

The Unlawful Trials of the Lamb

Luke 22:63-71

Manuscript and Discussion Guide for October 6, 2024

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As Jesus prepares to face the wrath of the high priest, the Jewish religious leaders, and the Roman Empire, He will face injustice, unlawful prosecution, and an illegal conviction. But He knowingly endured all that and more so He could save us from our sins, reunite us with His Father, and procure for us our eternal security.

In the 15th century, under the reign of King Henry VII, a special court was established to handle high-profile cases. These were cases where jury members might be influenced, or a judge might be bribed.

This special court met in a hall within the Palace of Westminster, and since that hall had a star-patterned ceiling, it became known as The Star Chamber.

Almost immediately, it earned a reputation for justice and fairness. The powerful and the political could not manipulate or intimidate what went on in The Star Chamber.

Unfortunately, over time, it became the puppet court of the king and would be used to silence his enemies. The Star Chamber became a symbol not of the stars that shone brightly, but of the shadows that brought darkness.

While a crooked courtroom is so bothersome to me, as I'm sure it is to you, nothing bothers me more than a crooked religious system or a corrupt religious leader who is supposed to not only represent God but represent the character of an honest and just God.

We're about to enter a scene where Jesus is going to face six different hearings, or trials. All of it will be corrupt and unjust.

Jesus will have three trials before the Jewish leaders, and three trials before Roman leaders—six unlawful trials of Jesus in all.

Now we're not going to get through all 6 today.

We're going to study the first three—the Jewish hearings—today. And what I want to do is organize these three settings around nine different Hebrew laws that were broken in these proceedings.

Now the Gospel of **Luke, here at chapter 22**, condenses these Jewish court appearances, so to speak, while the other Gospel accounts lengthen the timeline.

We know from John's Gospel that Jesus is taken from the Garden of Gethsemane directly to the home of Annas, that old, corrupt former high priest.

John writes in chapter 18:

So the band of soldiers and their captain and the officers of the Jews arrested Jesus and bound him. First they led him to Annas, for he was the father-in-law of Caiaphas, who was high priest that year.

John 18:12-13

Annas had served as high priest from A.D. 6 to A.D. 15. Even though Annas was now too old to serve, the Romans determined the high priest based on who would be favorable to their political rule, and who could grease their palms with the most financial kickbacks from the temple.

That would be Annas. So, he still determined who held that position. Annas had five sons, and not surprisingly, they all served as high priest at one point or another. And we just read that Caiaphas, his son-in-law, was currently holding that office.

Annas had built his empire around the temple system. The exorbitant prices for sacrificial animals, the money changing that charged outlandish rates of exchange, Annas had set it all up.

Jewish historians even referred to the temple as the "Market Place of Annas." The profits were going directly into his pockets and his family estate.

I agree with one author who said that Annas was the godfather of the Jewish world.

Adapted from Charles R. Swindoll, [Insights on Luke](#) (Zondervan, 2012), p. 491

Imagine how infuriated Annas would have been when Jesus showed up and turned over the tables of the money changers and sent them running out of the temple, along with all the livestock.

And then Jesus had the audacity to call the Market Place of Annas a Den of Thieves.

So, it's no surprise that Annas wanted the first crack at Jesus that night. He knew what was going on in the Garden of Gethsemane, so when Jesus is brought over to his home, Annas isn't standing there in his pajamas; he's been waiting for this moment.

My guess is he's dressed in his high priestly garments to intimidate this backwoods rabbi from Galilee who dared to mess with his temple system.

Now to stand before the former high priest was nothing less than a legal hearing. But it was entirely illegal.

The first law broken, at this point is this one:

Trials were not to be held during Israel's national festivals.

And this was Passover season, a time when spiritually minded people would be focused on praise and worship for the grace and mercy of God.

Not Annas. He wanted to interrogate the man Who'd caused him high blood pressure and a lot of heartburn.

So, when Jesus arrives, Annas attacks with one question after another. We read in **John 18:19:**

The high priest then questioned Jesus about his disciples and his teaching. Jesus answered him, "I have spoken openly to the world ... I have said nothing in secret. Why do you ask me?"

John 18:19-21a

These are loaded words. You can't hold a secret hearing, and Jesus says that He's never said anything in secret, which exposes the fact that for Annas to question Him here, in secret, is violating the law.

You can imagine nobody's dozing off here! All the men in this room knew Annas was crooked and had no regard for the law, but nobody will say that out loud.

Jesus just did.

John records that one of the soldiers immediately slapped Jesus for basically saying that this hearing was crooked.

Annas knows he's just been outwitted. He's cornered and convicted, so he lets this soldier settle the score with a slap to the face of Jesus.

When our church met years ago in the band room of East Cary Middle School, one of the men in our assembly was a judge in Raleigh. I called him up and asked him, "Listen, what

would happen if an accused criminal talked back to you, the judge, and the bailiff turned around and slapped this person in the face? What would you do, as a judge?” He said, “If that happened in my courtroom—or any courtroom in our country—that bailiff would be in trouble with the law.”

But that didn’t happen here! Because the law didn’t matter to Annas.

With that, Annas sends Jesus away to Caiphas, his son-in-law.

Matthew’s account fills in some details that Luke doesn’t include at this point. While **Luke** focuses on Peter’s denial in the courtyard, **Matthew** gives us a closer look at the trial taking place inside.

And they’re in the process of breaking this Hebrew law, even more officially now:

Trials could not be held secretly at night, but publicly during the day.

We know that at Caiphas’ house, this is a trial in every respect, and we know that because **Matthew records in chapter 26 and verse 57:**

Then those who had seized Jesus led him to Caiaphas the high priest, where the scribes and the elders had gathered.

Matthew 26:57

Now old Annas hasn’t come along, he evidently stayed home to nurse a guilty conscience.

But members of the Sanhedrin, made up of scribes and elders, have arrived by torchlight.

This will be an illegal trial:

- out of sight.
- away from the people.
- away from any supporters of Jesus.
- this is the work of darkness under the cover of night.

Before we look any further, understand that the Hebrew system of law was a badge of honor. Israel prided themselves on their legal system and their Supreme Court, the Sanhedrin.

The Sanhedrin, sometimes referred to as the Senate, or the Council of the Elders, was composed of 70 men: 23 priests, 23 scribes, and 23 elders, along with the current high priest who served as the president of the council.

Some of them have gathered and this illegal trial is actually calling for witnesses.

And with that, here's another Hebrew law that shatters in the process:

Two witnesses must come forward and agree on the charges.

Never mind that there shouldn't have been a trial in the first place. But given the fact that there was, they should keep the law regarding witnesses.

And the law of witnesses is recorded in Deuteronomy 19 where Moses writes:

“Only on the evidence of two witnesses or of three witnesses shall a charge be established.”

Deuteronomy 19:15b

And of course, they had to agree on every point.

Now the Sanhedrin operated differently in some ways than our courts do today. In the Sanhedrin, there were no prosecutors as we know them, and that's because the *witnesses* served as the prosecutors. They were the critical components of the case.

The witnesses were typically questioned separately by members of the Sanhedrin to ensure their testimony was consistent, that they weren't making anything up, that their stories matched up.

You've probably heard about the three high school students who decided to skip school for an hour or two; they came into school at lunch time and told the principal they had had a flat tire, and it took them all morning to get another tire and then they had to put it on themselves, and it took forever.

He immediately sent them to three different corners of his office, gave each of them a piece of paper and a pen, told them to face the wall and then write down on that piece of paper which tire went flat.

Well, that took care of that.

With the critical nature of honest witnesses in mind, just let ***Matthew's Gospel*** account sink in as he writes:

Now the chief priests and the whole council were seeking false testimony against Jesus that they might put him to death, but they found none, though many false witnesses came forward.”

Matthew 26:59-60a

Imagine: they are actually looking for liars. They're hoping for two of them to make something up and step forward.

The trouble is, all these liars can't keep their stories straight. They keep guessing the wrong tire.

None of them were consistent in their accusations *until*—and probably *after*—they had some back room coaching.

Finally, two witnesses step up with the same details.

Matthew goes on to write in verse 60:

At last two came forward and said, "This man said, 'I am able to destroy the temple of God, and to rebuild it in three days.'"

Matthew 26:60b-61

When Jesus had said this back in John chapter 2, He was referring metaphorically to the temple of His body rising from the dead after three days (John 2:21).

But now these witnesses twist it and accuse Jesus of threatening to bring down the temple structure.

Now if this wasn't so tragic, it would be even more comical. Matthew even writes with a touch of sarcastic humor: **"At last two came forward."** At last! *Finally!* If you can believe it, the Sanhedrin found two men who could keep their story straight!

But what a crazy story: "Jesus threatened to tear down the temple." Was He going to take a hammer out there and start chiseling away when nobody's looking? And then He's going to rebuild it all in three days?

That's it? Really?

Now there's a reason the Sanhedrin had a hard time getting decent men to bear false witness against the Lord, I mean, where can you find good witnesses at 3 in the morning?

Now here's another law that was broken:

False witnesses were to bear the same penalty as the accused.

The law records in Deuteronomy 19:16-19:

"If a malicious witness arises to accuse a person of wrongdoing, ... the judges shall inquire diligently, and if the witness is a false witness and has

accused his brother falsely, then you shall do to him as he had meant to do to his brother.”

Deuteronomy 19:16-19a

You testify falsely in court and you're going to jail for the same amount of time the accused would have gone there.

You can be sure this had a way of curbing false witnesses.

Let me tell you, there should have been a dozen more crosses on Golgotha for all these false witnesses.

But here's the Sanhedrin's dilemma:

- There's just no evidence of wrong doing.
- They have no witnesses to a crime.
- Jesus never broke the law.
- He's innocent, and sinless.
- He's entirely perfect.

So, these corrupt religious leaders continue to break one law after another.

And here's another one, **number 5:**

The high priest was not allowed to question the accused.

The high priest simply presided over the court.

But you'll notice that after the false witnesses testify, Caiphas leaps to his feet. ***Matthew's Gospel records in chapter 26:***

And the high priest stood up and said, "Have you no answer to make? What is it that these men testify against you?" But Jesus remained silent.

Matthew 26:62-63a

He will eventually speak, but at this point, the Lord is effectively reminding Caiaphas that he's breaking the law *himself* by asking a question, and Jesus won't dignify him with an answer.

Now around this point in time, Luke's Gospel indicates that Jesus is handed over to the Roman soldiers to hold him until daybreak.

They know this secret trial is unlawful. So, they wait until daybreak to fake a real trial, to act like they're just now bringing Jesus to stand before the court of law.

And while these soldiers hold Jesus for a few hours, Luke records they beat Him and mock Him. **Luke 22 and verse 63:**

Now the men who were holding Jesus in custody were mocking him as they beat him. They also blindfolded him and kept asking him, "Prophecy! Who is it that struck you?"

Luke 22:63-64

We know from history that the children's game of Blindman's Bluff dates all the way back to these days here where a child would be blindfolded. The other children would take little papyrus reeds and tickle the child, who would try to guess who was tickling them.

Bruce B. Barton, *Life Application Bible Commentary: Luke* (Tyndale, 1997), p. 517

These Roman soldiers have picked up on the accusation that Jesus was a prophet, so they've turned it into a guessing game of Blind Man's Bluff, only in this game, they're using their fists to beat Him and then try to make Him guess who.

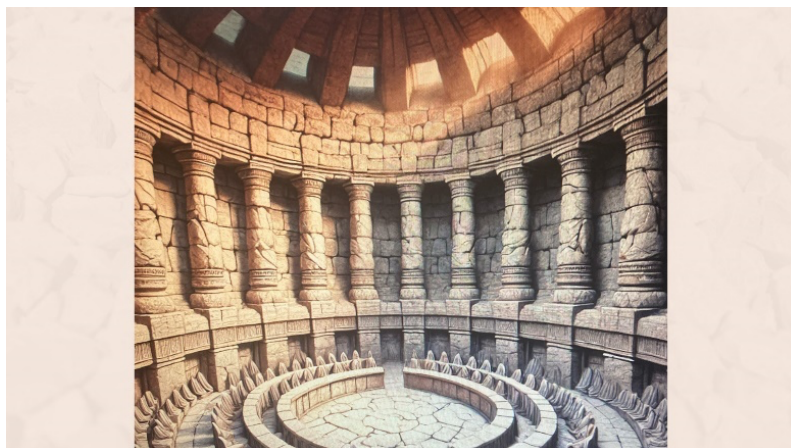
But eventually, the dawn arrives, Jesus now is even more bloodied and bruised. He'll be on a cross in a matter of hours.

Luke writes here in chapter 22 and verse 66:

When day came, the assembly of the elders of the people gathered together, both chief priests and scribes. And they led him away to their council.

Luke 22:66a

The language here reveals that now the entire Sanhedrin has assembled in the great Hall of Judgment.



This courtroom was located inside the Temple complex, and it was officially called **The Chamber of Hewn Stone**.

The name came from the fact that the stones were carefully cut and then fit together to form the walls and pillars, this court was built to represent the solid, granite-stability of truth and justice and devotion to God's law.

The men sat in semi-circles, with the accused standing in the middle. Imagine **The Corner Stone** will be rejected in **The Chamber of Hewn Stone**.

Now it doesn't take long at all before another Hebrew law is broken; here it is:

The accused were never required to speak for their own defense.

Luke writes that as soon as court is convened, they break this law, verse 66 again:

And they led him away to their council, and they said, "If you are the Christ, tell us."

Luke 22:66b-67a

We have adopted this same law, in a manner of speaking. We give the accused the right to "plead the fifth." A person is not required to speak for themselves in a way that might incriminate themselves.

Jesus didn't have to answer this incriminating question. He didn't have to speak at all. And earlier with Annas, Jesus had remained silent.

But now it's time. It's time to help the Sanhedrin find Him guilty of something significant, something worthy of death.

Don't miss this. The Sanhedrin is stuck. All they can accuse Him of is threatening to do harm to the temple building. He's going to take a little hammer out there and start pounding away at a wall!

They might send Him away from some *counseling*, not call for His *crucifixion*.

Even though Jesus is not bound by law to speak, this time He does in **verse 67**.

Jesus responds:

"If I tell you, you will not believe, and if I ask you, you will not answer."

Luke 22:67b-68

In other words, you don't really want to hear the truth about Jesus the Messiah!

They didn't want the truth about Jesus being the Christ, the Anointed Redeemer! Their eyes were closed.

And to our world today, it's the same issue. The problem isn't that our world around us needs more **evidence** of God, the problem is they know it would demand **repentance**. So don't tell me; leave me alone in the darkness.

But Jesus now takes them further, He will help seal His destiny on the cross. Jesus keeps talking in **verse 69**:

"But from now on the Son of Man shall be seated at the right hand of the power of God." So they all said, "Are you the Son of God, then?" And he said to them, "You say that I am."

Luke 22:69-70

In other words, "I am the Son of God just as you are saying it in your question!"

R.C.H. Lenski, [The Interpretation of St. Luke's Gospel](#) (Augsburg Publishing, 1946), p. 1099

The word "You" is emphatic. One translator paraphrases it: "You have just confessed it even if you don't believe it."

Dale Ralph Davis, [Luke: The Year of the Lord's Favor](#) (Christian Focus, 2021), p. 196

And look at what the Lord has just claimed.

- **Daniel 7:13-14** refers to the divine **Son of Man** approaching the throne of God.
- **Psalms 110:1** refers to the Lord sitting with God in judgment over the world.

Jesus takes these two passages and relates them to Himself. He effectively says, "I am the *person* from Daniel 7, and this is my *posture* in Psalm 110."

Davis, p. 195

"I am the **Son** of Man, and I am **seated** at the place of divine authority."

And the Sanhedrin immediately knew that Jesus was claiming virtual equality with God, both in person and in position.

Ibid

Which is why they respond here by asking, "**Are you saying that you are the Son of God?**" *Are you claiming to be deity, in the flesh?*

Yes!

And in case they missed what He meant, **Matthew's account** records Jesus adding this final phrase:

"You will see the Son of Man seated at the right hand of Power and coming on the clouds of heaven."

Matthew 26:64b

You can kill me, but I'm coming back! This is a prophetic picture of a coming judgment and Jesus is claiming here to be the Divine Judge!

Let me tell you, Jesus is not on trial here; the Sanhedrin is on trial.

And they fully understood what Jesus was saying about Himself. Which is why they respond **here in Luke 22 and verse 71:**

Then they said, "What further testimony do we need? We have heard it ourselves from his own lips."

Luke 22:71

"He's claiming to be deity robed in humanity." Let me tell you, they should've fallen down on that stone floor and worshipped Him.

But they didn't.

Matthew Henry wrote 300 years ago, "There is none so blind as those who refuse to see."

Adapted from Warren W. Wiersbe, *Be Courageous* (Victor Books, 1989), p. 127

Instead of falling down to worship Him, Matthew records Caiaphas calling for a vote:

Then the high priest tore his robes and said, ... "You have now heard his blasphemy. What is your judgment?" They answered, "He deserves death."

Matthew 26:65-66

Now with this action, they violate three more Hebrew laws, let me give them to you quickly. Number 7:

The sentencing of the accused followed a day of fasting and reflection.

These Supreme Court justices were to spend the day considering the evidence, praying, fasting or eating very lightly, and reflecting before sentencing.

We know from history that they would often pair up and discuss the case together.

But there was no hesitation in this case.

Yet another law was broken; here it is:

The sentence of death would be dismissed if the court was unanimous.

Now in our world, a unanimous vote is required for the death penalty.

But here in Israel, they believed that a unanimous vote implied something was wrong; there had been a lack of critical thinking; a prejudiced heart against the accused; or simply a lack of mercy.

So, a unanimous vote of the Sanhedrin allowed the accused to go free!

But not with Jesus.

Finally, one more law is broken, and most horribly; here it is:

The evidence of judicial prejudice or bias would overturn any decision of the court.

We would call it a mistrial today. If a jury member was bribed, if the judge mishandled the case on some technicality, if an attorney withheld some evidence, the case was dismissed.

Any sign of unfairness or bias and the case was thrown out of court.

Were these Supreme Court justices ruling with fairness and justice?

Just watch what they do next. **Matthew records** that after this verdict is read, they descended on Jesus like the Roman soldiers had done earlier.

Matthew writes:

Then they spit in his face and struck him. And some slapped him, ...

Matthew 26:67a

Can you imagine the Supreme Court of the United States condemning a criminal to die, and then—in their robes—descending upon the accused?

The Supreme Court of Israel became a vicious gang of 70 men, surrounding Him, spitting on Him, hitting Him, cursing and mocking Him.

He took it all without a word, on your behalf and mine.

The innocent, pure, sinless, Son of God came for this moment.

He was tried before this high court so that you will never have to be tried before the court of Heaven.

He was treated with the injustice of mankind so that you will never have to face the justice of God.

Jesus was unlawfully condemned to die, so that you can have the legal right to live with Him forever.

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Study Guide

Summary

In this sermon, we explore the unlawful trials of Jesus Christ, highlighting the corruption and injustice that pervaded both the Jewish and Roman legal systems. Despite the blatant disregard for Hebrew and Roman laws, Jesus remained composed, fulfilling the divine plan foretold by God. The trials were marked by false witnesses, illegal proceedings, and a corrupt religious system that sought to silence Jesus. Yet, through it all, Jesus' identity as the Son of God was affirmed, and His sacrifice was underscored as the means by which believers are spared from divine judgment.

Key Takeaways

- **The Corruption of Justice:** The trials of Jesus reveal the depths of human corruption, where those entrusted with upholding justice instead manipulated it for their own ends. This serves as a reminder of the importance of integrity and fairness, especially for those in positions of authority. As believers, we are called to reflect God's character by pursuing justice and righteousness in our own lives.
- **The Fulfillment of Divine Plan:** Despite the chaos and injustice of the trials, they unfolded according to God's sovereign plan. Jesus' calm demeanor and willingness to endure suffering highlight His obedience to the Father's will. This teaches us to trust in God's plan for our lives, even when circumstances seem unjust or overwhelming, knowing that He works all things for our good.
- **The Power of Truth:** Jesus' trials were marked by false accusations and deceit, yet He remained steadfast in truth. His example challenges us to hold fast to truth in a world that often distorts it. As followers of Christ, we are called to be people of truth, speaking and living it boldly, even when it is unpopular or costly.
- **The Cost of Redemption:** The trials and subsequent crucifixion of Jesus underscore the immense cost of our redemption. Jesus endured unimaginable suffering and injustice so that we might be reconciled to God. This profound sacrifice calls us to live lives of gratitude and devotion, recognizing the depth of His love and the price He paid for our salvation.
- **The Hope of Resurrection:** Despite the apparent victory of injustice, Jesus' trials ultimately led to His resurrection and triumph over sin and death. This assures us that no matter how dark or unjust our circumstances may seem, there is hope and victory in Christ. We are reminded that our present sufferings are temporary, and we look forward to the eternal glory that awaits us with Him.

Discussion Guide

- Bible Reading:
- Luke 22:63-71
- Acts 2:23
- Matthew 26:59-66

Observation Questions:

1. What were some of the unlawful actions taken during Jesus' trials as described in Luke 22:63-71?
2. In Matthew 26:59-66, what were the false accusations brought against Jesus, and how did the high priest react to Jesus' response?

Interpretation Questions:

1. What does Jesus' calm demeanor during the trials teach us about obedience and trust in God's plan, even in the face of injustice?
2. How does the sermon illustrate the power of truth through Jesus' steadfastness, and what implications does this have for believers today?

Application Questions:

1. In what ways can you pursue justice and righteousness in your daily life, especially if you hold a position of authority or influence?
2. Consider a situation in your life that seems unjust or overwhelming. How can you trust in God's plan and remain obedient to His will?
3. How can you hold fast to truth in your personal and professional life, even when it is unpopular or costly?
4. Reflect on the cost of redemption as demonstrated by Jesus' trials and crucifixion. How can you live a life of gratitude and devotion in response to His sacrifice?
5. In moments of darkness or injustice, how can the hope of resurrection and victory in Christ encourage you to persevere?
6. Identify a specific area in your life where you can demonstrate integrity and fairness. What steps will you take this week to reflect God's character in that area?