

Mark 14:53-65

⁵³ And they led Jesus away to the high priest; and with him were assembled all the chief priests, the elders, and the scribes. ⁵⁴ But Peter followed Him at a distance, right into the courtyard of the high priest. And he sat with the servants and warmed himself at the fire. ⁵⁵ Now the chief priests and all the council sought testimony against Jesus to put Him to death, but found none. ⁵⁶ For many bore false witness against Him, but their testimonies did not agree. ⁵⁷ Then some rose up and bore false witness against Him, saying, ⁵⁸ "We heard Him say, 'I will destroy this temple made with hands, and within three days I will build another made without hands.' " ⁵⁹ But not even then did their testimony agree. ⁶⁰ And the high priest stood up in the midst and asked Jesus, saying, "Do You answer nothing? What *is it* these men testify against You?" ⁶¹ But He kept silent and answered nothing. Again the high priest asked Him, saying to Him, "Are You the Christ, the Son of the Blessed?" ⁶² Jesus said, "I am. And you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Power, and coming with the clouds of heaven." ⁶³ Then the high priest tore his clothes and said, "What further need do we have of witnesses? ⁶⁴ You have heard the blasphemy! What do you think?" And they all condemned Him to be deserving of death. ⁶⁵ Then some began to spit on Him, and to blindfold Him, and to beat Him, and to say to Him, "Prophecy!" And the officers struck Him with the palms of their hands.

We have seen Christ's betrayal and arrest. Now we have come to Christ's trial, if you can call it that. We will see the biggest miscarriage of justice in human history. We are about to see the only person who has never sinned condemned to death. Truth is truly stranger than fiction.

Now, as usually the case, much is shown to us in other gospels that is not explained by Mark. I will borrow from One Perfect Life from John MacArthur again. He put all the passages together in one narrative.

182. Jesus' Trial Before Annas; Peter's First Denial

Matt. 26:58, 69–70; Mark 14:54, 66–68; Luke 22:54–57; John 18:13–24

^{LK} ^aHaving arrested Him, ^{JN} they led Him away to ^bAnnas first, for he was the father-in-law of Caiaphas who was high priest that year. Now it was Caiaphas who advised the Jews that it was expedient that one man should die for the people.

And ^cSimon Peter followed Jesus ^{MT} at a distance to the high priest's courtyard, ^{JN} and so *did* another disciple. Now that disciple was ^dknown to the high priest, and went with Jesus into the courtyard of the high priest. But Peter stood the door outside. Then the other disciple, who was known to the high priest, went out and spoke to her who kept the door, and brought Peter in. ^{MT} And he went in and sat with the servants to see the end.

^{LK} When they had kindled a fire in the midst of the courtyard and sat down together, Peter sat among them. ^{JN} The servants and officers who had made a fire of coals stood there, for it was cold, and they warmed themselves. And ^cPeter stood with them and warmed himself.

183. Jesus' Trial Before Caiaphas

Matt. 26:57, 59–68; Mark 14:53, 55–65

^{MT} Those who had laid hold of Jesus led *Him* away to ^aCaiaphas the high priest, where ^{MK} all the chief priests, the elders, and the scribes ^{MT} were assembled. ^{MK} Now the chief priests and all ^bthe council sought ^{MT} false testimony against Jesus to put Him to death, but found none. Even though many false witnesses came forward, ^cthey found none. ^{MK} For ^dmany bore false witness against Him, but their testimonies ^edid not agree.

^{MT} But at last two ^ffalse witnesses came forward ^{MK} and bore false witness against Him, saying, "We heard Him say, 'I will ^gdestroy this temple ^{MT} of God ^{MK} made with hands, and within three days I will build another made without hands.'" But not even then did their testimony agree. And ^hthe high priest stood up in the midst and asked Jesus, saying, "Do You answer nothing? What *is it* these men testify against You?" ^{MT} But Jesus ⁱkept silent ^{MK} and answered nothing.

^{MT} And the high priest answered and said to Him, "I put You ^junder oath by the living God: Tell us, ^{MK} are You the ^kChrist, the Son of the ^lBlessed?" ^{MT} Jesus said to him, "*It is as* you said. ^{MK} ^mI am. ^{MT} Nevertheless, I say to you, hereafter you will see ⁿthe Son of Man sitting at the ^oright hand of the Power, and coming on the ^pclouds of heaven."

Then ^qthe high priest ^rtore his clothes, saying, ^{MK} "What ^sfurther need do we have of witnesses? You have heard the ^tblasphemy ^{MT} He has spoken! ^{MK} What do you think?" ^{MT} They ^{MK} all condemned Him ^{MT} and said, "He is deserving of death." ^{MK} Then some began to ^uspit ^{MT} in His face ^{MK} and to blindfold Him, and to beat Him; ^{MT} and ^{MK} the officers ^{MT} struck *Him* with the palms of their hands, saying, ^v"Prophecy to us, Christ! Who is the one who struck You?"

To understand what is happening here we must look at some history. I am borrowing very heavily, sometimes word for word, from John MacArthur's commentary.

Deuteronomy 16:18-20

¹⁸ "You shall appoint judges and officers in all your gates, which the LORD your God gives you, according to your tribes, and they shall judge the people with just judgment. ¹⁹ You shall not pervert justice; you shall not show partiality, nor take a bribe, for a bribe blinds the eyes of the wise and twists the words of the righteous. ²⁰ You shall follow what is altogether just, that you may live and inherit the land which the LORD your God is giving you.

The Jewish people really took this to heart. They had one of the better justice systems in the world.

Every town that held 120 men who were heads of households could have a council called a Sanhedrin. The Sanhedrin would provide legal governance to the community it represented. It was made up of 23 men, usually many of the same men who were in leadership of the local synagogue. Since 23 is an odd number, no votes could be ties.

The supreme court of Israel was in Jerusalem. It met daily in the temple except on Sabbaths and holidays. This supreme court was also called the Great Sanhedrin. It was made up of 71 members, including the high priest. The high priest presided over the council. The rest of the members were made up of chief priests, elders and scribes. This group had several names. They were also called the Council of Elders and the Senate of the sons of Israel.

This group was the most powerful legislative and judicial body. They wrote laws and enforced them.

Now, do you remember at the beginning of our study what we learned about Annas and Ciaphas?

This ruling group of Jews had become very corrupt in Jesus's day. Rome was very careful who they picked to allow to oversee this group. They picked someone who would serve their interests. As a result, the person in the position of high priest had the power of Rome at their disposal if they played their cards right. Now Annas was the real powerhouse of this group. While he was no longer the high priest, he may as well have been. He called the shots while his son in law actually sat in the seat. Ciaphas was Annas's son in law.

Now, back to the legal system. A person who was accused of a crime had several protections to avoid being unjustly convicted of a crime. The trial had to be a **public trial** and had to be **held in daylight**. There had to be ample chance for the accused to make a defense. And all charges would be dropped that were not supported by at least two witnesses.

Perjury is a very big deal. The law applied the prescription in Duet 19:16-21.

Deuteronomy 19:16-21

¹⁶ **If a false witness rises against any man to testify against him of wrongdoing,**

¹⁷ **then both men in the controversy shall stand before the LORD, before the priests and the judges who serve in those days. ¹⁸ And the judges shall make careful inquiry, and indeed, *if the witness is a false witness, who has testified falsely against his brother,* ¹⁹ then you shall do to him as he thought to have done to his brother; so you shall put away the evil from among you. ²⁰ And those who remain shall hear and fear, and hereafter they shall not again commit such evil among you. ²¹ Your eye shall not pity: life *shall be* for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot.**

Do you get the implications of this? **Any false witness** known to **witness falsely** ends up with the penalty for the crime he was lying about. So any false witnesses in Christ's trial should have been immediately charged with the crime of blasphemy, which is the charge they were trying to bring upon Christ. And they should have been put to death.

Also the law required, when enacting the death penalty, that the witnesses cast the first stones. They had to own the part they were playing in the death of this man or woman.

Also Jewish law required a full day to elapse between the verdict and the death sentence. During that time the court members were to fast and seriously think about what they were doing. This also allowed for further testimony if any was available. So trials were never held on a day before a feast.

So you can see that this system of law was very good with great concern for justice. But the problem with good rules is that they are just rules. They cannot make people submit to them or live by them.

So as we are going through our text we will keep an eye on how often and how knowingly the leadership was simply doing illegal things. These actions were not just immoral. They were also flagrantly illegal. It is a possibility that a person could have been ignorant about who Christ really was. But they would not have been ignorant of the laws they were flagrantly violating in the lynching of Christ. Now Jesus' trial had two stages with multiple facets.

The first showed Christ at the hands of the Jewish leaders. First Christ appeared before Annas. Then Christ appeared before Ciaphas and the 71 Sanhedrin. And then again before the Sanhedrin after daylight.

Then Christ was sent to the Gentile leaders. First Christ stood before Pilate, then Herod Antipas, and then Pilate again.

It is difficult to get all this when reading a single Gospel passage. You need to read them all together to get the whole story. Some of the things appear to be

conflicts. But they don't need to be. Some writers just didn't bother to focus on some facts.

OK first Christ was taken to Annas. Why? Because Annas was the power person. There is nothing legal about this. There is nothing judicial about this. It is just evil. It is political. It is the first step in this spiraling injustice.

Not much is told to us about what happened before Annas. But we are told what happens with Peter. Two disciples went inside an area to be closer to Christ. One of the disciples was known by the high priest and was allowed inside. Peter went with Him.

John gives us more details of what happened with Annas.

John 18:19-24

¹⁹ The high priest then asked Jesus about His disciples and His doctrine. ²⁰ Jesus answered him, "I spoke openly to the world. I always taught in synagogues and in the temple, where the Jews always meet, and in secret I have said nothing. ²¹ Why do you ask Me? Ask those who have heard Me what I said to them. Indeed they know what I said." ²² And when He had said these things, one of the officers who stood by struck Jesus with the palm of his hand, saying, "Do You answer the high priest like that?" ²³ Jesus answered him, "If I have spoken evil, bear witness of the evil; but if well, why do you strike Me?" ²⁴ Then Annas sent Him bound to Caiaphas the high priest.

Annas was clearly trying to find something to charge Jesus with, or some legal plan of attack whereby they could convict Him. Christ was blameless.

While Annas rarely did anything in the open or anything without evil purposes, Christ was just the opposite. He did His teaching in the open. Annas already knew what Christ had been teaching. After all, there were **spies** at many of Jesus's teaching sessions. Annas had read the notes. So Jesus is calling Annas on his hypocrisy.

Notice that Jesus does not answer Annas's question. He does not owe this hypocrite an answer in this display of hypocrisy. There are times when it is appropriate to follow Christ's example. There are many places where we are not obligated to disclose truth when truth is not valued.

²² And when He had said these things, one of the officers who stood by struck Jesus with the palm of his hand, saying, "Do You answer the high priest like that?"

I would not want to be this lackey on judgment day. He used force to enforce submission to an evil system that is supposed to represent God on the Son of God. That is not going to set well. And look at what he says. Do you answer the high priest like that? Well no. Technically Anna is just pretending to be a high priest. Which probably is a stoning offense in itself.

I love Christ's response. He is essentially saying **"deal with the truth of my statement. Don't just respond with force because you don't like what I said. Was what I said true or false? That is the only issue here. The fact that I won't answer this human's statement is of no concern."**

Annas could see he wasn't getting anywhere so he sends Jesus to Caiaphas, the official liars club. This is where the devilish work of convicting Christ can begin.

Mark 14:53

⁵³ **And they led Jesus away to the high priest; and with him were assembled all the chief priests, the elders, and the scribes.**

Ok, and when was this? It was in the middle of the night.

What do we know about a trial in the middle of the night? It is completely illegal. It is not allowed by Jewish law. At this point someone should have stood up and said, no! We aren't doing this. We will not violate the law that **honors what God says** for any reason.

Sometimes we need to be that voice. When we see something being done wrong and without regard for what God has said, we must speak up. And often that is going to cost us things that are dear to us. But we must do it anyway.

Jesus is in front of the Sanhedrin, or at least part of it. It is an illegal assembly.

They are working at fast tracking Christ to crucifixion.

⁵⁴ **But Peter followed Him at a distance, right into the courtyard of the high priest. And he sat with the servants and warmed himself at the fire.**

Here is Peter. He may be alone or he may be with that other disciple that had access into Annas's courtyard earlier. There is something to consider here. Peter seems to have gone farther than any of the disciples in sticking with Christ. He put himself more at risk. He showed greater loyalty. And what is going to happen as a result? Greater failure. We might say, that isn't fair. Shouldn't greater faithfulness be rewarded in a more positive way? Well, that isn't how it works. God's favorites often seem to be the ones who learn the hardest lessons and whose sins are most exposed. God's training program seems more extreme for these people. Peter followed Christ further and closer than anyone else, taking more risk. But it will be Peter's denial of Christ that will be remembered by most folks. Peter, in his flesh went further than most. But flesh is flesh. And Peter must learn that he cannot trust it.

Do you ever feel like you are doing more than a lot of people in ministry or in service to Christ? But they seem to look wonderful and everything we do wrong comes out into the open for everyone to see? Our mistakes or failures need constantly corrected or forgiven. But others seem to be able to deal with their stuff in private. Well, maybe you are in the training school of Peter. Maybe God has some very special work for you to do.

⁵⁵ Now the chief priests and all the council sought testimony against Jesus to put Him to death, but found none. ⁵⁶ For many bore false witness against Him, but their testimonies did not agree. ⁵⁷ Then some rose up and bore false witness against Him, saying, ⁵⁸ "We heard Him say, 'I will destroy this temple made with hands, and within three days I will build another made without hands.'" ⁵⁹ But not even then did their testimony agree.

Look at the focus here. Normally someone brought charges against someone to the Sanhedrin. Then the Sanhedrin responded as the arm of justice. But that is not the role the Sanhedrin is playing here. The Sanhedrin was not legally allowed to initiate charges. But that is what they are doing here. The Sanhedrin has brought a man in who they assume to be guilty. In fact, He is allowed nothing other than **to be guilty**. And they will continue to pursue convicting Him until they accomplish it. This too was illegal. That was never the way this court should have acted. But this court was no longer a representation of the justice of God. It was being run by the father of lies.

The court has a guilty verdict to give, now they just have to dig up the evidence. No participants in this event could even pretend to be looking for justice at this point. Everyone in this event was complicit in the evil. They all knew they were acting wrongly.

Then look at the witnesses. They bore false witness. Essentially all of them contradicted each other's stories. You can imagine the leaders looking at each other and thinking, it is true. It is so hard to find good help. These guys couldn't even lie well.

What do we know about what should happen to false witnesses? They should have been convicted of perjury and given the penalty for blasphemy. This is something that God gets angry about. That is what Caiaphas should have torn his robe over. What does happen to them? Nothing. Again, there is no party in this event who is innocent or ignorant. Every single one of them bears the guilt of being part of this lynching. Every one of them is aware of their guilt.

Now what testimony did they bring?

⁵⁷ Then some rose up and bore false witness against Him, saying, ⁵⁸ "We heard Him say, 'I will destroy this temple made with hands, and within three days I will build another made without hands.'" ⁵⁹ But not even then did their testimony agree.

This is what Christ actually said.

John 2:19-21

¹⁹ Jesus answered and said to them, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up." ²⁰ Then the Jews said, "It has taken forty-six years to build this temple, and will You raise it up in three days?" ²¹ But He was speaking of the temple of His body.

It would be very difficult to hang Christ on that statement. And the false witnesses were embellishing what Christ said to make it more inflammatory. They wanted to make it sound like Christ was going to lay siege to the actual temple building and destroy it. This would be a crime Rome would not be pleased about. But in their embellishments of the truth they couldn't agree with each other what Christ actually said.

We can see now why Christ was so wise in using parables and speaking in figurative ways. He was much harder to hang legally with what He said.

⁶⁰ **And the high priest stood up in the midst and asked Jesus, saying, "Do You answer nothing? What *is it* these men testify against You?"**

Now Caiaphas, who is probably used to having his way by force and extortion reaches the boiling level. Caiaphas has probably dealt with a lot of powerless Jewish people who had to kowtow to Caiaphas's brutal tactics if they were to eat and to be able to worship. So like a spoiled kid Caiaphas stands up and asks Christ a question.

Essentially Caiaphas is saying, "so **what about** these men are saying about you? What about your destroying the temple and in three days rising it up again?"

⁶¹ **But He kept silent and answered nothing. Again the high priest asked Him, saying to Him, "Are You the Christ, the Son of the Blessed?"**

Jesus was not going to give this pretense of a legal trial legitimacy by answering the questions asked of Him to this point. He kept silent. He was innocent. He had done nothing wrong. He did not need to respond.

The Son of the Blessed was the Jews' way of saying Son of God. They tried to not use the name of God.

Actually we learn in other Gospels the High Priest said I put you under oath by the living God. Tell us. **Are You the Christ, the Son of the Blessed?**

By answering this question Jesus accepted the oath. Christ evidently accepted it as a legitimate question for which He would give an answer.

⁶² **Jesus said, "I am. And you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Power, and coming with the clouds of heaven."**

When Jesus said I am, this would have been recognized as a reference to when God said I am that I am.

The words "Son of Man" were a well known reference to the Messiah from Daniel 7:13-14

The word Power was known as a title for God in Acts 2:33 and 7:55

Jesus knew exactly what He was doing. He was claiming Deity and He knew this would cost Him His life. We see again that His life was not taken from Him. He gave it up. He would not have had to say anything. But He said this because it was time for his condemnation under this unjust religious system and time to die at the hands of the Romans.

⁶³ Then the high priest tore his clothes and said, "What further need do we have of witnesses?"

Here is the height of hypocrisy. The high priest tore his clothes. This is normally done when someone has great grief. The high priest was not allowed to express Himself this way except in the face of blasphemy.

We have already seen what regard Ciaphas had toward God. He shows no respect for God's law in this trial. He knows full well He is spitting in God's face with every action of his position of authority. He hates God and could care less about true spirituality. But as religion often does, he shows great indignation, great **play acting** about the things of God, he rips his robe over his concern that Christ has claimed He is part of the Godhead. If this trial had any sincerity in it at all one might have a shred of compassion. But it has none. This whole trial is nothing but a sham. Annas had Christ's death in mind as soon as Christ stopped the profit machine at the temple courts. Christ sealed His doom when he interfered with the money machine of Annas and his cronies. Ciaphas knows which side his bread is buttered on. And He is going to carry out Annas's wishes. Lest we have any sympathy on these men, we need to realize every one of them knew they were violating God's law by everything they did to Christ. They knew better. Every one of them. They knew that they were responsible to carry out these legal proceedings legally. They had no right to do what they did. But they did it anyway.

One application we can make from today is the danger of assumptions. The stronger our unchecked, unverified assumptions are, the greater danger our thinking is in. And it will lead to harm to ourselves and others.

These leaders assumed that Jesus was wrong, He was evil, He was of the devil. But they never allowed their assumptions to be checked. They never really investigated the truth. As a result they carried out their plans to convict the Son of God. And all the while they probably thought they were doing something good for the country.

I had a conversation with a believer the other day who was challenging some of my doctrine. I wanted to be angry and blow him off. It was a very real temptation. He was attacking my assumptions. The more I thought about it, the more I realized that to test what he was saying would take a lot of work. And if I am wrong it will mean a lot of change. At the same time I realized that I owe it to truth to re-check my assumptions. I need to make sure they line up with scripture. Truth is too important for us to allow our assumptions to stand unchecked. The same is true for the reasons we do things. We assume we do many things for good reasons. Or we assume that things we do are ok to do. But have we checked those assumptions? Do we know the truth about why and what we do? If I was the devil and I was asking God for one tool to lead people astray I

would ask for this- **the ability to insert unchecked assumptions in people's minds**. If I could do that, the rest would come along quite nicely. It would even allow a bunch of so-called spiritual leaders to put the Son of God on trial and convict Him. What do we assume? Is it true?