

**The Trial of the King**  
Matthew 26:57-68  
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In the past few weeks, we have begun to study the most familiar stories ever told. I doubt there is anyone here, even if you do not recognize the Lord Jesus as your savior, who does not know how this story ends. There are no surprises really - no need for a spoiler alert. Our Lord, the King of Kings, dies for us and then conquers death through his resurrection. For those of us, who have been smothered in God's grace - the grace that only comes from what Jesus did - this story never gets old. We know how it ends and yet we love to hear over and over. It deepens our appreciation and excites our worship.

That said, the verses we are about to read are very heavy. They deserve our reverence. If we didn't already know the end of the story, we might feel a dreadful sense of defeat... hopelessness as we watch our Lord betrayed, condemned and beaten in the span of only a few hours. So let's carefully, prayerfully and reverently read the Gospel from Matthew 26 verses 57 through 68.

*Then those who had seized Jesus led him to Caiaphas the high priest, where the scribes and the elders had gathered. And Peter was following him at a distance, as far as the courtyard of the high priest, and going inside he sat with the guards to see the end. Now the chief priests and the whole council were seeking false testimony against Jesus that they might put him to death, but they found none, though many false witnesses came forward. At last two came forward and said, "This man said, I am able to destroy the temple of God, and to rebuild it in three days." And the high priest stood up and said, "Have you no answer to make? What is it that these men testify against you?" But Jesus remained silent. And the high priest said to him, "I adjure you by the living God, tell us if you are the Christ, the Son of God." Jesus said to him, "You have said so. But I tell you, from now on you will see the Son of Man seated at the right hand of Power and coming on the clouds of heaven." Then the high priest tore his robes and said, "He has uttered blasphemy. What further witnesses do we need? You have now heard his blasphemy. What is your judgment?" They answered, "He deserves death." Then they spit in his face and struck him. And some slapped him, saying, "Prophecy to us, you Christ! Who is it that struck you?"*

Let's go to the Lord in prayer:

"Heavenly and gracious Father, these are difficult words for us to read. It is hard for us to comprehend how you would let your own son endure the judgment, shame and abuse usually reserved for the worst criminals. Help us this morning to have a renewed sense of the suffering involved in our ransom and the immense love you have on each of us

despite our many transgressions. Lord, may our response to this message be one of deep adoration and worship. In Jesus name, Amen.”

Why is it that we love a good trial? They are something of a spectacle for us.

According to [uscourts.gov](http://uscourts.gov), the US District Courts disposed 97,445 criminal defendants in 2012. Of those, 88,878 were convicted. It might surprise you to know that 86,730 (nearly 98%) pleaded guilty to their crimes. Only 1,985 were actually tried in front of a jury.

Perhaps even more astonishing is the amount of air time that is given to the most interesting jury trials. In fact, it is big business for courtroom shows and news networks. You may remember, last year, the trial of Jody Arias – the waitress who was accused and convicted of murdering Travis Alexander on June 4, 2008 in his house in Mesa, Arizona. Arias, Alexander's ex-girlfriend, was charged with first-degree murder for his death. At trial, she testified that she killed Alexander in self-defense. She was convicted of first-degree murder on May 8, 2013. The murder and trial received widespread media attention – so much so, The Toronto Star said this about the trial: "With its mix of jealousy, religion, murder, and sex, the Jodi Arias case shows what happens when the justice system becomes entertainment."

During the Arias trial last year, HNL experienced double-digit increases in viewership in every hour of its programming during the month of March compared to the same time in 2012. Some afternoon hours (when the daily trial recap would usually take place) reached 300% growth in viewership. You don't have to spend much time on HLN to see that they are doing their best to exploit our curiosity and interest in courtroom drama.

We love a good courtroom drama. Perhaps we like to see justice done, but it seems that the more sensational the drama... the more ridiculous... the better. Jesus' hasty trial before the Sanhedrin bears some resemblance to these.

The Gospels depict two trials for Jesus. The first is the ecclesiastical trial (or church trial). The second is the civil trial, which Pastor Dorst will cover in Matthew 27:11-14. In this passage, we get a glimpse into the proceedings of a Jewish trial - the council of the Sanhedrin with the High Priest, Caiaphas, presiding. Actually, the trial began earlier that night when the mob that arrested Jesus first took him to the house of Annas. Both Annas and Caiaphas held the position of high priest. John says in his Gospel that Caiaphas was high priest *that year*, but Annas was not only high priest, he was also father-in-law to Caiaphas. There was considerable deference to Annas, and that is why he saw Jesus first in something of an arraignment. John tells us that Annas had a few questions of his own and afterwards sent him to Caiaphas who was, according to historical accounts in an adjoining home sharing a courtyard.

One of the most remarkable things of this trial was how well understood it was that this trial was a total farce. It was hastily thrown together to take advantage of the betrayal of Judas and to avoid the potential of a riot, Jesus was taken late at night in the cover of darkness. Upheaval was a very real threat. Recall that only a few days earlier, the chief priests narrowly avoided a riot when Jesus entered Jerusalem on a donkey and a multitude of Jesus followers declared, "Hosannah!"

Recall, much earlier, when Jesus fed the five thousand, John describes the gravity of the situation, *"Perceiving then that they were about to come and take him by force to make him king, Jesus withdrew again to the mountain by himself."* A throng of thousands of Jesus' followers would be a formidable threat to the Jewish leadership and even to the Romans who would hold the leadership responsible for a riot.

Just a few days prior to Jesus' arrest, his fame and popularity are at an all-time high, having raised Lazarus from the dead, having entered Jerusalem as a king, having kicked out the money changers from the temple. Mark depicts both the anger of the Sanhedrin and their fear of the people this way: (14:1-2) *It was now two days before the Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread. And the chief priests and the scribes were seeking how to arrest him by stealth and kill him, for they said, "Not during the feast, lest there be an uproar from the people."*

The law mattered little to these men. Due process? none! Public accountability? forget that! Accountability to God? Certainly not if it gets in the way of imposing their own will and taking care of a troublemaker who had repeatedly discredited and humiliated them in public.

I'd like to look at this trial through three major themes. Unfortunately, these themes do not neatly divide the scripture, so you'll have to follow along as we extract the themes from the whole passage. The first is Truth versus Lies.

### **Truth versus Lies**

Let's take a closer look at verses 59 through 65

*Now the chief priests and the whole council were seeking false testimony against Jesus that they might put him to death, but they found none, though many false witnesses came forward. At last two came forward and said, "This man said, I am able to destroy the temple of God, and to rebuild it in three days." And the high priest stood up and said, "Have you no answer to make? What is it that these men testify against you?" But Jesus remained silent.*

So what do you do, when you are running a kangaroo court? You look for witnesses that lend credence to your accusations. In pretending to respect the law, Caiaphas sought the testimony of two or more witnesses in agreement with each other. This is in compliance with Deuteronomy 17:6 which says, *"On the evidence of two witnesses or of*

*three witnesses the one who is to die shall be put to death; a person shall not be put to death on the evidence of one witness."*

You see, Caiaphas knew he had to find two witnesses in agreement. Without them, he could not take his case to the Roman civil court and ask for the death penalty. But God confounded his efforts. Caiaphas could not get two people to agree on what Jesus had done. These false witnesses further highlighted the ridiculousness of the trial, frustrating Caiaphas and the other chief priests. After all, this should have been easy. Jesus' ministry was public. He said nothing in secret. He was not running an underground rebellion or a secret society. The Apostle John quotes Jesus' response in John 18:20 to these accusations, "I have spoken openly to the world. I have always taught in synagogues and in the temple, where all Jews come together. I have said nothing in secret. Why do you ask me? Ask those who have heard me what I said to them; they know what I said."

How could it be then that these witnesses were not paying attention to his words? Three years of open, public ministry... countless hours of listening to the Rabi... numerous observations. Yet they could not fabricate a consistent story. Why is that? What about his violation of the Sabbath or his disregard for the laws of cleanliness. That would not have been enough for an execution. Caiaphas needed evidence for a blasphemy charge - convincing enough that the Romans would be willing to execute a man on religious grounds. He finally finds two witnesses that agree: that Jesus suggested he would destroy the temple.

The thing was... Caiaphas was not interested in the truth. A good lie told by two people was good enough for him, so when asked to respond to this insidious claim twisting Jesus' own words to suit their purpose, the Son of God remains silent.

But once Caiaphas put him under oath (verse 63) and asked him, point blank, if he was the Christ, the Son of God, Jesus was ready to respond to these lies. Instead of acknowledging the lies against him, he slammed the Sanhedrin with the truest of truths: "*You have said so*"... meaning "It is just as you said." or maybe put in slang, "you said it, brother!" or if we were in Jamaica, "Ya mon!"

Whatever the expression, Jesus was clear. But instead of leaving it there, Jesus chose to leave no daylight between the question and his answer: (verse 64) "*But I tell you, from now on you will see the Son of Man seated at the right hand of Power and coming on the clouds of heaven.*" They tried to convict him with lies, and Jesus gave them the truth. Simply answering Caiaphas' question in the affirmative could have left doubt about Jesus' deity. Now there is no question that Jesus claimed to be God incarnate and eternal, and that he would return to his lofty position on the throne. It is interesting that Caiaphas tore his clothes. While to Caiaphas, this signified Jesus' blasphemy, to every single person who has been called to repentance and grace, this signified that Caiaphas had received and understood the testimony. For the rest of history, there is

no doubt that Jesus claimed to be God. When faced with the Truth (Jesus said that he was the Truth), the High Priest of God rejected him. Because of Christ's proclamation, we have no choice but to accept him or reject him. There's no middle ground.

The second theme that I'd like to explore overlays the first theme and applies to the same part of our passage (verses 58 through 64). This is the theme of authority versus submission.

### **Authority versus Submission**

Our passage opens by telling us that the scribes and elders (or chief priests) had already gathered at the home of Caiaphas. These are the Jewish elite who make up the Sanhedrin. There was little time for word to spread and yet, all the chief priests had already assembled. Mindful of the upcoming feast, they knew they needed to swiftly administer justice... that is... accuse, convict in a Jewish high court, then convict in a Roman court, sentence, then execute Jesus before the feast... before the day of atonement... the day, incidentally, God had set aside to forgive the sins of the people.

The Sanhedrin was the highest authority in all Judea. Its origins don't go back to the Old Testament but the Sanhedrin appears to have been established after the exile likely during the Greek period that followed Persian rule. At that time the Jews established a council of elders, which was accepted as the legal representative of Judaism. During the time period of our passage... during Roman rule, it was respected as the supreme court of justice for Jewish violations of the law. The Romans used the Sanhedrin to keep the Jewish people in line and held them responsible for keeping the peace. There were a few subordinate sanhedrins in Judea that were directed by elders in the synagogues, but the final and highest authority... the supreme court if you will, lay with the Jerusalem Sanhedrin.

So what does this really mean to Jesus? Well... for one... we just learned that Jesus, in speaking the truth under oath, declared himself an even greater authority than the high priest. I mean... I doubt that Caiaphas will ever sit at the right hand of Power. I doubt that Caiaphas will return on the clouds. Jesus just threw down the gauntlet on the highest authority in all Judea by saying that he has dominion over the Jews, over the Sanhedrin, over the high priest, over the high priest's priestly father-in-law, Annas, over the Romans, over Caesar and the entire Roman empire... over all of Heaven and Earth.

Recall last week in our passage, Jesus rebuked his disciples when they tried to defend him by force. Jesus said, "*Do you think that I cannot appeal to my Father, and he will at once send me more than twelve legions of angels?*" There were angel warriors standing by to corroborate Christ's claims of authority and reduce this kangaroo court to nothing.

But that's not what happened. Instead, we see Jesus submit to the authorities appointed over him. We see him willingly accept their accusations... no objections to their lies... no resistance to their beatings.

Paul uses the submission of Christ in Philippians as an example of how we should treat each other. He says, "Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross."

Often in meeting new members of our church, I'll ask a question about submission. The last question in our member vows asks, "Do you *submit* yourselves to the government and discipline of the church, and promise to study its purity and peace?" It's so hard for each of us to submit, but our Lord submitted. He has called us to submit in our marriages and to submit to one another. It's a mark of our faith in Jesus and our love for one another. God calls us to submission and he gave us an example.

But this does not diminish the fact that Jesus' submission would only be temporary. Paul continues in Philippians, "*Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.*"

This brings us to our final theme in verses 65 – 68:

*Then the high priest tore his robes and said, "He has uttered blasphemy. What further witnesses do we need? You have now heard his blasphemy. What is your judgment?" They answered, "He deserves death." Then they spit in his face and struck him. And some slapped him, saying, "Prophecy to us, you Christ! Who is it that struck you?"*

Our final theme is defeat versus victory.

### **Defeat versus Victory**

I'm sure you've seen enough courtroom drama to identify with the scene. This is that moment of defeat when the accused learns that all hope is lost and that they will either go away for a very long time or be sentenced to death. To make matters worse, over the cries of the friends and family of the accused, you can hear the cheers of the accusers. When justice is administered properly, this is a happy day, but when it's not, it is egregious and sad. It is a kick in the gut.

To make matters worse, The Sanhedrin move quickly from a dignified group of elite religious leaders to abusive, vile thugs. "Then they spit in his face and struck him. And

some slapped him, saying, "Prophecy to us, you Christ! Who is it that struck you?" As Jesus took each blow, continuing to submit, his face swelled. Blood ran from his mouth and nose. His eyes swelled shut. Even if someone came at him straight on, he couldn't see who it was who hit him.

But he knew. He knew each name. He knew where and when they were born. He knew the number of their days. He knew the number of their sins. Yes. Not just the number but he could name every single sin they committed whether in public or in private. I have to wonder if he uttered my name. If he saw my each and every sin. If he saw your name and all of your sins. After all, it was our sins that brought him to this very moment. Our sins were the reason he took each blow.

Who is it that struck you? Lord, I struck you!

Now who feels defeated.

Isn't that what our sin does to us? It makes us feel defeated.

But Jesus was not defeated that day. He was right where he wanted to be, and he knew where he would end up. And he would indeed be seated at God's right hand as he had from the beginning of time.

And he would come on the clouds in all his glory to defeat the enemy, save the lost and claim his kingdom. As the Daniel describes for us in beautiful detail:

*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.  
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.*

Christ's victory over death is wonderful news for those of us who struck him. We are rescued from that sense of shame and defeat.

Look at 1 Corinthians 15:54:

*When the perishable puts on the imperishable, and the mortal puts on immortality, then shall come to pass the saying that is written: "Death is swallowed up in victory."*

Jesus never sinned. He stood falsely accused. The accusation of blasphemy was not for him - it was for us. The words that our Lord spoke were the truest words ever uttered on Earth. He was the Christ... the Messiah. He was the son of the Living God. He takes our blasphemous sins and offers us his sinlessness.

I am sure that many of you had days when you felt like your were on trial and the guilt of your sin left you feeling hopeless and defeated. Perhaps the most beautiful thing about these versus in Matthew is that we can see that we are not alone. Jesus didn't simply die for your sins; he felt the weight of your guilt. If you are feeling crushed by your sin, I want you to know that you are not alone. You have a savior who loved you enough to come to Earth and take that weight on himself. All he asks is that you believe the truth he declared that day. Victory is his and defeat is no more. So...

*Will you hear and accept the Truth?*

*Will you submit to the Godhead?*

*Will you live a life of victory in the shadow of the cross?*

*Let's pray.*