

SERMON THOUGHTS ABRIDGED

MATTHEW 26:59-63a
MALIGNED

Now the chief priests, the elders, and all the council sought false testimony against Jesus to put Him to death, but found none. Even though many false witnesses came forward, they found none. But at last two false witnesses came forward 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 to Him, Do You answer nothing? What is it these men testify against You? But Jesus kept silent.

What does it mean to be “maligned”? It means to have someone say something against you that makes you look bad. *Maligned* is closely related to the word “malignant.” A malignant tumor is a bad, harmful, cancerous tumor. The word *maligned* is also but not quite so closely related to the word “malicious.” Malicious talk seeks to hurt and harm another. The word *maligned* is also but not so closely related to the word “malefactor”—a criminal, a bad man, who needs to be punished. A person who is *maligned* is painted in a bad light, usually with lies.

At the Garden of Gethsemane, Jesus was “bound” like a criminal even though He was innocent. The arresting soldiers and officers took Jesus to the palace of the high priest. There we see Him “maligned” so that He, who was not a criminal, would look like a criminal. A so-called trial was held before the Sanhedrin, the ruling council of the Jews. The chairman of the Sanhedrin was the high priest. This group was the political and religious high court and leadership of the nation. Their power was, however, limited by the Romans who had conquered them. This group ought to have been a group with the highest concern for truth—legal truth, political truth, and above all Truth of Holy Scripture. The high role of that group would be as if the church council at St. Luke's, besides being the congregation's doctrine leaders and Christian-discipline leaders, as it is now, were also the city of Lemmon's political and civil leaders. One would certainly look for truth and faithfulness in such a council.

However, at the Sanhedrin's gathering that night there was little Truth. Jesus was *maligned* and lied against at the behest of the court! The high priest (its chairman) and the Sanhedrin members had already decided what the outcome of this trial would be. In verse 4 of this same chapter, Matthew writes, “*The chief priests, the scribes, and the elders of the people assembled [several days earlier] at the palace of the high priest who was called Caiaphas, and plotted to take Jesus by trickery and kill Him (26:3-4).*” Do you suppose Jesus was saddened to know that the leaders of the people, whom God had chosen to be the nation from whom the Savior and Messiah would come, were thumbing their nose at the One God sent? “We don't need you. You're no help. You make us look bad. We have the system of how to get in good with God and we're at the top. People look to us. You're making us look bad. People flock to you. We will get rid of you. We will kill you.” Indeed, sad.

Now the chief priests, the elders, and all the council sought false testimony against Jesus to put Him to death, but found none. Even though many false witnesses came forward, they found none. But at last two false witnesses came forward and said, This fellow said, I am able to destroy the temple of God and to build it in three days. These “pillars” of truth, sought liars to accuse Jesus. Stand in Jesus' shoes. How good does it feel to have people maligning you, lying about you, to get you into trouble and get rid of you? When you were a child, did it ever happen on the playground that schoolmates lied about who started the trouble and blamed you? Jesus' own people and countrymen lied about Him to get Him into trouble.

FALSE witnesses were desired and sought—pseudo-witnesses. Have you ever heard of pseudo-science, or pseudo-medicine? Something that claims to be “science” or “medicine,” but is not? It is false. These are pseudo-witnesses. Did the Sanhedrin advertise for individuals to come, did they coax people to come, did they pay people to come???? (They paid Judas!) We don't know. But the Sanhedrin was behind the lies. Matthew adds there were many who came. Not just a few, but *many*. Not just one or two classmates lying against you at school, but many! What a hurtful blow! The same here for Jesus.

Who else had lied against Jesus that night? Judas in the Garden, “Hail, Master” and greeted Him with a kiss. Peter, who had said I will never leave you nor deny you, yet in the courtyard during this very trial, three times responded, “I don't know the man.” And he cursed and he swore that it was so. Have you *maligned* Jesus? I doubt you have *maligned* Him to get Him into trouble, but have you *maligned* His good name? Do you curse and swear by His name foolishly, carelessly, and angrily? Do you claim loyalty to Him, but then in words and actions downplay the priority and significance of the Bible's message of salvation in Jesus alone. Do agree with those who

chime, “It’s all the same god, people just worship Him in different ways—Hindu, Buddhist, Muslim, non-Christian Jewish, etc.” If so, how does that make Jesus feel? And now how do you feel?

Two of the false witness who did agree, but didn’t really agree, twisted Jesus’ own words against Him. Jesus had said, *Destroy this temple and in three days I will raise it up again*, but John tells us that He was not talking about the temple building, but about the temple of His own body, that it would be put to death by the Jews and then He would raise it again on the third day. --- Isn’t it frustrating and aggravating to have one’s own words twisted against oneself? Using words out of context, is the same thing. Does that happen between opponents in election campaigns? I think so. Bible groups will quote Scripture out of context. Example: “Those who have done good will rise to eternal life” (John 5:28-29), which is used to support the false notion that my own deeds will win God’s favor and get me to heaven. Yet the truth is “By the deeds of the Law, no flesh will be justified in His sight. . . . A man is justified by faith apart from the deeds of the Law” (Romans 3:23-28). Do not quote the Bible out of context.

Where does all this come from—maligning, lying, twisting the Truth to one’s own advantage? You know the answer. In John 8:44, Jesus says that *The devil is a Liar and the Father of Lies*. Satan. He lied in the Garden of Eden, “You will not surely die.” And he lies to you today to your own great harm, and to make the Lord look bad.

How much of a “fight” did Jesus put up? Did He shout back, “Lies! Lies! All lies!” trying to turn the tables against His accusers, as culprits often do? No. Did He disgustingly counter, “You liar,” totally sick of the false witnesses’ line? No. He answered nothing. In situations where lying rules, even the best response only generates more lies. Jesus said nothing. With His silence He condemned the sham trial that was unfolding. That same scene would unfold before Pilate where false allegations were brought, and before Herod where He was vehemently accused by the Jews. Why did Jesus take the maligning? Is it because He couldn’t do anything about it? No. He could have. In one second He could have super-glued all their mouths shut. Just as He had willingly let Himself be “bound” with the ropes in the Garden, He willingly let them “malign” Him and make Him look bad at the trial. That is why He had come. He had come to take your “bad” and your lies and your disrespect for the Father onto Himself in order to suffer the shame and the scorn that is yours. The Father scorned and abandoned Him, “maligning” Him for us, during the three hours of darkness on the cross, when Jesus cried out “My God, My God, why have You forsaken me.” The Father was rightfully punishing the sins of the world, but declared His innocent Son Guilty instead of us. It was mercy and love for you. In Jesus, all your sins, your own lying, your own maligning, and otherwise, are taken off the record. You are declared HOLY. Thank You, Savior! Our sins maligning Him, taking Him to the cross. “Savior, thank you for Your love and kindness. Through the Holy Spirit, create a new heart in me and a new man to serve you willingly, in righteousness and true holiness.”

As you move forward in life now a child of God, fight against Satan and your own sinful flesh so that you do not malign others, whether out of dislike and hate, or as a cover up for your own faults! Jesus says, *Whatever you have done unto one of the least of these My disciples, you have done it unto Me*. Husbands and wives, do not lie to one another. Do not accuse one another of lying. Such destroys the trust and the bond between you. It is a hurtful matter, regardless how you look at it. It applies to parents and children, to siblings and siblings, to friends and friends, to neighbors and neighbors. Stop the false witness and maligning. Do you remember the 8th Commandment? -- “You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.” Do you remember Martin Luther’s “What Does This Mean? We should fear and love God that we do not tell lies about our neighbor, betray him, or give him a bad name. [believe, betray, slander, or defame our neighbor]; but defend him, speak well of him, and put the best construction on everything [take his words and actions in the kindest possible way].” Jesus was maligning because of you. Now you are forgiven. May your New Man, fed by the Word and the Holy Spirit of Jesus, fight against maligning the Lord and others. And may the New Man, fed by the Word and the Holy Spirit of Jesus, move you to forgive those who have maligning you, just as Christ has forgiven you first.

So be it! Amen.

Pastor Kanzenbach---