

MATTHEW 26; JOHN 18 – JESUS' ILLEGAL TRIAL



After Judas betrays Jesus by a traitor's kiss, the soldiers proceed to arrest Him. But one of Christ's disciples tries to resist. Even in this trying time, Jesus is still teaching some important lessons. Each Gospel account gives us vital information.

Luke records Jesus' compassion when Peter resisted and cut off a servant's ear. He says, "When those around Him saw what was going to happen, they said to Him, 'Lord, shall we strike with the sword?' And one of them struck the servant of the high priest and cut off his right ear. But Jesus answered and said, 'Permit even this.' And He touched his ear and healed him" (Luke 22:49-51).

John emphasizes this arrest was all part of God's plan, "Then Simon Peter, having a sword, drew it and struck the high priest's servant, and cut off his right ear. The servant's name was Malchus. So Jesus said to Peter, 'Put your sword into the sheath. Shall I not drink the cup which My Father has given Me?'" (John 18:10-11).

Matthew shows in this account that it is wrong for a Christian to take up the sword to kill. He says, "But Jesus said to him, 'Put your sword in its place, for all who take the sword will perish by the sword. Or do you think that I cannot now pray to My Father, and He will provide Me with more than twelve legions of angels? How then could the Scriptures be fulfilled, that it must happen thus?'...Then all the disciples forsook Him and fled. And those who had laid hold of Jesus led Him away to Caiaphas the high priest, where the scribes and the elders were assembled" (Mt. 26:52-57).

Jesus would now be tried and it would take six stages, consisting of three religious and three civil steps, many of them illegal by Jewish law.

1. He would first go before Annas, the former high priest and head of the high priest family
2. Next, He would go before Caiaphas, the ruling high priest and Annas' son-in-law.
3. Then, before the Sanhedrin, the religious judicial body.
4. He would go before Pontius Pilate, the Roman governor over Judea.
5. Then, before Herod Antipas, the Jewish governor under Pilate.
6. Finally, to Pilate again for the final verdict.

John, who witnessed the first phase of the trial, records, "Then the detachment of troops and the captain and the officers of the Jews arrested Jesus and bound Him. And they led Him away to Annas 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 Simon Peter followed Jesus, and so did another disciple. Now that disciple was known to the high priest, and went with Jesus into the courtyard of the high priest. But Peter stood at 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" (John 18:12-16).

John, being very humble, didn't want to highlight himself in his own Gospel, and so spoke of himself in the third person (John 21:24), and was present at the interrogation, leaving the only Gospel account on this part of the trial.

One commentary mentions, "In the meantime Peter has followed Jesus with '*another disciple*' (John 18:15). The intimate details which tell us how Peter got into the courtyard from the '*outside*' indicate that John was present here, but he did not mention his name. His father Zebedee apparently had a prosperous fishing business and his status may well have opened contacts within the high priest's official family" (*Preacher's Bible Commentary*, notes on John 18:15).

It is also probable that John's mother, Salome (Mr. 15:40), was a sister of Mary, Jesus' mother (Mt. 27:56; John 19:25), and so Jesus would have been his cousin, and he would have also been related to John the Baptist, who came from a priestly family, and perhaps that could be another connection to the high priest knowing him.

So Jesus first went before Annas, who had previously been high priest for several terms, and was known as being very powerful and corrupt.

Barclay gives us the historical background about Annas, "Only John tells us that Jesus was brought first of all to Annas. Annas was a notorious character. Alfred Edersheim writes of him: 'No figure is better known in contemporary Jewish history than that of Annas; no person deemed more fortunate or successful, but none also more

generally execrated [despised] than the late High Priest.' Annas was the power behind the throne in Jerusalem. He himself had been High Priest from A.D. 6 to 15. Four of his sons had also held the high priesthood and Caiaphas was his son-in-law. That very fact is itself suggestive and illuminating. There had been a time, when the Jews were free, when the High Priest had held office for life; but when the Roman governors came, the office became a matter for contention and intrigue and bribery and corruption. It now went to the greatest sycophant and the highest bidder, to the man who was most willing to toe the line with the Roman governor. The High Priest was the arch-collaborator, the man who brought comfort and ease and prestige and power not with bribes only but with close co-operation with his country's masters. The family of Annas was immensely rich and one by one they had intrigued and bribed their way into office, while Annas remained the power behind it all.

"Even the way in which Annas made his money was most probably disgraceful. In the Court of the Gentiles there were the sellers of victims for the sacrifices, those sellers whom Jesus had driven out. They were not traders; they were extortioners. Every victim offered in the Temple had to be without spot and blemish. There were inspectors to see that it was so. If a victim was bought outside the Temple it was certain that a flaw would be found. The worshipper was then directed to buy at the Temple booths where the victims had already been examined and where there was no risk of rejection. That would have been convenient and helpful but for one thing. Outside the Temple a pair of doves could cost as little as 4 pence; inside they could cost as much as 75 pence. The whole business was sheer exploitation; and the shops where the Temple victims were sold were called The Bazaars of Annas. They were the property of the family of Annas; it was by the exploitation of the worshippers, by trading on the sacred sacrifices that Annas had amassed a fortune. The Jews themselves hated the household of Annas. There is a passage in the Talmud which says: 'Woe to the house of Annas! Woe to their serpent's hiss! They are High Priests; their sons are keepers of the treasury; their sons-in-law are guardians of the Temple; and their servants beat the people with staves.' Annas and his

household were notorious" (*Daily Study Bible*, notes on John 18:13).

So John gives an eyewitness account, saying, "The high priest then asked Jesus about His disciples and His doctrine. 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. Why do you ask Me? Ask those who have heard Me what I said to them. Indeed they know what I said.' 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?' Jesus answered him, 'If I have spoken evil, bear witness of the evil; but if well, why do you strike Me?' Then Annas sent Him bound to Caiaphas the high priest" (John 18:19-24).

Now, the second part of the trial took place in Caiaphas' house. Although some scholars doubted his existence, in 1990, an elaborate bone box with Caiaphas' name was found in Jerusalem.

Matthew states, "And those who had laid hold of Jesus led Him away to Caiaphas the high priest, where the scribes and the elders were assembled. But Peter followed Him at a distance to the high priest's courtyard. And he went in and sat with the servants to see the end. Now the chief priests, the elders, and all the council sought false testimony against Jesus to put Him to death, *but found none*. Even though many false witnesses came forward, they found none. But at last two false witnesses came forward and said, 'This fellow said, 'I am able to destroy the temple of God and to build it in three days.' And the high priest arose and said to Him, 'Do You answer nothing? What is it these men testify against You?' But Jesus kept silent. And the high priest answered and said to Him, 'I put You under oath by the living God: Tell us if You are the Christ, the Son of God!' Jesus said to him, 'It is as you said. Nevertheless, I say to you, hereafter you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Power, and coming on the clouds of heaven.' Then the high priest tore his clothes, saying, 'He has spoken blasphemy! What further need do we have of witnesses? Look, now you have heard His blasphemy! What do you think?' They answered and said, 'He is deserving of death.' Then they spat in His face and beat Him; and others struck Him with the

palms of their hands, saying, 'Prophecy to us, Christ! Who is the one who struck You?'" (Mt. 26:57-64).

Barclay again gives the best background material on the trial: "The Sanhedrin was the supreme court of the Jews. It was composed of Scribes, Pharisees, Sadducees and elders of the people; it numbered seventy-one members; and it was presided over by the High Priest. For a trial such as this a quorum was twenty-three. It had certain regulations. All criminal cases must be tried during the daytime and must be completed during the daytime. Criminal cases could not be transacted during the Passover season at all. Only if the verdict was 'Not Guilty' could a case be finished on the day it was begun; otherwise a night must elapse before the pronouncement of the verdict, so that feelings of mercy might have time to arise. Further, no decision of the Sanhedrin was valid unless it met in its own meeting place, the Hall of Hewn Stone in the Temple precincts. All evidence had to be guaranteed by two witnesses separately examined and having not contact with each other. And false witness was punishable by death...These were the Sanhedrin's own rules, and it is abundantly clear that, in their eagerness to get rid of Jesus, they broke their own rules. The Jews had reached such a peak of hatred that any means were justified to put an end to Jesus.

"The main business of the night meeting of the Jewish authorities was to formulate a charge against Jesus. As we have seen, all evidence had to be guaranteed by two witnesses, separately examined. For long not even two false witnesses could be found to agree. And then a charge was found, the charge that Jesus had said that he would destroy the Temple and rebuild it in three days. It is clear that this charge is a twisting of certain things he did actually say. We have already seen that he foretold--and rightly--the destruction of the Temple. This had been twisted into a charge that he had said that he himself would destroy the Temple. We have seen that he foretold that he himself would be killed and would rise on the third day. This had been twisted into a charge that he had said that he would rebuild the Temple in three days. This charge was formulated by deliberately and maliciously misrepeating and misinterpreting certain things which Jesus had said. To that charge Jesus utterly refused to reply. Therein the law was on his side, for no person on trial could either be asked, or

compelled to answer, any question which would incriminate him. It was then that the High Priest launched his vital question. We have seen that repeatedly Jesus warned his disciples to tell no man that he was the Messiah. How then did the High Priest know to ask the question the answer to which Jesus could not escape? It may well be that when Judas laid information against him, he also told the Jewish authorities about Jesus' revelation of His own Messiahship. It may well be that Judas had deliberately broken the bond of secrecy which Jesus had laid upon His disciples.

"In any event, the High Priest asked the question, and asked it upon oath: 'Are you the Messiah?' he demanded. 'Do you claim to be the Son of God?' Here was the crucial moment in the trial. We might well say that all the universe held its breath as it waited for Jesus' answer. If Jesus said, 'No,' the bottom fell out of the trial and there was no possible charge against Him. He had only to say, 'No,' and walk out a free man, and escape before the Sanhedrin could think out another way of entrapping Him. On the other hand, if He said, 'Yes,' He signed his own death warrant. Nothing more than a simple 'Yes' was needed to make the Cross a complete and inescapable certainty.

"It may be that Jesus paused for a moment once again to count the cost before He made the great decision; and then He said, 'Yes' [for He could not lie]. He went further. He quoted Dan 7:13 with its vivid account of the ultimate triumph and kingship of God's chosen one. He well knew what He was doing. Immediately there went up the cry of blasphemy. Garments were rent in a kind of synthetic and hysterical horror; and Jesus was condemned to death.

"Then followed the spitting on Him, the buffeting, the slapping of his face, the mockery. Even the externals of justice were forgotten, and the venomous hostility of the Jewish authorities broke through. That meeting in the night began as a court of justice and ended in a frenzied display of hatred, in which there was no attempt to maintain even the superficialities of impartial justice" (Daily Study Bible, notes on Matthew 26:57).

Thus, Our Savior, the Lamb of God, willingly accepted to drink of that horrible cup of suffering--all done for the forgiveness of our sins. Do we really appreciate the depths of it?