Luke Lesson 87 (2021)

**THE TRIALS OF JESUS**

(Meekness and Majesty)

Luke 22:63-23:25

Key Verse: 22:69

“‘But from now on, the Son of Man will be seated at the right hand of the mighty God.’ They all asked, ‘Are you then the Son of God?’ He replied, ‘You say that I am.’”

In today’s passage, we see Jesus on trials before the Jewish religious leaders and secular leaders. The Jewish religious leaders viciously accused him of deserving the death penalty. The ignorant crowd of people shouted, demanding Jesus to be crucified. Political leaders who saw Jesus’ innocence could not rescue Jesus. The entire transactions of these trials were ugly and very disturbing, full of false accusations, dirty politics, and ignorance of the crowd. It’s tough to read through this section of the Bible without becoming emotional. We are inclined to be critical of those who accused the innocent Jesus. But we should not overlook that their behaviors represent none other than the sinfulness of all fallen men and women, including ourselves. It’s a challenging passage to digest. As I went over my old sermon files, I found that I barely delivered Sunday messages based on this passage. Yet, as I struggled to prepare the sermon, I realized that the trials of Jesus reveal something genuinely wonderful and glorious about our Lord Jesus Christ. His true nature as the Son of God, his meekness and majesty, is displayed during his trials. May the Lord bless us with his words this morning.

In the previous passage, we learned how Jesus was arrested and led into the high priest's house in the middle of the night, through which the Sanhedrin members interrogated him, and Simon Peter denied Jesus three times (47-62). Look at verses 63-65. “The men who were guarding Jesus began mocking and beating him. They blindfolded him and demanded, ‘Prophesy! Who hit you?’ and they said many other insulting things to him.” The men guarding Jesus were temple guards. They were assigned the duty to hold Jesus in custody until the next segment of the trials. Yet, during the night, they began to abuse Jesus. They mocked and beat him, maybe with fists and even with clubs. Their abuse had no limit. They blindfolded him and demanded, *“Hey, you who claims to be a prophet. Prophesy! Who hit you?”*
I am sure Jesus’ face was bruised and bloody by their beatings. It’s hard even to think about it. I wonder if all the temple guards were abusive all the time. Maybe or maybe not. But definitely, these temple guards were abusive of Jesus.

Why would they do such things? Well, they might have been holding grudges against Jesus after seeing him clearing the temple a few days ago, and their superiors were mad at them. Or they might have been stressed, tired and upset because they had to work overnight shifts. So, they were merely venting their frustration and anger to someone weak and vulnerable around them. More surprising is that Jesus our Lord, the Son of the living God, was abused physically, emotionally, and mentally by the hands of ruthless temple guards. Probably, such abuses were considered normal in those days. Unfortunately, these kinds of abuses happen everywhere, even today. Not all abusive people are aware of their offensive language and destructive behaviors. However, such abuses should never be considered normal or hidden but exposed to be corrected.

Look at verses 66-71. In the daybreak, after the long physical, emotional and mental torture, Jesus was dragged to the council of the people, the Sanhedrin court, to be interrogated again by the chief priests and the teachers of the law. They questioned him by saying, “If you are the Messiah, tell us.” In other gospels, they asked, “Are you the Messiah, the Son of God (or the Son of the Blessed One)?” (Mt. 26:63; Mk. 14:61) The term “Messiah” had a political connotation in those days. They asked this question, wanting Jesus to admit that he was the Messiah who was expected to overthrow the Roman government and make Israel free and great again as in the days of King David. They wanted Jesus to admit it so that they could accuse him of being a political threat to the Roman government.

How did Jesus answer their dubious question? Look at verses 67b-69. “Jesus answered, ‘If I tell you, you will not believe me, and if I asked you, you would not answer. But from now on, the Son of Man will be seated at the right hand of the mighty God.’” Up to this point, Jesus had avoided using the terms such as “the Messiah, Christ, or the Son of God” for himself because the Jewish religious leaders could misuse them. So Jesus intentionally used the term “the Son of Man” for himself.

Jesus performed numerous miracles which only God could, and his teachings were amazingly inspiring and even exposing their hypocrisy. Yet, the Jewish religious leaders refused to believe him and hardened their hearts. Jesus knew that they had no intent to change their minds. So, he answered, “If I tell you, you will not believe me, and if I asked you, you will not answer.” Yet, he told them who he was by using the description of the Son of Man, recorded in Daniel 7:13-14, “But from now on, the Son of Man will be seated at the right hand of the mighty God.” By quoting the prophecy of Daniel, Jesus acknowledged that he is the Messiah, not as the political Messiah for the nation Israel but as the spiritual Messiah for the entire world.

Look at verses 70-71. “They all asked, ‘Are you then the Son of God?’ He replied, ‘You say that I am.’ Then they said, ‘Why do we need any more testimony? We have heard it from his own lips.’” According to Mark’s account, when the high priest heard what Jesus said, he tore his clothes, condemning Jesus as blasphemy (Mk. 14:63). They shouted that Jesus deserved to die for blasphemy. Yes, if Jesus was not the Son of God, he was guilty. But the fact is that he is who he claims to be.

If the Jewish religious leaders had carefully listened to what Jesus meant with an open mind, they would not have accused him. They could have God’s revelation with the moment of awakening. Yet, they had no ears to hear, no intent to listen to God’s voice. Here, we should think a little more. We seem to hear God’s words all the time, but we don’t necessarily listen to his words. These religious leaders had head knowledge of the Scriptures. Yet, it was useless if they didn’t have ears to hear God’s voice. 2 Peter 1:19 states, “We also have the prophetic message as something completely reliable, and you will do well to pay attention to it, as to a light shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts.” Superficial Bible knowledge is different from hearing God’s voice personally.

In the following passage, 23:1-25, we see Jesus’ trials by secular judges one after another, first by the Roman Governor Pontius Pilate, by King Herod, and again by Pontius Pilate. But behind all these trials were the fanatic Jewish religious leaders, who had determined to kill Jesus by any means.

Look at verses 1-2. “Then the whole assembly rose and led him off to Pilate. And they began to accuse him, saying, ‘We have found this man subverting our nation. He opposes payment of taxes to Caesar and claims to be Messiah, a king.’” When the Sanhedrin members brought charges against Jesus to Pilate, it was no longer blasphemy because that was not relevant to Rome. So they charged Jesus with different matters. According to their accusation, Jesus disturbed the peace and rebelled against the Roman government by opposing taxes and claiming his kingship over Israel. False accusations!

Look at verses 3-5. “So pilate asked Jesus, ‘Are you the king of the Jews?’ ‘You have said so,’ Jesus replied. Then the Pilate announced to the chief priests and the crowd, ‘I find no basis for a charge against this man.’ But they insisted, ‘He stirs up the people all over Judea by his teaching. He started in Galilee and has come all the way here.’” Luke’s account does not record in detail how Pilate found Jesus was innocent. But according to John’s account, when Pilate asked Jesus if he was the king of the Jews, Jesus said that his kingdom was not of this world but from another place and that he was not a political king but a spiritual king (18:33-37). Pilate found Jesus innocent, yet he could not simply dismiss the case. Why not? It’s because of the political pressure of the fanatic Jewish leaders. The case of Jesus was a big headache to Pilate.

So what did he do? When Pilate heard that Jesus was from Galilee, he decided to dump Jesus’ case to Herod, who was the ruler of Galilee and happened to be in the town (6-7). Look at verses 8-9. “When Herod saw Jesus, he was greatly pleased, because for a long time he had been wanting to see him. From what he had heard about him, he hoped to see him perform a sign of some sort. He plied him with many questions, but Jesus gave him no answer.” Herod was happy to see Jesus because he wanted to be entertained by Jesus. Herod tried to question Jesus at length. Still, Jesus did not give him any answer.

Seeing Jesus’ complete silence, the chief priests and the teachers of the law tried to help Herod by vehemently accusing Jesus, hoping to invoke some reaction out of Jesus (10). Jesus remained silent. Yet, the mockery did not stop. Look at verses 11-12. ‘Then Herod and his soldiers ridiculed and mocked him. Dressing him in an elegant robe, they sent him back to Pilate. That day Herod and Pilate became friends – before this, they had been enemies.” It was about a 10-minute walk from the Pilate’s office to Herod’s palace. Jesus was ridiculed and mocked in between. Yet, Jesus showed remarkable restraint.

Jesus is the Son of the Living God. If he wanted, he could have destroyed his enemies who ridiculed him with one blow. Yet, Jesus didn’t exercise his power to defend himself. Instead, he remained silent. It reminds us of what Isaiah 53:7 states about the Messiah, “He was oppressed and afflicted, yet he did not open his mouth; he was led like a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before its shearers is silent, so he did not open his mouth.” The phrase “he did not open his mouth” is repeated twice.

When somebody accuses us falsely and constantly, what do we do? We surely open our mouths and verbally defend ourselves or even attack them. But we know that it does not work well. Instead, we fall into a more heated argument. When somebody wants to continue to argue, what should we do? It’s wise to remain silent. Somebody said, *“Speech is silver, and silence is golden.”*

But Jesus’ silence demonstrates more than his wisdom. It reveals his divinity. Jesus remained completely calm and silent not because he was weak but because he was in complete control over himself and everything under God’s plan. Jesus’ silence and meekness remind us of what he said in the Sermon on the Mount, “Blessed are the meek for they will inherit the earth.” (Mt. 5:5) Humility is like water, which gives life to all living things. It assumes the lowest place and is like God. Jesus’ meekness reveals his majesty as God. *“Meekness and majesty; manhood and Deity, in perfect harmony, the Man who is God. Lord of eternity, dwells in humanity.”* (Hymn 32-Green)

 Look at verses 13-17. “Pilate called together the chief priests, the rulers, and the people, and said to them, ‘You brought me this man as one who was inciting the people to rebellion. I have examined him in your presence and have found no basis for your charges against him. Neither has Herod, for he sent him back to us; as you can see, he has done nothing to deserve death. Therefore, I will punish him and then release him.’” Finding Jesus’ innocence, Pilate attempted to release Jesus, not just once but over and over (16, 20, 22), yet with no success.

 In verses 18-25, the crowd shouted to Pilate to release Barabbas, an insurrectionist, and murderer. It’s shocking to see that people chose Barabas instead of Jesus. Not only that, they demanded innocent Jesus to be crucified, shouting out loud, “Crucify him! Crucify him!” They pressured Pilate to execute Jesus on the cross. They were insane. Pilate couldn’t stand up for the sinless Jesus. He surrendered to the will of the ignorant crowd to crucify Jesus and to release Barabbas. Barabbas became a national hero while Jesus became a shameful criminal. What the heck is going on here? But that’s what happened during the trials of Jesus.

Before closing this message, let’s think a little more. It’s easy to point the finger at the Jewish religious leaders who hardened their hearts and condemned Jesus. But how often are we critical and judgmental of others because of our hidden pride and sense of competition and do not even admit it? We often blame Pilate for what he did, accusing him of being a coward. Yet, I wonder what we would have done for Jesus if we were in Pilate’s shoes. Unless we give up everything, including our success, position, life, and family, we would not have saved Jesus. How easy is it to compromise for fear of losing people’s approval and recognition? Am I ready to risk everything for following Christ? We also blame King Herod, who only wanted Jesus to satisfy his curiosity and entertain him. But we cannot deny that the current Christian culture is not different from entertainment. We want to be entertained rather than to serve the Lord. We also blame people who chose Barabbas over Jesus. But do we always chose Jesus over Barabbas?

Indeed, all of us are guilty, like Jewish religious leaders, Pilate, King Herod, and the crowd. By nature, we are all self-seekers. No matter how hard we try, we can never be perfect. Yet, we need faith in Jesus. Instead of feeling guilty and remaining in guilt and shame, we need to look at Jesus by faith. While interrogated, mocked, and abused by men, Jesus didn’t retaliate or open his mouth to complain or curse those falsely accusing him. Instead, Jesus remained silent, like a gentle lamb. Why did he stay silent? It’s because Jesus wanted to end the vicious cycle of human sins by swallowing all the poison of our sins through his sacrificial death on the cross. His meekness was not the sign of weakness but true majesty as the Son of the living God.

Let me close the sermon. Jesus said to his accusers, “But from now on, the Son of Man will be seated at the right hand of the mighty God.” Indeed, Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of the living God, who is seated at the right hand of the mighty God. And he is with us now. We are concerned about many things happening around us today, including the pandemic, global warming, natural disasters, injustice, violence, the rise of amorality, anarchy, etc. We feel that the second coming of Christ is imminent not because we look forward to his appearance but because of the feeling of insecurity. Honestly, we cannot be sure. Yet, one thing we should be sure of is that Christ, the Son of the living God, is already with us here now. In whatever situation we may be in, Christ Jesus is able to sympathize with us and help us. And he will be with us forever. So why should we be afraid or worry about anything? At the beginning of Luke’s Gospel, we learned in Zechariah’s song of praise that Christ’s coming is like the rising Sun, which came from heaven and shone on those living in darkness and the shadow of death. It means that if we don’t acknowledge his presence with us by faith now, we still live in darkness, no matter how hard we struggle. Our life begins and lasts forever simply by trusting Christ Jesus and abiding in him. Do you let Christ live in you or let him stay out of you? May we experience the true life and reveal the glory of Christ Jesus as we struggle to acknowledge his living presence in us moment by moment.