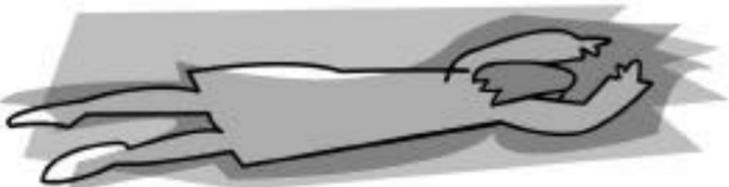


Passage to Calvary



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Matt. 26:57-68, Luke 22:66-71, John 18:2-9, 12-23.*

Memory Text: “**But Pilate once more addressed them, wishing to set Jesus free. They, however, persistently shouted, ‘Crucify, crucify him!’**” (*Luke 23:20, 21, Weymouth*).

In his book *The Trial*, Czech writer Franz Kafka wrote about a bank clerk named Joseph K. who was arrested, convicted, and executed on charges that were never explained to him. Throughout the story he faced an absurd and unjust labyrinth of interrogations, summonses, and delays. Though continuing to proclaim his innocence (even if not sure what he's charged with), Joseph K. is at the end led to an abandoned quarry and executed.

However absurd and unfair Joseph K.'s experience, it pales in comparison to the absurdities and injustices attending the trial of Jesus. And though hauled before a biased court that had no intention of getting the facts (they were interested only in getting Jesus), Christ maintained the dignity, love, and compassion that marked His entire ministry. However much of a farce, this trial reveals what fallen humanity is capable of doing, even in the face of unconditional love.

The Week at a Glance: **How, even in Gethsemane, did Jesus show His compassion for His enemies? How was the gospel prefigured in Christ's arrest and trial? How did Christ respond to those who persecuted Him? What helped explain the blindness of the leaders toward Christ?**

**Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, February 12.*

Arrest in the Garden

What opportunity did God provide to arouse the rabble to a sense of their crime in coming to arrest Jesus? *John 18:2-9.*

When they said that they came to seek Jesus of Nazareth, the Lord responded with two Greek words, *Ego eimi*, which means, “I am,” the same words He used when He said to the Jewish leaders, “Before Abraham was, I am” (*John 8:58*). This simple phrase is linked in meaning to the Hebrew name for God, often translated “Yahveh” (*Exod. 3:11-14*), and it seems to come from a Hebrew root word that means “to be.” Thus, some believe the name means the “One is who,” or “the Self-Existing One.” By using that phrase, Jesus was, perhaps, subtly witnessing to them about His identity.

Immediately after Jesus says “I am,” the crowd falls backward, to the ground. “A divine light illuminated the Saviour’s face, and a dove-like form overshadowed Him. In the presence of this divine glory, the murderous throng could not stand for a moment. They staggered back. Priests, elders, soldiers, and even Judas, fell as dead men to the ground.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 694.

What does Peter’s action show about how little even he understood what was happening? *Matt. 26:51, Mark 14:47, Luke 22:50, John 18:10.*

One would think that after seeing the crowd fall down before Christ’s “divine glory,” Peter would have realized that the Lord didn’t need the disciple’s weak sword to protect Him. By His words, and then by causing the unruly mob to fall to the ground, the Lord showed that He was allowing Himself to be taken. Even more so, by these acts, Jesus was still giving evidence of His divine character and nature, thus, in a way, witnessing to the mob that had come to take Him. Even here, amid the impending doom, Jesus was working for the salvation of those who hated Him.

Nothing in Scripture indicates that anyone in the mob, even after seeing this divine manifestation of power, changed his or her mind about Jesus. Why are our hearts so hard toward the Lord, even when faced with evidence of His existence and love?

Jesus Before Annas, Peter Before the Young Woman

Read John 18:12-23. Both Peter and Jesus faced questioning. What were the differences between the situations in which they were questioned, those who questioned them, and their responses to those questions? What can we learn from these contrasts?

What a powerful contrast between Jesus and Peter. Peter is outside, in an informal setting, before a person with no real stature or standing and, certainly, with no legal authority to do him harm. And yet, when questioned about his relationship to Jesus, Peter lies, saying “I am not.” In contrast, here’s Jesus, inside, before a high official in the Jewish nation, a leader with standing and power. And when asked about, among other things, His disciples, Jesus speaks openly and freely. Even when hit for His words, Jesus responded in a candid manner that showed He had nothing to hide.

Read carefully John 18:20-23, especially the words Jesus spoke to the officer who smote Him (*vs. 23*). How is this little account—that of Jesus being unfairly struck by the officer—a small example of the whole principle of the gospel? See *Isa. 53:5*, *2 Cor. 5:21*.

Peter lies; Jesus is smitten for doing no wrong. What a powerful representation of the contrast between fallen humanity and the loving God who came to save humanity. In Jesus’ answer we see intimations of the gospel: His enemies can find no evil in Him; thus, it’s in His innocence that Jesus is punished.

How should this account of Christ’s treatment help us deal better with situations in which we ourselves are treated unfairly?

The Evening Trial

Read in **Matthew 26:57-68** (also in *Mark 14:53-65*) the account of Jesus before Caiaphas, the scribes, and the elders. How do these verses show how unfair and prejudiced the trial was?

Why was it not necessary for Jesus to answer those who had accused Him? *Mark 14:56-59*.

Because they were getting nowhere in their trial, the high priest finally asked this question: “I adjure thee by the living God, that thou tell us whether thou be the Christ, the Son of God” (*Matt. 26:63*). Christ fully recognized that His affirmative answer was His death warrant, but He would not deny His identity or His relation to His Father. He warned the court, however, that someday they would see Him in His divine authority.

How does Jesus respond to the high priest’s question?

How fascinating that in response to the high priest’s question, Jesus referred not to His atoning death for the sins of the world or to His resurrection or to His upcoming ministry in heaven as the true High Priest (the one that Caiaphas was supposed to represent). Instead, in a clear and unambiguous manner, Jesus talked about His second coming, when He’ll be seen by them, not as some itinerant preacher whom they can arrest, torment, abuse, and sentence to death but as the Son of man, “sitting on the right hand of power, and coming in the clouds of heaven” (*vs. 64*). All through Christ’s ministry, He talked about the Second Coming to His disciples; now, at this climactic moment, He talks about it to His enemies, as well. After this, they could never say, “We weren’t told.”

By referring to His second coming, Jesus—despite the immediate circumstances—pointed to the great and grand hope of all Christians everywhere. Why, particularly in trying times, does the promise of the Second Coming give us our only hope? Why, in the end, is it our only hope?

The Morning Trial

After the night trial, Jesus again faced the leaders, perhaps in an act to formalize the death sentence issued against Him the night before.

Of all the Gospel writers, Luke gives the most detailed account of this morning trial. Read his account (*Luke 22:66-71*). What similarities exist with what happened the night before? What differences?

With more people there, they ask Him basically the same question they asked the night before. Notice how Jesus responds (*vss. 67-69*). Knowing their hearts and knowing that they weren't asking because they wanted to know truth but wanted only to condemn Him, Jesus doesn't answer their question directly, though He does answer it. "If I tell you, ye will not believe" (*vs. 67*). Believe what? That He's the Christ, what else? They certainly would have believed Him if He said that He wasn't. Indeed, they had Him there because they didn't believe that He was the Christ (otherwise they would not have been doing to Him what they were). Thus, Jesus revealed to them that He could see right through their face of a trial. They weren't interested in finding out the truth; they were interested only in making the Truth go away.

Then, before the whole group, Jesus repeated His reference to the Son of Man sitting on the right hand of God, alluding to His power and authority. The leaders, obviously assuming that He was talking about Himself, then asked Him flat out, "Art thou then the Son of God?" (*vs. 70*).

Here, too, Jesus, though not directly answering their question, answers it nevertheless, using in His answer the phrase "I am." Their reaction shows that they clearly understood His claim to divinity. Again, as the night before, Jesus made it clear to them who He was. With all the evidence He had given through His ministry of His divine credentials, the leaders should have believed Him. Sadly, for them, they did not.

One reason the leaders were so blind to Jesus was that they had a false understanding of prophecy. They expected the Messiah to come in a different manner. This ignorance helped explain, though not excuse, their hostility to Him. What does this tell us about how important it is to have, as much as possible, a correct understanding of prophecy, or Bible doctrine, in general?

Pilate's Wife's Dream

After the three religious *trials*, Jesus was herded off for three political *trials* before Pilate, Herod, and then back to Pilate again. What's especially fascinating is what happened to Pilate when his wife warned him against bothering with Jesus. Notice the intensity of her warning (*Matt. 27:19*). Whatever she saw in her dream, it was real and convincing enough for her to tell her husband to stay away from Him completely, as opposed to just *be nice* to Jesus or to *treat Him fairly*. What did she see?

"In answer to Christ's prayer, the wife of Pilate had been visited by an angel from heaven, and in a dream she had beheld the Saviour and conversed with Him. Pilate's wife was not a Jew, but as she looked upon Jesus in her dream, she had no doubt of His character or mission. She knew Him to be the Prince of God. She saw Him on trial in the judgment hall. . . . She saw the cross uplifted on Calvary. She saw the earth wrapped in darkness, and heard the mysterious cry, 'It is finished.' Still another scene met her gaze. She saw Christ seated upon the great white cloud, while the earth reeled in space, and His murderers fled from the presence of His glory. With a cry of horror she awoke, and at once wrote to Pilate words of warning."—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 732.

Analyze her dream. Notice the three specific elements about Jesus that were shown to her (see the texts below). What are they, and how are they all related to one another? Also, what significance is found in the fact that Pilate's wife wasn't a Jew but a Gentile? *Mark 14:62, Acts 1:11, Rom. 5:18, 2 Cor. 5:21, Phil. 2:8, Heb. 12:2.*

In one sense, in that vision, Pilate's wife was given a compressed version of the whole plan of salvation, from the righteous character of Christ to His second coming. Notice, too, the parallel between what she saw regarding the Second Coming and Christ's words to the leaders in both the evening and morning trial. Besides receiving a clear vision of the Cross, she was shown the Second Coming, as well. So closely tied was the First with the Second that in this dream, the angel gave her images of both.

Look over the week's lesson and review the ways in which Jesus, even amid the turmoil, was working to save all those with whom He came in contact, even those who were bitterly opposed to Him. What hope should that give you—who might be struggling with faith and assurance of salvation—about God's desire to save you despite your struggles and weaknesses?

Further Study: Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, pp. 698–740; *The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 5, pp. 1104, 1124.

“It will do you good . . . to frequently review the closing scenes in the life of our Redeemer. Here, beset with temptations as He was, we may all learn lessons of the utmost importance to us. It would be well to spend a thoughtful hour each day reviewing the life of Christ from the manger to Calvary. We should take it point by point and let the imagination vividly grasp each scene, especially the closing ones of His earthly life. By thus contemplating His teachings and sufferings, and the infinite sacrifice made by Him for the redemption of the race, we may strengthen our faith, quicken our love, and become more deeply imbued with the spirit which sustained our Saviour. . . . Everything noble and generous in man will respond to the contemplation of Christ upon the cross.”—Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 4, p. 374.

Discussion Questions:

- 1** In healing Malchus’s ear and in His accompanying rebuke to Peter, what did Jesus reveal concerning
 - a. His attitude toward His enemies?
 - b. the degree of freedom He could potentially exercise to liberate Himself from their clutches?
 - c. His manner of dealing with the mistakes of His disciples?
 - d. His own state of mind regarding the peril in which He was placed?
 - e. His approved methods of defending and upholding His cause?
 - f. His view of employing physical force in the realm of spiritual conflict?

- 2** When Pilate presented Christ and Barabbas side by side and offered to free the man of their choice, the mob pressed for Barabbas’s release. In what less dramatic ways do people today continue in principle to choose Barabbas over Christ?

- 3** Why do you think Pilate was given a warning when Herod wasn’t?

A Spiritual Hunger

by Juan Carlos Conde, Sr.

Juan Carlos managed a large company in Guatemala. He worked 16 hours a day seven days a week, and it was killing him. He became discouraged and started drinking. Although his wife, Elba, was more religious than he, neither regularly attended church.

One day Elba's brother invited her to the Adventist church. Elba had visited the Adventist church as a child and remembered the quiet, orderly worship services. She accepted her brother's invitation. Juan Carlos was too busy to go, so Elba went alone.

Elba began attending regularly and enrolled her children in the Adventist school. One by one her three children asked to be baptized. Elba wished she could be baptized too, but she and Carlos were not legally married. Elba often talked to Carlos about getting married, but some legal papers were not in order, and the marriage had to wait.

When the couple's son, Juan Carlos, Jr., was baptized, Carlos responded to the pastor's call to follow Christ. Carlos wanted to become a Christian example for his family. He saw a lawyer about the legal papers he needed and was amazed to learn that the lawyer would prepare the papers for a tenth of the cost. A few months later Elba and Carlos were married and baptized on the same day.

Sabbath problems led Carlos to resign his job, putting the family into financial difficulty. Elba traveled to another country where she had family. She planned to work there to help the family get out of debt. But she was not able to get steady work that paid enough to help the family as she hoped.

Back home Carlos struggled with the family's financial situation. One day they had no food in the house and only the tithe money with which to buy anything. Carlos prayed with the children, then he turned in the tithe. Moments later neighbors knocked at the door bringing food. When they learned that the family had nothing to eat, the members of the church purchased groceries to sustain them.

Carlos grew spiritually and became a Sabbath School teacher, a small group leader, and eventually a church elder. Elba's influence led several of her relatives to visit the Adventist church; and a number were baptized. But she missed her husband and children and decided to return to Guatemala.

After months of temporary jobs and low pay Carlos found steady work, and the family was reunited. They still have challenges, but God is their strength, and He helps them.

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