

Matthew 26:57-68

I. Matthew 26:57 — Then those who had seized Jesus led him to Caiaphas the high priest, where the scribes and the elders had gathered.

This won't be an official trial. We should probably think of it as a preliminary, more informal examination (cf. France). It takes place inside the high priest's private residence (cf. Luke 22:54) in the middle of the night. Many of the chief priests, and scribes, and elders had already gathered and were already waiting for Jesus when He was led inside. They know now that time is of the essence. This had not been their original plan. They had originally planned to arrest Jesus and kill Him *after* the Passover feast was over and the crowds had all gone home (26:3-5). But when Judas presented them with the opportunity, they decided not to wait. Now they had to hurry. The Sabbath would begin at sundown of the coming day (John 19:31), so they either had to do away with Jesus before then or else wait until after the Sabbath was over. But every minute this was allowed to drag on, the more they risked the possibility of popular protests and mob violence – especially by the pilgrims who had come from Galilee (26:3-5). So in order to make the official proceedings in the morning as short and as efficient as possible (27:1) they will work to establish the charges against Jesus now – at the high priest's house, in the middle of the night.

There's been a lot of talk and debate about the legalities of what happened that night. But this, at least, seems clear – there will be no justice tonight. I'm reminded of Psalm 22 which describes the sufferings of the innocent, and especially the sufferings of the Messiah:

✓ Psalm 22:12-13 — Many bulls encompass me; strong bulls of Bashan surround me; they open wide their mouths at me, like a ravening and roaring lion.

Already, we can anticipate what's coming.

II. Matthew 26:58 — And Peter was following him at a distance, as far as the courtyard of the high priest, and going inside he sat with the guards to see the end.

Who can imagine what was going on in Peter's heart and mind? He already had Jesus' own words about His suffering and death. Just now, he had watched Jesus go out willingly to meet those who had come to seize Him. Then, when he had drawn his sword, Jesus commanded him to put it back in its place. And now the leaders of Israel have gathered together at the private residence of the high priest, in the middle of the night, to examine Jesus. Did Peter really have any doubts left about what the end would be? But on the other hand, how could he *accept* that this is what was happening? How could he *believe* that this was happening?

After following Jesus at a distance, as far as the courtyard of the high priest, Peter sat down with the guards *to see what the end would be*. What terribly sad words. Peter is still willing himself not to abandon Jesus completely. But he's also willing that this entire night should not be happening. Why should Jesus *be here* at all? Why was this happening? Very soon it will be Peter's turn to be examined, but for now he sits outside in the courtyard waiting to see what the end will be for Jesus – still willing that somehow things might turn out differently...

III. Matthew 26:59–60a — 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.

The chief priests and the council would not have said that they were seeking false testimony. Even the “many false witnesses” that came forward would probably not have been considered false. For them, it was just that no two witnesses could quite agree in their testimony (Mark 14:55-56), and the law required at least two witnesses to be in agreement (Deut. 17:6; 19:15).

Everyone *knew* that Jesus was guilty. Everyone was convinced that He deserved to die. But in the end, it was complicated. What was it, *really*, that Jesus said and taught? What was this Jesus *really* about? Since they were confused about this, it was proving impossible for them to pin Jesus down – with one person saying one thing, and the next person saying another. But this should have told them something, shouldn’t it? They were holding Jesus without any *just* cause. They should have seen this. It should have been obvious to them. But they were blinded by their zeal. They couldn’t see what seems so obvious to us – that the testimony they were seeking could *only* be false. All they knew for sure was that Jesus deserved to die. Now they only had to prove it. But so far this had turned out to be completely impossible. Are you *beholding* Jesus? Do you see Him there in the high priest’s house – the lamb unblemished and spotless?

Thus far, Jesus’ many accusers have had no success. So might the *innocent* possibly be set free? Could Peter be right to still wonder what the end will be?

IV. Matthew 26:60b–63a — 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.’ ” 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.

Mark says that even this was false testimony, and that “not even in this respect was their testimony consistent” (Mark 14:57-59). He tells us about a slightly different accusation:

✓ Mark 14:58 — We heard him say, “I will destroy this temple that is *made with hands*, and in three days I will build another, *not made with hands*.”

So what did Jesus actually say? No one seemed to know for sure. Or at least no one seemed to know what He had meant. One thing for sure is that Jesus never said *He* would destroy the temple – only that it *would be* destroyed.

✓ Matthew 23:37–38 (cf. 24:1-2) — O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it! How often would I have gathered your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing! See, your house is left to you desolate.

John tells us how Jesus said once:

- ✓ John 2:19–21 — “Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.” The Jews then said, “It has taken forty-six years to build this temple, and will you raise it up in three days?” But he was speaking about the temple of his body.

So what did Jesus say? And what did Jesus *mean* by what He said? Even here, there was disagreement and confusion. But in all the confusion, still one thing should have been clear to everyone: Jesus Himself had never posed even the slightest, tiniest threat to the temple in Jerusalem. Only a few days before, He had “cleansed” the temple while quoting from Isaiah: “It is written, ‘My house shall be called a house of prayer’” (21:12-13). This was certainly no attempt to *destroy* the temple! And yet here now is a sliver of hope for the chief priests and elders. Two witnesses have at least agreed that Jesus said something about the destruction of the temple. So the high priest begins to pressure Jesus. He “stood up and said, ‘Have you no answer to make? What is it that these men testify against you?’”

“But Jesus remained silent.” Why should He say anything? They still have no grounds against Him. They still have no admissible evidence. They still have no reason to put Him to death – and they know it. But Jesus also knows that to explain what He did and didn’t say, and to explain what He did and didn’t mean would accomplish nothing, and only expose the truth needlessly to mockery and scorn. So He remains silent. He never defends Himself. He lets His accusers expose the thoughts and motives of their own hearts.

- ✓ Isaiah 53:7 — He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth; like a lamb that is led to the slaughter, and like a sheep that before its shearers is silent, so he opened not his mouth.

Are you *beholding* Him? Are you seeing Him there in the high priest’s house – the lamb unblemished and spotless?

But now the time is slipping away. Now it’s become clear to everyone that unless they can get Jesus to say something, *anything*, to incriminate Himself right then and there, they will have lost their chance – probably forever. There is a rising feeling of exasperation, and probably also of desperation on the part of Jesus’ accusers. Could it be possible that the innocent might be set free? Could Peter be right to still wonder what the end will be?

V. Matthew 26:63 — 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.”

“Christ” is the Greek equivalent of the Hebrew “Messiah.” “Messiah” was the popular title for the coming king and deliverer of Israel so often promised in the Old Testament. In Israel, the rightful kings were descended from David. And it was David who wrote, “The LORD said to me, ‘You are my Son; today I have begotten you’” (Psalm 2:7). The book of Samuel describes what God said about David’s descendants: “I will be to him a father, and he shall be to me a son” (2 Sam. 7:14). So while every Davidic king of Israel could rightly be called the “son of God,” this title would be especially appropriate for Israel’s ultimate king and final deliverer – Israel’s promised Messiah. That’s why before Peter ever truly understood the deity of Jesus, he could still confess Jesus to be “the Christ [the Messiah], the Son of the living God” (Matthew 16:16).

So the High Priest's question is really very simple: "Do you claim to be the deliverer of Israel – the promised Messiah?"

We might wonder why he even needs to ask. Isn't it already obvious from *all* that Jesus has said and done? But Jesus has not once made this claim explicitly – at least not in so many words, and never in public. And never has He even hinted at being the kind of political and military Messiah that Israel had in mind. So what *does* Jesus say about Himself? What *does* Jesus say about who He is?

"I adjure you by the living God, tell us if you are the Christ, the Son of God." What will Jesus say? To answer "no" would not be the truth. To say nothing, now, in this moment, would be a betrayal of the truth. But what happens if He answers "Yes. I am Israel's deliverer. I am the promised Messiah, the Son of God"? What then? What has Jesus *done*? This may be something to accuse Jesus of before the Roman authorities, even though Jesus has never once posed any threat to Rome, but what law of the Jews has Jesus broken? Even if Jesus answers "yes," still, what has He done to be deserving of death? Could it be possible that the innocent might be set free? Outside in the courtyard, could Peter still be right to wonder what the end will be? But here is a problem. If Jesus simply answers "yes," then His answer is misleading – for He is nothing like the Messiah that this high priest is imagining. So maybe Jesus could say something like He will say to Pilate when Pilate asks Him whether He is the King of the Jews:

- ✓ John 18:36 — My kingdom is not of this world. If my kingdom were of this world, my servants would have been fighting, that I might not be delivered over to the Jews. But my kingdom is not from the world.

If Jesus gives this same answer to the high priest it might expose Him to more mockery and ridicule, but at least it might also keep Him off the hook. On the other hand, what is an answer that just gets you off the hook? It's a betrayal of the truth. It is to fear men more than God. So what will Jesus say? How *will* Jesus answer? Are we beholding Him now?

VI. Matthew 26:64 — 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."

"You have said so." A qualified "yes." "Yes, I am the Messiah, but that is not how I would choose to put it because I don't mean by that exactly what you mean" (cf. France). "But I tell you..." "I will tell you the *truth* about the Messiah. I will tell you the *truth* about who I am." "From now on you will see the Son of Man seated at the right hand of Power and coming on the clouds of heaven."

Who is Jesus? Who did Jesus say that He was? He said that His true glory and power is not earthly, but *heavenly* (cf. France). He said that His authority is not political and of this world, but rather the exalted authority of one who sits at the very right hand of God. In Psalm 110, David wrote:

- ✓ Psalm 110:1 — The LORD says to my Lord: “*Sit at my right hand*, until I make your enemies your footstool.”

And Daniel writes:

- ✓ Daniel 7:13–14 — 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. 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.

And now *behold*(!), here stands Jesus before His accusers, solemnly proclaiming that He is *this* Messiah, and that very soon they will see Him exalted to share in the very power and authority of God. One day those who judge Him and accuse Him now will stand before Him as the final judge of all. Jesus says that even “from now on,” they will see Him exalted in heavenly glory.* They will see the reality of the exalted Son of Man in the empty tomb, in the powerful outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the disciples of Jesus, in the powerful, unstoppable growth of the Church through the Gospel of Jesus Christ, and in the miracles that the Apostles will perform in Jesus’ name. They will see the authority and power of Jesus as He sits at the right hand of God in the coming destruction of Jerusalem. And finally, they will see the exalted Son of Man when He returns with power and great glory as the final Judge of all the earth. In only a few days, Jesus will say to His disciples, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.”

But right now, in the high priest’s house, in the middle of the night, Jesus stands before His accusers, and He is weak and frail. Right now, Jesus stands before His accusers in a body that men may seize, and abuse, and kill. Are you *beholding* Him? Are you seeing Him there in the high priest’s house – the *lamb* unblemished and spotless? Now we know that the innocent will *not* go free. Now we know what the end will be. In speaking the truth so uncompromisingly and with such power and conviction, Jesus has given His accusers exactly what they wanted.

VII. Matthew 26:65–68 — 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. What is your judgment?” They answered, “He deserves death.” Then they spit in his face and struck him. And some slapped him, saying, “Prophecy to us, you Christ! Who is it that struck you?”

I can hear Jesus’ words to Peter in the garden: “Do you think that I cannot appeal to my Father, and he will at once send me more than twelve legions of angels?” If ever there was a time when I would have expected lightning to strike, it would have been now. Even as I read these verses, I can find myself almost holding my breath – waiting for something to happen, waiting for the legions of angels. But Jesus just stood there and endured it. He did nothing. And He said nothing more. Jesus knew not only Psalm 110 and Daniel 7. He also knew Isaiah chapter 50.

* I agree with Bruner’s observation that the combination of “from now on” with the future tense (“you will”) seems to indicate something along the lines of “very soon and from there on out.”

- ✓ Isaiah 50:5–7 (NASB) — The Lord GOD has opened my ear; and I was not disobedient nor did I turn back. I gave my back to those who strike me, and my cheeks to those who pluck out the beard; I did not cover my face from humiliation and spitting. For the Lord GOD helps me, therefore, I am not disgraced; therefore, I have set my face like flint, and I know that I will not be ashamed.
- ✓ Isaiah 53:7 — He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth; like a lamb that is led to the slaughter, and like a sheep that before its shearers is silent, so he opened not his mouth.

The formalities are still to come, but that’s all they are now – just formalities. It was in the middle of the night at the high priest’s house that the verdict was reached. **Guilty**. And now as they spit in His face, and strike Him, and slap Him, and dare Him to prove that He is the Messiah by telling them who it was that hit him – now they are even more convinced that He cannot be who He says He is. But we know. By the grace of God, we know. In this scorned, and abused, and suffering Jesus we see the infinitely precious Lamb of God, unblemished and spotless. Are you truly beholding Him? Are you *seeing* Him with the eyes of *faith*?

The high priest asked, “What further need do we have of witnesses?” (NASB). Or as the NET Bible translates: “Why do we still need witnesses?” And so the high priest admitted that they had found none (cf. Lange). Jesus was condemned not on the false testimony of others, but on the basis of His own *faithful witness* (Rev. 1:4-5). When Jesus could have hedged, He spoke out clearly. When Jesus could have been evasive, when He could have kept the truth hidden, He proclaimed it fearlessly, boldly, in all of its power and beauty. “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.” And so it was on the basis of these words—on the basis of His own faithful testimony (cf. 1 Tim. 6:13)—that Jesus was condemned and sent to hang on a cross.

Whether we live in times of freedom and ease or in times of persecution and suffering, may we also testify the good confession – **boldly** and without fear; **joyfully** and without any shame (cf. Rev. 2:13). He testified the good confession, He was a faithful witness – and as a result He was condemned by sinners to be deserving of death, so that *we* who *deserved death* might go free. Are you a faithful witness? Are you testifying the good confession with your words and with your life? Am I?

There in the *high priest’s* house, in the middle of the night, as Peter waited outside, the verdict was reached. Guilty. “He deserves death.” But I know in my heart that I am the one who is guilty. I am the one who deserves to die. But we have been “ransomed... with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot” (1 Pet. 1:18-19). Are you *beholding* Him?