

The Temple of God

Matthew 26:57-68

Let me take just a moment to review where we are, since it has been several weeks since we last studied this book of Matthew's gospel. Jesus has been betrayed by Judas. He has been arrested, refusing even to defend himself as Peter attempted to do with his own sword. Jesus knows what is coming, what lies ahead, as he prayed so earnestly in the Garden of Gethsemane, praying even these words,

v.39 "O My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from Me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as You will."

Luke's gospel tells us this about that prayer,

Luke 22:44 "And being in agony, He prayed more earnestly. Then His sweat became like great drops of blood falling down to the ground."

So the time has come, the time appointed by his father, the time ultimately of his death. He is now being led away, under arrest, to the Jewish High Priest, Caiaphas. The Sanhedrin was the Jewish council of elders, led by the high priest himself. It is the session, as we would label it today, the rulers of the Jewish church gathered together in the exercise of their government. They were assembled!

v.57-58

The Sanhedrin was to be a court of law, so there was to be a trial. And a trial would require witnesses to testify. Judas had already conspired with them to have Jesus arrested, but it seems like they hadn't figured out all the details yet. No witnesses were found, even when the council of the Sanhedrin sought them out and even solicited them.

v.59

Then, v.60 "...but found none. Even though many false witnesses came forward, they found none. But at last two false witnesses came forward."

So we come to see that this whole trial is dependent upon,

I. THE TESTIMONY OF FALSE WITNESSES.

There is nothing being hidden here. Matthew tells it just like it is. "The chief priests, the elders, and all the council sought false testimony against Jesus to put Him to death, but found none." The obvious point of all that is that,

A. Jesus' life was above reproach.

There were no accusers because Jesus had done no wrong. And that isn't just an interesting or impressive historical fact, it was of absolute necessity. For Jesus was about to die, and in order to accomplish with his death the satisfaction of God's wrath and justice due for our sins, he himself had to be perfect, without sin. Only a perfect sacrifice would be sufficient, only a sacrifice without defect, without sin.

That need for a perfect sacrifice is well explained in,

Heb. 7:23 "Also there were many priests, because they were prevented by death from continuing. 24 But He, because He continues forever, has an unchangeable priesthood. 25 Therefore He is also able to save to the uttermost those who come to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them. 26 For such a High Priest was fitting for us, who is holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners, and has become higher than the heavens; 27 who does not need daily, as those high priests, to offer up sacrifices, first for His own sins and then for the people's, for this He did once for all when He offered up Himself. 28 For the law appoints as high priests men who have weakness, but the word of the oath, which came after the law, appoints the Son who

has been perfected forever.”

Then, also, Heb. 9:24 “For Christ has not entered the holy places made with hands, which are copies of the true, but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us; 25 not that He should offer Himself often, as the high priest enters the Most Holy Place every year with blood of another— 26 He then would have had to suffer often since the foundation of the world; but now, once at the end of the ages, He has appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself. 27 And as it is appointed for men to die once, but after this the judgment, 28 so Christ was offered once to bear the sins of many. To those who eagerly wait for Him He will appear a second time, apart from sin, for salvation.”

As Paul expresses it,

2 Cor. 5:21 “For He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.”

Jesus knew no sin! He was without sin, for he was born of Mary by the power of the Holy Spirit enabling her to conceive a son of her own human flesh, yet not without the sin and guilt of the fallen nature which all other descendants of Adam and Eve inherited by nature.

v.59 “Now the chief priests, the elders, and all the council sought false testimony against Jesus to put Him to death, 60 but found none. Even though many false witnesses came forward, they found none.”

Yet we then read,

v.60 “But at last two false witnesses came forward...”

B. Jesus was falsely accused.

And that is an integral part of this story, for it was a fulfillment

of very specific prophecy.

Ps. 27:12 “Do not deliver me to the will of my adversaries; For false witnesses have risen against me, And such as breathe out violence.”

Even more clearly,

Ps. 22:6 “But I am a worm, and no man; A reproach of men, and despised by the people. 7 All those who see Me ridicule Me; They shoot out the lip, they shake the head, saying, 8 “He trusted in the LORD, let Him rescue Him; Let Him deliver Him, since He delights in Him!”...12 Many bulls have surrounded Me; Strong bulls of Bashan have encircled Me. 13 They gape at Me with their mouths, Like a raging and roaring lion. 14 I am poured out like water, And all My bones are out of joint; My heart is like wax; It has melted within Me. 15 My strength is dried up like a potsherd, And My tongue clings to My jaws; You have brought Me to the dust of death. 16 For dogs have surrounded Me; The congregation of the wicked has enclosed Me. They pierced My hands and My feet; 17 I can count all My bones. They look and stare at Me. 18 They divide My garments among them, And for My clothing they cast lots.”

Or even more clearly yet,

Is. 53:7 “He was oppressed and He was afflicted, Yet He opened not His mouth; He was led as a lamb to the slaughter, And as a sheep before its shearers is silent, So He opened not His mouth. 8 He was taken from prison and from judgment, And who will declare His generation? For He was cut off from the land of the living; For the transgressions of My people He was stricken. 9 And they made His grave with the wicked—But with the rich at His death, Because He had done no violence, Nor was any deceit in His mouth. 10 Yet it pleased the LORD to bruise Him; He has put Him to grief. When You make His soul an offering for sin, He shall see His seed, He shall prolong His days, And the pleasure of

the LORD shall prosper in His hand. 11 He shall see the labor of His soul, and be satisfied. By His knowledge My righteous Servant shall justify many, For He shall bear their iniquities.”

That’s Jesus. Falsely accused, “Yet He opened not His mouth; He was led as a lamb to the slaughter, And as a sheep before its shearers is silent, So He opened not His mouth.”

But notice in our text what it was that he was accused of. And notice the great irony of that accusation,

II. THE IRONY OF FALSE WITNESSES.

Actually, the accusation is something which he did, something he actually said. It was a false accusation, because he is not guilty what his accusers meant. But the words themselves which they used were not only true, but they express the very essence of the gospel itself. So here’s the irony. Jesus faces,

A. The accusation of sedition.

It was the accusation that he would literally, physically, destroy the Jewish temple. That would, of course, be an act of rebellion, of insurrection, of blasphemy in the highest order. It would be an act of terrorism, aimed at the very heart of Jewish life and faith.

v.61

You should note that the first Christian martyr, Stephen, also faced this false accusation.

Acts 6:11 “Then they secretly induced men to say, “We have heard him speak blasphemous words against Moses and God.” 12 And they stirred up the people, the elders, and the scribes; and they came upon him, seized him, and brought him to the council. 13 They also set up false witnesses who said, “This man does not cease to speak blasphemous words against this holy place and

the law; 14 for we have heard him say that this Jesus of Nazareth will destroy this place and change the customs which Moses delivered to us.” 15 And all who sat in the council, looking steadfastly at him, saw his face as the face of an angel.”

So that’s the accusation. He’s going to physically destroy the temple. He’s a terrorist. And here’s the irony. He did say those words, but rather than threaten sedition by physically destroying the temple, he rather is claiming rather boldly the power of the resurrection. Thus we see,

B. The reality of Jesus’ claim of resurrection.

The words of this false accusation go all the way back to the early days of Jesus’ ministry when he cleansed the temple of the money changers who were conducted their unrighteous business in that temple. The account is recorded in,

John 2:16 And He said to those who sold doves, “Take these things away! Do not make My Father’s house a house of merchandise!” 17 Then His disciples remembered that it was written, “Zeal for Your house has eaten Me up.” 18 So the Jews answered and said to Him, “What sign do You show to us, since You do these things?” 19 Jesus answered and said to them, “Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.” 20 Then the Jews said, “It has taken forty-six years to build this temple, and will You raise it up in three days?” 21 But He was speaking of the temple of His body. 22 Therefore, when He had risen from the dead, His disciples remembered that He had said this to them; and they believed the Scripture and the word which Jesus had said.”

Such a plain and simple explanation. Jesus is not threatening to destroy the temple himself. Rather he says to these unbelieving merchants who were themselves bringing blasphemy to the temple, “You are destroying the true meaning of this

temple.” And then, with that image of the temple, he makes reference to his own body. “Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.”

He is prophesying his own resurrection, the resurrection of his own body, with specific reference to the third day. And John helps us in our understanding, of course,

v.21 “But He was speaking of the temple of His body. 22 Therefore, when He had risen from the dead, His disciples remembered that He had said this to them; and they believed the Scripture and the word which Jesus had said.”

So as Jesus is handed over to the Sanhedrin to be condemned by them, he makes explicit reference to the very central promise of salvation, that he, in his flesh, would be raised from the dead on the third day. And that is the gospel, as Paul would emphasize in,

1 Cor. 15:1 “Moreover, brethren, I declare to you the gospel which I preached to you, which also you received and in which you stand, 2 by which also you are saved, if you hold fast that word which I preached to you—unless you believed in vain. 3 For I delivered to you first of all that which I also received: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, 4 and that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures.”

That’s the irony. They accuse him of an offense worthy of condemnation on the basis of his declaration of his own resurrection. And it goes further, with,

C. Jesus’ claim of deity.

v.62 “And the high priest arose and said to Him, “Do You answer nothing? What is it these men testify against You?” 63 But Jesus kept silent. And the high priest answered and said to Him,

“I put You under oath by the living God: Tell us if You are the Christ, the Son of God!” 64 Jesus said to him, “It is as you said.”

Again, the irony. They think they are able to accuse him of blasphemy. They think that they can hold Jesus accountable for judgment because he claimed to be God, he claimed to be the Messiah, the christ. They think they can charge Jesus with blasphemy by accusing him of being the Son of God! But again, such irony. For that so-called charge is actually a declaration of that which is absolutely and completely true! So Jesus just kept silent while his false accusers declared his true identity! “Tell us if You are the Christ, the Son of God!” They even claim God’s name and identify him rightly as the living God.

v.63 “But Jesus kept silent. And the high priest answered and said to Him, “I put You under oath by the living God: Tell us if You are the Christ, the Son of God!”

Finally, Jesus accepts that title and rightly identifies himself.

v.64 Jesus said to him, “It is as you said.”

So even as he is being arrested, he is able to declare his own identity as the divine messiah, the anointed Christ, the son of God, the savior of all mankind! And then, finally, he adds a final declaration.

D. Jesus’ declaration of divine authority.

Not only is he God, not only does he exist as God, the Messiah of God, the son of God, but he declares that authority in no uncertain terms. And these words just infuriated his enemies.

v.65 “Then the high priest tore his clothes, saying, “He has spoken blasphemy! What further need do we have of witnesses? Look, now you have heard His blasphemy!”

And what was it that he said? What was it that so infuriated

them?

v.64 Jesus said to him, “It is as you said. Nevertheless, I say to you, hereafter you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Power, and coming on the clouds of heaven.”

We might call that “poking the bear!” Talk about being provocative. Talk about a plain and straightforward declaration of absolute power, divine power. He is the one being arrested. He is the one about to be put to death, and here is as clear a declaration as you will find anywhere in the gospels of his divine power and authority. “Hereafter you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Power, and coming on the clouds of heaven.”

Those are words of judgment, eternal judgement, divine judgment. He had spoken similarly in,

Mat. 16:27 “For the Son of Man will come in the glory of His Father with His angels, and then He will reward each according to his works.”

Mat. 24:29 “Immediately after the tribulation of those days the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light; the stars will fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken. 30 Then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in heaven, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. 31 And He will send His angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they will gather together His elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other.”

Mat. 15:31 “When the Son of Man comes in His glory, and all the holy angels with Him, then He will sit on the throne of His glory. 32 All the nations will be gathered before Him, and He will separate them one from another, as a shepherd divides his sheep from the goats.”

That is our great hope as believers, this return of Jesus coming on the clouds.

1 Thes. 4:15 “For this we say to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive and remain until the coming of the Lord will by no means precede those who are asleep. 16 For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. 17 Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord.”

Jesus is declaring all of that even as he is being so falsely accused, declaring the authority that he, alone has, as the divine messiah. And yet, what that declaration provokes in his enemies is not anything related to faith and repentance, but rather a further rebellion. Thus we see,

III. THE BRUTALITY OF FALSE WITNESSES.

There is no other word for it...brutality. Both in the verbal attack upon Jesus and then physical violence as they mock Jesus' claim to be divine. First, the increase and intensified verbal attack.

A. The accusation of blasphemy against Jesus.

v.65-66

It's a consistent response to Jesus' claims of deity. They understood that claim, but rather than submit to him as God, they attack him for that very claim. Claiming to be God was, for Jesus' enemies, a blasphemy of the worst kind. And the accusation is so deep rooted that they elevate the whole situation to the level of a capital offense. “He is deserving of death.”

This was, of course, exactly what Jesus had prophesied

himself.

Mat. 20:17 “Now Jesus, going up to Jerusalem, took the twelve disciples aside on the road and said to them, 18 “Behold, we are going up to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man will be betrayed to the chief priests and to the scribes; and they will condemn Him to death, 19 and deliver Him to the Gentiles to mock and to scourge and to crucify. And the third day He will rise again.”

Then they proceed to their brutality, as,

B. The mockery of Jesus the Messiah.
v.67-68

Luke 22:63 “Now the men who held Jesus mocked Him and beat Him. 64 And having blindfolded Him, they struck Him on the face and asked Him, saying, “Prophecy! Who is the one who struck You?” 65 And many other things they blasphemously spoke against Him.”

Such utter wickedness. And going back to Isaiah 53, it is exactly what was prophesied,

Is. 53:3 “He is despised and rejected by men, A Man of sorrows and acquainted with grief. And we hid, as it were, our faces from Him; He was despised, and we did not esteem Him. 4 Surely He has borne our griefs And carried our sorrows; Yet we esteemed Him stricken, Smitten by God, and afflicted. 5 But He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities; The chastisement for our peace was upon Him, And by His stripes we are healed. 6 All we like sheep have gone astray; We have turned, every one, to his own way; And the LORD has laid on Him the iniquity of us all.”

Let me emphasize in all of this that Jesus has suffered this

brutality as the atoning sacrifice for our sins. “He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities.” That is the gospel, and that temple which would be destroyed, will be raised up on the third day. That is the promise and hope of the gospel. And your salvation, your eternal destiny is dependent upon your faith to believe just that.

Rom. 10:8 “The word [of the gospel] is near you, in your mouth and in your heart” (that is, the word of faith which we preach): 9 that if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. 10 For with the heart one believes unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation.”

Confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord. And beloved, here is your hope and confidence of eternal life— Jesus did rebuild the temple in three days. So “believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead [and] you will be saved.”