

INI Hymns:

Sermon 25-L1

Ash Wednesday **John 18:12-14, 19-24**

3/5/25

“Stricken, Smitten and Afflicted” has always been one of my favourite lenten hymns. The line that has always struck me the most is the last sentence of the second verse, “*Many hands were raised to wound Him, none would interpose to save, but the deepest stroke that pierced Him was the stroke that Justice gave.*” We are going to use that last line as the Theme for our Lenten season this year.

The Deepest Stroke that Pierced Him was the Stroke that Justice Gave!

Throughout Jesus’ trial and crucifixion, there were truly many hands that were raised to wound Him. We will be examining the terrible injustice of each of His trials. But all the suffering that men unjustly inflicted on Jesus didn’t even begin to compare to the suffering that God laid on Him to fulfill the Justice of God. By that justice we are justified.

We begin with the very first phase of Jesus’ trial as He is brought before Annas. It is recorded in John 18:12-14, 19-24.

“12 Then the detachment of troops and the captain and the officers of the Jews arrested Jesus and bound Him. 13 And they led Him away to Annas first, for he was the father-in-law of Caiaphas who was high priest that year. 14 Now it was Caiaphas who advised the Jews that it was expedient that one man should die for the people....

19 The high priest then asked Jesus about His disciples and His doctrine. 20 Jesus answered him, “I spoke openly to the world. I always taught in synagogues and in the temple, where the Jews always meet, and in secret I have said nothing. 21 Why do you ask Me? Ask those who have heard Me what I said to them. Indeed they know what I said.”

22 And when He had said these things, one of the officers who stood by struck Jesus with the palm of his hand, saying, “Do You answer the high priest like that?” 23 Jesus answered him, “If I have spoken evil, bear witness of the evil; but if well, why do you strike Me?”

24 Then Annas sent Him bound to Caiaphas the high priest.”

Dear Fellow Redeemed,

Did you know that our criminal justice system is based primarily on the laws of ancient Israel? Moses said in Deut. 4:8 “What great nation is there that has such statutes and righteous judgments as are in all this law which I set before you this day?” God gave Moses many laws for maintaining justice in the nation of Israel. The Israelites used them to developed a very sophisticated criminal justice system. Most of the laws in our criminal justice system come directly from the laws of ancient Israel in effect in Jesus’ day.

For example: You’ve heard it said that an accused person is presumed innocent in a court of law until he or she is proven guilty by clear evidence beyond any reasonable doubt. That law also came from ancient Israel. Yet look at verse 13-14 of our text, “Caiaphas was high priest that year. Now it was Caiaphas who advised the Jews that it was expedient that one man should die for the people.”

The High Priest presides over the Sanhedrin to make sure that all the laws of the

court room were strictly followed. Yet far from making sure that Jesus was presumed innocent until proven guilty, they High Priest determined several weeks beforehand, that Jesus needed to be put to death. It was right after Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead, “The chief priests and the Pharisees gathered a council and said, “What shall we do? For this Man works many signs. If we let Him alone like this, everyone will believe in Him, and the Romans will come and take away both our place and nation.” John 11:47-48. That is when Caiaphas said that it would be better for one man to die for the people. Then we read, “From that day on, they plotted to put Him to death.” John 11:53. This trial was not about seeking justice, it was about protecting their own position. Now they just had to figure out how to do it.

With that motive to begin with, it is not surprising that they broke many other laws in their justice system in order to convict Jesus. We see that right from the start in His mock trial before Annas.

Before Annas, Jesus was Interrogated.

Annas didn't have any actual authority at this time since he was no longer High Priest. But they took Jesus to him while they gathered the rest of the 70 members of the Sanhedrin for his real trial. What Annas did was totally against their laws of justice. “The high priest then asked Jesus about His disciples and His doctrine.” When Jesus answered Annas, one of the guards implied that He was being disrespectful, and “struck Jesus with the palm of his hand.” But was Jesus being disrespectful? Not at all! It was actually a very polite way of pointing out the injustice of what they were doing.

Section 11(d) of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms guarantees a defendant the right to a PUBLIC trial in an open courtroom. That is to make sure that the court doesn't ramrod a conviction through without a fair trial. That law also comes from ancient Israel. It was illegal to hold a trial at night or in secret. But here Jesus was in the private residence of the former High Priest, at night in a secret trial. There is only one reason to do these things at night and in secret. That is because they knew they had no legal basis for convicting Jesus, and they didn't want anyone to know or get in their way.

Another important law said that they could not convict anyone based on their own testimony. They had to have at least two witnesses who could testify to the crime committed. Yet here there were no witnesses. Annas proceeded to interrogate Jesus. That's why Jesus said “I spoke openly to the world. I always taught in synagogues and in the temple, where the Jews always meet, and in secret I have said nothing. Why do you ask Me? Ask those who have heard Me what I said to them. Indeed they know what I said.” That is the way a trial is supposed to be conducted. But for that, the officer of the guard struck Jesus. Isn't that the way it always is. When those in high position are doing wrong and someone calls them out, they respond by flexing their muscle and saying how dare you speak to me like that? They hide behind their authority.

These injustices done to Jesus are even more horrendous when you consider, these were creatures treating their Creator like this. These were mere mortals unjustly

accusing their God! These were sinners condemning their Holy, Sinless Lord.

What is really amazing however, is that Jesus sat there and took that abuse. He pointed out their illegal actions to prick their own conscience, but He endured their abuse. Even when the guard slapped Him, He calmly responded, “If I have spoken evil, bear witness of the evil; but if well, why do you strike Me?” But He didn’t retaliate in any way. That is because Jesus was submitting to God’s justice. God had foretold through the prophet Isaiah in chapter 42:1, “Behold! My Servant whom I uphold, My Elect One in whom My soul delights! I have put My Spirit upon Him; He will bring forth justice to the Gentiles.” That is what Jesus was doing. He was establishing JUSTICE by enduring the worst INJUSTICE. For He agreed to suffer the just punishment of God for all the sins of the world.

Think about it. They were abusing Jesus in this unjust trial and Jesus endured their abuse, AND at the same time, He suffered God’s punishment against those Jews for wrongfully arresting Him and conducting this illegal, secretive trial. He endured the pain of the guard who hit Him, AND He bore God’s punishment against that guard for striking Him.

Let’s think about how we fit in to this. As we said, people do things in the dark and in secret that they know are wrong and don’t want anyone else to see them do it. What are your secret sins? What things do you know are wrong, but you do it anyway under the cloak of darkness when no one is around? While Jesus was being interrogated inside by Annas, Peter was outside in the courtyard being interrogated by a servant girl. He denied having anything to do with Jesus. What a blow to Jesus. To be accused and condemned by your enemies is one thing, you expect that; but to be denied and betrayed by your friends, that hurts.

So think about your secret sins. They are not really a secret. You may keep other people from seeing and knowing, but Jesus always sees and knows everything you do. He even knows your hidden thoughts and feelings and attitudes. Do you also accuse your Creator God of not doing what is right when things happen that you don’t like? We too are condemning our Sinless Lord when we complain, why me? We insult and abuse Jesus in many ways, which must really sting, coming from His friends. Then God punishes Jesus for those things we did to Him.

That’s what it means that the Deepest Stroke that Pierced Him was the stroke that Justice gave! Jesus suffered God’s just punishment against our sins in order to satisfy God’s justice for you so that you could be forgiven. What wondrous love is this? The Apostle Peter describes it very succinctly, “For Christ also suffered once for sins, the JUST for the UNJUST, that He might bring us to God.” 1 Peter 3:18 Praise God for His amazing Justice!

Amen.