

Chapter 80

Jesus before the Sanhedrin

John 18 vv 12 and 13

John 18 v 19-23

"Well now, tell me something about your followers. Who are those who believe in you? How many disciples have you?"

Look, there stands the Lord, bound, before His judge.

Who is this judge? ... Now just listen carefully, boys and girls!

When the band of armed men and Jewish servants returned to Jerusalem from their journey to Gethsemane with Jesus as their prisoner, it was deep in the night. All the inhabitants of Jerusalem slept.

Yet they would not wait until morning. No, the Pharisees, who had accompanied them did not want to waste any time. It was their intention to condemn Jesus to death as quickly as possible, before morning could stir the people from sleep it must all be over. If they could manage that Jesus would already be dead before the people knew anything about it.

So the Sanhedrin must be gathered in great haste. Yes, but they were also sleeping. Only a few members had gone with the group to the garden. Well then, they must be disturbed just for this once. The matter is one of such great importance that they must for once sacrifice some sleep.

But where can they hold Jesus in the meantime? ... Yes, that is an awkward point. They cannot stay in the street. Fortunately they are able to bring their prisoner into the house of Annas.

Annas? ... Who is he? ...

Annas was formerly the high priest. Now he no longer holds that office however. At the moment Caiaphas is the high priest. Annas and Caiaphas were related to each other. Caiaphas had married a daughter of Annas. So Annas was father-in-law to Caiaphas.

Perhaps some of you will be thinking: "But surely a high priest remained high priest until his death?"

Yes, you are quite right. That was supposed to be the case. God had ordained that in His laws. But at this period the responsible position of high priest was sometimes sold by the Romans. Thus it came about that a high priest was deposed from office and another came instead, while the first was still alive. Evidently that is what had happened here too. Annas still lived, and yet his son-in-law Caiaphas had become high priest in his stead.

Some writers think that Annas and Caiaphas took turns to be high priest and that they changed places each year.

Whatever the case may have been however, the Lord Jesus was brought for a time into the house of Annas. And now you know who Annas was.

And while messengers walk through the empty streets of Jerusalem to rouse the members of the Sanhedrin from their beds, Jesus stands before Annas.

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He begins at once to cross-question Jesus. He hopes that the Nazarite will say something amiss. He hopes that he can find something against Jesus which he will shortly be able to pass on to the Sanhedrin. That will speed up the coming trial somewhat, for there must be no delay. So Annas¹ asks Jesus various things.

He asks about Jesus' disciples. He asks also about the teaching of Jesus. It is as though he says: "Tell me now very carefully what it is you preach."

At once the Lord Jesus answers: "I spake openly to the world; I ever taught in the synagogue, and in the temple, whither the Jews always resort; and in secret have I said nothing. Why askest thou Me? Ask them which heard me what I have said unto them; behold they know what I said."

That was a good answer, children. What the Lord said was quite true.

But one of the servants is annoyed by this answer. He considers that the Lord Jesus is rude to Annas. He strikes Jesus with the palm of his hand and says sharply: "Answerest thou the high priest so?"

Jesus did not deserve that blow, for He had not answered rudely, what Jesus had said was completely true. How humiliating for the Lord Jesus.

Yet the Lord does not become angry. He only asks: "If I have spoken evil, bear witness of the evil: but if well, why smitest thou me?"

What else was said in the house of Annas, we do not know. The Bible has no more to say about it, and so I can tell you no more.

¹ JMB: It is not clear to me that Annas examined the Lord, or did any more than "send Him bound to Caiaphas".

Matthew 26 vv 57-66

Mark 14 vv 53-64

In the middle of the night the members of the Sanhedrin hasten towards the house of Caiaphas. When they had been aroused and told for what reason they had to come, they had got up immediately with joyful hearts. They had dressed as quickly as possible and soon afterwards they are assembled in the high priest's house.

When most of them are present a message is sent to Annas that Jesus can now appear. Shortly afterwards the Lord Jesus arrives. He is still strongly bound. Very soon He stands as an evildoer before the Jewish council.

Look, there sit the proud elders of the Jewish nation.

When in our country a man or a woman, a boy or a girl is brought before a court of law, then everything is very carefully examined. If all is done correctly, the judge is not doing his utmost to ensure that the man or woman is sentenced, no, he would far rather be able to pronounce them not guilty. Certainly, if it appears that such a person is indeed guilty, well then he must pronounce judgment; but if it appears that that man or woman is not guilty, then he sets them free.

Here, however, with the Sanhedrin it is not so. The final decision has already been made by them: "Jesus must be put to death!" but then they must find something of which to accuse him. They cannot surely pronounce him guilty without some reason? ... No, that won't do. They must think of something!

Now just read what Matthew writes. "They sought false witness against Jesus." His

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accusers then are false accusers.

This does not happen by chance, but quite intentionally. Is that not terrible?

One says this, another says that. A third tells yet another story, but nobody tells the same tale. Furthermore they tell nothing but lies about the Lord Jesus. They accuse Jesus falsely.

And ... does the Saviour defend Himself? ... No indeed, He remains silent!

Hours pass by. They can find nothing which is of any use to them. This is a clear sign of Jesus' innocence.

At last two witnesses come and say: "This fellow said, I am able to destroy the temple of God, and to build it in three days." (Matthew).

That was a lie, children. The Lord Jesus had not said it thus; by "the temple", the Lord had meant His own body. The Jews would kill Him, but after three days Jesus would raise the temple of His body again. That means that after three days He would rise from the dead. That was what the Lord Jesus meant by those words, but these false witnesses say that Jesus meant the stone building in Jerusalem. Even these two witnesses do not agree completely with each other. Their witness was not the same.

Caiaphas stands up.

"Answerest thou nothing?" says he to Jesus, and he speaks as though he finds that shocking. "Answerest thou nothing? What is it which these witness against thee?" He means: "Is it true, have you really said anything so terrible about our holy temple?"

They all wait tensely for Jesus' answer. What will He say to that? How will He defend Himself? ... silence reigns. They all hold their breath and stare at Him searchingly. But ... it remains quiet! Jesus is silent! What? ... Does the

Lord say nothing? ... Can He make no defence? ...

Does He not know what to answer? ...

Of course, but the Lord does not want to say anything. He will not answer such false accusations. To such NONSENSE He gives no reply. That is not worthy of His trouble, so by His silence He condemns these hypocritical witnesses.

Suppose however that the Lord Jesus had in fact meant the stone temple in Jerusalem, was that something for which to condemn Him to death? The most they could then have said would be: "He is not quite sane!" For such an expression nobody can surely be condemned to death?

So, boys and girls, that is why the Lord Jesus remains silent. Against such foolishness He will not justify Himself.

The members of the Sanhedrin look at each other. At this rate they are not making much progress. Oh, if only they could find something, if only they could find Jesus guilty of something serious. They feel themselves that all that has so far been said is really worth nothing. They cannot possibly condemn Jesus to death upon that. Yes, it is an awkward position. They really don't know what to do. They are somewhat embarrassed.

Suddenly Caiaphas has a good idea. Yes, that's it, that is bound to succeed.

He stands up and speaks with mock seriousness: "I adjure thee by the living God, that thou tell us whether thou be the Christ, the Son of God."

It becomes even quieter. The tension increases. Will Jesus still remain silent? ... No, now the Lord Jesus must no longer be silent. Now He must speak.

And He does speak. Just listen!

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Seriously and calmly His voice replies:
"Thou hast said." In our country we would say:
"Yes."

The Messiah then, is now openly declaring before the Jewish council that He is in truth the Son of God, the King of Israel. Yet at the same time He warns those elders solemnly: He says: "Nevertheless I say unto you, Hereafter shall ye see the Son of man sitting on the right hand of power, and coming in the clouds of heaven." He means: "Now you do not believe it, but the day will come when you will have to believe it. Then you will see that I am speaking the truth. When I appear on the Judgment Day in the clouds of heaven, to judge the living and the dead, then you will see it, but then it will be too late to repent and mourn. Then the day of grace will be past!"

And then? ... Do those elders fall before Him in adoration? ... Do they acknowledge Him as the true Messiah? ... Do they beg with tears for forgiveness?

Just see what happens. The high priest goes white with anger. He grasps his robes and tears them apart. This is a token of deep indignation. In a voice trembling with wrath, he cries to the Sanhedrin: "What further need have we of witnesses? Behold, now ye have heard his blasphemy. What think ye?" He says that it is blasphemy for Jesus, the son of Joseph, to say that He is the Son of God.

A loud murmur is heard. With shrieking voices, bitter with anger, they scream: "He is guilty of death."

The Lord Jesus then is condemned to death because He avows Himself to be the Son of God. So you see the Lord Jesus was condemned when INNOCENT, for He IS indeed the Son of

God. He did not blaspheme!

But ... The Lord Jesus had to be innocent too, otherwise He could never be the Saviour. Otherwise He could never atone or pay for the sins of others. Otherwise He would have had to die for His own sins. Yes, the Lord Jesus truly met death as innocent, that He might redeem sinful guilty men from eternal ruin. He is suffering here, not as a sinner or an evildoer, for He had no sin, but He suffers as the Surety and Saviour of His people.

I know that it is difficult for you, but this you must know. Because the Lord Jesus was innocently condemned, there is for you too, boys and girls still hope of salvation. You still can be converted. Oh, pray daily to the Lord to renew your heart.

Is it not cause for gratitude that the Sanhedrin could find nothing?

Matthew 26 vv 67 and 68

Mark 14 v 65

Luke 22 vv 61-65

What I must now tell you is so terrible, so atrocious that I scarcely dare to do so. But I must not leave it out, for the Bible relates it too. So I will tell you briefly something of it.

In blind, cruel hatred, these dignified elders rush towards the bound Jesus. Their eyes blaze with wrath. Their fists are clenched. Oh, they could well tear in pieces this hated Nazarene, who dares to affirm that He is the Son of God. They would gladly have stoned Him, but that they dare not do. Dare not? ... Why not?

Well, without the permission of the Romans, they were not allowed to put anyone to

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death, and if they dared to do so, without permission, they would be heavily punished.

Yet they vent all their hatred, all their fury upon the Lord Jesus. They spit in His face contemptuously. They strike Him in the face with their fists. The Lord Jesus is buffeted and smitten. They ill-treat Him. They cover the face of the suffering Saviour with a cloth and then they strike Him and cry mockingly: "Prophesy, who is it that smote thee?"

And what answer does the Lord give? ... Does He answer back? Does He become angry and try to defend Himself? ...

No, Jesus remains silent! In silence He undergoes the scorn and reviling. In silence He bears the terrible ill-treatment.

Here is fulfilled what the prophet Isaiah had long before told: "As a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so He openeth not His mouth."

The Lamb of God is silent? He could indeed defend Himself. He could avenge

Himself, for if He were for a moment to show His almighty power then all of them, the whole raging, mocking band would fall down dead. But He is silent! Freely He takes upon Himself the scorn. He receives the stripes which His people deserved. Here as the Saviour He takes the blame for His people. Their unrighteousness is upon His head. Their guilt is imputed to Him.

I have not told you this that you should be sorry for the Lord Jesus, but that you may see how fearful are the consequences of sin. Just see what a great price Jesus had to pay to redeem His people. Do not imagine that you sin cheaply. Never laugh about sin, do not make fun of it, but rather ask if God will save you from sin. For if you die unconverted, then you will have to bear the punishment yourself in everlasting ruin. And that will be inconceivably terrible. The suffering of the Lord Jesus was heavy, but you too will have to suffer just as heavily if you die outside of the Saviour. God is righteous. Never forget that!