

\* These notes are provided for personal devotional and study purposes only. They may not be published, distributed, or disseminated to others without the permission of the author.

**The Jewish Trial**

**John 18.12-14, 19-24; Matthew 26.57-68, 27.1**

**Series: Signs of Life**

**July 17, 2022**

**Rev. Andrew Hawkins, Senior Pastor**

- I. Introduction
  - A. You've been there – in the courtroom
    - 1. With Perry Mason
  - B. The prosecutor is trying the case for murder
    - 1. He has an open-and-shut case
      - a. And Perry Mason's client seems headed for the slammer
      - b. Probably for the rest of his or her life
  - C. But Perry Mason has been doing his homework
    - 1. He's been beating the bushes, digging up other leads
      - a. Convinced that his client is not the real killer
      - b. He's committed to finding out who the real villain is
  - D. And just as the trial is about to move to closing arguments
    - 1. In comes the new witness
      - a. Or new evidence
    - 2. And completely blows the case apart
      - a. And points the judicial finger at someone else not even considered a suspect by the prosecution
      - b. Many times, that person has been in the courtroom all along
  - E. The drama is undeniable
    - 1. It has you on the edge of your seat
    - 2. Which is what sustained that theatrical franchise through 82 novels, 4 short stories, 12 years of a daily crime series on the radio, 12 years of television shows, 10 years of TV movies, and even a recent HBO series
    - 3. We love that kind of drama
  - F. In our last message from the Gospel of John found ourselves witnessing the arrest of Jesus through the betrayal of Judas Iscariot
    - 1. And you know what happens after an arrest
      - a. That's right – a trial
    - 2. And the trial of Jesus contains as much drama – perhaps even more – than a Perry Mason case
  - G. In actuality, there were two trials of Jesus
    - 1. There was a Jewish trial
      - a. And there was a Roman trial
    - 2. The Jewish religious authorities, collaborating with Judas, were the primary instigators of the legal proceedings against Jesus
      - a. But under Roman occupation, the Jews weren't able to execute

- anyone
    - b. Even when Jewish law demanded the death penalty, the people of Israel depended on the Romans to carry out capital punishment
  - 3. So the Jewish authorities had to navigate a complicated legal landscape to try capital cases
- H. And to make the legal landscape even more complicated, the Jews wanted the trials – both of them – to be conducted, the suspect convicted, sentenced, and executed, and buried within 24 hours of the arrest – indeed, less than 24 hours!
  - 1. Because they wanted the whole nasty business to be over by the Passover
    - a. They would minimize the possibility of a public outcry over the removal of this Jesus of Nazareth
  - 2. Kind of like the government, when it has bad news to report, likes to wait until Friday afternoon to release it
    - a. That way, fewer people would pay attention to it
    - b. And maybe by the weekend, by Monday morning, the whole thing will be forgotten

## II. Courtroom Drama

- A. We pick up the drama in John 18.12
  - 1. John 18:12–14 (ESV) —
    - a. 12 So the band of soldiers and their captain and the officers of the Jews arrested Jesus and bound him.
    - b. 13 First they led him to Annas, for he was the father-in-law of Caiaphas, who was high priest that year.
    - c. 14 It was Caiaphas who had advised the Jews that it would be expedient that one man should die for the people.
  - 2. Enter two characters central to the Jewish trial: Annas and Caiaphas
  - 3. Annas was the father-in-law of Caiaphas
    - a. He was the one who would conduct the preliminary hearing
    - b. This would be most like an arraignment in our justice system
    - c. But Annas was well-connected with the Jewish authorities
    - d. And he knew they wanted this trial to be fast-tracked
    - e. The Jews were hoping Annas would get Jesus to plead out so they could trot him off to the Romans ASAP
  - 4. Caiaphas was the more sinister, manipulative, and shrewd of the two relatives
    - a. As we shall see as the trial unfolds
    - b. He was the high priest who presided over the Sanhedrin – the Jewish ruling council, the ones who would eventually render judgment on Jesus
    - c. And he was appointed by the Romans after his predecessor was deposed
    - d. He was sustained in that position for 18 years – indicating that he and the Roman authorities got along swimmingly!
  - 5. But it was Annas – the father-in-law of Caiaphas, who had been the high

priest some years earlier

- a. Who continued to assert considerable influence on the Jewish ruling council, the Sanhedrin
- b. Who would conduct the preliminary hearing
- 6. And of course, the hearing took place pronto – right after the arrest
  - a. **In the middle of the night!**
  - b. Which itself is curious since Jewish law required that trials take place between the morning and evening sacrifices
  - c. This would have been between the evening and morning sacrifices
  - d. Do you see the difference?

B. **John 18:19–21** (ESV) —

- 1. 19 The high priest then questioned Jesus about his disciples and his teaching.
- 2. 20 Jesus answered him, “I have spoken openly to the world. I have always taught in synagogues and in the temple, where all Jews come together. I have said nothing in secret.
- 3. 21 Why do you ask me? Ask those who have heard me what I said to them; they know what I said.”
- 4. This is a strange interchange between Annas and Jesus
  - a. It might give you the impression that Jesus was being evasive, even a bit cantankerous, in the exchange
- 5. But once again, an understanding of Jewish law helps us see what Jesus is driving at
  - a. Jewish law requires that accusations be brought by witnesses
  - b. Never was it expected that the accused bring accusations against himself
  - c. We have the 5<sup>th</sup> Amendment – defendant is not required to testify against himself
  - d. The Jews had no 5<sup>th</sup> Amendment – didn’t have to; never in a legal proceeding was the defendant to testify against himself
  - e. So Jesus was simply saying, “This is a trial. The initiation of a trial comes from witnesses. If you have any witnesses, bring them forward.”
  - f. Jesus was simply affirming the constituted process for trying a criminal case

C. **John 18:22–23** (ESV) —

- 1. 22 When he had said these things, one of the officers standing by struck Jesus with his hand, saying, “Is that how you answer the high priest?”
- 2. 23 Jesus answered him, “If what I said is wrong, bear witness about the wrong; but if what I said is right, why do you strike me?”
- 3. Ah! The blood pressures rise
  - a. One of the court officers loses it – strikes Jesus
  - b. But Jesus maintains His position
  - c. “What I said is precisely what I should have said under Jewish law. Why strike me?”

- D. **John 18:24** (ESV) — 24 Annas then sent him bound to Caiaphas the high priest.
1. Well, Annas' attempts at getting Jesus to confess to a capital crime at the arraignment is going nowhere
    - a. He realizes Jesus knows the law, knows His rights under the law
    - b. And rather than waste any more time, he sends Him along to his ruthless son-in-law Caiaphas
    - c. Maybe under the current presiding officer of the Sanhedrin, and in front of the whole Sanhedrin, Jesus will crack
  2. The Sanhedrin, by the way, was made up of 71 Jewish officials
    - a. Priests
    - b. Scribes
    - c. Elders
    - d. Presided over by the High Priest
    - e. An imposing gathering if there ever was one
  3. All of whom would be dragged out of bed in the middle of the night to hear the case
    - a. And none too happy about it!
- E. Now here's where the drama in the Gospel of John takes a detour
1. The exchange between Annas and Jesus is recorded
  2. But then the courtroom drama jumps to the Roman trial under Pontius Pilate
  3. The encounter between Caiaphas and Jesus is mentioned
    - a. But the actual interchange between them is not recorded, only assumed
    - b. But interestingly, details of that conversation are recorded by Matthew and the other gospel writers
    - c. And those details are confirmed by various elements of John's gospel
  4. But John himself doesn't record the actual dialogue
- F. **Matthew 26:57** (ESV) —
1. 57 Then those who had seized Jesus led him to Caiaphas the high priest, where the scribes and the elders had gathered.
  2. **Matthew 26:59–60** (ESV) — 59 Now the chief priests and the whole council [Sanhedrin] were seeking false testimony against Jesus that they might put him to death, 60 but they found none, though many false witnesses came forward....
    - a. So here the trial appears to go forth according to Jewish procedures
    - b. Driven by witness testimony
    - c. But the problem is – where do you find witnesses in the middle of the night in Jerusalem?
    - d. The witnesses they find give testimony that, under Jewish law, is essentially inadmissible
    - e. Under Jewish law, the witness testimony must be plausible
    - f. And multiple witnesses must agree in the details
    - g. Evidently, the witnesses they managed to drag from the street in

the middle of the night concocted stories that were obvious fabrications

h. Those testimonies were thrown out of court

3. **Matthew 26:60–61** (ESV) — 60 ... At last two came forward 61 and said, “This man said, ‘I am able to destroy the temple of God, and to rebuild it in three days.’ ”

a. So here you have multiple witnesses testifying to the same event – a statement that Jesus made

b. And they appear to agree on the essentials

c. In fact, John’s gospel corroborates the event

4. **John 2:18–21** (ESV) — 18 So the Jews said to him, “What sign do you show us for doing these things?” 19 Jesus answered them, “Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.” 20 The Jews then said, “It has taken forty-six years to build this temple, and will you raise it up in three days?” 21 But he was speaking about the temple of his body.

a. So John corroborates the event

b. And he explains what Jesus meant by it

c. And how the Jews misunderstood it

5. **Matthew 26:62–63** (ESV) — 62 And the high priest stood up and said, “Have you no answer to make? What is it that these men testify against you?” 63 But Jesus remained silent. ...

a. Once again, it appears Jesus has them stymied

b. Evidently, even though these last two witnesses agree on the essentials of what Jesus said, there was something still not right about their testimony

c. Perhaps they disagreed about the meaning behind it; or the occasion when the statement was made

d. Either of which would have made their testimony inadmissible

e. But Caiaphas knew that unless Jesus was able to corroborate it, he still didn’t have the evidence to convict Jesus of a capital crime

f. So he takes a poke at Jesus: “What about this, Jesus? What do you have to say to that?”

g. But Jesus, as any good defense attorney would – if the prosecution hasn’t made its case, no defense needs to be made

h. So Jesus stays quiet

G. Now here’s where the drama really gets us to the edge of our seats

1. The Perry Mason moment

a. When the unexpected happens

2. Caiaphas has not made any progress in prosecuting his case

a. His witnesses have been pathetic at worst, disappointing at best

b. And he’s running out of time

c. He’s really got nothing that will get the Sanhedrin to declare Jesus guilty of anything resembling a capital offense

d. So he goes for the hail-Mary – though he wouldn’t have understood what a hail-Mary was!

- H. **Matthew 26:63** (ESV) — 63 ... And the high priest said to him, “I adjure you by the living God, tell us if you are the Christ, the Son of God.”
1. Caiaphas’ final attempt at getting Jesus to condemn Himself
  2. “I adjure you...” – “I put you under oath by the living God...” (NKJV)
    - a. This is putting Jesus into a position where He is obligated, as a pious Jew, to respond
    - b. Not to respond would be tantamount to refusing to answer God Himself
  3. “Tell us if you are the Christ, the Son of God”
    - a. Caiaphas boxes Jesus into a corner
    - b. (At least Caiaphas thought so – remember who’s really orchestrating events here!)
    - c. Jesus could easily pass off either one of those designations
    - d. If it was just “the Christ” – sure He could claim He was anointed by God – as were all prophets; that’s what “the Christ” means
    - e. If it was just “Son of God” Jesus could deal with that too – all Jews in one sense could claim to be “sons of God”
    - f. But when Caiaphas puts the two together, he identifies the Messiah, the Christ, as no mere human, but as One presuming to be divine
    - g. “Tell us if you are the Christ, the Son of God”
    - h. “Tell us if you are God! Tell us if you are the divine Messiah”
- I. Finally, this gets a response from Jesus
1. He takes the bait
  2. **Matthew 26:64** (ESV) — 64 Jesus said to him, “You have said so...”
    - a. “You’re right. That’s Me. I am the Christ, the Son of God”
  3. But He even doubles down
  4. **Matthew 26:64** (ESV) — 64 Jesus said to him, “You have said so. But I tell you, from now on you will see the Son of Man seated at the right hand of Power and coming on the clouds of heaven.”
    - a. Jesus here alludes to the statement of the Divine Messiah from Daniel 7
  5. **Daniel 7:13–14** (ESV) — 13 “I saw in the night visions, and behold, with the clouds of heaven there came one like a son of man, and he came to the Ancient of Days and was presented before him. 14 And to him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him; his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom one that shall not be destroyed.”
    - a. What a magnificent description of the divine Son of God!
  6. When I say He “took the bait” – remember, this is Jesus
    - a. And Jesus is the One orchestrating this entire drama
    - b. In the final analysis, Jesus intends to be found guilty
    - c. But guilty of who He truly is; not of some concocted trumped up charge

- d. Not like Al Capon – the murderer who gets thrown in the slammer for tax evasion
  - e. If Jesus is going to go down for anything, it's for actually being accused of being the Son of God incarnate, the Messiah
  - f. I think Jesus was saying to Himself, "Finally! This fool Caiaphas actually has stumbled on to the critical issue of who I am!"
- J. **Matthew 26:65** (ESV) — 65 Then the high priest tore his robes and said, "He has uttered blasphemy. What further witnesses do we need? You have now heard his blasphemy."
  - 1. Jesus has declared Himself to be the Christ, the Son of God
    - a. But of course, Caiaphas doesn't believe that Jesus really is the true divine Messiah
    - b. And evidently, neither do the other members of the Sanhedrin
  - 2. So the final charge, the final accusation, on which Jesus will be judged is **blasphemy**
    - a. A mere mortal claiming to be God!
- K. **Matthew 26:66** (ESV) — 66 "What is your judgment?" They answered, "He deserves death."
  - 1. So the Council renders their judgment right then and there
    - a. No retiring to chambers
    - b. No jury room deliberations over hours or days
    - c. They put the hammer down without a further word
  - 2. They not only agree to Jesus' guilt
    - a. They move right into the sentencing phase
    - b. And there is no phase
    - c. It's immediate
    - d. "He deserves death"
  - 3. Of course they can't execute Him
    - a. That's where the Roman trial comes in
    - b. But that's for another day!
  - 4. But at the same time, they can't wait to get their pound of flesh – literally
  - 5. **Matthew 26:67–68** (ESV) — 67 Then they spit in his face and struck him. And some slapped him, 68 saying, "Prophecy to us, you Christ! Who is it that struck you?"
- L. What drama!
  - 1. Wouldn't you have loved to have been a fly on the wall?

### III. **Courtroom Catastrophe**

- A. As remarkable as the courtroom drama was, it was really a courtroom catastrophe
  - 1. That's because nearly everything about this trial violated Jewish law!
    - a. This was a "kangaroo court"
  - 2. I really don't know what kangaroos have to do with kangaroo courts
    - a. Seems to me to be highly offensive to kangaroos
  - 3. But a kangaroo court is a court which ignores rules of evidence, ignores procedures designed to preserve justice and give the accused a reasonable

- opportunity to defend oneself, jumps to conclusions
    - a. Maybe that's where kangaroos come in – they jump really well
    - b. Why not jump to conclusions?
  - 4. But whatever you call it, this trial was a legal catastrophe right from the start
- B. **The Arrest was Illegal**
- 1. **It was at night**
    - a. Jewish law prohibited any part of a legal process from occurring at night
  - 2. **It was achieved through the use of a traitor** acting as an informant
    - a. Jewish law required any arrest to be made on the basis of a witness of good and reputable character
    - b. Judas was certainly not that – indeed, he had even taken a bribe to be involved
    - c. In addition, the informant was one who was a close companion to Jesus; such close associates were disqualified under Jewish law in providing testimony
  - 3. And the arrest was made **without any specific charge** having been made
    - a. They arrested Jesus
    - b. Took Him to the High Priest, then tried to figure out what to charge Him with
  - 4. Any of these elements of the arrest would have rendered the case moot
    - a. Jesus should have been acquitted on this basis alone
- C. **The Trial at Night was Illegal**
- 1. The fact that Jesus was not only arrested, but tried at night, violated Jewish law
  - 2. Trials had to be conducted between the morning and evening sacrifices
    - a. In other words, between dawn and dusk
- D. **The Examination by Annas was Illegal**
- 1. Trying a case by a single judge was forbidden
  - 2. And Annas' attempt at getting Jesus to testify against Himself was illegal
- E. **No Formal Indictment Rendered the Trial Illegal**
- 1. Any trial under Jewish law was to have proceeded by a specific charge brought by credible witnesses – plural!
    - a. There was no charge brought to provoke the trial
    - b. And time was wasted in trying to find witnesses to fabricate one
  - 2. It was not Caiaphas' place to figure out a charge
    - a. He was the presiding officer of the Council; the chief judge among other judges
    - b. He was not the one to prosecute the case
    - c. This was a case of the judge and the prosecutor being one and the same person!
- F. **The Trial Itself was Illegal**
- 1. It was conducted at night – as we've said
  - 2. **It was conducted the day before the Jewish Sabbath** – no court could

- lawfully meet the day before a feast day or a Sabbath
3. **It was completed in one 24 hour period**
    - a. Jewish law requires a trial to take place over multiple days
    - b. If the entire case could be presented in one day and a vote taken, they were to reconvene the next day, reconsider the evidence, and take another vote
    - c. Essentially – two trials were to be conducted to protect the rights of defendants
  4. **It was decided on the basis of the defendant's own confession**
    - a. Jewish law prohibited such a decision
    - b. There were to be credible, agreeing witnesses
  5. **It was also decided with a unanimous verdict**
    - a. Under Jewish law, to recognize the difficulty in rendering judgments in criminal cases, unanimous verdicts by the entire Sanhedrin were rendered invalid
    - b. That seems strange to us; not to the Jews
  6. **It was also decided with no defense**, no advocate for the accused
- G. So the courtroom drama was a courtroom catastrophe
1. How could that happen?
    - a. How could such religious authorities end up looking like kangaroos?
  2. It happened because of sin
    - a. No amount of legal procedure can be successful when evil men seek the personal destruction of another person
  3. Legal procedures are designed to protect from such wickedness
    - a. But when those legal procedures get in the way, wicked men just do away with the legal requirements
    - b. And that's what happened in this case

#### IV. **The Verdict**

- A. Then we come to the verdict
  1. **Matthew 27:1** (ESV) — 1 When morning came, all the chief priests and the elders of the people took counsel against Jesus to put him to death.
- B. So they took a break
  1. Then got back together when “the rooster crowed”
  2. And condemned Jesus to death
- C. Remember, they should have conducted the trial during the day, broke for the night, then reconvened, reviewed the evidence and testimony
  1. And then rendered judgment again
  2. But why mess around with legal procedure
    - a. They needed to get the show on the road
    - b. Get Him to Pilate
    - c. Get the Romans to kill Him
  3. And get it all out of the way by sundown

V. **The Defense**

- A. There you have it – the great courtroom drama
  - 1. Perry Mason on steroids
- B. A trial
  - 1. But no defense
- C. But what defense might have been presented if this were not a kangaroo court?
  - 1. **Messianic prophecies**
    - a. Numerous prophecies of the Hebrew Bible were fulfilled by Jesus
    - b. And could only have been fulfilled by Jesus
    - c. **Birth in Bethlehem (Micah 5.2)**
    - d. **Born of a virgin (Isaiah 7.14)**
    - e. **Born of the house of David (2 Samuel 7.12, 16; Jeremiah 23.5-6; Isaiah 11.1-2)**
    - f. **Appearance of a forerunner (Malachi 4.5)** – fulfilled by John the Baptist
    - g. **Works and miracles of Jesus (Isaiah 61.1-2; 35.5-6)**
    - h. **Jesus riding into Jerusalem on a donkey (Zechariah 9.9)**
    - i. **Jesus' betrayal by close friend for 30 pieces of silver (Psalm 41.9; Zechariah 11.12)**
    - j. **Messiah as a man of sorrows, suffering (Isaiah 53.2-3)**
  - 2. Jesus claimed to be the Son of God
    - a. This was a claim in the unique sense of The Son of God
    - b. **Isaiah 9.6 – “The Mighty God”**
    - c. **Psalm 2 – “You are my Son; today I have become your Father”**
    - d. **OT speaks of an incarnation – Isaiah 7.14 (Immanuel, God with us)**
    - e. **Jehovah appears on earth among men (Genesis 16.10-11, 13; 18.1-3)**
- D. In other words, these Jewish authorities had access to the very best testimony – biblical testimony
  - 1. All of which corroborated Jesus' claim to be God incarnate; the Christ, the Son of God
    - a. Not merely that He claimed to be such
    - b. But that He actually was who He claimed to be
  - 2. This is what we would call exculpatory evidence
    - a. And it was ignored or withheld from the Council
  - 3. All of it was easily accessible to these scribes, elders and priests
    - a. And they ignored it all
- E. But here's the thing
  - 1. It's easily accessible to you
  - 2. What is your judgment?
    - a. Is He the Christ, the Son of the living God?
    - b. Is He Lord of all?
  - 3. The alternative is no neutral opinion
    - a. No room for sitting on the fence on this one
  - 4. If He's not Lord

- a. He's either a liar
- b. Or a lunatic
- c. C.S. Lewis: "A man who was merely a man and said the sort of things Jesus said would not be a great moral teacher. He would either be a lunatic — on a level with the man who says he is a poached egg — or else He would be the Devil of Hell. You must make your choice. Either this man was, and is, the Son of God: or else a madman or something worse. You can shut Him up for a fool, you can spit at Him and kill Him as a demon; or you can fall at His feet and call Him Lord and God. But let us not come with any patronising nonsense about His being a great human teacher. He has not left that open to us. He did not intend to."

F. What do you declare?

- 1. Don't wait any longer than the Sanhedrin to make your judgment
  - a. None of us knows how much more time we have on this planet
- 2. Who is this Jesus?