
Christ Before Caiaphas

“Those who had seized Jesus led Him away to Caiaphas, the high priest, where the scribes and the elders were gathered together” (Matthew 26:57).

After Annas had finished with his examination of Jesus, he sent Him to Caiaphas, the acting high priest (John 18:24). “The house of the high priest” (Luke 22:54) was likely located near the hall of Annas. Caiaphas had summoned an assembly of the Sanhedrin. Some of the scribes and the elders had already gathered at his house and were ready to join with him in interrogating Jesus (Matthew 26:57).

A preliminary judgment about Jesus would be made at this early morning meeting, and the Sanhedrin would issue an official verdict at a full meeting later in the day. Following the announcement of the official verdict, Jesus would be sent to Pilate, the Roman governor, with a request that he concur with the judgment and put Jesus to death. In capital punishment cases, the Roman government required a civil trial to render the same verdict as the Jewish trial before the death sentence could be carried out.

Annas and Caiaphas, no doubt, had for some time utilized all of their executive powers to bring about the execution of Jesus. During His earthly ministry, hatred for Him had mounted among the Jews. Ever since Jesus had rebuked their merchandising at the temple (John 2:13–22), Annas and Caiaphas had surely inflamed and encouraged this hatred. At the pool of Bethesda, two years before His trials in Jerusalem, the Jews had sought to kill Jesus (John 5:18). A year before these trials, because of the intense animosity toward Him, Jesus had asked, “Why do you seek to kill Me?” (John 7:19b). On other occasions the Jews had sought to slay Him or seize Him (John 8:59; 10:31, 39).

Annas and Caiaphas must have been involved when the temple guard went out to arrest Him but came back empty-handed (John 7:32, 44). After the resurrection of Lazarus, Caiaphas had pointedly urged the Sanhedrin to recognize that Jesus must die (John 11:47–53). The evidence indicates that Caiaphas had been working toward the elimination of Jesus for some time.

Finally, Caiaphas had Jesus before him for judgment, and this was exactly where he wanted Him. He was determined not to let Jesus escape his grasp, even if he had to fabricate a case against Him.

How Jesus reacted to Caiaphas’ interrogation gives us a picture of how He handled all His sufferings. Peter said that we must look closely at the actions and attitudes of Jesus so that we may know how to react to our own sufferings. He said that Christ, in His trials and crucifixion, left us “an example” and that we should “follow in His steps” (1 Peter 2:21). His words exhort us to respond to our trials in the same way Jesus responded to His. Let us ask, then, “What kind of spirit and composure did Jesus manifest toward this mockery of a trial that took place under Caiaphas?”

Amazingly, throughout this difficult ordeal, Jesus committed no sin. He did not react to those who were sinning against Him by sinning against them. He put Himself in the hands of God, who judges righteously. Jesus was well aware that He had been pre-judged. He knew that His enemies had condemned Him without evidence and a fair trial would be impossible. However, He was committed to allowing God

to determine the outcome.

Jesus had neither witnesses to speak in His behalf nor a defense lawyer to represent Him. However, as the Son of God, He could have defeated their evil intentions with one word. In a moment of time, He could have dispersed this ungodly gathering, but He chose to let them do what they had chosen to do. At times, it is appropriate to offer a personal defense, as was illustrated by Paul (Acts 22; 23; 26); but Jesus did not see this hearing as such a time.

In the midst of Caiaphas' contrived interrogation, Jesus did not sin. He did not descend to the level of His interrogators or match their acid words.

Furthermore, throughout it all, no deceit was ever found in His mouth. He did not try to answer the flimsy charges of these unreasonable men by stretching the truth or by building a case out of lies. He stood silently before them and allowed His silence to rebuke their misconduct and misplaced zeal.

The first challenge of Annas and Caiaphas was to find evidence that would convict Him. They had already determined that He should be put to death, but they needed evidence to support their judgment. They would have to find some way to confirm their biased verdict. They had their staff searching frantically for anything that could be said against Jesus. Finding nothing that they could use against Him, they turned to manufactured evidence. They brought in false witnesses. After being sworn in, these minions of the devil began to accuse our Savior. Jesus did not argue with them. He did not need to. The witnesses could not agree. They nullified their own testimony by their inconsistencies and inaccuracies.

Matthew reported,

Now the chief priests and the whole Council kept trying to obtain false testimony against Jesus, so that they might put Him to death. They did not find any, even though many false witnesses came forward. But later on two came forward, and said, "This man stated, 'I am able to destroy the temple of God and to rebuild it in three days.'" The high priest stood up and said to Him, "Do You not answer? What is it that these men are testifying against You?" But Jesus kept silent (Matthew 26:59-63a).

The priests and Council members misconstrued what Jesus had said. They misrepre-

sented the facts by lifting His words out of their context and presenting them as a threat against their temple, when Jesus had actually intended to give a figurative picture of His resurrection.

Jesus did not try to correct these foolish witnesses. He calmly watched as they scrambled to put together a believable case. Their frantic efforts resulted in confusion and a jumbled, makeshift argument for the prosecution that in no way appeared to pursue justice. Laws were broken, the rights of the accused were ignored, and the court sought to convict an innocent man with false evidence. Through it all, Jesus respectfully committed to God His mistreatment at the hands of lawless men.

Moreover, when He was reviled, He did not revile in return. When He was put under oath, He answered with dignity and truth. The text says,

And the high priest said to Him, "I adjure You by the living God, that You tell us whether You are the Christ, the Son of God." Jesus said to him, "You have said it yourself; 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 26:63b, 64).

Jesus chose this moment as the moment to reveal to the world who He was. He had kept the truth of His deity out of public mention until this key juncture in the trial before Caiaphas. When Caiaphas asked Him under an oath before God to state the truth about His identity, He did. He not only affirmed His deity, but He also added a prophecy that would, in time, prove the truthfulness of what He had said.

He remained faithful to His intention to commit His circumstances to God, even when the high priest resorted to using agitated gestures and accusations. When the high priest saw that he had no evidence, he desperately made a different accusation. Engaging in the worst kind of blasphemy himself, he charged Jesus, the Son of God, of blaspheming against His Father! The text says,

Then the high priest tore his robes and said, "He has blasphemed! What further need do we have of witnesses? Behold, you have now heard the blasphemy; what do you think?" They answered, "He deserves death!" (Matthew 26:65, 66).

How did Jesus respond to all of this? Did

He revile His accusers because they had reviled Him? Did He curse them because they had condemned Him! No, He did none of these things. He stood before them as the epitome of righteousness. When He was charged with the worst imaginable sin, He said nothing! They laughed at the truest words that have ever been spoken, the divine truth that Jesus had been sent from heaven. Jesus humbly permitted them to have their way with His words and with Him.

While He was suffering, He uttered no threats. After Caiaphas' tirade over Jesus' testimony that He was the Christ, those who held Him in custody began to mock and brutalize Him. Once again, we see the magnificent personality of Jesus. He allowed wicked religious leaders and cruel, heartless soldiers to beat Him in an unmistakable attempt to humiliate Him. While being spat upon and slapped, our Savior com-

mitted Himself to the care of God. Matthew said, "They spat in His face and beat Him with their fists; and others slapped Him, and said, 'Prophesy to us, You Christ; who is the one who hit You?'" (Matthew 26:67). He did not recoil or retaliate. He did not answer fist for a fist or insult for an insult. He chose God to be His Rock and Shelter in the midst of this storm.

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Jesus, as the Lamb of God, suffered silently, obediently, and reverently. He endured with confidence and majesty as He faithfully fulfilled Isaiah's prophetic picture: "He was oppressed and He was afflicted, yet He did not open His mouth; like a lamb that is led to slaughter, and like a sheep that is silent before its shearers, so He did not open His mouth" (Isaiah 53:7).