

Subject: *God on Trial*
Scripture: *John 18:12-27*

Every now and then a court case draws national attention. This is true whenever a celebrity or important person is involved. In this message we will look back at the trial of Jesus, a highly unlikely and unusual trial. After all, He is the only perfect man who ever lived. His trial can be described in many ways. It was a unique trial and it was an unfair trial, a mockery of justice. This is the trial you would never expect...God on trial.

THE AUTHORITY FOR HIS TRIAL

In every trial there must be a proper jurisdiction or authority given to try someone charged with wrongdoing. One Bible identified this text with the heading: "Jesus before Jewish authorities." Any trial has to do with an accused person being brought before a judge, a jury, or proper venue of authority. The trial of Jesus actually was two trials in two separate courts.

- The Jewish religious trial
- The Roman civil trial

If we look at all four gospels we see that the Jewish trial took place in three phases and Jesus was brought before Annas, the former high priest, and Caiaphas, the current high priest and son-in-law to Annas. Annas served as high priest from 6-18 A.D. Caiaphas served as high priest from 18-36 A.D. Their time in leadership actually overlapped. The high priest was the highest ranking member of the Jewish Sanhedrin. He was the most powerful Jew in Israel. He answered to no one but Pontius Pilate. The Roman civil trial also took place in three phases. Jesus was brought first to Pilate, then to Herod Antipas, and then back to Pilate.

We should remember that the authority for this trial or any trial comes from God. The authority of the Jewish high priests and the Roman officials was given by God. For that reason they had a very solemn responsibility to carry out justice. They were all accountable to God, as all judges and government officials are today.

Romans 13:1 *Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers. For there is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God.*

Proverbs 17:15 *He that justifieth the wicked, and he that condemneth the just, even they both are abomination to the LORD.*

We know that Caiaphas had already rendered his verdict before the trial even started (vs. 14). **John 11:47-52** ⁴⁷ *Then gathered the chief priests and the Pharisees a council, and said, What do we? for this man doeth many miracles. ⁴⁸ If we let him thus alone, all men will believe on him: and the Romans shall come and take away both our place and nation. ⁴⁹ And one of them, named Caiaphas, being the high priest that same year, said unto them, Ye know nothing at all, ⁵⁰ Nor consider that it is expedient for us, that one man should die for the people, and that the whole nation perish not. ⁵¹ And this spake he not of himself: but being high priest that year, he prophesied that Jesus should die for that nation; ⁵² And not for that nation only, but that also he should gather together in one the children of God that were scattered abroad.*

Caiaphas said it was "expedient" for Jesus to be killed. It would be to their advantage. His concern was not for justice, but to protect the vested interests of the religious establishment.

He didn't realize that his verdict was actually a prophecy that Jesus would die as a substitute sacrifice for sinners. God used the words of an ungodly man to speak the truth about Jesus.

THE TIME AND PLACE OF HIS TRIAL

Jesus was arrested in the Garden of Gethsemane and taken into Jerusalem. You would think the men who came to arrest Jesus would have changed their minds. After all, they had all fallen backwards on the ground when Jesus identified Himself (vs. 6). The Jewish religious trial took place overnight and it was in three phases. First, there was a preliminary hearing at the home of Annas, and then a formal gathering of the Sanhedrin at the palace of Caiaphas, the high priest. The first stages of this trial took place at night so that it would not cause a public uproar. It was illegal to hold such a trial at night. The formal charge took place after sunrise. The Roman trial took place later that morning in the judgment hall of Pontius Pilate. First, Pilate questioned Jesus in the judgment hall. Then he sent Jesus to Herod, and finally Pilate questioned Him one final time.

THE EXAMINATION AT HIS TRIAL

Caiaphas questioned Jesus about His disciples and His doctrine. These were two of the most important things in Jesus' ministry. He answered Caiaphas that nothing was done in secret. He challenged the high priest to ask the people who heard Him. Jesus knew that Caiaphas was well aware of His disciples and His teaching.

The trial of Jesus was actually a mistrial. Both the Jews and Romans claimed to uphold human rights, but both were guilty of a terrible injustice to an innocent man. Matthew's gospel tells us that the Jewish leaders tried to find false witnesses, and finally found some to testify against Jesus, but their charges did not agree with each other and in some cases the charges were a distortion of the truth. At first, Jesus was silent, but eventually He testified that He was the Christ, the Son of God, and that He would appear in glory.

Matthew 26:57-66 ⁵⁷ And they that had laid hold on Jesus led him away to Caiaphas the high priest, where the scribes and the elders were assembled. ⁵⁸ But Peter followed him afar off unto the high priest's palace, and went in, and sat with the servants, to see the end. ⁵⁹ Now the chief priests, and elders, and all the council, sought false witness against Jesus, to put him to death; ⁶⁰ But found none: yea, though many false witnesses came, yet found they none. At the last came two false witnesses, ⁶¹ And said, This fellow said, I am able to destroy the temple of God, and to build it in three days. ⁶² And the high priest arose, and said unto him, Answerest thou nothing? what is it which these witness against thee? ⁶³ But Jesus held his peace. And the high priest answered and said unto him, I adjure thee by the living God, that thou tell us whether thou be the Christ, the Son of God. ⁶⁴ Jesus saith unto him, Thou hast said: nevertheless I say unto you, Hereafter shall ye see the Son of man sitting on the right hand of power, and coming in the clouds of heaven. ⁶⁵ Then the high priest rent his clothes, saying, He hath spoken blasphemy; what further need have we of witnesses? behold, now ye have heard his blasphemy. ⁶⁶ What think ye? They answered and said, He is guilty of death.

Jesus was condemned, but not yet sentenced to die. The religious leaders condemned Jesus and took Him to Pilate's judgment hall, but they would not go in lest they would be defiled and not be able to eat the Passover. The Roman government reserved the right to carry out capital punishment. This was in the plan and purpose of God (Jn. 18:32) because Jesus had to be crucified. Jesus had said that He would die by being "lifted up" (3:14; 8:28; 12:32-33) or crucified. If the Jews executed Him it would have been by throwing Him down and stoning

Him. God controlled all the details around these proceedings so that when sentence was passed He would be sentenced by the Romans to be crucified. When the Jewish leaders took Jesus to Pilate they knew he would laugh at their charge of blasphemy against a God he did not know or worship. He could care less about the blasphemy. So they brought three charges against Jesus they knew Pilate would act on.

Luke 23:1-2 ¹ *And the whole multitude of them arose, and led him unto Pilate.* ² *And they began to accuse him, saying, We found this fellow perverting the nation, and forbidding to give tribute to Caesar, saying that he himself is Christ a King.*

Pilate began his questions by asking Jesus if He was the King of the Jews (vs. 33). He further questioned Him about what He had done, and Jesus told Him that His kingdom was not an earthly kingdom, but a heavenly kingdom. Earthly kingdoms come and go, but His kingdom is eternal and unchangeable. Pilate then asked Jesus if He was a king. Jesus then told Pilate the reason why He was born and came into this world. He came to bear witness of the truth. Everyone who is of the truth hears Him. This is one of the most important things Jesus ever said. He is the way, *the truth*, and the life (Jn. 14:6). He came to testify of the truth.

John 8:31-32 ³¹ *Then said Jesus to those Jews which believed on him, If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed;* ³² *And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.*

Pilate was skeptical, “What is truth?” But he didn’t stay around to hear Jesus’ answer. He had other business to do, and went out to the Jews and tried to get rid of the problem by saying, “I find in him no fault at all.” In other words, this man is no guilty of any wrongdoing.” At this point, Jesus should have been acquitted of all charges and set free. Instead, Pilate looked for a way out and suggested that he could release him as a customary favor during the Passover, but the Jews wanted him to release Barabbas, a notorious criminal.

THE VERDICT AT HIS TRIAL

In the Jewish trial Jesus was found guilty of blasphemy because He claimed to be the Son of God. They didn’t know who Jesus was. For the Jews it was a case of mistaken identity. In the Roman trial Jesus was found guilty of insurrection and treason because He claimed to be the King of the Jews and therefore a rival to Caesar, **John 19:12** *And from thenceforth Pilate sought to release him: but the Jews cried out, saying, If thou let this man go, thou art not Caesar's friend: whosoever maketh himself a king speaketh against Caesar.*

The verdict of the Jewish leaders was based on what was best for them and the nation. As Caiaphas said, it was expedient for Jesus to die and the Jewish nation to survive. The verdict of Pilate was also based on what was best for him and the Roman Empire under Caesar. It was best for Jesus to die and for him and his career to survive. Their verdict was only based on the basis of pragmatism or what works, instead of what is right.

The same thing happens today. People say, “I have to live and get along in this world.” No, you have to die and meet God. Annas and Caiaphas, Pilate and Herod all realize now that when Jesus was on trial, they were the ones actually on trial. Just think what they would do differently if they had another chance. People still put God on trial. They approve Him if He meets all their demands and expectations, but God is not on trial. We are the ones on trial and Christ is the Judge. We stand guilty and condemned, but He offers us a pardon. Will you accept a pardon on His terms of repentance and faith or will you be condemned in hell?