11:51, "He didn't say this on His own initiative but being High Priest that year, he prophesied that Jesus was going to die for the nation. How about that? God used his evil words as a prophecy of the death of Christ on behalf of the nation. He is majestic in His silence. Satan is cranking up the tsunami of hatred and the sinful blindness of the black hearts of these people are unable to see the truth, they're so bent on destroying Him.

There isn't...there isn't a legal aspect to this whole thing. They violate every Law. The arraignment is illegal. The testimony is illegal. The interrogation is illegal. And that leads us to the sentence which is illegal...the sentence.

What are they left with? Back to verse 61, "The High Priest must make his move." One option remains. Verse 61, "Again the High Priest was questioning Him and saying to Him, 'Are You the Christ, the Messiah, the Son of the blessed One? Are You the Messiah? Are You the Son of God?'" which they knew to be a title of equality with God, absolute deity.

By the way, Matthew 26:63 adds that. "The High Priest began by 'I adjure you by the living God.'" That's the heaviest oath possible...the heaviest oath possible. "I place an oath on you," this is so strange, "that God punishes liars," he didn't quite see the personal implications, "I place an oath on You, I adjure You by the living God who hates liars, who punishes liars, tell the truth." That's a common Jewish way of laying down one's serious responsibility to speak the truth. What an amazing

paradox that is. They demand truth from Christ, while perpetrating lies against Him. This, for the first time, is a legitimate question. This is not a “what did You do?” question, this is “who are You?” “Are You the Christ, the Son of the blessed One?” This is the first legitimate thing in the trial, it is a legitimate question. It does not call for self-incrimination, but merely a truthful response. It is the first legitimate aspect of the proceedings and Jesus knows the intent of the question but He answers any way and the intent of the question is to play the final trump card, the blasphemy card.

They all know what He’s claimed. They know He has claimed to be the Messiah. He’s done it again and again and again and again. You find it strung out all through His ministry. They know He has claimed to be the Son of God repeatedly through the gospel of John in particular. They confront Him about making Himself equal with God. And so here it comes, the blasphemy card, because that’s the only place he can go. “Are You the Messiah, the anointed One, the promised One, and the Son of the blessed One?” They substitute some other term for God, His name they think being too holy to be spoken. And Jesus said, He answers because the question is legitimate, with the *ego eimi* the tetragrammaton, *Yahweh*, the name of God, I AM. Matthew adds, “You have said it, I AM.”

John loves that. Twenty-three times in the gospel of John Jesus says I AM. Jesus knows His answer means death. He knows that. But after all, that’s where He’s headed and He knows that. Jesus enhances His answer. It’s not just I AM, He then adds to that answer, “And you shall see the Son of Man sitting on the right hand of power and coming with the clouds of heaven.” Instead of saying, “I AM, but let Me explain,” and trying to reduce the impact of that, He says, “I AM,” and escalates the reality of it. “Yes I AM the Messiah. Yes I AM the Son of God. And you will see Me sitting at the right hand of power, that is at the right hand of God, and coming with the clouds of heaven.”

Psalm 110:1 pictures the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of God. “The Lord said unto My Lord, ‘Sit at My right hand.’” Power refers to God. He is the power. He extends His power to the exalted One, the Lord at His right hand. Jesus is saying, “Yes I am equal to God, I sit at His right hand.” He is the powerful expression of God. The express image of God, Hebrews 1 says, perfect manifestation of His person. When Stephen was stoned in Acts chapter 7, he looked up as he was dying and he saw the Lord Jesus sitting at the right hand of God. Not only that, He says, “I’m the one coming with the clouds of heaven, I’m the Son of Man,” that’s a term taken out of Daniel 7:13 and 14, a messianic term, and also it says in that same portion of Scripture that He will come with the clouds of heaven. “I am not only God, I am the one who sits at His right hand and reigns and rules, and will come one day in the future back to this world to judge and to reign and to receive the dominion and the Kingdom promised to Me.”

They knew those scriptures. They knew Psalm 110 and they certainly knew Daniel 7:13 and 14. What He is saying is, “Yes I AM and My death is not the end, I will be exalted to the throne of God. I will return in glory to judge and reign over the earth.”

This is a glorious moment for our Lord. The question serves Him well because it allows Him in the horrors of facing the cross, to rehearse what's coming after the cross. He sees past the cross, past the burial, past the resurrection, past the intercession so His coronation and His exaltation. They judge Him unjustly, He will one day judge them justly and they'll get a preview of that judgment in 40 years at the destruction of Jerusalem.

He knows these words will bring about His death. He is ready. He has been through the Garden agony and He will do the Father's will all the way to the cross.

Then comes the verdict. This is the unjust sentence. Verse 63, "Tearing his clothes, the High Priest said, 'What further need do we have of witnesses?'" Tearing clothes is a ceremonial and contrived display, in this case, fake righteous indignation. It was usually a sign of grief. You find it in Genesis, Leviticus, the book of Job, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Joel, even in the book of Acts. Jews would tear their garments as an expression of immense grief. It was not allowed, however, for a High Priest to do that. According to Leviticus 21, a High Priest could never do that unless God was blasphemed. And if God was blasphemed, then one would expect the High Priest to do it. He knows that, so he theatrically starts ripping his clothes.

By the way, all Jews could tear their clothes at blasphemy. Judges in the courts could do so and then later sew them up to be torn again if the occasion called for. The High Priest's response is if Jesus is blaspheming by claiming to be Messiah, Son of God, sitting at the right hand of God, returning to judge and reign. And what is the punishment for blasphemy? Leviticus 24:16, "The one who blasphemes the name of the Lord shall surely be put to death." So, the High Priest says, "What further need do we have of witnesses?" Caiaphas at this moment calls an end to all the legalities with an illegal sentence. He condemns Jesus blasphemy when he and the Sanhedrin are the blasphemers because Jesus is the Messiah, He is God, He is the one who sits at the right hand of the throne of God and He is the coming King and judge. They are the blasphemers but they render Him the blasphemer. Verse 64, "You have heard the blasphemy, how does it seem to you?" Let's take a vote. No hesitation. They are instantly responsive, they all condemned Him to be deserving of death. It is unanimous.

By the way, in the normal course of voting, there was a scribe who tabulated the votes one at a time and each person had to give his vote at the end of the court case personally and singularly. So everyone took responsibility for it. And the junior members of the Sanhedrin, the younger ones, voted first so that they would not be tempted to follow the vote of their mentors. In this case, the junior members are not voting first, nobody is voting first, they are all a mob and they all together, collectively, want Him dead.

Everything is illegal. The arraignment is illegal. The testimony is illegal. The interrogation is illegal and the sentence is illegal. And the decision they make there will be rehearsed in a theatrical way, just after dawn in the morning. It's recorded in Luke 22:66 to 71. However, that's really not a crime that the Romans are going to find deserving of death. So when they bring Jesus to Pilate, it says in Luke 23:2, "They began to accuse Him, saying, 'We found this man misleading our nation and forbidding to pay taxes to Caesar and saying that He Himself is Christ, a King.'" They just invented that. They said, "He's starting a tax revolution and He's claiming to be a King and He's usurping the place of Caesar." They just lied.

So all those centuries and all those years of working at a very carefully crafted system of jurisprudence and justice, thrown away so they could kill Jesus. We said this morning, it's pretty hard to understand Judas, isn't it? How does a monster like that arise in the presence of Jesus? How do these people end up the way they are? How profound is sinfulness?

And to show you their attitude, they all condemned Him to be deserving of death. These are religious leaders now, essentially 24 chief priests, 24 elders, 24 scribes and a High Priest. And verse 65 says, "Some began to spit at Him." Luke says this began with the Sanhedrin, they began to spit at Him. Matthew says they began screaming, "He deserves death." This is a Supreme Court? These are religious leaders?

Then to blindfold Him so He couldn't know what was coming from whom? And this is the comedy that begins, that ends up as the comedy on Calvary. It's a joke now. It's time for mockery. They blindfold Him so He doesn't know what's coming or from whom and then they beat Him with their fists. Matthew says, "Others hit Him with the palms of their hand," Matthew 26:67, "slap after slap after slap, saying, 'Who hit You? Who hit You? Prophecy...Prophecy.'" It's a horrible scene, mocking, ridicule. And He said they would do that, way back in chapter 10 verse 34, He said that's what they're going to do. "They're going to arrest Me. They're going to spit on Me. They're going to mock Me. They're going to kill Me. I'm going to rise again."

The end of this section in verse 65 says, "And the officers received Him with slaps in the face." The Sanhedrin turns Him back over to the temple police and the Roman guards and they follow the example of their noble leaders and they slap Him in the face as well.

One could conclude that this nation and this Sanhedrin is rotting flesh, soon to be eaten by road kill by the Roman eagle. But even more importantly, God will judge them and God has judged them as they have been cast into eternal hell. God's just sentence of judgment falls on them. But the sad thing is, the same sentence falls on anyone who rejects Christ. I don't know anyone who would say, "Well, I want to be like Judas." I don't know anyone who would say, "I want to be like those guys. I want to be like that."

You are like that if you reject Christ. And you'll spend an eternity in the same place those people will spend their eternity and are now there. But, it was those kinds of people and the kind of people we all are for which Jesus went to the cross, right?, to provide salvation for those who repent and embrace Him as Savior and Lord. Let's pray.

Our hearts reach out, Lord, to You for grace on behalf of those who are with us tonight, who don't know forgiveness of sin, who will be sentenced to eternal hell with the crucifiers, with the Christ-rejecters, with Judas, the ugliest of all humans, are in the same hell with very kind religious people, very well-intentioned moral people because hell is for people who reject Christ, whatever their morality, whatever their commitment to justice and ethics and goodness. Heaven is for people who know they're sinners no matter what the level of their human evil, whether they are mass murderers or kind philanthropists. The issue of salvation is not an issue of human goodness, it's an issue of repentance for sin and personal faith in Christ. I pray, Lord, that tonight Your grace would be mighty on behalf of folks here who will end up the same way Judas did and the same way these despicable leaders of Israel did and they will be shocked because they had no such animosity toward Jesus. But it was Jesus Himself who said, "Whoever is not for Me is against Me." It's one or the other. So I pray, Lord, that Your grace would be profound and mighty, fall on the hearts of all who are outside the Kingdom, all who have not repented and come to Christ and may this be the night they do that. Break their hard hearts. Don't let people continue in hardness and rejection until they become as resistant as these people who sat and looked into the face of the blessed Son of God and all He did was elevate their hatred. Unimaginable to us, unthinkable, impossible but true. There are people like that who crucify afresh the Son of God, put Him in open shame, who reject Him in all His majesty and all His glory, all the grace of forgiveness who spurn heaven, spurn the full forgiveness of sin, spurn blessing and goodness, joy and peace forever in order to hang on to the ugliness of sin that drives them into hell. Lord, may You help sinners to be freed from the bondage of sin and to embrace the glory of Christ, we pray in His name. Amen.

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