

# Travesties of Justice: The Trials of Jesus Christ (Part 1)

Originally Preached on 4/3/22

Good morning. Today we will begin a 3-part sermon called “Travesties of Justice: The Trials of Jesus Christ”. We will conclude this extended message on Easter Sunday.

We will be examining the 6 trials that Jesus underwent between the time of His arrest in the Garden of Gethsemane and crucifixion at Calvary. In sum, this was a span of about 7-9 hours, mostly in the dark of night. We will look closely at related passages from all 4 gospels. The first 3 of these trials were led by the Jews and were religious in nature. The second 3 were led by the Romans or their officials and were secular in nature. All 6 of these trials were fraught with illegalities, inconsistencies, and bias and were “travesties of justice”.

To begin, let’s set the stage. On the evening of Passover some 2,000 years ago, Jesus gathered with the apostles in the Upper Room in Jerusalem to observe the Last Supper. During the meal, Judas Iscariot left the group to summon those who would take Jesus into custody. After they’d finished eating, Jesus and His disciples left the city and went out to the Garden of Gethsemane to pray. While they were there, Judas arrived leading a cohort of Roman soldiers and some Jewish officers. Jesus was bound and led away.

## I. THE TRIAL BEFORE ANNAS

(John 18:12-14, 19-23)

After His arrest, Jesus was taken immediately to the house of Annas. This would have taken place between midnight and 2:00 am. Annas was the father-in-law of Caiaphas, who was the high priest during the year of Jesus’ arrest. Annas had previously served as the high priest in Jerusalem for about 10 years from approximately 6-15 AD. Though he no longer *officially* held that position, he continued to have considerable influence upon the priestly clan and *unofficially* shared the title of high priest during the ministries of both John the Baptist and Jesus (some 10-15 later).

Annas questioned Jesus about His disciples and the content of His teaching. Jesus answered by stating that all of His teaching had been done publicly, in the synagogues and temple area where the Jews openly congregated. Nothing had been taught in secret. Jesus suggested that Annas talk to the many people who’d heard Him speak about the things He’d said. Taking offense to His response, one of Annas’ officers struck Jesus and said in essence, “How dare you talk to the high priest in this way!” Jesus was not rattled by being hit, and calmly replied, “If I am wrong, prove it.” After this brief exchange, Annas sent Jesus bound to Caiaphas.

This short interaction was somewhat like a preliminary investigation. I compare it to a suspect interrogation conducted by law-enforcement officers at the police station. The charges being made against Jesus were not stated at His arrest or even in this passage, yet He made it clear that there were many witnesses who could confirm His testimony.

## II. THE TRIAL BEFORE CAIAPHAS

(Matthew 26:57-68; Mark 14:53-65; Luke 22:54, 63-65; John 18:24)

Jesus was escorted by His captors to the house of Caiaphas, the Jewish high priest. This would have been sometime around 2:00 or 3:00 am. There He was questioned thoroughly by Caiaphas several and other chief priests, elders, and scribes. They tried to trap Him in a lie. After failing to do so, they began bringing false witnesses against Him. However, their testimonies were inconsistent. Finally, a pair of men came forward and accused Jesus of saying that He would destroy the temple and rebuild it in 3 days. Caiaphas offered Jesus a chance to rebut their testimony, but He remained silent.

Getting nowhere and becoming frustrated, Caiaphas asked Jesus directly, "Are you the Christ, the Son of God?". Jesus answered, "Yes, I am" and went on to describe how He would sit at the right hand of God and come again someday from heaven. Caiaphas tore his clothes (something the high priest was forbidden to do) and then charged Jesus with blasphemy for claiming to be God. He asked the Jewish religious leaders present what sentence Jesus deserved for His crime and they all answered "Death". Hearing this, Caiaphas decided to move forward with the trial at daybreak before the entire council of the Sanhedrin.

In the meantime, Jesus was held in custody for the remainder of the night. During these hours, He was cruelly mocked and beaten. The officials blindfolded Jesus, spat in His face, and repeatedly slapped Him. They laughingly provoked Jesus to prophesy and tell them who had hit Him.

As all of this was unfolding inside, Peter was waiting outside in the courtyard. He had followed Jesus at a distance to the high priest's house. He sat with several others warming himself by the fire. Throughout the night, a few of the slaves and bystanders identified Peter as one of Jesus's disciples. Peter fiercely denied their claims on 3 separate occasions. After his third denial, a rooster crowed just as Jesus had earlier foretold. The rooster crow also indicated that morning had come.

I compare this interaction to a grand jury trial. It was here that Caiaphas formally indicted Jesus with an offense - namely blasphemy. He also concluded that there was ample evidence to convict Jesus because He had incriminated Himself. Therefore, he chose to take the case against Jesus to court. Ironically, Caiaphas was charging Jesus for telling the truth - He was and is the Christ, God in the flesh!

## CONCLUSION

The first 2 trials of Jesus Christ took place during the dark of night, traditionally believed to be the night of Passover. Conducting a trial at night was against Jewish law, as was conducting any trial during the Passover celebration. This was to ensure that the proceedings were public and open to scrutiny. It would be like conducting a trial at 2:00am on Christmas Eve while absolutely nobody is paying attention.

Though Jesus mentioned that He had many witnesses who can testify to His teaching, He was never given an opportunity to call His own witnesses. In fact, He was not even given someone to speak in His defense. This too was a violation of Jewish law. The testimony of the false witnesses that were brought forward was so ridiculous that it should have been thrown out.

No formal charges were ever stated against Jesus until the end of the second trial. It was as if they were searching for a crime and a reason to indict Him. They hounded Jesus with questions until they were able to find something to charge Him with. Then they beat and mocked Him just for fun...

Next week we will continue with a look at Jesus' third and fourth trials.

# Travesties of Justice: The Trials of Jesus Christ (Part 2)

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It is wonderful to see everyone here this morning for worship. We are in the middle of a 3-part message titled "Travesties of Justice: The Trials of Jesus Christ". Today we will cover part 2 of this message, focusing on Jesus' 3rd and 4th trials. We will wrap this sermon up next week, on Easter Sunday.

As you may recall from last week's discussion, Jesus was arrested in the Garden of Gethsemane late at night, perhaps around midnight. He was taken first to Annas' house for a brief preliminary investigation. Afterwards He was ushered to the home of Caiaphas, the high priest. Many false witnesses were presented against Him and He was ultimately charged with blasphemy. Caiaphas scheduled a hearing before the full Sanhedrin to be held at daybreak. Jesus was kept in custody for the remainder of the night, during which time he was ruthlessly mocked and beaten.

## I. THE TRIAL BEFORE THE SANHEDRIN

(Matthew 27:1; Mark 15:1; Luke 22:66-71)

During the early morning hours, probably between 5:00-6:00am, the entire Council of the Sanhedrin was assembled in their chambers. The Sanhedrin was the Jewish supreme court, and was made up of 70 members (leading priests, scribes, and the like) along with the high priest. Several of these men had probably already been at Caiaphas' house for Jesus' 2nd trial. However, as morning broke, all of them gathered to conduct an official and binding proceeding.

Jesus was brought before the Sanhedrin and charged with blasphemy. The Council asked if He was the Christ, to which He replied, "You won't believe Me no matter what I tell you." He went on to say that they would not answer His questions, revealing that He had no real opportunity to defend Himself. Finally He repeated the same answer that He had given earlier to Caiaphas, saying that He was the Son of God and that He would be seated at the right hand of power. Hearing this, the Sanhedrin formally determined that Jesus was guilty of blasphemy and sentenced Him to death.

The Jews did not have the legal authority to impose capital punishment. Jesus had become so popular among the people that the Jewish officials feared taking matters into their own hands, as they would later do with the stoning of Stephen. An unsanctioned Jewish execution of Jesus might lead to an uprising against the priests and religious officials. Civil unrest among the Jewish people would be much less likely if the

sentence was enforced by the Romans. Thus, the Sanhedrin sent Jesus to Pilate to affirm the conviction and carry out the crucifixion.

## II. THE FIRST TRIAL BEFORE PILATE

(Matthew 27:1-2, 11-14; Mark 15:1-5; Luke 23:1-7; John 18:28-32, 33-38)

Still in the early morning, now around 6:30am or so, the Sanhedrin brought Jesus to Pilate. Pilate was the Roman governor of Judea from 26-36 AD. He had the legal authority to impose the death penalty, and had done so many times. Pilate lived in a residential palace known as the Praetorium, believed by historians to have been built by Herod the Great. It had a large courtyard where many people could congregate.

When they arrived, the Sanhedrin refused to enter the Praetorium so as not to defile themselves during the Passover. As such, Pilate came out to meet them. The Sanhedrin accused Jesus of misleading the nation with His teachings, forbidding them to pay Roman taxes, and calling Himself Christ the King. Pilate was not concerned with these accusations and advised them to judge Jesus for themselves and leave him out of it. The Jews persisted that Jesus had already been found to be deserving of death, but they lacked the authority to carry out the sentence.

Pilate had Jesus come with him into the Praetorium while the Sanhedrin waited outside so that he might question Him privately. Pilate asked Jesus if He was the King of the Jews. Jesus answered that He was, but that His kingdom was not of this world. Instead, He has come into this world to testify of the truth. Pilate reflectively questioned, "What is truth?" and determined that Jesus was not a threat to Rome or to Caesar. So he returned Jesus to the chief priests and crowd saying, "I find no grounds for charges in this case."

As Jesus stood silently, the Jews kept insisting that He was stirring up trouble with His rebellious teachings throughout Judea and Galilee. When Pilate learned that Jesus was from Galilee, he seized on the opportunity to rid himself of this nuisance. As a Galilean, Jesus belonged to Herod's jurisdiction. Since it was Passover at the time, Herod just happened to be in Jerusalem for the annual Jewish feast. Therefore, Pilate instructed the Sanhedrin to present Jesus and His case before Herod.

This brief interaction with Pilate is comparable in my mind to a legal appeal. The notable difference is this - in most cases, an appeal is made by the person who has been convicted in hopes of overturning the verdict. However, in this instance the appeal is being brought forward by the prosecution in order to enact a sentence that lacks legal standing.

## CONCLUSION

The third and fourth trials of Jesus Christ took place during the early morning hours, before the activities of the day had begun. Like the trials conducted at night, this too was illegal as the proceedings were supposed to be public. Again, Jesus was given no genuine opportunity to defend Himself and the heavily biased chief priests and scribes who judged Him would not even respond to His questions. They were certainly not a fair or impartial jury.

The sentencing of Jesus was inappropriate as well. The Jewish Sanhedrin decided that Jesus should be executed, yet they did not have the legal authority to enact the death penalty. In other words, the sentence they'd rendered against Jesus was not legally permissible - it was out of bounds, so to speak. This necessitated a new series of criminal proceedings in the Roman courts.

When Jesus was taken to Pilate, the charges being made against Him were changed. He had been just convicted by the Jews of blasphemy. That said, the Romans didn't care about Jewish religious issues. They weren't concerned in the slightest about someone claiming to be the God of the Jews. All the Romans cared about was power - the stability and security of the Roman Empire. Thus, the Jews accused Jesus of treason and sought to present Him as an insurrectionist who threatened Rome and Caesar with His rebellious teachings.

Next Sunday we will conclude this message with a look at Jesus' fifth and sixth trials.

# Travesties of Justice: The Trials of Jesus Christ (Part 3)

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Today is Easter, the day that we memorialize Jesus' resurrection from the dead. Scripture teaches that on the first day of the week, early in the morning, the women came to anoint His body. They arrived to find that the stone had been rolled away and the tomb was empty. An angel declared to them that Jesus was not there, but had risen!

The resurrection of Jesus Christ is the most significant occurrence in all of human history. On that day, the Son of God forever defeated death and the grave. Those who have placed their faith in Him as Lord and Savior share in this blessed hope. The same power that raised Jesus will someday raise believers as well, so that all of God's children may live together with Him eternally.

This morning we will conclude our study on the trials of Jesus. After His late-night arrest, Jesus was taken to the house of Annas for a brief preliminary investigation. From there He was sent to Caiaphas the high priest, who indicted Him of blasphemy and held Him in custody for the remainder of the night. In the early morning, Jesus was tried before the Sanhedrin, convicted, and sentenced to death. Fearful of executing Him themselves, the Jews then brought Jesus to the Roman governor Pilate. After questioning Him and finding no wrongdoing, Pilate sent Jesus on to Herod...

## I. THE TRIAL BEFORE HEROD

(Luke 23:6-12)

As most people were still at home getting ready for the day, probably sometime around 7:00am, Jesus appeared before Herod. Herod Antipas, who was the son of Herod the Great. He was recognized by Caesar as the tetrarch of Galilee and Perea from 4 BC-39 AD. Though Herod Antipas was Jewish by birth, he dutifully served the Romans as a provincial leader and trusted official.

Having heard about Jesus and His reputation throughout Galilee, Herod was excited to meet Him. Herod hoped that Jesus would perform a miracle for him. When they arrived the Jews passionately presented their charges against Jesus. However, when Herod questioned Him, Jesus just stood there silently. Disappointed that Jesus was not going to entertain him with signs and wonders, Herod and his soldiers mocked Him, dressed Him in a shiny robe, and sent Him back to Pilate.

Jesus' brief appearance before Herod Antipas was His fifth trial. It was a failed attempt by Pilate to change the venue of the case. Pilate did not want to deal with it himself, so he sought to use jurisdiction as a means of passing Jesus off to Herod. Unfortunately, Herod was not interested in trying Jesus either, but rather was hoping to see a magic show. Herod threw the case back to Pilate, setting up Jesus' sixth and final trial.

## II. THE SECOND TRIAL BEFORE PILATE

(Matthew 27:15-23; Mark 15:6-14; Luke 23:13-25; John 18:39-19:16)

After their brief interaction with Herod Antipas, the Jews returned to Pilate with Jesus. This would have been around 7:30am. As we've already learned, Pilate was the Roman governor of Judea. He had already questioned Jesus earlier that morning and found no reason to charge Him. Yet, the Sanhedrin was insistent that Jesus was a criminal deserving of death.

Pilate had a tradition of releasing one prisoner each year during the Passover celebration. He thought to himself that perhaps if he offered to release either Jesus or Barabbas to the Jews, given the alternative they'd most certainly choose to let Jesus go free. After all, Barabbas was a notorious and rebellious murderer. But the chief priests and elders stirred up the crowd and convinced them to choose Barabbas. Pilate's plan to release Jesus had failed and the Jews continued shouting, "Crucify Him!"

As all of this was happening, Pilate received a message from his wife. She said that she'd had a troubling dream during the night about Jesus. She warned her husband not to condemn Him. Her words added to Pilate's moral dilemma, as he'd already concluded that Jesus was an innocent man.

Pilate decided that if he had Jesus severely punished - but not executed - it might be enough to appease the Jews. Therefore, he ordered that Jesus be flogged (or scourged). Jesus was tied to a post and whipped repeatedly across the back. The whip used likely had sharp stones, barbed pieces of metal, or perhaps even hooks that would sink into and rip the flesh. Such a beating was brutal and grotesque. While Jewish law restricted a flogging to no more than 40 lashes, Jesus was flogged by the Romans. It is unknown how many lashes He received.

After the flogging was over, the Roman soldiers dressed Jesus in a purple robe and placed a crown of thorns on His head. They slapped Him in the face several times. Finally Pilate led Jesus out of the Praetorium and presented Him to the Jews once again. They were still not satisfied with the punishment, and continued to demand that Jesus be crucified. After another brief interaction with Him, Pilate concluded that the

Jewish mob was not going to be content until Jesus was executed. Therefore, Pilate washed his hands in front of the crowd and declared, "I am innocent of this Man's blood." Nevertheless, he turned Jesus over to be crucified.

Jesus' sixth and final trial was the most consequential. Ultimately Pilate acquiesced to the unruly demands of the Jews priests and scribes. He feared that they might riot and cause even greater damage to the city and, more importantly, to his own standing before Caesar. Though he knew Jesus was not guilty of any crime and had the authority to release Him, Pilate lacked the personal strength and moral fortitude to do so. He did not stand up to the mob, but rather surrendered to them.

## CONCLUSION

Like those that had taken place before, Jesus' fifth and sixth trials were travesties of justice. His appearance before Herod didn't even resemble a legal proceeding. Imagine a judge merely wanting to be entertained by the person being accused! Then Pilate, who had already determined that Jesus was innocent, engaged in a series of pathetic attempts to placate His accusers. Is this how a criminal court is supposed to operate? In fact, Jesus was never formally convicted of any crime against Rome, yet He was still given over to be crucified.

The trials that Jesus endured were a complete joke - a total sham. Still, He submitted to their rulings despite the repeated illegalities, injustices, and bias. After His case had been decided, Jesus was led away to Golgotha where He was crucified between 2 thieves. His execution was the work of both the Romans and Jews. Jesus was nailed to the cross around 9:00am that morning and died 6 hours later at about 3:00pm in the afternoon. His body was taken down and laid in a tomb that night just before sunset. The Sabbath day passed by silently, but early the next morning...