

## The Passion of Our Lord: The Palace of the High Priest

In the name of Jesus. Amen.

Does it not look strange to you? Here is Jesus, the Son of God, the Great High Priest and Prophet of prophets, the King of kings and Lord of lords, standing bound and beaten before the Sanhedrin—put on trial. Is this any way for royalty to be treated? Is this any way for a priest to be treated? Is this any way for the Son of God, very God of very God to be treated?

He stands before the ruling council—as He had said He would be—not to speak, but to be spoken against. He stands there as a sheep before it's shearers is silent. (cf. Isaiah 53:7) False accusation after false accusation is leveled against Him. And point after point, the evidence "against" him did not add up. False witness after false witness speaks against Jesus, some of them paid off, perhaps, to lie against Him, and their stories never match. And through it all, the Suffering Servant never opens His mouth.

Does it not look strange to you? These men, simple men, speak all kinds of evil against Jesus, falsely accuse Him of breaking the Law that He Himself as God had given, and He doesn't speak out in His own defense. One little word from the Word, and He could have set all things right; a word from two or three true witnesses, and the record would be set straight. But, that's not the way it was supposed to go.

Jesus wasn't simply "pleading the Fifth," here. He was standing there for you. While what we are given is short on details, it shouldn't take great leaps to imagine that the many who bore false witness against Jesus ran the gamut through the entire Law of God. In one way or another, in all ways, dear listener, what was falsely said of Jesus is correctly said of you.

And He spoke not a word. "Do you have no answer? What is this evidence they have given against you?" (cf. Matthew 26:62) What was said was untrue of Jesus, but it was true of you, and Jesus silently received it all as your substitute. Accusations were leveled against Him, and He received them on your behalf, in order to take them to the cross. You are the blasphemer they call Him—even as they level all other accusations against Him—for you, in breaking any and every commandment, place yourself where God should be—you fear, love, and trust in yourself above all things, disregarding and denying your Creator and Benefactor in heaven.

Now, if you are ever asked, undoubtedly you would never disregard or deny your Creator outright. Perhaps under extreme pressure and duress, you might, but all things being equal, you would never say, "I deny you, O Father in heaven, and I disregard your Word." But that is exactly what you say every time you transgress His commands and doubt His grace and mercy for you. Pick a command, any of them, and you can find that you have broken it in one way or another. But not your Savior who stands before the Sanhedrin—He, alone, is the One who kept it all perfectly. You are guilty of all the sins they accuse Jesus of, yet Jesus accepts your guilt and condemnation on your behalf.

"Are you the Christ, the Son of the Blessed?" He replied, "I am. You will see the Son of Man seated at the right hand of God's power and coming with the clouds of heaven." (cf. Mark 14:62) Finally, Jesus speaks, and this only in response that something said in truth of Him. "Are you the Christ," the high priest asks; "I am," Jesus says.

Jesus' answer is two-fold. He responds in the affirmative to the question. He is the Christ, the Messiah. Jesus is the one anointed to bear the sins of the world and die with them. He is the One come to give His life as a ransom. Jesus is the One of whom Isaiah prophesied,

He is despised and rejected by men,  
A Man of sorrows and acquainted with grief.  
And we hid, as it were, our faces from Him;

He was despised, and we did not esteem Him.  
Surely He has borne our griefs  
And carried our sorrows;  
Yet we esteemed Him stricken,  
Smitten by God, and afflicted.  
But He was wounded for our transgressions,  
He was bruised for our iniquities;  
The chastisement for our peace was upon Him,  
And by His stripes we are healed. (Isaiah 53:3-5)

"I am," Jesus replied. This is no ordinary phrase, not merely an affirmative answer. This is the very identity of God, YHWH. "ἐγὼ εἰμί," He said. Jesus is YHWH, the Son of the Blessed, very God of very God. Jesus affirms in the hearing of the Sanhedrin that He is God.

It is fitting, then, that today is the day after the Annunciation. The church celebrates that day as the day when Gabriel appeared to a maiden in Nazareth and proclaimed that she would bear the Savior of the world. As he told her, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Highest will overshadow you; therefore, also, that Holy One who is to be born will be called the Son of God." (Luke 2:35) The Annunciation marks the day that the Son of God took on our human flesh in the womb of the virgin Mary—therefore Jesus is very God of very God, and also true man. Jesus is the Son of the Blessed, He is God, sent from the Throne, whence He shall return, to bear your sin and be your Savior. "I am," Jesus says, and in that answer, speaks volumes in the hearing of the Sanhedrin.

He is God-in-the-flesh, the Messiah, come to die for you and for them, because of your sins and their sins, the accusations of which having been leveled against Him, which He gladly receives and takes into Himself.

The high priest tore his garments and called Jesus a blasphemer. Jesus was blindfolded and beaten. He was mocked and spat upon. But this was not the end. "Prophecy," His detractors urged Him, and He very well could have, but again, He was silent. He suffered their wrath—again, in your place. This was no way for the Prophet to be treated, but it was not enough. This was only the beginning.

The end would come a couple of days later. The beaten and mocked Creator of all in His flesh would be nailed to a cross. Then, He would finally say that one little word, and with that word, He set all things straight: τέτελεσται—"It is finished." (John 19:30) With that word, His Passion is fulfilled, and your salvation is completed.

This is the Passion of Our Lord Jesus Christ for you from the foundation of the world. For He took on your flesh to be your Savior. He loved you to death—His own death on the cross. For He took what was said of you in His trial there, and was nailed to that lifeless tree, thereby making it a life-giving tree. He was crucified and died that you might live, sacrificed and shed His blood as your propitiation. Therefore, you are forgiven for all of your sins.

In the name of Jesus. Amen.