

JOURNEY WITH JESUS.

C. THE REDEEMER.

98. The Truth on Trial.

Matthew 26:36-46 (Mark 14:32-42, Luke 22:39-46 and John 18:1) That precious last time with His disciples had come to an end; Jesus had set in place His own memorial ordinance; now He must go to meet His destiny. The little band left the upper room to make the journey beyond the walls of Jerusalem, to the Mount of Olives, to a garden called Gethsemane which means oil press, a place for squeezing the oil from the olives. The account is told vividly, each gospel writer well aware of the extreme significance of these last hours of Jesus' life as the teacher of Galilee. The climax was approaching when the cosmic struggle of good against evil would be won, and the victorious Jesus would emerge as Lord and Saviour.

The fiercest battle.

But that struggle was fierce and would demand every ounce of spiritual as well as physical strength from Jesus. Hence he took for companionship just 3 of His closest disciples, Peter, James and John, and in the garden He poured Himself out to His Father. As God and as Man, He faced with dread not just the pain of crucifixion, or the taunts and insults from His enemies, but the supreme agony of bearing the sin of the world which would separate Him for a time from the Father He loved so much. No wonder He told His disciples that His soul was overwhelmed with sorrow. "If it be possible", He cried to God in His soul-wrenching grief, "may this cup be taken from Me. Yet not as I will, but as You will." And in spite of His knowing that God would not, and could not, grant Him relief, Jesus used the word "Abba" (Father), which expresses an especially close relationship with God. In the very worst moments of His life, His loving trust in His Father never wavered.

But far from keeping watch with Him, Peter James and John had fallen asleep even while He was praying. It was quite a common practice for people to sleep out on the Mount of Olives but it must have been hurtful in the extreme for Jesus to see their lack of empathy with Him. Twice He went back to prayer, His deep trauma producing great drops of sweat falling to the ground. But where His friends let Him down, His Father, while denying Him the answer He craved, did not leave Him alone, but cast His love around Him in the person of an angel sent to strengthen Him. And it was there that the battle was won.

Jesus had to take the answer of "no" from His Father, yet He submitted completely to His Father's will. As His followers, can we do any less than that?

The battle won.

Matthew 26:47-56 (Mark 14:43-50, Luke 22:47-53 and John 18:4-11.) From that moment on, Jesus, far from being the cornered criminal, was Himself in command of the situation. John in particular stresses this in **John 18:4,5**, that Jesus, knowing all that was going to happen to Him, went out to face His captors. He had the perfect control that comes from perfect trust in God. When they asked who He was, His reply was so powerful that the soldiers and officials sent from the chief priests and Pharisees were thrown to the ground by its effect. For Jesus said, in simple majesty, "I am!" He had used that word before, in **John 8:58**, and the crowd had instantly known that He was claiming to be God: He had made a solemn emphatic declaration echoing God's great affirmation to Moses so long ago, but applying it to Himself. It is one of the greatest mysteries in all time, that this all-powerful and all-knowing God would allow Himself to be bound and led away to the ultimate punishment by the men whom He had created. He did that for us: can we ever forget?

Even when Judas committed that heinous betrayal, Jesus showed no anger - nothing but a loving rebuke that offered Judas his last chance to repent of the evil he had done. It was the kiss of a

disciple to a beloved master that Judas used as a sign of betrayal. But Jesus did not just submit negatively: He reacted positively when Peter, in his misplaced zeal, cut off the ear of Malchus, the high priest's servant. It is interesting that Luke, the doctor, is the only gospel writer who states unequivocally that Jesus with a touch healed Malchus's ear! (**Luke 22:51**).

Have you ever tried to help, and made a complete mess of things? Be encouraged: Jesus is able to completely heal the damage!

Forsaken!

Matthew 26:55,56. Then, even as the great armed crowd saw fit to bind this "dangerous" lone man, Jesus asserted his innocence by pointing out that He had been teaching publicly in the temple courts without anyone seeing a need to arrest Him: they had no cause to suspect Him of leading a rebellion. But Jesus knew that prophecy about Him was being fulfilled: His mind in spite of all the trauma, was completely clear. It was also important for the future of the Christian movement that Jesus assert His innocence with no fear of being challenged. As for the disciples, it was all just too much: fearful and discouraged, they forsook their Friend and fled.

Mark 14:51 tells of a young man who had hastily donned a linen garment (a sign of wealth) and followed Jesus to the garden, but who when seized by the crowd, departed in more haste, leaving the garment behind him. It is thought this could have been Mark himself: the man is not named, and if indeed it was Mark's mother's house in which Jesus had eaten the Passover meal, it could well be that Mark was included in the little company of Jesus' friends. Mark beat a similar retreat later when the going got tough on a missionary journey with Paul and Barnabas: yet this young man grew in strength through God's grace, and it is he who penned the first gospel to be written.

Two failures might have sealed Mark's doom as a complete write-off: one failure is enough to put some of us off for life! Can you trust God, as Mark did, to help you overcome the past and become a great pillar in the future?

Travesty of a Trial.

Matthew 26:57-67 (Mark 14:53-65, Luke 22:54-71 and John 18:12-24) Bound as He was, the mob led Jesus away to the high priest Caiaphas, to begin that semblance of a trial which had in it no legal authenticity whatsoever. Those teachers of the law broke almost every law relating to the trial and conviction of prisoners. These laws are set out below:-

1. No arrest to be made by religious authorities that was effected by a bribe. Exodus 23:8.
2. No steps of criminal proceedings after sunset.
3. Judges or Sanhedrin members were not allowed to participate in the arrest.
4. No trials before the morning sacrifice.
5. No secret trials, all trials to be in public.
6. Sanhedrin trials to be conducted only in Hall of Judgement in Temple Compound.
7. Procedure to be - first the defence, then the accusation.
8. All may argue in favour of acquittal, but all may not argue in favour of conviction.
9. At least 2 or 3 witnesses with testimony agreeing in every detail. Deut.19:15
10. No compulsion for the accused to testify against himself.
11. The High Priest was forbidden to rend his garments. Leviticus 21:10
12. Judges could only investigate charges, not originate them.
13. Accusation of blasphemy was only valid if the name of God was mentioned.
14. A person could not be condemned on the basis of his own words alone.
15. The verdict must be announced in daytime, not at night.
16. For capital punishment, the trial and guilty verdict must be separated by at least 24 hours.
17. Voting for death penalty must be done by individual count, beginning with youngest to avoid influence by elders.

(contd.)

- contd.) 18. A unanimous decision for guilt shows innocence since it is impossible for 23-71 men to agree without plotting.
19. The sentence must not be pronounced until 3 days after the guilty verdict.
20. Judges were to be humane and kind.
21. A person condemned to death was not to be scourged or beaten beforehand.
22. No trials were allowed on the eve of the Sabbath or on a feast day.

Matthew 26:59 states boldly that the “whole Sanhedrin were looking for false evidence against Jesus” and many readily volunteered even though, according to Jewish law, to give false evidence was punishable by death! All evidence had to be guaranteed by two witnesses separately examined and having no contact with each other. Strange that the witnesses testified all together – and couldn’t even reach agreement on what their story was! (**Mark 14:56**). In any trial evidence for the innocence of the accused should precede evidence of guilt – a provision that was completely denied to Jesus!

Another law stated that no-one on trial could be compelled to answer any question which might incriminate him. Yet the chief priests and the Sanhedrin kept hounding Jesus, frustrated when He gave no answer. At last in blind fury the High Priest charged Jesus under oath to declare whether or not He was the Christ, the Son of God, and Jesus, fulfilling the law, gave him His answer. Notice what Jesus said, in **Mark 14:62** – simply, “I am.” Once again He used that Name, the Name that God had used for Himself so long ago to Moses, and then proceeded to back it up with a reference to **Daniel 7:13,14**, declaring that the Son of Man would be sitting on the right hand of God and coming on the clouds of heaven. Jesus was indisputably claiming to be God, and in so doing, was signing His own death warrant. The High Priest tore his clothes in horror and condemned Jesus as a blasphemer, turning Him over to the crude mockery of the guards – an action which again broke the Jewish law regarding the treatment of prisoners!

Thousands of the followers of Jesus have had to endure injustice for His sake. We need to pray constantly for those being persecuted in many countries today and we need to be patient and trust in the Righteous Judge when it happens to us.

The lack of mercy shown by the religious leaders to Jesus was also dished out to Judas. **Matthew 27:1-10** tells us the sad story of Judas’s remorse, with the significant statement in **verse 4**, “I have sinned, for I have betrayed innocent blood.” Judas made no excuses for his sin. But what did the leaders care about his distress? Because it was “unlawful” they refused to accept the blood money back into the temple coffers and told Judas coldly that it was his problem, not theirs. His was the tragic end of suicide.

In **John 18:15-18** we learn that John was known to the high priest well enough to secure for himself and for Peter a spot in the high priest’s courtyard. Alas, that was Peter’s undoing: here in enemy territory his courage failed and 3 times he denied he had ever known Jesus. None of us can judge him: at least he was there – and what would we have done? But when the cock crow reminded Peter of the warning Jesus had given him, Peter was broken-hearted that he had let his Lord down and wept bitter tears of shame.

Read John 21:15-19 to see the different treatment given to a transgressor by the religious leaders and by Jesus. Which example should we follow when someone in our midst falls from grace? Do we consider that it could also happen to us?!

How true are the words of **John 1:11** – “He came to that which was His own, but His own did not receive Him.” The privilege that has come to us through Israel’s rejection, is stated in the next **verse 12**, “Yet to all who received Him, to those who believed in His name, He gave the right to become children of God.” May we never take for granted that wonderful privilege extended to us!

