

Dr. Dustin Daniels | River Bible Church
Matthew 26:57-68 | A Mockery of God's Justice
Sunday April 12, 2026

WELCOME:

- Bibles in the back—our gift to you.
- My sermon notes are in the foyer—please take them home with you.

REVIEW:

After our celebration of Resurrection Sunday, we continue our verse-by-verse exposition of Matthew's Gospel today.

Last Sunday, we looked at Luke's Gospel for the Resurrection account, and now that we're back in Matthew— we're going back just a few hours before the crucifixion.

We left off in Matthew's Gospel with Judas' betrayal in the Garden of Gethsemane.

Picture it: it's dark, quiet— and suddenly you see a large group of people coming toward you—with their torches lighting up the trees, the sound of clanging armor, swords, and clubs.

You hear people talking and mumbling.

Chattering

- Get closer | police

And leading the group is Judas Iscariot—one of the 12!

They've come for one reason: to arrest a pesky rabbi named Jesus.

In the heat of the moment, Peter pulls out a weapon, Jesus calls the religious leaders a bunch of cowards, and then tragically, yet prophetically, the Disciples desert Jesus by running off.

At the end of the day, we learned a lot about Judas—and how wicked this man truly was.

He not only betrayed God's Son, but Judas did it in such a way that really emphasized his disgust for Jesus by turning Him over to the Jewish leaders through a kiss.

disappointment

We examined why that kiss was so wicked.

INTRODUCTION:

Today, we go from wicked to more wicked.

As the Disciples run off, the police escort Jesus back to Jerusalem, where the first set of illegal trials begins.

That's where we are today—the first illegal trial of Jesus Christ.

Not only will we learn about how the Jewish leaders made a mockery out of God's justice, but we'll witness the anger and disrespect for God Himself.

Please stand for the reading and honoring of God's Word.

SCRIPTURE:

Matthew 26:57—Those who had arrested Jesus led him away to Caiaphas the high priest, where the scribes and the elders had convened.

Matthew 26:58—Peter was following him at a distance right to the high priest's courtyard. He went in and was sitting with the servants to see the outcome.

Matthew 26:59—The chief priests and the whole Sanhedrin were looking for false testimony against Jesus so that they could put him to death,

Matthew 26:60—but they could not find any, even though many false witnesses came forward. Finally, two who came forward

† **Matthew 26:61**—stated, “This man said, ‘I can destroy the temple of God and rebuild it in three days.’ ”

† **Matthew 26:62**—The high priest stood up and said to him, “Don’t you have an answer to what these men are testifying against you?”

† **Matthew 26:63**—But Jesus kept silent. The high priest said to him, “I charge you under oath by the living God: Tell us if you are the Messiah, the Son of God.”

† **Matthew 26:64**—“You have said it,” Jesus told him. “But I tell you, in the future you will see the Son of Man seated at the right hand of Power and coming on the clouds of heaven.”,

† **Matthew 26:65**—Then the high priest tore his robes and said, “He has blasphemed! Why do we still need witnesses? See, now you’ve heard the blasphemy.

† **Matthew 26:66**—What is your decision?” They answered, “He deserves death!”

† **Matthew 26:67**—Then they spat in his face and beat him; others slapped him

† **Matthew 26:68**—and said, “Prophecy to us, Messiah! Who was it that hit you?”

† **PRAY:**
I long and yearn for the courts of the Lord; my heart and flesh cry out for the living God. Better a day in your courts than a thousand anywhere else.
(Ps. 84:2, 10)

EXEGESIS: (From last week)

Matthew 26:55—At that time Jesus said to the crowds, “Have you come out with swords and clubs, as if I were a criminal, to capture me? Every day I used to sit, teaching in the temple, and you didn't arrest me.

Matthew 26:56—But all this has happened so that the writings of the prophets would be fulfilled.” Then all the disciples deserted him and ran away.

Matthew 26:57— Those who had arrested Jesus led him away to Caiaphas the high priest, where the scribes and the elders had convened.

Matthew doesn't say this outright—but this moment marks the beginning of Jesus' illegal trial with the religious leaders of Israel.

We can see several things that are shady from the start.

We've all seen enough cop shows/episodes of *True Crime* to know that in any sane society, it's against the law to arrest someone and then take them directly to the mayor's house.

When the police arrest someone, they are to take them to jail so they can await trial.

Most decent civilizations have a system of jurisprudence—a structure of procedures, evidence, and rights of the accused.

Right from the start, the Jewish leaders have planned to break every element of their own judicial process.

First, it was against Jewish law to hold a trial at night.

Matthew 26:57— Those who had arrested Jesus led him away to Caiaphas the high priest, where the scribes and the elders had convened.

It's around 3:00am on Friday morning during Passover—the biggest celebration of the year.

And the religious leaders are waiting at the high priest's home. Coincidence? The city council, the district attorney, and a handful of judges are already there—with no cameras, no reporters, no defense attorney, and no jury—strike one.

Second, a trial involving capital punishment was supposed to be held only in public in the Temple.

Not at the High Priest's home in private—strike two.

They plan to try Jesus in private under the cover of darkness.

Let's talk about Caiaphas, the high priest...

He was the son-in-law of Annas, the former high priest—in fact, we see a power struggle between the two men, as John's Gospel tells us that Jesus was first taken to Annas's home. (John 18:12–14)

Like most priests of his time, Caiaphas was a Sadducee and not a Pharisee.

Being a Sadducee is an important theological distinction because he didn't believe in the resurrection of the dead.

What do we know about this man?

Caiaphas comes across in Gospel accounts as a cruel, pompous hypocrite.

Caiaphas had to be a shrewd man because he held the office for eighteen years, longer than any high priest before him.

Think of today's politician who survives every scandal—everybody knows this guy is corrupt, but nothing ever seems to stick.

He knows all the right people, he pushes all the right buttons—and he knows where all the bodies are buried.

The office of the high priest is the premier non-Roman office in Israel.

Caiaphas had to be quite the politician to remain in that role for nearly two decades.

And we'll see his politics and influence as we study this passage.



Matthew 26:58—*Peter was following him at a distance ...*

Matthew changes the scene back to the Disciples.

Although they ran away—Peter is following Jesus but keeping his space.

I've heard too many sermons talk about the cowardice of Peter at this moment.

Let's keep in mind that in John's Gospel, Jesus told the police to let the Disciples go. (Jn 18:8).

It's really easy for us who know how this story ends to point fingers at Peter and call him a coward.

Yes, Peter will make serious mistakes. *-Mouth shaped like a foot.*

But right here, Peter is doing something many of us wouldn't do: he's actually following Jesus into dangerous territory.

He's slipping through dark streets, staying in the shadows, heart pounding. He's thinking:

What are they going to do to Him? What are they going to do to me?

Let's keep in mind that Peter represents us.

You are in the middle of your story—and no matter where you are in your walk with Jesus, are you following Him perfectly?

Or are there moments when you tend to keep your distance?

Matthew 26:58—*Peter was following him at a distance right to the high priest's courtyard. He went in and was sitting with the servants to see the outcome.*

How in the world did Peter end up at the high priest's home?

That's like us accidentally finding ourselves at the governor's mansion.

Evidently, Peter met up with John, who knew the high priest and got him access to the courtyard. (John 18:16)

This is no small backyard.

Caiaphas's home was a multi-story, 6,500-square-foot residence with elaborate detailing, vaulted ceilings, and several master baths.

It really wasn't just one home; it was like a complex that housed his extended families.

We know that his father-in-law, Annas, the former high priest, also lived there.

In fact, they shared the same back yards, which formed the entire courtyard.

Back to the trial...we'll come back to Peter next week.

Matthew 26:59—*The chief priests and the whole Sanhedrin were looking for false testimony against Jesus so that they could put him to death,*

So much for “innocent until proven guilty.”

This is like watching an episode of Law and Order and the state saying, “We don’t have much of a case, in fact, we don’t have any eyewitnesses or corroborating evidence—but we’re going for the death penalty.

Strike three—they don’t want justice; they want an execution.

Matthew 26:59—*The chief priests and the whole Sanhedrin...*

The chief priests and the Sanhedrin are the Supreme Court of religious leaders for Israel.

70 men make up the Sanhedrin, and it’s doubtful that all of them are there as it’s 3:00am on Friday morning of Passover week.

Technically, they only needed 23 members to make a quorum—but once again, this is not a real trial.

Matthew 26:59— *were looking for false testimony against Jesus...*

Looking— *zētēō*: seeking/desiring

Picture a group of religious politicians *disguised* as well-known pastors and seminary presidents framing an innocent man with their Bibles open.

Matthew makes no bones about it—the Jewish religious leaders are only looking for people to commit perjury.

They’re scrolling through their contact list—

- Who owes us a favor?
- Who’s willing to lie?
- How much will it cost to pay these guys off?

Perjury is a criminal offense in most legal proceedings.

Most of the time, judges don't like people lying under oath in a court of law.

That's why people used to put their hand on the Bible in our court proceedings—because the Bible represents truth.

Do you swear that you will tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth? I swear... so help me God!

BTW, what does God the Father think about perjury?

Exodus 20:16—Do not give false testimony against your neighbor.

Perjury makes God's top ten list of things not to do—perjury is against the moral law of God and shows up as number 9 within the Ten Commandments!

Proverbs 6:16—The Lord hates six things; in fact, seven are detestable (abominations/disgusts) to him:

Guess what number six is:

Proverbs 6:19—a lying witness who gives false testimony,

Proverbs 19:9—A false witness will not go unpunished, and one who utters lies perishes.

In Revelation 21:8, Liars will have ***“their share in the lake that burns with fire and sulfur.”***

In a real Jewish trial, the Sanhedrin was obligated to interview witnesses separately, and then the judges would compare notes.

Inconsistent testimonies were thrown out.

In our courts today, we would hear the judge tell the jury to “disregard” it. Or it would be “stricken from the record.”

Now, in the Jewish courts, if someone lied on the stand, that person/liar would also receive the same punishment as the accused if convicted.

So if you lied in a murder case and your lie was exposed, *you* could be put to death.

Yet, these religious leaders have all the liars lined up and read to go for the sole purpose...

✦ **Matthew 26:59**— *so that they could put him to death,*

Strike #4—their purpose was not to discover the truth about Jesus— and certainly not to save His life.

Their single compelling motive was murder.

✦ **Matthew 26:60**—*but they could not find any,*

Think about this—not a single witness could be found to convict Jesus of any wrongdoing.

Verse 60 is one of the strongest cases in all of Scripture for Jesus' moral and spiritual perfection.

✦ **Matthew 26:60**—*even though many false witnesses came forward.*

This is like a scene from “The Godfather.” These men really are spiritual gangsters.

Although it wasn't the easiest thing to do, seeing it was 3:00am during Passover, these religious men found and paid worthless men to perjure themselves.

→ NO phones - knocking on doors waking people up
 → paying people off
 → calling in favors.

The problem is that no one made up a good enough story that supported the death penalty.

So, the first set of witnesses accomplished nothing.

Why? Because Jesus is perfectly sinless!

† **John 8:46**—*Who among you can convict me of sin?*

Jesus didn't say "accuse me"—convict me.

Jesus never sinned; however, He was accused of sin because He refused to conform to their rabbinic traditions.

That would be like someone taking a different theological position on speaking in tongues, apostolic miracles, or even the End Times today.

† **Matthew 26:60/61**—*Finally, two who came forward stated,*

"Finally!" After hours of empty testimonies and inconsistent lies, two men say something that sounds serious.

† **Matthew 26:60/61**—*"This man said, 'I can destroy the temple of God and rebuild it in three days.'"*

Not "this teacher." Not "this rabbi." Not "this prophet who heals people and raises people from the dead."

"This man!" It's distancing and demeaning language.

This is where the defense attorney would stand up and say, "OBJECTION! "Roll the clip for Exhibit A."

† **John 2:19**—*"Destroy this temple, and I will raise it up in three days."*

See the difference? “Destroy this temple” versus “I can destroy the temple.”

Twisted just right, this sounds like domestic terrorism.

Imagine someone going to Washington, D.C., standing on the Capitol steps, and saying, “I can blow up this building and rebuild it in three days.”

You'd have federal agents on them in seconds.

That's how they're framing Jesus. They're ripping His words out of context.

Jesus wasn't talking about the physical Temple—physical body.

After the resurrection, there is no need for a physical Temple—and that's why the whole thing gets destroyed in 40 years.

Pharisees / Sadducees / Sacrificial system

Jesus is the fulfillment of the Temple.

Regardless, this accusation of destroying the Temple was a capital crime.

This is serious stuff—and that's why Caiaphas reacts the way that he does.

Matthew 26:62—The high priest stood up and said to him, “Don't you have an answer to what these men are testifying against you?”

At this moment, Caiaphas gets hot under the collar.

The high priest standing up and speaking during a trial was supposed to be illegal—but the whole trial is illegal.

In a legitimate trial, the high priest was forbidden to intervene.

He was to remain more like what we'd call a presiding judge—he would listen and eventually cast his vote.

He wasn't supposed to function as prosecutor and jury.

Regardless, he's like the judge who jumps down from the bench, grabs the microphone, and starts cross-examining himself!

What's Jesus do? The high priest of Israel did ask Him a question.

- All eyes turn to Jesus.
- All the liars are lying.
- The politicians are scheming.
- The religious leaders are raging.

Matthew 26:63—*But Jesus kept silent.*

Jesus stands majestically silent at this moment.

Lie upon lie, perjury upon perjury, false charge upon false charge, and Jesus says nothing to defend Himself.

Is that what you would do, remain silent?

Wouldn't you defend yourself and cry out, "LIARS!"

Wouldn't you want to call Fox News? Start a YouTube Channel and launch a PR campaign to proclaim your innocence?

Hold A press conference.

Not Jesus—because it's not the silence of guilt.

It is the silence of innocence and dignity.

Sometimes the most Christlike thing we can do is to trust the One who judges justly (1 Pe. 2:23) and let the silence fall where it lay.

From a practical standpoint, Jesus knows His mission.

KEYPOINT 1:

Jesus knows this trial is not about proving innocence; it's about fulfilling His Father's plan.

In one of the most graphic descriptions of Jesus and the crucifixion, Isaiah says this... *written 500-700 years before Jesus was born.*

Isaiah 53:7—He was oppressed and afflicted,

yet he did not open his mouth.

Like a lamb led to the slaughter

and like a sheep silent before her shearers,

he did not open his mouth.

We'll see Jesus keep silent during His Roman trial with Pilate.

John's Gospel records Jesus keeping silent before King Herod.

Jesus kept silent because He knew that by defending Himself, He would actually be opposing His Father's will.

Jesus knows He's innocent. The Father knows Jesus is innocent.

The Apostle Paul says, ***"If God is for us, who can be against us?"*** (Rom. 8:31)

So, Jesus allowed the slander to go unchallenged.

And it's in this moment of silence where Caiaphas goes ballistic.

Matthew 26:63—The high priest said to him, "I charge you under oath by the living God: Tell us if you are the Messiah, the Son of God."

Never mind that Caiaphas missed his anger-management meeting—at this moment, he is seething.

Caiaphas' rage prevents him from seeing who Jesus really is.

The irony is thick: Caiaphas is invoking God's name to force *God the Son* to speak.

This is like forcing Jesus to put His hand on the Word of God when—
In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God (Jn 1:1).

From a political perspective, what Caiaphas does is a wicked stroke of political genius.

Caiaphas is wicked, but he's not dumb.

He sees that this fake trial is falling apart and tries to make Jesus respond by placing Him under oath.

As if the Son of God can be placed under oath.

An oath is the most sacred word a Jew could utter—it's the strongest judicial tool to compel someone to speak.

An oath (vow) is a legal commitment that demands fulfillment.

Regardless, the high priest of Israel badgers the Son of God.

† Matthew 26:63— *Tell us if you are the Messiah, the Son of God.*"

Messiah is a Hebrew title literally meaning "the anointed one."

We're more familiar with the Greek translation, "Christ."

At this moment, we see why Caiaphas is the high priest and why his tenure was so long.

The high priest, having nothing to work with, invites Jesus to incriminate himself under oath.

Caiphas' question is wickedly brilliant for two reasons.

First, the precise wording of his statement.

 **Matthew 26:63**— *Tell us if you are the Messiah,*

The Messiah is the deliverer of Israel—the one who would liberate Israel from the bondage of Rome.


Most Jews thought the Messiah would be a talented but ordinary man—a charismatic military leader.

Think of Jewish Napoleon Bonaparte, Alexander the Great, or George Patton!

So, to claim to be the Messiah is bold, but not blasphemous—it's not necessarily a sin, but it is a concern for Rome.

And if they can spin His kingship as a rival to Caesar, the Romans will charge Him with sedition/rebellion against Rome.

But, Caiaphas doesn't stop with the Messiah...

 **Matthew 26:63**— *the Son of God."*

If Jesus answers "yes" to this question, He makes Himself equal to God (blasphemy), and the Jews would stone Him.

But that's not what Caiaphas asks; he asks...

 **Matthew 26:63**— *Tell us if you are the Messiah, the Son of God."*

The question is, “Are you the Messiah who is God?”

The obvious answer is an overwhelming YES!

If Jesus answers yes to that question, the Romans would convict Jesus of sedition, and the Jews would convict Him of ~~the capital crime~~ of blasphemy ~~against God.~~

As I said, this is a wicked stroke of political genius.

Now, keep in mind, if this were not a kangaroo court, a defense attorney would stand up and say:

Some Cochran

Yes, my client, Jesus of Nazareth, is indeed the Messiah, the Son of God... and here's the proof: look at the OT prophetic passages about the Messiah.

↳ If the glove don't fit -

- Was Jesus born in Bethlehem?
- From David's ancestral line?
- Perform miraculous healings?
- Give sight to the blind?
- Give hearing to the deaf?
- Raise the dead? (Not once but 3 times: Widow from Nain, Jairus, and Laz).
- Enter Jerusalem on a donkey?
- Love by the people and despised by the nation's leaders?
- Betrayed by a friend?

But Jesus doesn't have a defense attorney...

Matthew 26:64—“You have said it,” Jesus told him.

That's a strange answer to us.

The Greek in this passage is awkward.

↳ I AM the Messiah who is the Son of God

Paraphrase—“Yes, but not in the way you mean it.”

Or, “I would not have put it that way, but since you do, I cannot deny it.”

In other words: *Yes, I am Israel's Messiah. Yes, I am the Son of God. But I'm not the kind of Messiah you imagine—a mere political figure who will overthrow Rome. I am far more.*

Mark's Gospel cuts to the chase— **“I am”** (Mark 14:62).

But Jesus isn't done. *Answering Caiaphas.*

Matthew 26:64—“But I tell you, in the future you will see **the Son of Man seated at the right hand** of Power and **coming on the clouds of heaven.**”

Jesus answers Caiaphas's question so clearly that every Jewish child understands.

Every Jew in that room knew exactly what Jesus was saying— He's reaching back to Daniel's prophecy:

Daniel 7:13—I continued watching in the night visions, and suddenly one like a son of man was coming with the clouds of heaven. He approached the Ancient of Days and was escorted before him.

(VISIONS WERE A MEANS OF HOW GOD SPEAKS TO HIS PEOPLE IN THE OT)

Daniel 7:14—He was given dominion and glory and a kingdom, so that those of every people, nation, and language should serve him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion that will not pass away, and his kingdom is one that will not be destroyed.

Notice how Jesus doesn't use Caiaphas's title, "Son of God," but rather uses his favorite title for himself here—*The Son of Man*.

The Son of Man represents Jesus very identity—divine and human—the very face of Almighty God!

He's used it for the past three years, and at this moment, it takes center stage.

Jesus is saying—"Yes, I am the Messiah who is the Son of God. I am the Son of Man from Daniel 7. You are judging Me now, but one day I will judge you. (Matt. 25:31–46).

Although Caiaphas is brilliantly wicked—he thinks Jesus is the one who's on trial.

What he doesn't realize is that all of this is temporary, because there is a greater court coming—and in that court, Jesus will not be the accused, He will be the Judge. *for all mankind.*

Matthew 26:65—Then the high priest tore his robes...

Kangaroo Court turns into the Jerry Springer show.
Jesus' statement was more than Caiaphas could bear—he lost all sense of control.

When a man tore his robe in the first century, it meant grief and outrage.

However, because the robes of the high priest were sacred, it was against Jewish law for him to tear them.

His garments are set apart as holy.

Leviticus 21:10—"The priest who is highest among his brothers, who has had the anointing oil poured on his head and has been ordained to wear the clothes, must not dishevel his hair or tear his clothes.

In accusing Jesus of blasphemy, *Caiaphas* is the one who commits it.

Matthew 26:65—“He has blasphemed! Why do we still need witnesses? See, now you've heard the blasphemy.”

Since Caiaphas assumes that Jesus is lying, he cries “blasphemy,” and blasphemy brings death. (Lev. 24:16)

Matthew 26:66—“What is your decision?” They answered, “He deserves death!”

This is mob justice, not real justice.

In fact, the unanimous vote to convict Jesus should have automatically given Him His freedom. Why?

In the Jewish court system, if there was a unanimous verdict of guilty, it was considered a mistrial. Why?

Because mercy was lacking—strike #5.

Next, it was against Jewish law to reach a guilty verdict on the same day as the trial—strike #6.

The law required at least twenty-four hours of contemplation and fasting by the judges before a guilty verdict could be rendered—strike #7.

Why? They gave additional time in case additional evidence was found.

The priority in capital cases was supposed to be: “The Sanhedrin is to save, not destroy life.”—strike 8.

KEYPOINT 2:

The irony is that Jesus will be executed for telling the truth.

Matthew 26:67/68—Then they spat in his face and beat him; others slapped him and said, "Prophecy to us, Messiah! Who was it that hit you?"

Can you imagine the Chief Justice of our Supreme Court, John Roberts, and all the other justices surrounding a defendant like a mob— and spitting, slapping, and beating someone after a trial is over?

Can you imagine if that happened today? The headlines? The outrage?

But this isn't just any defendant, is it?

- They spit in the face of God—claiming that Jesus has authority over them.
- They beat and slapped Jesus—claiming Jesus has no power over them.
- They mocked His gift of prophecy—claiming Jesus doesn't know what the future holds—although He is indeed prophet, priest, and king simultaneously.

This is not only a mockery of justice but also one of the despicable and demonic moments in the history of humanity.

These men reveal who they truly are—utterly ~~decadent~~ depraved.

The highest officials of the Old Testament church rage against the Son of God.

And yet, Jesus takes this abuse. Also know they're not done.

This is only the beginning—the Son of God must endure more.

Isaiah prophesied that Jesus would be more hated than any man who ever lived (Isaiah 53:2).

I'll point you back to the movie, *The Passion of the Christ*. And yet it's only a small window into what actually happened.

DEVOTIONAL/SMALL GROUP QUESTIONS:

1. In what ways am I following Jesus “at a distance” right now—in my retirement, at work, at school, in my family, or online?
2. Do I believe that Jesus is both *Lord* and *Savior*—or do I treat Him more like a cosmic genie?
3. How would my daily life look different if I lived as if Jesus were to return to tomorrow to judge the living and the dead?
4. If I knew I would stand before Jesus this week, what is the first thing I would want to change, confess, or make right?
5. How do I respond when I experience injustice, misunderstanding, or false accusation—do I trust God, or do I immediately take matters into my own hands?
6. Where in my life am I more eager to be declared right rather than Christlike?
7. In what areas of my life is my silence Christlike and when is it cowardly?
8. Is there a situation right now where I need to stop defending myself and trust the Lord with all my heart?
9. In what ways might I resemble the religious leaders—using religious language or Bible knowledge to justify my own agenda?
10. Do I ever hide sin or compromise behind a “churchy” exterior—serving, leading, or talking about God while ignoring clear disobedience in my heart?
11. How do I react when Jesus’ authority confronts my traditions, preferences, or comfort—do I submit, or do I quietly resist as the leaders did?
12. Is there anyone I am refusing to forgive—even though the innocent Son of God endured spitting, beating, and crucifixion to forgive me? Have I truly received the forgiveness Jesus suffered to offer—or am I still trying to “earn” my way back to God through performance or religion?

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