

To Seek and to Save the Lost

Jesus Before the Council

Luke 22:63-71

Rev. Freddy Fritz

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Jesus Before the Council

Scripture

Jesus was betrayed by Judas and arrested by the religious authorities in the Garden of Gethsemane on the Mount of Olives. He was taken to the high priest's house where Peter denied knowing him three times before the rooster crowed. Then Jesus was subjected to an illegal, hastily-convened religious trial before the Jewish council.

Let's read about the religious trial of Jesus in Luke 22:63-71:

⁶³ Now the men who were holding Jesus in custody were mocking him as they beat him. ⁶⁴ They also blindfolded him and kept asking him, "Prophecy! Who is it that struck you?" ⁶⁵ And they said many other things against him, blaspheming him.

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, and they said, ⁶⁷ "If you are the Christ, tell us." But he said to them, "If I tell you, you will not believe, ⁶⁸ and if I ask you, you will not answer. ⁶⁹ But from now on the Son of Man shall be seated at the right hand of the power of God." ⁷⁰ So they all said, "Are you the Son of God, then?" And he said to them, "You say that I am." ⁷¹ Then they said, "What further testimony do we need? We have heard it ourselves from his own lips." (Luke 22:63-71)

Introduction

After the arrest of Jesus there were a number of hearings and trials during the night and the early hours of daylight. Each of the Gospels emphasize different aspects. Generally speaking, however, there was a religious trial before the Jewish council and there was a civil trial before Pilate.

The Jewish legal system was actually a very impressive system of jurisprudence. God had given the Law to his people, and they were

to implement it faithfully. God stressed the importance of justice. When God's people were about to enter the Promised Land and be established as a nation, God commanded them in Deuteronomy 16:18-20:

“You shall appoint judges and officers in all your towns that the Lord your God is giving you, according to your tribes, and they shall judge the people with righteous judgment. You shall not pervert justice. You shall not show partiality, and you shall not accept a bribe, for a bribe blinds the eyes of the wise and subverts the cause of the righteous. Justice, and only justice, you shall follow, that you may live and inherit the land that the Lord your God is giving you.”

John MacArthur notes that by the time of Christ, Israel's judicial system had become well established.¹ Every town with at least 120 men who were heads of households had a local court known as a Sanhedrin. This council, made up of twenty-three men (seven or three in smaller towns), acted as judge and jury in all legal matters. The Great Sanhedrin in Jerusalem was the final judicial authority in Israel, comparable to the Supreme Court of the United States. It consisted of seventy men from three categories (Mark 14:53): chief priests (mostly Sadducees), elders (religious and secular aristocrats), and scribes (mostly Pharisees).

The law mandated three requirements in a criminal proceeding: a public trial, a defense for the accused, and a confirmation of guilt by two or three witnesses (Deuteronomy 17:6; 19:15; cf. Hebrews 10:28). Because the last point was crucial to a just verdict, the law prescribed a severe penalty for false witnesses – the punishment that the accused would have received if he had been guilty was to be inflicted on the liars. God said in Deuteronomy 19:16-19:

“If a malicious witness arises to accuse a person of wrongdoing,

¹ The following is taken from MacArthur, John F (2014-10-01). Luke 18-24 MacArthur New Testament Commentary (MacArthur New Testament Commentary Series) (pp. 330-332). Moody Publishers. Kindle Edition.

then both parties to the dispute shall appear before the Lord, before the priests and the judges who are in office in those days. 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. So you shall purge the evil from your midst.”

The rules were particularly strict in capital cases:

On the day of the trial, the executive officers of justice caused the accused person to make his appearance. At the feet of the Elders were placed men who, under the name of *auditors*, or *candidates*, followed regularly the sittings of the Council. The papers in the case were read; and the witnesses were called in succession. The president addressed this exhortation to each of them: “It is not conjectures, or whatever public rumour has brought to you, that we ask of you; consider that a great responsibility rests upon you: that we are not occupied by an affair, like a case of pecuniary interest, in which the injury may be repaired. If you cause the condemnation of a person unjustly accused, his blood, and the blood of all the posterity of him, of whom you will have deprived the earth, will fall upon you; God will demand of you an account, as he demanded of Cain an account of the blood of Abel. Speak.”

A woman could not be a witness, because she would not have the courage to give the first blow to the condemned person; nor could a child, that is irresponsible, nor a slave, nor a man of bad character, nor one whose infirmities prevent the full enjoyment of his physical and moral faculties. *The simple confession of an individual against himself*, or the declaration of a prophet, however renowned, would not decide a condemnation. The Doctors say – “We hold it as fundamental, that *no one shall prejudice himself*. If a man accuses himself before a tribunal, we must not believe him, unless the fact is attested by two other witnesses; and it is proper to remark, that the punishment of death inflicted upon Achan, in the time of Joshua was an exception, occasioned by the nature of the circumstances; for our law does not condemn upon the simple confession of the accused, nor upon the declaration of one prophet alone.”

The witnesses were to attest to the identity of the party, and to depose to the month, day, hour, and circumstances of the crime. After

an examination of the proofs, those judges who believed the party innocent stated their reasons; those who believed him guilty spoke afterwards, and *with the greatest moderation*. If one of the *auditors*, or *candidates*, was entrusted by the accused with his defence, or if he wished in his own name to present any elucidations in favour 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 favour 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 which were in favour of the accused, and the other, those which condemned him. Eleven votes, out of twenty-three, were sufficient to acquit; but it required thirteen to convict. If any of the judges stated that they were not sufficiently informed, there were added two more Elders, and then two others in succession, till they formed a council of sixty-two, which was the number of the Grand Council. If a majority of votes acquitted, the accused was discharged *instantly*; if he was to be punished, the judges postponed pronouncing sentence till the third day; during the intermediate day they could not be occupied with anything but the case, and they abstained from eating freely, and from wine, liquors, and everything which might render their minds less capable of reflection.

On the morning of the third day they returned to the judgment seat. Each judge, who had not changed his opinion, said, *I continue of the same opinion and condemn*; any one, who at first condemned, might at this sitting acquit; but he who had once acquitted was not allowed to condemn. If a majority condemned, two *magistrates* immediately accompanied the condemned person to the place of punishment. The Elders did not descend from their seats; they placed at the entrance of the judgment hall an officer of justice with a small flag in his hand; a second officer, on horseback, followed the prisoner, and constantly kept looking back to the place of departure. During this interval, if any person came to announce to the Elders any new evidence favourable to the prisoner, the first officer waved his flag, and the second one, as soon as he perceived it, brought back the prisoner. If the prisoner declared to the *magistrates*, that he recollected some reasons which had escaped him, they brought him before the *judges* no less than five times. If no incident occurred, the procession advanced

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slowly, preceded by a herald who, in a loud voice, addressed the people thus: “This man (stating his name and surname) is led to punishment for such a crime; the witnesses who have sworn against him are such and such persons; if any one has evidence to give in his favour, let him come forth quickly.” . . .

At some distance from the place of punishment, they urged the prisoner to confess his crime, and they made him drink a stupefying beverage, in order to render the approach of death less terrible.²

The Great Sanhedrin, which Luke simply calls “the council,” were determined to have Jesus condemned and killed. But in their zeal to destroy Jesus they committed a number of violations against their own system of jurisprudence. According to commentator Darrel Bock, these violations included:

- a. The proceedings take place at the high priest’s home and not in the temple (mishnah *Sanhedrin* 11.2).
- b. Jesus was tried without a defense (mishnah *Sanhedrin* 4.1 says that both sides of a case must be heard).
- c. Jesus was accused of blasphemy without actually blaspheming in the technical sense of the term by pronouncing the divine name (mishnah *Sanhedrin* 7.5).
- d. The verdict came in the space of one day, when two days were required for a capital trial (mishnah *Sanhedrin* 4.1).
- e. Jesus was tried on a feast day.
- f. Contradictory testimony nullifies evidence (mishnah *Sanhedrin* 5.2).
- g. A pronouncement of guilt by the high priest is contrary to the normal order, which should start with the least senior members (mishnah *Sanhedrin* 4.2).³

Luke gives an abbreviated summary of Jesus before the council,

² M. Dupin, “The Trial of Jesus Before Caiaphas and Pilate,” in Simon Greenleaf, *An Examination of the Testimony of the Four Evangelists by the Rules of Evidence Administered in Courts of Justice* (London: A. Maxwell & Son, 1847), 887–90. Italics in original.

³ Darrell L. Bock, *Luke: 9:51–24:53*, vol. 2, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 1996), 1792.

also known as the Great Sanhedrin.

Lesson

The religious trial of Jesus in Luke 22:63-71 shows us the charge against Jesus.

Let's use the following outline:

1. Jesus Was Mocked and Blasphemed (22:63-65)
2. Jesus Was Charged with Blasphemy (22:66-71)

I. **Jesus Was Mocked and Blasphemed (22:63-65)**

First, Jesus was mocked and blasphemed.

After Jesus was arrested in the Garden of Gethsemane he was taken to the home of the high priest (Luke 22:54). Caiaphas was the current high priest. He was the son-in-law of Annas, who had previously served as the high priest, and still had tremendous influence. Jesus was interviewed by both Caiaphas and Annas during the night. Perhaps some time before dawn they summoned the council, also known as the Great Sanhedrin. They wanted to get a conviction against Jesus as quickly as possible.

While they were waiting for the members of the council to arrive, Jesus was being held by the temple guards (cf. Luke 22:52), perhaps in the high priest's courtyard. **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?" And they said many other things against him, blaspheming him (22:63-65).** Jesus was innocent of all wrongdoing, and the soldiers were mocking him, beating him, and blaspheming him.

Bishop J. C. Ryle notes:

Our Lord's calm submission to insults like those here described, shows the depth of his love towards sinners. Had he so willed, he could have stopped the insolence of his enemies in a moment. He who could cast out devils with a word, could have summoned legions of angels to

his side, and scattered those wretched tools of Satan to the winds. But our Lord's heart was set on the great work he had come on earth to do. He had undertaken to purchase our redemption by his own humiliation, and he did not flinch from paying the uttermost farthing of the price. He had undertaken to drink the bitter cup of vicarious suffering to save sinners, and "for the joy set before him he despised the shame," and drank the cup to the very dregs (Hebrews 12:2).⁴

Bishop Ryle also suggests the following application for us:

Patience like that which our blessed Lord exhibited on this occasion should teach his professing people a mighty lesson. We should forbear all murmuring and complaining, and irritation of spirit, when we are ill-treated by the world. What are the occasional insults to which we have to submit compared to the insults which were heaped on our Master? Yet "when he was reviled he reviled not again. When he suffered he threatened not." He left us an example that we should walk in his steps. Let us go and do likewise (1 Peter 2:21-23).⁵

So, Jesus was mocked and blasphemed.

II. Jesus Was Charged with Blasphemy (22:66-71)

And second, Jesus was charged with blasphemy.

Finally, **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**, which was also known as the Great Sanhedrin. Jesus used this opportunity to confirm his identity. And he did so by affirming three titles that were used of him.

A. *Jesus Is the Christ (22:67-68)*

First, Jesus is the Christ.

The council **said** to Jesus, **"If you are the Christ, tell us"**

⁴ J. C. Ryle, *Expository Thoughts on Luke*, vol. 2 (New York: Robert Carter & Brothers, 1879), 442.

⁵ J. C. Ryle, *Expository Thoughts on Luke*, vol. 2, 442-443.

(22:67a). The Greek word for **Christ** is the same as the Hebrew word “Messiah,” and it literally means, “one who has been anointed.”⁶ The title **Christ** is used 54 times in the Gospels. Darrell Bock says, “It is crucial to remember that to call Jesus Messiah is to confess his rule, since the title is a regal one. It is Jesus’ authority as the one sent of God that is in view here.”⁷

But, Jesus actually rarely called himself the **Christ** because the title was so misunderstood. In Jesus’ day people wanted a royal ruler who would overthrow the Romans and free the people from their oppression. So, they were looking for a political or military Messiah. Jesus knew that if he asserted the title it would be misunderstood because it had overtones of rebellion against Rome, and that could get him killed. Of course, that is what the council wanted him to assert.

But Jesus said to them, “If I tell you (that I am the Christ), you will not believe, and if I ask you (who you think the Christ is), you will not answer” (22:67b-68). Jesus skillfully answered their question, but not in a way that they understood.

Jesus asserted that he is the Christ.

B. Jesus Is the Son of Man (22:69)

Second, Jesus is the Son of Man.

Jesus continued his response and said, **“But from now on the Son of Man shall be seated at the right hand of the power of God”** (22:69). The title Jesus most often used to refer to himself was **“Son of Man.”** But this title is often misunderstood.

The title **“Son of Man”** is used 82 times in the Gospels. And the title “Son of God,” which we shall look at next, is used only 26 times in the Gospels. Many people think that **“Son of Man”** is a reference to the humanity of Jesus, while the title “Son of God” is a reference to the deity of Jesus. But that is not exactly what the **“Son of Man”** means.

⁶ Johannes P. Louw and Eugene Albert Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains* (New York: United Bible Societies, 1996), 542.

⁷ Darrell L. Bock, *Luke: 9:51–24:53*, vol. 2, 1795.

When Jesus was young he read the Old Testament book of Daniel. There he read these words in 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.” The vision is that “one like a son of man” would be presented to “the Ancient of Days.” Jesus understood that one day he would be presented to God. And God would give him an everlasting dominion over the entire earth. This really is a picture of God-like sovereignty over all the earth.

So, the term “**Son of Man**” is really expressing the deity – rather than the humanity – of Jesus.

Jesus told the council that **from now on the Son of Man shall be seated at the right hand of the power of God**. He knew that in a short while his earthly humiliation would be concluded, and his heavenly exaltation would begin when he is seated at God’s right hand.

So, Jesus is the Christ. And he is also the Son of Man.

C. Jesus Is the Son of God (22:70-71)

And third, Jesus is the Son of God.

The council understood that the vision of Daniel referred to a divine being who was given an everlasting dominion over the entire earth. They could scarcely believe their ears at what Jesus was asserting. **So they all said, “Are you the Son of God, then?”** (22:70a). They asked him directly about his identity.

And he said to them, “You say that I am” (22:70b). This may seem evasive to us. But, actually, Jesus was agreeing with their assessment of his identity. Leon Morris offers the following paraphrase: “I would not put it like that, but since you have, I cannot deny it.”⁸

⁸ Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to St. Luke: An Introduction and Commentary*, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974), 318.

It was this assertion that Jesus is the **Son of God** that was particularly problematic to the council. They believed that this assertion was blasphemy. **Then they said, “What further testimony do we need? We have heard it ourselves from his own lips”** (22:71).

The irony, of course, is that Jesus is indeed the Son of God!

Conclusion

Therefore, having analyzed the religious trial of Jesus in Luke 22:63-71, we should clearly affirm that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of Man, and the Son of God.

At the religious trial of Jesus, he affirmed that he is the Christ, the Son of Man, and also the Son of God.

Let us affirm that Jesus is the Christ. Jesus was sent by God to seek and to save the lost (Luke 19:10). He was anointed by God to be King of kings and Lord of lords. Jesus died as the Messiah with the declaration, “Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews,” written in three languages above his head so that the entire world would know that he is indeed the Christ (John 19:19).

Let us also affirm that Jesus is the Son of Man. He understood that he would be presented before the Ancient of Days and receive an everlasting kingdom. He will rule over the entire earth at God’s right hand for ever and ever.

And finally, let us affirm that Jesus is the Son of God. He is God the Son who is the Mediator between God and man. He lived a perfect life and died a substitutionary death to reconcile sinners with God.

We know that Jesus succeeded in his mission because God raised Jesus back to life again three days after he was crucified, died, and was buried. That is where our hope lies! Jesus is the Christ, the Son of Man, and the Son of God. Let us clearly affirm that in our hearts, and live! Amen.

Mission Statement

The Mission Statement of the Tampa Bay Presbyterian Church is:

*To bring people to Jesus Christ
and membership in his church family,
develop them to Christlike maturity,
equip them for their ministry in the church
and life mission in the world,
in order to magnify God's name.*

Sermons by Rev. Freddy Fritz

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Tampa Bay Presbyterian Church (PCA)

Answers for Life!

Address: 19911 Bruce B. Downs Blvd., Tampa, FL 33647

Telephone: (813) 973-2484

Fax: (813) 973-4673

Email: Office@TampaBayPresbyterian.org

Web site: www.TampaBayPresbyterian.org

PRAYER:

O Lord our God, we thank you for your Son, Jesus.

Thank you that he is the Christ. He is the Anointed One, the one sent by you to seek and to save the lost.

Thank you that Jesus is the Son of Man. He now sits next to you, the Ancient of Days, and rules over the entire earth as he has received his everlasting kingdom.

And thank you that Jesus is the Son of God. He is the Mediator between you and us. He lived a perfect life and died a substitutionary death to reconcile us to you.

Enable us to repent of our sin and to believe in Jesus as the Christ, the Son of Man, and the Son of God.

And for this I pray in Jesus' name.

BENEDICTION:

May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all, now and always. Amen.

CHARGE:

Now, brothers and sisters, go and serve God wholeheartedly!