

MIXED EMOTIONS

Matthew 26:57-64

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Behind Him were His sermons; ahead, His suffering. Behind Him were His parables; ahead, His passion. Behind Him were His suppers of fellowship; ahead, His last supper of betrayal. Behind Him the delights of Galilee; ahead, dark Gethsemane. Prophecy was now to become practice.

Jesus and His entourage arrive at the city which is both His destination and His destiny. As He approaches the city, branches were thrown down on the road in front of Him. Some were so caught up they even used their coats, their cloaks. It was kind of a poor man's red-carpet treatment – a homemade ticker-tape parade. They shout together, "Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord. Hosanna to the Son of David. Hosanna in the highest."

There were those pulling for Him there, but there were also those pulling against Him. Pharisees. They heard the shouts. They were appalled by the blasphemy of it. This ragged man the Messiah? They ran out into the road and told Him He'd better shut His friends up before it was too late. "I tell you," Jesus said, "if these were silent, the very stones would cry out."

This entry of Jesus into Jerusalem is at the start of His last week. As you watch Him ride again this year into that city, as you've watched Him countless times before, it's like seeing a famous tragedy, as Walter Brueggemann says, acted out on the stage for the hundredth time and yet hoping against hope that maybe this time the impossible will happen and things will somehow go right in the end instead of going wrong – that Juliet will wake up from her drugged sleep before her young lover kills himself, that Cordelia will come alive in the old king's arms so his heart won't have to break after all.

As Jesus rides the colt into the city, we hope against hope that maybe everybody will recognize Him for who He is – not just the handful of followers with their palm branches but the Pharisees too, the Sanhedrin, the High Priest. Maybe even Pilate will recognize His messiahship. Maybe this time Pilate will sink to his knees before Him, and all through the city, Romans and Jews, rich men and beggars, saints and thieves, old and young will embrace one another and declare Him to be the Messiah. Maybe this time Judas will be loyal and Peter will be brave and the cross won't have to happen.

We hope about what might have been and what someday will be. But there are mixed emotions as the crowd shouts "Hosanna," and as the rocks prepare to cry out. There is a way in which the hope is blurred and shattered with the sadness, because sadness as well as triumph was in the air like the dust. You picture heroic parades where the esteemed lift their hands and wave to the crowd. There was none of that here. Jesus is not nodding and smiling and raising His arms. On the contrary. He is silent except when He speaks to the Pharisees.

Then He sees Jerusalem, and there is sadness in His heart. He comes around the bend in the road and reaches the top of the hill, and there it is all at once – the ancient, holy city, built on the high hills with its walls and domes shimmering in the spring sun. Jesus looks and weeps. (Walter Brueggemann, *A Room Called Remember*, p. 71-74, amended)

There are mixed emotions. Despair and hope. They travel together on that road to Jerusalem.

After the triumphal entry, after the hosannas had died down, there is the cleansing of the temple. There is a parable – or two, or three. There is the Lord's Supper, foreshadowing the events to come. There is the agony of Gethsemane. And then the kiss of Judas.

Judas kisses. Jesus is bound. The feet of 600 Roman soldiers march. It was late and there were no idle saunterers in the streets of Jerusalem, and the tramp of the Roman guard must have been too often heard to startle sleepers or to lead to the inquiry why that glare of lamps and torches. The prisoner – Jesus, now guarded by both Roman soldiers and servants of the High Priest.

Six stages of questions – six portions to the trial. First, and ironically, Jesus was taken to Annas, though he was not actually High Priest at the time. If his sons (five of them), a son-in-law, and a grandson were puppets when they enjoyed the office of High Priest – then he was the puppeteer. If he could not enjoy the official status of High Priest, he could enjoy all the power that accompanied that office.

Annas's family was sure to have profited from the Temple traffic, from the tables which Jesus, Himself, had arrogantly overturned just shortly before His arrest, because he wasn't going to allow them to make a profit center out of God's holy Temple. Only John's Gospel speaks of this first interrogation of Jesus.

The questions began:

What are you teaching?
Who are your disciples?

“I have spoken openly to the world; I always taught in the synagogues and in the Temple, where all Jews come together. I have no secrets. Don't ask me – ask those who have heard me teach – they know what I have said.”

Slap! “Is that any way to answer the High Priest?”

Annas sends him to Caiaphas, hands bound.

What a contrast it all seemed between the Purification of the Temple only a few days before, when Jesus had overturned the trafficking tables of the High-Priest, and as He now stood, a bound Prisoner before him, at the mercy of every person who might curry favor by wantonly insulting him?

Before Caiaphas, it's hard to find any witnesses, and their testimony is anything but consistent.

“I heard him say, ‘I am able to destroy the Temple of God and to rebuild it in three days.’”

Another said, “I’ll destroy this Temple with hands, and in three days I will build another Temple without hands.”

“Well,” said Caiaphas, looking the Son of God eye-to-eye, “what’s your defense to the charges against the Temple?”

V. 63 – But Jesus Kept Silent

There is much chattering on the part of the accusers, but when it comes to the defense, we find silence. Silence permeates the pages of the account. Jesus does not defend himself. No witnesses – not a single witness offers a defense. Remember, the disciples have fled. Throughout, God the Father did not utter a single word, as He had at the baptism. Silence. Of course, Jesus never said that he would have any part in destroying the Temple. He is saying that His body will be destroyed, and that He will be raised again in three days (John 2:18ff.).

Despite the fact that the witnesses were contorting His words, both twisting what He had said and claiming that He had spoken words which He, Himself, had never uttered, Jesus is silent.

Maybe it was in grade school. . .

Maybe it was recently. . .

Someone accuses you. But you know you are completely innocent. My, how the defending darts spew forth at the slightest provocation. “I did no such thing.” How rare is silence.

But the prophet had predicted His silence so long ago.

Isaiah 53:7

He was oppressed and He was afflicted, yet He did not open His mouth; like a lamb that is led to slaughter, and like a sheep that is silent before its shearers. So he did not open his mouth.

Only one thing remained. Jesus knew it as well as Caiaphas. It was to put the question, which Jesus could not refuse to answer, and which, once answered, must lead either to His acknowledgment or to His condemnation.

It was a question that had loomed large over Jesus from the beginning. The dialogue could no longer be delayed. Jesus could no longer escape the question by escaping the crowd. The question was there; it filled the entire room. Does this Rabbi think he is

the Messiah?

the Anointed One?

the Holy One of Israel?

the One upon whom the ends of the ages hinge?

Caiaphas cannot disguise it any longer. Though by law he ought not make the witness testify against himself, the witnesses, by their testimony, had been too weak, too contradictory to condemn Jesus. So he asks, “I adjure you, by the Living God, you tell us, Are you the Christ, the Son of God?”

The silence must have seemed an eternity – that moment of silence between the question and the answer. Jesus answers straight-faced, without flare, without undue emotion. “You have said it yourself; nevertheless I tell you. Hereafter you shall see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of power and coming in the clouds of heaven.”

Jesus had just claimed to be the Son of God, the Anointed One, the Christ. There was no mistaking his claim. He was speaking in exalted terms of the Son of Man coming in the clouds of heaven. It was too much. “Why do we need any more witnesses?” declared the high priest, as he ripped his clothes.

No more secret Messiah.

No more cryptic disguise.

Jesus had spoken plainly for all to hear.

This Rabbi claims to be the Son of God.

They all heard it that day. As the law directed when blasphemy was spoken, the High Priest rent his garments. Christ would neither explain, modify nor retract his statements – He was guilty as charged.

Caiaphas turns to the council and replies, “What is your verdict?”

There was no doubt. According to Leviticus 24:16 the one who blasphemed the name of the Lord shall be put to death, shall be stoned. There could be no other sentence. He must be put to death.

But being Jews and being under oppression they could not conduct a capital punishment campaign without the help of the Romans. It didn’t stop the pronouncement, however, because with the unison of a choral refrain, those present on the council shouted, “He is deserving of death.” They could not wait for the Romans to help before their bloodthirstiness could be satisfied. They began slapping the Son of God and spitting in His face.

Night passes.

The third trial begins the next morning, tipping a hat to the legal necessity of conducting Jewish trials in the daylight (Matthew 27:1-2).

With the council assembled, the question was repeated. “If you are the Christ, tell us.”

“If I tell you, you will not believe; and if I ask a question, you will not answer. But from now on the Son of Man will be seated at the right hand of the power of God.”

“Are you then saying that you are the Son of God?”

Luke 22:70:

“I am,” He replied.

If you’ve ever had any doubt that Jesus claimed to be the Messiah, you can safely tuck that doubt away. Say that He was wrong, say He was a lunatic, say He meant well but was misled, but never distort the evidence. He claimed to be the Son of God.

He claimed to be the Son of Man figure of the prophet Daniel, the one who comes in the clouds of heaven.

Arriving at the paved courtyard outside the Fortress of Antonia, which overlooked the temple grounds, Pilate, the Roman governor, came out to hear their charges against this accused rabble-rouser. “What charges are you bringing against this man?” Pilate asked gruffly. “If he were not a criminal,” they replied, “we would not have handed him over to you.” They countered his sarcasm with their own. There followed a string of spurious charges of political subversion which Pilate decided he would have to investigate for himself.

Luke 23:1-3.

Three specific charges against Jesus are brought before Pilate:

1. He’s misleading the nation.
2. He’s opposing Roman taxation.
3. He’s claiming to be king.

All political in nature and none true. He was not a political prisoner; He was a religious criminal. He had not opposed tax; He had said “Give to Caesar that which belongs to Caesar.” He never claimed to be an earthly king, for His kingdom was not of this world.

Pilate heard the charges, but he could find no law which had really been broken.

Pilate learned that he is a Galilean, so he sends Him to Herod – passing the buck – hoping not to have to make a decision. Herod just happened to be in Jerusalem at that time.

Only Luke tells us (23:6-12) about this episode before Herod Antipas.

Luke 23:15

Pilate sends him to Herod in order that Herod might provide a second ruler’s testimony to Jesus’ innocence.

Herod was so excited to meet Jesus. He had heard about all the wonderful, miraculous things He had done. “Maybe this Jesus will do some of that magic or perform a miracle before my very eyes.”

He asked Jesus question after question, but Jesus was silent. He asked another, but still silence. He could find no question that Jesus would answer. Even as the chief priests and scribes stood before Him, vehemently hurling accusations against Him, He remained silent. Herod couldn't resist – he mocked Him, placing a gorgeous robe on His back and sending Him back to Pilate.

So Pilate returned to the noisy crowd gathered outside to announce his verdict: “I find no basis for a charge against him.”

There was an angry stirring, mumbling from the religious leaders responsible for the crowd. Sensing that they might not be speaking for the people, Pilate attempted to subvert their little plot. “But. . .” he continued, holding up his hand to quiet them, “it is your custom for me to release to you one prisoner at the time of the Passover. Do you want me to release ‘the king of the Jews?’”

For a number of years, the Romans had granted this concession to the cantankerous Jewish community, a token compensation for their loss of jurisdiction over capital crimes. He was giving the people the opportunity to contradict their manipulative leaders, for whom Pilate had no love. But the members of the Sanhedrin were too quick. “No, not him!” they shouted back, urging the crowd to join them, “Give us Barabbas!”

“Yes,” the crowd shouted, “give us Barabbas!” (another political prisoner who had committed murder in an earlier insurrection).

Sometime in the middle of the night she awoke with her forehead sweaty and her heart pounding. It had been a nightmare, just a simple nightmare. Or had it? She could take no chances. “Pilate, Pilate, have nothing to do with Jesus. Don't take part in His death. I had a horrible nightmare about Him last night. Pilate, it's an eerie feeling. Leave this righteous man alone.”

Pilate didn't know how to respond to his wife's nightmare. The crowd had grown unruly and a riot was always a possibility with these contentious people. A riot meant he'd lose his job, his fame, his position. He really hated being manipulated by them, and he genuinely thought Jesus was innocent. Maybe he could win the sympathy of the common folks by beating Jesus up, having Him scourged. This punishment, which stopped just short of death, might satisfy their lust for blood and allow him to release the man without actually taking his life.

They tied his hands to the post, and two men with whips, short whips of braided leather attached to a wooden handle, began to rip His back, buttocks, and legs apart with full force. While they waited for the governor's next instructions, the soldiers decided to make sport of Jesus, putting a crown of thorns on Jesus' head, mocking Him, striking Him on the face, bowing down before Him. “Hail, King of the Jews. Hail, King of the Jews.” They put a reed in His hand – a fake scepter, and began to beat Him on the head with it. Eventually, Pilate led Him out the people again, but if his sentence had been calculated to win Jesus sympathy, it had failed. As soon as the chief priests and their officials saw Him, they began to shout once more, “Crucify Him! Crucify Him!”

Pilate continued to debate with the Jewish leaders for a time until Caiaphas, played the trump card. The politically powerful chief priest, said “If you let Jesus go, then you're not really a friend of

Caesar.” Pilate folded his cards and turned Jesus over to be crucified, even as he runs water over his hands and declares, “I have nothing to do with the death of this man. See to that yourselves,” as he washes his hands before the multitude. “I am innocent of His blood.”

Jesus stood that day before Annas, before Caiaphas, before Pilate, before Herod, and before the mob of the people. And claimed by His presence and His words to be the Son of God. The Jews thought He was a blasphemer. Pilate thought Him simply confused. And Herod had hoped for nothing but a magic trick.

Now the question turns to you. Is Jesus the Son of God? As they answered, you must answer. It’s the ultimate question for your life.

Matthew 21:6-10
Who is this?