

67. God on trials – Part 1

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I am sure that you've seen this statue sometime in your life – 'Lady Justice'. Since the 15th century, Lady Justice has often been depicted wearing a blindfold. The blindfold represents objectivity, in that justice is or should be meted out objectively, without fear or favor, regardless of identity, money, power, or weakness; blind justice and impartiality. A great concept, but in many cases, she was not so blinded.

We've seen so many twisted verdicts that come out of the United States judicial systems that any law-abiding citizen would throw one's hands up in the air and wonder if we still have any true justice system in America. Many liberal judges try to twist and rewrite the Constitution of the United States according to their political views. They are the ones who allow many crooked lawyers to abuse our judicial systems to the core. Truly, 99% of lawyers ruin the good reputation of 1% of lawyers.

Out of the entire judicial verdicts of human kind from the beginning to this date, there are six trials that were far worse than any kangaroo court in anyone's imagination. These six trials had the same single defendant. All these six trials were done in matter of less than 9 hours without a defense attorney, nor any verifiable witness. It was nothing more than a gross miscarriage of justice that ever occurred to anyone, let alone to the truly innocent One Jesus.

This morning we are going to watch the first Jewish trial that Jesus went through and how our over-confident Peter handles himself.

A. THE SETTING

The charge against Jesus in the Jewish trials was blasphemy, but in the Roman trials, they changed it to treason. The Jewish religious rulers had two reasons for this:

1) They wanted Jesus to be dead once and for all at all cost. They were willing to lie.

The Jews were not allowed to execute anyone with their judicial verdict. The Romans preferred to retain the right to administer capital punishment, so the Jews had to turn to their authorities, which explains why Jesus was crucified instead of stoned.

2) To the Romans, blasphemy didn't mean anything since they already had many gods in their polytheistic religion. And the Jews knew that a blasphemy charge didn't hold water with the Romans.

Since the Roman judicial systems have influenced Western Europe and America very much, we are going to ask our resident legal expert, criminal defense attorney Mr. Jeffrey W. Thorpe about what would happen if a prosecutor changes the charge against the defendant from the lower court to the appeals court.

B. JEWISH JUDICIAL REGULATIONS

The Jews took their legal instructions from the Mosaic Law as interpreted for them in the Talmud which is the collection of ancient Rabbinic writings consisting of the Mishnah and the Gemara, constituting the basis of religious authority in Orthodox Judaism. Here are the regulations they HAD TO UPHOLD, otherwise a defendant was dismissed:

- Arrest for a capital crime must be made in broad daylight, not at night.

In the case of Jesus: They ignored it and arrested Jesus at midnight.

- Arrest for a capital crime may not be made based on information by the offender's follower, because if the accused were a criminal, so were his followers.

In the case of Jesus: They ignored it and used Judas.

- No Jewish trial may be held at night; that is, between 6 P.M. and 6 A.M. Furthermore, a trial is never to be held before only one person so that partiality or prejudice can be avoided.

In the case of Jesus: They ignored it. Two of the three trials occur some time between 2 and 6 A.M., and they are before single individuals.

- Members of the Jewish court, after hearing testimony regarding the one accused of a capital crime, are not permitted to render an immediate verdict but are required instead to return to their homes for two days and nights, eating only light food, drinking only light wines, and sleeping well. Then they are to return and hear again the testimony against the accused and cast their vote.

In the case of Jesus: They ignored it.

- The Sanhedrin must vote one at a time, the younger men first, so as not to be influenced by the older men on the council.

In the case of Jesus: They ignored it. In the third trial, they all vote simultaneously.

Conclusion: This entire set of Jewish trials was absolutely wrong and they were the ones that should be found guilty of law breaking. But the Lord Jesus allowed it to happen.

One more thing, under Jewish law, no one person could act as a judge. The verdict was decided by a "court" of at least three. A more important case might be judged by a band of twenty-three known as the 'Lesser Sanhedrin'. The ultimate court was the 'Greater Sanhedrin', consisting of seventy to seventy-three men.

C. THE FIRST JEWISH COURT

John 18:12-14 Then the detachment of troops and the captain and the officers of the Jews arrested Jesus and bound Him. 13 And they led Him away to Annas first, for he was the father-in-law of Caiaphas who was high priest that year. 14 Now it was Caiaphas who advised the Jews that it was expedient that one man should die for the people.

After we read this, we have to wonder what could possibly bind God Almighty. He can measure the universe with the span of His hand; the heaven of heavens cannot contain Him; He spoke words and there was light from nothing. Even just a few minutes ago, when Jesus declared Himself with two words "I am," the power of His words knocked down over 600 soldiers flat on their backs.

Did those puny soldiers think that they bound Jesus in their rope? Seriously? Actually, they didn't even have to bind Him, because all these court proceedings were already a part of God's master plan because He knew that it had to happen this way.

But we still have to go back to the original question – What bound Him? He was bound by His love for you and me. No one in the universe ever can break His love for us, no one.

Please note that Jesus was tried illegally during the hours of darkness, by one man – Anna who was the father-in-law of Caiaphas the high priest at that time, was comparable to a Mafia godfather. So he was gonna make an offer Jesus could not refuse – execution.

Annas was the wealthiest and most influential man of the city. He had served as the high priest for seventeen years and was the high priest emeritus. He was the power behind the high echelon of the Jewish society. He owned and operated the entire money-changing system and the market in the outer court of the temple, which was corrupt to the core. They were the ones Jesus chased out of the temple. In other words, Jesus hurt his income. Now he had a personal vendetta against Jesus.

D. PETER'S FIRST DENIAL

John 18:15-18 And Simon Peter followed Jesus, and so did another disciple. Now that disciple was known to the high priest, and went with Jesus into the courtyard of the high priest. 16 But Peter stood at the door outside. Then the other disciple, who was known to the high priest, went out and spoke to her who kept the door, and brought Peter in. 17 Then the servant girl who kept the door said to Peter, "You are not also one of this Man's disciples, are you?" He said, "I am not." 18 Now the servants and officers who had made a fire of coals stood there, for it was cold, and they warmed themselves. And Peter stood with them and warmed himself.

Even though we all have to admit Peter's devotion to Jesus and courage, we notice that he walked right into temptation. This is what Jesus warned him about in the Garden.

Matthew 26:41 Watch and pray, lest you enter into temptation. The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak."

We do not know who the "other disciple" was who went before Peter to the home of the high priest. Some Bible commentators insist that it was John, however it is rather difficult to imagine how a fisherman could be acquainted with the high priest and his household. Since the Bible is silent, we would be silent for the identity of the "other disciple."

Please note Peter's progression into temptation and sin. His actions parallel the description of Psalm 1:1:

Psalm 1:1 Blessed is the man Who walks not in the counsel of the ungodly, Nor stands in the path of sinners, Nor sits in the seat of the scornful;

First, Peter walked "in the counsel of the ungodly" when he followed Jesus and went into the high priest's courtyard. Then, Peter stood with the enemy by the fire; and before long, he sat with the enemy according to Luke 22:55. Within a short time, he would deny his Lord three times.

E. ANNAS COULDN'T HANDLE THE TRUTH

John 18:19-24 The high priest then asked Jesus about His disciples and His doctrine. 20 Jesus answered him, "I spoke openly to the world. I always taught in synagogues and in the temple, where the Jews always meet, and in secret I have said nothing. 21 Why do you ask Me? Ask those who have heard Me what I said to them. Indeed they know what I said." 22 And when He had said these things, one of the officers who stood by struck Jesus with the palm of his hand, saying, "Do You answer the high priest like that?" 23 Jesus answered him, "If I have spoken evil, bear witness of the evil; but if well, why do you strike Me?" 24 Then Annas sent Him bound to Caiaphas the high priest.

By now, gloating, the seventy-year-old Annas probed Jesus on two counts: His doctrine and His disciples. In response, Jesus' answer merely placed the legal burden of proof on Anna's shoulders where it rightfully belonged. In our legal systems, prosecutor must prove that the defendant committed the crime beyond a reasonable doubt to the jury.

One of Annas' officers came to rescue by slapping Jesus which was another illegal activity. Since Annas could not handle Jesus' truth and logic, he sent Jesus to his not-so-bright son-in-law Caiaphas.

F. PETER'S SECOND AND THIRD DENIAL

John 18:25-27 Now Simon Peter stood and warmed himself. Therefore they said to him, "You are not also one of His disciples, are you?" He denied it and said, "I am not!" 26 One of the servants of the high priest, a relative of him whose ear Peter cut off, said, "Did I not see you in the garden with Him?" 27 Peter then denied again; and immediately a rooster crowed.

The scene changes back to the courtyard of the high priest Annas' house where Peter still lingered around the fire with the enemies of his Master Jesus. He should have been gone. But he remained by the fire even after the second denial, so it is no wonder that he was questioned again.

The third question came from one of Malchus' relatives. After all, this man had gotten a good look at Peter because he was probably standing close to Malchus when Peter lobbed off his ear.

Dr. Luke gives us another view at this point:

Luke 22:59-60 Then after about an hour had passed, another confidently affirmed, saying, "Surely this fellow also was with Him, for he is a Galilean." 60 But Peter said, "Man, I do not know what you are saying!" Immediately, while he was still speaking, the rooster crowed.

When Peter was denying that he was not associated with Jesus who was known as the prophet from Galilee, his Galileans northern drawl betrayed him, "No, I ain't."

It was at that point that the rooster began to crow just as Jesus had predicted. If Jesus was referring to the rooster around our church property, He would have said, "When that rooster shuts up for the first time..." I tell ya, that rooster never stops.

There are two things we can learn from the crowing of the rooster:

1) Jesus was totally in control of the situation, even though He was bound and being beaten by His enemies.

Peter should, by now, remember that Jesus had the authority over fish, animals, sea, death, even over demon-possessed men.

2) The crowing of the rooster was an invitation to repentance and a step toward restoration.

Again, Dr. Luke gives another insight that other Gospel writers skipped:

Luke 22:61-62 And the Lord turned and looked at Peter. And Peter remembered the word of the Lord, how He had said to him, "Before the rooster crows, you will deny Me three times." 62 So Peter went out and wept bitterly.

Jesus' look of love, not a cynical snort, broke Peter's heart.

I believe that it is worthwhile to contrast Peter and Judas: Peter wept over his sins and repented; but Judas regretted his sins, but only remorse. When Peter went out and wept bitterly, it was the dawning of a new day; but when Judas went out from the upper room, it was night. It is the contrast between godly sorrow that leads to true repentance, and the sorrow of the world from regret and remorse only leads to death.

G. REMINDERS

1) I am already tired of bickering and arguing amongst the GOP Presidential hopefuls in addition to Obama's blame game. No matter whatever the outcome of this election, our God is totally and absolutely in control, none of the Presidential candidates.

2) If you ever come to the point when you start to doubt God's love for you, may I suggest you take a good long look at the cross where Jesus died for your sin so that you might have eternal life in heaven?

3) Restoration and a new beginning do not start with remorse, but heart-felt repentance.