

When God Was On Trial – 1

You've heard many times from this pulpit the Law of the Tea-Bag. If you want to make tea, you add hot water. What determines the colour and the taste of the water? What is in the tea-bag. If you get a pale yellow, and you wanted a dark red, is it the hot water's fault? No, what is inside the tea-bag determines what kind of taste you get. The hot water just brings out what was always inside the tea-bag.

In the same way, when God wants to show you what is really inside you, He pours the hot water of problems, pressure, difficulties, conflict, temptations and trials. He pours on you a financial squeeze, an unfair boss, an impossible work situation, a health problem, a selfish spouse, a rebellious child. How you respond is not the fault of the situation, but of what is already inside us.

Many Christians do not understand the Law of the Tea-Bag. They are still fighting the hot water. Such Christians don't see that a sovereign God has allowed the hot water of their spouse's selfishness, or the financial trial, or the health issue to be poured on them, so you can deal with what is coming out of your tea-bag.

If you keep focusing on the hot water, you miss the point of what God is doing. God doesn't want to change the temperature of the water – He wants to change the taste of the water. He wants to deal with what is coming out of your tea-bag.

One of the most glorious examples of the beauty and perfection of Christ is to see how He responded in His sufferings and agonies on Maundy Thursday and Good Friday. In this account of the betrayal, trial, and denial, we see what happens when you add hot water to Jesus Christ. Specifically, the hot water of betrayal, trial, and denial.

The betrayal and trials of Jesus are actually a series of events beginning late Thursday night, continuing right through the night and early hours of Friday, finishing with Jesus being put on the cross at 9am on Friday, for six hours.

It is a long and arduous, sleepless night, filled with trials, mockings and beatings before He is crucified Friday morning. In many ways, the great suffering Passion of Jesus begins right after the Upper Room Discourse and the High Priestly prayer of Jesus, as Jesus goes into the Garden. And yet the way He referred to all of this was *the hour that the Son of Man should be glorified*. His glory begins, not with the triumphant notes of victory, but with suffering glory.

He is glorified because not only is He accomplishing redemption for us, but because the suffering is the hot water bringing out the glory of His character. As we walk through this account, look carefully to see what comes out of our Lord Jesus as he experiences three agonies. A sickening betrayal, a sham trial, and a sad denial make up three torturous, hot-water agonies that reveal His glory as the spotless Lamb of God.

What are we supposed to do? Look. Admire. Adore. Weep. Compare what come forth from him with what comes out of us. And then look in faith for the Spirit of Christ to produce the same life in you and me.

I. Sickening Betrayal

¹ When Jesus had spoken these words, He went out with His disciples over the Brook Kidron, where there was a garden, which He and His disciples entered. ² And Judas, who betrayed Him, also knew the place; for Jesus often met there with His disciples. ³ Then Judas, having received a detachment of *troops*, and officers from the chief priests and Pharisees, came there with lanterns, torches, and weapons.

We recall Judas had left the Upper Room after having received the sop, the bread, dipped in the dish from Jesus. He left before Jesus instituted the Lord's Supper, before Jesus gave the teaching of John

14 through 16. In the middle of the discourse, Jesus told His disciples to get up and walk with Him, as they headed out. That bought extra time for Jesus to teach. Very likely, Judas had gone to the Upper Room with his detachment of troops and officers, and found it empty. Judas would then have guessed that the most likely place for Jesus to have gone was Gethsemane.

While Judas is headed there, the other Gospels tell us of the enormous anguish Jesus began experiencing in Gethsemane. The sheer weight of Calvary began clouding His soul, the storm of God's judgement on sin began thundering, and felt the chill wind of Calvary filling his soul with deadly sorrow. Three times He prayed alone, asking for His Father to remove the cup, and three times, the answer was no. He returned to Peter, James, and John, who had gone further into the garden with Him, asking them to pray with Him, but each time He found them overcome with fatigue from the sorrow of the evening.

Now, the time of praying and asking for prayer is over. Jesus and the disciples hear the sound of footsteps, the jangle of weapons and armour, the rustle in the undergrowth and the low mumble of a large group of men come to arrest Jesus, as if He were some dangerous criminal, known for violence and insurrection. So normal and similar to His companions did Jesus look, and so cowardly was Judas, that he had arranged to mark Jesus with a fake kiss, as if he'd just arrived at the Garden late.

It was the Lord Jesus' human ancestor David, who under the guidance of the Holy Spirit captured the pain of this betrayal. ⁹ Even my own familiar friend in whom I trusted, Who ate my bread, Has lifted up *his* heel against me. (Psalm 41:9)

¹² For *it* is not an enemy *who* reproaches me; Then I could bear *it*. Nor *is it* one *who* hates me who has exalted *himself* against me; Then I could hide from him. ¹³ But *it was* you, a man my equal, My companion and my acquaintance. ¹⁴ We took sweet counsel together, *And* walked to the house of God in the throng. (Psalm 55:12–14)

Nothing hurts quite as much as to have someone you mentored, invested in, trained, bared your heart to, turn on you. Nothing stings as much as an insider using his inside knowledge, his inside trust and connections to do you harm.

But what is coming out of Jesus in response to this sickening betrayal? The other Gospels record Jesus as addressing Judas with the term, “Friend.” “Friend, why have you come?” He treats Judas with kindness, to the very end. But He also shows kindness to another group – His own scared disciples.

⁴ Jesus therefore, knowing all things that would come upon Him, went forward and said to them, “Whom are you seeking?” ⁵ They answered Him, “Jesus of Nazareth.” Jesus said to them, “I am *He*.” And Judas, who betrayed Him, also stood with them. ⁶ Now when He said to them, “I am *He*,” they drew back and fell to the ground. ⁷

This is a remarkable moment, not recorded in the other Gospels. When Jesus identifies Himself as the one they are seeking, He uses the words, “I AM”. You'll notice in your Bible the word “He” is supplied in italics to translate it better into English, but the original in Greek is simply *ego eimi*, I am. Jesus is not saying any less than “I am the Jesus you are looking for.” But He is saying much more. Throughout this book He has identified Himself with I AM statements. I am the Bread of Life. I am the Light of the world. I am the door. I am the Good Shepherd. I am the Resurrection and the life. I am the way, the truth, and the life. I am the true vine. Seven times. But now, just as He did when He told them that He was before Abraham, He says simply, I am. He identifies Himself as I AM THAT I AM. And when He says these words, the men all fall backwards. The very name of

God causes this cohort of soldiers to be flattened as if a wind had just blown them down. It's the last time Jesus says I AM in the book, and it is said to a group who reject Him. Those who believe Jesus is I AM would fall forward voluntarily bowing and worshipping. Those who reject Him fall backwards in divine judgement.

Now Jesus uses His authority to shelter and protect.

Then He asked them again, "Whom are you seeking?" And they said, "Jesus of Nazareth." ⁸ Jesus answered, "I have told you that I am *He*. Therefore, if you seek Me, let these go their way," ⁹ that the saying might be fulfilled which He spoke, "Of those whom You gave Me I have lost none."

Jesus, the Substitute even before He is on the cross, shielding others from punishment, seeking to protect His disciples. But at least one of them decides the best way to deal with this situation is through violence.

¹⁰ Then Simon Peter, having a sword, drew it and struck the high priest's servant, and cut off his right ear. The servant's name was Malchus. ¹¹ So Jesus said to Peter, "Put your sword into the sheath. Shall I not drink the cup which My Father has given Me?" ¹² Then the detachment of *troops* and the captain and the officers of the Jews arrested Jesus and bound Him.

As Peter attempts to defend the messianic kingdom with violence, Jesus points out that resisting this moment would be resisting the very reason He came: to drink the cup of suffering as the sin-bearer of the world. The Gospel of Luke tells us something remarkable: Jesus touched his ear and healed him. Imagine performing a healing miracle on your enemies; the ones who have come to illegally arrest and try you. It's in fact the last miracle, Jesus performs before the final recorded miracle in John 21 after the resurrection.

What comes out of Jesus when you pour the hot water of betrayal on Him? Meekness and kindness. Kindness to Judas, kindness to the disciples, kindness to Malchus.

They bind him, as if He is a dangerous criminal, likely to run or harm someone else. And as if their ropes could hold someone who just made them fall back when He said His name, and could restore a severed body part with a touch. The ridiculousness of rebellion against the Creator on display.

The agony of sickening betrayal was followed by a second agony.

II. Sham Trial

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.

Jesus actually appears at six trials from Thursday night into early Friday morning. Three are Jewish trials, held in the middle of the night, seeking the death penalty for blasphemy. Two are Roman trials, phase 1 and phase 2 before Pilate, seeking the death penalty for rebellion against Rome, held in the early hours of the morning. The sixth trial happens in between the trials with Pilate, and it's almost a halfway Roman-Jewish trial, as Jesus stands before Herod, Rome's puppet king of Galilee.

Annas was not the high priest, but he had been for many years earlier. In fact, the Romans had expelled him from the position because of how corrupt he was. When the Romans are finding a Jewish High Priest to be greedy and corrupt, you know it's bad.

But Annas was still very powerful. Annas' family had been high priest through six generations, which no one in that era of Jewish history had equalled. It was probably testimony to just how corrupt and politically savvy the family was. He was the father-in-law of Caiaphas, the present high priest. He's referred to here as the High Priest, because he still had that honorary position: we would say high priest emeritus.

¹⁹ 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."

Annas tries to find some accusations against Jesus in what He had taught and done. Jesus replies by insisting that witnesses be brought. Jewish law required two to three witnesses to establish any kind of accusation. Jesus knows this trial is illegal and is simply calling for proper procedure. Annas does not like that.

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.

Now Jesus is sent to His second Jewish trial, conducted by Caiaphas and the Sanhedrin. The other three Gospels give us the details of this trial. This trial was illegal in multiple ways.

- 1) The trial was held in the wrong place - a private home, rather than in the temple precincts, or some public place where witnesses might be easily brought.
- 2) The trial was held at night, when it was difficult (if not impossible) to subpoena witnesses at that hour; in fact, there is no record that any attempt was made to hear witnesses concerning this Jesus of Nazareth, (Dt 17:6);
- 3) The trial was convened with undue haste.
- 4) False witnesses were sought and bribed.
- 5) There was no careful warning of witnesses concerning the results of perjury.
- 6) Attempts were made to force Jesus to bear witness against Himself.
- 7) Jesus was not released when witnesses against Him disagreed among themselves.
- 8) Execution was carried out immediately, without allowing time to find witnesses in support of the accused.

In other words, the Sanhedrinists did not meet to try Jesus, but to condemn Him; He was guilty before the trial commenced.

Because this trial was illegal, Jesus remained silent as accusations were hurled against Him. Finally, when asked under oath if He did indeed claim to be Messiah, the very God, He affirmed the charge, adding that one day He would return in a display of infinite power proving His claim. Once He said that, the court felt they had all the proof they needed to convict and condemn Him on the charge of blasphemy.

"It was...required that after condemning a criminal to death the Sanhedrin should mourn and fast all that day; but no sooner was Jesus condemned than [they]... arose from their seats and....spat on His face, they buffeted Him, they blindfolded Him and, striking Him, challenged Him, as He was a prophet, to [tell] who smote Him." (David Smith, The Days of His Flesh)

The rabbis later sought to rewrite history, and included in the Talmud a story of one Yeshu, who

was led through the city for forty days, with a herald going before Him, announcing that He had been sentenced to death by stoning as a deceiver of the people, and inviting any who could testify of His innocence to come forward and do so."

They then took Him to a dungeon to await the dawn when this illegal verdict could be "validated".

The third Jewish trial takes place just after dawn, where Jesus formally condemned by the Sanhedrin. Mark 15:1 says, "Immediately, in the morning, the chief priests held a consultation with the elders and scribes and the whole council; and they bound Jesus, led Him away, and delivered Him to Pilate. (Mark 15:1) The purpose of this assembly was to cover the illegal nighttime proceedings with a gloss of legitimacy. Three trials, in the space of a few hours.

It is one of the most telling events in history: when humans put God on trial, when creatures accused and tried the Creator, when we put God in the dock and read out our accusations. No folk tale or fairy tale could capture it: the mice trying and judging the cat, the Lilliputians trying Gulliver. This is truly the pots indicting the Potter, mortals seeking the death penalty for the Immortal. And in an irony that only God could write, it is one of the greatest indictments on mankind. If we were seeking courtroom evidence that man is rebellious, arrogant and unrighteous, look no further than the day when man put God on trial.

We can only marvel at the meekness for the Son of God to have submitted to a sham trial. For the author of justice to stand in the dock and be accused by guilty sinners, to have His creatures sit in judgement on Him.

III. Sad Denial

¹⁵ 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.

²⁵ 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. (John 18:1–27)

It looks as if John himself was somehow known to the High Priest, which allowed him access into the courtyard. John gets Peter in, and at that point the girl keeping the doors asks Peter if he isn't one of the disciples. First denial. Around the fire with the servants and officers, someone again recognises Peter. Second denial. And then a relative of the man whose ear Peter cut off, is sure this is the same guy who cut off Malchus' ear. Third denial. The rooster crows, and at that very moment, Jesus is being led to the dungeon, and looks over at Peter, and Peter knows he has just fulfilled the prophecy that Jesus made, and he denied, that he would deny Jesus three times before the rooster crowed.

At that moment, Peter went out and wept bitterly.

It is interesting that it was Peter who wept bitterly, and not Christ. For here was one of his closest earthly friends, one of the inner three with James and John. And in His hour of greatest need, everyone else has fled, and Peter disowns Jesus to save his own skin. If you ever needed an

illustration that the best of men are at best, men, here it is. For all his vehement protestations of loyalty, when the hot water was poured on Peter, what came out of his heart was man-pleasing fear.

But what came out of Christ's heart was understanding. First, because He predicted it would happen, seeking to forewarn Peter of his own instability, and ignorance of his condition. Second, after Christ rises from the dead, He meets the apostles back up in Galilee on the shores of the lake. And there, over a breakfast of fish, Jesus publicly, in front of the others asks Peter, Simon, son of Jonah, do you love me? Peter says he does. Jesus asks the question three times. Why? So that Peter can deny his denials. Peter can walk back his fear and shame, repent of it, and publicly emerge again as a humbled and courageous leader of the twelve.

This is why when John opened the book in chapter 1, and said, “We have seen His glory”, I don't think John meant the shining glory on the mount of Transfiguration – an event which John doesn't choose to record in His Gospel. He means the glory of all that God is, the beauty of the full character of God in Christ.

And we see His glory in new, unprecedented ways, when we pass the black light of suffering over Him. No revenge. No retaliation. No cursing. No self-pity. No anger at God. No despair. The hot water of betrayal, injustice and denial draws out of Christ kindness, meekness, patience, endurance.

This is a Lion acting like a Lamb out of heroic love for His people.

Meekness and majesty,
Manhood and Deity,
In perfect harmony,
The Man who is God.
Lord of eternity
Dwells in humanity,
Kneels in humility
And washes our feet.
O what a mystery,
Meekness and majesty.
Bow down and worship
For this is your God,
This is your God.
Father's pure radiance,
Perfect in innocence,
Yet learns obedience
To death on a cross.
Suffering to give us life,
Conquering through sacrifice,
And as they crucify
Prays: 'Father forgive.'

I want this kind of heart in my trials. I want the hot water of betrayal, unfairness, slander, financial pressures, medical problems, family conflict, persecution for my faith to draw out something the world seldom sees. The Bible tells me it is mine if I repent of my selfish flesh, and trust in His Spirit and Word. The Bible says if you are one of Christ's sheep, one of His people, then you can, by the same power that animated Jesus that night, put off the evil responses coming out of us, be washed and cleansed, and then replace them with Christlike responses.