

SERMON THOUGHTS ABRIDGED

Matthew 26:57-59**THE PROUD AND THE HUMBLE AT TRIAL**

And those who had laid hold of Jesus led Him away to Caiaphas the high priest, where the scribes and the elders were assembled. But Peter followed Him at a distance to the high priest's courtyard. And he went in and sat with the servants to see the end. Now the chief priests, the elders, and all the council sought false testimony against Jesus to put Him to death, but found none.

The proud vs. the humble—there's quite a difference, isn't there? Think of a doctor. The proud doctor who lets you know that he's in charge, who does not handle well any questions that seem to challenge his authority, who is gruff with the patients as well as the nurses, who runs the show. Versus the humble doctor whose concern is the patient's physical, emotional, and psychological welfare, who goes the extra mile without being perturbed, who is patient with the patients and the nurses, who leads with his heart rather than his fist.

In our text for this evening, we see such a contrast: Humble Jesus arrested and put on trial before the proud Jewish court. The text says, they *who had laid hold of Jesus led Him away*. Those that came out to Gethsemane with swords and clubs to get Jesus "laid hold on Him." They took control of Him, held the upper hand, had power over Him. These were people just like you, people made by God. God had "knit them together in the womb" (Psalm 139) just as He does for all. They were grasping God, Jesus, maneuvering Him in their own power, and taking control of Him. Yet this was the very Jesus described in Revelation 1:7-8 "Behold, He is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see Him, even they who pierced Him. . . . I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the End, who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty." Jesus the Almighty! He has ALL POWER. Yet He humbly let these proud bags of dust and dirt take the power over Him. He did it for you.

They led him away. He who leads the world, King of Kings and Lord of Lords, was "led away." In the Old Testament Isaiah says, "He was oppressed and He was afflicted . . . He was led as a lamb to the slaughter" (Isaiah 53:7). He let them do it. Jesus the Leader of all, allowed Himself to be led away as our sacrificial lamb, to pay the penalty for our sins. What a contrast—the proud, self-assertive enemies, who were Nothing before Jesus vs. the humble, compliant Jesus, who in reality is Everything.

Jesus was taken to Caiaphas the high priest. The high priest held a special position in the worship life of the Children of Israel. He was the chief, the head, of the priests who were descendants of Aaron (Moses' brother). The priests approached the Lord for the people, bringing their sacrifices to the altar and placing them on the fire for the people. The high priest was the head of the priests, He had special garments distinguishing him from the ordinary priests. On one day of the year, after bringing offerings for himself, he and he only was allowed to enter the Holy of Holies. This was the Great Day of Atonement. In the Holy of Holies, he sprinkled the blood of atonement—the blood of peace—on the ark of the covenant. The ark held the ten commandments, with the mercy cover over the top. The high priest was the special go-between between God and the people. In our scene, Caiaphas the high priest had become Jesus' enemy, because Jesus knew that Caiaphas was not interested in atonement and peace with God through the Sacrifice of the Messiah to come. Jesus knew Caiaphas was interested only in Caiaphas and Caiaphas' power and Caiaphas' position. Here stood Jesus in His humility before the proud high priest. And do you know what?

Who was the real high priest here? It was Jesus! The Son of God came to earth to serve as the real High Priest, to offer the real, the only, the final, sacrifice of atonement for sin. He came to offer Himself on the altar of the cross, to be the real go-between between sinless God and sinful man. In the letter to the Hebrews where the writer speaks of Jesus, we read, "Such a High Priest was fitting for us; who is holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners, and has become higher than the heavens; who, as those high priests, does not need daily 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" (Hebrews &:26-27). Jesus' priesthood was so much higher than that of Caiaphas. He would die for Caiaphas' sins too. Yet Jesus stood there in humility before Caiaphas in his pride. Jesus did so for you, for me, and for all the world. He was the perfect, spotless sacrifice and also the holy sinless high priest who served as our perfect middle-man. Such a Savior!

But there's more. This ruling council, this Sanhedrin—"Sanhedrin" meaning those "seated together"—was the highest Jewish authority at the time. The Romans allowed it to function, while Rome itself held the supreme authority. The high priest, the chief priests, the scribes and the elders made up this Sanhedrin. The scribes were the men of letters who know the Old Testament and the rules of God inside and out. The Law was much more than 10 Commandments, but all the religious feasts and ordinances, sacrifices and festivals, as well as civic law and punishment. The scribes interpreted and applied the rules of the Old Testament for the people, they taught the Old Testament rules of God, they determined sentences to be administered when one transgressed. They were enemies of Jesus, because He saw through their outward observance of the laws of God, and saw hearts that were far from the Lord. Their actions were for outward show and outward credit—self-righteousness. These proud scribes were ready to bring to bear the whole body of Old Testament against Jesus of Nazareth.

Yet Jesus was not under the stranglehold of the law and all its ordinances and all its condemnation for failure to keep the rules. He was holy. He was the One who gave the law, who understood it perfectly, who taught not just the outward letter of the law, but its message of condemnation for self-righteousness. Humble Jesus, the perfect Scribe, the perfect Rabbi, the teacher of the 12 disciples and of us His students and disciples. stood before the proud scribes to receive their judgment. All the while He Himself was the Great Judge, who at the End of time will separate the sheep from the goats. At that time, those who cling to Him for His forgiveness and mercy will be granted the glories of heaven; and those who in pride and stubbornness insist their way is better will be dispatched to the pangs of hell. There stood humble Jesus, the Scribe of Scribes, letting them condemn Him under the Law, so that You and I are not condemned for our sin. We are mercifully given heaven because Jesus' humbly took the judgment. Such a contrast.

And there were also the "elders," the aged, well-respected men, who held accumulated years of wisdom and experience in handling matters of this life under God. The people turned to them for direction and approval. Do you remember Boaz in the Old Testament, who wanted to marry Ruth and redeem her family's property and the family's line of heredity? He went to the elders at the gate of the city to accomplish the process. In our text, Jesus stood before the elders, perhaps some were 70 or 80 years old. Who was really the elder here? Who had the vaster and wider picture of things, who had the most years of experience and existence? Jesus! Jesus surpassed them all. He was eternal! "Before Abraham was I AM" (John 8:58), the Lord had said. Jesus, THEIR ELDER, humbly stood before them. with their proud, sinfully corrupted view and understanding of all things. Jesus allowed it. Through Him you and I are given righteousness, forgiveness, and approval to join the Father's family.

Finally, how did this group, the high priest, the scribes, the elders seek to accomplish their goal? In arrogance, to get their way, they sought false witnesses against Jesus.. They sought lies. Lies are of the devil. Yet Jesus who is the Truth—"I am the way, the truth, and the life; no man comes to the Father, but by Me" (John 14:6)—stood in front of them. They wanted no part of Jesus or His merciful salvation. They wanted a salvation that could be credited to them. How much like that are you, whether you consciously think that way or not.? Everyone likes to get a little credit, or a lot of credit. But self-credit is a lie. It will never get anyone acceptance by the Father. Jesus is our Way, our Truth, and our Life. Here He was subjected to their lies. None of the false charges "stuck," other than the final charge of Blasphemy—that Jesus had "mocked" God by making Himself equal with God. Jesus had not blasphemed; He was in fact the eternal Son of God. But He did not argue their charges. The Old Testament punishment for blasphemy was death. He submitted to their verdict. In humble love for you and for me, He who is the Truth, submitted to the lie, carried our guilt to the cross, paid our penalty. He rose in victory, your Savior and mine granting forgiveness and eternal life!

What a contrast: Jesus' humble power, holiness, and heart of love for needy sinners vs.. the proud sinful hearts of the weak leaders interested only in themselves. This Lenten season, let us humbly cling to Jesus, our Savior. Through Him cast aside your sinful pride. Let the devil lie as he will. Jesus has out-manuevered him already.

So be it! Amen!

Pastor Kanzenbach ---