

AFTER THE PASSION

Answering Questions People Have After Seeing
Mel Gibson's movie: *The Passion of the Christ*

Pt. 6

THE ULTIMATE "COLD CASE"

Who Were the Real 'Christ Killers'?

I. OPENING REMARKS

I'm sure that most of you have heard or watched the new CBS crime solving series, **COLD CASE**. **COLD CASE** is a crime drama starring Lilly Rush, a female detective on the Philadelphia homicide squad who, because of her instinctive and intuitive understanding of the criminal mind, is assigned to "**cold cases**" – which are past crimes that have never been solved. The series has her tracking down and interrogating witnesses of past crimes whose lives and circumstances have since changed. But now she has the use of today's new science which help her find fresh clues to solve cases that were previously unsolvable. But there is a catch: her work on **cold cases** opens up old wounds and can potentially cause old suspects to commit new crimes.

Ever since the word got out last year that Mel Gibson was making a movie about ***the Ultimate Cold Case*** – the torturous crucifixion of Jesus Christ entitled - *The Passion of the Christ*, Jewish leaders and the ADL have protested and sought to censor it. They were concerned that in making the movie, this particular cold case would reopen old wounds amongst the Jewish and Gentile population, by portraying the Jews as the ones singularly directly responsible for Jesus death, inciting a wave of anti-Semitism amongst certain fringe groups amongst the Gentile population.

From the standpoint of the Jewish community, this is understandable, if irritating and somewhat overplayed. From the beginnings of the Roman Catholic Church, Jews have been made scapegoats for a whole host of society's problems. Epithets like "the Devil's children", and "Christ killers" have been hurled at Jewish people, as precursors to inevitable acts of violence and even genocide. At one time, persecution from the Roman Catholic Church was every bit as hateful and racist as that which proceeds from Moslems today. The hurt from those days may lie dormant, under the surface of the Jewish psyche, but it is still there, like an exposed nerve waiting to be touched and triggered by anything that hints at fomenting anti-Semitism. So empathy and a certain amount of culpability from the Christian community for Jewish paranoia is not uncalled for here.

Inevitably, when the discussion of the sufferings of Jesus comes up, some common questions are asked, such as; "Why did Jesus have to die in such a horrible way?" "What was the reason for His death?" And, "Who was responsible for His death?"

Some equally common responses are: "Jesus didn't die, He was murdered."
"Jesus was publicly executed for committing crimes worthy of the death penalty."

“Jesus died for political ideology.” “Jesus died for his religious convictions.”
“Jesus was killed by the establishment of his day because his teachings were so militant and radical and revolutionary.” “Jesus was seen as a dangerous activist!”
“He disturbed the status quo so profoundly that he had to be taken out.”

Are these statements true? Well, Jesus was looked upon by the Jewish **religious leaders** as a blasphemer for making claims of divinity (John 8:58) and “making Himself equal with God” (John 10:33). The **Romans** did see Him as guilty of the crime of sedition or **treason against Caesar**, although no evidence was ever found to support this, as Pontius Pilate so ceremoniously admitted when washing his hands of the affair.

So, yes, between the Jews and the Romans He was charged with religious and political crimes punishable by death in both spheres, but they were never proven because he never did them. Such hostility, we are told in the Gospels, was actually rooted in **envy** and **jealousy** in the heart of the **Jewish leaders**, and **cowardice** in the **Roman governor**. This means that in the execution of Jesus Christ, there was a carrying out of gross injustice.

If He did not, in fact, do anything worthy of death, why did they crucify him any way? All He ever did was go about doing good and healing all who were oppressed of the devil. The blind were healed, deaf heard, lepers were cleansed and poor bereaved mothers received their dead sons back again from the dead. What is so evil about that? Where was the disconnect? Who were the ones responsible for perpetrating this gross injustice? How can we rectify the wrong? Who should we assign the blame to? Perhaps a little digging around may turn up something. It may also make implicate some who up to this time have hidden behind a cloak of innocence, while exonerating others who have been falsely blamed all these years.

II. THE FALSE WITNESSES & CHARGES AGAINST JESUS

A. Was the Proper Procedures Followed?

2. A major feature of the gospel writers was the emphasis on Jesus' trials. All the trials Jesus was subjected to (there were 6: before Annas, the Sanhedrin, Caiaphas, Pilate, Herod, and Pilate again) were
 - a. Illegal
 - b. In both the Jewish and Roman courts, a certain protocol and legal procedure was to be followed:¹
 - c. There were to be four steps in a trial:
 - i. the morning sacrifice
 - ii. the assembling of the judges

¹ An excellent book on the various trials of Jesus is Dale Foreman's book, Crucify Him, Zondervan Books & Publishing House, Grand Rapids, Michigan.

- iii. the examination of the witnesses, and
 - iv. debate and balloting on the guilt or innocence of the accused.
3. The actual proceedings before the Sanhedrin, however, were illegal because **court convened before the morning sacrifice**, which was expressly forbidden by Hebrew law. The trial was further illegal because **the Sanhedrin was not to meet for capital punishment cases on Friday or on any day before a feast**. Further, **Christ was illegally condemned on his own uncorroborated testimony**.
 4. The judges of the Sanhedrin hated Christ because he had denounced hypocrisy and cleansed the Temple; they had held three meetings to conspire against Him. Having an interest in the subject matter of the trial, the judges should have been disqualified.
 5. Multiple witnesses contradicted themselves, and should have been prosecuted themselves for bearing false witness! This should raise our suspicions that some sort of conspiracy was underfoot.
 6. The verdict of "guilty" was unanimous; court should, therefore, have reconvened the next day. But only about three hours after the first meeting of the Sanhedrin they met again, did not reconsider the evidence, but led Jesus away and delivered him to Pilate. This action was legally unconscionable.
 7. Furthermore, the reasons for this were the ominous presence of **hidden personal and political agendas** influencing the outcome of the trial. For an example, both Caiaphas, the high priest, and Pilate, the Roman governor, were not exactly just, fair or neutral as unbiased representatives of church and state, in the fulfillment of their official roles and duties. As fallible and fallen human beings they were swayed by public opinion and personal passions that seek to overcome and rule us all. Thus, they did not bother to observe the proper procedures in their legal proceedings, making their trials illegal and unjust.
 8. First hand impeccable eyewitnesses expose these secret, evil, personal agendas as they tell of the arrest, custody, trial, sentence, torture and execution of our Lord Jesus Christ.

B. Who is the "One"?

1. A good question to ask at this point is why Pontius Pilate is singled out in the Apostles & Nicene Creed?

2. After all, in John 19:11 Jesus himself said Pilate wasn't the one most guilty, but ***“the one who handed me over to you is guilty of a greater sin.”*** Now that is an important “cold case” clue. Who is this ***“one”*** Jesus is talking about?

Caiaphas?

1. **Caiaphas** representing the Sanhedrin could have been the ***one***. Mark 15:10 tells us the real nature behind Caiaphas handing Jesus over to Pilate was envy, and Pilate knew it. Mark tells us Pilate heard their charges against Jesus - “knowing it was out of **envy** that the chief priests had handed Jesus over to him” (Matt. 27:18). (Jealousy and envy are still the underlying attitudes that fuel anti-Christian bigotry amongst the Jewish community today.
2. But further digging around uncovered even more incriminating evidence against the religious establishment at the time of Christ. The Temple in Jerusalem had a place where Gentiles could and learn about the God of Israel.
3. The COG gave them an access point so that they could search for God and hear the truth about the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob
4. But it just so happened that in the two decades prior to Jesus' arrest and execution, the COG had been gradually turned into a Farmers Market of sorts, called “Annas' Bazaar.”
5. Annas was the High Priest before Caiaphas took over the office, but he was a greedy and corrupt man who had given up on true faith in God, if he ever knew God at all, and finally came around to believing if he wanted to see something happen, he'd have to make it happen. As a side note, Annas was the father-in-law of Caiaphas. Interesting.
6. Annas soon saw the Temple of God as a means of making money and bettering his lot in life.
7. He saw that religion could serve as an opiate for the people long before Karl Marx did. There was no fear of God in this man, who dared to use God as bait to make money off of people who sought to draw near to God.
8. So the Court of the Gentiles came to be called over the years **“Annas' Bazaar”**, and was run by corrupt priests who were ordained by Annas' himself.
9. **Annas' was actually paid by godless merchants for the rights to operate their concession stands that sold worship paraphernalia such as Temple approved sacrificial animals and birds, sacred salt, frankincense, wine, flour, oil.**
10. People with foreign or non-temple currency were forced to exchange their money with the money changers so they could

have “temple money” but were charged a 25% fee to do so, or else they could do no business at Anna’s bazaar.

11. Anna’s got a percentage of the profits each day, of course, and on those days when the profits were low he had his hireling priests make sure the spotless sacrifice one brought from one’s flock **failed to pass inspection**, making it necessary to purchase one of the temple’s previously inspected and approved animals for **ten times the price the animal** was normally worth (many of which were merely the animals of others that failed inspection previously) and some of these were unfit to offer to God.
12. On at least two separate occasions Jesus was seen violently reacting to this religious spectacle. John records one of them, at the beginning of His ministry.²

¹³When it was almost time for the Jewish Passover, Jesus went up to Jerusalem. ¹⁴In the temple courts he found men selling cattle, sheep and doves, and others sitting at tables exchanging money. ¹⁵So he made a whip out of cords, and drove all from the temple area, both sheep and cattle; he scattered the coins of the money changers and overturned their tables. ¹⁶To those who sold doves he said, “Get these out of here! How dare you turn my Father’s house into a market!”

13. Matthew records the other one at the end of his ministry, on Palm Sunday, five days before His arrest and crucifixion.³

¹As they approached Jerusalem and came to Bethphage on the Mount of Olives, Jesus sent two disciples, ²saying to them, “Go to the village ahead of you, and at once you will find a donkey tied there, with her colt by her. Untie them and bring them to me. ³If anyone says anything to you, tell him that the Lord needs them, and he will send them right away.”

⁴This took place to fulfill what was spoken through the prophet:

*⁵ “Say to the Daughter of Zion,
‘See, your king comes to you,
gentle and riding on a donkey,
on a colt, the foal of a donkey.’ “*

⁶The disciples went and did as Jesus had instructed them. ⁷They brought the donkey and the colt, placed their cloaks on them, and Jesus sat on them. ⁸A very large crowd

² John 2:13-16

³ Matthew 21:1-

spread their cloaks on the road, while others cut branches from the trees and spread them on the road. ⁹The crowds that went ahead of him and those that followed shouted,

“Hosanna to the Son of David!”

“Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!”

“Hosanna in the highest!”

¹⁰When Jesus entered Jerusalem, the whole city was stirred and asked, “Who is this?”

¹¹The crowds answered, “This is Jesus, the prophet from Nazareth in Galilee.”

¹²Jesus entered the temple area and drove out all who were buying and selling there. He overturned the tables of the money changers and the benches of those selling doves.

¹³“It is written,” he said to them, “My house will be called a house of prayer,’ but you are making it a ‘den of robbers.’”

¹⁴The blind and the lame came to him at the temple, and he healed them. ¹⁵But when the chief priests and the teachers of the law saw the wonderful things he did and the children shouting in the temple area, “Hosanna to the Son of David,” they were indignant.”

14. So this conspiracy to assassinate Jesus had been brewing for some time, and it had to do with the economic and political control of the religious market, both of which were threatened by Jesus of Nazareth
15. Passover provided the opportunity for these corrupt priests to make more money than some would see in a lifetime, and they weren't going to let anybody threaten what it took them years to develop

Religious Leaders?

1. The chief priests, elders and teachers of the law - the whole Sanhedrin - stood behind Caiaphas' actions. Is this group, along with Caiaphas, the **one** Jesus was talking about?

The Crowd?

1. Or maybe Jesus was referring to **the people** that made up the lynch mob in Pilate's court. Acts 3:12-15 reads: “The God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob - the God of our fathers, has glorified His servant Jesus. **You** handed him over to be killed, and **you** disowned him before Pilate, though he had decided to let him go.”
2. So perhaps the Jewish people who made up that crowd were in fact the ones indicted by our Lord as directly responsible for the

injustice and cruelty that led to his death that day. Perhaps they had grown tired of his meddling and interfering with the status quo, business as usual religious charlatanism going on in the name of God in those days, and wanted to be done with Him!

Judas Iscariot?

1. Could Jesus have meant **Judas Iscariot**, the man we all love to hate?. He must be the one. He's the ultimate Benedict Arnold. He was the one really responsible for the murder of Jesus, wasn't he? Finally, the ADL will be able to breath a sigh of relief. The Jews are exonerated. Judas killed Jesus. Case closed.
2. After all, even though Caiaphas and the chief priests, elders and teachers of the law did hand him over to Pilate, it was Judas who got the ball rolling by handing him over to the priests. Bada bing!
3. Please note that there are some who would discourage us from treating Judas too harshly. Judas has used his silver wisely, and called his defenders from Time Warner and CBS. Over the years, Hollywood has made continual, heroic efforts to acquit, exonerate or at least soften poor Judas' treachery.
4. The television and film industry has done a pretty good job making Judas the **Teflon traitor**. It's not unusual to hear people actually sympathizing with the poor fellow. After all " he really did get an unfair deal"; "He had the cards stacked against him from the start"; "He could've been framed, set up, got unfair press"; etc., etc. "Betraying Jesus was a tough job, but someone had to do it."
5. A few weeks ago, there was a TV movie about Judas with the title of the same name. It opens with a crucifixion scene. Hundreds are being crucified, but one stands out to the viewer.
6. It is not Jesus, but Judas' father who is on the cross. What would such a thing do to a young boy? Standing there watching his poor father being crucified before his very eyes? Judas watches, embittered with hatred toward the Romans, and vows to avenge his father one day. Who could blame him. In this day when greater appeals are made for us to understand the rationale of perpetrators, and sympathize with their plight, no matter how much suffering they did to those they injured or killed, we are cajoled and wined and dined to have sympathy for poor Judas Iscariot. How could we ever blame him or speak a disparaging word about him. If we walked in his shoes, we too, would have been tempted to betray Jesus. Later, in this new version of T.V.'s Judas, an older Judas has become an anti-establishment, urban terrorist rebel called a zealot. It is his

justifiably anger and traumatized heart over the cruel crucifixion of his father that keeps him from accepting Jesus' message of love for enemies, and non-violence. That makes sense. Now we understand.

7. Poor Judas still hangs himself in guilt and despair in the end, and the viewer is tempted to feel worse about Judas death than the crucifixion of Jesus, but afterward, Peter and two other disciples are shown praying over Judas lifeless body, because, says the maker of the movie, ***“that’s what Jesus would want them to do.”*** It is a touching scene, much more palatable than the Biblical record of Judas body falling from the broken branch and tumbling down the side of the cliff so violently that his body bursts open spilling his guts all over the place. But if they had shown that on the TV movie, it would have not produced warm fuzzy feelings toward Judas the victim.
8. However, the gospel writers peg Judas right from the beginning. Matthew 10:4, Mark 3:19 and Luke 6:16 list him last among the 12 apostles, tagging on to the end of his name - ***“who betrayed him” or “who became a traitor.”*** John 12:6 tells us Judas was a greedy thief who used to steal funds from Jesus expense account and pocketing what he stole for his own purposes.
9. Yet, some will persist in saying, ***“But aren’t the gospel writers too hard on ol’ Judas? I mean,”*** they will say, ***“wasn’t Judas a victim of predestination? A cog in the machinery? A tool of providence?”*** After all - ***“The devil made him do it.”***
10. Well, John 13:2 tells us that Satan did “prompt” Judas ***“to betray Jesus.”*** John 13:27 tells us that ***“Satan entered him”*** after he made the decision to betray Jesus. Luke 22:3 tells us that at the very moment Judas **premeditated** and **finalized** his betrayal of Jesus, **“then** Satan entered him.” Nevertheless, none of these facts exonerate Judas. He must be held responsible for his own decisions and choices, and finally, his actions, all of which were premeditated.
11. The fact that Judas betrayal of Jesus was foreknown, (known by God before hand) and foretold (written down as a prophetic prediction) **does not remove from Judas his free moral agency** in the matter, anymore than Old Testament predictions of Christ’s death means he died **involuntarily**.
12. The verdict in the Bible is extremely clear. Acts 1:18 tells us Judas’ reason for betraying Jesus: “reward money.” In other words, Judas was motivated by the love of money, or **greed**.

Nothing more. And the fact of the matter was that after hanging himself, the branch broke, and his body tumbled down the mountain bursting his intestines all over the ground below him. Unceremonious. Unglamorous. Ignoble. Unmourned.

13. John 12:1-6 tells us Judas was a greedy person who loved to get a hold of money and hated giving it up. Yet, even though Jesus knew Judas would eventually betray Him, our Lord, even at the end, attempted to give Judas a way out, by sharing his bread and wine with him at the last supper. Psalm 41:9 gasps at the fact that he did this most heinous of all acts of betrayal with a kiss!
14. Mark 14:21 minces no words, ***“it would have been better for him had he never been born.”*** Acts 1:15-20 tells us Judas’ suicide was his own confession of his heinous act.
15. How many of you have named your sons Judas? How about your dogs? Pigs? No one really wants any part of Judas. Who here wants to be like Judas, or wants your children to grow up to be just like Judas? Yet, we behave like Caiaphas, the people, even Judas, when we deny or refuse to acknowledge Jesus publicly (Matthew 10:32-33), or follow Jesus with false motives and hidden agendas (John 2:23-25; 6:14-15, 26). When we follow Jesus merely for what we will get out of it or what He will do for us, our attitudes reveal the presence of the ghost of Judas Iscariot, who betrayed our Lord out of greed for 30 pieces of silver, the price of a slave. But was Judas the ***one*** Jesus spoke to Pilate about? It seems plausible to this cold case to list him as a possible suspect.

Roman Soldiers?

1. Let’s not claim a verdict yet, for to do so would let the **soldiers** who physically tortured Jesus get away with murder. They were directly responsible for carrying out the awful sentence. They probably had boiled their cruel and inhumane duties down to an efficient and sadistic science, done by the book, **leaving little room for conscience**. They just didn’t allow themselves to think about it. They were an efficient execution team. Human cyborgs – unfeeling cogs in the machinery of the Roman Empire. They brought their lunch boxes, board games, a little wine. **After all, there’s nothing wrong with making your job as enjoyable as you can, is there?**
2. These guys were just a bunch of good ol’ boys, a group of big, clock-punching, non-thinking, non-feeling Roman cyborgs drones carrying out their monotonous and routine jobs, oblivious to what was really going down. Where the chief priests and elders were blinded by envy, and Judas was blinded by

greed, the Roman soldiers were desensitized by the daily grind and sheer boredom of their job. You've seen one crucifixion, you've seen 'em all. Completely detached from the suffering and agony and grief that surrounded them. They didn't have a clue as to who it was they had just nailed to the cross, and could care less.

3. Two things stand out:

One - **Jesus pronounced forgiveness on those soldiers**, even while they gambled for His robes, **something He did not do for the chief priests.**

Two-**The gospel writers place no particular blame on them for Jesus' sufferings.** They really didn't have a clue as to what they were doing.

In 1962 Billy Graham was roused from sleep to pray for a famous movie starlet. Later, he called her secretary seeking an appointment to speak with her about the matter of her soul and Jesus Christ. Her aide said, "I have talked with Miss _____ and she has asked me to relay this message to you. Miss _____ has no time to get personally involved with Jesus." Sadly, 2 weeks later she was dead, and very possibly, personally involved with the devil. Either we choose to accept by faith Jesus' full payment of our sin debt now, or we will personally have to pay for them later. "This is the day of salvation; now is the acceptable time. . . ." 2 Cor. 6:2

Pontius Pilate?

1. So, why does Pontius Pilate get top billing in the Apostles Creed, while others don't even get an honorable mention? Why was he the one to go down in infamy as ultimately responsible for the suffering of Christ?
2. John 19:16-18 tells us that Pilate clearly was the one responsible for ordering the torture and crucifixion of Christ.

"Then he [Pilate] delivered [handed Him over] to them to be crucified. Then they took Jesus and led Him away... where they crucified Him..."

3. Pilate was also responsible for the physical and emotional abuse Jesus suffered at the hands of the cruel, mocking soldiers who:
 - a. took a 2 ½ lb. rod and beat a crown of thorns into his head (John 19:2; Matt. 27:29-30)
 - b. spat in his face and on his body (Matthew 27:30)
 - c. stripped him and humiliated him (Matthew 27:28-31)

- d. put a scarlet robe on him after his back was badly lacerated by the scourge (Matthew 27:28; John 19:1-2)
4. repeatedly punched and slapped his already bruised and swollen face (John 19:3)
5. Pilate was the one who sent Jesus to Herod, and so was also responsible for the abuse Jesus received in his court (Luke 23:6-12). **You see, Pilate was the one with the most authority and who was put in charge of this whole legal charade. Nothing happened without his authorization.** He represented the only government who perfected the ancient Parthian form of execution that tortured to death its victims, called crucifixion. Since Pilate held the position of civil authority over all of Palestine, he could have prevented the crucifixion of Jesus, **for he had the authority to stop the process** as soon as it came into his court. He didn't. So Jesus suffered under Pilate's authoritative nod.
6. What's worse, Pilate acted against both conscience, counsel and evidence. The gospels give us some insight into some things about Pilate:

Pilate was absolutely convinced of Jesus' innocence!

On 3 separate occasions Pilate publicly declared that the conclusive results of his investigation turned up no evidence with which to accuse Jesus. He had to admit publicly, that, try as he might, he could "find no fault with" Jesus (John 18:38; 19:4,6).

Pilate made ingenious attempts to avoid taking sides repeatedly trying to **pass the buck** when it came to having to make a **personal decision about Jesus**.

4 evasatory tactics are recorded:

Pilate passed him off to Herod (Luke 23:6-12).

He scourged him to either get a confession through torture, or provoke public sympathy.

He attempted to right the situation for wrong reasons (get the political monkey off his back).

He attempted to protect his own innocence in the matter in Matthew 27:4 when he said, "***I am innocent of the blood of this man.***"

In the end, Pilate allowed himself to be blinded by political expediency, and condemned Jesus out of cowardice. His conscience knew better. Jesus was innocent. Pilate was bound legally, to let him go. Instead he condemned an innocent man to a horrible death. His wife, after having a dream about Jesus, counseled him to “have nothing to do with” Jesus (Matthew 27:19), but he chose rather to listen to public opinion. Evidence demanded a verdict of innocence, but he chose to ignore the evidence because **he refused to take personal responsibility in the matter of what to do with Jesus of Nazareth.**

7. So who killed Jesus Christ? Who was responsible for His death?
8. Well, we cannot escape the fact that the Jewish leaders and Jewish crowd were in some way responsible for the crucifixion of our Lord Jesus Christ. But not all the Jewish people were involved in this conspiracy, so it is wrong to put the label or responsibility solely on the Jews for being “Christ Killers.” Do they share the blame? Absolutely. But no more than others.
9. Judas was certainly the one Jesus spoke about to Pilate, who was guilty of a greater sin than Pilate, because of his treachery. But Judas is never mentioned in the creeds. Pilate holds that distinction.
10. As a result, Pontius Pilate ended up as the infamous person of the Apostles and Nicene Creed, labeled as the one who ultimately was responsible for the suffering of Jesus Christ. Or was he?
11. If we believe the creed, then we believe that Christ died, Christ arose, and Christ will come again, and so, the fact of the matter is, Jesus Christ isn't dead after all, which means that for Christians, it's rather pointless to assign the blame to any ethnic or racial group. On the other hand, if all Jesus was, was a good man who suffered an unjust death on the cross, then it is probably important and significant for you to find out who murdered him.
12. Is it true that we all are responsible for Jesus death? Indirectly maybe, since it was for our sins that He died. We need to be careful not to sentimentalize Jesus death by saying we all killed him, or trivialize it by saying both the Romans and ther Jews killed him.
- 13.**Lets not forget the real reason He was crucified didn't have anything to do with which race was responsible for killing Him.

Jesus voluntarily chose, before the foundations of the world, to pay the penalty for our sins by coming down from heaven, and taking on human flesh by being born of a woman, so that he could die in our place for our sins. It was all carefully planned, prophesied and set into motion beforehand. No one controlled the situation, for it was all in the hand of God. Does this take anything away from His suffering? No, it only adds to it to know it was totally voluntary on His part, and that He stuck with it until the very end, and drank the bitter cup of God's wrath to the very dregs, satisfying all the righteous and just requirements of the Law that was against us.

14. If you are a Christian, you believe that Jesus was more than a carpenter with a hankering for stirring up trouble. Jesus was and is and evermore shall be...God. As a part of the Godhead, he is Elohim, God the Creator. He is the Creator of all life and the ruler of both life and death.⁴
15. Lets face it, how can you kill someone whose whole purpose in being born was to die as a redeeming Sacrifice?
16. Can anyone really murder the Son of God? Can you destroy Him who is, by His very nature, Creator, the One whose command the angels seek to answer? I don't think so, Tim.
17. I believe that Jesus is the Christ...the Messiah. As the Son of God, I do not believe that He could have been killed by any single man, but that He willingly laid down His life because of man's sin, including my sin and your sin.
18. Without His substitutionary, sacrificial death on the cross, becoming a cursed thing in the eyes of God and man, and the very personification of sin and condemnation as a payment for the sins of the whole world, there could have been no redemption...no salvation...and no hope for mankind to be reconciled back to God.⁵
19. There were no pawns but there were players, foreseen and foretold beforehand by a God who sees the end from the beginning, without manipulation or interference.

III. CONCLUSION/APPLICATION

- A. If you consider yourself a Christian this morning, this would be a good place to make some personal application: take a minute and ask yourself if you, like Caiaphas, the

⁴ **Who Really Killed Jesus?** An article by Eva Marie Everson

⁵ Ibid

Sanhedrin and the Crowd, resent Jesus' infernal intrusions into your private, personal, prearranged schedules and agendas?

Our reactions to Jesus often times almost begs the question - *"Who does He think He is - God!?"* Yes! He is God the Son, second person of the blessed Trinity, whose hands created us for God's good pleasure and purpose. C.S. Lewis called Jesus, a **"*transcendent interferer.*"** We must not envy him, nor resent him for not living up to our personal agendas, or we conspire to crucify him again in our hearts. We must obey the admonition of scripture to humble ourselves under God's mighty hand, trusting that He will exalt us in due season.

- B. For those of you who, as yet, do not consider yourselves Christians, consider: like Pilate, many seek to absolve themselves from having to pass judgment on the person and work of Jesus Christ; many are constantly attempting to wash their hands of making a personal verdict as to whether He is the Son of God and Lord of all, or to have Him removed from your presence so that you don't have to deal with him yourself. Let others beat Him, scourge Him, mock Him and spit upon Him. At least they are committed in what they believe about Jesus and how they feel about Jesus. But you, like Pilate, cannot avoid the moment of decision. To not decide is to be numbered with the spitters and mockers, and lictors just the same. And the consequences of your silent decision will determine your eternal destiny on that day when the books are opened and God calls you to account for what you have done. On that day the only one who will be doing the talking is the one you refused to deal with your whole life, and He will not be washing His hands of the matter!
- C. For Christians: Have you ever heard of the "Judas Price"? Judas attempted to faithfully follow Jesus without ever repenting, confessing and declaring war on his secret sin of greed and bitterness. As a result, there remained a price tag to his faith just waiting for someone to meet it. If you were to ever be tempted to forsake Christ, for what would

you abandon your faith? Sex? Money? Power? Relationship? Job? Ability? When you come up with the answer, you have located your own personal bag of silver – 30 pieces – the Judas price. Behold the ghost of Judas Iscariot is most assuredly on that thing living in the imaginations of your heart. You must flee to Jesus and seek His help in renouncing the damnable thing, hating it with a perfect hatred, and loving Him even unto death.

- D. For non-Christians: The Bible tells us that “Judas went to his own place” (Acts 1:25). That is, a place he had a hand in preparing. In what ways are you preparing to go to your own place, at the end of your life? If it is heaven, how can you know you are going there for sure? Have you collaborated with Christ in the building of it, by being faithful to Him? Have you done all you know to do to make absolutely sure you are not going to the place Judas went to? How about your children?
- E. For Non-Christians: take heed that a lifestyle of skepticism and bitterness does not reduce you (like the Roman soldiers) to the earning and spending of wages, so focused on the mundane things of life that your heart becomes hardened through the deceitfulness of sin, to the point where you do not even notice whose clothes it is your throwing the dice for, or the hammer and nails you are holding in your hands; as if Jesus is just another imposter in your long and sordid life of distrust and betrayal. Open your eyes, and take time to consider Jesus, the author and finisher of faith.
- F. For Christians: Take heed to yourselves: Judas wasn't born a traitor, he was called by Christ Himself to be His disciple, to have a share in Christ's ministry amongst the 12 apostles, but instead, he put his soul out of reach, and - “...became a traitor.” (Luke 6:16). What are you becoming? I think it is fair to remind you today that the direction in which you are traveling is the most singular important thing about you? Who you are is important, but what you are becoming by the grace of God is of far

greater importance. If we are facing in the right direction, we will only become more and more like Jesus as we walk. But if we are facing in the wrong direction, or merely diverting from the right one by fractions of degrees, and ever so slightly off track, there is no telling to what depths we may descend by the time or soul is required of us. Alas, for poor Judas. In the end, he became defined by his actions. He became a traitor, the betrayer of our Lord.

William Sangster told the story of a friend of his who climbed a Mt. near Abner Falls in N. Wales. He wrote,

I never go to Abner Falls in North Wales without feeling *The pathos of something that occurred there years ago. A brilliant young lawyer, whom I knew, was climbing the Mt. near Abner Falls with a friend. His friend noticed the green slime on the rocks as they climbed and called out: 'Do be careful,' to which the young Mr. Payne replied: 'Oh, it's as safe as anything. I couldn't fall here.' They were the last words he uttered. I know the spot at the bottom of the Falls where his mangled body was picked up.*"⁶

The fact is, the potential **for self deceit** is a universal propensity of all human beings. How easily we, with a wave of the hand, ignore the warnings of wisdom, deceived into thinking that for just a space of a few heartbeats, we are invincible, immortal, in no real, present danger. Paul admonishes every believer who arrogantly and non-chalantly thinks they cannot slip, **"to take heed lest they fall."** Judas "lives on the stage of Scripture as an awful warning to the uncommitted follower of Jesus who is in his company but does not share his spirit," writes R. P. Martin.

May the circumstances and people involved in this 2000 year old "Cold Case" serve to open your eyes to the potential for repeat performances in you and yours. Today, if you hear His voice, harden not your heart as so many others had done in that day of visitation. Soften your heart to Jesus Christ. Answer the summons of the Gospel to repent and believe the good news of Who Jesus was, and what Jesus did. For He did it for you. There were many in that hostile crowd that day who believed in Jesus. Many more followed. Before the sun goes down on this Palm Sunday, may you be counted amongst the number who claim Christ as Lord and Savior. Amen.

⁶ From a sermon by William E. Sangster (1900-1960) entitled – THE TRAITOR WHO SOLD HIM.