

<sup>57</sup> And those who had laid hold of Jesus led *Him* away to Caiaphas the high priest, where the scribes and the elders were assembled. <sup>58</sup> 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. <sup>59</sup> Now the chief priests, the elders, and all the council sought false testimony against Jesus to put Him to death, <sup>60</sup> but found none. Even though many false witnesses came forward, they found none. But at last two false witnesses came forward <sup>61</sup> and said, "This *fellow* said, 'I am able to destroy the temple of God and to build it in three days.'" <sup>62</sup> And the high priest arose and said to Him, "Do You answer nothing? What *is it* these men testify against You?" <sup>63</sup> But Jesus kept silent. And the high priest answered and said to Him, "I put You under oath by the living God: Tell us if You are the Christ, the Son of God!" <sup>64</sup> Jesus said to him, "*It is as* you said. Nevertheless, I say to you, hereafter you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Power, and coming on the clouds of heaven." <sup>65</sup> Then the high priest tore his clothes, saying, "He has spoken blasphemy! What further need do we have of witnesses? Look, now you have heard His blasphemy! <sup>66</sup> What do you think?" They answered and said, "He is deserving of death." <sup>67</sup> Then they spat in His face and beat Him; and others struck *Him* with the palms of their hands, <sup>68</sup> saying, "Prophecy to us, Christ! Who is the one who struck You?" <sup>69</sup> Now Peter sat outside in the courtyard. And a servant girl came to him, saying, "You also were with Jesus of Galilee." <sup>70</sup> But he denied it before *them* all, saying, "I do not know what you are saying." <sup>71</sup> And when he had gone out to the gateway, another *girl* saw him and said to those *who were* there, "This *fellow* also was with Jesus of Nazareth." <sup>72</sup> But again he denied with an oath, "I do not know the Man!" <sup>73</sup> And a little later those who stood by came up and said to Peter, "Surely you also are *one* of them, for your speech betrays you." <sup>74</sup> Then he began to curse and swear, *saying*, "I do not know the Man!" Immediately a rooster crowed. <sup>75</sup> And Peter remembered the word of Jesus who had said to him, "Before the rooster crows, you will deny Me three times." So he went out and wept bitterly.

### Introduction

So far in our Easter series we have covered the preparations for the death of Jesus Christ.

This has included His anointing at Bethany. The equivalent of about 3 million yen was spent on perfume to anoint the body of Jesus. This act was so appreciated by Jesus, that He said, wherever the gospel would be preached in the whole world, what this woman has done will be told as a memorial to her.

We discovered that the last "Passover" that Jesus celebrated with his disciples was a perfect opportunity for Him to connect His death with the sacrificial lamb at Passover time.

Jesus connected His body and blood with the Passover lamb.

We had an insight last week of the sorrow and anguish that Jesus went through in the garden of Gethsemane.

Finally, we heard of the traitor's kiss and desertion of all the disciples.

There are two incidents before us this week.

1. The illegal unjust trial of Jesus Christ – v. 57-68.
2. The denial and repentance of Peter – v. 69 – 75.

1. The illegal unjust trial of Jesus Christ – v. 57-68.

The Jews had always prided themselves on their sense of fairness and justice.

The judicial systems in the modern western world have their foundations in the legal system of ancient Israel.

Their standards were first introduced by God and set forth in the old Testament.

### Deuteronomy 16: v. 18-20. (N.K.J.)

<sup>18</sup> "You shall appoint judges and officers in all your gates, which the LORD your God gives you, according to your tribes, and they shall judge the people with just judgment. <sup>19</sup> You shall not pervert justice; you shall not show partiality, nor take a bribe, for a bribe blinds the eyes of the wise and twists the words of the righteous. <sup>20</sup> You shall follow what is altogether just, that you may live and inherit the land which the LORD your God is giving you.

These general principles were carried out in all the local communities where there were more than 120 men.

These councils were mainly comprised of 23 members, but the Jerusalem council was composed of 71 men; these being the chief priests, elders and scribes.

Members of these Councils were chosen for their maturity and wisdom.

It was very serious in those days to be a false witness.

If somebody knowingly gave a false testimony, then they would suffer the punishment the accused person would suffer if found guilty.

(Deut. 19: v.18-20)

This penalty was a strong deterrent to prevent injustice.

There was an additional deterrent.

The accusing witnesses in the case of a death penalty were to initiate the execution. This made them stand behind their testimony by action as well as words. (Deut. 17: v.7 )

This is why Jesus said to the accusers of the woman caught in adultery, "He who is without sin among you, let him be the first to throw a stone at her."

(John 8: v. 7)

Rabbinical Law required that a sentence of death could not be carried out until the third day after it was rendered. The courts were also required to fast for these 3 days.

The delay of the execution also provided additional time for evidence or testimony to be discovered for the benefit of the defendant.

Research has been undertaken by Simon Greenleaf a famous professor of law at Harvard University in the U.S.

He gives valuable insight into correct procedure for a trial at this time.

1. On the day of the trial, court officers would require all evidence against the accused person to be read in the full hearing of an open court.
2. All witnesses had to speak about direct experience and not what someone had told them.
3. All witnesses had to correctly identify the precise month, day and hour and location of the event in which they were testifying.
4. A Council itself could not initiate charges against a person, they could only consider charges brought before them by an outside party.

As we will see in a moment, there was only one correct procedure adopted concerning the trial and death of Jesus.

There are 5 things that Matthew brings to our attention concerning the illegal unjust trial of Jesus.

1. The illegal convening of the Sanhedrin. (legal- council) – v. 57-58.  
We need to go to John's gospel for a fuller account of this situation.

John 18: v. 12-14 (N.K.J.)

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

John 18: v. 19-24. (N.K.J.)

<sup>19</sup> The high priest then asked Jesus about His disciples and His doctrine. <sup>20</sup> 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. <sup>21</sup> Why do you ask Me? Ask those who have heard Me what I said to them. Indeed they know what I said." <sup>22</sup> 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?" <sup>23</sup> Jesus answered him, "If I have spoken evil, bear witness of

the evil; but if well, why do you strike Me?" <sup>24</sup> Then Annas sent Him bound to Caiaphas the high priest.

Annas was a very powerful man. He used to be a "High Priest" but was removed by the Roman authorities from his position because he was becoming too powerful politically. However, he still controlled the money changers and sacrifice sellers at the temple. He took a large percentage of their takings.

He was like a "Yakuza" today in Japan.

Annas broke two major rules concerning the trial of Jesus. Firstly he formally accused Jesus of a crime and secondly he tried to persuade Jesus to incriminate Himself.

All of this happened in the middle of the night.

When Annas was unable to get Jesus to testify against Himself, He was led away to an illegal gathering before Caiaphas, the high priest.

There was an illegal gathering at his home of scribes and elders as the supreme Jewish Council.

At this stage no charge had been brought against Jesus.

This was not legal according to Jewish Law.

There was one other Jewish Law broken. The Sanhedrin was only permitted to hold a trial involving capital punishment in the Temple and only in public.

The private meeting at Caiaphas's house clearly broke the Jewish Law.

## 2. The illegal and unjust conspiracy to convict Jesus – v. 59-61.

From v. 59 we can see clearly that the council acted illegally. The council were only empowered to act as judge and jury in legal proceedings. They could not instigate charges, but only hear charges brought before them.

We now see the council acting as the prosecution and the police force.

The single desire of the council was to put Jesus to death and they were prepared to break as many rules as needed in order to fulfil their purpose.

First of all, the council tried to find people who would give a false testimony against Jesus, but they found none.

This doesn't mean that they had no willing people to lie.

It means that their story had no credibility. They needed something convincing.

But at last they discovered two false witnesses whose story sounded convincing.

Matthew only tells us of what one of the false witnesses said.

Turn with me to Mark 14: v. 55-59.

<sup>55</sup> Now the chief priests and all the council sought testimony against Jesus to put Him to death, but found none. <sup>56</sup> For many bore false witness against Him, but their testimonies did not agree. <sup>57</sup> Then some rose up and bore false witness against Him, saying, <sup>58</sup> "We heard Him say, 'I will destroy this temple made with hands, and within three days I will build another made without hands.'" <sup>59</sup> But not even then did their testimony agree.

Mark is clear that both of the testimonies did not agree.

Also they did not state a time, date, and place where Jesus said these things.

Jewish law stated that evidence like this was not admissible.

It is amazing that not a single legal witness could be found to convict Jesus of any wrongdoing.

This is one of the strongest defences in the New Testament for the moral and spiritual perfection of Jesus.

If any fault could have been found in Jesus, they would have found it, but they found none.

Jesus was 100% perfect, because He was God, in a human form.

He was fully man and fully God.

## 3. The High Priest's illegal attempt to self-incriminate Jesus – v. 62-64.

The council became very frustrated with Jesus. They were desperately trying to get the trial finished before dawn. They didn't want their illegal activities to be discovered. The High Priest tried to steer Jesus into self-incrimination. Jesus stood "silent" against the false allegations made by the two false witnesses. Silence when we are accused can often be a powerful thing. It is automatic when we are accused falsely to defend ourselves. However, in the case of Jesus, His silence was very powerful. Silence is often a time when the Holy Spirit can work powerfully. In the case of Jesus His silence was a silence of innocence. He was not guilty of any crime. The silence of Jesus was a silence of dignity. Jesus was not the evenings' entertainment; He was not going to start a verbal fight with the "High Priest". The silence of Jesus was a silence that trusted in His Heavenly Father. The silence of Jesus was like a boomerang, the lies of the witnesses, the illegal activities of the council, came back to convict them. Jesus finally gave the affirmation that the Sanhedrin had been waiting to hear. Jesus replied "It is as you have said..." Jesus then continued, not just to declare his divinity, that He was God, but also to declare His return to be their judge. They were judging Jesus, but one day Jesus would be their judge. Jesus was saying that one day the accused, that is Jesus, would become the accuser and the judges, the Sanhedrin, would become the judged.

#### Application

We live in a society today where the God of the Bible, and the moral and spiritual truth contained in the Bible is used and abused. More Christians are being killed around the world just for their faith, than at any other time in history. We live in a post truth society where people make up the rules to suit the moral decay in people's lives. However, one day there will be absolute truth, absolute justice, and absolute judgement. The Bible says that we are "all" going to stand before the judgement seat of Christ.

#### 2 Corinthians 5: v. 10. (N.K.J.)

<sup>10</sup> For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive the things *done* in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad.

Most people today live for this moment in time. Christians live for the future, because they trust in the precious blood of Jesus for the forgiveness of their sins. Temporary suffering now, with Jesus, is much better than eternal suffering after death, without Jesus. Jesus lived for the future and He declared to the "High Priest" what that future would look like in v. 64.

#### 4. The illegal and unjust condemnation of Jesus – v. 65-66.

In v. 65 – 66 we are told that the high priest tore his clothes, declared Jesus as having blasphemed, and initiated the death sentence for this crime.

#### Lev. 21: v.10.

<sup>10</sup> *He who is* the high priest among his brethren, on whose head the anointing oil was poured and who is consecrated to wear the garments, shall not uncover his head nor tear his clothes;

There were regulations for the personal conduct of priests and the high priest broke one of those here.

He also broke the rules concerning having a polled ballot to determine the outcome of a trial. The High Priest was riding upon the emotional hype of the situation.

The verdict of guilty and the sentence of death were not based on careful consideration of the full and impartial evidence and testimony of credible witnesses.

#### Application

Today there are many people who reject the truth about Jesus.

They don't even bother to try and discover the truth for themselves.

They have closed minds to the truth and it seems that no amount of evidence will open their eyes.

Even miracles of God's grace are lost upon hard hearts.

Q. What should we do about these people?

Well, we should pray for them, but in the end, we should leave them to receive what they have chosen. A life without Jesus now and for all eternity.

#### 5. The illegal and unjust conduct of the court – v. 67-68.

We are told in v. 67-68 that people spat in the face of Jesus, they beat Him, other people struck Jesus with the palms of their hands, and they mocked Him.

What an awful way to treat the person who left the glory of Heaven to come to this sin sick world, in order to take the punishment for their sins.

What a way to treat God's Son who came to rescue them from the wrath of God, which would be poured out for their sins.

One day these people who misjudged Jesus and spat in His face, will be rightly judged by Jesus and receive their punishment.

In spite of all that happened to Jesus He behaved impeccably.

1 Peter 2: v. 21-23. (N.K.J.)

<sup>21</sup> For to this you were called, because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that you should follow His steps: <sup>22</sup> "Who committed no sin, Nor was deceit found in His mouth"; <sup>23</sup> who, when He was reviled, did not revile in return; when He suffered, He did not threaten, but committed *Himself* to Him who judges righteously;

#### 2. The denial and repentance of Peter – v. 69-75.

The single greatest gift that God could give mankind is the "forgiveness of sins"

Without forgiveness of our sins there is no salvation, there is no reconciliation with God, no spiritual life, no victory over death, and no prospect of Heaven.

#### Exodus 34: v. 6-7

<sup>6</sup> And the LORD passed before him and proclaimed, "The LORD, the LORD God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abounding in goodness and truth, <sup>7</sup> keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, by no means clearing *the guilty*, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children and the children's children to the third and the fourth generation."

#### Micah 7:18

<sup>18</sup> Who is a God like You, Pardoning iniquity And passing over the transgression of the remnant of His heritage? He does not retain His anger forever, Because He delights *in* mercy.

#### 1 John 1: v. 7-9.

<sup>7</sup> But if we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin. <sup>8</sup> If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. <sup>9</sup> If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us *our* sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

These are very precious verses.

They speak to us about a God who longs to forgive, when we are ready to repent of our sins.

Peter denying that he ever knew Jesus was a great sin. In fact, it was a total lie.

However, if we view the story in the light of Peter's repentance and God's gracious forgiveness then this sad story can bring great encouragement to every Christian.

Let us now go over the text.

Turn with me to v. 69.

<sup>69</sup> Now Peter sat outside in the courtyard. And a servant girl came to him, saying, "You also were with Jesus of Galilee."

It was about 1a.m. in the morning and Peter sat outside in the courtyard. Mark tells us that he was warming himself by the fire with other servants.

(Mark 14:v.54)

A servant girl spoke to Peter and accused him of being with Jesus of Galilee. Peter denied that he had been with Jesus. His denial was made to all of the people present.

Peter was obviously a little anxious and made his way towards the exit.

Another servant girl saw him leaving and said to Peter, in the hearing of everybody, "this fellow was also with Jesus of Nazareth" (v. 71)

This time Peter denied it with an oath.

He said "I do not know the man"

Peter obviously remained in the courtyard and a small crowd came up to him and challenged Peter a third time.

On this occasion they identified his accent. He had a strong Galilean accent.

Peter was now very angry. He had been found out.

He started to curse and swear.

Peter said for the third time "I do not know the man"

Immediately a "rooster" (cock) crowed. If you have ever heard one first thing in the morning, they make a loud noise.

Suddenly Peter remembered the words of Jesus.

"Before the rooster crows, you will deny Me three times"

Peter went out of the courtyard and wept bitterly.

It was sad that after 3 years of ministry with Jesus that Peter had denied even being with Jesus.

Although for Peter after his repentance and restoration, and the filling of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, there was a happy ending to the story.

However, there are practical lessons to be learnt from this incident.

### Application

1. Be part of a strong Christian unit.

As Christians, no matter how strong our faith might be, when we are alone, we are vulnerable to attacks from Satan, our enemy.

Peter was very strong in the presence of all the other disciples, but on his own he failed.

Satan attacked "Eve" when she was alone in the garden of Eden without Adam.

Every Christian needs to be an active member in a Church family.

Every Christian needs to be supported in that family and be accountable for their Christian testimony.

We all "need" one another.

The New Testament teaches that we need to;

Serve one another – Gal. 5:13.

Accept one another, warts and all, - Rom. 15:7.

Forgive one another – Col. 3:13.

Bear one another's burdens – Gal. 6:2.

Be devoted to one another – Rom. 12:10.

Honour one another – Rom. 12:10.

Submit to one another – Eph. 5:21.

Encourage one another – 1 Thess. 5: v. 11.

These are just a few of the many “one another challenges” that we find in the New Testament.

If we do these things we are less likely to fall prey to Satan and deny the Lord Jesus, or dishonour Him in some way.

2. You can only be an effective Christian witness with the help of the Holy Spirit.

Peter had yet to experience being filled with God’s Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost. Therefore, there was no Holy power that he could draw upon in his time of need.

Every Christian who has been “born again” has already received God’s Holy Spirit. The important thing is to depend upon God’s Holy Spirit to help you to be an effective witness for Jesus.

The Bible teaches that witnessing is a task for “all” of God’s people.

(1 Peter 2: v.9, 3:15 )

Witnessing is a major act of Christian living. (Romans 10: v. 9-10)

The New Testament teaches us lots of different ways in which we can witness for Jesus. All of these ways require the help of the Holy Spirit.

Let me just mention some.

1. Sharing our personal testimony of how we became a Christian.

(John 4: v. 29 )

2. Explaining the Bible to people – Acts 8: v. 30-35.

3. Writing to people or e mails or face book etc. (John 20: v. 31)

4. Through living a “Holy Life” (Matt. 5: v. 16.)

5. Through acts of devotion and sacrifice for Jesus – (Matt. 26: v. 6-7.)

We must be careful to witness with ‘love’, “without fear”, “clearly” and “courteously”

It is going to cost you to be a witness for Jesus in Japan, especially at work. That is why we need one another and the work of the Holy Spirit in our lives.

May God help us all to be good witnesses for Jesus here in Japan.