

The Illegal, Unjust Trials of Jesus, Part 2

Scripture: Matthew 26:62–68

Code: 2390

INTRODUCTION

A. The Relevance of the Hour

1. For Satan

Jesus told those who came to arrest Him, "This is your hour, and the power of darkness" (Luke 22:53). It was hell's moment to do its deed. When Judas left the upper room before Jesus instituted the Lord's table, "Satan entered into him" (John 13:27). Satan energized Judas to do his evil deed. No doubt Satan and his demons also energized the high priest, the Sanhedrin, and all those involved in the execution of Jesus Christ.

a) His initial plan Satan was now trying a new approach. Previously he had tried to prevent Christ from going to the cross. Certainly that was his plan in his first temptation of Christ (Matt. 4; Luke 4). Immediately after Jesus was baptized, Satan tried to divert Him from the cross. That may have been his plan in the garden, as our Lord sweat great drops of blood and agonized in the midst of that temptation. Satan was still trying to do whatever he could to divert Christ from the cross. He knew the cross would provide the salvation for the redeemed of all ages. b) His secondary plan Apparently Satan now was resigned to the fact that Jesus was going to the cross--that it was inevitable in the plan of God. So he turned his efforts toward making Christ's death on the cross so final that He could not rise again. That demonstrates both the impotence and inconsistency of Satan-- he can't do what he wants to, and he changes his plans frequently. Evil is ultimately inconsistent. That's why it's difficult for us to understand why Satan does what he does. But it appears he had energized the betrayal of Christ, and now the death of Christ. Even after Christ did rise, breaking through Satan's bonds of death, Satan spread lies that He had not risen in an effort to stop the message of the resurrection. Satan was behind the scenes of Christ's betrayal, arrest, trials, and crucifixion. Jesus said this to the leaders who wanted Him dead: "Ye are of your father the devil He was a murderer from the beginning he is a liar, and the father of it" (John 8:44).

2. For God

The arrest and trials of Christ also represent a holy hour--God also is at work. God intends the anger, hatred, and evil of Satan to fit within His own redemptive purpose. Christ could say with Joseph, "Ye thought evil against me, but God meant it unto good" (Gen. 50:20). Whatever latitude Satan has is always within the confines of God's will. So while we know it is the moment of Satan, we also remember that Christ "was delivered by the determinant counsel and foreknowledge of God" (Acts 2:23). It is a plan that was carried out by hell but had its origin in heaven.

3. For evil men

A third party was involved in the arrest and execution of Christ: evil men. The evil rulers conspired long before to eliminate Jesus Christ. A short time after Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead and a few weeks before Christ's arrest, they met together and said, "This man doeth many miracles" (John 11:47). They knew He did miracles--they were of such significance and frequency that no one could deny them. But this is the conclusion they came to "If we let him thus alone, all men will believe on him; and the Romans shall come and take away both our place [Temple] and nation" (v. 48). They believed all the people would begin to follow Jesus. As the Romans saw the populace moving toward

Jesus, they would be worried about a revolution. Then they would react to that by taking away the Jewish leaders' positions, destroying their Temple, and wiping out their nation.

The crowd that had cried, "Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord!" (Matt. 21:9) when He rode into the city on Monday posed a great threat to their security. That's what prompted Caiaphas to say, "Ye know nothing at all, nor consider that it is expedient for us that one man should die for the people, and that the whole nation perish not" (John 11:49-50). John 11:51 says, "This spoke he not of himself; but, being high priest that year, he prophesied that Jesus should die for that nation." Out of a mouth filled with hatred came a prophecy of the substitutionary death of Jesus Christ for the redemption of His people.

In the arrest and trials of Christ, we are seeing the blending of the plot of hell, the plan of God, and the hatred of evil Christ-rejecting people. But understand this: although it is the plan of God, it in no way lessens the evil of hell's conspiracy and the men who carried it out. Their guilt is not mitigated. It was the plan of God, but they willed to do it. They chose to be the compatriots of hell by their own volition.

B. The Relentlessness of the Mob

We pick up the scene in the garden of Gethsemane where the mob took Jesus captive. It is tragic in that there is a certain relentlessness about their approach. They came to take Jesus Christ, the King of glory and Son of God with a relentlessness that's actually staggering. Let me show you what I mean.

1. The potent miracles

a) A miracle of power and judgment When Jesus went to meet the mob in the garden, the entire crowd of nearly one thousand fell down on the ground at the moment He identified Himself (John 18:6). The very power of His person knocked them to the ground as if they'd been hit by a celestial hammer. They had just been exposed to the power and judgment of the Son of the living God. Now you would think that any thoughtful person would say to himself, "This is not just another man." They all should have understood that miracle of power and judgment as a message to examine who He was. But it found absolutely no response in their hard hearts. The terrifying power that knocked them to the ground brought about no thought of the deity or lordship of Jesus Christ. As clear as it was, they bypassed that warning sign. b) A miracle of kindness and mercy A little later, Peter sliced off the ear of Malchus, the servant of the high priest (John 18:10). Jesus responded to Peter's attack by calling a stop to it, and then instantaneously creating a new ear for Malchus (Luke 22:51). That was a miracle not of power and judgment, but of kindness and mercy. If you were a part of that mob and had just seen a miracle like that, you would most likely say to yourself, "Certainly one with such incredible creative power is someone to reckon with. We better stop and examine who this is." But again, they bypassed another signpost.

2. The possible conclusions

There are only two possible conclusions: one, they felt sure He wasn't the Messiah. But if they thought He wasn't the Messiah, they would have tried to prove He wasn't. The other conclusion is they were afraid He was the Messiah--they didn't want to go through an examination because they were afraid of what they would discover. They simply wanted Him out of the way. They didn't want to know if He was their Messiah or not. Why? Because they were locked into their own false religion, with the accompanying self-righteous life-style, power, and prestige. Jesus' true holiness, purity, and power threatened them and they were afraid to find out the truth. If they found Him to be the Messiah, His words had already damned them. So rather than find out the truth, they wanted to eliminate Him. If at any moment they thought He might not be the Messiah, I think they would have conducted a more thorough investigation.

The relentlessness of the religious leaders to kill Christ went beyond reality and His miracles. After the resurrection of Lazarus they said, "This man doeth many miracles" (John 11:47). They couldn't deny that; they just didn't want to face what it meant, which was their own judgment.

Mark 14:51-52 tells us a young man who had been observing the arrest was grabbed by some men in the crowd. They ripped his outer garment off and he ran away wearing only his undergarment. The narrative of that event is one way Scripture shows us the violence of the scene. This was an agitated mob. Here they grabbed someone they weren't interested in arresting, and they ripped his clothes off in their effort to seize him. This frenzied mob took Jesus captive and led Him away "as a lamb to the slaughter" (Isa. 53:7).

REVIEW

Before the rulers had Jesus executed, they had a trial--although an unjust and illegal one. Such a trial was unusual for a people so committed to its great system of justice. Their supreme court was the Sanhedrin (see pp. xx-xx). It was built on the premise that every defendant in a trial was entitled to three things: a public trial, an opportunity to present a defense, and a conviction confirmed by at least two or three witnesses.

The Sanhedrin also followed some important laws. Any false witness would pay the same penalty as the one he witnessed against. They could not prosecute the accused; they could only try him. No court could convene at night or in any other place except the Judgment Hall. No hearing could convene in the late afternoon, lest justice be hurried to a hasty and wrongful conclusion. No convicted criminal could be executed the same day he was tried. A one-day interval was required. No execution could be held on a feast day, or the day before. All the votes were carefully counted. And no one could incriminate himself by giving testimony against himself.

The Jewish leaders violated every single one of those safeguards. They never gave Jesus a public trial; they held it privately. They didn't allow Him to make a defense--no witnesses spoke on His behalf. They couldn't find two or more witnesses to convict Him of anything. They actually bribed some false witnesses, which was contrary to their efforts of discouraging false witnesses through severe punishment. They were not allowed to prosecute an individual, yet they did that. There was no prior prosecution because there was no crime. They met in the middle of the night. They sentenced and executed Him the same day. The trial took place on a feast day. They met outside the Hall of Judgment. And they never bothered to count the votes.

I. THE ILLEGAL, UNJUST CONFRONTATION (John 18:12-13, 19-24)

II. THE ILLEGAL, UNJUST CONVENING (Matthew 26:57)

III. THE ILLEGAL, UNJUST CONSPIRACY (Matthew 26:59-61)

Since the leaders couldn't come up with any accusation, they brought in false witnesses. They found two, but even their testimony didn't agree. The reason they couldn't bring an accusation is that Christ never did anything wrong. He was God in human flesh. He was absolutely impeccable. The leaders had decided to put Christ to death (v. 59), and now they needed to find a reason to do it. But the testimony of the two witnesses was useless, since it was based on something Jesus said. There was no way they could require death for that. The inability to find a crime frustrated Caiaphas.

LESSON

IV. THE ILLEGAL, UNJUST CONDEMNATION (Matthew 26:62-64)

The religious leaders were in a hurry to convict Jesus before dawn-- before people began to mill around. They were afraid of His popularity with them, and of what might happen if they found out what they were trying to do to Him. They wanted to finish the trial so they could celebrate the Passover with unbloodied hands.

A. The Frustration of Caiaphas (v. 62)

"The high priest arose and said unto him [Jesus], Answerest thou nothing? What is it which these witness against thee?"

Frustration reached its apex in Caiaphas. A myriad of false witnesses paraded before the Sanhedrin,

none of whom could concoct successful lies about Jesus. While that went on Jesus stood staring into the eyes of Caiaphas with a gaze that must have burned his soul. Never did He say a word. The frustration and hatred of Caiaphas and the rest of the Sanhedrin mounted as they waited for Jesus to say something they could attack, and thus release their passion. Even after the two witnesses presented their twisted testimony, Jesus still said nothing. The air was filled with lies and inconsistencies. The mockery of justice dominated the scene. The Sanhedrin became even more desperate for Jesus to say something so they could twist that and make it the new issue. Yet all they could hear up to this point was the echo of their own stupidity and anger.

1. Jesus upheld the law

Jesus said nothing because there was nothing to say. If they weren't going to uphold Jewish law, He would. And one of those laws said that a man could not incriminate himself. Maimonides, a Jewish medieval scholar, said that The law does not permit the death penalty as a sentence for a sinner by his own confession. That had always been central to Jewish law. Jesus had nothing to say, and the law made provision for Him to stay silent. He had to be accused by others and proven guilty by them. There was nothing to say anyway because there had been no true testimony, only contrary statements about something He had supposedly said. So Jesus stood before the Sanhedrin and allowed the echo of their words to ring through the hall of Caiaphas's house.

2. Jesus put the Sanhedrin on trial

The contrast between the calmness of Christ and the fury of Caiaphas is striking. When anyone looks at this scene objectively, he won't see Jesus on trial, he'll see the Sanhedrin put to task. It's clear who Christ was. There was no need for retaliation, vindication, or self-defense. Jesus stood before Caiaphas, resolutely headed for the cross. He knew it was His hour to die for the sins of the world.

B. The Peace of Christ (v. 63a)

"Jesus held His peace."

That's another way of saying he kept silent. Caiaphas must have continually badgered Him to say something, but He did not. The prophet Isaiah said, "As a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so he openeth not his mouth" (Isa. 53:7).

C. The Charge of Blasphemy (v. 63b)

"The high priest answered and said unto him, I adjure thee by the living God, that thou tell us whether thou be the Christ, the Son of God."

Caiaphas called on Jesus to make the most sacred oath a Jew could ever speak--to answer the question truthfully as a vow before the living God. It was an oath to the God of truth who punishes liars. Here Caiaphas wanted Jesus to claim to be the Son of God, a claim to deity. That was considered a blasphemous claim for a human to make, so he was trying to get Jesus to blaspheme. If He was successful, they would have their reason for executing Him. Leviticus 24:16 says, "He who blasphemeth the name of the Lord, he shall surely be put to death." So the crime they attached to Christ was that He said He was God. But that wasn't a crime because it happened to be the truth. Jesus was not executed for saying He was God, but for being God.

1. Christ's claim to be the Messiah

Jesus had previously claimed to be the Messiah. After reading a Messianic prophecy from the book of Isaiah in the synagogue in Nazareth, He said, "This day is this Scripture fulfilled in your ears" (Luke 4:21). That was a claim to be the Messiah. On a different occasion Christ met a woman of Samaria. She said to Him, "I know that Messiah cometh" (John 4:25). He replied, "I that speak unto thee am he" (v. 26). He claimed overtly to be the promised Messiah--the deliverer and Savior of Israel. That was something He never denied; He always affirmed it. That Caiaphas asked Him if He was the Christ indicated he knew Jesus claimed to be the Messiah. When Christ rode into the city of Jerusalem, "the multitudes that went before, and that followed, cried, saying, Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord!" (Matt. 21:9). Those names were all

Messianic titles. It was perfectly clear that Jesus had claimed to be the Messiah.

However, Jesus never flaunted the fact that He was the Messiah. He didn't want to cause problems outside the proper plan of God. While He claimed to be the Messiah in no uncertain terms, He told His disciples to "tell no man that he was Jesus, the Christ" (Matt. 16:20). He avoided the danger and the threats. He avoided what might happen if people became upset at such a claim. So while He claimed to be the Messiah, He did so cautiously.

2. Christ's claim to be the Son of God

The Sanhedrin knew Jesus had also claimed to be the Son of God. That's why Caiaphas asked Him if He was the Son of God. But what did Caiaphas mean? Did he believe Christ claimed to be just another offspring of God or another creature God made? No, he meant deity. Why else would they charge Christ with blasphemy? If He was a son of God like everyone is a child of God in that He loved God and was created by Him, then affirming so wouldn't be blasphemous. But Caiaphas knew what Christ meant. When Jesus said He was the Son of God, He meant He was equal with God, for a son is of the same essence and nature as his father. Jesus had said continually, "I and my Father are one" (John 10:30). Throughout the gospel of John Jesus' claims to be the Son of God. Even John 19:7 says, "The Jews answered him [Pilate], We have a law, and by our law he ought to die, because he made himself the Son of God."

Caiaphas knew Jesus claimed to be the Messiah--the anointed one, the coming King and ruler of Israel. As such He was a threat to his rule and priesthood. And He claimed to be the Son of the living God, a claim no one could make even in a cautious way without it spreading like wildfire. Caiaphas wanted to hear those claims from Jesus' own mouth so he would have reason to execute Him.

D. The Prediction of Christ (v. 64)

1. Christ's present reaffirmation (v. 64a)

"Jesus said unto him, Thou hast said."

Mark 14:62 adds that Jesus also said, "I am." Jesus took the oath of the living God and affirmed He was the anointed Messiah and the Son of God. This was not a time for Him to be cautious; it was time for Him to die. So Christ was frank with the Sanhedrin about His claims.

2. Christ's future role (v. 64b)

"Nevertheless I say unto you, Hereafter shall ye see the Son of man sitting on the right hand of power, and coming in the clouds of heaven."

a) His exaltation That is a quote from Daniel 7:13-14, a great Messianic prophecy. What an amazing claim! Jesus affirmed before the Sanhedrin that He was God, and that soon they would see Him exalted to the right hand of God and coming in the clouds of heaven. One day He will return to earth as judge and King to establish His eternal Kingdom. Jesus claimed He was the one Daniel spoke of.

b) His judgment When Jesus said, "Hereafter shall ye see," He was informing Caiaphas that he would see Him again on that day. Caiaphas would see Christ at the Great White Throne when He calls out of the graves all those who rejected Him and His Father (John 5:25-29). Jesus will then become Caiaphas's eternal Judge. Jesus referred to Himself as "Son of man" in Matthew 26:64 because that's the phrase Daniel used in his prophecy. That title also was Christ's most common name for Himself. He is Son of man and the Son of God--fully man and fully God. In the eyes of the Sanhedrin, Jesus condemned Himself by His own words. But that alone was unjust and illegal. They claimed He incriminated Himself with His blasphemy--that He had the audacity to claim to be the fulfillment of Daniel 7:13-14. Jesus was right--He was equal with God and would be elevated to God's right hand. Hebrews 1:3 calls Jesus Christ "the express image of [God's] person." It also says that when He had finished His work, he "sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high." Matthew 24:30 says that one day the Son of man will come "in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory." Jesus affirmed that His death would usher Him into God's presence for His coronation. He would then remain at the right hand [a symbol of power] of God as King and ruler. But one day soon He will return in glory. Those who stood in judgment against Christ will some day be judged by Him.

V. THE ILLEGAL, UNJUST CONCLUSION (Matthew 26:65-66)

A. The Accusation of Blasphemy (v. 65)

"The high priest tore his clothes, saying, He hath spoken blasphemy! What further need have we of witnesses? Behold, now ye have heard his blasphemy."

1. Avoiding truth

Was Jesus' claim to be God blasphemy? No, because what He said was true. But the high priest didn't want to know the truth. Jesus said, "If I do not the works of my Father, believe me not. But if I do, though ye believe not me, believe the works" (John 10:37-38). The rulers knew He had performed miracles. They knew He raised Lazarus from the dead. But they didn't want to know the truth. They closed their minds to it out of fear. People today reject Christ because they are afraid to examine the issues. They know that if they do their lives will be overturned and exposed for what they are. They would rather go to hell blind than find the truth.

2. Applying theatrics

Caiaphas did what a high priest had the right to do when God was dishonored--tear his garments (Lev. 21:10). But in Caiaphas's case it was mere theatrics. He wasn't concerned about God's name; He was happy because Jesus could now be executed. But he put on a show to appear grieved. Such histrionics were typical among ancient peoples. Whenever they wanted to express grief, distress, or intense emotion, they would rip their clothes. It may well have been that members of the Sanhedrin wore garments that had been sewed many times because they had performed those kind of theatrics before. Caiaphas ripped his clothes to appear as if he were defending the holiness of God, but inwardly he was rejoicing at the prospect of getting rid of Jesus Christ.

When Caiaphas said, "What further need have we of witnesses?" he was effectively putting an end to the trial. No one was brought in to testify for Jesus. No evidence was presented. There was no proof that Jesus was not the Son of God.

B. The Violation of Protocol (v. 66)

"What think ye? They answered and said, He is guilty of death."

That procedure was not according to judicial protocol. No scribe was recording the votes. There was no pause between each vote so each judge could weigh the seriousness of his decision. It was nothing more than a rabble. They were a mad mob, screaming for His blood. There was no justice. Mark 14:64 says their vote was unanimous. The usual careful vote was thrown out.

VI. THE ILLEGAL, UNJUST CONDUCT (Matthew 26:67-68)

"Then they spat in his face, and buffeted him; and others smote him with the palms of their hands, saying, Prophecy unto us, thou Christ, Who smote thee?"

A. The Contempt of the Aristocracy

The Jewish aristocracy--the high priest, elders, chief priests, and scribes--abused Christ. They were the leaders of the nation, and they constituted the supreme court. To show you how utterly possessed they were by the demons of hell, Luke 22:65 says, "Many other things blasphemously spoke they against him." The blasphemer wasn't Jesus; the Sanhedrin itself was full of blasphemers. Jesus claimed to be God. That wasn't blasphemy; it was truth. But spitting in the face of God is blasphemy--blasphemy of an inconceivable kind. Luke 22:64 adds, "When they had blindfolded Him, they struck him on the face, and asked him, saying, Prophecy, who is it that smote thee?" That's frightening when considering whom they were dealing with!

1. They spit on Him

A supreme sign of contempt in Jewish culture was to spit on someone or something (Num. 12:14). A tomb in the Valley of Kidron is known as Absalom's tomb. The Jewish people have long hated the memory of Absalom because he was a traitor to his father, David. He even tried to take his father's life. To this day, when anyone who is faithful to Judaistic tradition walks by Absalom's tomb, he will

spit on it. Spit is a symbol of disdain, and the Sanhedrin spit in the face of God.

2. They buffeted him

The judges also buffeted (Gk., kolaphiz[ma]o), or hit Christ with their fists. They punched Him as if He were a punching bag. Others slapped Him with the palms of their hands. They ridiculed and mocked His supposed deity by asking to prophecy who hit Him. Mark 14:65 adds, "The guards did strike him with the palms of their hands." Even the Temple police took part in the mockery.

B. The Compassion of Christ

The nation of Israel was rotten--a rotten carcass waiting to be eaten by the Roman eagle. The representatives of the nation had abandoned all sense of virtue, righteousness, and holiness. They spat on the One who taught them to love their enemies. He who smiled at the approach of a child, who beamed when a sinner became a saint, and who mirrored the loving heart of God was prepared to die on the cross for the very people who spat on Him.

The religious leaders framed their own Messiah. They pretended to know God, but when God came to them, they spat on Him. They were far from the truth, intent on protecting their power, prestige, and position. Anyone who rejects Jesus Christ today stands with those religious phonies. Jesus said, "He that is not with me is against me" (Matt. 12:30).

CONCLUSION

Ironically, those who misjudge Jesus will be rightly judged by Him one day. The tables will be turned. The judges who tried Christ were nothing more than criminals, and they will be justly condemned. The One wrongly accused will one day become the Judge. The damning sin is the sin of unbelief, which encompasses pride, impenitence, independence, and self-sufficiency. It is the sin of thinking you can be right with God without Christ.

As I look at the scene of Christ before the Sanhedrin, I'm overwhelmed by His grace. I deserve the trial, the sentence, the condemnation, and the execution Christ undeservedly endured for me. It is God who should spit in my face, punch and slap me around, and then execute me. But Christ took my place.

I was once a captive of Satan, but Christ became a captive so I might be set free. I was once a forsaken outcast--apart from the fellowship of God--but Christ became forsaken and an outcast for me. He was forsaken by all His own that I might be made forever a member of the family of God. I was once denied compassion and sympathy, but Jesus went to a compassionless death for me. Now He is my sympathetic high priest who understands and cares for me. I was once accursed, but Jesus became accursed for me. I was once a false witness who denied the truth about Christ, but Christ endured false witnesses to make me His own. Now no one can ever bring an accusation against me that will make me lose my salvation. I saw Jesus remain silent for me. Shouldn't I fill my mouth with praise for Him? I was dead, but Jesus died that I might live.

Focusing on the Facts

1. What had Satan been trying to do to Christ throughout His earthly ministry?
2. What new approach did Satan take once Christ's death was imminent?
3. Explain why the arrest and trials of Christ represent a holy hour?
4. Explain the conspiracy of the religious leaders in John 11:47-51. What motivated the conspiracy?
5. What kind of response should the mob have displayed after being knocked to the ground by Christ? How should they have responded when He healed Malchus's ear?
6. What were the people in the crowd unwilling to face even after witnessing Christ's miracles?
7. Why was the Sanhedrin in a hurry to convict Christ before dawn?
8. What did Jesus uphold by remaining silent before the Sanhedrin?
9. Why did Caiaphas ask Jesus if He was the Son of God?
10. Cite some instances when Christ claimed to be the Messiah.

11. What did Caiaphas understand Jesus to mean by His claim to be the Son of God?
12. After affirming to Caiaphas that He was the Son of God, what did Jesus tell him in the rest of His statement? Explain (Matt. 26:64).
13. Why did the religious leaders avoid examining Christ's works?
14. Why did Caiaphas tear his clothes? How did he really feel?
15. Why did the members of the court spit on Jesus after convicting Him?

Pondering the Principles

1. In Genesis 50:20 Joseph said, "Ye thought evil against me, but God meant it unto good." We have already seen how God used the wickedness of the Jewish leaders to accomplish redemption for all men (Acts 2:23). Have there been occasions in your life when God turned something evil into good? What were the circumstances? Thank God for His plan for your life. As you encounter future circumstances that appear to be bad, remember when God turned bad circumstances to your benefit.
2. Christ often claimed to be both the Messiah and the Son of God. As a long-term study, read through the gospels. Each time you read a reference to Jesus claiming to be either the Messiah or Son of God, record it. Also record the context of events in which He made the claim. When you are finished, study your list. What conclusions can you make that apply to you personally? How might you use what you have discovered in developing a strategy to proclaiming the deity of Christ to the unsaved.

Available online at: <http://www.gty.org>

COPYRIGHT (C) 2026 Grace to You

You may reproduce this Grace to You content for non-commercial purposes in accordance with Grace to You's Copyright Policy (<https://www.gty.org/about#copyright>).