Grace to You :: *Unleashing God's Truth, One Verse at a Time*

The Sinless Savior Before the Sinister Sanhedrin, Part 1
Scripture: Luke 22:63-71
Code: 42-276

Open your Bible, if you will, to Luke chapter 22. We have come to the last section of this chapter, Luke 22, and I want to read to you verses 63 through the end of the chapter.

“And the men who were holding Jesus in custody were mocking Him and beating Him. And they blindfolded Him and were asking Him, saying, ‘Prophesy. Who is the one who hit You?’ And they were saying many other things against Him, blaspheming. And when it was day, the Council of elders of the people assembled, both chief priests and scribes, and they led Him away to their council chamber, saying, ‘If You are the Christ, tell us.’ But He said to them, ‘If I tell you, you will not believe. And if I ask a question, you will not answer. But from now on the Son of Man will be seated at the right hand of the power of God.’ And they all said, ‘Are You the Son of God then?’ And He said to them, ‘Yes, I am.’ And they said, ‘What further need do we have of testimony? For we have heard it ourselves from His own mouth.’”

This morning trial that I just read about in Luke’s words was a staged performance for show. The real trials of Jesus had been concluded hours before in the middle of the night. But in order to touch if ever so lightly on what was required, they had a mock meeting of the Sanhedrin in the morning to make it appear as though they were following matters of justice, well-known to the people. In reality, they had made their decision between the hours of one and five. And the morning trial which must have taken place between five and six A.M. on Friday was simply a public act of hypocrisy to give the appearance of justice.

So in order to understand what Luke is telling us about, we have to go back. I am convinced that everything in the Bible is important and everything is for our edification and understanding and consequently for our spiritual knowledge so that we can give to God the glory for all the things that He has revealed to us.
And rather than just simply stick with Luke, I want you to get the full story of the trial of Jesus. So we have to go back. We have to go back to about one o’clock in the morning and we have to go through the night to understand what happened in the morning. But actually, we have to go back long before that...back beyond Passion week, back beyond the three-year ministry of Jesus, back beyond the birth of Jesus, back beyond all of Israel’s history, all the way back to the time when they arrived in the land of promise because that’s where our understanding of the trials of Jesus really begins.

In fact, let's go to the writing of Moses in Deuteronomy chapter 16. The Jews prided themselves on their jurisprudence system, and it was the most well thought out, carefully constructed system of jurisprudence in existence, in many ways, superior to even our current justice system. And it was predicated on what God required. Since God was a God of truth, truth was all pervasive and central. The matter of discerning truth was what jurisprudence was all about. And therefore at the very beginning when the children of Israel were going into the promised land and being established as a nation, God laid down some matters for justice so the truth would prevail.

In the sixteenth chapter of Deuteronomy we read in verse 18, "You shall appoint for yourselves 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."

The land was divided up among the tribes and in those areas where tribes had their presence, there were towns and villages and in every town and every village there was to be a court. Verse 19 says, "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."

From the very outset they were told by God how important it was to protect justice. And protecting justice means protecting truth. They followed through on Deuteronomic law. As they settled in the land, they established courts in every locale. This was true in the time of Lord. The Law was exacted in every Jewish locality. If there were 120 men as heads of families, they had a local court there called a Sanhedrin. Literally that means in Hebrew a sitting together, translated council in the New Testament. This Council was made up of 23 men. They were elders. They acted as judge and jury in all matters...both criminal and civil. That was true of any town that had 120 men as heads of families.

In smaller towns where there were not 120 men as heads of families, there were either three if the town was very small, or seven judges who sat as a court both judge and jury in all legal matters. Always an odd number for obvious reasons. So there would never be a stalemate in the vote. These councils basically governed a synagogue community, or a synagogue neighborhood. In those locals where there were many synagogues and therefore many of these councils, there would be a ruling council...sort of a regional court. Then there was the great Supreme Court in Jerusalem. So there were courts in towns. There were sometimes in cities many courts and a court over the other courts and there were regional courts and there was the great Supreme Court.

The great Sanhedrin, the great court in Jerusalem was made up of 70 men plus the High Priest. Seventy men plus the High Priest. This is the final court. This is the Supreme Court, the highest ruling body in Israel, 24 Chief Priests, 24 elders, 24 scribes and Pharisees. They are a composite and representative group. To be selected to that court, you had to have proven yourself at lower court level. They were the best of the best, coming out of the other courts in the land.

The laws of jurisprudence provided three things in relation to criminal procedure...three things. One, a public trial. Two, a defense for the accused. Three, a confirmation of guilt by two or three witnesses...which goes back to Old Testament Law. It had then therefore to be proven. The one who was accused had to be defended. And all matters had to be public. Obviously everything in the world understand that justice only rides on the back of truthfulness. And so they made a huge issue out of false witnesses.

How serious was the crime of being a false witness? If you were found to be a false witness, you suffered the same punishment as the guilty. If it was a capital case and you lied, you died when the guilty criminal died. They were deeply concerned about justice. In fact, Deuteronomy 19:16 to 19 says this, “If a malicious witness rises up against a man to accuse him of wrong doing, then both the men who have the dispute shall stand before the Lord, before the priest and the judges who will be in office in those days, and the judges shall investigate thoroughly. And if the witness is a false witness and he is 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.” If you lied in court, you received the same penalty that the criminal received.

Digging a little deeper into their system because much has been written about it, each case had to be publicly open. There could be no clandestine courts, no judgments hidden from the people, no decisions that were not public. The judges were always exposed to the scrutiny of the full populace and all those who desired to be there. In any case where death was prescribed as the sentence, the death had to wait one full day. You had a trial one day. You waited a full day. And then on that third day, execution could take place.

The reason they waited a full day was so that during that day further evidence might be considered should it arise. And the witnesses whose evidence decided the sentence on the third day had to inflict the first blows of execution...thus adding the last degree of the certainty to their testimony. That’s why Jesus said in John 8 and verse 7, “He that is without sin, let him cast the first stone.” They knew exactly what that meant. The person who cast the first stone was the person who witnessed against the person being executed.
The Jews’ form of capital punishment was stoning and it was the accusers who threw the first stones. This was a wise thing in the event that someone reaching that point, lifting up that stone knowing he had lied would have to get past a wildly accusing conscience at a very intense moment. And perhaps his restraint would cause him to reconsider the verdict.

By the time you get into the era of the New Testament and our Lord Jesus, there are complexities that are very carefully crafted and well thought out. They are, in my judgment, not only the equal of but superior to our own kind of jurisprudence today which certainly would by its own confession think itself to be the best in the world. But when you studied this jurisprudence system of the Sanhedrin in

Israel, it's a very remarkable system intended to come to justice and display mercy.

Let me give you some insight into it. On the day of the trial, the executive officers of justice caused the accused person to make his appearance. His accusation had already been made clear, everyone knew what it was. At the feet of the elders on the Council were placed men who under the name of auditors or candidates followed regularly the sittings of the Council. The documents in the case were read. And the witnesses were called in succession. The president of the council addressed this exhortation to each witness, quote: "It is not conjectures or whatever public rumor has brought to you that we ask of you. Consider a great responsibility rests upon you as a witness. We are not occupied by an affair, like a case of pecuniary interest in which the injury may be repaired. If you caused the condemnation of a person unjustly accused, his blood and the blood of all the posterity of that person of whom you will have deprived the earth will fall upon you. God will demand of you an account as He demanded of Cain an account for the blood of Abel. Now speak." That's raising the bar.

Further, 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, nor a slave, nor a man of bad character, nor one whose infirmities prevent the full enjoyment of his physical and moral faculties, intellectual faculties. The simple confession of an individual against himself or the declaration, however renown, would not decide a condemnation. No one could be self-incriminating. 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. For our Law does not condemn on the simple confession of the accused, nor upon the declaration of one prophet alone."

You cannot incriminate yourself. And yet in the text that we just read in verse 71, they said, "What further need do we have of testimony? We heard it ourselves from His own mouth." That was not sufficient to condemn anyone by their own laws of jurisprudence. Of course, in the case of Jesus, what He was saying was not criminal, what He was saying was absolutely true.Further, the witnesses were to attest to the identity of the party that they knew this individual who was on trial. They were to dispose, give a deposition to the month, the day, the hour and the circumstances of the crime. After an examination of the proofs, these judges who believed the party innocent stated their reason. Those who believed him guilty spoke next and with the greatest moderation. If one of the auditors or candidates who were the monitors of these events were 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 admitted to the seat from which he addressed the judges and the people. But this liberty was not granted to him if his opinion was in favor of condemning.

Lastly, when the accused person himself wished to speak, they gave the most profound attention. When the discussion was finished, one of the judges recapitulated the case. They removed all the spectators. Two scribes took down the votes of the judges. One of them noted those in favor of the accused, the other those who condemned him. Eleven votes out of twenty-three sufficient to acquit, it

required thirteen to convict. If a majority of votes acquitted, the accused was discharged immediately. If he was to be punished, the judge postponed pronouncing sentence till that third day. And during the intermediate day, they could not be occupied with anything but the cause. And the judges could not drink during that day and they fasted during that day...doing everything to focus on the case and avoiding anything that might render their minds less capable of reflection.

And then on the morning of that third day, when punishment could fall, they returned to the judgment seats. Each judge who had not changed his opinion said, “I continue with the same opinion and condemn.” Anyone who had first condemned might at this sitting acquit. But he who had first acquitted was not allowed to condemn. If a majority condemned, two magistrates immediately accompanied the condemned man to the place of punishment that day. The elders, the Council did not descend, however, from their seats, they stayed in their seats. And they placed at the entrance to the judgment hall a man with a flag. The second officer then got on a horse and rode away from the judgment hall following the prisoner and continually looking back at the man with the flag.

During this interval, if any person came to announce to the Council some further evidence favorable to the prisoner, the first officer waved his flag, the man on the horse turned and brought the prisoner back. If the prisoner himself declared that he had forgotten to say something that was in his favor, he was allowed to come back as well. The prisoner could be brought back at least five times. If no such incidents occurred, the procession advanced very slowly, preceded by a herald who in a loud voice addressed the people saying, “This man...stating his name...is led to punishment for such-and-such a crime. The witnesses who have sworn against him are this person and this person and this person. If anyone has evidence in his favor, come forth quickly.” And he said that all the way to the execution. This is a very merciful, merciful approach. And at some distance from the place of punishment, they would urge the prisoner to confess his crime. If he confessed his crime, they would give him a stupefying drink to ease the anticipation pain and take him to his end.

Everybody in the Sanhedrin knew all of this. They had operated this way since they were in local courts. They had other very amazing rules. When they took a vote, they started with the youngest member and went to the oldest member so that younger members wouldn’t vote, being influenced by their peers who are older and more experienced. They wanted pure justice. They knew all of this. And the men who were in this Council had lived through this kind of system, that’s why they had ascended to the Great Council.
Our Lord understood the importance of the Council. He even refers to its power in Matthew 23, the opening three verses, and affirms that though you don’t want to do what they do, you want to do what they say for they sit in seats of authority. They had the most excellent code of legal procedure with a dominating attitude of justice and yet mercy. The axiom of the Sanhedrin is this, how interesting, quote: “The Sanhedrin is to save, not destroy life.” And the president of the Sanhedrin when it convened at the outset of the trial was solemnly to admonish the witnesses concerning the preciousness of human life, carefully and calmly reflect whether they had not overlooked some

circumstances which might be favorable to the accused.

And then there were these rules. No criminal trial can be carried through the night, or held at night. Nor can one begin in the afternoon, lest they compress their thoughtfulness because time is running out. The property of the accused if he was condemned was never confiscated, it was given to his family. If the Sanhedrin voted unanimously for a verdict of guilty, the accused would be set free because they demonstrated a lack of mercy. There was no system like it in the world. If it would err, it would err on the side of mercy. They all knew this, those who condemned Jesus. They all knew all of this.

These are the standards they had lived by and they were held to by the populace and they prided themselves on this because this was a manifestation of their personal virtue and their adherence to divine expectation.

The Sanhedrin and the high priests, however, in the trial of Jesus violated everything...everything. And the world needs to understand this. They need to know this. All the principles of justice they affirmed and implemented they scrapped and perpetrated the crime of the ages in the illegal and unjust trial of the Lord Jesus Christ. They breached all their standards to condemn THE most innocent person who ever lived.

Now you must understand that this was a prolonged sequence of trials that took place between one and five, jammed into this period, perhaps beginning a little bit before one o'clock. There are actually six phases to the trial of Jesus: three before the Jews and three before Gentiles. There is this Jewish ecclesiastical religious trial and there's a Gentile political secular trial. And it had to be this way because the Jews didn't have the right to capital punishment. They couldn't execute anybody, the Romans had taken that away from them and reserved it for themselves. And so there was only a possibility of executing Jesus if they got Roman complicity. The task of the Jews was to come up not only with a crime that satisfied them but with a crime and a spin on that crime that would satisfy the Romans and become for them a cause for execution.

So the six separate times in less than five hours would go like this. First, Jesus is taken before Annas, immediately coming out of the Garden of Gethsemane where He has been bound and arrested He is taken to Annas. The idea of going to Annas is they need a crime. And so Annas is acting as a grand jury would act, to come up with an indictment.

They go to Annas' house for this, a one-man indictment, it is supposed to be. Why did they go to Annas? Because he's the power behind everything. He is the king of corruption in Israel. From Annas He is sent to Caiaphas, the son-in-law of Annas and when He comes to Caiaphas He meets with Caiaphas and the Sanhedrin who now have gathered and it's still in the middle of the night.
Then in the morning after they've already had their trial in the darkness, violating their own principle.

They have this mock public trial which is a performance for show to make it look legitimate and they repeat everything they did in the night trial. That's the first three that constitute the Jewish side of it.

Then come the three that constitute the Gentile side of it. From the Sanhedrin He is sent to Pilate. From Pilate He is sent to Herod. From Herod He is sent back to Pilate who finally rules on the death sentence because he's intimidated by the Jews. All of this in a few hours, six-phase trial crammed in to the darkness of the night.

By noon He is crucified. By three He is dead. Before sundown, He is buried. At every phase in this entire thing they violate all principles of integrity, honesty, justice and jurisprudence. Justice can do no worse then sentence to death the only truly and entirely sinless person who ever lived, but they did it. Everything in the trial is a mockery of truth and justice. It exalts lying. It exalts hatred. It exalts vengeance. The illegalities are stunning.

And in order to capture all of this, you can't begin with Luke, as I said, because Luke starts in the morning. We've got to go back into the night. So let's go back where it all began. Turn to John 18...John 18. They have been in the Garden of Gethsemane, as you know. The entourage has come there with as many as a thousand people. The Romans have tied up Jesus, arrested Him. And this is where John picks up the story in chapter 18 and verse 12.

"So the Roman cohort, or battalion, if you like, and the commander and the officers of the Jews arrested Jesus and bound Him and led Him to Annas first, for he was father-in-law of Caiaphas who was High Priest that year." All blind to the majesty and glory of the Son of God which they've just seen on display in several ways. Number one, when He said who He was they all fell down backward unto the power of His name. They had seen Him give an ear to the servant of the High Priest which was unmistakable in its miracle power. They were not ever swayed by miracles up to this point, why would they be swayed by such miracles at this point? They like all people who are outside the Kingdom of God cannot understand the things of God and their hearts are dark and their souls are dead and they cannot turn.

And so in this stupor of spiritual blindness, they ignore what they have just seen and they lead Jesus to Annas first. This is to get the initial charge against Him, this would be called the arraignment in our language. He is the evil brain behind everything. There had to be a charge ultimately to get the Romans to execute Him. There had to be a charge ultimately that the Jews could accept and define and then pass to the Romans. They didn't have anything yet.

Why Annas? Who is this man? He had been High Priest for about five or six years, twenty years prior to this...twenty years prior to this. He hadn't been High Priest for twenty years. He was likely in his eighties by now. But he was the Mafia boss. He was the man behind the corruption. Five of his sons were high priests after him. And the Old Testament Law identified a high priest for life. Five high

priests in the twenty years and now another one who is his son-in-law? You get the picture. He kept the power in the family. He maintained the title “high priest” through it all. He should have served for life?
You say, “Well why wasn’t he still serving as the high priest?” Because the Romans pushed him out.

And he had to always make truce with the Romans because in order for him to keep his system and to keep getting as rich as he was getting and keep the flow coming, he had to have some kind of a positive relationship to Rome so he had to bend when they pushed. It didn’t really matter that he wasn’t the high priest anyway, he still was the power behind the position.

The family of Annas, both him and all his sons, and son-in-law, were hated and feared by the Jews. Temple businesses were called the bazaars of Annas. He and his sons controlled absolutely everything that occurred in the temple. And in tremendous greed they had become staggeringly wealthy.

There are lots of ways that they became wealthy, but perhaps the two most common ways are well known to us. According to the Law, when the people came before the Lord to the temple, they couldn’t come empty handed, they had to bring a free-will offering. And heathen money wasn’t accepted. There was money that the temple basically identified as acceptable money. So when you got to the temple, you had to have temple money. And that meant you had to change your money. And when you changed your money, they charged exorbitant exchange fees, that’s what we know as the money changers in the temple. They charged such exorbitant fees, they made great profits from this transaction.

The second thing they did was they were the ones who qualified animals for sacrifice. You didn’t come to the temple without a sacrifice. Sacrifices were offered every morning and every evening of every day, in addition to the great festival days. And as the people came, the priests at the temple were the ones who looked at the animals to determine if they were suitable. Well let it be known to everyone that the temple kept their own sheep because as a general rule nobody brought a sheep that was acceptable. So the people pretty soon got the message, no sense in taking one, they’re going to reject it. You have to buy one there which would be a very, very exorbitant price again, and they would literally soak the people. They had a special temple enclosure market where these sheep that were pre-approved by the priests could be purchased at an exorbitant fee.

They couldn’t lose. They were the fat cats, the religious frauds and charlatans getting rich on the people through religion. And Annas was the godfather behind the whole deal. He hated Jesus with a passion because when Jesus began His ministry two years before this, John chapter 2 verses 13 to 17, the first act of His ministry was to go into the temple and turn over the money changers and throw out the buyers and the sellers.
And then at the end of His ministry, as we well remember, on the Tuesday of the Passion Week,

we've just studied it in months past, He came in to the temple again for the last time and did the very same thing. They hated it. Annas was a religious racketeer, the big boss behind everything. He wanted Jesus out of the picture. It wasn't theology for him. It was economics.

For the Pharisees and the Sadducees, there was a big difference. Sadducees were liberals, didn't believe in the supernatural, the miraculous or angels or resurrection. The Pharisees were more theological. For them, Jesus was a theological problem because He attacked their system, their theology, their self-righteousness. The Sadducees, it was just money. They ran the temple enterprise. The Sanhedrin, as I said, was made up of a mix of these. But Annas is behind it and because he's the most corrupt and the most experienced of the corrupt and because he's an old man who has been corrupt all his life, they thought that the machinations of Annas could come up with some way to indict Jesus sufficiently to get the Romans to kill Him.

Drop down to verse 19. "So when Jesus comes before Annas, he is still called the high priest, he questioned Jesus about His disciples and about His teaching." This is illegal. This is illegal. He's searching for something, he has nothing. He wants Jesus to start talking so he can find something for which he can indict Him. This is not a true arraignment. This is not like a grand jury seeking to determine guilt or innocence because of testimony that can be given. He wants Jesus dead. He wants Jesus dead, that is the presupposition. Now he just has to find a way to make it happen. This is not about justice.

So, he gives this generic question: "Tell me about Your disciples and Your doctrine? What do You teach and how many people are following You?" It might be interesting for you to know that that's a good indication that Annas was out of touch with what Jesus was doing and the impact He was having amazingly. He certainly was clear about how many people had showed up at the temple every day that week to see Jesus and listen to Him. But beyond that, he doesn't seem to have had any interest in the things Jesus taught. "What do You teach? Who are Your disciples? How many are there? How widespread is this?"

Jesus answered him in verse 20, "I've spoken openly to the world. I always taught in synagogues and in the temple where all the Jews come together. I spoke nothing in secret. Why do you question Me? Question those who have heard what I spoke to them. Behold, these know what I said."

This is a call on the part of Jesus for Annas to recognize the illegality of the question he just asked. He calls for proper legal procedure. I'm not going to give evidence against myself. I'm not going to convict myself as the only witness, you know that's illegal, call your witnesses. Where are they? I've been in the temple, I've been in the synagogues, everybody knows what I've taught. Call some witnesses.
This is a severe open indictment of Annas' corruption and unwillingness to follow legal procedure. And it couldn't be read any other way, so verse 22 says, "When He had said this, one of the officers

standing by gave Jesus a blow saying, ‘Is that the way You answer the high priest?’” He punched Him in the face. This is the first physical maltreatment of Jesus on the path to the cross on Friday. The high priest had just been made to look unjust, foolish, uninformed, he’s embarrassed, he’s unmasked and the tenseness of the air is relieved by a servant who tries to break that tension by punching Jesus in the face. And there’s no retaliation. First Peter 2:23, Peter says, “When He was reviled, He reviled not again.” This was their hour and the hour of darkness.

Unlike Paul...remember Paul in Acts 22? You maybe don’t remember, so let me help you remember. Just looking at the blank eyes out there. Acts 22, listen to this, verse 30, “Paul was accused by the Jews, ordered the chief priests and all the council to assemble. Brought Paul down to set him before....” Same circumstance, bringing Paul, this time, before the Sanhedrin. “Paul looked intently at the counsel and said, ‘Brethren, I’ve lived my life with a perfectly good conscience before God up to this day. I’ve committed no crime.’” I have no indictment from God in my conscience. “And the high priest, Ananias, commanded those standing beside him to strike him on the mouth...punch him in the mouth. Then Paul said, ‘God’s going to strike you, you whitewashed wall.’” Oh....well Jesus didn’t do that. Huh...so...Paul wasn’t Jesus. Something about that that I like but it wasn’t right. That’s what he deserved. Jesus is so majestic.

“Jesus answered him, ‘If I’ve spoken wrongly, bear witness of the wrong. If rightly, why do you hit Me? Let there be justice.’” Well, there’s no where for Ananias to turn, he has no crime, he has nothing. So verse 24 says, “He sent Him bound to Caiaphas, the high priest.” Let Caiaphas have at Him.

In the meantime, while Jesus was before Annas, Caiaphas was collecting the Sanhedrin, hurrying and scurrying about the city to go to their homes to wake them up in the middle of the night and get them together. And they all began to collect. But before we come to the trial, quote/unquote, before Caiaphas, a few comments about the illegal, unjust acts being brought before Annas in the middle of the night...that’s illegal...without witnesses, that’s illegal...with no crime, that’s illegal. Furthermore Annas had no legal authority at all. No trial could be held in someone’s house either, it’s just the start of the many injustices.

Now to follow from here, you need to turn to Matthew 26 because Matthew picks up the next phase of the trial. Now remember, while all of this is going on, something else is going on that we talked about last time, and what else is going on is the sequence of denials by Peter that are interwoven into this. But we’ve already considered that. So we’re just looking at the trial.

Chapter 26 and Matthew picks it up with Jesus arriving at Caiaphas in verse 57. “Those who had seized Jesus led Him away to Caiaphas, the high priest, where the scribes and elders were gathered together.” The council, the Sanhedrin is coming together. This is the son-in-law of Annas. He is equally wicked, sinful, wretched, power hungry, greedy, he wants Jesus dead also.

So in the dark of the night, He is taken from one illegal clandestine trial phase to another. Now it only took 23 of them to make a quorum of the 71, only 23 to make a quorum. How many showed up? Well, Mark 14:53 says, “All of them.” They were all there. They came running because Jesus was a big issue. Either they had an economic issue with Him because they were part of the Sadducee structure, or they had a theological issue with Him because they were part of the Pharisaic religion which dominated the land, they had to act fast. They wanted to violate all law. They wanted to get it done before the people could weigh in on it, before there could be any public face to this thing, it had to be over with and done.

And so there’s a mad dash. It’s about 3 A.M., the cock has just crowed to announce to Peter that what Jesus said was true about him, he would deny the Lord on three occasions before the cock crowed twice. This is the cock crowing of the second time and what Jesus told Peter comes true. And that is going on in the courtyard when Jesus is moving from Annas to Caiaphas. And somewhere during that transit, you remember, Jesus looked into the face of Peter, exposing Peter. Peter ran out and wept bitterly.

So He comes to Caiaphas. The house of Caiaphas is across the same courtyard from the house of Annas. Jesus is taken in to this large room. Peter may still be just kind of sneaking away. The Sanhedrin is never allowed to originate charges. It’s another breach of Law. They are only allowed to investigate charges brought to them and confirmed by witnesses. There are no charges. The session before Annas came up with no charges. They now become prosecutor as well as judge and jury. They already have the sentence in view. They know what they’re going to do, they just have to find a way to do it. This is justice turned on its head.

Again it is still night, that’s illegal. It is the house of the high priest, that’s illegal. There is no indictment so they have to invent one, that’s illegal. They have become prosecutor rather than objective judge. They violate the season, no crime of capital punishment could be initiated on the eve of a feast. They can’t do this because it’s Passover. There can be no execution on a feast day either. And there certainly can be no bribery of a traitor ever. And the only reason they had Jesus in custody was that they bribed who? Judas.

Verse 59, “The chief priests and the whole council kept trying to obtain false witness against Jesus in order that they might put Him to death.” This went on for a while, a few hours. They’re chasing around trying to find somebody who will give false witness against Jesus. They don’t have true witness, they know that. He’s committed no crime. Even Pilate later says, “I find no fault in Him, what’s He done? You never have come up with anything.” So they sought false witnesses, pseudo-witnesses. It’s a continual picture. They’re chasing around trying to find them. They have to have at least two because no crime can be confirmed unless there’s two or three witnesses. Since there are no witnesses because there is no crime, they have to make up a crime and make up witnesses’ testimony because they want Him dead. That’s all predetermined in their minds. As it is, by the way, in the mind of God.

It’s unthinkable, isn’t it, that the judges would bribe false witnesses to seek the death of an innocent man? That’s what you’ve got....judges...it would be like the Supreme Court of the United States deciding to kill somebody and bribing someone to arrest him and then bribing witnesses to lie about him and programing the witnesses so that they would tell the same story.

Well, they had trouble finding witnesses. Verse 60 says, “They couldn’t find any.” Of course not. How can you be a witness of a crime when a crime didn’t happen? Even though many false witnesses came forward, none of their stories made any sense. There were always people who resented Jesus. They could always find people they could pay off who would come and say something, it just didn’t make sense, none of it worked. But later on, it says in verse 60, “Two came forward saying, ‘This man stated I am able to destroy the temple of God and to rebuild it in three days.”

Well sort of. They’re referring back to John 2:19 when Jesus said, “Destroy this body and in three days I’ll raise it up. And this He spoke not about the temple but about His own body.” He’s talking about His death and resurrection. But this could constitute a pretty serious crime if someone had actually destroyed the temple, but you could not be prosecuted in Jewish jurisprudence for something you said. They did have an understanding of what we have in America, that is freedom of speech. You could not be prosecuted for something you said. Jesus did say that, sort of. They put a little twist on it for their own purposes.

It was pretty tough for two false witnesses to agree. You know, the truth is the truth and it’s not hard to agree about the truth but if there is no truth and you have to invent something, it’s hard to come up with the same invention, right? There’s only one truth, but there are a million lies. The Mishnah, the codification of Jewish Law, required that each witness but be asked seven questions as to the alleged offense and what period of seven years counting from the Sabbatical year it occurred, in what year of the period, in what month, what day of the month, what day of the week, what day...what hour of the day and at what location. And the limits are indicated within which two witnesses may differ upon one or another question without invalidating all together their testimony. Wow, that’s very, very detailed. So if you’re trying to match up two liars, it’s really hard.

By the way, it should be stated and understood that there were no witnesses called for the defense of Jesus, even though Jesus had said to Annas, “Why don’t you call somebody and ask them what I said?” They didn’t want any witnesses for the defense.

And so, the travesty continues. Jesus never said I’m going to destroy this temple, He said I’m going to destroy this body...or you’re going to destroy this body and I’ll raise it up. Mark 14:59 actually says, “Neither did their witness agree together.” They didn’t follow the very careful crafted laws of witnessing that would have validated their stories.

So they still had nothing, absolutely nothing. No case at all. This is not a trial, this is a flat-out conspiracy. They bribed the false witnesses, they misrepresent what He said years before, twisted and even the people who twist it can't agree on it. They understand that you can't be executed for something you say, certainly if it's true. They provided no defense for Jesus, called no witnesses on His behalf. Their desperation is overwhelming, absolutely overwhelming.Frustration reaches the maximum point in the mind of the high priest in verse 62. "The high priest stood up in the middle of the Council and said to Him, 'Do You make no answer? What is it that these men are testifying against You?' But Jesus kept silent."

As if Jesus could have responded to two disagreeing false witnesses with some kind of words of self-defense. Jesus knew there was nothing to the accusations, so He said nothing. And by saying nothing, He indicted that whole Council. He would maintain the Law of jurisprudence, you do not give credence to false witnesses. You expose them as false. They were manifestly liars. Jesus kept silent.

And that silence is deafening, folks. That silence is paralyzing. It leaves only the reverberation of the words of the false witnesses bouncing around the room. The air is thick with yellow guilt under the condemning silence and gaze of Jesus as He looks at the high priest. A breach of justice, the palpability of hatred makes the air electric as the Jews hear only the echoes of their own evil hatred. He stands silent and majestic.

Then Caiaphas is direct. "And the high priest said to Him, 'I adjure You, I put You on oath...meaning that...by the living God that You tell us whether You are the Christ, the Son of God.'" Forget crimes, forget everything else, let's go to the core of this thing, You keep claiming to be the Son of God. You keep claiming to be the Christ, the Messiah. Are You?

By the way, the court does nothing to consider the punishment of the liars. He's got to take another approach, get the liars out of the room. Let's go for blasphemy. Tried other routes that might have been easier to sell to the Romans, but just tell us whether You're the Christ, the Son of God. He probably said it in several different ways because Mark says, "If You are the Son of the blessed One?" Do you really claim to be the Messiah. Do you really claim to be the Son of God and therefore one with God? Make Yourself equal with God? Do You really claim that?"

"And Jesus said to him, 'You said it yourself. Nevertheless I tell you, hereafter you shall see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of power and coming on the clouds of heaven.'"

Oh...and He declares who He is. If Jesus had said no, no I'm not, they would have dropped the case. They would have had nothing else. When He said yes, it was blasphemy...it was blasphemy.

And what happened? Come back next week and find out.
Father we see that in the end Jesus was the only witness who told the truth and the truth was yes, I am the Christ, the Messiah, the One who is God the Son. He swears by God, the living God to be no less than the Son of God. He swears by God no less than the living God to be the Messiah. It's now time for Him to say it. And it is absolutely true. How stunning it is to see our Lord in an undeserved trial, an undeserved sentence passed on Him, an undeserved condemnation and an undeserved execution in our place instead of our deserved trial, our deserved sentence, our deserved condemnation and our deserved execution. We were once a captive at the will of Satan, but Christ became a captive that we might be set free. We were once outcasts forsaken, but Christ was forsaken that we might be gathered into Your Family, O God. We were once without sympathy, but Jesus went without sympathy to become our sympathetic high priest. Jesus accused with false witnesses and He forgives us who can be justly accused by a thousand witnesses. We see Jesus silent and it fills our mouth with praise. We know, Lord, that as Christ suffered, He suffered for us, we reap the benefit of all that He bore. He was wounded for our transgressions, bruised for our iniquities, chastisement from You upon Him to an unjust system was for our peace and it pleased You, it pleased You and it pleases us and yet it overwhelms us. We thank You that Christ was willing to go to the cross to humble Himself that He might win us who are so unworthy. We thank You, Lord, thank You for the salvation that has come to us through grace through this monumental abuse of Christ to be abused by nails, to be abused by a crown of thorns, to be abused by a whip, to be abused by fists, to be abused in every way, having men spit in your face, to be abused by injustice. It must have tortured His holy soul for all He had ever known in Your presence was love, consummate and eternal. And all of this for us and what can we say but we rejoice and we offer our praise.

Available online at: http://www.gty.org
COPYRIGHT (C) 2014 Grace to You
You may reproduce this Grace to You content for non-commercial purposes in accordance with Grace to You's Copyright Policy (http://www.gty.org/connect/copyright).