

Worthy is the Lamb

Mark 14:53-65

***A courtyard fire sent sprays of sparks
Up to a death dark square of sky.
It waged a war against the dark's
Domain, as wicked men nearby***

***Waged war against the Lord of Light.
With Life in chains (beseiged by lies),
It seemed a triumph for the night.
But inner dark so dimmed their eyes,***

***They could not see and did not know
Their lies served truth; their dusk served Dawn.
The courtyard flames would soon burn low,
But when their night was dead and gone,***

***Men merely served the Lord most high.
With lies to denigrate and damn,
They proved that He was fit to die,
Proclaiming, worthy is the Lamb.***

The soldiers marched the Master out of the garden, over the bridge and up the hill into the eastern gate. Then they wound down shadowed side streets and up steep hills to the southwest quarter of the city. There, stern stone walls protected posh villas.

Old Annas' estate was there: a collection of square stone buildings arranged around a central courtyard. That villa was a buzz of activity. Sleepy-eyed members of the Jewish council, the Sanhedrin, were arriving at the gate.

They led Jesus away to the high priest; and all the chief priests and the elders and the scribes gathered together. Verse 53

All the former high priests were present. So were the elders. These were Sadducees: liberal leaning, political minded Jews. The rest were Pharisees: fundamental temple lawyers who spent their days straining at gnats and splitting spiritual hairs.

The meeting was supposed to be a trial. But it was really a kangaroo court. Witnesses had been alerted while Judas and the soldiers were still on their way to Gethsemane. And all of them were well paid and carefully coached.

So they all knew the trial had nothing whatever to do with justice. Weeks earlier, the Jerusalem was alive with stories about Lazarus, the dead man Christ called back from a cold corpse.

The news electrified the crowds. But it alarmed the Sanhedrin. So Caiaphas stood up and settled the matter. The Healer had to die.

The council members all nodded their heads. And Jesus' death became not a question of *if*, but

merely *when* and *how*.

Later, they counted shining silver coins into Judas' greedy hands. And soldiers tramped off to Gethsemane to arrest the Man.

Now it was time to try the Teacher. And Caiaphas' kangaroo court was in session. But the members had no intention of weighing evidence to determine guilt or innocence.

The verdict was already determined. The Carpenter had to die!

...the chief priests and the whole Council kept trying to obtain testimony against Jesus to put Him to death, Verse 55

The Lamb

The wicked motives of the high priest and his cohorts on the Council are clear. But a question remains. Why did the heavenly Father allow His Son to be dragged before a court that had no other aim than to dig up a reason, any reason, to execute Him?

In a way, God's reason for allowing that trial was the startlingly similar to the motives of the wicked men who met at Caiaphas' villa that night: to determine if Jesus was worthy to die.

Each year, the high priest had the task of inspecting the Passover lamb. That lamb had to be without spot or blemish. Only then could it be sacrificed. And only the high priest could declare a lamb was worthy to die.

Three years before the night our Redeemer was arrested, John the Baptist strode down the Jericho road out of the Judean desert. And beside the reeds and rushes of the Jordan, he pointed to Jesus.

The next day he saw Jesus coming to him and said, "Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!" John 1:29

Jesus was and is the great eternal Lamb, sent to this world to be sacrificed for the sins of all mankind. But every lamb had to be declared worthy to die. Only the high priest could do that. And Caiaphas was high priest.

While the last few Council members straggled in, Jesus was interrogated by old Annas. Then when the Sanhedrin was seated, He was led across the courtyard to Caiaphas' quarters.

Witnesses waited in an anteroom. Then, one by one, they were ushered into the hall to pour out their paid testimony. But their stories didn't agree.

...the chief priests and the whole Council kept trying to obtain testimony against Jesus to put Him to death, and they were not finding any. For many were giving false testimony against Him, but their testimony was not consistent. Verses 55-56

The ruling Jews were ready to do almost anything to convict Christ of a capital crime. But they were both unwilling and unable to ignore Moses' Law. And that Law declared no man could be condemned on the testimony of a single witness.

It was not enough for witnesses to agree in a vague, general sort of way, either. Their testimonies had to agree in every detail.

That was the problem. Each of the paid witnesses gave a slightly different story. So their evidence was inadmissible.

There is simple reason why the stories those false witnesses told were so contradictory and unconvincing. Jesus was not guilty of anything. He had kept the Law of Moses perfectly.

In fact, He was so confident of His purity, He once challenged these same ruling Jews to find any sin in His life.

Which one of you convicts Me of sin? John 8:46

Our Lord's enemies were silent that day. They couldn't convict Him of any sin because He had none. Like a sacrificial lamb, He was without spot or blemish. And that is of eternal importance.

The wages of sin is death. That is why Jesus had to die to pay for our sins. But if He had any sin of His own, He couldn't die for our sins. He would have had to die for His own.

The high priest was frustrated at the confused confessions of his false witnesses. But God was pleased.

His enemies had proven His Son was worthy to be slain.

The Lie

No lie is a purebred. They are all mongrelized mixes of fact and fiction. And the most convincing lies season the truth with a slight, sprinkling of lies. And so it was at Caiaphas' midnight trial.

Last of all, two men came forward with a story that was almost true. Almost, but not quite.

Some stood up and began to give false testimony against Him, saying, "We heard Him say, 'I will destroy this temple made with hands, and in three days I will build another made without hands.'" Not even in this respect was their testimony consistent. Verses 57-59

Once again the witnesses didn't agree. One man declared that Jesus said He *would* destroy the temple sanctuary while the other testified the Master merely said He *could* do so.

This man stated, 'I am able to destroy the temple of God and to rebuild it in three days.'
Matthew 26:61

That slight difference was enough to nullify the testimony those men gave. Nevertheless, their lie endured. When Jesus hung on the cross, His enemies flung it in His face.

Those passing by were hurling abuse at Him, wagging their heads, and saying, "Ha! You who are going to destroy the temple and rebuild it in three days, save Yourself, and come down from the cross!"
Mark 15:29-30

Years later, Stephen stood before the Sanhedrin. And the ruling Jews used the very same lie to convict him.

They put forward false witnesses who said, "This man incessantly speaks against this holy place and the Law; for we have heard him say that this Nazarene, Jesus, will destroy this place and alter the customs which Moses handed down to us."
Acts 6:13-14

It is amazing that one little lie was so potent and powerful. Especially when only the pronoun was changed.

Jesus never said *He* would destroy *this temple*. Instead, His statement was a challenge to these same ruling Jews.

The Jews then said to Him, "What sign do You show us as your authority for doing these things?"
Jesus answered them, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up."
The Jews then said, "It took forty-six years to build this temple, and will You raise it up in three days?"
But He was speaking of the temple of His body. John 2:18-21

Jesus challenged the Jews to destroy, not the stone sanctuary, but His physical body. And that is precisely what they were trying to do in their midnight meeting at Caiaphas' home.

The Jews did indeed destroy the temple of our Savior's body. They slapped and slugged Him. They beat and brutalized Him. Finally, they stretched Him out on a cross, nailed His hands and feet to hard, hewn wood and lifted Him up to die in agony.

But Christ's challenge was coupled with a promise. If they destroyed His body, He would raise it up in three days.

And early Sunday morning, when dewdrops still sparkled with the first light of dawn, God's Son made good on His promise. Life returned to His cold corpse. And He walked out of His garden grave, forever defeating death itself.

There was nothing unique about dying on a cross. Uncounted millions of men died that way. But only one of those who were crucified returned from the grave. Our Redeemer's resurrection was irrefutable proof that He did indeed pay the penalty for our sins.

So once again, the high priests' kangaroo court succeeded precisely where they thought they had failed. They confirmed Christ was worthy to die for our sins.

The Lord

The confusion and conflicting stories of the paid witnesses infuriated Caiaphas. So he rose from His seat of honor before the semi-circle of council members.

The high priest stood up and came forward and questioned Jesus, saying, “Do You not answer? What is it that these men are testifying against You?” But He kept silent and did not answer. Verse 60-61

In Jewish trials, witnesses served as prosecuting attorneys. And the accused served as his own defense council. So the high priest demanded that Jesus respond to the witnesses' charges.

But Jesus didn't utter a single word. For one thing, there was no need to answer the witnesses. Their confused, conflicting confessions made them inadmissible.

At the same time, the Savior's silence spoke of His worthiness to serve as sin's sacrifice. By refusing to speak, He fulfilled Isaiah's ancient prophecy. The Lamb of God wouldn't open His mouth.

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. Isaiah 53:7

The Savior's serene silence inflamed the high priest's anger even more. So Caiaphas threw Jewish legal requirements to the wind and demanded that Jesus incriminate Himself.

Again the high priest was questioning Him, and saying to Him, “Are You the Christ, the Son of the Blessed One?” Verse 60

This time Jesus knew He had to answer. He dared not leave any doubt in the minds of the men who sat in judgement over Him.

And Jesus said, “I am; and you shall see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of power, and coming with the clouds of Heaven.” Verse 62

The Master's answer was short and simple, *I am*. And echoing Daniel's prophecy of the coming Christ, the Master also called Himself the Son of Man.

I kept looking in the night visions, and behold, with the clouds of heaven One like a Son of Man was coming, and He came up to the Ancient of Days and was presented before Him. And to Him was given dominion, glory and a kingdom, that all the peoples, nations and men of every language might serve Him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion which will not pass away; and His kingdom is one which will not be destroyed. Daniel 7:13-14

That also confirmed Christ was worthy to die for our sins. Only the omnipotent God could reach across time and space to gather up all the lusts and lies and larcenies of mankind. Only God was strong enough to carry them all to the cross in His body. And only God could pay the penalty of blood and death for all humankind.

Our Redeemer made one last attempt to rescue the wicked men who sat before Him. He declared that they themselves would see Him when He came in the clouds to judge the living and the dead.

One day, our Savior insisted, the same proud men who refused to believe He was and is and ever shall be the Son of the living God will stand before His judgement seat.

There was no malice in our Savior's statement. He loved those wicked men so much He willingly bled and died to pay the penalty their sins justly deserved. And He dreaded to see them cowering in fear and wild with panic before His great white throne of judgement.

Even at that midnight meeting, it wasn't too late for them. There was still time to turn from their sin and selfishness, time to trust in Him as their Savior, their Sovereign, and the Lord who loved them.

But like the people of Jerusalem, they would not.

Tearing his clothes, the high priest said, “What further need do we have of witnesses? You have heard the blasphemy; how does it seem to you?” And they all condemned Him to be

deserving of death. Verses 63-64

In a show of anger and indignation, Caiaphas tore his robes. What the Carpenter said, he shouted, was blasphemy.

And in his mind it was. For any mere man to declare he is both the Son of God and the great eternal Judge is blasphemy.

But Jesus wasn't a mere man. He was and is and ever shall be God's only begotten Son. He will indeed come in the clouds one day. And He will judge every man's secret sins.

So for Him it was not blasphemy. It was a simple statement of fact. He really was the great eternal God robed in human flesh. And as such, He was worthy to die as sin's sacrifice.

When the council members heard Jesus' declare He is Lord of all, a mindless rage overwhelmed them. And some of them rushed forward and began to spit in His face and beat Him with their fists.

Some began to spit at Him, and to blindfold Him, and to beat Him with their fists, and to say to Him, "Prophecy!" And the officers received Him with slaps in the face. Mark 14:65

Then the high priest remanded the Redeemer into the custody of the temple police. And they continued the violent assault upon Him. That was the beginning of the suffering the Lamb of God had to endure to save us from our sins.

It was also the heavenly Father's declaration that His Son had passed the test. He was worthy to die as sin's sacrifice. And that is the heart of every Christian's praise and thanksgiving.

Even in Heaven, both angels and elders recall Caiaphas' trial as they worship God's sinless Son as the one and only sacrifice for sin.

I heard the voice of many angels around the throne and the living creatures and the elders; and the number of them was myriads of myriads, and thousands of thousands, saying with a loud voice, "Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power and riches and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing." Revelation 5:11-12

Only one question remains. Jesus declared He is both the Lamb of God and Lord of all. That is a matter of record.

Now we must decide if we will stand with Caiaphas and declare that Christ is a blasphemer. Or we must choose to join the chorus in Heaven and praise Him not only as *the* Savior.

But as our own personal Savior.