

Fourth Passion Sermon

The Lord Jesus Led To Annas And Caiaphas And Tried By The Jews.

Martin Luther, "Fourth Passion Sermon," Matthias Loy, ed., *Dr. Martin Luther's House-Postil, or, Sermons on the Gospels for the Sundays and Principal Festivals of the Church Year. Volume 2. Two Volumes. Second Edition.* (Columbus, Ohio; J. A. Schulze, 1884), pp. 112-121.

Matt. 26, 57-68.

And they that had laid hold on Jesus led Him away to Caiaphas the high priest, where the scribes and the elders were assembled. But Peter followed Him afar off unto the high priest's palace, and went in, and sat with the servants, to see the end. Now the chief priests, and elders, and all the council sought false witness against Jesus, to put Him to death; but found none: yea, though many false witnesses came, yet found they none. At the last came two false witnesses, and said, This fellow said, I am able to destroy the temple of God, and to build it in three days. And the high priest arose, and said unto Him, Answerest Thou nothing? what is it which these witness against Thee? But Jesus held His peace. And the high priest answered and said unto Him, I adjure Thee by the living God, that Thou tell us whether Thou be the Christ, the Son of God. Jesus saith unto him, Thou hast said: nevertheless I say unto you, Hereafter shall ye see the Son of man sitting on the right hand of power, and coming in the clouds of heaven. Then the high priest rent his clothes, saying, He hath spoken blasphemy; what further need have we of witnesses? behold, now ye have heard His blasphemy. What think ye? They answered and said, He is guilty of death. Then did they spit in His face, and buffeted Him; and others smote Him with the palms of their hands, saying, Prophecy unto us, Thou Christ, Who is he that smote Thee?

We have heard how our Lord Jesus was betrayed by Judas in the garden and taken by the Jews. Now we come to notice how He was brought before Caiaphas, the high priest, under such charges as to lead to the unanimous decision that there was sufficient cause for delivering Him to Pilate and aiming at His life.

In describing these things so carefully it was not the only object of the Evangelists to teach us the holy innocence of our Lord Jesus. That He was wholly pure and altogether without sin we must conclude from the known fact that He was the Son of God, conceived by the Holy Ghost, and born of the Virgin Mary. But, since the Church and the Gospel must receive the same treatment in the world which the Lord Jesus received, the history of Christ's wrongs is given us especially to the end that we may not be offended

when similar wrongs are inflicted upon us also, but that we may always refer to it for consolation and learn to be patient. For if God's Son, our Master and our Head, was falsely accused, delivered to Pilate by the high priests, scribes and elders, and surrendered to the Gentiles to be crucified, is it to be wondered at if we receive similar treatment? The servant is not to be more successful than his master. Therefore, we should rejoice when our experience is such that we can truthfully boast: This was the experience of my Lord Jesus also. For if we are like Him in suffering, we are warranted in the hope of being like Him in glory too; yea, and even before the revelation of this glory, we shall, in our suffering, derive from Him comfort, aid, deliverance. This history, which shows that even our Lord Jesus was not exempt from suffering, serves, therefore, first, to minister

unto us consolation, that we may become more cheerful and more patient in our sufferings.

And, secondly, it offers us an antidote against the common offences of this world. For every one regards the titular dignitaries, called chief priests and elders of the people here, as pious men and saints, in virtue of their office, station and pomp. And so to-day the Pope, bishops, monks and priests desire, on account of their office, to be looked upon and treated as the most eminent members of the Christian Church. But let us learn here not to judge men by the office they hold, else we shall be deceived; but by the manner in which they act towards Christ — by the relation which their heart, their will, sustains towards Him. When, by this text, we find good or evil in them, we must judge them accordingly; for then our judgment shall always be just. The office is, without a doubt, a holy and a good one; but he who holds it may be a villain. For here we see that the high priests, the scribes and the elders, who are the rulers and leaders of the people in spiritual things and in things temporal, are the very ones who cannot tolerate the Lord Jesus and who, by dint of unremitting persecution and manifold intrigues, finally bring Him to the cross. We must confess that they are God's worst enemies and also, as Luke testifies in the 5. chapter of Acts, Epicureans, who in those days said that there is no resurrection from the dead, neither angel nor spirit. If we would, therefore, know to a certainty whether Pope, bishops, and the like, are pious or not, we must not be misled by their office; but need merely see how they conduct themselves towards the Gospel and the true doctrine, when we shall find that all of them are disciples of Judas, and that their hearts are disposed towards the Gospel as were those of the high priests towards Christ. These are the very fruits by which we may know the false prophets, the wolves, even when they come in sheep's clothing and have the appearance of devout and harmless persons.

We shall now take up the trial of our Lord, and see with what hatred, malignity, craft, and virulence they treat Christ.

The Evangelist John mentions that the Jews led the Lord Jesus first to Annas, who, according to Acts 4., was also a high priest, but not in that year, and who was the father-in-law to Caiaphas, who officiated at the time. But Annas soon gave Him over to his son-in-law, Caiaphas, who was the high priest that same year; for with him the chief priests and elders were already assembled.

Here we see, in the first place, how inequitably the high priests deal with the Lord Jesus; for they are at the same time both plaintiff and judge. The Lord could, therefore, not receive justice, let His cause have been ever so good, and let Him have said and done what He would. Such a way of proceeding would be very dishonorable in a worldly law-suit, in which the same person is forbidden to act as plaintiff and judge by a special law. But nothing is sinful for these holy ones; they have all power; they can do as they please, and think they have the right to do so! Woe to him who construes their actions ill, tells them they are in the wrong, or admonishes them!

[And just so some of our church leaders today.] And, on our part, many serious efforts have been made at many an imperial diet, and on other occasions, to secure a free, Christian Council, at which to end the present disunion by means of the Holy Scriptures. [But this has not happened in Germany at this time.]

But here we have the proof that the world does not desire and is not able to deal otherwise with Christ. We should, therefore, be resigned, and, with the Lord Jesus, bear such injustice until the appointed time; for what else can we do? Caiaphas, who, as judge, sat in the judgment seat, himself accuses the Lord Jesus and then even decides against Him. This is the first act of injustice in the trial before the priests.

Another atrocious feature of this trial we find in their absolutely demanding the death of the Lord Jesus, while they cannot find sufficient cause for this, but must call to their assistance falsehood and false witnesses, until finally Caiaphas, the judge, himself arises and brings forth an

accusation possessing some semblance of foundation. Among other false testimony submitted, was that of "two false witnesses," who came "and said: This fellow said, I am able to destroy the temple of God, and to build it in three days."

The correct history of this latter charge we find in the 2. chapter of John. When our Lord Jesus, in Jerusalem, at the first passover after His baptism, had with a scourge driven out of the temple the changers of money and the merchants, together with their oxen, sheep, doves, and whatever else they had, and poured out the changers' money, and overthrown the tables, the Jews gathered together and said: Thou venturist to exercise special violence here; hast Thou authority to do this? What sign shewest Thou unto us, seeing that Thou doest these things? Then the Lord answered them thus: "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up." By this He meant to say the same as by the sign of the Prophet Jonah, Matt. 12., namely this: You desire a sign and shall have it. You shall kill me; but on the third day I will raise myself from the dead. He for whom such sign does not suffice is past all help. This is the narrative.

But see, how wantonly they pervert His words! He says: "Destroy this temple;" and then they charge Him with having said: "I am able to destroy the temple," thus to make Him appear guilty of having spoken against the temple of God. And even if we accept the Jews' interpretation of Christ's words, admitting that they were spoken with reference to the temple at Jerusalem, would a man be guilty of death on account of using such words? In short, he who would make charges against Christ, must first become a base liar; ... He who deals in falsehoods can speak no truth, and he who acts contrary to truth cannot help himself except with lies. On this principle the world, as we here see, dealt with Christ, and will continue so to deal with the Christians and the Holy Gospel; for it cannot do otherwise.

But when their witness agreed not together and was powerless in itself, Caiaphas, the judge or high priest, rushed to the rescue, and, accord-

ing to John, asked Jesus of His disciples, and of His doctrine, as though he would say: What is this new doctrine Thou bringest? Art Thou dissatisfied with Moses? Must Thou have something extra? Art Thou alone wise and are all we fools? Where are they now who regarded Thy doctrine right and divine? It may be such a good doctrine that we too would be pleased with it and receive it. But it is merely the rabble, which knows nothing about the law, that Thou attachest to thyself; the honest and upright desire not thy preaching. To such question the Lord answered: "I ever taught in the synagogue, and in the temple, whither the Jews always resort; and in secret have I said nothing. Why askest thou me? ask them which heard me, what I have said unto them; behold, they know what I said." The Lord does not desire His doctrine to be despised, and says that He had not feared the light, but had preached it openly to the world, that it should, therefore, not be reviled as a thing done in a corner.

When He had thus spoken, a scoundrel standing by dealt the Lord a severe blow with the palm of his hand, as though it were intolerable that the high priest should be thus answered and not more reverently treated. ...

When they now found themselves without any cause of action, Caiaphas, the high priest, comes to the main point, saying: "I adjure Thee by the living God, that Thou tell us whether Thou be the Christ, the Son of God." Knave Caiaphas thinks thus to hit the nail on the head, and to seize the Lord Jesus by the throat. Observe here, first of all, that it is not the intention of Caiaphas that he or the rest should believe in the Lord, in case He should say that He is the Christ. By no means! But this is the very confession they desire to hear Him make, thinking that then they could convict Him without difficulty. And Christ understands them well enough; but this does not induce Him to deny who He is. He answers: "Thou hast said," that is, just as thou hast said, I am the Christ And what is still more, it shall only be a little while yet and ye shall "see the Son of man sitting on the right hand of power;" that is, after these days I shall not need to suffer any more, but, in my glor-

ified body, shall show that I am not only a man, as you regard me, but also the almighty Son of God, who rules over all, and on the judgment day I shall come in the clouds of heaven and judge the quick and the dead.

Behold, now the high priest has heard the glorious, excellent confession which tells him what he should believe concerning this man, whom he and others had prepared themselves to entrap, and whom they were resolved on killing. Let us see what use the high priest makes of this confession. Matthew tells us that he "rent his clothes, saying, He hath spoken blasphemy; what further need have we of witnesses? Behold, now ye have heard His blasphemy. What think ye?"

In this, the first trial of our blessed Lord Jesus, which took place in the house of Caiaphas, He was declared a heretic and blasphemer. This gluts the high priestly maw; and now it only remains to have some worldly accusation brought against Christ before Pilate, so that His death

might be decreed. While each one privately deliberates on this, our innocent Lord Jesus is made to submit to their scorn; He must suffer them to spit in His holy face, and Himself to be buffeted, derided, smitten and mocked. For they regard such treatment altogether just, because Christ has been pronounced a heretic and blasphemer. They make a jest of His saying that He is the Christ. One strikes Him on this side, another on that. "Aha! You are the Christ, are you," they say, "then, pray, prophesy unto us, who is he that smote Thee?" ...

It is, therefore, important that we carefully study this priestly *Processum Juris*. For then, in case we are brought before a similar tribunal, we can follow the example of our Lord Jesus, learning of Him patience, and deriving from Him true consolation. And, should we be compelled to suffer with Him for the sake of His "Word, we can hope also to live with Him, and with Him to be lifted to glory. May God grant this to us all. Amen.