

Would anyone disagree with me – when I say that we are living in controversial times...? ... (Personally) I do not remember ever seeing our nation so polarized... with people of different views being so angry with each other. I think that these **are** controversial times... and I would (even) go so far... as to say... it appears that our current culture happens to like contentious and stormy issues into which we can invest our strong emotions.

So... in keeping with this popular trend... I will begin today with an illustration about a recent controversy... ... **[P A U S E]** ... (This is what I tell my college public speaking students is called an “attention getting strategy.” Because who doesn’t like to stop dead in their tracks... even if they are involved with an important task... and listen to a dramatic controversy? Many of us are drawn to them – like a moth to a flame... They are like juicy/tasty morsels in the mouth.) ... But please know that I intend to use it to lead us into our passage (today) which is about one of the **most** controversial events that the world has ever known.

... **[P A U S E]** ...

After a two-week battle with a sudden fast-spreading infection... Joshua Dean (a former quality auditor at Boeing supplier Spirit AeroSystems) passed away. ... Joshua Dean had recently given a deposition... alleging that his firing in 2023... was in retaliation for having disclosed what he called “serious and gross misconduct by senior quality management of the 737 production line.”

The Boeing 737 MAX has a troubled safety record... with high-profile crashes in 2018 and 2019 killing hundreds... and an Alaska Airlines flight in

early 2024 that had to make an emergency landing after an explosive decompression due to an insufficiently secured door plug.

According to *The Seattle Times*... Dean was 45 years old... in relatively good health... and known for a healthy lifestyle. ... It was (just) this past February... when he spoke to NPR about the company's troubling safety practices.

Interestingly... Joshua Dean's death comes two months after another Boeing whistleblower... **John Barnett**... was found dead of a suspected self-inflicted gunshot wound. Barnett was also in the process of testifying against Boeing about potential safety lapses in the manufacturing of the Boeing 787... and claims that he was similarly retaliated against for his whistleblowing. ... Barnett was 63 at the time of his death, and known for a vocal criticism of what he perceived to be Boeing's declining production standards.

Wow! This all seems so horrible... doesn't it...?! ... I certainly do not know if these two deaths are linked... but they are generating a lot of stories in the media. (And) this recent example is simply one of many such frightening reports that are emerging today about powerful people and organizations committing tremendous acts of injustice – and seemingly getting away UNPUNISHED. What happened to law and order...? Every day... it seems like another believable story comes out that screams another blatant unfairness has occurred.... or that the “*deep state*” really does exist. Do things appear to be out of control? Do we now live in a “banana republic”?

Maybe you used to think of someone who believes a “conspiracy theory” as paranoid... mentally ill... crazy... (or at least borderline)... but now **you** (*yourself*) think **some** are probably **true**. ... Or perhaps (and unfortunately)... you have recently been the **victim** of an incredible act of injustice. ... In either case... you may wonder (at times) **where is God?** ... Why is He allowing such hurt and depravity to reign so supreme?

If these are not your thoughts – I can pretty much guarantee there are those around you right now who **are** thinking this way. (And) their tribe is increasing. I have had two students **so far this term** come up to me after class and express this thinking. One student said she **had been** an evangelical Christian but is now deconstructing all of it.

This past Thursday... a young man who just moved here from out of State stayed after class and wanted to discuss this same matter. We had a very frank (and tender) conversation. He told me how his grandparents were missionaries to Papua New Guinea... how his mother and father and sister are all believers... that he attended Christian schools all his life... but he has turned away from it. The reason that he cited was that he just could not see God through all his personal health problems... (and he has many... for a man in his early 20's.)

Where is God in all this? ... This will be our focus today as we study a very familiar passage in Luke’s Gospel. You might not have ever read it before from the perspective that even though I cannot see God at work in my own mess – He is still there and working for my good.

We come today to THE MOST UNJUST trials of history... I said trial(**S**) because it was not just **one** court trial... but three... in immediate

succession. ... First... Jesus is brought before the court of Jewish religious law (the Sanhedrin.) ... Then He is tried according to Jewish secular law... represented by King Herod. ... Finally He comes before Pilate... the judge of Roman law.

The Sanhedrin tried Jesus twice (once at night - which was actually illegal - and again just at daybreak.) The first trial was not with the full Sanhedrin. It was at the home of the former high priest (Annas) – who still called the shots and seemed to have greater authority than the actual high priest (Caiaphas)... before whom Jesus would go next. It was illegal for them to hold Christ without a formal charge... so some of the members had Jesus brought before them so they could formulate one.

Luke offers only a couple of brief comments about the proceedings of the first two trials. For him... the details were not as important as the treatment Jesus received... which established the guilt of the religious leaders and denounced the trials as a sham. ... In truth... the first two trials before Annas and Caiaphas had two objectives. The **first objective** was to craft a credible case against Jesus (a clear violation of Sanhedrin rules.)

Their **second objective** was to intimidate Jesus or otherwise break down His will so that He would voluntarily recant His messianic claims. ... A humiliated Jesus (reading a retraction in the temple) would serve their cause better than a potential martyred hero... who the people would rally around. Their intimidation... mocking... beating... humiliation... taunting... and blasphemy – failed - however. ... Jesus stood firmly on the truth of His identity and continued to endure His long... dark night.

When it became clear that Jesus wouldn't renounce His messianic claims... the temple authorities disbanded for the night. ... As the sun rose the next morning... they would convene (again) with the full Sanhedrin in its official chambers... at the Temple. This time Caiaphas would preside over the court.

With both trials... we should note that the Sanhedrin violated several of their own laws. Sanhedrin members were to serve as a **jury** (listening to accusations and then rendering a decision) – but they were (instead) Jesus' accusers. ... Second – Jesus was not allowed any advocate (or attorney.) Third – the trial took place during a major Jewish Feast (the Feast of Unleavened Bread.) ... Fourth – the trial before Annas happened at night. ... Fifth - they compelled the accused to testify against Himself and used His statements to convict Him without corroborating evidence.

Today's passage begins between the first and second trials of the Sanhedrin – while Jesus was being held by the Temple guards. The religious rulers put Jesus into the hands of soldiers until a charge was made against Him. This leads to our sixth violation. Jesus was brutally treated (and held) without any formal charges.

Luke 22:63-65

Oh(!) how the watching angels must have leaned forward as they watched and tightened their grip on their swords! ... These common men actually struck the Lord of glory... over and over! ... They roughed Him up as a pastime while waiting for the proceedings to begin. ... The other Gospels add that, bare-knuckled, they punched and slapped and slugged Jesus left and right and also spit in his face (Matthew 26:67, 68; Mark 14:65).

Religion is always good for a joke among godless people... and especially against a self-proclaimed prophet. The grim irony was that their abuse fulfilled Jesus' own prophetic words. Please look back with me to a verse we covered when we studied chapter 18...

Luke 18:32 (ESV)

³² For he will be delivered over to the Gentiles and will be mocked and shamefully treated and spit upon.

The irony is Jesus predicted what they're doing. He predicted Peter was going to deny him, down to the cock crow. The mockery over his prophetic powers actually proves his prophetic powers. Not only that, it proves he's the fulfillment of the Prophets, because in Isaiah 50, Isaiah predicted the coming of a suffering Servant to do redemption. In one of the prophecies the suffering Servant says, "I offered my back to those who beat me ... I did not hide my face from mocking and spitting." ... So the mockery ironically establishes the very thing it's trying to subvert.

J. Vernon McGee writes:

The soldiers played games with him. The game they played with the Lord was called "hot hand." Each soldier would double up his fist in front of the blindfolded prisoner and hit him. Only one soldier would not hit him. Then the blindfold was removed and the prisoner was to guess which soldier had not hit him. They played the game again and again until I think they beat the face of Christ to a pulp. I doubt that anyone could have recognized Him. There was no form left to His face.

Isaiah 52:14 (ESV)

¹⁴ As many were astonished at you— his appearance was so marred, beyond human semblance, and his form beyond that of the children of mankind—

The Lord must have been a frightful sight after they got through with Him.

Of course Jesus knew (exactly) who hit Him and who didn't. If any these brutal soldiers were to (later on) become saved... and added to the church... they would find out at the Great White Throne judgment that He knows perfectly well who was striking Him. ... But at the time... Jesus said nothing. ... He had come to save them - not to strike *them*. ... Jesus stood in regal silence -, dripping spittle and blood. ... [P A U S E] ...

Do you see? ... Here's what they're doing. They're saying:

"If you're a prophet, why can I do this to You? Slap! You can't be a prophet. If You were a man of God, God wouldn't let these things happen to you. If you were a man of God, You wouldn't be so weak and vulnerable. God doesn't work through weakness like this. God doesn't work through such vulnerability. If God was with You, if God was working through You, He wouldn't be letting all these awful things happen to You. You can't be a prophet..."

But He was!

In other words... they looked at the apparent senselessness of Jesus' suffering. They looked at His willful meekness. They looked at His willful vulnerability. They looked at everything (seemingly) going wrong... and they mocked all the more. They said, *"God doesn't work like this. You can't be the Savior. You can't be bringing God's salvation."* ... They mocked... and they missed the greatest act of salvation and love and wisdom in the history of the world because - **it didn't fit into their little categories.**

Are you ready to apply this...? ... What do we learn from this? ... We all have a natural... spiritual blindness. ... There is a natural darkness that... when we look out and we see darkness in the world (when we see tragedies and suffering and evil and things like that) we question – which often then leads to a contemptuous mocking. We say: *"There could not*

possibly be a God. God wouldn't allow something like this. If there is a God, He must be a fool... weak... or He must be immorally unconcerned." We mock.

This is what's so ironic. In this case... they're looking right at something and they say: *"It just can't be here. God couldn't work like this. God wouldn't allow this kind of evil and suffering in somebody's life if he were really with them."* ... Yet Jesus was doing exactly what He should be doing.

Stop and think... ... What if Jesus had snapped His fingers... and fire immediately came down... and consumed all those despicable guards? Imagine Jesus mounting a stallion... rallying earthly and heavenly troops... and riding to GLORIOUS victory (right then and there.) The ONLY thing He would have accomplished would have been to save the Jewish people from Rome.

But Jesus wanted to save us (and many down through the centuries since then) from darkness itself... from sin and death itself. (LISTEN!) Jesus was doing exactly what He had to do... and God was doing exactly what God had to do. They couldn't figure it out.

We NEED to apply this. ... How are you doing? ... When you look at the problems in the world... when you look at the problems in your life... do you mock? ... Do you say: *"God couldn't be working through this"* or *"Maybe there isn't a God"* or *"God couldn't possibly bring anything good out of this"*... ? Do you mock? You're only hurting yourself.

The point of this is here's Jesus. Everything is going wrong... and it seems like God couldn't possibly be with a Man like this. God couldn't possibly be working in His life. Yet greatness and glory come out of it. Jesus' life is a

vignette... sort of a mini version of the whole world's history. ... If God can take the senselessness and tragedy of Jesus' life and turn it into something cosmically wonderful... the same thing is going to happen with our current events and with the end of history.

God is saying: "*Just because you don't see Me working... doesn't mean I'm not.*" ... The soldiers rejecting Christ... the mockery... shows one aspect to the spiritual darkness in our hearts that has to change. If we don't change that... we are not going to survive. Mocking.... Spite... disdain... and jeering will harden us... (like it did them.) ... **[P A U S E]** ...

Well... Jesus had been up all night. He had been mocked... bullied... and beaten for hours. Now the horseplay had stopped. The full Sanhedrin had assembled... Now the how-trial could begin... and they came straight to the point.

Caiaphas stood up... put Jesus under oath... and asked Him if He was the Son of God. ... His obvious goal was to get a whole roomful of people to witness the answer. ... He knew that Jesus' response could be construed as blasphemy. ... Jesus broke His silence. ... He affirmed His deity and warned them that one day they would be exposed to His unveiled glory. The high priest rent his clothes and appealed to his fellow conspirators... who agreed that Jesus was a blasphemer and worthy of death.

Luke 22:66-68

The Sanhedrin's opening question cut to the quick: " 'If you are the Christ,' they said, 'tell us' " ... Luke's Gospel leaves us in no doubt that Jesus is the Christ (the Messiah) These words are synonymous... they mean the same thing. Both mean "anointed one." *Messiah* is the Hebrew word... and

Christ the Greek word. ... The noun *Christ* is used as a title some twenty-five times in Luke.

Jesus rarely asserted His messianic title and generally avoided the term “*Messiah*.” This (probably) was because the title was so politicized and completely misunderstood by the masses. In Jesus’ day the title *Messiah* was not generally thought to be a divine title... but that of an anointed agent (descended from David’s royal line) who would cast out the Romans and restore Israel. ... And that is what the people wanted.

(Now)... from the vantage point of the Sanhedrin members... it was **the one title** that could get Jesus *killed* by the Romans... because it smacked of rebellion. ... Rome could not care less if Jesus claimed to be God. But Messiah? Watch out! ... (They constantly feared an uprising. It threatened their power.) So if the Sanhedrin could get Jesus to say He was Christ – or Messiah - Jesus was a dead man!

But Jesus saw that it was useless to answer them. Jesus knew the hearts of His accusers. He knew quite well about their unbelief and intellectual dishonesty. It would be futile to enter into a debate with them right now. He had already proven Himself – but they had rejected all of the very clear evidence. They were not truly interested in considering the matter.

Luke 22:69

The council gets more than it bargained for in the key part of Jesus’ reply. In fact... His reply ends up being the cause of His own conviction.... By appearances... Jesus is subject to the judgment of the leadership... but (ironically) He says that (in reality) **they are judged by Him!** ... Jesus replies in terms of Ps. 110:1 (an established Messianic verse.)

Psalm 110:1 (ESV)

¹ *The LORD says to my Lord: "Sit at my right hand, until I make your enemies your footstool."*

From now on... Jesus is the Son of Man (Lord) who will be seated at the Father's side.

Jesus was and is Messiah/Christ... but He was a far greater Messiah than they ever dreamed - He is also *the Son of Man!* ... And He let the Sanhedrin know it in no uncertain terms!

Son of Man was Jesus' title of choice. ... Throughout the Gospels... (whenever Jesus would refer to Himself)...Jesus would RARELY use the personal pronoun "I." ... Instead He would use the title "*The Son of Man.*" This was a clear claim that He was making that He was the Messiah.

Daniel 7:13-14 (ESV)

¹³ *"I saw in the night visions, and behold, with the clouds of heaven there came one like a son of man, and he came to the Ancient of Days and was presented before him. ¹⁴ And to him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him; his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom one that shall not be destroyed.*

"*This is Me!*" Jesus would declare every time He used this title for Himself. The Gospels have **eighty-two** recorded instances of Jesus using it to refer to Himself. *Son of man* encapsulated how Jesus saw Himself!

Luke 22:70

The members of the Sanhedrin were Biblically literate. They caught the drift of Jesus' bold declaration... and their beards bristled... and their eyes fired. The "son of man"! You heard Him!!! So now the whole assembly

chorused, “*Are you then the Son of God?*” - hoping to catch Him in blasphemy.

And He said to them, “You say that I am.” ... What we have here is a Hebraism (a Hebrew expression) meaning strong and positive affirmation. The Lord used a form of reply familiar to the rabbinical mind by which He accepted the question put to Him as His own affirmation: “*It is as you say,*” or “*what you say is so. That is what I am.*” ... (In truth) He was the Son of God... entitled to sit upon God’s throne... where indeed He would sit one day... and judge THEM!

That settled it! ...

Luke 22:71

The trial was over. From Dan to Beersheba... from the sea to beyond the Jordan... for three and a half years... Jesus had set before one and all countless demonstrations of His deity. They had ignored them all. The Hebrew trial was over. Caiaphas and his crowd (almost to a man) pronounced Him guilty of death. ... Caiaphas stood among his cronies receiving their congratulations for his “*masterly handling*” of a difficult and potentially highly explosive case.

But an even harder case was ahead. They would have to handle Pilate with kid gloves. They were not allowed to pronounce a death sentence. Only a Roman court could do that. The “religious trial” was now over. They can pacify the Jewish crowds that they acted right. The next step was to put Jesus through a civil trial and convince the Roman governor that Jesus of Nazareth was a criminal worthy of death. ... **[P A U S E]** ...

Jesus demonstrated incredible mastery at His “religious” trial before the Sanhedrin. He said in effect: “If you’re going to kill Me... you’re going to have to kill Me for who I am — the Messiah... the Son of Man... the Son of God... Who will judge YOU.” ... The religious leaders thought they had what they wanted... but far more than that... Jesus had what *he* wanted!

... ..

Today we see how evil (all around us) seems to be gloating! It is getting what it wants. It is winning... and good is losing.

Oh! But it’s not!

Even in the mess that you are facing. Even in the incredible injustice that you see. It might look like complete chaos right now... and there might not be the evidence that you would like to see of God at work. But let me assure you that He is! Just as His plan was much BIGGER than Jesus merely calling down fire... destroying the guards who mocked and beat Him... then riding on to defeat Rome... God’s plan is much bigger than what we are able to see right now.

Let Him have your trust.

In the March 2013 issue of CT magazine contributing editor Susan Wunderink writes:

When I was a swimming instructor, I spent a lot of time trying to get little kids to float. I would tell them to put their ears in the water and their belly buttons out of it, and I’d say, “When I count to two, you won’t feel my hands underneath you, but they’re there.” As soon as I’d say “two,” most of the children would frantically jerk their knees towards their chins and flail their arms, dropping their full weight into my hands. Almost all people float when they assume a posture of rest, but people who think they’ll sink don’t keep that posture for long.

Faith is about a posture of rest, too. Many of us are terrified by the life of faith, needing always to feel the support of steady jobs, steady relationships, and back-up plans. God, knowing that, signed us up for swim lessons. ... God intends to make a swimmer of (us), and he was teaching (us) to rely on him through what seems like a disaster.