

## Jesus: Condemned in Court

Matthew 26:57-68

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Ames, Iowa

February 23, 2025

Let's recap where we have been in Matthew 26. Chapter 26 opens with the religious leaders plotting to have Jesus arrested, and then, after the Passover, they would quietly arrest Him and have Him crucified. Then we see Jesus anointed in Bethany. After that, Judas met with the religious leaders and agreed to betray Him. Next, we see Jesus transform the Passover into the New Covenant meal that we celebrate, the Lord's Supper. Then Jesus told His disciples that they would be scattered because of Him and that Peter would even deny He knew Jesus. Then we walk with Jesus to the Garden of Gethsemane, where He prayed and His disciples slept. Last Sunday, we looked at Jesus' arrest in the Garden. This morning, we will cover Jesus' trial at Caiaphas' house.

Have you ever been treated unfairly or unjustly? Have you ever been accused of something that you didn't do? Perhaps the accusation came because your actions, your perceived motives, or your words were misunderstood.

Nothing is so hurtful as being mistreated or wrongly accused. Everyone wants to be treated fairly. So, when someone wrongly accuses us, we are wounded, frustrated, or angry. We may say things like, *"How could you treat me that way? How dare you blame me for that? How dare you think that I would say that? I never would say or do something like that."*

Perhaps you have experienced this at school, in your dorm, where you work, in your family, or even at church. It often occurs in marriages and can cause serious relational problems. The bottom line is that we do not like it when people judge us and accuse us unjustly.

Friends, Jesus knows what it is like to be mistreated and unfairly judged. In our text, we see this very clearly in His trial before Caiaphas, the high priest. His trial was the worst case of injustice ever perpetrated in all of human history.

We will work through the text. I outlined it in five sections to help us track with what occurred at this particular trial at Caiaphas' house.

Section One is vv. 57-61. Here, we see the *false witnesses*. Look at v. 57:

*Then those who had seized Jesus led him to Caiaphas the high priest, where the scribes and the elders had gathered.*

Remember, at the very beginning of Matthew 26 in vv. 1-5, Matthew tells us that the religious leaders wanted Jesus dead. They were looking for a way to arrest Him, but they originally planned to wait until the Passover feast. However, when Jesus made known to Judas that He knew what He planned to do, they had to go ahead and pull the trigger on their plan to arrest Him, put Him on trial, and kill Him.

Next, we see Peter's part in this scene. v. 58. I'm going to come back to Peter's part in this scene a little later. For now, let's continue to examine Jesus' trial.

Here's the deal: Jesus' trial before Caiaphas was hastily arranged and filled with illegal proceedings. Look in vv. 59-60a:

*Now the chief priests and the whole council were seeking false testimony against Jesus that they might put him to death,<sup>60</sup> but they found none, though many false witnesses came forward.*

These men were looking for evidence to support their verdict. What they wanted was anyone who would bring some kind of charge against Him that would merit the death sentence.

Jesus' trial would be much like what happens when the justice system is weaponized and sent after its political enemies. In Jesus' case, they had both religious and political offenses in view. They would use whatever charge they could make stick in order to kill Him.

Listen, there were a lot of things wrong with Jesus' trial. First of all, the trial was supposed to be held in the temple court, not in the house of the high priest. But, because the temple was closed at night, they had to find another location, so they chose the house of the high priest.

Secondly, Jesus' trial was held at night. It was illegal in the Jewish legal system to try a capital case at night. Trials that sought the death penalty had to take place during the daytime. This allowed the defendant to be represented by the proper counsel and have adequate witnesses for their defense.

Third, while you could acquit an innocent person on the same day as their trial, a guilty verdict, however, could only be given the day after the trial. This was to protect the defendant and prevent a rush to judgment.

In other words, what we have in Jesus' trial are leaders meeting at the wrong time and in the wrong place, seeking the wrong charges against the wrong person. Bottom line: Jesus' trial was full of illegal proceedings.

Nevertheless, the religious leaders carried out this illegal trial and brought many false witnesses to the trial that night. The other gospels fill in some blanks for us and tell us that their testimonies didn't agree.

However, vv. 60b-61, tell us that they finally may have manufactured a case. Look at what happened:

*At last two came forward<sup>61</sup> and said, "This man said, 'I am able to destroy the temple of God, and to rebuild it in three days.'"*

Jewish law was clear; no one could be put to death without the testimony of at least two witnesses. Finally, it seems they had the bare minimum of witnesses. Just picture the scene. They were like evil villains in a movie, wringing their hands together and saying, *"Finally, we have Him."*

The charge these witnesses made was a serious one. If Jesus had really threatened to destroy the temple, then, according to Roman law, it was a capital offense. Unfortunately, their testimony was based on hearsay and not Jesus' actual words.

What Jesus actually said is in John 2:19-21. He said:

*"Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up."<sup>20</sup> The Jews then said, "It has taken forty-six years to build this temple, and will you raise it up in three days?"<sup>21</sup> But he was speaking about the temple of his body.*

Jesus never said that *"He"* was going to destroy the temple. He only said, *"Destroy this temple, and I will raise it again in three days."*

There are a couple of ways to interpret that, but John's Gospel doesn't leave us guessing. John tells us that Jesus was speaking of His body.

Ultimately, by condemning him to death, the Jewish leaders actually fulfilled His prophecy. Jesus' body would be destroyed, and He would rise again on the third day—bottom line: Jesus is in control.

Let me summarize all of this. Like a violent criminal, Jesus was arrested under cover of darkness and subjected to a trial filled with illegal proceedings that produced false witnesses with a predetermined outcome and distorted testimony of His actual words. There's no way around it. Jesus was falsely accused and unjustly tried in the religious leaders' kangaroo court.

Yet, what Matthew wants us to see is how all of what Jesus went through was according to God's plan. He wants us to be in awe of Jesus as He endured these injustices. Jesus honored and obeyed God. He willingly submitted to these injustices because of the future joy set before Him. Jesus understood that His sinless endurance of these trials led to the crushing of the head of the enemy on the cross that would set His people free from sin and the wrath of God. Friends, in this trial, our Savior is lifting His leg to crush the serpent's head and preparing to receive the mortal wound of death as promised in Genesis 3:16.

The second section is vv. 62-63. Here, we see the *silent witness*. In these verses, we find Jesus more concerned with obeying God and fulfilling Scripture than anything else. Notice how Jesus responded to all of these charges?

*And the high priest stood up and said, "Have you no answer to make? What is it that these men testify against you?"*

In His silence, He fulfilled Isaiah 53:7, which says:

*He 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.*

Through it all, Jesus remained silent before His accusers. Jesus' silence frustrated the Sanhedrin and especially Caiaphas who was not used to someone defying him. So, at this point, Caiaphas had been sitting down. Now, He stands up and faces Jesus.

Think about it: Here, we have the current high priest of Israel facing off with the True and Ultimate High priest of Israel. The irony is that Caiaphas believes Jesus is on trial before him, but in reality, Caiaphas is on trial before Jesus, the True High Priest.

Here is another irony in this trial. The religious leaders thought they were rigging the trial to go in their favor so they could crucify Christ, but they were actually fulfilling all of the Old Testament prophecies that the Messiah would come and die for the sins of God's people. Bottom line: The sinless Son of God remained silent before His accusers, not because He was guilty, but because He had come to die as a substitute for His people.

Finally, in v. 63, we see that Caiaphas had enough of Jesus' silence. So, he put Jesus under a *solemn oath*. Look in v. 63:

*But 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."*

There was no higher oath in court than to swear by the living God. When charged with this oath, by law, Jesus was *required* to answer. Now, Jesus must answer the question truthfully:

*"Are you the Christ, the Son of God?"*

This leads us to the third section, v. 64, where we see *the True Witness*. Verse 64 is the key verse in this text. The way Jesus answers this question will determine the outcome of the trial.

If Jesus denies He is the Son of God, the crisis is over. He would lose His ministry and His influence on the Jewish people. However, if He said He was the Son of God, then He is a liar and must be put to death for claiming He was the Messiah.

Jesus answered the question in the affirmative. However, He was slightly ambiguous. This was because Caiaphas and the religious leaders misunderstood who the Messiah was supposed to be.

So, let's break down Jesus' answer to the Caiaphas. Even today, some people believe that Jesus never plainly confessed that He was the Messiah, the Son of God. They believe He never said He was the divine Son of God who came as truly human and yet truly God. Verse 64 is key for helping us understand that Jesus was very God of very God and fully and truly human.

In v. 64, Jesus clearly confesses He is the Messiah. Look at the first sentence of Jesus' confession to Caiaphas:

*You have said so.*

As I said, Jesus' answer was slightly ambiguous because Caiaphas and the religious leaders misunderstood the office of the Messiah. So, when Caiaphas asked Jesus if He was the *Son of God*, he asked if Jesus was the "human" man God had appointed as His representative (Messiah). They understood that this man would merely be human. They also thought He would be a nationalistic, political, military, and anti-Roman Messiah. But He was not that kind of Messiah.

Think about it this way. I have a friend in Texas, and his name is Scott. He has a doctorate in education, and he teaches at Texas A&M in Commerce, Texas. Imagine that Scott and his young son go to a football game, and while there, someone in the stands is having a heart attack. The people around him stand up and yell, "*Is there a doctor here.*" Then his young son looks up at him and says, "*Dad!*" All his son knew was that he was a doctor because people addressed him as "doctor." Then, people around him begin to look at him as if he could help. Then, he tells them, "*I'm a doctor, but not that kind of doctor. I'm not a medical doctor.*"

This is what is happening here. Jesus tells them,

*"Yes, I am the Messiah, but I'm not the kind of Messiah you were thinking would come."*

Jesus' initial statement was intentionally ambiguous so He could correct their misunderstanding of who the Messiah would be.

Listen, for Jesus and Matthew, the title of the *Son of God* was much more than a mere human title. For Jesus, it also affirmed His deity—He was God in the flesh. They didn't understand that about the Messiah. Yes, Jesus is their Messiah, but not the kind of Messiah they expected.

What Jesus said next left no doubt about what He meant about who He was as the Messiah. He was crystal clear that He was the divine Son of God and also God in the flesh.

*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."*

Jesus' answer corrected their misunderstanding of the Messiah by alluding to Daniel 7:13 and Psalm 110:1. Listen to these verses. Daniel says in his vision that he saw the *son of man* coming on the clouds. Listen to Daniel 7:13,

*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.*

Daniel 7:13 uses the title *son of man* instead of Son of God. This is because *son of man* is a Messianic title. Jesus was saying He was the *son of man*. However, it is text He ascribed to Himself next that pushed them over the edge.

When He applied Psalm 110:1 to Himself, it was more than they could bear. It says:

*The LORD says to my Lord: "Sit at my right hand, until I make your enemies your footstool."*

Your translation should have LORD in all caps. This means that, in the original language, it is the covenant name for God – Yahweh. When Jesus referred to Himself as the *Son of Man*, the Lord, who would be seated at the right hand of power, they knew He was claiming the throne of God.

Now, there was no more confusion about who Jesus said He was. Jesus told them that the next time they saw Him, He would return on the clouds as Almighty King and Judge of the universe. They may judge Him now, but He would be their judge in the future Kingdom. This was too much for Caiaphas and the religious leaders. They blew up!

In vv. 65-66, we have our fifth section: *The verdict of the True Witness*:

*Then the high priest tore his robes and said, "He has uttered blasphemy. What further witnesses do we need? You have now heard his blasphemy. <sup>66</sup> What is your judgment?" They answered, "He deserves death."*

What Jesus said infuriated them. It was unusual for the high priest to tear his clothes. In fact, it was actually forbidden except in cases of blasphemy. Yet, that was what Caiaphas did. He tore his robes and accused Jesus of blasphemy. But here's the deal: Jesus had not committed blasphemy. What He said was true, so the charge was false.

Nevertheless, they had what they needed. The false witnesses may not have been enough, but the charge of blasphemy was more than enough. So, Caiaphas repeated the charge of blasphemy twice, and then he asked the court's opinion. They cried out, *"He is worthy of death."*

Once again, they broke their own laws by handing down a guilty verdict at night.

Our fifth and final section is in vv. 67-68. Here, we see *the humiliated witness* in vv. 67-68.

*Then they spit in his face and struck him. And some slapped him, <sup>68</sup> saying, "Prophecy to us, you Christ! Who is it that struck you?"*

As this scene closes at Caiaphas house, we continue to see Scripture fulfilled in the mistreatment of Jesus. Here, Isaiah 50:6 is fulfilled:

*I 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.*

Jesus had been telling His disciples since Matthew 16 that He would be going to Jerusalem and that He would suffer many things at the hands of the religious leaders. Now, we see that they are mocking Him by telling Him to prophecy and hitting Him in the face.

So, here we see our Savior not only falsely accused, but He was also physically abused. From beginning to end, Jesus' trial at Caiaphas' house was a travesty of justice. He was a sinless, innocent man. Friends, Jesus knows what it is like to be treated unjustly.

As we conclude, I want to give you four takeaways from this text.

First, are you like the religious leaders? Do you misunderstand who the Messiah is? It's not possible for me to explain the complete person of Christ in one sermon, much less at the end of this message. That's why it's our responsibility as Christians to keep learning about the person and work of Jesus.

Also, if you're not a Christian, then you need to do a serious investigation about who Jesus is in the Bible. You need to know the true Jesus of the Bible. Just read the Bible.

Because it is so important to know who Jesus is, I want to read from our church's doctrinal statement, the *Baptist Faith and Message 2000*. Article 2 in on God the Son says:

*Christ is the eternal Son of God. In His incarnation as Jesus Christ He was conceived of the Holy Spirit and born of the virgin Mary. Jesus perfectly revealed and did the will of God, taking upon Himself human nature with its demands and necessities and identifying Himself completely with mankind yet without sin. He honored the divine law by His personal obedience, and in His substitutionary death on the cross He made provision for the redemption of men from sin. He was raised from the dead with a glorified body and appeared to His disciples as the person who was with them before His crucifixion. He ascended into heaven and is now exalted at the right hand of God where He is the One Mediator, fully God, fully man, in whose Person is effected the reconciliation between God and man. He will return in power and glory to judge*

*the world and to consummate His redemptive mission. He now dwells in all believers as the living and ever present Lord.<sup>1</sup>*

Doctrinal statements are not authoritative and infallible like Scripture, but good doctrinal statements will accurately summarize biblical teaching so we can get our minds around very complex and important doctrines. They also should give good Biblical footnotes to tell you where the doctrine is located in the Bible. So, if you want to know more about who Jesus is, you can find our statement of faith online with Biblical footnotes. You can read all of the texts that build this doctrine, so you will understand more of who Jesus is.

Where is your knowledge of Jesus lacking? What are you doing to grow in your understanding of the Messiah? Regularly attending worship, Foundations, and small groups are good starting points. Pastor Dean will be teaching a one-day doctrinal study on the doctrine of justification on the afternoon of April 12. I strongly encourage you to attend that study to grow in your knowledge of the person and work of Jesus.

Friends, don't be like the religious leaders and go through life with a misunderstanding of who Jesus is. Apply yourself to understanding God's word and who Jesus is.

Second, Jesus reminded the religious leaders in v. 64 that one day, they would see Him coming on the clouds, and the One they judged would judge them. No one will escape justice. Everyone will be treated with justice. Just as Daniel 7:9-10 reminds us, the Messiah will judge us as the divine risen Savior. Daniel writes:

*"As I looked, thrones were placed, and the Ancient of Days took his seat; his clothing was white as snow, and the hair of his head like pure wool; his throne was fiery flames; its wheels were burning fire. <sup>10</sup> A stream of fire issued and came out from before him; a thousand thousands served him, and ten thousand times ten thousand stood before him; the court sat in judgment, and the books were opened.*

Here's what this means. It means that Jesus will make right every injustice that has occurred to His people. Nothing will be overlooked or thrown out of His court. He will judge with righteousness and truth. He will want to know what you have done with who He is as the Savior. This leads me to my third takeaway.

Third, how do you respond when you are treated unjustly or unfairly? Most of us, when we are treated unjustly, cry out for justice. Perhaps we even want to seek revenge. What should we do when we are treated unfairly or unjustly?

As I said last Sunday, Peter learned from Jesus how to respond. So, when injustice comes into our lives, instead of cutting off the servant's ear, we should follow in Jesus' footsteps. Peter writes in 1 Peter 2:20-24,

*But if when you do good and suffer for it you endure, this is a gracious thing in the sight of God. <sup>21</sup> For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you might follow in his steps. <sup>22</sup> He committed no sin, neither was deceit found in his mouth. <sup>23</sup> When 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. <sup>24</sup> He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. By his wounds, you have been healed.*

Listen, when we're treated unjustly, everything in us cries out for justice or revenge. Friends, we have a higher calling. We are called to follow Christ's example. When we are treated unjustly, we shouldn't retaliate but trust God.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://bfm.sbc.net/bfm2000/#ii>.

We must remember that Jesus was judged unjustly, but he will judge justly when he returns. Every mouth will be silenced before him. Caiaphas will be there. Pilate and Herod will be there. You and I will be there. And if you do not know Christ, you will pay the penalty for your sins. But for those of you who are in Christ, you will be saved.

Lastly, let's return to Peter in v. 58. Next Sunday, we will pick up in v. 68 with Peter's denial, but before we get to his denial, here's what I want you to consider. Peter witnessed Jesus' trial at a distance. Verse 58 tells us that he was sitting in the courtyard with the temple guards as all of this unfolded. Look at v. 58:

*And 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.*

There is a tragic message in verse 58. Here we see Peter following Jesus at a distance, sneaking into the courtyard, and sitting down with the guards. Pay close attention to those words:

*"And Peter was following him at a distance."*

Brothers and sisters, Peter's journey in Matthew 26 is devastating. First, he boasts to Jesus on the way to the garden. Then, he fails to watch and pray in the garden. Next, he follows Jesus at a distance. Then, we see him sitting with Jesus' enemies. Now, he is only a short step away to his three denials of Jesus in the courtyard.

Here's the takeaway: We never deny Jesus all at once. There is always a gradual, incremental, downward progression in our lives. We gradually drift from the truth of the gospel. We minimize obedience. We fail to pray. We fail to read God's word. We stop going to church and worshipping with God's people. We don't listen to the warnings of God's word or from God's people.

Drifting from Jesus rarely happens all at once. It usually happens one small step at a time. Friend, how's your walk with the Lord today? Are you following Jesus closely, or are you following him at a distance? Are you drifting from Jesus, or are you clinging to Him?

Friends, the good news is that Jesus holds us fast, just like we sing in the old hymn. Yet, even though He holds us fast, we still have the responsibility to cling ever so tightly to the rock that will not be moved. Ultimately, because Jesus holds us, we are able to hold to Him. The old saying, *"Let go and let God,"* is not true. You must not let go. Friends, hold fast to the One who holds fast to you.