

MOCK TRIALS OF JESUS

– *NOVEMBER 1. – MATTHEW 26:57-68. –*

"As a lamb that is led to the slaughter, and as a sheep before its shearers is dumb, so He opened not His mouth." – Isaiah 53:7.

JUSTICE is a quality of mind which naturally and properly commends itself to every rational being, civilized or heathen. Every nation strives, therefore, to have just laws upon its statute books; and it must be admitted that many of the laws of the world, including those of Lycurgus and those of Caesar, have manifested much wisdom and much justice.

But the Jewish Law, given by God Himself at Mount Sinai at the hand of Moses, properly claims the highest place; and the laws of all nations in any degree claiming to recognize Christianity properly seek to represent the principles of justice on the highest plane. Nevertheless, when it comes to the interpreting of these laws, and their application to individual cases, we find that everywhere there is a tendency to make excuse and depart from the laws and from the principles of justice under the claim that the circumstances and conditions of the case make necessary such a violation of law and of just principles.

The story of the conviction of Jesus unjustly, by a Jewish court and in violation of Jewish Law, must not surprise us nor be thought different from what has occurred in numerous cases in other courts.

AN ILLEGAL ARREST

Jesus was arrested, neither by Pilate's orders nor by Herod's nor by their soldiers. His arrest was made at the instance of the high priest and his associates, who particularly had concluded that

the life and ministry of Jesus were inimical to their plans and projects and to what they [R5561 : page 316] considered to be the best interests of Judaism. The murder of Jesus was plotted in advance. But the murderers sought some excuse for their conduct, as all murderers do; and, being politicians, they sought also an outward form or semblance of justice, having regard for the opinions of others of tenderer consciences than themselves.

Under the charge of the priests were a number of men who served as policemen in the Temple and its precincts. These were the servants of the high priest; and, armed with maces, swords and lanterns, they followed Judas, who knew beforehand that on this particular night Jesus did not intend to go to Bethany as usual, but purposed to rendezvous with His disciples in the Gethsemane olive orchard, or garden.

They brought Jesus directly to the house of Annas, a superannuated high priest, whose son-in-law Caiaphas officiated in his stead. Annas attempted an examination of Jesus, but met with little success, and turned Him over to Caiaphas, whose house adjoined, being in the same courtyard. There, at probably three o'clock in the morning, the Sanhedrin had gathered.

The plot for Jesus' death was deeply laid. The hours between the time when Judas left Jesus and the other Apostles at the Passover Supper and the time of this trial were spent in gathering the Sanhedrin from their various homes throughout the city. Conditions were considered desperate enough to justify all this arrangement for the murder of Him who "spake as never man spake" – because He taught the people – because His teaching of the people was weakening the power of the Scribes and the Pharisees and of the traditions of the elders. – John 7:46; Matt. 26:55.

The theory of erroneous religious teachings is that ignorance and superstition are necessary for the preservation of sacerdotal

power. Thus always has Error hated the Truth; thus always has Darkness hated the Light. The condemnation of Jesus was merely another triumph of Darkness over the Light. Yet it was a triumph only in appearance; for God's Plan was thus being carried out. The great Atonement for sin was thus being arranged for, the result of which will be the ultimate overthrow of sin, Satan and death, and the establishment of righteousness and truth worldwide and everlastingly.

AN INIQUITOUS TRIAL

The Sanhedrin was composed of seventy of the most influential Jews, an ecclesiastical court, whose voice properly had great influence with the Roman Governor, in whose hands lay, at this time, the power of life or death.

Caiaphas not only filled the office of high priest, but in this particular case he acted as prosecuting attorney. While gathering the Sanhedrin, he had not been forgetful to collect witnesses, who are said to have been suborned, or bribed, to give their testimony. Of course, no attempt was made to bring before the Sanhedrin any of those whom Jesus had relieved from the power of evil spirits, nor any of those whose blind eyes He had opened or whose deaf ears He had unstopped, nor any of those whom He had awakened from the sleep of death. The high priest knew, for instance, particularly about the case of Lazarus, but they desired no such testimony. They were bent upon murder, to be accomplished in an apparently judicial form.

Caiaphas called the witnesses, but found that their testimonies were self-contradictory; and it was a part of the Jewish Law that at least two witnesses must agree before any matter could be considered proven. Finally, two partly agreed that they had heard Jesus say something about the Temple – that He was able to destroy it and rebuild it in three days. They probably had

misunderstood Jesus. However, their testimonies were too slight to make a basis for conviction.

As a last resort, Caiaphas attempted to get Jesus Himself to say something which he could construe to be blasphemy. To the various questions Jesus answered nothing; but now Caiaphas exclaimed, "I adjure Thee by the living God, tell us truly, Art Thou the Messiah?" It would not do for Jesus to keep quiet and fail to answer this question. To have done so would have been to deny this great truth and to have failed to give proper witness to the Sanhedrin. He therefore avowed that Caiaphas had expressed the truth in what he had applied.

Caiaphas leaped to his feet, anxious to grasp the opportunity of calling this statement blasphemy; but Jesus proceeded to say, "Hereafter shall ye see the Son of Man sitting on the right hand of power, and coming in the clouds of Heaven." Affecting great horror at this, Caiaphas dramatically tore his priestly garment, as implying to the Sanhedrin that as a representative of God amongst them he had heard something awful indeed. Turning to the Sanhedrin, he inquired, "What further need of witnesses have we? Ye yourselves have heard His blasphemy. What think ye?" – What is your verdict? Their answer was, "He is worthy of death."

Apparently only two refrained from this vote – Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathaea, both of whom had learned to have great respect for Jesus. But what power or influence could they have? At the very most, they could claim that the proceedings of the Sanhedrin were illegal, that the Law forbade that they should sit as a court to condemn anybody to death in the night-time. Hence Jesus was remanded to an adjoining court-room while the Sanhedrin waited to take its official action after daybreak. Meantime, in that waiting-hall, Jesus, condemned **[R5561 : page 317]** by the high priest as a blasphemer and malefactor, was subjected to various indignities by the attaches of the high priest's

palace, who ignorantly supposed that whatever was done by the high priest must be right.

SUBMISSIVE TO THE DIVINE WILL

The Scripture which declares, "Ye have killed the Just One, and He doth not resist you," and the Golden Text of this lesson are in full agreement, and are both applicable to Jesus in these trials. Jesus opened not His mouth in the sense that He did not attempt to defend His life. Realizing that nothing was happening to Him contrary to the Father's will, He gladly permitted matters to take their course, without attempting to hinder the results.

Who can doubt that His brilliant mind, and His tongue, which "spake as never man spake," could quickly have brought such an argument for His defense that Caiaphas and the entire Sanhedrin would have trembled and would not have dared to condemn Him! He spoke only what was necessary to be said that the Truth might be presented, and it was their own perversion of this Truth which His enemies styled blasphemy.

The Scriptures intimate that the followers of Jesus must not expect full justice in the world, nor always to be rightly understood. They, too, are to remember that the cup of their experiences, like that of their Master, is supervised by Heavenly Wisdom; and that if they are obedient to the Divine arrangement, they will find that all of their experiences will eventually work out to their highest welfare. "We know that all things work together for good to those who love God."

