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BIBLE LESSONS.

STUDIES IN MARK.

Second Quarter.

Lesson IX. June 2. Mark 14: 55-65.

JESUS BEFORE THE COUNCIL.

GOLDEN TEXT.

They hated Me without a cause.—John 15: 25.

EXPLANATORY.

XI. THE TRIAL OF JESUS BEFORE AN IRREGULAR MEETING OF THE SANHEDRIM (continued).

FIRST, THE COURT.—The court convened to try Jesus Christ was the Sanhedrim. It consisted of chief priests, scribes, heads of the twenty-four priestly classes; scribes, that is, rabbies learned in the literature of the church; and elders, who were chosen from amongst the most influential of the lay.

SECOND, ITS AUTHORITY. The Sanhedrim had power to try those charged with capital offences; but it had no power to execute the sentence of death (John 18: 31).

THIRD, THE TRIAL (vers. 55-59). The whole criminal procedure in the Pentateuch rests upon three principles: (1) publicity of the trial; (2) entire liberty of defence allowed to the accused; (3) a guaranty against the dangers of testimony: "one witness is no witness."

THROUGHOUT the whole course of the trial, the rules of the Jewish law of procedure were grossly violated. He was arrested in the night, bound as a malefactor, beaten before his arraignment, and struck in open court during the trial.

He was tried on a feast-day, and before sunrise. He was compelled to criminate himself, and this under an oath of solemn judicial adjuration; and he was sentenced on the same day of the conviction. In all these particulars the law was wholly disregarded.

55. And the chief priests and all the rest of the council: the Sanhedrim. Sought for witness to put Him to death. Not to ascertain the truth, but to destroy One whom they considered a personal enemy, was this trial conducted (John 8: 18; 7: 19, 25; 8: 37, 40; 11: 50) And found none: rather, as in Rev. Ver., found not. Probably no two witnesses could be found, out of the ranks of other disciples, who had ever heard out of His own lips an avowal of His Messiahship.

56. For many bare false witness against Him. This was easy to bring about; in fact, they had no doubt been for some time hunting up witnesses (Matt. 26: 4). Anywhere in Asia, not to speak of other countries, there are hangers-on about the courts ready to sell testimony. But their witness (or testimony) agreed not together. Their testimony was on different points or was evidently contradictory.

57. And there arose certain. At last they found two (Matt. 26: 60) who seemed to agree, and have a charge of some weight. And bear false witness. The testimony was false (1) because the facts were not correctly reported, and (2) because they were entirely misapprehended and perverted.

58. We heard Him say, I will destroy this temple, etc. Note that His accusers were obliged to go back three years, to the very opening of His ministry, to find what they might even call testimony (John 2: 19).

Note in reference to this charge, (1) that Christ had not said so; he had said (John 2: 19) that the Jews would destroy the temple, which He would restore; (2) that they understood, at least partially, that He had referred to His own body (Matt. 27: 40, 63). (3) The promise to restore the temple proved that he had no hostility to it, and his cleansing it had shown how much He cared for it.

59. But neither so did their witness agree together. They relied upon the accounts of others, or had very imperfect remembrance.

FALSE WITNESSES AGAINST CHRIST. The false witnesses against Christ did not die with that generation. Opposers still are bearing false witness. They continually declare that Christians believe what they do not believe. They distort the doctrines of Christianity. They make connections in the Bible where there are none. They set forth the faults of Christians without giving them credit for their virtues. They impute to Christianity the deeds done by bad men in the name of Christianity.

FOURTH, THE ACCUSATION (vers. 60-64). The crime for which Jesus was condemned before the Sanhedrim was His alleged blasphemy; i. e., an assumption of power and authority which belonged to Jehovah alone (see also Matt. 26: 65). But when he was brought before Pilate they changed the accusation to one of treason against the Roman government, as the only one of which Pilate would take cognizance (Luke 23: 2).

60. And the high priest stood up in the midst. Either in his place among the Sanhedrim, or the high priest, leaving his official seat, came forward into the middle of the semicircle, in which the members of the Sanhedrim were seated. And asked Jesus. He was determined to force Him to criminate Himself. Answered thou nothing? The question implies a long-continued silence, while witness after witness were uttering their clumsy falsehoods.

61. But He held His peace. The silence made have continued an hour or so, for Peter's denials were about an hour apart (Luke 22: 69).

ANSWERING NIMBUS. Jesus made no reply, because a reply would have been useless. There are many times when it is well for the church to imitate their Master in this. Do not waste time and strength in replying to blatant infidels who are determined to oppose Christianity under all circumstances. Reply often advertises the enemy; and arguments take the attention from the main work of the gospel, the saving of the world from sin. Again the high priest asked Him. Putting Him upon oath (Matt. 26: 63). Art thou Christ (the Messiah), the Son of the Blessed? a common title among the Jews. The difficulty of this question consisted in this: if He confessed that He was the Son of God, they stood ready to condemn Him for blasphemy; if He denied it, they were prepared to condemn Him for being an impostor.

62. And Jesus said, I am. He now publicly declares that He is the Messiah. It would not do to be silent in answer to

such a question, for it would be taken as a denial of His Messiahship, and the claims of His whole ministry. And yet shall see the Son of man sitting on the right hand of power: a sharer in omnipotence, having all power at His control; in contrast with His present apparent weakness. Now they have the power, then He will have it. And coming the clouds of heaven. This expression and the previous one refer (1) to the judgment on them and their city 40 years later, as Jesus foretold (Matt. 16: 27, 28; Mark 13: 13, 30). (2) They refer to the great judgment day at the end of the world, when every one must give an account of the deeds done in the body.

63. Then high priest rent his clothes. The act was almost as much a formal sign of condemnation as the putting on of the black robe in English judges. What need we any further witnesses? They had called but one true witness; his testimony they rejected; and yet on the strength of his testimony they were about to condemn Him!

64. What think ye? This was a formal putting the question to vote; and they all condemned Him to be guilty of death. The vote was unanimous, only those having been called to this irregular night meeting, but those in sympathy with the chief priests.

FIFTH, ARRANGEMENT OF DAYLIGHT. The Sanhedrim was forbidden to investigate any capital crime during the night, and according to the Roman law a sentence pronounced before dawn was not valid. The council now adjourned, to meet at daybreak, when they could legally pronounce the sentence.

XII. THE THREE DENIALS OF PETER.—Palace of Caiaphas. Two to three o'clock Friday morning (Matt. 26: 69, 75; Mark 14: 66, 72; Luke 22: 55, 62; John 18: 15, 17, 25, 27). It was while the trial of Jesus was proceeding before the high priest that Peter denied his Lord.

XIII. MOCKERY OF JESUS BY THE OFFICERS AND OTHERS.—Ver. 65. In the court of Caiaphas' palace. From three to five o'clock Friday morning (Matt. 26: 57, 58; Luke 22: 63, 65). When the preliminary examining was through, and the informal meeting had adjourned, there was a period of waiting for at least two hours before the formal meeting of the Sanhedrim could take place. And some began to spit. Spitting was considered among the Jews as an expression of the greatest contempt (Deut. 25: 9; Num. 12: 14). Cover His face: blindfolded Him. The covering of the face was a mark of a condemned man, held as unworthy to behold and enjoy the light of the sun or of the prince's countenance.

66. They struck Him with their fists. To say unto Him, Strike. After covering His face, they called upon Him to tell by a supernatural intuition who struck Him (Luke 22: 64). And the servants. Better, officers, as in Rev. Ver. Strike Him. They received Him with blows (see Rev. Ver.). They received Him into custody till the regular meeting of the Sanhedrim in the morning; but the moment He was committed to them, they received Him with blows. Did strike Him with the palms of their hands. The hands they bound had healed the leper, raised the dead, and the lips they smote had calmed the winds and waves. One word, and His smiters might have been laid low in death. But as He had begun, He would end,—as self-restrained in the use of His awful powers on His own behalf as if He had been the most helpless of men.

"Only a Boy." More than a half-century ago a faithful minister, coming early to the kirk, met one of his deacons, whose face wore a very red hue but distressed expression. "I came early to meet you," he said. "I have something on my conscience to say to you, Pastor, there must be something radically wrong in your preaching and work; there has been only one person added to the church in a whole year and he is only a boy."

The old minister listened; his eyes moistened, and his thin hand trembled on his knee as he said. "I feel it all," he said. "I feel it, but God's knows that I have tried to do my duty and I can trust Him for the results."

"Yes, yes," said the deacon; "but by your fruits ye shall know them;" and one new member, and he, too, only a boy, seems to me a rather light evidence of true faith and zeal. I don't want to be hard; but I have had this matter on my conscience, and I have done but my duty in speaking plainly."

"True," said the old man; "but charity suffereth long and is kind; beareth all things, hopeth all things. Ay, there you have it; hopeth all things. I have great hopes of that one boy, Robert. Some seed that we sow bears fruit late, but that fruit is generally the most precious of all."

The old minister went into the pulpit that day with a glowing and heavy heart. He closed his discourse with dim and tearful eyes. He wished that his work was done forever, and that he was at rest among the graves under the blooming trees in the old kirkyard.

He lingered in the dear old kirk after the rest were gone. He wished to be alone. The place was sacred and impressively dear to him. It had been his spiritual home from his youth. Before this altar he had prayed over the dead forms of a bygone generation, and had welcomed to the children of a new generation; and at here, yes, here, he had again told at last that his work was no longer owned and blessed!

"No one remained—no one?" "Only a boy."

The boy was Robert Moffatt. He watched the evening old man. His soul was filled with holy sympathy. He went to him, and laid his hand on his black gown.

"Well, Robert?" said the minister. "Do you think if I were willing to work hard for an education, I could ever become a preacher?"

"Perhaps a missionary,"

There was a long pause. Tears filled the eyes of the old minister. At length he said: "This heals the ache in my heart; Robert, I see the Divine hand now; and I bless you, my boy, yes, I think you will become a preacher."

"Some few years ago there returned to London from Africa an aged missionary. His name was spoken with reverence. When he went into an assembly the people rose; when he spoke in public there was a deep silence. Princes stood uncovered before him; nobles invited to their homes.

He had added a province to the Church of Christ on earth; had brought under the gospel influence the most savage of African chiefs; had given the translated Bible to strange tribes; had enriched with valuable knowledge the Royal Geographical Society, and had honored the humble place of his birth, the Scottish kirk, the United Kingdom, and the universal missionary cause.

It is hard to trust when no evidence of fruit appears. But the harvests of right intention are sure. The old minister sleeps beneath the trees in the humble place of his labors, but men remember his work because of what he was to that one boy, and what that boy was to the world.

"Only a boy!" "Do thou thy work. It shall succeed. In time, or in another's day; And if denied the victor's meed, Thou shalt not miss the toiler's pay." — Youth's Companion.

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Bob Barlett's "Tribute to Women." True she cannot sharpen a pencil, and, outside of commercial circles, she can't tie a package to make it look like anything save a crooked cross section of chaos; but land of miracles! see what she can do with a pin! She cannot walk so many miles around a billiard table with nothing to eat, and nothing to speak of to drink, but she can walk the floor all night with a fretful baby. She can ride five hundred miles without going into the smoking-car to rest (and get away from the children.) She can enjoy an evening visit without smoking half a dozen cigars. She can endure the distraction of a houseful of children all day, while her husband sends them to bed before he has been home an hour. A boy with a sister is fortunate, a fellow with a cousin is to be envied, a young man with a sweetheart is happy, and a man with a good wife is thrice blessed more than they all.

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