

The Glory of Jesus' Suffering, Death, and Resurrection

Lesson Four Christ Is Rejected by His Own

*He was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows,
and familiar with suffering. (Isaiah 53:3)*

1. Rejected by the Sanhedrin, which rejects the truth
2. Rejected by Peter, who is ashamed of the truth
3. Rejected by Judas, who fails to understand the truth

Worship

Read responsively Isaiah 53:1-3.

A: Who has believed our message

B: And to whom has the arm of the LORD been revealed?

A: He grew up before him like a tender shoot,

B: And like a root out of dry ground.

A: He had no beauty or majesty to attract us to him,

B: Nothing in his appearance that we should desire him.

A: He was despised and rejected by men,

B: A man of sorrows, and familiar with suffering.

A: Like one from whom men hide their faces

B: He was despised, and we esteemed him not.

Prayer: Lord Jesus, as we watch you being despised and rejected by your own people and denied by one of your dearest disciples, may we recognize also our own natural inclinations to despise you in pride and deny you from fear. Help us see your willingness to face the condemnation that should rightly have fallen on us, that we may marvel forever at the wonder of your grace and boldly declare you before the world. Amen.

Introduction

Scripture references:

Matthew 26:57–27:10

Mark 14:53–15:1

Luke 22:54-71; 18:12-27

John 18:12-27

What often takes place in our nation's courtrooms sometimes leads us to doubt our justice system. Justice is supposed to be blind, blind to anything that would pervert and twist the search for the truth. However, sometimes it seems that justice is not only blind but deaf and dumb as well—to the truth, that is.

However, that is nothing new. The greatest travesty of justice happened long ago in a Jewish courtroom and before a Roman governor. There we see Jesus unjustly rejected by his own nation and also by the authorities God ordained to maintain justice. However, right when darkness was ruling, we find the glory of the gospel shining brightly.

Background

The Jewish Sanhedrin, before whom Jesus stood, wielded significant power over the lives of the Jewish people. The Sanhedrin was an all-in-one mixture of what we would call the judicial, legislative, and executive branches of government. It was made up of the chief priests (representatives of the most powerful priestly families from which Rome selected the high priest), the elders (heads of other powerful and influential families), and the teachers of the law (mostly Pharisees).

Presiding over this proud body was the high priest, who was supposed to have been a direct descendant of Aaron. However, Herod the Great and other Roman authorities after him had made the office of high priest a political plum. They installed and deposed high priests at will. The current high priest was Caiaphas, the son-in-law of Annas, a powerful man who himself had been a high priest.

As we put together the account of all four evangelists, we find that Jesus was first taken to Annas. This served as an opportunity to put together a good case against Jesus (a pretrial hearing as we would call it) while the Sanhedrin was being quickly gathered for its emergency, late-night meeting.

Following this was a middle-of-the-night trial before Caiaphas and the whole Sanhedrin, in which Jesus was condemned. However, because Jewish law seems to indicate that a death sentence trial had to extend over two days and that it needed to take place during the day, there was a second meeting at dawn before Caiaphas. Jesus was again put under oath and again formally condemned as worthy of death.

Rejected by the Sanhedrin, which rejects the truth

One can only imagine what Jesus must have looked like after he wrestled in prayer, sweat blood, was shoved around by his captors, and endured the pretrial hearing before Annas. He looked defeated. But as he stood before Caiaphas, we see that it is really Caiaphas and the Sanhedrin who will soon be defeated!

Read Matthew 26:57-68.

1. Describe how the case against Jesus was falling apart.
2. Why did Jesus answer when Caiaphas put him under oath although he remained silent to Caiaphas' other questions?

3. How were Jesus' words a final, loving warning to those who were about to sentence him?
4. Use the following passages to explain why the leaders rejected Jesus in such bitterness and anger.

"The man without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually discerned." (1 Corinthians 2:14)

"The sinful mind is hostile to God." (Romans 8:7a)

"This is the verdict: Light has come into the world, but men loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil. Everyone who does evil hates the light, and will not come into the light for fear that his deeds will be exposed." (John 3:19,20)

5. Consider the words of Isaiah 29:13: "These people come near to me with their mouth and honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me. Their worship of me is made up only of rules taught by men." How did these words apply to the Jewish Sanhedrin? Is there a temptation for us to act like this?
6. Agree or disagree: The Jewish people deserve all the trouble that has come their way because of their rejection of Christ.

What awesome majesty can be seen in the suffering Savior. He boldly states the truth that he is the promised Christ, the eternal Son of God, knowing full well that such a confession will seal his doom!

Rejected by Peter, who is ashamed of the truth

If only Peter had taken Jesus' warning to heart and recognized his own spiritual weakness and the danger he was in. Unfortunately, he enters the courtyard and warms himself by the fire with all Jesus' enemies standing around. Indeed, things get a little too hot for Peter to handle!

Read Matthew 26:69-75.

1. In a sense Jesus and Peter are both on trial at the same time. What is different about Jesus' and Peter's reactions?
 - Both are challenged by their enemies to make a confession, but . . .

 - Both speak under oath, but . . .

 - Both are in danger of losing their lives by telling the truth, but . . .

2. Why is Peter's answer to the slave girl not only sinful cowardice but utter foolishness?

3. Luke 22:61 adds the detail that just after the second rooster crow (only one is mentioned by Matthew, Luke, and John), Jesus turned to look straight at Peter. As you picture this taking place, how would you describe the look Jesus gave Peter?

4. What is good about Peter's bitter weeping?

5. Evaluate this statement: Unless our sin brings tears to our eyes as Peter's sin did to Peter's eyes, we aren't really repentant.

6. When can we know that we have been repentant enough to be forgiven? These words from 1 John can help with the answer: "If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:8,9).

Rejoice, Christians! Our Savior's beautiful "I am" has covered over all the times we have given the impression that we are not one of this man's disciples.

Rejected by Judas, who fails to understand the truth

By his own corrupted will and sinful determination, Judas had fulfilled the prophecy that one of Jesus' own followers would betray him. Now we see Judas' tragic end.

Read Matthew 27:1-10.

1. What terrifying truth now grips Judas?
2. It is interesting to note that the usual Greek word for “repentance” is not used when Matthew records Judas’ reaction. Rather, it says he was “seized with remorse.” What is different about Judas’ remorse and Peter’s grief?
3. What is so sadly tragic about Judas’ self-inflicted death and eternal condemnation? (See Acts 1:25.)
4. Agree or disagree: Satan doesn’t care whether he drives us to pride or despair. Both serve his purpose equally well.
5. Why is the biblical concept of grace the answer to both pride and despair?

During the week

Take some time to reread the Scripture references found at the beginning of this lesson. As you do, pray that God spare you from falling into the proud hypocrisy of the leaders and the horrible despair of Judas.

Prepare for the next lesson by reading these references: Matthew 27:11-31; Mark 15:1-20; Luke 23:1-25; and John 18:28–19:16. As you read these references, look for reasons to give honor to the King of truth.