

The Morning Trial

Caiphas, Annas, the ancients, and the scribes assembled in the morning in the great hall of the tribunal, to have a legal trial, as meetings at night were not lawful, and could only be looked upon in the light of preparatory audiences. The majority of the members had slept in the house of Caiphas, where beds had been prepared for them, but some, and among them Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea, had gone home, and returned at the dawn of day.



The meeting was crowded, and the members commenced their operations in the most hurried manner possible. They wished to condemn Jesus to death at once, but Nicodemus, Joseph, and some others opposed their wishes and demanded that the decision should be deferred until after the festival, for fear of causing an insurrection among the people, maintaining likewise that no criminal could be justly condemned upon charges which were not proved, and that in the case now before them all the witnesses contradicted one another.

The High Priests and their adherents became very angry, and told Joseph and Nicodemus, in plain terms, that they were not surprised at their expressing displeasure at what had been done, because they were themselves partisans of the Galilean and his doctrines, and were fearful of being convicted. The High Priest even went so far as to endeavour to exclude from the Council all those members who were in the lightest degree favourable to Jesus. These members protested that they washed their hands of all the future proceedings of the Council, and leaving the room went to the Temple, and from this day never again took their seats in the Council. Caiphas then ordered the guards to bring Jesus once more into his presence, and to prepare everything for taking him to Pilate's court directly he should have pronounced sentence. The emissaries of the Council hurried off to the prison, and with their usual brutality untied the hands of Jesus, dragged off the old mantle which they had thrown over his shoulders, made him put on his own soiled garment, and having fastened ropes round his waist, dragged him out of the prison.

The appearance of Jesus, when he passed through the midst of the crowd who were already assembled in the front of the house, was that of a victim led to be sacrificed; his countenance was totally changed and disfigured from ill-usage, and his garments stained and torn; but the sight of his sufferings, far from exciting a feeling of compassion in the hard hearted Jews, simply filled them with disgust, and increased their rage. Pity was, indeed, a feeling unknown in their cruel breasts.

Caiphas, who did not make the slightest effort to conceal his hatred, addressed our Lord haughtily in these words: 'If thou be Christ, tell us plainly.' Then Jesus raised his head, and answered with great dignity and calmness, 'If I shall tell you, you will not believe me; and if I shall also ask you, you will not answer me, or let me go. But hereafter the Son of Man shall be sitting on the right hand of the power of God.' The High Priests looked at one another, and said to Jesus, with a disdainful laugh, 'Art thou, then, the Son of God?' And Jesus answered, with the voice of eternal truth, 'You say that I am.' At these words they all exclaimed, 'What need we any further testimony? For we ourselves have heard it from his own mouth.' They all arose instantly and vied with each other as to who should heap the most abusive epithets upon Jesus, whom they termed a low-born miscreant, who aspired to being their Messiah, and pretended to be entitled to sit at the right hand of God. They ordered the archers to tie his hands again, and to fasten a chain round his neck (this was usually done to criminals condemned to death), and they then prepared to conduct him to Pilate's hall, where a messenger had already been dispatched to beg him to have all in readiness for trying a criminal, as it was necessary to make no delay on account of the festival day.

The Jewish Priests murmured among themselves at being obliged to apply to the Roman governor for the confirmation of their sentence, but it was necessary, as they had not the right of condemning criminals excepting for things which concerned religion and the Temple alone, and they could not pass a sentence of death. They wished to prove that Jesus was an enemy to the emperor, and this accusation concerned those departments which were under Pilate's jurisdiction. The soldiers were all standing in front of the house, surrounded by a large body of the enemies of Jesus, and of common persons attracted by curiosity. The High Priests and a part of the Council walked at the head of the procession, and Jesus, led by archers, and guarded by soldiers, followed, while the mob brought up the rear. They

were obliged to descend Mount Sion, and cross a part of the lower town to reach Pilate's palace, and many priests who had attended the Council went to the Temple directly afterwards, as it was necessary to prepare for the festival.