



7 Last Steps to the CROSS

Jesus' Path to the Crucifixion in the Gospel of LUKE

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Audio Text - Step 4

Step 4 - Luke 22:66-71 - The Jewish Council Condemns the Christ

This is the fourth of a series of eight articles on the theme, *7 Last Steps to the Cross*. We have walked with Jesus through the betrayal of Judas Iscariot, the denial of Peter, and the mockery of the Roman soldiers. In this message, Jesus stood on trial before the Sanhedrin, the Jewish Council.

Luke 22:66-71 (ESV)

⁶⁶When day came, the assembly of the elders of the people gathered together, both chief priests and scribes. And they led him away to their council, and they said, ⁶⁷“If you are the Christ, tell us.” But he said to them, “If I tell you, you will not believe, ⁶⁸and if I ask you, you will not answer. ⁶⁹But from now on the Son of Man shall be seated at the right hand of the power of God.” ⁷⁰So they all said, “Are you the Son of God, then?” And he said to them, “You say that I am.” ⁷¹Then they said, “What further testimony do we need? We have heard it ourselves from his own lips.”

The Jewish Council

The Jewish Council was the top religious and civil authority over the Jewish community in Jerusalem. It was called the Sanhedrin. It consisted of the elders, the chief priests, and the scribes. This included Pharisees and Sadducees in their numbers. In all the four Gospels, we find that these were the leaders most offended by Jesus' teachings and rebukes. They rejected His claim to be the Messiah, and saw Him as a very serious threat to their authority and influence. This was the legislative body that ordered Jesus' arrest. This was the Jewish authority that Judas Iscariot decided to help for thirty pieces of silver (Matthew 26:15) to lead them to Jesus for His arrest. It is very clear that the trial of Jesus was not about finding out who Jesus is or whether He may have done anything illegal. They had already decided that they wanted Him dead. This was not an exercise in justice. It was a procedure they did for show so as to execute Him.

In the course of Jesus' public ministry, there was growing opposition against Him from the Pharisees, the Sadducees, the priests and the scribes. They were the interpreters and champions of the Law of Moses, Jewish traditions, and the administrators of the temple. Although they were each other's opponent in their theology and practices, they were united in their hatred and rejection of Jesus and His teachings. Luke 11:39-54 records a big clash between Jesus and the Pharisees and the scribes (or lawyers). Jesus pronounced God's woe upon them. Luke 20:27-38 records a similar clash between Jesus and the Sadducees. Jesus pointed out that their disbelief in the resurrection was a serious error in their understanding of Scripture. It is very tragic, but not at all surprising, that they decided that they wanted to put Jesus to death.

It is utterly remarkable, highly ironic, and totally tragic, that in Luke 22:66-71, which we quoted above, the Sanhedrin condemned Jesus to death precisely because He admitted to be the Messiah! He was sentenced to death for admitting truthfully who He is. Instead of responding in faith and worship, they determined to execute Him by their unbelief.

Reflecting the Evil in Humanity

While the mockery of the Roman soldiers, in our last message, reflected much of our fallen human nature as demonstrated by the lower rungs in society, the trial of Jesus before the Sanhedrin exposed much of our fallen human nature among the powerful. When one has the

capacity to use force against a chosen target, one would be inclined to do so because one can. Those with such power are able to express their displeasure against whoever offend them by force; nevermind if it is due to their own prejudice, jealousy, anger, or hatred. They will use it against whoever is identified as an obstacle, or an enemy, to their interest or agenda. The greater the power, the more extremely, the more extensively, they will do so. Hence, regardless of what strata of society we belong to, fallen human nature has a way of expressing itself in sin.

Israel Rejects its Messiah

Yet the position and role of the Sanhedrin as the top religious and civil authority of the Jews at that time was a historic and momentous act of rejection of the Jews as the covenant people of God against their own Messiah! There were Jews who recognised, believed and accepted Him as their Messiah. They became His disciples. But the Jewish community at large, as represented by this Jewish Council, and the jeering Jewish public who cried for His crucifixion later on, rejected their Saviour and their God. This was a monumental act of unbelief and rebellion. It is the very opposite of faith and obedience. They sealed their own judgement by so doing. During His public ministry, Jesus cried out in Luke 13:34-35 (ESV)

³⁴O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it! How often would I have gathered your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing! ³⁵Behold, your house is forsaken.

Jesus further forewarned His disciples and those listening to Him in Luke 21:5-6 (ESV)

⁵And while some were speaking of the temple, how it was adorned with noble stones and offerings, he said, ⁶“As for these things that you see, the days will come when there will not be left here one stone upon another that will not be thrown down.”

Again, Jesus said in Luke 21:20-24 (ESV)

²⁰“But when you see Jerusalem surrounded by armies, then know that its desolation has come near. ²¹Then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains, and let those who are inside the city depart, and let not those who are out in the country enter it, ²²for these are days of vengeance, to fulfill all that is written. ²³Alas for women who are pregnant and for those who are nursing infants in those days! For there will be great distress upon the earth and wrath against this people. ²⁴They will fall by the edge of the sword and be led captive among all nations, and Jerusalem will be trampled underfoot by the Gentiles, until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled.

Bible scholars and historians agree that these warnings and declarations were fulfilled in A.D. 70 when the Roman army besieged and destroyed Jerusalem and the temple to put down yet another Jewish rebellion. It was an act of God's judgement against their rejecting Jesus as their Messiah. Every Israelite, throughout Israelite history, that walk in disobedience to God's national covenant with them will face judgement. The OT curses of Deuteronomy 28:15 for breaking the Law point this out. So does the NT teaching in Galatians 3:10-11 that no one is able to keep every Law so as to be save. Indeed, Romans 3:23 and 6:23 tell us that all humankind that live in sin without repentance, without turning to Christ, would likewise face God's judgement.

Salvation Is In Christ

On the other hand, God offers salvation to all in Christ. Every one who respond to the Gospel of Christ and walk by faith in God to keep His covenant will be saved in Christ by repentance from sin and surrender to Him (Acts 2:38; Romans 1:16-17). This is offered to all humankind and to all nations. Christ was walking to the Cross for the very purpose of dying to pay for our sins. We will delve into this absolutely vital truth at the climax of this series in the crucifixion.

Rejection by the People of His Covenant

The sting of Jesus' 4th Step to the Cross is the rejection of the Jews, the covenant people of God, with whom God made a national covenant at Mt. Sinai. They were the people of the Abrahamic Covenant through whom God had chosen to be His channel to bless all the nations of the earth (Genesis 12:3). They have departed from this role to reject the very God who called them to this purpose. Hence the purpose of God will only be carried out by His Messiah, Jesus Christ. It is only in Him and through Him that God's national purpose for the Israelites and the line of Abraham would be fulfilled. It is thus not by the faithfulness of the nation, but only through the faithfulness and mercy of God Himself, to still reach out to save all, in spite of abject human failure. Jesus' walk to the Cross demonstrated God's enormously gracious faithfulness and mercy to Israel, and to all humankind. For He made it so that, in spite of Israel's failure, and in spite of the magnitude of human sinfulness, all who repent and surrender to Him as their Lord and their God will be saved.