

## The Trials of Jesus

Matt. 26:57-68

**Intro.** This morning I want to pick up our study of Matthew at **26:57**, where we left off a few weeks ago. Jesus has now been arrested. His arrest was triggered by the animosity of the Jewish authorities who knew a trial was necessary to convict Him. The fact that the perfect Son of God came to earth only to be arrested by wicked men is enough irony for a lifetime. But as Matthew has emphasized, everything happened according to the predetermined plan of God and to fulfill the Scriptures. Contrary to the Law these leaders were sworn to uphold, the injustice was set in motion in a back room deal where Judas was promised 30 pieces of silver. The Law said, "**Do not accept a bribe, for a bribe blinds those who see and twists the words of the righteous.**" - **Ex. 23:8** But Judas agreed to deliver Jesus to the Jewish authorities for a sum of money equal to the cost of a common slave. Though all of heaven's power was at his disposal, Jesus offered no resistance when arrested. He knew it was His Father's will that He go to the cross. **To the chief priests, the officers of the temple guard, and the elders, who had come for Him,** Jesus said, "**Am I leading a rebellion, that you have come with swords and clubs? Every day I was with you in the temple courts, and you did not lay a hand on me. But this is your hour--when darkness reigns.**" - **Lk. 22:52, 53**

Down through history there have been scores of famous trials for every conceivable violation of law. Because we were created in God's likeness, all human beings have an innate sense of justice and fairness. We may not always be fair to others, but we expect them to be fair to us. Along with crimes against humanity, history tells the story of men and women whose only crime was that they dared to suggest something other than what was commonly believed. 400 years before Christ's coming, the trial and execution of this free thinking philosopher was decided by a jury of 500 men. For what was labeled impiety and corrupting the youth of Athens, Socrates was forced to drink Hemlock. Other free speech trials involved famous names like Joan of Arc / Galileo / John Hus / and Martin Luther. In effect, Galileo said, "*My accusers are so bright and sure of themselves they refuse to look through the lens of my telescope lest they see something that upsets their notions.*" A more modern proverb says, "*None are so blind as those who refuse to see.*" During the Protestant Reformation, scores of faithful believers were tried and executed for their faith.

Yet here's the point I want to stress...almost every trial on record was conducted with some sense of justice and fairness and based on laws on the books at that time. Even though justice has not always been blind nor has it been faithfully administered in every case, following whatever system of justice existed, the innocent were acquitted and those found guilty were punished. What makes the trial of Jesus such a unique travesty is the fact that rules of justice were suspended and completely set aside. Jesus was without sin and hated without a cause. When cause to condemn Him wasn't found, false witnesses were sought. But even the false witnesses couldn't get their stories to agree. Those in religious and civil authority set justice and fair play aside to convict and crucify the Son of God. Yet at any point in this whole charade, God the Father could have intervened and put a stop to it...but He didn't. Everything that happened to Jesus was part of the divine plan to save sinners like you and me.

Through the prophet Amos, the Lord rebuked Israel because they turned **justice into bitterness and cast righteousness to the ground. (Amos 5:7)** Yet nowhere was injustice more graphic than in the arrest / trials / and crucifixion of Jesus Christ. For the next few minutes, I want to journey with me through the six trials Jesus endured and the injustices He suffered. To get the whole picture we need to combine the record supplied by all four Gospel writers. 3 x's Jesus stood before Jewish authorities and 3 x's He was tried by Roman officials. As I did on Good Friday, I'll put the Scriptures on the screens accompanied by the outstanding artistry of French painter, James Tissot.

Pastor Keegan has read **Matt. 26:57-68** for us, so we won't read it again.

**1. The hearing before Annas – Jn. 18:12, 13** - Jesus was led away from the Garden of Gethsemane when He answered the authorities and said, **I am He.** - **Jn.18:13.** His hands were bound behind his back and He was led away. Matthew's account begins with Jesus before Caiaphas, but John tells us He was led to Annas first. **Annas** was father in law to **Caiaphas, the High Priest.** This raises a question...why would the father in law of the High Priest see an accused man at 2 AM when he was no longer a member of the court? The answer seems obvious...on two occasions Jesus went into the Temple and drove out the money changers. The man in charge of these concessions was this sidelined priest named, **Annas.** In those days, God's Temple was knick-named, "**the Bazaar of Annas.**" This was like knick-naming a church, *Greektown or Soaring Eagle Casino.* **Annas** was god father of the Jewish Mafia. The temple merchants exchanged free-will offerings at exorbitant rates. His henchmen also inspected animals brought for sacrifice. Since most were rejected, people were forced to buy the animals sold in the concessions at 3 to 4x's the going rate. These extorted profits found their way into the pockets of **Annas.** Though deposed from priestly duties by Valerius Gratus, **Annas** was still the power behind the priesthood. He remained a member of the Sanhedrin and had an axe to grind with Jesus. Jesus had overturned his racket and damaged his income. His hatred and malice toward Jesus probably explains why the Jewish leaders brought Jesus to him first.

This first trial is reported in **Jn. 18:19-22** - **Meanwhile, the high priest questioned Jesus about his disciples and his teaching. "I have spoken openly to the world," Jesus replied. "I always taught in synagogues or at the temple, where all the Jews come together. I said nothing in secret. Why question me? Ask those who heard me. Surely they know what I said." When Jesus said this, one of the officials nearby struck him in the face. "Is this the way you answer the high priest?" he demanded.**

Unlike the shadowy dealings of **Annas**, Jesus told the court there was nothing covert about His ministry. Under the rules of trial procedure, Jesus knew it was against the law to solicit testimony from anyone except witnesses and collaborators. It was also illegal to hold a preliminary examination under the cover of darkness. So Jesus told Annas that he should ask witnesses what He had been teaching. **Jn. 18:23** - **"If I said something wrong," Jesus replied, "testify as to what is wrong. But if I spoke the truth, why did you strike me?"** When He challenged **Annas** to ask anyone who heard His teachings, an officer of the court struck Him in the face. Brutality like this was forbidden in a Jewish court! **v. 24** says, **Then Annas sent him, still bound, to Caiaphas the high priest.**

**2. The hearing before Caiaphas – Jn. 18:24 - Mk. 14:53** says, **They took Jesus to the high priest, and all the chief priests, elders and teachers of the law came together.** This was the second trial. At sometime around 3:30 AM, **Caiaphas** hastily assembled a group of leaders. This whole deal was illegal because it took place while it was still dark. According to the Law a man could never be arrested at night for a capital crime and no Jewish trial could ever be conducted after sunset. The Jewish Talmud reads this way, *"The members of the court may not alertly and intelligently hear the testimony of the accused during the hours of darkness."* The hearing was also illegitimate because it took place at the house of Caiaphas instead of the council chamber. This was a clandestine meeting, a kangaroo court that had been pre-arranged and in the works for months. But they finally had Jesus in custody and the rules of justice didn't matter.

The confusion of these proceedings is highlighted in **Mk. 14:56-59** - **Many testified falsely against him, but their statements did not agree. Then some stood up and gave this false testimony against him: "We heard him say, 'I will destroy this manmade temple and in three days will build another, not made by man.'" Yet even then their testimony did not agree.** The informants couldn't get their story straight. They contradicted each other. But **Caiaphas** had already determined the outcome must be. He was instructed by his father in law **Annas** that this man must be eliminated. But justice itself put the High Priest in a bind.

He had no witnesses that could make the case for a capital offense. So he tried another illegal tactic by questioning the accused directly. **Mk. 14:60 - Then the high priest stood up before them and asked Jesus, "Are you not going to answer? What is this testimony that these men are bringing against you?"** In other words, Caiaphas asked Jesus to incriminate Himself. This was also expressly forbidden by law and Jesus knew it. **v. 61a - But Jesus remained silent and gave no answer.** So Caiaphas probed further. **vs. 61b-62 - Again the high priest asked him, "Are you the Christ, the Son of the Blessed One?" "I am," said Jesus.** Caiaphas understood what Jesus was saying. He was claiming to be God. Jesus then laid a prophesy on Caiaphas the priest couldn't handle. **"And you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Mighty One and coming on the clouds of heaven."** **v. 63** says, **The high priest tore his clothes. "Why do we need any more witnesses?" he asked.** Caiaphas reacted violently even though Levitical Law forbids a priest from ever tearing his robes.

But think through what Caiaphas said, **"Why do we need any more witnesses?"** That's a pretty clever "out" when don't have any! It's like being flat broke while claiming, *"I don't need any more money than I have."* And these leaders weren't in this bind for lack of trying! (It reminds me of the recent myth of Russian collusion with our president!) In **v. 64**, Caiaphas said, **"You have heard the blasphemy. What do you think?" They all condemned Him as worthy of death.** Then in an outburst of raw hatred and anger, **v. 65** says, **Then some began to spit at him; they blindfolded him, struck him with their fists, and said, "Prophecy!" And the guards took him and beat him.** The barbarism and brutality of their actions was expressly forbidden. This raw anger was inflamed by the hatred of a Jewish high priest. Under Roman rule, the Jews had certain rights. But they didn't have the right to execute capital punishment. To execute Jesus, He would have to stand before Roman officials. They also knew their case was very weak.

By the time the first two trials were over, Jesus was bleeding and bruised. He had been mocked, beaten and spat upon. He suffered all this abuse before there ever was a verdict pronouncing him guilty or innocent. Since all this took place during the hours of darkness, the Romans refused to hear or recognize their charges until Jesus was heard by the **Sanhedrin**...the Jewish Supreme Court.

**3. The hearing before the Sanhedrin – Lk. 22:66** - The third trial was the shortest of the three Jewish trials. The verdict of the Sanhedrin had already been decided...Jesus was guilty! **Lk. 22:66** says, **At daybreak the council of the elders of the people, both the chief priests and teachers of the law, met together, and Jesus was led before them.** Whatever the Sanhedrin discovered and declared became law. **Lk. 22:67-71** says, **"If you are the Christ," they said, "tell us." Jesus answered, "If I tell you, you will not believe me, and if I asked you, you would not answer. But from now on, the Son of Man will be seated at the right hand of the mighty God." They all asked, "Are you then the Son of God?" He replied, "You are right in saying I am." Then they said, "Why do we need any more testimony? We have heard it from his own lips."** It's amazing to read these words and hear some insist that Jesus never claimed to be God. Aside from Nicodemus who may have sat in silence, the Sanhedrin voted to deliver Jesus to Pontius Pilate. The charge was blasphemy and blasphemy was punishable by death. **Lk. 23:1** says, **Then the whole assembly rose and led Him off to Pilate.**

**4. The first hearing before Pontius Pilate – Jn. 18:28** - This fourth trial removed Jesus from the jurisdiction of Jewish Law. The whole matter was now under the Roman Code of Criminal Procedure. The time was now somewhere around 6:30 to 7:00 AM. **Jn. 18:28** says, **Then the Jews led Jesus from Caiaphas to the palace of the Roman governor. By now it was early morning, and to avoid ceremonial uncleanness the Jews did not enter the palace; they wanted to be able to eat the Passover.** The hypocrisy of the Jewish leaders is on full display here. They were conspiring to murder Jesus based on whatever charge they could fabricate.

But they refused to defile themselves by stepping foot in the palace of a Roman governor. The irony is enormous. It reminds me of a certain religious group whose name I won't mention. They were willing to murder the Lamb of God, but unwilling to be disqualified from eating the Passover that symbolized His sacrifice for them. They were criminal in attitude and intent, but impeccably legal in their religious requirements. So they waited outside until Pilate came out to meet them.

The remind me of a certain religious group whose name I won't mention. Members of their religious order are allowed to prepare food in the kitchen, but they're not allowed to step across the threshold to the Bingo floor. Whoops...I think I gave something away.

Now **Pontius Pilate** was a Gentile appointed by Caesar to govern Judea. He was a marked man because of some turmoil that had broken out under his rule. As an unstable politician he had made some unwise decisions and mercilessly slaughtered some Jews. So he had to be careful here. His office was on the line. After Christ's death, Pilate was banished to Gall where he committed suicide.

**Jn. 18:29** says, **So Pilate came out to them and asked, "What charges are you bringing against this man?"** The Jews answered sarcastically, **"If he were not a criminal...we would not have handed him over to you."** Accusers tend to answer that way when can't back up their allegations. **Pilate said, "Take him yourselves and judge him by your own law." "But we have no right to execute anyone," the Jews objected.** Until now, Pilate didn't realize they'd come because they wanted Jesus executed. The other gospels say they claimed Jesus was guilty of treason and that He claimed to be King of the Jews. That single claim changed Pilate's thinking. It made Jesus a political threat.

**Jn.18:33** says, **Pilate then went back inside the palace, summoned Jesus and asked him, "Are you the king of the Jews?"** Jesus answered Pilate and said, **"Is that your own idea, or did others talk to you about Me?"** Then **Pilate replied. "Am I a Jew?...It was your people and your chief priests who handed you over to me. What is it you have done?"** Pilate wanted to know if Jesus was leading a rebellion to overthrow the Roman government in Palestine. So Jesus answered, **"My kingdom is not of this world. If it were, my servants would fight to prevent my arrest by the Jews. But now my kingdom is from another place."** Aside from Peter's reaction when Jesus was arrested, Jesus and His disciples had given no evidence of rebellion or an organized coup against Roman authority.

Following accusation and interrogation, the third step in the Roman code was the defense. So in the absence of a legally required defense attorney, Pilate began to look at things from Jesus' point of view. **"You are a king, then!" said Pilate. Jesus answered, "You are right in saying I am a king. In fact, for this reason I was born, and for this I came into the world, to testify to the truth. Every-one on the side of truth listens to me."** "What is truth?" Pilate asked. **With this he went out again to the Jews and said, "I find no basis for a charge against him."**

The fourth step in the Roman code is the verdict. The Romans carried out each step their jurisprudence required. Pilate found no guilt...no basis for the charge of treason. All he heard was talk about an imaginary heavenly kingdom that was no threat to Rome. So **Pilate announced to the chief priests and the crowd, "I find no basis for a charge against this man."** - Lk. 23:4, 5 Despite Pilate's verdict, the injustice didn't end at his doorstep.

**5. The hearing before Herod – Lk. 23:6, 7** says, **But they insisted, "He stirs up the people all over Judea by his teaching. He started in Galilee and has come all the way here." On hearing this, Pilate asked if the man was a Galilean. When he learned that Jesus was under Herod's jurisdiction, he sent him to Herod, who was also in Jerusalem at that time.**

Herod did what many politicians do...he passed the buck. **Herod** was **Pilate's** life-long enemy and the ruler who beheaded John the Baptist. He thought Jesus was a magician and was curious to see Him perform a trick. **Lk. 23:8, 9** says, **When Herod saw Jesus, he was greatly pleased, because for a long time he had been wanting to see him. From what he had heard about him, he hoped to see him perform some miracle. He plied him with many questions, but Jesus gave him no answer.** Though the hearing before **Herod** is counted as the 5<sup>th</sup> trial, it was no trial at all. All Herod wanted was a jester for his court...a clown...a magician...some entertainment. When Jesus didn't cooperate, they mocked His claim to be a king. **Lk. 23:10, 11 - The chief priests and the teachers of the law were standing there, vehemently accusing him. Then Herod and his soldiers ridiculed and mocked him. Dressing him in an elegant robe, they sent him back to Pilate.**

**6. The second hearing before Pilate – Lk. 23:10, 11** - The sixth and final trial took place back at the Roman Palace. Pilate was probably eating breakfast when he tweeted out this message... *"Whew, I dodged a bullet this morning. I'm glad that's over with. I can't afford another squabble with the Jews."* But to his dismay, when he looked out his palace window he saw a mob leading Jesus back to his front steps. Jesus is still bound, but now He's badly beaten and mockingly robed as a king. You've no doubt heard it said, *"the enemy of my enemy is my friend."* **Lk. 23:12** says, **That day Herod and Pilate became friends--before this they had been enemies.**

Pilate tried several avenues to avoid having to pronounce Jesus guilty. He first offered to chastise Jesus...to beat Him and then release Him. But the Jewish leaders were determined. They said *"no, that's not what we're interested in...that's not why we brought Him to you."* His second attempt was to release Jesus through a Roman custom. It was customary to release a prisoner at Passover.

**Matt. 23:15 - Now it was the governor's custom at the Feast to release a prisoner chosen by the crowd.** Barabbas was a notorious criminal guilty of a capital offense. But the crowd refused this offer and Pilate's plan backfired. **Matt. 23:20-23** tells the back story. **But the chief priests and the elders persuaded the crowd to ask for Barabbas and to have Jesus executed. "Which of the two do you want me to release to you?" asked the governor. "Barabbas," they answered. "What shall I do, then, with Jesus who is called Christ?" Pilate asked. They all answered, "Crucify him!" "Why? What crime has he committed?" asked Pilate. But they shouted all the louder, "Crucify him!"** In the end, Pilate washed his hands of the whole matter. **"I am innocent of this man's blood," he said. "It is your responsibility!" – Matt. 27:24**

At this point, the trials have ended. **Matt. 27:26-31 - Then he released Barabbas to them. But he had Jesus flogged, and handed him over to be crucified. Then the governor's soldiers took Jesus into the Praetorium and gathered the whole company of soldiers around him. They stripped him and put a scarlet robe on him, and then twisted together a crown of thorns and set it on his head. They put a staff in his right hand and knelt in front of him and mocked him. "Hail, king of the Jews!" they said. They spit on him, and took the staff and struck him on the head again and again. After they had mocked him, they took off the robe and put his own clothes on him. Then they led him away to crucify him.**

At any point during the 18 hours from when Jesus was arrested to the moment when He took His last breath, the armies of Heaven could have intervened. This travesty of justice didn't have to happen! Just think back...when Jesus was arrested, **a detachment of soldiers and some officials from the chief priests and Pharisees drew back and fell to the ground** when Jesus simply said the words, **I AM**. Scrambling to maintain their dignity and regain their footing, this posse numbering as many as 1,000 men with **torches, lanterns and weapons**, fell flat on their backs. (Where's a cell phone camera when you need one?) And Jesus merely spoke His name...**I AM**. In **Matt. 26:53** Jesus said, **Do you think I cannot call on my Father, and he will at once put at my disposal more than twelve legions of angels?**

No victim of injustice was ever more innocent than the perfect sinless Son of God. Yet no one suffered greater abuse and agony than Jesus. He was accused by Jewish authorities who sought false witnesses. He was then condemned by Roman officials who openly admitted He was without fault. He was crucified while a man guilty of murder, theft and insurrection was set free. The arrest / trials / and murder of Jesus are the greatest travesties of justice the world has ever known. Yet even as this miscarriage of justice was unfolding, Jesus was calm and in complete control. The Scriptures that prophesied these events were being fulfilled. In fact, though it seemed that Jesus was on trial, it was the world that was really on trial.

By the deliberate rejection and murder of Jesus, God affected His gracious plan to fully satisfy the sin debt of the world. At Pentecost Peter said, **This man was handed over to you by God's set purpose and foreknowledge; and you, with the help of wicked men, put him to death by nailing him to the cross. - Acts 2:23.** Later he wrote, **For Christ died for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God. - I Pet. 3:18** Justice would have been served if we were the ones beaten, mocked and spat on. We deserve the nails that were driven into His hands and feet. We are the guilty ones...the sheep gone astray. We are the rebels whose sin separates us from God...not Jesus. Every detail of Calvary was orchestrated in the eternal counsels of Heaven. **II Cor. 5:21** declares, **God made Him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in Him we might become the righteousness of God.** The injustice Jesus suffered, He suffered for you and me. What a wonderful Savior is Jesus, my Jesus! When life seems tough and even friends turn against you, the writer of Hebrews has a word for us. **Heb. 12:3 - Consider him who endured such opposition from sinful men, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart.** Let's prepare our hearts for the Lord's Table. Prayer

**Communion** - From every outward appearance, Jesus was in the hands and at the mercy of wicked men. But listen friends...He didn't see it that way. Jesus saw a larger picture of reality. After all the injustice He endured, from the cross **Jesus called out with a loud voice, "Father, into your hands I commit my spirit." When he had said this, He breathed his last. - Lk. 23:46**

Here's a question for you...in whose hands do you see your life? Do you see yourself at the mercy of fickle circumstances over which you have no control? Do you see yourself the pawn of people who don't always have your best interests in mind? Seeing and placing our lives in God's hands is a matter of faith, not sight. Jesus entrusted His whole life into the hands of His Father. Even when men did their worst, He rested in His Father's love. And from cover to cover this Bible urges us to do the same. **I Pet. 2:21-23 - To this you were called, because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps. "He committed no sin, and no deceit was found in his mouth." When they hurled their insults at him, he did not retaliate; when he suffered, he made no threats. Instead, he entrusted himself to him who judges justly.**

Do you trust God that way? Do you trust Him for everything?