

WHAT REALLY HAPPENED AT THE TRIAL OF JESUS?

SERIES: JESUS, SAVIOR OF THE LOST

by Ron Ritchie

Early on a foggy Thursday morning four weeks ago I drove into San Francisco to be a character witness at a pretrial hearing for a young man who had been accused of committing a felony by the U.S district attorney's office. As I mounted the steps of the Federal Court building at 450 Golden Gate Avenue, everything looked gray: the sky, the building, and its windows and doors. The gloom of all that grayness followed me inside to the halls where guards stood in front of several courtroom doors. Even the people seemed to have gray faces. Lawyers, police officers, security guards, and potential witnesses all rushed to their appointed places. As a man with merciless and lifeless eyes searched me, momentarily I felt insignificant and insecure.

I was instructed to appear on the second floor where I joined about fifteen friends and members of the defendant's family who were also character witnesses. The situation began to seem a bit brighter. At the stroke of 9:00 am we were all ushered into the courtroom by two of the defendant's lawyers, who, I was told by his best friend, were the best money could buy. I sat down next to a Christian friend and handed her a book I brought to read in case we had some waiting time. The book was entitled *The Trial of Jesus Christ* by the late British Judge Frank J. Powell. I told her I was interested in contrasting the trial of Jesus to American, British, Jewish, and Roman pretrial procedures. The conclusion I have drawn, in light of all these systems of justice, is that the trial of Jesus was a travesty of justice. Let's look together at Luke 22:63-23:25. This is a difficult passage to study, but it will humble us and ultimately move us to praise our Lord for being willing to go through this ordeal for our sakes.

Before we examine the trial of Jesus, let's step back and remember how he came to be in this circumstance. Luke's theme in his book on the life, death, resurrection, and Ascension of Jesus, shows us Jesus' purpose: "For the Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost" (Luke 19:10). And Romans 3:23 says, "...for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God...." In order to save the lost Jesus Christ became incarnate, "that through death He might render powerless him who had the power of death, that is, the devil; and might deliver those who through fear of death were subject to slavery all their lives" (Hebrews 2:14-15). And to accomplish his purpose in a fallen and unrighteous world, Jesus our righteous Prophet, Priest, and King had to "...suffer many things, and be rejected by the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised up on the third day" (Luke 9:22).

When we last looked at the book of Luke together, we were in our Lord's passion week, which began on what we now call Palm Sunday. We had come to Thursday evening in the garden of Gethsemane, just before the final eighteen hours of Jesus' life on earth. Remember, in Luke 22:47-62 our Lord had just finished praying to his Father. He had returned to his disciples and found them sleeping from sorrow, awakened them, and said, "Behold, the hour is at hand and the Son of Man is being betrayed into the hands of sinners. Arise, let us be going; behold, the one who betrays Me is at hand!" (Matthew 26:45-46). At that moment Judas arrived with a small army, walked up to Jesus, and betrayed him with a lover's kiss. They immediately arrested Jesus, bound him, and took him back into Jerusalem for a pretrial hearing before the high priests.

The Son of Man before the high priests

Luke 22:63-65

And the men who were holding Jesus in custody were mocking Him, and beating Him, and they blindfolded Him and were asking Him, saying, "Prophecy, who is the one who hit You?" And they were saying many other things against Him, blaspheming.

Who exactly was the accused, this Jesus who would allow himself to be taken before the human courts of

Israel and Rome? To his disciples on several occasions he had called himself the Son of Man. He took that term from Daniel 7:13-14:

"I kept looking in the night visions,
And behold, with the clouds of heaven
One like a Son of Man was coming,
And He came up to the Ancient of Days
And was presented before Him.

And to Him was given dominion,
Glory and a kingdom,
That all the peoples, nations, and men of every language
Might serve him.
His dominion is an everlasting dominion
Which will not pass away;
And His kingdom is one
Which will not be destroyed."

In Daniel 7:15-25, however, before all the above were to be put in place we find that the Son of Man was the representative of the "saints of the Highest One" who must suffer defeat and oppression at the hands of their enemies before coming into His glory.

According to Matthew 13:41 and 19:28 Jesus said the Son of Man was the coming Savior and Judge. Mark records that Jesus said, "...the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many" (Mark 10:45). Luke, as we just saw, records that Jesus said, "For the Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost" (Luke 19:10). And John records that Jesus said, "...as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up; that whoever believes may in Him have eternal life" (John 3:14-15). John goes on to say that the Son of Man will be exalted and will come again in power and glory to judge the nations. The title "Son of Man," based on these scriptures and many others, sums up his person and refers to both his humanity and his divinity. It also speaks of his mission: "...it [is] written of the Son of Man that He should suffer many things and be treated with contempt" (Mark 9:12), in order to offer the gift of salvation to all sinners who place their faith in him. For he is, as John the Baptist said, "...the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world" (John 1:29), God in the flesh. It was my sin and yours that he took away.

Who were the accusers? Who had the gall to arrest and condemn to death the Son of Man? We will meet Annas, the former high priest; his son-in-law Caiaphas, the current high priest; the Sanhedrin; Herod Antipas, governor of Galilee; Pilate, the Roman governor of Judea; and the Jewish mob.

According to John 18:13-24 the soldiers and Jewish officers took Jesus to be questioned by Annas the high priest as John and Peter stood in the shadows. Annas was high priest 6-15 AD. He then held an honorary position of high priest as five of his sons and finally Caiaphas his son-in-law filled that position. Annas asked Jesus about his disciples and teaching. Jesus answered that he had taught nothing in secret, and so the high priest could ask the people. Without warning a temple guard delivered a severe blow to his face because it appeared that Jesus did not answer the high priest directly.

According to Matthew 26:57-68 they then took Jesus to the house of Joseph Caiaphas, who was high priest 18-36 AD. Caiaphas is portrayed in the gospel of John as a champion of political expediency. On an earlier occasion he had unknowingly prophesied about Jesus to the Sanhedrin (the Jewish supreme court) as he said, "You do not take into account that it is expedient for you that one man should die for the people, and that the whole nation should not perish" (John 11:50). Jesus was led before Caiaphas and a quorum of the Sanhedrin. After a string of false witnesses failed to bring in the required results, Caiaphas in frustration said to Jesus, "I adjure You by the living God, that You tell us whether You are the Christ, the Son of God." Jesus, realizing that the verdict was already in, answered in terms of his resurrection and Ascension: "You have said it yourself; nevertheless I tell you, hereafter you shall see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of Power, and

coming on the clouds of heaven [referring to Psalm 110:1; Daniel 7:13]." At that point Caiaphas tore his robes; accused Jesus of blaspheming God, a religious charge worthy of death (Matthew 26:65-66); and condemned him to death. Then some of the men around Jesus spat in his face and beat him with their fists. Others blindfolded him, then slapped him and said mockingly, "Prophecy to us, You Christ; who is the who one hit You?" It was at this point that Isaiah 53:7-8 was fulfilled:

"He was oppressed and He was afflicted,
Yet He did not open His mouth;
Like a lamb that is led to slaughter,
And like a sheep that is silent before its shearers,
So he did not open his mouth.
By oppression and judgment He was taken away...."

Return with me for a moment to the pretrial hearing of my young friend. A fatherly U.S. federal judge walked into the courtroom. One of the clerks asked the audience to rise and then be seated. At that moment a side door on our left opened, and two marshals escorted the young man into the courtroom in handcuffs. We were warned not to speak to him while he was waiting to stand before the judge, but many of our eyes met his so that he would not feel alone in that humiliating position. When his turn came to stand before the judge, he was joined by his lawyers and the prosecuting district attorney. The judge read him his rights and told him that at no time did he have to speak on his own behalf. In contrast, what really happened at the pretrial hearing of Jesus? They took him to the houses of the high priests Annas and Caiaphas, struck him a blow on the face, beat him around the head, spat upon him, mocked him, and condemned him to death.

The Son of Man before the Sanhedrin

Luke 22:66-71

And when it was day, the Council of elders of the people assembled, both chief priests and scribes, and they led Him away to their council chamber, saying, "If You are the Christ, tell us." But He said to them, "If I tell you, you will not believe; and if I ask a question, you will not answer. But from now on the Son of Man will be seated at the right hand of the power of God." And they all said, "Are You the Son of God, then?" And He said to them, "Yes, I am." And they said, "What further need do we have of testimony? For we have heard it ourselves from His own mouth."

The Son of Man, God incarnate, had been awake now for some 24 hours and was weakened by lack of sleep, food, and water and by the beatings. They took him before the Sanhedrin. This seventy-member council was made up of the high priest and former high priests in addition to members of the high priests' families, elders, scribes, Pharisees, and Sadducees. This court was set up under Rome to handle religious cases within the Jewish community that fell under the Law of Moses, in order to off-load as many cases as possible from the Roman courts. As we will see, Jesus was brought before this court on the charge of blaspheming, which referred to acts or words that violated God's power and majesty, or claiming for oneself attributes that belonged to God alone (see Leviticus 24:11-16). Within the Jewish system of justice under Roman control, this council could pronounce death sentences but had to have them ratified by the Roman governor (see John 18:31), which in this case was Pontius Pilate. Certain rules applied: They were not allowed to meet at night; that is why it was necessary to wait until morning for the arrival of the full court. All charges had to be supported by the evidence of two witnesses. The sentence of death could never be carried out on the day on which it was given; a night had to elapse so that the court might sleep on it and perhaps their verdict might give way to mercy. The whole procedure in the books was designed for mercy, but in Jesus' case mercy was a lost child in the woods of envy. The Jews broke all the rules to get him in front of Pilate.

"If you are the Messiah, tell us!" they demanded. Jesus answered, "If I tell you, you will not believe; and if I ask a question you will not answer." And rather than answer the question directly, our Lord gave them a clear statement by quoting Psalm 110:1, which prophesied of his resurrection and Ascension, saying, "But from

now on the Son of Man will be seated at the right hand of the power of God." This statement caused even greater frustration in the members of the court, and based on that statement they all asked, "Are you the Son of God, then?" And he replied, "Yes, I am." And the Sanhedrin heard what they needed to hear in order to charge Jesus with the Jewish crime of blaspheming God, a capital offense. If anyone else had been making that claim, the Sanhedrin would have been right, of course. The problem was, Jesus was not blaspheming because he really was God's Son (see Luke 3:22; Luke 9:35; John 5:31-37).

Let's return again to the story of my young friend's pretrial hearing. The fatherly judge read him his rights and told him that at no time did he have to speak on his own behalf. The lawyers on both sides presented the case to the judge, and then the district attorney told the judge that the government wanted the young man to remain in jail because he was a "risk for flight" and a "danger to society." The defense lawyers asked the judge to look at all the family members and personal friends who came to the courtroom to give witness that this man was not a risk or a danger to society, and said that he should be released on bail until his trial.

Did you notice any fatherly judge informing Jesus of his rights as a Jewish citizen, or any friendly lawyers representing him in his trial? Was there a host of family members standing behind him as character witnesses? No! But we do have some insight about Jesus at this moment that Peter gave years later to the suffering innocent Christians in Western Turkey: "...while being reviled, He did not revile in return; while suffering, He uttered no threats, but kept entrusting Himself to Him who judges righteously...." (1 Peter 2:23). That is, he entrusted himself to his heavenly Father, the perfectly righteous Judge. He was in fact supported in that courtroom by the God of the universe!

The Son of Man before Pilate

Luke 23:1-7

Then the whole body of them arose and brought Him before Pilate. And they began to accuse Him, saying, "We found this man misleading our nation and forbidding to pay taxes to Caesar, and saying that He Himself is Christ, a King." And Pilate asked Him, saying, "Are You the King of the Jews?" And He answered him and said, "It is as you say." And Pilate said to the chief priests and the multitudes, "I find no guilt in this man." But they kept on insisting, saying, "He stirs up the people, teaching all over Judea, starting from Galilee, even as far as this place." But when Pilate heard it, he asked whether the man was a Galilean. And when he learned that He belonged to Herod's jurisdiction, he sent Him to Herod, who himself also was in Jerusalem at that time.

Pilate was the Roman governor of Judea and Samaria 26-36 AD. Agrippa I, who was the grandson of Herod the Great and who ruled Palestine 37-44 AD, wrote a letter to the Emperor Caligula in which he called Pilate "inflexible, merciless, and obstinate." Pilate had very little respect for the Jews and their religious traditions. On several occasions he had brought his troops up from Caesarea into Jerusalem, and had put their Roman shields and standards, which were engraved with images of Roman gods and goddesses, in the temple itself. That caused the Jews to riot, and each time the Jews rioted Pilate would back down. The Jews knew that Pilate was in trouble politically with the Emperor Tiberius and the house of Herod, and religiously with the Jewish leadership and the people. He hated the Jews, but he feared for his political life, so he was at their mercy; and the Jews knew it. They had figured out how to manipulate him. And here it was the Passover, with millions of Jews from around the world in Jerusalem, and because he needed to be in town with his troops to keep law and order, the Jews were restless once again.

Because the Jews did not having the authority to administer a sentence of death, they took Jesus before the Roman governor Pilate. Rather than bring a religious charge of blaspheming into the Roman court, they presented three different political charges before the governor: This man Jesus had been (1) misleading the nation by (2) forbidding the people to pay taxes to Caesar (which was not true; see Luke 20:21f), and (3) declaring himself King (Messiah). This all had the ring of political insurrection against the Roman government, which was not true because Jesus had refused to be declared a temporary political king (see John 6:15).

According to John 18:29-33 Pilate listened to the Jews and saw that they had more of a religious care than a

civil care so they were Jews free to judge Jesus under their law. They answered that they had the power to pronounce the death sentence but they could not carry it out without permission from Rome. So Pilate again entered the Praetorium and summoned Jesus. As he looked at this human being exhausted from lack of sleep, water, and food; his face black and blue and puffed up from the beatings to the head; his words should be interpreted: "You-King of the Jews? Ridiculous!"

Jesus answered, "It is as you say." In verses 34 and 35 Jesus asked Pilate, "Are you saying this on your own initiative, or did others tell you about Me? [Is Rome accusing me of treason, or the Jews?]" Pilate answered, "I am not a Jew, am I? Your own nation and the chief priests delivered You up to me; what have You done?" In verses 36 and 37 Jesus explained to Pilate that indeed he was a king but not in any political sense; he was a king in a real spiritual sense over all those who paid homage to the truth, changing human hearts and building a kingdom within. He said, "My kingdom is not of this world. If My kingdom were of this world, then My servants would be fighting, that I might not be delivered up to the Jews; but as it is, My kingdom is not of this realm." Pilate therefore said to him, "So You are a king?" Jesus answered, "You say correctly that I am a king. For this I have been born, and for this I have come into the world, to bear witness to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth hears My voice." Pilate said to him, "What is truth? [What is your truth to me?]"

Pilate again went to the Jews and said to them, "I find no guilt in Him." He was able to say this because the kingdom of Jesus did not represent a rebellion against his Roman authority. So he was willing to release him, and Jesus should have been acquitted and released as far as Roman justice was concerned. But as Peter said on the day of Pentecost: "Men of Israel, listen to these words: Jesus the Nazarene, a man attested to you by God with miracles and wonders and signs which God performed through Him in your midst, just as you yourselves know-this Man, delivered up by the predetermined plan and foreknowledge of God, you nailed to a cross by the hands of godless men and put Him to death." (Acts 2:22-23.)

Walter Cronkite used to say at the end of every broadcast, "And that's the way it is...." That phrase represents the human point of view. Many might look at the bewildering and tragic injustice of Jesus' treatment in the hands of men, shrug their shoulders, and say, "Well, that's just the way it is." But God says, "That's only the way it appears to be. There is much more going on than you can see. And though my Son is about to go to the cross for the sins of mankind, I am behind everything that is going on here."

The Son of Man before Herod

Luke 23:8-12

Now Herod was very glad when he saw Jesus; for he had wanted to see Him for a long time, because he had been hearing about Him and was hoping to see some sign performed by Him. And he questioned Him at some length; but He answered him nothing. And the chief priests and the scribes were standing there, accusing Him vehemently [with passion]. And Herod with his soldiers, after treating Him with contempt and mocking Him, dressed Him in a gorgeous robe and sent Him back to Pilate. Now Herod and Pilate became friends with one another that very day; for before they had been at [bitter] enmity with each other.

Herod Antipas was the governor of Galilee and Perea 4 BC-39 AD. He was the governor whom John the Baptist had renounced publicly because of his adulterous marriage to Herodias, his brother's wife (see Matthew 14:1-12). He was the one the Lord had called a fox in Luke 13:32, for Herod's administration, intensely selfish and utterly destitute of principle, was characterized throughout with cunning and crime. Now Herod was in town because of the Passover. Back when he had had John beheaded, he had heard of the miracles of Jesus and had said out of a guilty conscience, "This is John the Baptist; he has risen from the dead; and that is why miraculous powers are at work in him" (Matthew 14:1-2).

Now we are told that Herod wanted to see Jesus so he could witness some miracle. They took Jesus to what is known as the King's Pavement (which still exists today in Jerusalem) and placed him before Herod. Herod looked at this Galilean Jew and listened to the members of the Sanhedrin accusing him vehemently. He questioned Jesus at some length, but Jesus would not perform for him as if his purpose in being there was

merely to put on some dog-and-pony show. That infuriated Herod, so finally when he received no answers to his questions he joined in with his soldiers, "...treating Him with contempt and mocking Him, [and then he] dressed Him in a gorgeous robe and sent him back to Pilate," not pronouncing Jesus guilty. Thus for the second time Jesus was declared innocent.

The Son of Man returned to Pilate

Luke 23:13-25

And Pilate summoned the chief priests and the rulers and the people, and said to them, "You brought this man to me as one who incites the people to rebellion, and behold, having examined Him before you, I have found no guilt in this man regarding the charges which you make against Him. No, nor has Herod, for he sent Him back to us; and behold, nothing deserving death has been done by Him. I will therefore punish Him and release Him." [Now he was obliged to release to them at the feast one prisoner.] But they cried out all together, saying, "Away with this man, and release for us Barabbas!" (He was the one who had been thrown into prison for a certain insurrection made in the city, and for murder.) And Pilate, wanting to release Jesus, addressed them again, but they kept on calling out, saying, "Crucify, crucify Him!" And he said to them the third time, "Why, what evil has this man done? I have found in Him no guilt demanding death; I will therefore punish Him and release Him." But they were insistent, with loud voices asking that He be crucified. And their voices began to prevail. And Pilate pronounced sentence that their demand should be granted. And he released the man they were asking for who had been thrown into prison for insurrection and murder, but he delivered Jesus to their will.

The Roman government had made it a policy that each year during Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread the Jews could request of them the release of one criminal. At this time the most notorious prisoner was Barabbas, a murderer and a member of a local resistance movement dedicated to overthrowing Roman rule in Judea. The latter made him a hero to many in Jerusalem, especially among the zealots of Israel and the Sanhedrin. But this prisoner release program put Pilate between a rock and a hard place. Pilate was saying to the Jewish leaders, " You brought this man to me as one who incites the people to rebellion, and both Herod and I find him not guilty [this is the third time]. So the best I can do is punish him and then release him." In Matthew 27:17 he says, "Whom do you want me to release for you? Barabbas or Jesus who is called Christ?" And in Mark 15:9 he says, "Do you want me to release for you the King of the Jews?" Then Matthew says that Pilate understood the motives of the Jews: "For he knew that because of envy they had delivered Him up" (Matthew 27:18). Then while Pilate was sitting in the judgment seat his own wife said to him, "Have nothing to do with that righteous Man; for last night I suffered greatly in a dream because of Him."

The pot of envy, however, continued to be stirred up. The chief priests and elders persuaded the multitudes to ask for Barabbas and demand that Jesus be put to death. (It is interesting to note that the Sanhedrin accused Jesus of insurrection against Rome; yet they knew that Barabbas was an insurrectionist, a murderer, and a robber; but they still wanted him released.) Pilate walked out toward the crowd and again asked which man they wanted to be released.

Then Pilate had Jesus scourged (thirty-nine lashes with a cat-o'-nine-tails, which was a whip made of nine knotted cords with small bones tied among the cords) for no other reason than to get the Jews off his back; and the soldiers wove a crown of thorns, put it on his head, and arrayed him in a purple robe. And they began to come up to Him and say, "Hail, King of the Jews!" and to give him blows in the face. Again, Isaiah wrote:

"Just as many were astonished [appalled] at you [Him], My people,

So His appearance was marred more than any man,
And His form more than the sons of men."
(Isaiah 52:14.)

Jesus Christ in that short period of time was so badly beaten that anyone who knew him before his beating would not have recognized him.

Then Pilate brought him out before the crowd and said, "I find no guilt in Him," for he wanted to release him. And as Jesus came out before the people wearing the crown of thorns and the purple robe, Pilate pointed to him and said to the crowd, "Behold the Man! What shall I do with Him whom you call the King of the Jews?" (John 19:5; Mark 15:12.) And the people calling out saying, "Crucify, crucify Him!" For they knew they would get their way with Pilate; they had used mob psychology against him since the beginning of his office, and in each case he had backed down. But Pilate (for the fifth time) said to them, "Why, what evil has he done?"

John 19:6-15 says that the Jews' saying, "Crucify him!" because Jesus made himself out to be the Son of God caused fear in Pilate's heart. So he brought Jesus back into the judgment hall and asked him, "Where are You from?" When Jesus did not answer, Pilate said, "Do You not know that I have authority to release You, and I have authority to crucify You?" Jesus reminded Pilate that the only authority he had came from above. So Pilate once again made an effort to release him, but the Jews reminded him of his political position by saying, "If you release this Man, you are no friend of Caesar; everyone who makes himself out to be a king opposes Caesar." This statement got through to Pilate. (Remember Pilate was in political trouble with the Roman government at home in Italy over his handling of the Jews. The Jewish leadership knew this so now they drove their nail home!) Pilate brought Jesus back into the judgment hall and said to the Jews, "Behold, your King!"

According to Matthew 27:24-25 Pilate finally realized that nothing he could say would quiet the crowd, which was on the verge of a riot, so "...he took water and washed his hands in front of the multitude, saying, 'I am innocent of this Man's blood; see to that yourselves.' And all the people answered and said, 'His blood be on us and on our children!'" He then released Barabbas and delivered Jesus to the will of the maddened crowd by giving him over to the Roman soldiers, who would execute him by crucifixion on that spiritually dark Friday afternoon.

Whatever became of the accusers? Annas died and was buried. Caiaphas also simply died and was buried. *Biblical Archaeology Review* reported in September that they may have found Caiaphas' bones in a burial cave near Jerusalem. The finding could be the first archaeological evidence of any major New Testament figure. In 39 AD Herod Antipas was accused of treason against Rome, and he and his wife Herodias were stripped of all rank, power, and wealth and banished to Lyons, France. Eventually they died in Spain. In 36 AD Pilate was charged by the Samaritans with ordering his troops to willfully murder several hundred religious fanatics who were looking for some sacred vessels that they thought Moses had buried on Mount Gerazim. For this attack he was removed from office and ordered to Rome to stand trial. On the way to Rome he received word that the emperor Tiberius had died. Pilate disappeared, and according to some unconfirmed reports he took his own life rather than stand trial. And as for the mob, some eight thousand Jews would come to realize that Jesus was their Messiah after the coming of the Holy Spirit and the preaching of Peter. We don't know what happened to the rest of them.

And what happened to my young friend at his San Francisco pretrial hearing? After listening to all the arguments, the judge decided that if he could raise \$500,000 in bail money he could be released to society until his trial. I watched his father and mother, his brother-in-law and wife, and sister and brother-in-law come before the judge and sign over their homes as security. It was an amazing moment as that family gathered around a young man they believed was innocent of the crime. (My friend got out on bail the next day and came by the house to thank me for standing by him in a time of crisis. He is still waiting for his trial date.)

When I left the courtroom some two hours later and walked out into the same foggy morning, I thought of the contrast between that young man's pretrial hearing and our Lord's pretrial hearing and trial. Jesus had no lawyer on this earth to represent him as he stood before the Sanhedrin and the Roman governor. Of his twelve closest friends, one betrayed him and nine fled at the time of his arrest. Two went into the hall of justice with him, but one denied him in the early morning hours. He had no family who said they would lay down all they owned on his behalf at his moment of greatest affliction. There was no friendly judge to tell him of his rights and remind him that he did not have to say anything if he did not want to. And yet it was he who said, "Greater

love has no one than this, that one lay down his life for his friends" (John 15:13).

And whatever happened to Jesus the righteous Prophet, Priest, and King; the Prince of Peace; the Messiah; the Son of God; the Son of Man; the Way; the Truth; the Life; the sinless Passover Lamb; the Savior of sinful mankind? Within the hour his bruised and beaten body, his bleeding head, and swollen and discolored face would be laid on a cruel Roman cross, and he would allow three nails to be driven through his hands and feet and later a Roman spear to cut into his side. Within six hours he would die.

What really happened at the trial of Jesus? I urge you to consider very carefully the words of the apostle Paul to the Romans written years later to explain the death of the innocent Son of Man: "For while we were still helpless, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. For one will hardly die for a righteous man; though perhaps for the good man someone would dare even to die. But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us" (Romans 5:6-8). Paul also wrote to the Corinthians, "He made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him" (2 Corinthians 5:21).

That is what really happened at the trial of Jesus.

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