



THE BETRAYAL AND TRIAL OF JESUS

Course 4, *The Promised One*, Lesson 9

The Problem: What should be our attitude when we are unjustly treated for believing in Christ? The Bible makes it very clear that trial and persecution will come to those who are endeavoring to live wholly for the Lord. The apostles taught *"that we must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God"* Acts 14:22. Paul wrote to the Thessalonians: *"For verily when we were with you, we told you before that we should suffer tribulation"* 1 Thessalonians 3:4. The beloved Apostle John caught a vision of the saved of all ages standing before the throne of God after the second coming of Jesus. These multitudes of saved are identified as those who have come *"out of great tribulation, and have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb"* Revelation 7:14.

Why should suffering be so inevitable for the true Christian? This fact makes some people turn away from Christianity. If serving God results in such suffering, is it really the happiest way to live? The answer is that suffering, trial, and persecution are inevitable, not because God wants His people to be unhappy but because the devil, and the one-third of the angels who were cast out of heaven with him (Revelation 12:4, 9), are doing all they can to turn people away from Christ. One of the main ways they attempt to do that is by using unbelievers in Christ to harass those who believe. The devil knows that social, economic, and professional pressure are effective tools in driving people away from the Lord. If people do not feel accepted in their society after becoming Christians, they are more likely to give up their faith. So Satan arranges for them to be rejected, scoffed at, or discriminated against.

Jesus predicted the inevitability of suffering for His people because He knew the perversity of the unbelieving heart. He said: *"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"* John 15:20. Jesus foresaw the day when *"they shall put you out of the synagogues [churches]: yea, the time cometh that whosoever killeth you will think that he doeth God service"* John 16:2. Why do they do such things? Jesus explained: *"And these things will they do unto you, because they have not known the Father, nor me"* John 16:3.

Then, is the Christian way of life truly the best and happiest? Indeed yes! It is much better to have peace of mind and heart knowing that your sins are forgiven and that you are right with God than it is to be afflicted by guilt, constantly overcome by habits that you cannot control, or filled with hatred for those who are serving God. The Bible says that *"the way of transgressors is hard"* Proverbs 13:15. *"There is no peace, saith the Lord, unto the wicked"* Isaiah 48:22. But there is great peace and joy for the Christian even in the midst of trial and rejection. *"Great peace have they which love thy law: and nothing shall offend them"* Psalm 119:165.

Moreover, the Christian believer knows *"the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us"* Romans 8:18. Even though it is true that *"all that who will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution"* 2 Timothy 3:12, it is also true that *"if we suffer we shall also reign with Him"* 2 Timothy 2:12. So the totally committed believer in Christ has the best of both worlds. They have peace of mind now with love and joy in their heart, and they have the assurance of a part with the Lord in the eternal Kingdom. No wonder Peter wrote to the believers: *"Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you: but rejoice, since we are partakers of Christ's sufferings; that, when His glory shall be revealed, ye may be glad also with exceeding joy"* 1 Peter 4:12, 13.

What should be our attitude when we are discriminated against for our faith? The Bible says to rejoice; not because anyone likes to suffer, but because we know that we have Jesus on our side, that His character has been given to us by the Holy Spirit, and that we will share the unparalleled peace of Heaven with Him soon.

Jesus is constantly held up to us as a great example of the way we should respond when made to suffer for our faith. *"For this you were called, because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that you should follow His steps: Who, when He was reviled, did not revile in return; when He suffered, He did not threaten, but committed Himself to Him who judges righteously"* 1 Peter 2:21, 23. In this lesson, we will take a closer look at how Jesus acted during the terribly stressful experience of His trial.

Objectives:

- I. We view Jesus' suffering in the Garden of Gethsemane.
- II. We consider the trial before Annas.
- III. We review the trial before Caiaphas and the Sanhedrin.
- IV. We will take note of Herod's treatment of Jesus.
- V. We will see Pilate vacillating between justice and self-interest and finally, with total injustice, giving in to the popular demand.

I. JESUS' SUFFERING IN THE GARDEN OF GETHSEMANE

Jesus ate the Passover supper with His disciples on the final Thursday evening of His life (Matt. 26:17-20). At this time Jesus instituted the Lord's Supper, known as the Communion Service or the Eucharist. During and immediately after the meal, Jesus revealed to the disciples some of the events that would occur during the next 24 hours.

The Word:

1. Who did Jesus predict would betray Him to the Jewish authorities? Matt. 26:21-25; compare Mark 14:17-21; Luke 22:21-23; John 13:21-30.
2. What did Jesus warn Peter that he was about to do? Matt. 26:30-35; compare Mark 14:26-31; Luke 22:31-34; John 13:37-38.
3. What great burden was laid upon Jesus after He and the disciples left the supper room and walked toward the Garden of Gethsemane? Matt. 26:36-38; compare Mark 14:32-34.
4. Describe the intensity of Jesus' suffering in Gethsemane. Luke 22:39-46; Matt. 26:39-44.
5. What were the circumstances of Jesus' arrest? John 18:1-12; compare Matt. 26:47-56; Luke 22:47-53.

Explanation: At the last supper and shortly after, Jesus warned the disciples of the temptation to disloyalty with which they were about to be confronted. Jesus revealed that He knew of Judas' betrayal plot. That fact alone should have been a deterrent to Judas, but he was so far gone in pride and greed that he was unwilling to repent and put right his wrong. Peter was very confident that, under stress, he would not deny his connection with Jesus, and all the other disciples likewise were sure that they would rather die than forsake Jesus at a time of need.

When they came to Gethsemane, instead of praying for power to resist temptation, the disciples slept while Jesus suffered. His suffering began seriously as He approached the Garden. He was weighed down with an indescribable sorrow resulting from the sin of the human race being laid upon Him. (See Isaiah 53:6; 2 Corinthians 5:21). Three times, He prayed that the responsibility of bearing the sin of the world would be removed from Him, yet each time, He submitted to the will of His Father. The prayer, *"Not as I will, but as Thou wilt"* (Matthew 26:39), is the greatest prayer of humble submission in the history of our universe. Jesus was committing Himself to the agony of bearing the punishment for the sin of the whole world.

While He was praying, Judas was leading the religious leaders and the mob up into the Garden where they arrested Jesus. The arrest was illegal, according to Hebrew law. It was illegal to arrest at night a person who was to be tried for a capital offense. It was illegal to use an accomplice in bringing about an arrest or in securing a conviction. Judas was an

associate of Christ's. It was, therefore, illegal for the Sanhedrin to use him in the arrest. The arrest of Jesus did not stem from a legal mandate. It did not result from a just desire to try a man for an offense for which he might be found guilty or innocent; they had condemned Jesus already. It was also illegal under Hebrew law to bind an uncondemned man. John 18:12-13 indicates that they bound Jesus and led Him down to Jerusalem.

Relevance: Jesus was supreme Deity (John 5:18; Colossians 2:9), yet He permitted Himself to be illegally arrested and bound by a mob of murderous rascals. He refused to put up a fight and refused to abuse His persecutors. When His disciples forsook Him and fled, He did not give in to discouragement or despair. He had a work of suffering and atonement to do for each of us, and He was determined to see it through.

II. THE TRIAL BEFORE ANNAS

The mob led Jesus down to the High Priest's palace in Jerusalem. This residence consisted of the palaces of Annas and Caiaphas, separated by a courtyard. Annas was the ex-High Priest and the father-in-law of Caiaphas, who was the current High Priest. Although he was no longer in office, Annas retained his title and influence.

The Word:

6. To whom was Jesus led first for questioning? John 18:12-13.
7. How did Jesus answer Annas' questions? John 18:19-21.
8. What did one of the officers do to Jesus? Why? John 18:22.
9. What did Jesus say to the officer? John 18:23.

Explanation: Because of Annas' seniority and influence, he was first permitted to question Jesus in an attempt to have him condemn himself. According to Hebrew law at that time, the preliminary trials conducted before Annas and Caiaphas were illegal. It was illegal to try a capital charge at night. Only trials for money could be conducted after sunset. It was illegal for the prisoner to be questioned. It was the business of the witnesses to arrest the accused, to bring him to the court, and to present the evidence to the court. But the prisoner was not to be questioned in an attempt to have him condemn himself. The responsibility of the court was to protect the interests of the prisoner in every way possible. Private or preliminary hearings, such as those held that Thursday night before Annas and Caiaphas, were illegal. The preliminary trials of Jesus were designed to glean evidence that would stand up to the scrutiny of the entire Sanhedrin and Pilate, the Roman Procurator.

Jesus' answer to Annas, suggesting that he should ask the witnesses about what He taught and what He did, was a plea for Him to be given His legal rights as a Jewish citizen. The officer's act of striking Jesus was an act of brutality that was not tolerated by Hebrew law, but it was allowed and unpunished nonetheless.

Relevance: Annas' attitude virtually amounted to condemning Jesus as an imposter, guilty of sedition, unworthy of the legal rights accorded to even the most debased of Jewish criminals.

III. THE TRIAL BEFORE CAIAPHAS AND THE SANHEDRIN

Caiaphas was the current High Priest and the ruling president of the Sanhedrin, the highest judicial body in the country. The Sanhedrin could pass a sentence of death, but at this time, its sentence had to be confirmed by the Roman Procurator. Since the hour was so late, Caiaphas had not been able to summon the entire Sanhedrin. A partial Sanhedrin examined Jesus and passed a sentence, which the next morning was presented to the full Sanhedrin.

The Word:

10. What conflicting testimony was presented by the false witnesses at the trial before Caiaphas? Matt. 26:59-62; Mark 14:55-59.
11. What did Jesus say in answer to these accusations? Mark 14:61; Matt. 26:63.
12. What question did Caiaphas now ask Jesus, and what answer did Jesus give? Matt. 26:63-64; Mark 14:61-62.
13. What was the response of Caiaphas and the Sanhedrin? Matt. 26:65-68; Mark 14:63-65.
14. What did Judas do during the trial? Matt. 27:3-10.
15. How did Peter act when his time for the test came? Matt. 26:69-75; Luke 22:54-62; John 18:15-18, 25-27.

Explanation: A Hebrew capital trial followed the principle stated by Moses: "*On the evidence of two witnesses or of three witnesses, he that is to die shall be put to death; a person shall not be put to death on the evidence of one witness*" Deuteronomy 17:6, RSV. At least two witnesses would have to agree against the accused. According to the Mishna, which recorded laws that had been handed down for centuries, there were three classes of testimony recognized in a Hebrew trial: 1) a "vain testimony" that was irrelevant and worthless and recognized as such by the judges; 2) a "standing testimony" which was accepted only provisionally until either confirmed or disproved; 3) an "adequate testimony" in which the witnesses "agreed together." The least disagreement between the witnesses was held to destroy its value.

We might well ask, "Why wasn't the testimony at the trial of Jesus harmonized in advance?" It would have been so easy for Caiaphas to bribe the witnesses. But quite evidently Caiaphas wanted to give this illegal trial an appearance of legality.

The two major witnesses against Jesus presented conflicting testimony. Mark and Matthew seem to be presenting these two different pieces of testimony, and it is easy to see why they were rejected. Mark records that the testimony was "We heard him say, 'I will destroy this temple...'" (Mark 14:58). Matthew records that the testimony was, "This man said, 'I am able to destroy the temple of God...'" (Matt. 26:61). The first statement could be interpreted as a direct threat to the temple; the second could hardly be regarded as anything but an idle boast. The two statements did not agree. In fact, of course, when Jesus made a statement similar to this, He was referring to the temple of His body, which he would allow to be destroyed but which would be raised on the third day. (See John 2:18-22).

When the testimony of the witnesses broke down, Caiaphas applied what was known as the oath of testimony. It was illegal to condemn an accused person to death on the basis of his own testimony, but Caiaphas had no alternative now that the witness against Jesus had broken down. He said, "*I adjure you by the living God, tell us if you are the Christ, the Son of God*" Matthew 26:63. Jesus could not remain silent to this demand, for His relationship with His Father was called into question. To remain silent would have implied a question as to his Deity and messianic mission. Mark records that Jesus's answer was, "I am" (Mark 14:62). The answers recorded by Matthew (26:64) and Luke (22:70) were simply polite ways of saying the same thing. "Thou sayest" meant "Yes," the traditional idiomatic way in which a cultivated Jew replied to a question of grave importance. The law of courtesy forbade a direct "Yes" or "No."

In His answer, Jesus predicted that these unjust judges would be raised just before His second advent to see Him coming in the clouds of Heaven (Matt. 26:64). Now, the Sanhedrin thought they had sufficient evidence to condemn Jesus to death. The procedure had been illegal, and the verdict was totally unjust; but abuse and physical attack followed, revealing the demonic hatred that ruled in the hearts of these men.

During the proceedings, Judas acknowledged his error, Judas acknowledged his wrongdoing, but by then, he believed it was too late for him spiritually. Consumed by remorse that he felt could not be erased, he sought relief in suicide. In contrast, Peter, though he denied his Lord, sought and received forgiveness for his impulsive act. This humbling experience transformed Peter, leaving him less self-assured and teaching him to rely on Christ for the strength to overcome sin

Relevance: Jesus never lost His composure with His unjust judges. He remained dignified and controlled under extremely stressful circumstances. He taught us how to endure and how to rely on heaven for power.

IV. HEROD'S TREATMENT OF JESUS

The Herod to whom Jesus was sent during the trial was Herod Antipas, ruler of Galilee and Perea. In the New Testament, he is called Herod the Tetrarch. He was the son of Herod the Great, who had died in the spring of 4 B.C. Herod Antipas had been educated in Rome with his brother Archelaus and his half-brother Philip.

The Word:

16. What transpired on the Friday morning, after Jesus' arrest and night trial? Matthew 27:1-2; Mark 15:1; Luke 22:66-71.
17. To whom did the Jewish leaders first take Jesus? What accusations did they make against Him? Luke 23:1-5.
18. To whom did Pilate send Jesus? Why? Luke 23:6-7.
19. What did Herod expect Jesus to do? How did he and his soldiers treat Jesus? Luke 23:8-12.

Explanation: Herod Antipas was responsible for the putting to death of John the Baptist. During a visit to Rome, Herod Antipas had fallen in love with Herodias, his niece, who was married to his half-brother, Herod Philip. Herodias left Philip and, from then on, lived with Antipas. Because John the Baptist rebuked Antipas and Herodias for their adultery, he was imprisoned. Herodias hated John and was not satisfied until she had brought about his death (Luke 14:1-12). This murder must have played on the mind of Herod Antipas, for when he heard of Jesus' ministry and miracles, he assumed that this was John the Baptist risen from the dead (Matthew 14:1-2; Mark 6:14-16). Antipas was known for his cunning. Jesus had referred to him as "that fox" (Luke 13:32). At the time of Jesus' trial, Antipas was in Jerusalem for the celebration of the Passover (Luke 23:7). When Pilate sent Jesus to him, Herod hoped to see Him perform a miracle, but Jesus' refusal to satisfy his curiosity or to answer his questions angered him. Curiosity turned to scorn and abuse. Herod and his soldiers mockingly dressed Jesus in a gorgeous robe and sent Him back to Pilate. In A.D. 39, Herod Antipas was banished by Emperor Caligula and ended his days as a nonentity.

Relevance: Selfishness is indeed self-defeating. Herod Antipas is a classic example in history of a man who, despite wonderful opportunities to know Christ and His salvation, chose rather to live in lust and luxury. Not only did he destroy himself in this life, but he forfeited all hope of a place in the hereafter.

V. THE INJUSTICE OF PILATE

On Friday morning, the Jewish authorities took Jesus to Pontius Pilate, the ruling Roman procurator of Judea. The Sanhedrin could pass a sentence of death but could not carry it out without the approval of the Roman governor.

The Word:

20. Briefly describe the conversation that transpired between Pilate and Jesus. John 18:33-38.
21. Whose release did the people demand at that Passover time, when Pilate suggested that he would release Jesus? John 18:39-40.
22. What did Pilate know about the Jew's motive for wanting to kill Jesus? Matthew 27:18.
23. What message was sent to Pilate by his wife? Matthew 27:19.

24. What public act did Pilate perform indicating that he found nothing in Jesus worthy of punishment? Matthew 27:24-26

25. Briefly describe Pilate's weak vacillation and final unjust decision. John 19:1-16.

Explanation: Pilate knew that Jesus was innocent of the charges brought against Him. When torn between truth and professional survival, Pilate studied his own political position and capitulated to popular demand. His administration was guided by consensus rather than principle. The record of Pilate's procuratorship in Judea (A.D. 26–36) reveals a series of misguided decisions that contributed to significant unrest. Throughout the Bible, it is repeatedly shown that rulers who yield to popular demand at the expense of justice and righteousness forfeit God's blessing. Pilate, faced with the Son of God Himself, chose to appease the crowd rather than stand for what was right, allowing His execution to preserve his own political favor.

Later, Pilate orchestrated the massacre of a large group of Samaritans, prompting them to report his actions to Vitellius, the legate of Syria. In response, Vitellius ordered Pilate to return to Rome and defend his conduct before the emperor. Pilate was banished to Vienne on the Rhone, in the south of Gaul, and, stung by remorse and wounded pride, he took his own life.

Relevance: There is great danger in rejecting truth when it is presented to us. Pilate had the greatest opportunity to know Christ and His love, but he turned Him down because he was too weak to resist the people. Along with the Jewish leaders who condemned Jesus, Pilate and Herod will be raised to see Jesus coming in the clouds of heaven at His second advent (Revelation 1:7). Then it will be too late to change. Along with those who, at the end of time, have rejected Jesus, Pilate, Herod, and the Jewish leaders will be put to death by the glory of Jesus' presence. See Revelation 6:15-17; 2 Thessalonians 1:7-10.

Have you truly considered Jesus' call on your life? Serving Him brings immeasurable joy, even when facing opposition from those who reject His love. Choosing God's way is far greater than following the easy path of the world, for in Him, you find mercy, forgiveness, and eternal hope.

Those who commit to Christ will experience everlasting joy, even amid present hardships. But turning away from His love leads only to despair and eternal separation. By His Spirit, the Lord invites you to open your heart to His presence, to let Him reign within.

Review Questions

1. True or False
 - a. Peter and the other disciples might not have abandoned Christ if they had devoted themselves to prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane.
 - b. Annas was fully justified in questioning Jesus.
 - c. Jesus should have allowed His disciples to defend Him with swords.
 - d. Pilate had no choice but to give in to what the people wanted.
2. Discuss: Jesus willingly suffered for our sake, showing us the depth of His love. How should His sacrifice shape our response to Him? Romans 8:28 declares that "*all things work together for good to them that love God.*" How can we view suffering as an opportunity for growth and deeper dependence on God's grace? How can we trust that any trial we endure—when met with faith—can lead to blessing for both ourselves and those we influence? Jesus' suffering was a redemptive gift to humanity. How can we, in surrendering to His will, allow our circumstances to become means through which God's love and transformation flow into the world?

Further Study: Ellen G. White, The Desire of Ages, pp. 685-740.