

## **The Illegal, Unjust Trials of Jesus, Part 1**

Matthew 26:57, 59-61

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We find ourselves in our study of God's Word right at the point where our Lord is offering His life for the sins of men and women. Turn in your Bible to Matthew, chapter 26. We come to a new paragraph in our study this morning, verses 57 and following. This is the section that gives us the record of the illegal, unjust trial of Jesus. And I want to try to lay a foundation for us this morning to understand the nature of the trial of Christ that we might understand truly how illegal and unjust it was, and how, in spite of that, it demonstrates His holy, perfect majesty. It is a remarkable, remarkable portion of Scripture. Let me give you a little background. The Jews have always prided themselves on their sense of fairness, their sense of equity, their sense of justice, and rightly so, for they have basically a foundation of justice that has benefited the whole world. The sense of justice and jurisprudence that we have, even in America, finds its origins in the Judaic justice system, as do all equitable systems around the world.

The Jewish system of jurisprudence and law and judgment was predicated on one Old Testament passage, primarily, and that is Deuteronomy 16, verses 18 to 20. This is what it says: "You shall appoint for yourself judges and officers in all your towns which the Lord your God is giving you, according to your tribes, and they shall judge the people with righteous judgment. You shall not distort justice, you shall not be partial, you shall not take a bribe, for a bribe blinds the eyes of the wise and perverts the words of the righteous. Justice and only justice you shall pursue, that you may live and possess the land which the Lord your God is giving you."

Now, there you have God's bottom line standard for judgment and justice; local judges, judging the people with fairness and righteousness, never distorting what is true, not being partial, never taking a bribe, justice and only justice. You pursue it in order that you may live and possess the land which the Lord your God is giving you. And throughout the history of the Jewish people, there has been that undergirding sense of justice and judgment as a standard for their system of jurisprudence. Now, as they began to work out the practical application of Deuteronomy, chapter 16, in any area or region or locality where there were 120 men as heads of families, there was to be in that locality a local council. Wherever you had at least 120 men who were heads of families, you had enough people to constitute a local council. It was really a synagogue community; that community was large enough to have a synagogue, and then, of course, to have this local council. The councils became known as Sanhedrin. That is a Hebrew term, but it is basically transliterated right off of a Greek term which means "sitting together." They were a group of men who came and sat together to make judgments, to decide issues of civil and criminal aspects. So in any group of 120 men who were head of families, any locality, they would have a Sanhedrin, a sitting together council. The council would be made up of 23 men. Always an odd number, of course, so that in any voting there would always be a majority. These 23 men would be taken from the elders of the village. They acted as judges and jury in all matters.

Now, where you had a village or a town smaller than 120 men who were heads of families, there would be a group of either three or seven elders, chosen to rule over those smaller villages. And they would make the judgments and render the verdicts in the cases of conflict or criminal activity. These councils or Sanhedrin constituted basically the government over a synagogue community. Now, one of them on the councils, whether small or large, would be called the chief ruler. So in the New Testament gospels, when you read about the chief ruler, he is one who presides over that local council. But all of them served as a court. And whenever you read, such as in Matthew 5:22 or Matthew 10:17 or elsewhere, that you would be brought before the council, that's what it has in view; the local governing group of judges who sit over any given locality, any given synagogue community of Jews.

Now, in Jerusalem, which of course was the capital city, the great religious center of the life of Israel, there was what was called the Great Sanhedrin – the Great Council. This was composed most likely of 70 men who were elders, 24 chief priests, 24 elders, 23 scribes plus the high priest makes 71, so they got an odd number by including the high priest. They were the final court for appeal. Any person who felt that the adjudication made at a lower level was not fair could appeal to the Sanhedrin and the Supreme Court level in Jerusalem, and under some conditions, no doubt, gain a hearing. They were the highest and ultimate ruling body in Israel. The men who were on that group were chosen because of their wisdom. They were chosen from the lesser councils. They did their apprenticeship work by serving a lesser council, and if they proved themselves to be uniquely wise, were brought to the Sanhedrin level. Also, people were invited to sit on the Sanhedrin who became aware of their duties and who grew to understand the function by being pupils who sat at the feet of other Sanhedrinists. So it was made up, then, of students and pupils of the group itself, as well as those taken from local groups, brought to that point because of their high esteem, and their proven track record of wisdom and impartiality, and so forth.

Now, the Sanhedrin in terms of criminal procedure, guaranteed to a person who was under prosecution several things. There were three primary things in relation to criminal procedure that the laws of jurisprudence upheld in the Sanhedrin guaranteed to a person. Number one: public trial – public trial. In other words, there was to be no hidden, secret, clandestine trials. Everything was to be open and exposed, so that no one could be framed and railroaded into some kind of execution or some kind of penalty without just trial taking place. The judges were always, then, under the scrutiny of the populace, who were able to see and attend and, to some extent at least, know what was going on. And courts today have maintained the same thing. Secondly, the Sanhedrin guaranteed for anyone brought in on a criminal procedure the right of self-defense. That is, there was to be a defender. There was to be someone who provided a defense for the accused. He had the right to bring in defense of himself in the mouth of other witnesses who could participate in the trial. Thirdly, no one could be convicted of anything unless convicted or proven to be guilty by two or three witnesses.

So basically, those three things: public trial, the right of defense, and a solid case based upon the evidence of more than one witness. Those things remain with us even today under the basic guarantee of courts in our own society. And so that was in place by the time of our Lord, and that is very important to know as we get through this trial, because you'll see how they violated all of these kind of things, and many more, as we shall see. I might add at this point that false witnessing was so serious a crime, because their punishments were so swift and so serious, that anyone who gave false testimony was punished with the very penalty the false witness sought to bring upon the person he witnessed against. In other words, if you came into the court to witness that someone had

committed a murder, and you were giving false witness, you would pay the death penalty yourself. Whatever penalty you sought, you received, if your testimony was false.

And that comes from Deuteronomy 19, verses 16 to 19. “If a malicious witness rises up against a man to accuse him of wrongdoing, then both of the men” – that is, the one accused and the accuser – “who have the dispute shall stand before the Lord, before the priests, and the judges who will be in office in those days.” In other words, the Lord will bring about His will through that group. “And the judges shall investigate thoroughly, and if the witness is a false witness and he has accused his brother falsely, then you shall do to him just as he had intended to do to his brother; thus you shall purge the evil from among you,” Deuteronomy 19:16 to 19. You get rid of false witnesses if they realize that that which they seek falsely is what they’re going to get if they’re caught, because obviously the system of justice depends so much on true witnesses.

Each case, also, was to be publicly heard; no unjust act allowed to proceed behind closed doors. And I think it’s most interesting to note that in any case where death was prescribed as the sentence, the execution could not be accomplished until the third day. For example, if today the sentence was rendered, this would be the first day. One whole day, tomorrow, would be the second day, and not until the morning of the third day could the council reconvene and reaffirm the death sentence, and execute the person that same day. And the day in the middle was a day to be sure that all the evidence was in, and there was no further need for testimony. And by the way, the witnesses who witnessed against the person which brought about the death penalty were the ones who had to cast the first stone in the execution. The witnesses were the executioners. So you wanted to be very certain that your testimony was true, or you would not only be guilty of lying, you would be guilty of murder. And so they tended to protect themselves from false witnessing by making the witness himself the executioner, and that would add the last degree of certainty, or assist in adding the last degree of certainty, to the testimony the person gave.

Now, this is based on Deuteronomy 17:7, and is what our Lord had in mind, you’ll remember, when all these people accused this woman taken in adultery, and said she’s committed adultery. And Jesus said to them, “All right, you’re the witnesses against her, then let he that is without sin,” do what? “Cast the first stone.” In other words, that would have been the normal procedure. If she’s guilty, then we’re going to execute her, and you that have witnessed against her will cast the stones. The only thing He said is if you haven’t done the same thing, then you have a right to cast that stone. The implication there, of course, is that the witnesses were the executioners, and that was the system; that’s the way it worked.

Now, I want to give you a little bit of an insight, and it’s essential to do this, into the procedure for a Sanhedrin trial. There’s a very helpful book by Simon Greenleaf entitled, *The Testimony of the Evangelists*, and in it there is a whole section by Joseph Salvador on this matter of Sanhedrin trial procedure. I think it’s essential enough that I want to share it with you. Listen – and we’ll know what should have happened in the trial of Christ. “On the day of the trial, the executive officers of justice cause the accused person to make his appearance. At the feet of the elders were placed men who, under the name of auditors or candidates, followed regularly the sittings of the council.” In other words, the council was audited by some objective men, who scrutinized everything going on to make sure it conformed to justice and equity. “The papers in the case were read, and the witnesses were called in succession. The president addressed this exhortation to each witness, quote: ‘It is not conjecture or whatever public rumor has brought to you that we ask of you. Consider that a great responsibility rests upon you, that we are not occupied by an affair like a case of pecuniary interests,

in which the injury may be repaired. If you cause the condemnation of a person unjustly accused, his blood and the blood of all the posterity of him, of whom you will have deprived the earth, will fall on you, and God will demand of you an account, as He demanded of Cain an account of the blood of Abel. Now speak.”

Now, that sort of filtered down to us through the years as, “Put your hand on the Bible and swear before God to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth.” And that comes right out of that Jewish concept, which even goes a step further and says, “If you pronounce a guilty sentence that means death, his blood is going to be on you, and not just his blood, but all the blood of all the unborn posterity that will never reach this earth because you have taken his life, and you would be blood guilty before God. Now that you know that, speak.” Furthermore, Salvador tells us, “In the Sanhedrin process a woman could not be a witness, because she would not have the courage to give the first blow to the condemned person. Nor could a child, that is irresponsible, nor a slave, nor a man of bad character, nor one who has infirmities that prevent the full enjoyment of his physical and moral faculties. The simple confession of an individual against himself or the declaration however renowned would not decide a condemnation.” It’s very important. Jewish law said no person can himself testify against himself, and on the basis of that single testimony, be held guilty.

And we have that same kind of thing today as gained from this basic perception. In fact, they said, “We hold it as fundamental that no one shall prejudice himself. If a man accuses himself before a tribunal, we must not believe him unless the fact is attested by two other witnesses.” And then they said, “The witnesses are to attest to the identity of the party, to depose to the month, day, hour, and circumstances of the crime.” In other words, it can’t be hearsay or generalities. “After an examination of these proofs, the judges who believe the party innocent stated their reasons. Those who believed him guilty spoke afterwards, and with the greatest moderation. If one of the auditors was entrusted by the accused with his defense, or if he wished in his own name to present any elucidations in favor of innocence, he was allowed to do that.” He could address the judges and the people. “But this liberty was not granted to him if his opinion was in favor of condemnation.” In other words, they really leaned on the merciful side.

“Other than a judge could speak only if he was speaking in behalf of the innocence of the party, not if he was speaking in behalf of the guilt, because they didn’t want to start a rabble,” an emotional response that could bring about guilt by fervor, guilt by mob rule, guilt by emotion. Lastly, “When the accused person himself wished to speak, they gave the most profound attention, and when the discussion was finished, one of the judges recapitulated the case and they removed all the spectators. Two scribes took down the votes of the judges. One of them noted those who were in favor of the accused; the other, those who condemned him. Eleven votes” – if only 23 were there; even in the great synagogue, 23 was a quorum. If only 23 were in the great synagogue, or the 23 in the lesser ones – I mean the great Sanhedrin, or 23 in the lesser ones. “Eleven votes out of 23 was sufficient to acquit, it required 13 to convict. If a majority of votes acquitted, the accused was discharged instantly. If he was to be punished, the judges postponed pronouncing sentence until the third day. And during the intermediate day, they could not be occupied with anything but the cause, and they abstained from eating” – they had to fast.

And that’s a very important note, because that indicates to us that they could never have this kind of trial the day before a feast day, or they would be fasting on a feast, and violating their Jewish law. That’s another violation of the trial of Christ. “They were to abstain from food, from wine or liquor or anything that might render their minds less capable of reflection. Then on the morning of the third

day,” this was the procedure, “they returned to the judgment seat, and each judge who had not changed his opinion said, ‘I continue of the same opinion and condemn.’ Anyone who had first condemned might at this sitting acquit, but he who had once acquitted could not change his mind to condemn. If a majority condemned, two magistrates immediately accompanied the condemned person out to the place of punishment.” In other words, they executed him on the same day they sentenced him. This, of course, is consistent with the Old Testament passage in Ecclesiastes, chapter 8, that where you have swift punishment, you have decreasing crime.

“The elders sat in the seats in the judgment hall while the man was ushered out toward his place of execution. They placed at the entrance of the judgment hall an officer of justice with a flag in his hand. A second officer of justice got on a horse and rode after that party headed for execution. He followed the prisoner, and constantly turned around and looked back at the man with the flag. During this interval, if any person came to announce to the Sanhedrin any new evidence in favor of the prisoner, the first officer would wave his flag, and the second one, as soon as he saw it, brought back the prisoner. If the prisoner declared to the magistrates that he recollected some reasons which had escaped him, some thoughts that had escaped him, they brought him before the judges no less than five times. If no incident occurred, the procession advanced slowly, proceeded by a herald. And the herald in front of it was in a loud voice addressing the people, ‘This man – and stated his name – is led to punishment for such a crime, the witnesses who have sworn against him are – and he named the persons – If anyone has evidence to give in his favor, let him come forth quickly.’” This was heralded all the way so the front of the procession was heralding “If there’s any evidence, tell us,” the back of the procession was looking back to see if anyone was coming, and the man with the flag was there ready to wave it, stop the process. And finally, “If they arrived at the place of punishment,” nothing deterred them, “they made the man drink a stupefying beverage in order to render the approach of death less terrible, and executed him.”

Now, when you look at that whole scene, you would say, “Boy, if you were in the Sanhedrin’s hands, you would be in pretty good hands.” These people have a tremendous sense of justice, mixed with a sense of mercy. And they have built in some safeguards here that are going to make it pretty good for someone who is innocent, because you’ve got all kinds of opportunities to come back in with testimony. And the tremendous crime of false witnessing is a good preventative, too. And the care of fasting and reflecting for one whole day and all of these things, make it sound like it would be a pretty safe place to be. But it didn’t turn out to be so for Christ. Let me tell you why. In the Jewish trial of Jesus Christ, and here’s the key point, they violated every single law of justice and jurisprudence known to them. They violated every single one of them willfully, so that the trial of Jesus Christ is the most unjust trial in human history. It has to be, for this court condemned to death the only truly innocent person who ever lived.

It is a mockery of justice. It is a violation of everything in their system of jurisprudence. The axiom of the Sanhedrin was this: the Sanhedrin is to save, not destroy life. Well, that wasn’t true in this case. No criminal trial could be carried through the night – this one was. The judges who condemned a criminal had to have a day in between before the execution, and they had to fast all day – they didn’t. They killed Jesus the same day. There had to be witnesses who witnessed against Him – there were none. There had to be defense – there was no defense. There was not even any indictment, there was no arraignment, there was no nothing, there was no crime. And that and many other compile a list of things they did to violate the laws that they themselves affirmed.

Now, let me give you another sort of basic thing you need to understand going into this. Jesus had

two major trials – two major trials. First was a Jewish ecclesiastical religious trial, and then a Roman secular political trial. And the reason is this: the Jews were an occupied people. Rome was in authority and control over them, and the Jews did not have the right of execution. They couldn't kill a criminal. They didn't have the right of capital punishment. The Romans reserved that right. So the Jews could condemn Jesus to death, but they couldn't execute Him. So whatever they could accomplish in their religious trial, they had to sell the Romans on, because the Romans were the ones that would have to kill Jesus. And that is why you have to have two major trials – a trial before the Jews, and then the evidence and the supposed evidence and the supposed crime that Jesus commits is carried to the Romans, who have to see this as a viable crime and a reason for execution, and carry out the execution. So, you will see, then, as this trial unfolds, a Jewish aspect to the trial, and a Gentile one as well.

Now, I'm going to give you a further thought. The Jewish trial and the Gentile trial each have three phases. They each have three phases, so in total, there's really six different trials Jesus was involved in. The Jewish trial began when Jesus was taken to Annas, Annas sent Him to Caiaphas and the Sanhedrin in the middle of the night, and then the third phase, Caiaphas and the Sanhedrin met again in the morning, after dawn, to try to legitimize their evil deed, and those are the three phases of the Jewish trial – Annas, then Caiaphas and the Sanhedrin, then Caiaphas and the Sanhedrin again in the morning. Now, after they had finished their work, they pushed Him off to the Romans, and that meant taking Him to Pilate. First He went to Pilate, Pilate sent Him to Herod, Herod sent Him back to Pilate, and Pilate condemned Him to death. There are the three phases of the Roman trial. Both the Jews and the Romans violated all of justice, violated all of truth, all equity, all fairness, and committed horrendous crimes against an innocent man.

From Gethsemane, He was taken to Annas, for what was to be an arraignment. Annas was to function like the grand jury, coming up with an indictment. From Annas, He was sent to Caiaphas and the Sanhedrin for the main Jewish trial. They did what they wanted to do, and then from there, in the morning after daybreak – so that they could make it legal, it had to happen in the day – they had a very brief thing, may have lasted ten minutes, and they reaffirmed their condemnation of Jesus Christ. And then from there, He was sent to Pilate, and then Pilate sent Him to Herod, because Pilate knew He was innocent. Then Herod sent Him back to Pilate, and Pilate, under the pressure the Jews put on him that they would tell Caesar that he was an inadequate ruler, decided to condemn Jesus to death. And that's the sequence.

And all this series of trials leads to the execution of Jesus Christ, and it isn't that they found something out about Him and therefore they killed Him. It is that they wanted Him dead, and they had to invent means to bring about His death. The sentence was already determined, it was the crime they didn't have. Now, as we begin to look at the elements of the unjust, illegal trial of Jesus, let's begin with the first aspect: the illegal, unjust confrontation. Look at verse 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," and we'll stop there. Now, Matthew says "they led Him away to Caiaphas, the high priest," and that's true, but Matthew doesn't give us the phase before that. Matthew just goes right into the main trial. In order to get the first phase of it, we have to go to John, chapter 18, so let's do that, and it's a very important portion of this story.

In John, chapter 18, we come to the first part, the illegal, unjust confrontation, the initial arraignment. Notice in verse 12, "Then the band," that's the *speira*, the Roman cohort, could have been as many as 600 men, the soldiers of Rome, "and the captain," their *chiliarch*, their leader, "and the officers of

the Jews,” who would be the temple police, “took,” and the word “took” is a technical word, sometimes used for arrest, “Jesus and bound Him, and led Him away to Annas first.” Now, John then helps us here to fill in the whole story. You know, in studying the gospels, it’s a composite. The life of Christ is given in four different paintings, in a sense, each of which emphasizes different features and aspects of the same scene, and so, first He was led to Annas. He is bound. I think it interesting to note that – the sacrifice, Psalm 118:27 says that the sacrifice was tied to the horns of the altar. Those horns were there to tie down the sacrifice, and Christ is bound almost as a fulfillment of the typology of sacrifice. He is bound, even as Isaac was bound to be sacrificed. And He comes like a criminal, bound to be offered as a sacrifice, and He is led away to Annas.

Now, the idea of taking Him to Annas is that Annas is the brains behind everything. Annas despises Jesus Christ. Jesus is a threat to his security, his power, his prestige, everything. He resents Jesus’ holiness because he’s so utterly unholy. He resents Jesus’ perfection because he’s so utterly vile. Everything about Jesus causes him anger, and he is under the direction, of course, of the great choreographer who’s staging the whole scene here, and that’s Satan himself and all his demons. “This is your hour,” Jesus said, “and the power of darkness.” So he’s one of the cast of characters manipulated by hell itself, and he has a venomous hatred for Jesus Christ. There are reasons for it, which I shall give you in a moment. But he is basically behind everything. He is behind it all. And so they send Jesus to him, in his house, which is illegal. It’s illegal because it’s at night and it’s in his house, and no such procedures were to occur like that.

Who is Annas? Annas had been high priest for about five or six years, but that 20 years before this. He was not now the existing high priest, Caiaphas was. He was high priest that year, John 18:13 says. That’s kind of interesting because under God’s design, high priests were high priests for life. You didn’t have them chosen every year or so. But it was becoming such a political position, and it was bought and sold, in a sense, and then it was so connected with being able to bow the knee to Rome that high priests came and went rather rapidly. And from what I understand of history, the Romans had actually pressurized Annas out of the office of high priest because he was amassing so much power. He was a wily and clever man. And so he had been pushed out as high priest after about five or six years, but still carries the name, because a high priest was to be a high priest for life. But when Annas went out as high priest, five of his sons and one son-in-law, Caiaphas, who married his daughter, succeeded him, so he maintained control. It was “in the family,” if you will. And he maintained this title of high priest, and he was the boss. He was the head of racketeering. He was behind everything. In fact, all of the money changers and the selling and the buying in the temple, all of that was called “the bazaars of Annas.” He got a piece of all that action. He was the big boss, if you will, in the temple mafia, the temple criminal proceedings of extortion. He controlled it all.

I’ll give you just a little illustration. When you as a Jew would come to the temple, you would never come empty-handed. You would never come with nothing. Well, you don’t come to God with nothing in your hand. And so, when a Jew came he would bring either a sacrifice or an offering. If you brought an offering, he would bring some coins to put in those bell-shaped receptacles that were up on the wall where he gave his offering. The problem was he couldn’t put pagan coinage in there, because pagan coinage often was inscribed with an image, and an image to a Jew is a what? Is an idol. So what had to happen was there had to be an exchange of his coinage for temple coinage, which was acceptable. And when he came in with his money and made the exchange, he was taken, if you will. It was exorbitant, it was extortion, and the money changers were charging the people way more than they should – not giving a just return in temple currency.

On the other hand, let's say a Jew came in with his lamb. Let's say he had brought a lamb out of his own flock, and he came to offer it to the Lord, or a pigeon or a turtledove, depending on his economic capability, and he came in there. The first thing he would have to do is take his animal to a screening group of priests, and those priests would examine the animal to see if it was without blemish. Chances are, if you didn't buy it in the temple, it was blemished. You understand? You could avoid all of that by coming with nothing, going to the temple stockyard, and buying an already approved animal at about three times the price. But what choice did you have if your animal was turned down? And so another way whereby they extorted from the people; this is the bazaar of Annas, this is how he is getting rich and influential. The first thing Jesus did when He came to the city of Jerusalem in John, chapter 2, was cleanse the temple. Remember that? John 2:13 to 17, He went in and overturned the tables and threw everybody out. Now, that was His initial contact with Annas and his operation, and you get a little idea of why Annas didn't like Jesus, right?

And then again, when Jesus came back, if you read it in Mark, chapter 11, verses 15 to 18, when He came into the city this passion week, He went to the temple, and you remember He cleansed the temple, overturned the tables of the money changers, wouldn't let anybody carry anything out of there. And it says the Jews then met together to discuss how they could kill Him. He was disrupting everything. He was disrupting their religious teaching. He was disrupting their power and authority. He was disrupting their business. He was really a problem. And He said at that time, you remember, that, "How is it that My Father's house is to be a house of prayer, and you have made it into" – what – "a den of thieves?" And in effect, called Annas and all his cohorts a bunch of thieves.

So Annas wanted to be rid of Jesus, and the Jews knew that he was the braintrust behind everything. They figured that's a good place to start. Annas will act like a grand jury, he'll come up with some kind of an indictment, and we'll get that indictment against Jesus, bring Him into the Sanhedrin, condemn Him and execute Him. Now, look at John 18:19, and see what happened. "The high priest then asked Jesus of His disciples and of His doctrine." Annas said, "I want to know what You teach, and I want to know about Your followers. How widespread is Your movement, and who are Your followers?" Now, we don't know all the specifics that are implied in that idea, but he asked about disciples and doctrine. "Who follows You? How many follow You? What's Your range of influence? And what is it that You teach?" And Annas violates right here all sense of justice. If you bring a person in for an arraignment, you tell them what they've done, you don't ask them. You don't ask them to talk in generalities, hoping you can uncover a crime for which you've already given a sentence. This is illegal and unjust, and Jesus' answer indicates it.

It's a tremendous answer. Verse 20, "Jesus answered him, I spoke openly to the world. I ever taught in the synagogue and in the temple where the Jews always resort, and in secret have I said nothing. Why are you asking Me?" In other words, He in effect says, "If you've got a case, present it. "Ask them who heard Me what I have said unto them. Behold, they know what I said." If you've got a case, let's see your witnesses, Annas. Don't ask Me. I can't incriminate Myself. If you have a case, show it. He calls for proper legal procedure. He shows the evil, ugly injustice of Annas. He wasn't to give evidence against Himself. He wasn't to convict Himself as His own witness for prosecution. Call your witnesses, Annas. Everything I've said, I've said openly and publicly, people have heard it, there are plenty of people, you can bring them in, they'll tell you. If you want justice, it's out there. If you want testimony, it's out there. Call your witnesses. Annas was embarrassed. He was frustrated. He was unmasked. And you could have cut the air with a knife. Believe me, Annas was no match for the infinite mind of Jesus Christ.

And when the air gets thick like that, and everybody's neck starts to swell, and everybody gets red ears, and it's a very embarrassing moment, somebody breaks the ice, and in verse 22, "When He had thus spoken, one of the officers who stood by struck Jesus with the palm of his hand, saying, 'Answerest Thou the high priest so?'" Slapped Him across the face and said, "How dare you answer the high priest that way?" He had cornered Annas and unmasked him as a man who was violating the laws of justice. And this man, wanting to defend his master who had lost face, slapped Jesus across the face. And the Lord basically offered no emotional retaliation. You remember in Acts 22 and verse 30, Paul was brought before the same Sanhedrin, and in chapter 23, Paul gives testimony of how he's lived with a clear conscience before God, and he's been faithful, and so forth, and the high priest gets upset, and he says to one of his servants, "Smite that man." And then Paul says to the high priest, "God smite you, you whited wall." Well, I mean that sounds like I'd react, but that's not how Jesus reacted.

Jesus didn't react that way. "He was reviled," says Peter in 1 Peter 2:23, "yet He reviled not again," right? He never reacted that way. This was the hour of His death, He was resolute, He was ready, this was hell's moment, He would go through it, He had settled that in the garden, in the Father's will. He was moving to the cross. There was nothing to say in regard to an angry retort. He answered him in one of the most marvelous responses. He said, "If I have spoken evil, bear witness of the evil." If I have done something evil or said something evil, bring your witnesses. "If I have spoken well, why did you hit Me?" Well, there's no answer for that except to say, "I hit You because You embarrassed the high priest," who should have been embarrassed. Jesus, always the master of response; if you've got a case, give it. If you don't, why are you hitting Me? If I'm guilty, prove it. If I'm innocent, why are you hitting Me?

Well, what did Annas do? Well, the only thing he could do. Verse 24, "Annas sent Him bound to Caiaphas." I mean he was finished. What could he do? I mean it's in the middle of the night. It isn't even three o'clock in the morning yet, because the cock hasn't crowed. The cock crows at three. Cock crow is from twelve to three, so it isn't even the end of the cock crow period when the cock crows to mark the end of that time, around three o'clock. And we know that it isn't three o'clock, because Peter hasn't quite yet denied Him, so it's earlier than three o'clock. It's the middle of the night. Annas is in his own house in the dark, clandestine night, trying to pull off an arraignment; can't do it, winds up embarrassed. Has to have his servant slap Jesus in the face, and then says, "Get Him out of here, take Him to Caiaphas." So He goes to Caiaphas with no indictment and no arraignment at all – no crime. Is this an illegal and unjust confrontation with Annas? It is. It's in the middle of the night; that's illegal. It was without witnesses; that's illegal. There was no crime. There was no charge. Annas had no legal authority. He wasn't even an official prosecutor, in any sense. And his home was an improper place to have such a thing. But don't be startled, that's just one of many illegalities. They just mount and mount and mount and mount and mount.

Let's go back to Matthew, chapter 26. And just briefly this, we see the illegal unjust confrontation, now look at the illegal unjust convening in verse 57, and we'll pick it up there. "And they that had seized Jesus, then after Annas led Him away to Caiaphas, the high priest, where the scribes and elders," that makes up the council, or Sanhedrin, "were assembled." The chief priests, the temple police, the elders, the soldiers, take Jesus, bound from Annas to Caiaphas, and Caiaphas is equally wretched, equally evil. Of course, anything Annas likes, he likes. Anything Annas hates, he hates. They're in the same thing, and he is equally the manipulated tool of Satan. He is threatened. He is possessive. He is power hungry. He is greedy. He hates truth. He hates righteousness. He hates holiness. He hates Jesus Christ.

So in the dark of night, Jesus is transported from the house of Annas to the house of Caiaphas, somewhere near the temple. The scribes and elders are all gathering – in fact, they were getting them together when He was at the house of Annas. It'd be having Him at Annas' allowed them the time to get everybody together. And by the way, according to Mark 14:53, it says all of them were there. I would like to suggest, however, that based on Luke 23:50 and 51, there is at least one that wasn't there, and that doesn't violate the idea of all, "all" meaning "all of them," in the sense that a great number of them were there. But I would like to suggest to you that Joseph of Arimathaea was not there, because it says in Luke 23:50 and 51 that that man, who gave the tomb to Jesus, was "a good and righteous man, and consented not to the death of Christ with them." He wasn't there to vote on that. And so, apart from, say, him, the vast majority of them, perhaps even all the remaining ones, were there, ready to do their foul deed to Christ.

And of course, I'm sure some of them didn't even realize what was going on they were so totally the pawns of Satanic possession and influence. No public trial here, no defense, nobody to give testimony for Christ, nothing. And here they are in Caiaphas' house, absolutely illegal. Luke 22:54 says they met in Caiaphas' house in a large room. When He went to Annas' house, He was in a courtyard. Those houses were large because they were very wealthy men. They would have a wall outside, you go into the wall, and there's a courtyard there. In the case of Annas, He remained in the courtyard, but now He goes into the courtyard, and is taken into a large room adjacent to the courtyard. Out in the courtyard is a fire and some soldiers, verse 58. And Peter, who is following Him afar off, goes into the high priest's courtyard and sits down with the guards to see the end. He wanted to see what was going to happen. He's caught between cowardice and curiosity. He's not brave enough to step out for Christ, but he's concerned enough to sort of stand in the wings, and it's in that setting that he winds up denying Jesus Christ on three occasions.

So he's out in the courtyard, and no doubt can look through the doors or windows into this large room where this is happening to Christ, as He's confronted with the Sanhedrin and Caiaphas. The law of Israel said no one is to be tried any other place than the Hall of Judgment; it is to be during the day, it is to be public, it is to be in the Hall of Judgment, which was in the temple complex. And they, by the way, would go back there early in the morning, just after daybreak, to do a quick brief retrial and get the thing stated in a legal format during the day, to make it look good. So Jesus goes in to be confronted with the Sanhedrin, and they are going to have to originate charges. And this violates the law, too, because the Sanhedrin was a jury and a judge, not a prosecutor. And they couldn't invent a crime. They couldn't invent a prosecution. That was beyond their purview. They were not to originate charges. Their law said that. They could only investigate charges that had been brought.

And since the session with Annas failed to bring a charge, they had nothing to deal with, so they had to become prosecutors. They had to invent a crime and then try it. The only thing they had was a sentence. They had to make up a crime to go with it. So everything was illegal and unjust. The time, it was night: that's illegal. The place, the house of the high priest: illegal. The procedure: no crime. The function: prosecutor rather than judge and jury. The season: they were doing this on a feast day at the feast time, when no such thing could take place. The means: the bribery of a traitor named Judas, and no bribery was tolerated, of course, as we read in the passage in Deuteronomy 16 – and so all the illegalities of the trial before Annas are compounded, in that convening of the Sanhedrin and Caiaphas in his house.

And one other thought that I want to give you today is the illegal, unjust conspiracy – the illegal,

unjust conspiracy. Look just briefly at verse 59. “Now the chief priests and elders and all the council sought false witnesses against Jesus to put Him to death.” You know what they wanted to do to Jesus? Find out the truth. No, they didn’t want to find out the truth. They wanted to do what? What’s the purpose? Put Him to death. They wanted to kill Him. Now, the only way you can kill an innocent man is to have people lie about him. The only witnesses who could witness against Jesus would be liars, because He was a perfect person. He was perfect God in human flesh, and perfection violates nothing. So there was never a crime. He never did anything wrong, ever, at any time, in any way, shape or form. Therefore, the only people who could condemn Him would be liars.

So they went out then, in the middle of the night, trying to stir up some liars, who would come in and do the very thing which their law condemned with such ferocity. But their passions were so controlled by hatred, and so dominated by Satan and the demon forces that were behind this activity, and this was so much within the determinant counsel of God that Jesus die for the sins of the world, that it was as if they were swept up in an absolute flood. And here they are doing the very thing that they’ve spent all their life not doing; trying to save people from the testimony of false witnesses, and now trying to get false witnesses to lie, so they can kill somebody. Unthinkable, that judges should do this; but they were plotting His death. Now, they had to have witnesses, because it says in Numbers 35, Deuteronomy 17, Deuteronomy 19, you have to have two or three witnesses. So all the chief priests and elders and council, the whole Sanhedrin went seeking false witnesses against Jesus that they might kill Him.

You see, Jesus never got a fair trial. He was not condemned because of something He had done. He was condemned because of hate. And verse 60 says it – underline these words – “but found none” – but found none. Nobody succeeded. You say, “Didn’t anybody come?” Oh yes, some came, sure. Verse 60 says, “Though many false witnesses came, yet they found none.” I mean, nobody could give a viable testimony. There were some people who wanted to do it, and I’m sure hell generated all it could, but nothing that stuck, nothing that worked, nothing that made sense. And worse than that, they couldn’t find any two of them to what? To agree. Liars – it’s hard for liars to agree, since they’re lying. Since there’s no facts to deal with, it’s hard for them to get together. It says in Mark 14:56, “For many bore false witness against Him, but their witness agreed not together.” Their witness agreed not together. They got this guy, and this guy, and this guy, and this guy, and everybody come up with a different lie, and they couldn’t get any continuity.

Well, the frustration mounts until at last two false witnesses came. Here come two that have gotten together, and they got their story sort of together. And they say, “This fellow said,” verse 61, “I am able to destroy the temple of God and build it in three days.” All they could come up with was “this fellow said.” That’s remarkable. I mean, it’s a big generalization. This fellow said? In Mark, the parallel passage again, 14 verse 57, listen to this, “These two witnesses said, ‘I will destroy this temple that is made with hands and within three days I will build another without hands.’” It’s interesting. The Lord has given us these two, one of them has a testimony recorded in Matthew, the other’s testimony is recorded in Mark. Look at the difference. The guy in Matthew says, “I am able to destroy the temple,” the one in Mark’s record, “I will destroy the temple.” The guy in Matthew says, “And build it in three days,” the guy in Mark says, “And within three days I will build another made without hands.” This is just – doesn’t even agree.

What is interesting is they say Jesus said this, and He didn’t say that. In John 2:19, He said, “You destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it,” and He spoke of the temple of His body. But they’re trying to come up with a lie about Him saying “I will” or “I am able to destroy the temple.” He

never said that. He said “You destroy this temple, and I’ll build it up.” But they got together, and twisted and perverted this thing. The problem is the two of them didn’t agree. It just didn’t fly, and the priests knew it; and they dropped the issue right after this. Now, I want you to listen to something. These people should never have been admitted as witnesses. As I mentioned earlier, a witness had to know the year, the month, the day, the hour of the day, and the location of the testimony given of what supposed accusation was rendered. And there were very strict rules about the limitations of disagreement which would be tolerated between witnesses. They wouldn’t have qualified at all.

Now, I want to draw this to a conclusion with a very important thought. Listen: if I didn’t know Jesus Christ was perfect, if I didn’t know Jesus Christ was absolutely sinless, the Son of God as He claimed, this incident alone would convince me that He was. I really wouldn’t need anything else. I’ll tell you why. Hell is running this whole show. Satan has entered Judas. This is the hour of the power of darkness. All the best of hell, the brain trust of hell, Satan and all his most brilliant, powerful, resourceful demons, are after an accusation against Jesus. And all of earth’s leaders in that place are also after an accusation of Jesus. Listen: when all earth and all hell, energized by supernatural resources and intelligence, and desperately wanting to find something against Jesus Christ can’t find anything, that tells me there isn’t anything to find. Did you get that? This is one of the greatest apologetics for the perfection of Jesus Christ anywhere in the pages of Scripture. If there was anything He ever did wrong, they would have found it. If it had to be revealed by demons, they would have found it. But there was no crime – absolute perfection. This is God in human flesh, no less – no less. They couldn’t find anything – absolutely nothing.

The illegality of this? These people were bribed witnesses. They misrepresented what He said. And no one could be executed for what He said anyway. And especially if it was true, and where was His defense? It’s absolutely illegal, every bit of it. An illegal confrontation with Annas, an illegal convening of the Sanhedrin, and an illegal conspiracy against Jesus Christ, and in the midst of it all is all hell and earth and the worst that there is in the supernatural and the natural world, come together against Jesus Christ; nobody can come up with anything – not anything. What a blessed Savior we have, amen? Perfect – and found to be so at the tribunal of evil men. You see, the only people on trial this day really were the people who were accusing Jesus, right? And they show themselves to be wretched, wicked, sinful, unjust men. Christ will always, by His very presence, mark those who are of Satan. When you come into confrontation with Christ, you will be exposed, and they were that day. At this point, Caiaphas tries to take charge. And what happens is very dramatic; come back in two weeks and I’ll tell you about it. Let’s bow in prayer.

Father, as we look at this scene, again a scene in which Jesus Christ could have suffered such humiliation, in which He could have been seemingly irremediably cast as a loser, He is majestic, He is glorious. He stands as pure, and perfect, and spotless, and sinless, and holy. And the court that tries Him is criminal, and wicked, and vile. And, Father, may we be reminded that there are only two places that you can take in this world; one is to affirm the majesty and deity and perfection of Christ, and the other is to stand with those who deny that. Father, we pray that all who are here, all who hear this message would stand with those who affirm the perfection of Jesus Christ. When all that earth and hell could bring against Him left Him unstained, we know He is the perfect, sinless Son of God, our Savior. And willingly does He endure this, that He may go to a cross He didn’t deserve, to die for us who deserved to be on that cross. Thank You for such a gracious Savior. While your heads are bowed in a closing moment, if you don’t know the Lord Jesus Christ, if you’ve never received Him as Savior, if you’ve not opened your heart to Him, this is the day, this is the day, now is the time. Don’t stand with those who reject Christ. You may not feel in your heart that you would want to be

identified with them, but you are if you refuse Him. If you've put Him to trial in the court of your own heart, and the verdict is that He isn't who He claimed to be, and you don't want Him in your life, you stand with those in the court that day in Jerusalem. But open your heart to Christ.

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