

Text: Matthew 26:57-68

Title: Sham Trial #1

Truth: Jesus receives the death penalty from a kangaroo court.

Date/Location: Wednesday November 30, 2022 at FBC

Introduction

Technically, a kangaroo court is an unofficial body who tries someone they already feel is guilty. I use the term more broadly to refer to any court—whether an official body or not. The key feature of a kangaroo court is that it “leaps over” evidence favorable to the accused. It ignores such evidence and focuses only on that evidence it feels is favorable to its predetermined conclusion.

Officers of true justice will not only *take into consideration* evidence that favors the defendant; they will *desire* to find such evidence so it will be possible to clear a person rather than to condemn one who is innocent. Such people have a desire to pursue *truth*, not just a higher number of convictions. Unfortunately, that is not always or even often the case in our own justice system. I believe it was far worse for Jesus.

We will not focus on Peter in this section because he comes to the forefront again in verse 69. However, the text does mention in v. 58 that he followed the Lord as He was taken into custody and to Caiaphas the high priest. He tried for some time (an hour? two? three?) to be as close as he could to see how the matter turned out. Unfortunately, this put him in the hottest fire of temptation.

I. The Court, v. 57

- A. Annas, former high priest, from 6 AD to 15 AD (John 18:13). He was father-in-law to Caiaphas and son of Seth.
- B. Joseph Caiaphas was high priest from 18 AD to 36 AD. Where he is named in Scripture, 9 verses, he is vehemently opposed to Jesus and the disciples (Matt 26:3, 57; John 11:49, 18:13-14, 24, 28; Acts 4:6); the exception is a historical note (Luke 3:2). He may have had an overriding concern to avoid confrontation with Rome (John 11:48-49) but seemed to “have it out” for Jesus regardless.

- C. The Sanhedrin. The word Sanhedrin is from a Greek word meaning “council.” The scribes and elders were *already* assembled when Jesus was brought into the palace of Caiaphas. This shows the extent of the pre-planning to kill Jesus.

The council was a body of 70 or 71 (with the high priest) men who met to hold court in the temple every day. They were unable to legally administer certain punishments like the death penalty. In this case, they pushed that off to Pilate. In other cases, like that of Stephen in Acts 7, they did so illegally, but got away with it.

II. The Proceedings of the Court, v. 59-65

- A. They sought false testimony. I am quite sure they would not characterize what they were doing with those words, but that is what it was. Jesus had done nothing wrong, so any testimony they sought or found *had to be false*.
- B. They sought testimony to put him to death. They had plotted to do that very thing. Now the plotters were the judges. It would be like a modern judge plotting to get an innocent party in trouble, issuing an arrest warrant for them, bringing them into his courtroom, and then convicting them. They set themselves up as judge, jury, and executioner, basically, all in one. There was no accountability.
- C. They were unable to find two or three witnesses who said the same thing. They wanted to give an appearance of meeting the most basic evidence requirement in the law (Deut. 17:6, 19:15).
- D. Finally they did find two false testifiers who said that the Lord claimed to be able to destroy the temple and build it in three days. How this claim is a capital offense is beyond me. It may be crazy (in the eyes of the Sanhedrin) but being crazy is not worthy of capital punishment. Furthermore, they had misunderstood this statement from the moment Jesus said it about His body (John 2:19-22). They had an entirely wrong meaning in mind and misquoted it to boot—he told them to destroy this temple and he would raise it up. Obviously, He was *able* to do so. Furthermore, the quotation of Mark 14:58 expands in more detail what the false witnesses said: destroy this temple *that is made with hands*. That is NOT what Jesus said, but it reflects their misunderstanding of what He said.

- E. Verse 62 records the high priest expressing frustration at Jesus answering nothing to the charges leveled against Him. It is probably somewhat abnormal for the defendant in a capital case to keep his mouth closed. But Jesus did—not only because the accused should not be required to say anything, but because He was righteous, and it was God’s plan for Him to gently follow the path assigned for Him by the will of the Father (Acts 8:32). If Jesus kept silent, we know that must have been the right approach. Jesus continued to answer nothing.
- F. The high priest then tried to pull rank on Jesus and put Him under oath by the living God, to “make” Jesus speak. This is another unkind thing that the high priest did—the one who was supposed to be the holiest of all men. By this time in history, though, he was more of a political figure than anything. He was unsaved. He demanded to know if Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God. This strikes me as an irrelevant question in context of the line of questioning because the false witnesses did not accuse him of saying that. But that was the real issue behind the whole situation.
- G. Jesus acceded to the demand of the priest, in a sense giving respect to the office if not the man himself. The short answer He gave was basically this: “Yes—I am the Messiah, the Son of God.” That is the meaning of “It is as you said.” “Son of God” may not have meant the same thing to the priest as it did to Jesus—and us. To us, it is an explicit connection to deity, for the “son” of God partakes in all the qualities of deity that there are to have. It does not mean he is a subordinate to God or “came later” than God.
- H. In verse 64, Jesus added that He would come on the clouds of heaven. To anyone who knew the Bible, this is a clear reference to Daniel 7:13-14 and to a lesser degree, Psalm 110:1. By so saying, combined with “Son of God” language, He identifies Himself as the Son of Man and the ruler of the Messianic kingdom. He was thus claiming royal prerogative, as a descendant of King David.
- I. Evidently, the high priest understood this to be so close to a claim to be deity that he immediately charged Jesus with blasphemy and asked for a concurrence from the other members of the council.

This causes me to wonder at those who deny the deity of Jesus Christ. Even the *enemies* of Christ accused him of blasphemy.

- J. This trial was at night (27:1). This was illegal in their system of law. They were trying to do this all under the cover of real darkness! Not only were trials to be held in the light of day, but they were also supposed to hold capital trials in public at the temple. Neither of these rules were followed. The entire proceedings should have been thrown out by Pilate. After all, he said, “You take him and judge Him according to your law.” They did not do that!

III. The Conclusion of the Court, v. 66-68

- A. They adjudged Jesus to be worthy of death—a judgment to which they had already come *before* the trial began, and which guided their whole approach at trial.

By the way, the high priest tore his clothing. Leviticus 10:6 and 21:10 forbade this action. Caiaphas did it anyway because their tradition allowed it for blasphemy.

- B. They spit on Jesus and beat Him.

- C. They mocked Jesus by asking that He tell them the name of the person who struck him at various times throughout the beating. If He could not see them due to a blindfold (Luke 22:64), then He would have to use His powers of omniscience as the son of God to know who the attacker was.

If authorities use blindfolds, beatings and spitting, you know they are out of control.

Conclusion

Clearly, the “human reason” that Jesus was killed was for claiming to be what He was—Son of God and Son of Man. Deeper than that, however, is the divine reason. He was going to die to ransom and rescue sinners from their bondage to sin and death. He gave His life by means of a terribly unjust trial. It was the height of evil for Jewish people to corrupt the law of God against the Son of God to kill Him. But observe how God brought much good out of much evil.

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