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## GOD IN THE HANDS OF ANGRY SINNERS

Luke 22:63-71

By

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Luke Lesson 104

## God in the Hands of Angry Sinners Luke 22:63-71

Probably the most famous sermon ever preached on American soil was Jonathan Edwards' "Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God," preached at Enfield, Connecticut, on July 8, 1741. God used that sermon in remarkable ways, bringing many to faith in Christ at the time it was preached, and probably many more in the years since, as it has been read. If you have never read it, you should. Edwards graphically portrays God's wrath and judgment on sinners, using as his primary text Deuteronomy 32:35, "Their foot shall slide in due time."

Today I'm taking the liberty of turning Edwards' title on its head as we look at God in the hands of angry sinners. God actually allowed Himself, in the person of His Son, to be taken in custody, to be mocked, beaten, and falsely judged by angry sinners who finally succeeded in executing Him. I hope that we all will avoid the mistake of these evil men, who foolishly sat in judgment on Jesus and that we will bow before Him before that awful day when He comes to sit in judgment on sinners. And I hope that by considering His willing but terrible mistreatment at the hands of sinners, we will be moved by His great love and sacrifice on our behalf to follow Him with more devotion.

To understand this portion of Scripture, it is helpful to piece together information from the other gospels to construct the probable chronology of Jesus' trials (I am following Darrell Bock, *Luke* [Baker], 2:1793). John 18:13 reports that first Jesus was taken to Annas, the father-in-law of Caiaphas, the high priest. This was probably followed by a nighttime meeting with Caiaphas presiding (Matt. 26:59-66; Mark 14:55-64; Luke omits these meetings). Since it was illegal under Jewish regulations to try a prisoner at night, Caiaphas hastily convened an early morning meeting of the Sanhedrin to rubber stamp the verdict of the night's proceedings (Luke 22:66-71; Matt. 27:1; Mark 15:1). Then Jesus was taken for an initial meeting with Pilate (Matt. 27:2, 11-14; Mark 15:1-5; Luke 23:1-5; John 18:29-38), who sent Him to Herod (Luke 23:6-12). This

was followed by a second, more public meeting before Pilate and the people (Luke 23:13-16; the consequences of which are found in Matt. 27:15-23; Mark 15:6-14; Luke 23:17-23; John 18:39-40).

Our text shows two sets of characters in this epic drama: the sinners who sat in judgment on Jesus; and, Jesus who sat in judgment on the sinners then, by His majesty and power, but who will sit in terrifying judgment on them in the future when He returns. We learn that ...

Although sinners presently sit in judgment on Jesus, the day is coming when Jesus will sit in judgment on sinners.

1. Sinners presently sit in judgment on Jesus.

Just as Jesus then allowed Himself to be bound, mocked, spit upon, beaten, and rejected by these evil men, even though He could have struck them all dead on the spot, so now He tolerates the ragings of evil men against Himself. He could wipe them off the planet in an instant if He willed to do so, but He patiently endures their abuse. Some, through His mercy, will come to repentance and faith; others are storing up wrath for the day of judgment. But in His great patience, God allows sinners in the present age of grace to sit in judgment on Jesus in the sense of allowing them to hold and express their own views of Jesus, even to the point of blasphemy. Luke, for our instruction so that we will avoid their example, shows us two broad types of sinners:

A. Some sinners sit in judgment on Jesus in their mad pursuit of pleasure (22:63-65).

Perhaps after the interview with Annas, while the Jewish leaders were waiting for a quorum of their comrades to come together, the Jewish temple guards who held Jesus in custody decided to have some fun with their prisoner. Many of them mocked Jesus, perhaps imitating His teaching style, mimicking Him by repeating some of His claims, perhaps with a Galilean accent, or making fun of some of the things He had said, which undoubtedly they misconstrued. The other gospels relate that they spit in His face, perhaps having a spitting contest to see who could hit the closest to His lips. Then they made up a game of blind man's bluff, blindfolding Jesus and hitting Him in the face, mockingly asking Him to prophesy about who hit Him. If only they knew that He *did* know!

Luke adds that “they were saying many other things against Him, blaspheming” (22:65). Their mad pursuit of fun and pleasure caused them to do terrible things to the spotless Son of God.

Picturing this scene makes me feel nauseated. My first reaction is to draw back in horror and to think, “How could anyone treat any other human being, let alone the Lord Jesus, like that?” But, as Spurgeon points out (*Spurgeon's Expository Encyclopedia* [Baker], 4:258), we need to lay aside our indignation and bring forth penitence, because we all have hit our dear Savior in the face with our sin. It was because of our sin that He endured the abuse of these sinners and went willingly to the cross.

Hopefully we are not as cruel as these wicked men were, but we all have put personal pleasure ahead of the things of God. Perhaps some of them made sport of Jesus ignorantly, not having heard His claims or witnessed His miracles. But we have heard and yet we've made sport of our blessed Savior. We've all laughed at entertainment that mocks God and is evil in His sight. We've all indulged in pleasure that the Bible calls sin. In so doing, we have done what these wicked men did to our Savior.

The great Dutch artist, Rembrandt, has a famous painting of the crucifixion in which your attention is first drawn to the dying Savior. Then you notice the crowd gathered around that scene, with their various attitudes and actions. Finally, you notice at the edge of the picture a lone figure almost hidden in the shadows. That man is Rembrandt himself. The great artist realized that his sins had helped nail Jesus to the cross, and so he painted himself into the picture. And so should we!

B. Some sinners sit in judgment on Jesus in their mad pursuit of power (22:66-67, 70-71).

On the surface, the Jewish leaders who sat in judgment on Jesus were less cruel and more civilized than the guards who made sport of Jesus. They went through the formality of a trial, under the guise of justice. They asked Him questions about His claims. But they were not seeking the truth so that they could conform their lives to it. They were not inquiring about Jesus so that they could be His followers. Their minds were already made up, that they wanted to get rid of Him. They wanted to hang onto the

power that they enjoyed. They wanted to keep living as they were living, being lords of their own lives. Their mad pursuit of power caused them to prejudge Jesus and disregard His claims.

The way that these powerful men conducted Jesus' trial violated a number of Jewish laws (the following list collated from Bock, 2:1792; and, John MacArthur, Jr., *The MacArthur New Testament Commentary, Matthew 24-28* [Moody Press], pp. 199-204):

No criminal trial could be started at night. The Jewish council could not initiate charges, but could only consider charges brought by an outside party. The initial proceedings took place at the high priest's home and not in the temple as prescribed. Jesus was tried without a defense counsel. The defendant was supposed to be presumed innocent until proven guilty. He could not be convicted on the basis of testimony against himself. Conviction required the testimony of at least two reliable witnesses, whose testimony had to agree. They had to affirm that their testimony was true on the basis of direct experience, not hearsay or presumption. They had to identify the precise time and location of the event about which they testified. False witnesses were subject to the same penalty that the accused would suffer if convicted (a strong motivation to speak only the truth, especially in capital cases!).

In capital cases, the death sentence could not be carried out until the third day after it was given, and in the intervening time, the members of the council were to fast. This meant that the trial could not be convened during a feast, such as Passover. A pronouncement of guilt by the high priest was contrary to the normal order, which should have started with the least senior members. If a council voted unanimously for conviction in a capital case, the accused was set free, because the necessary element of mercy was presumed to be lacking.

Thus from start to finish, the Jewish council's trial of Jesus was a mockery of justice, in violation of their own laws. The questions that they asked Jesus were not sincere, seeking to get at the truth. They were devised to trap Him by His own words, so that they could accuse Him before Pilate. If He claimed to be Christ, a King, then He stood in opposition to Rome (23:2). Since Rome denied the Jews the right to carry out capital punishment and since the Jewish leaders did not want to draw fire from those in the mul-

titudes that liked Jesus, they wanted grounds to accuse Him before Pilate, and let him do the dirty work of crucifying Jesus.

Note carefully that these were religious men who instigated and carried out this mockery of justice against Jesus. Later they would get the Romans involved, but at this point, both the guards who mocked and beat Jesus and the leaders who led this unfair trial were religious men. They were about to participate in the Jewish Feast of the Passover. They were at the temple each week for religious services. They professed to follow the Law of Moses. And yet their hearts were far from God. We should learn from this that just going to church or participating in religious rituals is not enough. True Christianity is a matter of the heart before God. To use religion as a covering for our own seeking of pleasure or power is to live as if there is no living God who knows our every thought and motive. It is to deceive ourselves in the worst possible way.

We should also learn from these religious men that we are all subject to the danger of making up our minds based on our personal preferences or desires and then coming up with "evidence" to support our case. These men liked their position of power and influence. It was financially lucrative for many of them to have the monopoly on the temple business. When Jesus upset their tables and disrupted their profitable schemes, they knew that they had to get rid of Him. Ignoring all of the evidence that backed His claims to be both Lord and Christ, they went looking for contrary evidence to support their claims that He was an impostor.

We all act just like they did, if we're not careful. I have seen Christian leaders who speak out on divorce until they go through a divorce. Suddenly they find new evidence that their former position was in error! I know of a prominent Bible prophecy teacher who used to speak against the charismatic movement. But when he divorced his wife and married the woman he had been having an affair with, the charismatic branch of the church took him under wing. Suddenly, his criticisms of charismatic teachings stopped! We need to get self out of the way, judge our pride and sinful desires, and seek to obey God's Word as it plainly is written. If we go looking for verses to support our sinful desires, we will find them but end up under God's judgment.

These Jewish leaders needed to examine their own hearts and honestly ask the question, "Who is Jesus? Are His claims about Himself true or false?" The truth is, ...

2. The day is coming when Jesus will sit in judgment on sinners.

Jesus' calm demeanor in spite of His wrongful treatment was already a judgment against these wicked men. A sinner would have been yelling about his rights being violated. He would have been threatening to get even. But Jesus bore all of this abuse silently before God, as a lamb led to the slaughter. When to be silent would be to deny the truth, He spoke straightforwardly, giving testimony concerning who He is. Clearly there was a great chasm between the views of the Sanhedrin and Jesus' claims. Both cannot be true. As Darrell Bock puts it, "Either Jesus is right or the Jewish court is right. Jesus' claim is either blasphemy or deadly serious truth" (*Luke* [IVP], p. 364). Although they asked with the wrong motives, the two questions the Sanhedrin asked Jesus are the two supreme questions that all must consider: "If you are the Christ, tell us"; and, "Are You the Son of God, then?" (22:67, 70).

A. Jesus will sit in judgment on sinners because He is the Christ.

The first request, "If you are the Christ, tell us," was insincere on the part of the Jewish leaders. Jesus knew that and replies, in effect, "What good will it do to tell you, since your minds are made up?" They were not asking the question out of a heart that wanted to know the truth. They were trying to bait Jesus, to set Him up so that they could report to Pilate that Jesus was claiming political leadership of the Jews in opposition to Rome (23:2). Jesus' response shows us that when we're dealing with scoffers who are not interested in knowing the truth, but who simply want ammunition to shoot back at us, don't waste your breath.

In spite of their evil motives, the fact of the matter is that Jesus is the Christ or Messiah. In Luke 2:11, the angel told the shepherds, "For today in the city of David there has been born for you a Savior, who is Christ the Lord." In 2:26, Luke tells us that the Holy Spirit had revealed to the aged Simeon that he would not die "before he had seen the Lord's Christ." In 3:15, Luke says that the

people were in a state of expectation, wondering whether John the Baptist could be the Christ. John clearly denied that he was and pointed people to Jesus. In 4:41 we learn that the demons were proclaiming Jesus to be the Son of God, but "He would not allow them to speak because they knew Him to be the Christ." In 9:20, Peter made his famous confession, that he believed Jesus to be "the Christ of God." In 20:41, Jesus asked the scribes how the Christ could be David's son, since David calls Him "Lord." (See also 23:2, 35, 39; 24:26, 46). Jesus is clearly God's anointed one (= Christ, Messiah), whom He has installed as King over the nations, who sits at His right hand of power (Pss. 2; 110).

To confess Jesus as the Christ is to confess His right to rule, not only over the nations, but also over your life. It means that God has vested Jesus with His own authority to rule. To resist Jesus' lordship is to resist Almighty God and be in rebellion against the one who will judge all the earth!

B. Jesus will sit in judgment on sinners because He is the Son of God.

Jesus goes on to tell the Jewish leaders that "from now on the Son of Man will be seated at the right hand of the power of God" (22:69). This brings together several Old Testament prophecies: Psalm 2, which predicts the sovereign rule of Jesus who is installed as God's King and is called God's Son; Psalm 110, where the Lord tells David's Lord to sit at His right hand until He makes His enemies a footstool for His feet; and, Daniel 7:13-14, where Daniel sees one like a Son of Man who comes up to the Ancient of Days and is given dominion, glory, and an everlasting kingdom over all peoples, nations, and tongues. Again, Jesus is asserting that He is both Lord and Christ, the ruler of God's eternal kingdom, who will judge the nations.

Jesus uses the phrase "Son of Man" in reference to Himself, but the Jewish leaders respond by asking, "Are You the Son of God, then?" They got the connection because they knew the Psalms and Daniel. They knew that the Son of Man, Messiah, is God's Son in a unique way that no one else is. So Jesus is turning the tables on them. They thought that they were sitting in judgment on Him. He lets them know that really, He is sitting in judgment on them! As Peter proclaimed on the Day of Pentecost, this

Jesus whom they had crucified, God had raised up to His right hand, where He was installed on David's throne as both Lord and Christ (Acts 2:30-36).

Jesus answers their question about being the Son of God by saying, literally, "You say that I am." Why didn't He just say, "Yes"? I think the reason goes back to Jesus' explanation for why He spoke in parables, "in order that seeing they may not see, and hearing they may not understand" (8:10). Parables revealed truth to the seekers, but it concealed truth from the scoffers, who continued in their spiritual blindness. Even so here, Jesus is saying "yes, I am," but He is not saying it straightforwardly because He does not want to respond to men who are asking from the wrong motives. There is also a touch of irony, in that He is saying, "So, is that what you are saying, that I am the Son of God?" Clearly, the Jewish leaders knew that He meant yes, because they concluded, "What further need do we have of testimony? For we have heard it ourselves from His own mouth."

C. Jesus will sit in judgment on sinners because they have heard His testimony but rejected it.

Yes, they had heard it, but sadly, they had not submitted to Jesus as Lord. That is always the issue: How do we respond to the testimony that we have heard concerning Jesus? God allowed Himself, in the person of His eternal Son Jesus, to be put into the hands of angry sinners. Jesus willingly went to the cross, despising the shame, but now He has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God (Heb. 12:2). If you are running your own life, then you are not in submission to Jesus as Lord. If you do not repent and yield to His lordship before you die or before He returns, you will no longer sit in judgment on Him. He will sit in judgment on you, and it will be eternal judgment! He is today the Lamb of God who suffered as the penalty due to sinners (Isa. 53). But soon rebellious sinners will cry out to the rocks, "Fall on us and hide us from the presence of Him who sits on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb; for the great day of their wrath has come; and who is able to stand?" (Rev. 6:16-17).

## Conclusion

There is a story about an Archbishop of Paris who was preaching to a great congregation. He told them about three worldly, godless young men who wandered into a cathedral. Two of them bet the third that he would not make a phony confession to the priest. The priest realized what was happening, and so when the pretending penitent had finished, he said, "To every confession there is a penance. You see that crucifix over there? Go to it, kneel down, and repeat three times as you look into the face of the crucified, 'You did all this for me, and I couldn't care less!'"

The young man emerged from the confessional box to collect on his bet. But when he told his friends what the priest had said, they said, "Oh, no, first complete the penance; then we'll pay you."

He walked slowly toward the crucifix, kneeled down, looked up into the statue and began, "You did all this for me, and I ...". He could get no further. Tears flooded his eyes. His heart was broken with his sin. There his old life ended and his new life began. The priest concluded his sermon, "I was that young man."

While I disagree with confessions to priests, penance, and crucifix statues (which amount to idolatry), there is an application for us in that story. The account of Christ's suffering is told in the gospels. Read it, then come often to His table, which is the picture He gave us to remember Him by, and say to Him in your heart, "You did all this for me, and I ...". Fill in the blank. If He gave His Son into the hands of angry sinners on your behalf, shouldn't you give your all for Him?

## Discussion Questions

1. Some say that Christians should not view themselves as sinners, but as "saints who sin occasionally." Agree/disagree?
2. Is it spiritually healthy or unhealthy to be growing in awareness of our sinfulness? Give scriptural support.
3. Can a person truly know Jesus as Savior and yet consciously deny Him as Lord? Give scriptural support.
4. What lessons can we learn from Jesus' testimony about our own witness?

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