

## Jesus before His Accusers

Matthew 26: 57-68

Our text today immediately follows the agonizing events Jesus experienced in the Garden of Gethsemane. There He prayed, being in an agony regarding what was soon to come, and yet He was willing to submit to the Father's will. As Jesus finished praying, Judas, one of the twelve, led a band of men to arrest Jesus and transfer Him to the home of the high priest to stand trial.

During the proceedings of this mock trial, Jesus would be falsely accused and condemned to death by those He came to save. He would be denied and rejected of the Jewish elite, the ranking religious council. Unfortunately, the attitudes present that faithful night remain among many today. Let's take a few moments to consider the incidents recorded in the text as we think on: [Jesus before His Accusers](#).

**I. The Prelude to the Trial** (57-60a) – Here Matthew describes the events that happened immediately prior to the trial of Jesus before the Sanhedrin. Consider:

**A. The Assembly** (57) – [And they that had laid hold on Jesus led him away to Caiaphas the high priest, where the scribes and the elders were assembled](#). This was not a gathering of insignificant men with little influence who brought accusation against Jesus. These were the religious elite; the chief priest was there along with the elders and scribes. The Sanhedrin was comprised of 70 men plus the high priest. We don't have a list of specific names, but these men were held in high regard by the people and their decisions held great influence among the Jews. Those who should've known the Scriptures and recognized Jesus as the Christ have gathered to cast their voices against Him.

**B. The Anxiety** (58) – [But Peter followed him afar off unto the high priest's palace, and went in, and sat with the servants, to see the end](#). Peter had promised the Lord to abide faithful with Him though all others would forsake Him. Peter even assured Jesus that he was willing to die for Him if necessary, but he never intended to forsake Him. Following the arrest of Jesus, fear and doubt gripped the heart of Peter. He was filled with anxiety and followed the procession toward the trial from a distance. He was curious about what would happen to Jesus, and yet he was afraid to be counted with Him on that faithful night.

- We tend to be critical of Peter, but we too have stumbled and fallen at times. No doubt we too have denied the Lord as well. Maybe not vocally or publicly, but inwardly we deny Him through disobedience and willful sin.

**C. The Conspiracy** (59-60a) – Now the chief priests, and elders, and all the council, sought false witness against Jesus, to put him to death; <sup>[60a]</sup> But found none: yea, though many false witnesses came, yet found they none. These men had not met by coincidence. This meeting had been arranged with the intent of finding Jesus guilty of crimes worthy of death and condemning Him. We know they had conspired with Judas to betray Jesus, but this meeting had been planned for some time. **John 18:14** – Now Caiaphas was he, which gave counsel to the Jews, that it was expedient that one man should die for the people. Jesus was hated by the majority of the Sanhedrin and they conspired against Him in order to condemn Him. They resorted to seeking out false witnesses, anyone willing to make accusation against Jesus, so they might call for His execution.

- Clearly, they were determined to present evidence that would condemn Jesus to death, even if it had to be fabricated. They knew He had committed nothing worthy of death, but they were willing to present blatant lies if necessary. These men would not rest until the council consented to the death of Jesus. They were not interested in truth.

**II. The Proceedings of the Trial** (60b-64) – Matthew provided details regarding the proceedings of the mock trial as Jesus stood before His accusers. Consider:

**A. The Accusation** (60b-61) – At the last came two false witnesses, <sup>[61]</sup> And said, This fellow said, I am able to destroy the temple of God, and to build it in three days. Finally, two men appeared in agreement with a particular accusation. Apparently, this was all the evidence the council could produce. Tragically, these had not understood the spiritual implications with which Jesus spoke. He was speaking of His coming resurrection, but this was the best they had. “This man claimed to be able to do in three days what it took others years to accomplish.” Even if they didn’t believe Jesus was the Christ, thinking He was a lunatic, was such an offence worthy of death? Their arguments prove their determination to condemn Jesus, but even these arguments did not agree.

**B. The Examination** (62-63) – And the high priest arose, and said unto him, Answerest thou nothing? what *is it which* these witness against thee? <sup>[63]</sup> But Jesus held his peace. And the high priest answered and said unto him, I adjure thee by the living God, that thou tell us whether thou be the Christ, the Son of God. Jesus stood silent in the face of his accusers. As of yet there had been no evidence given to render a guilty verdict worthy of death. Caiaphas was eager to condemn Jesus and determined to obtain a guilty verdict. He became enraged at the progress of the trial, taunting Jesus to speak in His defense. (Is that not how many respond today when confronted with the absolute truth of Jesus? Many have already made up their minds concerning Him and become angry when they are forced to examine the truth He reveals. Conviction creates anger in the hearts of many.)

- Caiaphas never believed Jesus was the Christ. In fact, he was outraged at such a claim. However, he knew Jesus professed to be the Christ, the promised Messiah. Desperate for a conviction, Caiaphas urged Jesus to publicly proclaim His deity so He could be charged with blasphemy. Having no credible witness against Jesus, Caiaphas sought to have Jesus incriminate Himself.

**C. The Affirmation (64)** – Jesus saith unto him, Thou hast said: nevertheless I say unto you, Hereafter shall ye see the Son of man sitting on the right hand of power, and coming in the clouds of heaven. Jesus publicly proclaimed His deity by identifying Himself as the Son of the living God. Jesus publicly proclaimed He was in fact God in the flesh! The Sanhedrin thought they were in control of the destiny of this man they considered a criminal worthy of death, but Jesus revealed He was the sovereign God of power and authority!

- It is also interesting to note that Jesus makes a profound statement about the future. Knowing they would deny Him and sentence Him to death, Jesus proclaimed that His death would not be the end. He would rise from the grave, triumphant over death, ascend back to the Father, and return in power and great glory at a time appointed in the future! These would cast their voices against Jesus in judgment, but He will return to earth as the righteous Judge.

**III. The Perjury in the Trial (65-68)** – Here we discover the deception and lies used to condemn a righteous Man. The Sanhedrin showed no remorse in their unjust treatment of one who was innocent of all charges, basing their judgment on lies. Notice:

**A. The Suggestion (65-66a)** – Then the high priest rent his clothes, saying, He hath spoken blasphemy; what further need have we of witnesses? behold, now ye have heard his blasphemy. <sup>[66a]</sup> What think ye?

Following the proclamation of Jesus, Caiaphas became enraged and called for a vote. He accused Jesus of blasphemy, a crime punishable by death according to the Law. He implied there was no need for further testimony – in his mind, Jesus was worthy of death.

- Notice that Caiaphas rent his clothes. We might not think much of that, but according to the Mosaic Law, the high priest was forbidden to uncover his head or rend his garments. In a fit of rage, Caiaphas disqualified himself from the priesthood before the Great High Priest. Jesus would fulfill the righteous demands of God as He shed His own blood on the cross, presenting it to the Father to atone for the sin of mankind! Caiaphas didn't realize it, but the office of high priest would no longer be necessary upon earth. Jesus would ascend back to Father where He stands as our Great High Priest, making intercession for us.

**B. The Condemnation** (66b) – *They answered and said, He is guilty of death.* The Sanhedrin cast their voices against Jesus, declaring Him to be guilty of death. They had heard all they needed to hear. They were determined to rid Jerusalem of the Man who claimed to be the Christ. In a fit of rage, these men condemned Jesus to stand trial for blasphemy, planning to encourage Pilate to consent to His death upon the cross.

**C. The Humiliation** (67-68) – *Then did they spit in his face, and buffeted him; and others smote him with the palms of their hands,* <sup>[68]</sup> *Saying, Prophecy unto us, thou Christ, Who is he that smote thee?* The suffering and agony were just beginning for our Lord as those who should have embraced Him began to abuse Him physically and emotionally. They mocked and sneered at the Lord, viewing Him only as an imposter and blasphemer. He would endure much more in the coming hours on our behalf, but the pain and suffering had begun.

- This is difficult to consider and even angers us as we read of our Lord's treatment by the religious Jews, but we must remember that the situation had not gotten out of control. It is undeniable that a great injustice had been committed. An innocent Man, the Son of God was condemned by false accusation, but this was all within the will of God. Jesus willfully submitted to this mock trial and would willfully submit to the death of the cross. *Isaiah 50:6 – I gave my back to the smiters, and my cheeks to them that plucked off the hair: I hid not my face from shame and spitting. 1 Pet.2:23 – Who, when he was reviled, reviled not again; when he suffered, he threatened not; but committed himself to him that judgeth righteously.*

**Conclusion:** We cannot begin to imagine the agony and suffering our Lord endured. The sinless Son of God willingly submitted to the death of the cross on our behalf. As He stood before His accusers, He knew He would be condemned to death. He endured all of that for us. He bore our sin and our shame, suffering the righteous judgment of God in His body so we might escape judgment and eternal death. Sadly, many present on that faithful night denied Jesus and rejected Him as the Christ. What about you? What decision have you reached concerning Jesus? Have you received Him as the Christ, the Lord and Savior? If not, I urge you to do so!