

MBC - 10/7/2018 - Pastor Doug Thompson
"The Unjust Trial of an Innocent Man"
Matthew 26:57-68

Turn with me in your Bibles this morning to Matthew 26. We've been watching Jesus as He makes His way to the cross, calmly, deliberately. We've seen Him praying in the Garden while His men slept, betrayed by a kiss and arrested while His men scattered. And now He is in the hands of His enemies who have already decided to kill Him. They think they are passing judgment on Him, but they are the ones who are on trial. Let's read it—

- Matthew 26:57-68 ⁵⁷Then those who had seized Jesus led him to Caiaphas the high priest, where the scribes and the elders had gathered. ⁵⁸And Peter was following him at a distance, as far as the courtyard of the high priest, and going inside he sat with the guards to see the end. ⁵⁹Now the chief priests and the whole council were seeking false testimony against Jesus that they might put him to death, ⁶⁰but they found none, though many false witnesses came forward. At last two came forward ⁶¹and said, "This man said, 'I am able to destroy the temple of God, and to rebuild it in three days.'" ⁶²And the high priest stood up and said, "Have you no answer to make? What is it that these men testify against you?" ⁶³But Jesus remained silent. And the high priest said to him, "I adjure you by the living God, tell us if you are the Christ, the Son of God." ⁶⁴Jesus said to him, "You have said so. But I tell you, from now on you will see the Son of Man seated at the right hand of Power and coming on the clouds of heaven." ⁶⁵Then the high priest tore his robes and said, "He has uttered blasphemy. What further witnesses do we need? You have now heard his blasphemy. ⁶⁶What is your judgment?" They answered, "He deserves death." ⁶⁷Then they spit in his face and struck him. And some slapped him, ⁶⁸saying, "Prophecy to us, you Christ! Who is it that struck you?"

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Solomon wrote in—

- Ecclesiastes 8:14 ¹⁴There is a vanity that takes place on earth, that there are righteous people to whom it happens according to the deeds of the wicked, and there are wicked people to whom it happens according to the deeds of the righteous. I said that this also is vanity.

Life isn't fair under the sun. Sometimes wicked people get off the hook, and righteous people are condemned. Sometimes crooks get rich and live out their dreams, and honest people suffer and die unhappy. On a temporal, horizontal level, life might not be all that different for sincere Christians and godless unbelievers - under the sun. That's what the Preacher says here.

- Sometimes guilty people are found innocent, and innocent people are found guilty - and sometimes, we can't tell which is which!

On an earthly, temporal level - if that's all we're looking at - Jesus was a miserable, tragic failure: He lived a good life, did good things, and all it got Him was crucified. I heard a profound saying many years ago: "Life isn't fair - but don't confuse life with God."

God has a bigger, glorious plan that includes this life and the next life, and everything that is upside down here will be turned right-side up there. Count on that. For God's children, "*the sufferings of this life are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us.*" Count on that.

And God will use this horrible, unjust trial and execution of Jesus, to bring salvation to multitudes from every people, tribe, and tongue; reverse the curse on the universe, and make all things new! Keep that in mind as we move toward the cross. It's not the end, it's the beginning.

I. Intro & review vv.57-58.

- Matthew 26:57 ⁵⁷Then those who had seized Jesus led him to Caiaphas the high priest, where the scribes and the elders had gathered.

There are 6 trials or examinations that Jesus had to endure in His last hours before He went to the cross. The first three were before the Jews, and the last three were before the Romans. This is actually the second group Jesus is taken to. John tells us that Jesus was first taken to the house of Annas who was the high priest Emeritus in Israel at the time, and the father-in-law of Caiaphas who was the acting high priest.

Now turn with me to a passage in John's Gospel that mentions Caiaphas and gives insight into why the Jewish leaders wanted Jesus dead—

- John 11:46-53 (This is right after Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead:) ⁴⁶but some of them went to the Pharisees and told them what Jesus had done. ⁴⁷So the chief priests and the Pharisees gathered the council and said, "What are we to do? For this man performs many signs. ⁴⁸If we let him go on like this, everyone will believe in him, and the Romans will come and take away both our place and our nation." ⁴⁹But one of them, Caiaphas, who was high priest that year, said to them, "You know nothing at all. ⁵⁰Nor do you understand that it is better for you that one man should die for the people, not that the whole nation should perish." ⁵¹He did not say this of his own accord, but being high priest that year he prophesied that Jesus would die for the nation, ⁵²and not for the nation only, but also to gather into one the children of God who are scattered abroad. ⁵³So from that day on they made plans to put him to death.

The Jewish leaders wanted to kill Jesus because they saw Him as a threat to their social order. Israel was an occupied nation. They were the property of Rome, but Rome had granted them a *semi-autonomy* which allowed them many freedoms, especially in the exercise of their religion. Israel really had it pretty good under the Pax Romana - the peace of Rome.

Remember, Herod the Great had even financed and built their beloved Temple - which was purely a political move. So even though the Jews despised the Romans - and the feeling was mutual - they had a peaceful co-existence, as long as the Jews stayed in their own lane and submitted to Roman rule.

- It was kinda like the relationship the American colonies had with England before the Revolution.

And - this is important - the Jewish religious leaders were getting rich off their religion in partnership with Rome. This is why Caiaphas didn't want Jesus rocking their boat. But when the Jews got feisty with Rome, it was bad news: The Romans were quick to smash any uprisings—remember, this is why Jerusalem and Herod the Great were so upset at the first Christmas when they heard that one had been born who was King of the Jews! Rome wouldn't put up with any rival kings under their Empire.

And now this Man is grown, and He's still trouble: stirring up the crowds, raising the dead, all in the name of God - the Romans might take back their Temple, and all their freedoms. And

the money would dry up. So what is Caiaphas' solution? Better this one Man die than the whole nation suffer.

Now get this: This is the human, political reason that the Jews wanted Jesus dead! Jesus was a threat to their freedoms and the power/money partnership the religious leaders had with Rome.

But John gives us the real reason that Jesus was killed: it was God's sovereign plan to save sinners!

- ⁵¹[Caiaphas] did not say this of his own accord, but being high priest that year he prophesied (unknowingly) that Jesus *would* die for the nation, ⁵²and not for the nation only, but also to gather into one the children of God who are scattered abroad.

I.e., God would use the evil plan of the Jews to accomplish salvation for His people, both Jew and Gentile through the substitutionary atonement of His Son. What an amazing passage!

So as the Jewish religious leaders carry out their scheme to put Jesus to death, they are fulfilling the eternal plan of God. And I want you to notice that it's the spiritual leaders of the people who are the leading conspirators in putting their Messiah to death. This wasn't a popular uprising against Jesus. The multitudes were mostly positive about Jesus - not necessarily with a saving faith - but because He healed their sick and fed them.

The point is that these religious leaders were not representing the will of their people - huh - is that ever true about our leaders? That's why they had to do all of this away from the crowds and under the cover of darkness. Keep this in mind - they didn't want the people to find out what they were doing.

And it's here that Matthew inserts a word about Peter—

- Matthew 26:58 ⁵⁸And Peter was following him at a distance, as far as the courtyard of the high priest, and going inside he sat with the guards to see the end.

While Jesus is on trial, Peter is on trial too, right? He had just bragged about how he would never deny Jesus. He would die with him. Really? Here he is following at a distance. At least he is following Jesus, but he's afraid. When he was by Jesus' side he could take on the whole Roman army, but now there is a distance between him and Jesus, and he's not so brave.

*Beloved, don't follow Jesus at a distance! Stay close to Him, and whatever is coming between you and Him, deal with it quickly and thoroughly. Don't let your walk with Jesus grow cold.

II. The phony "trial" vv.59-62.

- Matthew 26:59 ⁵⁹Now the chief priests and the whole council were seeking false testimony against Jesus that they might put him to death,

This is such a damning verse against the Jewish leaders. They already had their verdict, they just needed to justify it. So they actually sought out people who would lie to provide bogus evidence for what they had already decided! It had to *look* fair and impartial.

*Is the Bible relevant or what? People could be just as evil and hypocritical 2,000 years ago as they can be today.

A. The illegality of the trial—

This whole thing was illegal on so many levels:

- It was against the law to try a capital case at night, and to do it at a private residence instead of in the temple court.
- By law, they were supposed to wait a day in between the conviction and the execution to give the person the chance to repent - but they broke that law too.
- Executions were not to be held during feasts, they disregarded that law.
- According to Deut.19, any person who knowingly gave false testimony was to suffer the same punishment of the person they falsely accused. By that law, they all should have been executed - and they knew it! But they did all of this to pay lip service to the law and to look righteous before the people.

And I'm sure they would have said: "Yes, what we are doing is wrong, but it's for the higher good. I.e., the *end* - saving our nation - justifies the *means*. We are righteous men - heroes." Isn't that exactly what lying politicians say today? Blind, corrupt, self-deceived.

But they had to keep up at least the appearance of propriety, that's why they had to find two witnesses - that's what the Law of Moses required. It didn't matter if they were lying - but for the sake of appearance, at least two of them had to tell the *same* lie - and they had trouble finding even that!

- Matthew 26:60 ⁶⁰but they found none, though many false witnesses came forward. At last two came forward—(and look at what they said about Jesus--)

B. The phony charge.

- Matthew 26:61 ⁶¹and said, "This man said, 'I am able to destroy the temple of God, and to rebuild it in three days.'"

Now did Jesus actually say this? These men must have heard, or heard about what Jesus said over in John's Gospel after He had trashed the Temple and was asked by the Jews for a sign to show that He had the authority to do this—

- John 2:19-21 ¹⁹Jesus answered them, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up." ²⁰The Jews then said, "It has taken forty-six years to build this temple, and will you raise it up in three days?" ²¹But he was speaking about the temple of his body.

Jesus was saying: Here's your sign - My own resurrection! Like when He was asked for a sign on another occasion and He said, "The only sign you get is the sign of Jonah in the belly of the whale for 3 days" - i.e., My own death and resurrection will be your sign, but it will be your sign of judgment because it will prove that I am the Son of God, whom you crucified!"

But why did Jesus say this? Didn't He know that it could be misunderstood? Yes, that's why He said it. He knew they weren't interested in the truth so He deliberately spoke this way to confuse them even more. It's the same reason He spoke in parables to the crowds back in ch. 13—

- Matthew 13:13-14 ¹³This is why I speak to them in parables, because seeing they do not see, and hearing they do not hear, nor do they understand. ¹⁴Indeed, in their case the prophecy of Isaiah is fulfilled that says: “You will indeed hear but never understand, and you will indeed see but never perceive.”

I.e., it was judgment on their unbelief: “If you don’t want to listen, then you won’t be able to listen - you get what you deserve.”

So these men came forward with this charge, but they were misquoting Jesus, weren’t they? He said “*this temple*,” not “*the temple*,” and in Mark we read this—

- Mark 14:58 ⁵⁸“We heard him say, ‘I will destroy this temple that is made with hands, and in three days I will build another, not made with hands.’”

He never said that. It could be that Matthew recorded what the first man said, and Mark recorded what the second man said, because Mark says, “Yet even about this their testimony did not agree.”

Here is something else that’s interesting: their law required them to give the location, time, and date that this happened - and they didn’t give any of that. But again, the facts didn’t matter. They had the verdict, they just needed to justify it.

Now if it was true, threatening to destroy the temple would be a serious thing - but these guys are looking at Jesus, this one humble, common Man, who had never done anything wrong, He has no followers left: He’s a threat to their temple? They knew they needed something more than this, they’re getting frustrated. They need Jesus to incriminate Himself—

- Matthew 26:62 ⁶²And the high priest stood up and said, “Have you no answer to make? What is it that these men testify against you?”

And look at how Jesus responds - He doesn’t!—

III. Jesus’ silence v63a.

- “But Jesus remained silent.”

Silence. The same thing happened later when He was before Pilate—

- Matthew 27:12-14 ¹²But when he was accused by the chief priests and elders, he gave no answer. ¹³Then Pilate said to him, “Do you not hear how many things they testify against you?” ¹⁴But he gave him no answer, not even to a single charge, so that the governor was greatly amazed.

Jesus wasn’t frozen in fear. This was a majestic silence. He was in complete control of Himself, and He said nothing. Why? Why didn’t He defend Himself? Let me give you some reasons—

1.) He had already said all He had to say. They had their minds made up. Nothing He could have said would have changed anything in this sham of a trial. So He didn’t waste His words. He wasn’t going to answer fools according to their folly. He refused to cast pearls before swine.

2.) By His silence, Jesus was forcing them to hear the echo of their own lying words and ridiculous charges: He wasn't on trial before them; they were on trial before Him.

3.) As we often see in the Gospels, Jesus would quote a Scripture to trigger people's memories of the surrounding Scriptural context. You say, "But He isn't saying anything here!" Yes, and that should have triggered in their minds what Isaiah said about the Messiah in—

- Isaiah 53:7 ⁷He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth; like a lamb that is led to the slaughter, and like a sheep that before its shearers is silent, so he opened not his mouth.

And that entire chapter is about Jesus as the Lamb of God who would suffer and die as the Substitute for His people. Jesus is fulfilling the Scriptures by His godly silence.

4.) Jesus did this to leave us an example, didn't He?

- 1 Peter 2:21-23 ²¹For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you might follow in his steps. ²²He committed no sin, neither was deceit found in his mouth. ²³When he was reviled, he did not revile in return; when he suffered, he did not threaten, but continued entrusting himself to Him who judges justly.
- Our daughter Sara said that they were watching *Judge Judy* this week, and 8 year old William said, "Mom what's wrong with all these people going to court? Don't they know that they can entrust themselves to Him who judges righteously?"

*Wise words to remember when you are unjustly maligned and accused. Entrust yourself to the Judge of all men. And keep your words to a minimum.

5.) But more than any other reason, Jesus remains silent because He won't do anything or put any obstacle in the way of His Father's will. He kept His mouth shut because He loves His people and was willing to die for them.

Well Jesus' silence enraged His enemies. It just convicted them of their lies. But they had to get this over with and get Him to the Romans authorities before daylight, so Caiaphas shouts out—

IV. Caiaphas' direct question v63b.

- Matthew 26:63 . . . "I adjure you by the living God, tell us if you are the Christ, the Son of God."

He is putting Jesus under oath, before God. He must answer. And he really asks Jesus two questions: Are you the Christ, the Messiah? And, are you the Son of God? If He claims to be the Messiah, they can paint Him as an insurrectionist and a rival King to the Emperor Tiberius - and Rome was used to executing false Messiahs. And if He claimed to be the Son of God, He would be guilty before the Jews for the crime of blasphemy: Lev.24:16 says, "*The one who blasphemes the name of the Lord shall surely be put to death.*"

*Let me remind you - because people will say, "Jesus didn't claim to be God, He claimed to be His Son" - and they show their ignorance of the Bible because to the Jews, if God had a Son, that Son would share the divinity of His Father, therefore He would be God—

- John 5:18 ¹⁸This was why the Jews were seeking all the more to kill him, because not only was he breaking the Sabbath, but he was even calling God his own Father, making himself equal with God.

So Caiaphas isn't looking for truth here, just ammunition: Did Jesus claim to be the Messiah, and did He even claim to be the Son of God - the first could get Him a death sentence from Rome, the second, a death sentence from their own Law - even though the Jews couldn't legally put anyone to death.

How did Jesus respond? He finally breaks His silence, but it wasn't to defend Himself: it's actually to say something that will ensure that they find Him guilty and have Him put to death, because that is why He came!

V. Jesus' direct answer v64.

- Matthew 26:64 ⁶⁴Jesus said to him, "You have said so. But I tell you, from now on you will see the Son of Man seated at the right hand of Power and coming on the clouds of heaven."

In Mark 14:62, Jesus says, "I AM," but here in Matthew also says, "You have said so." Is that yes or no? It means, "Those are your words," i.e., "Yes, but what I mean by Messiah is not what you mean." Jesus didn't mean the political warrior that they were looking for, He meant that He was a Messiah way beyond anyone they ever imagined—*"the Son of Man seated at the right hand of Power and coming on the clouds of heaven."* Jesus is pointing them to two OT passages—

- Psalm 110:1 ¹The LORD says to my Lord: "Sit at my right hand, until I make your enemies your footstool."
- Daniel 7:13-14 ¹³"I saw in the night visions, and behold, with the clouds of heaven there came one like a son of man, and he came to the Ancient of Days and was presented before him. ¹⁴And to him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him; his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom one that shall not be destroyed.

At His ascension, Jesus was given all authority in heaven and on earth by His Father - He was crowned as King of the universe. He told His disciples that in the Great Commission, didn't He?

Now get what Jesus is saying to these men who only want an excuse to put Him to death: "You think you are my judges? You will see that I am *your* Judge - 'seated at the right hand of Power,'" And that was another claim to be God. And they got it.

Mark it: Jesus' worst enemies clearly understood that He claimed to be God - don't ever let anyone tell you differently—

- **John 10:33** ³³The Jews answered him, "It is not for a good work that we are going to stone you but for blasphemy, because you, being a man, make yourself God."
- **John 19:7** "We have a law, and according to that law he ought to die because he has made himself the Son of God."

They were right about who He claimed to be, but very wrong in their response.

VI. The evil response to the truth vv.65-68.

- Matthew 26:65-66 ⁶⁵Then the high priest tore his robes (that was a phony sign of outrage and grief over this so-called blasphemy) and said, “He has uttered blasphemy. What further witnesses do we need? You have now heard his blasphemy. ⁶⁶What is your judgment?” They answered, “He deserves death.”
- ⁶⁷Then they spit in his face and struck him. (Mark tells us that they blindfolded Him) And some slapped him, ⁶⁸saying, “Prophecy to us, you Christ! Who is it that struck you?”

They’re mocking Him. Taunting Him. This is a hilarious joke to them. And all of it is against Jewish law.

Can you imagine - spitting in Jesus’ face? These men were spitting in the face of their Creator! That was the ultimate form of disrespect. Sinless, holy, gentle Jesus - the One who healed lepers, and raised children from the dead: but *“while being reviled, He did not revile in return, while suffering, He uttered no threats, but kept entrusting Himself to Him who judges righteously.”*

But even this was prophesied in Scripture—

- Isaiah 50:6 ⁶I gave my back to those who strike, and my cheeks to those who pull out the beard; I hid not my face from disgrace and spitting.

Did you hear that? “I gave My back. . . I gave My cheeks . . . I hid not My face . . .” Jesus gave Himself over to all of this humiliation and torture. And death. At any moment, He could have whistled for 10’s of thousands of angels to come and stop it. *But it’s what He came for!*

And as you imagine this horrible scene unfolding, remember: *it should have been you - and me!* Jesus took all of this in *our* place, and so that we would not face the wrath of God—

- Isaiah 53:5 ⁵But he was pierced for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his wounds we are healed.

He came into our world to be our Substitute, to take all the punishment our sins deserve so that we can be completely forgiven. *Hallelujah, what a Savior!*

*I want you to imagine that you were a bystander at this phony trial, and you heard the question the high priest put to Jesus, and you saw His face, and heard His answer. How would you respond to Jesus claims about Himself? There are only two possible responses: believe Him, and worship Him as your Lord; or reject Him and be condemned.

Jesus isn’t on trial here. You are, and I am. Who do you say that He is?

- John 5:24 ²⁴Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life. He does not come into judgment, but has passed from death to life.

Well they have found Jesus guilty of blasphemy, but there is a problem: they don't have the legal right to put anyone to death, and the Romans couldn't care less about blasphemy, so they have to figure out another way to get Rome to execute Jesus.

Pray.

- Hallelujah, What a Savior!