

The Gospel of John

Jesus Before the Priests

John 18:12-14, 19-24

INTRODUCTION:

It's Fridaaaay (pause for response) but Sunday is coming!

We are continuing in the Gospel of John. John 18:12-19:15 is going to cover the mock trial of Jesus and the denial of Peter.

There were six parts to Jesus' trial: three stages in a religious court and three stages before a Roman court. Jesus was tried before Annas, the former high priest; Caiaphas, the current high priest; and the Sanhedrin. He was charged in these trials with blasphemy, claiming to be the Messiah, the Son of God.

The trials before Jewish authorities, referred to as the religious trials, showed the degree to which the Jewish leaders hated Him because they carelessly disregarded many of their own laws. There were several illegalities involved in these trials from the perspective of Jewish law:

- (1) No trial was to be held during feast time.
- (2) Each member of the court was to vote individually to convict or acquit, but Jesus was convicted by acclamation.
- (3) If the death penalty was given, a night must pass before the sentence was carried out; however, only a few hours passed before Jesus was placed on the Cross.
- (4) The Jews had no authority to execute anyone.
- (5) No trial was to be held at night, but this trial was held before dawn.
- (6) The accused was to be given counsel or representation, but Jesus had none.
- (7) The accused was not to be asked self-incriminating questions, but Jesus was asked if He was the Christ.

The trials before the Roman authorities started with Pilate after Jesus was beaten. The charges brought against Him were very different from the charges in His religious trials. He was charged with:

- (1) Inciting people to riot.
- (2) Forbidding the people to pay their taxes.

(3) Claiming to be King.

Pilate found no reason to kill Jesus so he sent Him to Herod. Herod had Jesus ridiculed but, wanting to avoid the political liability, sent Jesus back to Pilate. This was the last trial as Pilate tried to appease the animosity of the Jews by having Jesus scourged. The Roman scourge was a terrible whipping designed to remove the flesh from the back of the one being punished. In a final effort to have Jesus released, Pilate offered the prisoner Barabbas to be crucified and Jesus released, but it was all to no avail. The crowds called for Barabbas to be released and Jesus to be crucified. Pilate granted their demand and surrendered Jesus to their will.

The trials of Jesus represent the ultimate mockery of justice. Jesus, the most innocent man in the history of the world, was found guilty of crimes and sentenced to death by crucifixion.

In our passage this morning we find the religious trial intertwined with Peter's denial of Jesus. We are going to look at the trial this week and, Lord willing, cover Peter's denial next week.

So let's look at Scene One: Jesus' trial before the priests.

Stand and Read Scripture

John 18:12-14, 19-24 (NASB)

¹² So the *Roman* cohort, the commander, and the officers of the Jews arrested Jesus and bound Him, ¹³ and brought Him to Annas first; for he was the father-in-law of Caiaphas, who was high priest that year. ¹⁴ Now Caiaphas was the one who had advised the Jews that it was in their best interest for one man to die in behalf of the people.

...¹⁹ The high priest then questioned Jesus about His disciples, and about His teaching. ²⁰ Jesus answered him, "I have spoken openly to the world; I always taught in synagogues and in the temple *area*, where all the Jews congregate; and I said nothing in secret. ²¹ Why are you asking Me? Ask those who have heard what I spoke to them. Look: these people know what I said." ²² But when He said this, one of the officers, who was standing nearby, struck Jesus, saying, "Is that the way You answer the high priest?" ²³ Jesus answered him, "If I have spoken wrongly, testify of the wrong; but if rightly, why do you strike Me?" ²⁴ So Annas sent Him bound to Caiaphas the high priest.

Prayer

BODY:

I. THE ARREST OF JESUS.

John 18:12 (NASB)

¹² So the *Roman* cohort, the commander, and the officers of the Jews arrested Jesus and bound Him,

This is a very amazing hardness of heart. They had just fallen before Him and experienced first hand the miraculous power of Jesus.

This is a mixed group of people who came to arrest Jesus. There are Gentiles there, the Romans; and there are Jews. There are soldiers there; there are slaves there; there are priests; there are Pharisees. The heathen are there; the religious are there. It is this

mixed multitude. But in one respect, they are all absolutely alike. They are all utterly blind to the glory of Christ. They have experienced firsthand, and certainly by testimony, a three-year reign of miraculous power in the land. No one ever denied the miracles of Jesus; no one ever tried. They were undeniable.

They have not only known of and seen His miracles, but they have heard His words. They have been hearing Him all week, words like no one ever spoke. He said, **"If you cannot believe me then believe Me for my works."** But, still, even after that and knowing of the resurrection of Lazarus and seeing the creation of an ear, a relative of the man who was given the ear is even there among them. They are unmoved and are resolved to carry out their mission to kill Him.

They are glad that it is night. They are out of the city. They are on the Mount of Olives in an obscure, isolated garden. They were wanting to arrest Jesus a lot earlier, but they were afraid of the riot that it might start. When Jesus arrived into the city, the whole place exploded and erupted in hailing Him as Messiah. So here they are in spite of all that. They are blinded by Satan to the glory of God shining in the face of Jesus Christ. Their unbelief and hardness of heart causes them to pursue Him like a hunted animal as if He is some kind of criminal and not the Son of God as He has demonstrated Himself to be. So the commander and those who are with him, arrest Jesus. And at this point, Matthew tells us the disciples flee. They disappear, fulfilling the prophecy of the Old Testament, that when the Shepherd is smitten, the sheep will scatter.

Then it says they tie Him up. They commonly did that, as people still do today, to ensure that once they capture somebody he does not get away. I think they bound Him from their perspective because they wanted to put Him in a position where He was shamed like a criminal, because they were tired of the way He had discredited them, particularly the Jewish leaders.

So they led Him to Annas first.

John 18:13 (NASB)

¹³ and brought Him to Annas first; for he was the father-in-law of Caiaphas, who was high priest that year.

Who is Annas? In verse 19 he is named the high priest. But in verse 13, it says Caiaphas was high priest that year.

Is this a problem? No.

It is like a past President of the United States. You still refer to him as President even though he is not the current President. This would be particularly true in the Jewish world, because according to **Numbers 35**, a high priest was a high priest for life. So they would always think of Annas as the high priest. However, the Romans did not like that idea, because that gave a man way too much power. And so they were always wanting to remove the high priest and replace him so that he could not accumulate massive power.

They did not get too far, however, from the family of Annas, because the subsequent high priests to Annas were five of his sons and one of his grandsons, which meant that he, as the father and grandfather, was always the patriarchal high priest behind the scenes, and from the vantage point of the Jews, should have been the legitimate high priest. The Romans have run out of sons and grandsons, and so now the Romans have appointed a man named Caiaphas who is Annas' son-in-law.

John 18:14 (NASB)

¹⁴ Now Caiaphas was the one who had advised the Jews that it was in their best interest for one man to die in behalf of the people.

The one thing that the high priests feared was that the Romans would become their enemies. So in order to appease the Romans, the priestly family allowed for the establishment of a Roman taxation system. They corrupted the worship in the temple to such a degree that our Lord, at the beginning and the end of His ministry, went in and wiped it out and called it a den of thieves. The people deeply resented the high priests, although they had respect for the office.

If you were to go to the temple on any occasion to offer a sacrifice, the sacrifice would have to be inspected by some of the priestly appointed inspectors, and it would be very likely that your animal would not pass inspection and you would then have to buy an animal from the operation of the temple at an exorbitant price. All of the profit would go to Annas and the priestly family.

When you came to Jerusalem, you had to pay your temple tax in Jewish money. The pilgrims came for Passover throughout the Mediterranean region with different kinds of coinage. They had to do exchanges. The moneychangers were there, and they also charged exorbitant rates. That was also skimmed off for Annas and the priestly family. So their fear was that if people started following after this Jesus there would be a revolt and the Romans would come in and suppress the Revolution and remove them all from power.

We see that fear addressed by Caiaphas back in John 11.

John 11:47-48 (NASB)

⁴⁷ Therefore the chief priests and the Pharisees convened a council meeting, and they were saying, "What are we doing in regard to the fact that this man is performing many signs?"

⁴⁸ If we let Him *go on* like this, all *the people* will believe in Him, and the Romans will come and take over both our place and our nation."

This is their great fear – they are going to lose their power and their money.

John 11:49-53 (NASB)

⁴⁹ But one of them, Caiaphas, who was high priest that year, said to them, "You know nothing at all, ⁵⁰ nor are you taking into account that it is in your best interest that one man die for the people, and that the whole nation not perish *instead.*" ⁵¹ **Now he did not say this on his own, but as he was high priest that year, he prophesied that Jesus was going to die for the nation;** ⁵² and not for the nation only, but in order that He might also gather together into one the children of God who are scattered abroad. ⁵³ So from that day on they planned together to kill Him.

He had no idea what he was saying. He had no clue that Jesus was going to die in order to provide atonement for our sins. From his perspective, all it meant was that from that day forward they planned to kill Him. It was either Him or all of us. They were immensely rich – ruthless, ambitious, and greedy – and they were frightened to lose their power.

Annas and Caiaphas were both furious with Jesus. So that is Scene One. They arrest Him with the intention of fulfilling the words of Caiaphas: "It's going to be Him who dies and not all of us."

II. THE TRIAL BEFORE THE HIGH PRIESTS.

Then we shift to the trial before the high priests.

John 18:19 (NASB)

¹⁹ The high priest then questioned Jesus about His disciples, and about His teaching.

Meanwhile back at the trial, the high priest then questioned Jesus about His disciples and about His teaching. Now, this is a complete mockery of justice. Nothing legal happens here. This is to be a legal arraignment. Nothing is legal about any of it. They had already decided they wanted him dead. They were thirsting for His blood. This was not a trial, this was a murder plot.

But just to give you the specifics of that, it was an essential regulation of Jewish law that a prisoner must be asked no question that by answering would be an admission of guilt. We have translated that into what we call the Fifth Amendment, that a criminal cannot be made to incriminate himself. If you are going to find someone to be guilty, there has to be evidence beyond a self-confession. You cannot force someone to confess.

So, first of all, the high priest, who is the judge, says to Jesus, "Tell me about Your disciples and Your teaching." He has no right to do that. He has no right to ask Him any question at all. He is presumed innocent until He is proven guilty, and He cannot be the proof. This is illegal.

So he asked Jesus, "How many disciples do you have? Where are Your disciples? Are there pockets of them here or there? He is trying to put together just how widespread this insurrection may be. "And what about Your teaching? What are you saying? What are your heresies?"

John 18:20 (NASB)

²⁰ Jesus answered him, "I have spoken openly to the world; I always taught in synagogues and in the temple *area*, where all the Jews congregate; and I said nothing in secret.

Why do you question Me? Question those who have heard what I spoke to them; they know what I said. Bring the witnesses. Do this legally.

It is all illegal. It is even illegal according to Roman law. This, of course, was Jewish court. They are the ones who are guilty. They are the ones who need to be indicted. They are the ones perverting justice. Jesus says he did not do anything in secret. You have been listening to My teaching every day, in the temple in public. Find somebody to comment on My teaching. You know the story of what I have done. Find some of My disciples and ask them.

Jesus is not being uncooperative, He is simply asking for a legal trial – not that He will get it – but to expose the illegality of this event. He knew exactly that this would happen.

John 15:25 (NASB)

²⁵ But *this has happened* so that the word that is written in their Law will be fulfilled: 'They hated Me for no reason.'

So Jesus calmly says,

John 18:21-22 (NASB)

²¹ Why are you asking Me? Ask those who have heard what I spoke to them. Look: these people know what I said.” ²² But when He said this, one of the officers, who was standing nearby, struck Jesus, saying, “Is that the way You answer the high priest?”

This is the first blow inflicted against His body. It was received from the hand of sinners. It came from a Jew. These temple police carried clubs. What it means is he smashed Him in the face with a club. And that is a fulfillment of Micah 5:1.

Micah 5:1b (NASB)

...With a rod they will strike the judge of Israel on the cheek.

Here He is in a court and there is a judge, but Jesus is the true judge of Israel who is hit in the face with a rod. The officer is unknowingly fulfilling prophecy.

Annas hates Jesus, the people around him hate Jesus, and thus the reaction. Calmly Jesus responds.

John 18:23 (NASB)

²³ Jesus answered him, “If I have spoken wrongly, testify of the wrong; but if rightly, why do you strike Me?”

There is no hot response. There is no spirit of resentment. Jesus remains perfectly calm perfectly accomplishing the will of His Father. He handles His attackers by laying bear the ugly reality that **this** is no trial at all. This is a vigilante operation. **This is a murder!** And justice, at this point, has to release Him, because there are no witnesses, there is no crime, there is no indictment, there is no arraignment. But instead look at verse 24.

John 18:24 (NASB)

²⁴ So Annas sent Him bound to Caiaphas the high priest.

They cannot release Him, they want Him dead. They send Him bound to Caiaphas.

Now, the Sanhedrin is assembled with Caiaphas in their chamber in the dead of night. This is absolutely illegal. They pull together some false witnesses in the trial before Caiaphas and finally accuse Him of blasphemy. They also come up with the idea that He is trying to overthrow Caesar because He claimed to be a king. They dream up any accusation that they can.

CONCLUSION:

The hour has come! He must voluntarily, in an act of supreme obedience, give Himself up in our place. “The cup which the Father has given Me, am I not to drink it?”

He is Lord!