

The Trial of Jesus

Intro: sometime around 1AM, Jesus was arrested by a mob and taken to the first of several trials he would face over the next several hours. Things would move quickly and Jesus would be on the cross by 9AM that same day. (while timelines can be argued, let's stick with this one for today)

I. Arrest and Trial

- A. Here are the scriptures that cover the trials of Jesus. (SLIDE ONE)
- B. Each gospel writer emphasized different issues and events.
- C. To set this up, we need to remember that the religious establishment had already decided that Jesus had to die. Caiaphas had said so (John 18:14) and the Pharisees had wondered how to kill him.
 - 1. When we read these trials there is a sense of unreality. How could ruling, powerful individuals who claimed they did what they did for God, be so dishonest and arrange for an honest man's death?
 - 2. If we don't watch out, however, this lesson turns into a history lesson or an anti-Jewish religious establishment of 30AD lesson. And what good will that do us?
 - 3. Let's turn this another way and see it in today's light: Jesus is still on trial. Christian teens are screamed at on the streets of San Francisco, called fascists and haters.
 - 4. Stand up for Jesus and you will draw fire. Some will want to keep their traditions rather than live as Jesus decreed and others will want to kill Jesus all over again so that they – we repeat ourselves – do what pleases them.
 - 5. Why do we think we can get away with this? For the same reason Annas, Caiaphas, and the Pharisees thought they could get away with it.

II. The Sham of the Trials

- A. Legal experts have crawled all over this trial for centuries, amazed at how many violations of Jewish law (Mishna) took place during this short period of time. Their findings come up with between 12 and 27 violations.

1. No mention of a warrant (which had to be written and read) or a military guard. No formal charge.
2. Taken to Annas who was not a high priest and had no standing. He was the father-in-law of Caiaphas, the high priest.
3. Caiaphas couldn't hear the case or participate in it for the Mishna required that the judge have no interest in the outcome; that he be neither friend nor foe. He had already decided Jesus should die for the good of the country. (John 18:14)
4. The Sanhedrin met at night – which was illegal.
5. Capital trials cannot be held just before a Sabbath or feast day (to avoid a rush to judgment).
6. Capital cases had to be heard, and verdicts passed, in daylight hours... but NOT on the same day.
7. The charge had to remain unchanged during the trial. They changed it twice during Jesus' trial. (tearing down the temple, equating self with God, political insurrection)
8. If witnesses contradicted themselves or each other, the trial was to be immediately ended. (Mk. 14:56-59)
9. No one spoke for the accused.
10. When the witnesses failed, Caiaphas questioned Jesus himself, which was illegal.
11. No one was to be convicted on his own testimony (Mk. 14:61). Blasphemy required using the name of God.
12. Capital sentences couldn't be carried out for two days after the end of the trial. Jesus was arrested and on a cross less than 12 hours later.
13. Pilate found Jesus not guilty twice before and one more time after sending Jesus to the cross. Once would be all it takes to end the trial.
14. On the way to the execution site, if the prisoner recalled something that might ameliorate his case, he could ask to be brought back. If anyone along the way thought of something that would save him, the progression was stopped. A man was to go ahead of the condemned man and say "This is *** who is led to punishment for the crime of ***". The witnesses who testified against him

were ***. If anyone has evidence to give in his favor, let him come forth quickly.”

III. How Did This Happen?

- A.** Caiaphas, Annas, Herod and Pilate were all deeply flawed men, but is that enough to explain their behavior? No. But Jesus explained it, once in a parable and once during the trial.
- B.** Matthew 21:33ff. The parable of the wicked workers. This is a bizarre tale: who would think that the landowner would give them the land if they killed the son?
- C.** During the trial, the council asked Jesus if he was the Son of God. (Luke 22:70,71) Jesus said, “That is what you’ve said.” They knew who he was, and yet they delivered him to death.
 - 1.** They trusted in their special relationship with God to get them through this. They assumed they would be forgiven and God would change His plan for them.
 - 2.** Sound absurd? Not to me. It sounds familiar.
- D.** The parable spoke to this. God sends preachers, elders, prophets, teachers and they are abused for merely saying what God has said (no la-la land prophecies, but the written word). People assume that God HAS to love them and HAS to keep pursuing them.
- E.** But he doesn’t. Jesus had already alerted the religious establishment that the old way would be done away with (Matthew 24) and it was. Invaders destroyed the records and temple in Jerusalem. The system that Caiaphas, the Sanhedrin, Annas, and Pilate lied, cheated, and committed felonies to save was destroyed. They were left outside the chosen.
- F.** Caiaphas’ job as high priest was to keep the people subdued and happy, manage the temple, and keep the worship going. He didn’t have the time or inclination to be radically overhauled by the gospel. How is this different from today?
- G.** To the right, Jesus would say they were worshipping God in vain by teaching traditions as if they were doctrine. To the left, Jesus says if he is rejected, no other savior is coming.
- H.** Every day, Jesus is on trial. And so are we.