

SUNDAY SCHOOL LESSON

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TRIAL AND CRUCIFIXION

Reading: John 19:1-24

Today's lesson should have a great effect on us all. We have two chapters in all the four gospels giving us details of all that went on in the trial and crucifixion of the Lord Jesus. Reading them all the way through carefully, you can clearly see the evilness of the Jewish elders who were determined to have Jesus put to death. So much of the trial of Christ was illegal according the law but they were prepared to bend the law to get their own way. However we must remember that God was in control. He could have stopped the trial or death of Jesus at any time, yet in His love for us, God allowed His beloved son to suffer as he did for you and me. Think about this carefully as we go through the lesson. Many of the details of the crucifixion you will know so I want us to consider some of the unusual points you may not have seen.

We left Jesus having been taken in the garden by the soldiers and the disciples had fled.

The trial of Jesus took place in six stages, three before the Jewish elders and three before the Gentile authorities. Only John records the first stage which was before Annas who though he was deposed as High Priest by the Romans, received recognition among the Jews.

He was immensely rich and powerful and head of the Jewish council, the Sanhedrin. Annas questioned Jesus about his disciples and doctrine. Jesus in reply referred to those who had heard him and pointed out that he had spoken openly wherever he had gone. Annas had little patience with the man who stood before him and commanded that Jesus be hit. This was done as the margin tells us with, as the word implies, a clenched fist. This was the first of many blows which was to leave the Lord disfigured and broken. In Isaiah 52:14 this is spoken of and Jesus is said to be marred more than any man. From here Jesus was bound and sent to the high Priest, which at the time was Caiaphas.

The arrest of Jesus probably occurred in the early hours after midnight, so Jesus was brought to trial before Jewish elders in the cold dark hours before dawn. Such a trial was illegal as no capital cases were to be considered after sunset. Many of the elders were there and false witnesses had been bribed and brought in to give evidence against Jesus. However it was soon clear that the witnesses began to contradict each other and Caiaphas was desperate to get a charge against him, in a few hours many of the ordinary people would come flocking into the courts looking for the prophet from Galilee and the High Priest might lose his prisoner. One thing they did come up with that Jesus said "He would destroy the temple and build it again in three days..." This was their interpretation of what Jesus had said meaning the temple of his body, but even if this was true it was not an offence which required death. Caiaphas then clearly asked Jesus "are you the Son of God, the Christ to come?" Jesus' reply that, "hereafter shall ye see the Son of man sitting on the right hand of power and coming in the clouds of heaven...", this was the confession Caiaphas wanted, he could now charge Jesus with blasphemy before the Jews and treason before the Romans. He and the elders gave an emotional outburst and ripped their clothes. Although this was approved as a gesture of disassociation from blasphemy it was forbidden for the High Priest (Lev 21:10 tells us this). Here the unworthy Caiaphas stood before the true High Priest, even Jesus, and pronounced the sentence of death on him. Jesus was once more beaten and spat on – what terrible treatment for this noble figure.

The third trial was at sunrise when the full assembly of the 70 elders was called to confirm the sentence. They now sent Jesus to Pontius Pilate, the Roman governor.

Trial by the Gentiles

Pontius Pilate was not popular amongst the Jews. His inadequacies had been reported to Rome and Pilate knew that if another upheaval occurred he could lose his job. Pilate could find no fault in Jesus, he knew the Jews had delivered him because of envy but he dared not ignore the claims made against Jesus because they were against Rome also and this could be serious. He could scarcely believe that the battered humble figure before him was a trouble maker. His wife had told him to have nothing to do with the sentence of Jesus because she had had a dream about this man from Nazareth and she was afraid. Pilate after questioning him at length said that he could find no fault in Jesus but the Jews insisted he was worthy of death. What could Pilate do when he found out that Jesus was a Galilean? He saw a way out and sent him to the ruler over Galilee, Herod Antipas.

Second Gentile Trial

Only in Luke can we read of this incident. He records that Herod was pleased to see Jesus because he had heard much about him. He hoped he would do some kind of miracle but Jesus knew this evil man and refused to answer his questions. Herod annoyed by Jesus set his men of war on Jesus who mocked him. Jesus was mocked by all those present, he was given kingly garments and made fun of and then sent back to Pontius Pilate.

Third Trial (before Pontius Pilate)

Justice could not now be expected from Pilate. He had changed his mind once and he was soon to receive more pressure from the Jews and would give in to them. It was the time when Pilate was to release a prisoner, however when the people assembled together the priests arranged that enough of their men would cry out for the release of the criminal Barabbas, and the crucifixion of Jesus. They made it quite clear to Pilate that if he let Jesus go then he was no friend of Caesar as Jesus had called himself king. Pilate was now trapped, he knew Jesus was innocent yet he was a coward and delivered Jesus to the Jews to be crucified. However he took water and washed his hands before the multitude saying that "I am innocent of the blood of this just person". This was just a pathetic attempt to excuse his weakness, but was a sin in God's eyes.

Crucified

To picture the Roman soldiers driving large nails through the hands of the Lord into the timber of the stake fills us with horror. This dreadful agony was after he had been flogged with a leather whip in which were sewn pieces of bone to rip the skin and cause great pain. The crown of thorns thrust down upon his head again causing terrible suffering. Jesus was crucified at 9 am outside the walls of the city at a place called Golgotha, or the place of the skull. Jesus was crucified in the middle of two thieves. He was offered vinegar to drink, this is a type of fermented wine, but Jesus would not take it. All those standing around mocked at Jesus crying out to him to save himself. The soldiers cast lots for his clothes and sat down to gloat over the suffering.

Pilate wrote a title "Jesus of Nazareth the King of the Jews" and set it on the cross by Jesus' limp and bleeding body. Jesus was exercising his mind in spiritual things to enable him to endure the present pain. He had no thoughts of hate towards those who mocked him, instead he said "Father forgive them for they know not what they do". Jesus hoped that even these evil men might have an opportunity to repent and turn from their evil ways. This was the greatest love a man could show, care and thought for others at a time of great

personal need. Jesus even made provision for his mother, asking John to look after her. He thought nothing of himself.

Jesus was on the stake for 3 hours, this was a very short time for crucifixion – a direct answer to the pleading of his prayer to let this cup be taken from me.....

During this time there was a strange darkness over the land, this would shield Jesus from the burning sun, and would also hide him from the mocking crowd to give him a little privacy. At the end of this time Jesus cried out and then died. As this happened the earth quaked, rocks were thrown around by the moving earth and the veil in the temple was mysteriously ripped from the top to the bottom. Why? The veil separated the Holy place from the Most Holy place where the presence of God was felt to be. By the death of the Lord Jesus and his work as our High Priest, the way into the Most Holy place or presence of God was made clear. The suffering and the pain was over, Jesus had led a sinless life and now he rested in the sleep of death having obeyed to the letter the work of the Father.

All during the trials of the Lord Jesus in the Jewish Council there were two men who were secretly followers of Jesus and who did all they could to help get Jesus' released, yet we know it was impossible because of the prophecy about his life and death. One of them a very rich man called Joseph of Arimathea went and begged for the body of Jesus so that he might take him from the cross and bury him. Pilate was amazed that Jesus was already dead; nevertheless Jesus' body was thrust through with a spear to make sure he was indeed dead. Joseph then took the body and wrapped it in clean linen and placed the body in his own new tomb, this was not an easy thing to do... imagine trying to take out the nails, and the body would also be pouring with blood. Joseph's love for his Lord made him want to do all he could at great expense to himself. Leaving the body in the tomb, he set a large stone in the entrance.

The Jews would have watched this and to make perfectly sure the body was not removed told Pilate about the claim of Jesus to rise after three days. They were afraid that the disciples would come and steal the body and say that he had risen. It was agreed to seal the stone and set soldiers to watch the tomb to make sure that nothing was tampered with. This they thought would be the end of the carpenter of Nazareth whom they hated so much. Little did they realise what was to come....

Extra work: Open your Bibles at Psalm 22 and find as many quotations as you can which were fulfilled at the time of crucifixion of Jesus.