

7

Jesus' Trials

Matthew 26:57—27:31;

Mark 14:53—15:20; Luke 22:54—23:25;

John 18:12—19:16

“For many were giving false testimony against Him, but their testimony was not consistent” (Mark 14:56).

The crucifixion of Christ is so horrible that we tend to overlook or forget other shameless events leading up to it. The trials that Jesus went through were unfair from beginning to end! Jesus was treated so grossly and wickedly that Satan must have blushed! Not even Satan can control sin!

This time of His trials has to be the lowest point in all history. Judas betrayed, Peter denied, ten apostles ran for cover, four puppet rulers—Annas, Caiaphas, Pilate, and Herod—judged the “Judge,” and the deeply respected Sanhedrin became a lynch mob. The holiest city (Jerusalem) and the city of law (Rome) united to produce the greatest legal farce in history.

The only one in control was Jesus (John 10:17, 18; 19:10, 11). He had deliberately chosen to go to Jerusalem (Luke 9:51). His “hour” had come (John 17). He forced His en-

emies to take action by both provoking and facilitating His own arrest. Can we see this?

Today Christ has been reduced to a dear, soft, nice Jesus. No! He was a “man among men,” not a glorified weakling. He took on Satan, Judaism, and the whole world—and won. He never retreated from anybody!

Judaism (Jerusalem) was morally and spiritually bankrupt. As we see man at his worst, we also see God in His perfection. This is the glory of grace. Jesus did not sneak into town or hide in a closet. He publicly cleansed the temple (Matthew 21:12, 13; Mark 11:15–17; Luke 19:45, 46). The Jews were so steeped in corruption that they had turned the temple into a cattle auction. Jesus, alone, stopped that. What courage! What strength! Within the city of Jerusalem, He taught “judgment parables.” There is no neutrality with Jesus—you either accept Him or put Him on a cross! His enemies never said, “Rebuke Him.” They said, “Kill Him!”

The religious leaders were “scared out of their wits” by Jesus! His miracles could not be dismissed. Jerusalem was hostile and unsympathetic to the truth about Jesus. Religious leaders had no control over Him or His ministry.

No one wanted a riot during the Passover. If the Jews had intended to kill Jesus during the feast, they would have made plans and not waited until Thursday night to implement them. This is where Judas entered the scene. Having been with Jesus and listened to His teachings in Jerusalem, he had heard Jesus announce His death. Judas thought that he would make merchandise out of it.

In one sense, Jesus’ announcement of His approaching death was good news to His enemies, but the uncertainty that it created during the feast caused them to panic. They had no fear of the fishermen and others who

were His disciples, but they did not underestimate Jesus. The Pharisees said, "Look, the world has gone after Him" (John 12:19b). In the eyes of the unbelieving Jews, the resurrection of Lazarus necessitated the death of Christ (John 11). They were afraid that Jesus would convince the whole world!

Such truth as Jesus had given and such miracles as He had worked should terrify sinners! God gave the people of Jerusalem every opportunity to repent, but they refused the evidence. Because of Jesus, the religious leaders were going to lose not only their religious positions, but also their source of monetary gain (John 11:47, 48). No wonder Caiaphas announced that Jesus must die (John 11:49, 50)! "But the Jews were looking for a Messiah," you may say. Yes and no. They talked about it; they exploited it . . . but the last thing the religious leaders wanted was the kind of Messiah that God sent. They knew He would put them "out of business." Pride, with power, does damnable things. Men with pride cannot give up power. They can only reject truth, fight truth, and try to destroy truth. The Jews, out of control, branded Jesus as being "guilty." Pilate pronounced Him "not guilty" (John 18:38).

Among the most obvious irregularities in the trials of Jesus were breaches of the following protocols:

- No decision of guilt or innocence could be made before a trial began.
- Officials had no authority to make an arrest at night unless someone was caught in the act of a crime. Judges were not to be part of an arrest.
- Capital trials could not be held at night.
- A criminal could not be acquitted in one day; a guilty verdict also demanded a night to think about it.

- Crucifixion was unknown to Jewish law.
- The judges were to be defenders as well as accusers.
- Hearsay evidence was inadmissible under Hebrew law.
- Circumstantial evidence was discredited; Hebrew law was based upon two or three witnesses.
- The youngest members of the Sanhedrin were to vote first.
- A member of the Sanhedrin was to be assigned to defend the accused.
- The Sanhedrin had no authority to originate charges . . . only to try them.
- Court sessions were forbidden on feast days and the eve of the Sabbath.
- The accused could not testify against himself.
- A high priest was not to rend his clothes.

Those who were the worst supposed themselves to be the best. It is terrifying to think how monstrous men in sin can be!

THE JEWISH TRIALS

Had it not been so contemptible, the arrest of Jesus would have been comical. The enemies of Jesus believed more in the power of Jesus than the apostles did. They sent a lynch mob (estimated at six hundred or more men) to arrest one man! Jesus, in plain view, had to help them to arrest Him.

Jesus was bounced back and forth like a Ping-Pong ball between the supreme judges. He was first taken to Annas. This high priest had been ordained for life, but his corruption had ousted him. Although he no longer had the title, he was still the man with power.

Annas sent Him to Caiaphas. This shows that Jesus was not on trial for religious reasons, but for the purposes of corrupt politics. Caiaphas, the son-in-law of Annas, was the high priest that year. Annas was powerful, feared, and hated. Caiaphas was but his “errand boy,” completely under his control.

Proud, haughty, and conceited beyond words, the Jewish leaders lost their composure. Barbarically, they spat on Jesus, slapped Him, punched Him, cursed Him, and taunted Him to prophesy blindfolded (Matthew 26:67, 68; Mark 14:65; Luke 22:63–65). We can endure curses and slaps maybe, but *spit*? Who can tolerate spit? How did God? Jesus prophesied spit (Mark 10:34; Luke 18:32). His prediction came true. Jewish leaders spat in His face, and Roman soldiers spat on Him (Matthew 26:67; 27:30; Mark 15:19). Disgusting! God’s grace can endure anything, including *spit*!

Peter warmed himself by the “devil’s fire” (see Mark 14:54; Luke 22:55; John 18:18, 25). In doing this, he placed himself closer to the enemy than to Christ. *Always guard where you are and with whom you are spending your time.*

In quick succession, Peter denied Jesus three times. Then the rooster crowed and Satan exulted. Jesus was being shuffled from trial to trial. As He was moved from Caiaphas to the Sanhedrin, He was taken near the court where Peter was. Jesus turned and looked at Peter, and the apostle’s heart melted. He went out and cried over what He had done (Luke 22:61, 62).

The supreme court of the Jews was once praised as the Great Sanhedrin. It was made up of seventy-one august members. Their illustrious position ended that day. Caiaphas, in desperation, forced Jesus to testify against Himself under oath (Matthew 26:62–64). Jesus not

only accepted their accusation, but He also gave them further evidence to use against Him: “Nevertheless I tell you, hereafter you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of Power, and coming on the clouds of heaven” (Matthew 26:64). With that, the Jews sent Him to Pilate!

The Jewish leaders were obviously behind the one question that Pilate asked Jesus: “Are You the King of the Jews?” If a charge had not already been made, how did Pilate know what to ask? This suggests that someone had contacted Pilate earlier that night. Who could have gained access to Pilate during the night? Probably, only the high priest, Caiaphas, could have done it. Again, how could the tormenting dream of Pilate’s wife make sense (Matthew 27:19)? This explains why the Jewish leaders were insulted when Pilate reopened the case. The Jews thought a deal had been made!

THE ROMAN TRIALS

Pontius Pilate hated the Jews, and they hated him. They were stuck with each other, and each would do anything to win an argument between them. With his record of past mistakes, Pilate had to be very careful. The Jews wanted blood; Pilate wanted to save his political position.

The Jews exchanged the charge of blasphemy for one of political treason. Pilate tried to avoid being part of this travesty, yet he could not. He wanted others to judge, and they refused. He repeatedly declared Jesus “not guilty.” In desperation, he sent Jesus to Herod.

Jesus did not acknowledge Herod’s request for a magic show. All Herod could do with Jesus was to send him back to Pilate. The only thing achieved by this process was that Pilate and Herod became friends (Luke 23:12).

Pilate marveled at the quiet composure of Jesus. Using Barabbas, he attempted to release Jesus as a favor for the Jews. They rejected it. They chose to free Barabbas, a common thug! People will always choose a Barabbas.

The Jews won yet lost. They declared, "We have no king but Caesar" (John 19:15). They renounced God for Caesar. They bowed to that which they hated, even shouting, "His blood be on us and on our children!" (Matthew 27:25).

Pilate had the "not guilty" Jesus crucified! He had washed his hands; Jesus had washed others' feet. What a difference!

Pilate yielded to the will of the Jews. This was the crime of crimes! Do not be prejudiced like the Jews, amused like Herod, or spineless like Pilate. The historian Eusebius¹ said that Pilate committed suicide. God wiped out Jerusalem (using Titus and the Roman army in A.D. 67–70). Do not mess with God!

*The cross . . .
there is no other way!*

¹Eusebius *Ecclesiastical History* 2.7.