



CAPITOL COMMISSION

Quick to Lie - Quick to Judge (John 18:12-40)

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The Apostle John will now share with us the story of the trials that Jesus experienced. In addition to the trials, he opens a window on a story within the story – the denial of a disciple. First we will peer through the window and look at the denial and then focus on the trials.

In our last study we read about the bitter betrayal of Jesus by one of His disciples, Judas. Jesus is now faced with the disappointing denial of not only another one of His disciples, but one privileged to be part of His inner circle, Peter.

John 18:15-18—Simon Peter and another disciple were following Jesus. Because this disciple was known to the high priest, he went with Jesus into the high priest's courtyard, but Peter had to wait outside at the door. The other disciple, who was known to the high priest, came back, spoke to the girl on duty there and brought Peter in. "You are not one of his disciples, are you?" the girl at the door asked Peter. He replied, "I am not." It was cold, and the servants and officials stood around a fire they had made to keep warm. Peter also was standing with them, warming himself.

Matthew said that Peter followed Jesus, but at a distance. Earlier we saw that Peter was self-confident when he should have been humble and sleeping when he should have been praying. Now he hangs out with those who opposed and wanted to condemn his Lord (*Psalm 1:1*). If Peter had watched and prayed when our Lord advised him to do so, he would have found grace to help him in the time of need.¹ The other disciple was probably John because the same phrase is used in four other verses that clearly refer to John (*John 20:2-4, 8*). The servant girl asked him an innocent question. He was neither being interrogated by an official, nor was he on trial, but his courage failed him and he responded with a lie.

Do you ever answer questions in ways that will avoid conflict, are politically correct, but untrue?

Too many believers fear...

- embarrassment
- loss of position
- ridicule
- loss of worldly friends
- loss of promotion
- loss of worldly neighbors²

(*Deuteronomy 31:6; Mark 8:38*)

While Jesus was being questioned by Annas in another room, Peter's second denial occurs as he warms himself by the fire.

John 18:25—As Simon Peter stood warming himself, he was asked, "You are not one of his disciples, are you?" He denied it, saying, "I am not."

More than likely as Peter was standing around the fire with the soldiers, his Galilean accent betrayed him. He probably sounded like someone from the Bronx who just moved to Raleigh. They all knew where he came from. In the other accounts of this incident, he had to deny that he was a disciple of Jesus two or three times because he sounded like one. By this time he was becoming frustrated, but couldn't back away from his lie.

A lie is an abomination to God, but can seem like a very present help in a time of need. But once a lie is told, it is hard to stop. Often another must be told to back up the first one...like the lies of not fathering a child out of wedlock, hiking the Appalachian Trail, or fighting in Viet Nam.

John 18:26-27—One of the high priest's servants, a relative of the man whose ear Peter had cut off, challenged him, "Didn't I see you with him in the olive grove?" Again Peter denied it, and at the moment a rooster began to crow.

According to the other accounts, Peter was so rattled that he denied his Lord with oaths and curses (*Matthew 26:74-75*). When he did, there came the sound of a rooster crowing. At that very moment Jesus walked across the courtyard and caught Peter's eye. When Peter saw his Lord's eyes filled with mercy and tender love, he went out into the streets of Jerusalem and wept bitterly (*Luke 22:60-61*).

This account of Peter's denials provides lessons for all believers. It shows us the danger of pride and self-confidence that may be found in all of us. It also shows the great compassion of our Lord. The One who saved Peter from drowning when his faith failed him was the same One who showed him great compassion when he denied his Lord in the High Priest's courtyard.

Now we move to the trials that Jesus experienced. For some time there had been conflicts with the Jewish religious leaders—over the Sabbath observance (*Mark 2:23-28*) and in connection with the miracles of healing (*Mark 3:1-6*). Traps had been set for him so it is no surprise that this opposition came to a head in Jerusalem after Jesus had entered the city with a measure of popular support (*John 12:12-13, 17-19*).

When doing a thorough study of the trials, we need to be careful to read all the gospels. If we only read John's account and not Matthew's, we miss the interaction with Caiaphas and the Sanhedrin. If we just read Matthew's account, we won't know that Jesus appeared before Herod as Luke's gospel tells

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us. When we put all four gospels together, they fit together like a puzzle. Jesus experienced six trials; seven, if you include the crowds rejection and judgment. The first three trials were before the Jewish officials and the next three trials were before the Roman authorities. John reports on three of the trials.

THE THREE JEWISH TRIALS

TRIAL #1 – BEFORE ANNAS (*John 18:12-14; 19-24*)

John 18:12-14, 19—Then the detachment of soldiers with its commander and the Jewish officials arrested Jesus. They bound him and brought him first to Annas, who was the father-in-law of Caiaphas, the high priest that year. Caiaphas was the one who had advised the Jews that it would be good if one man died for the people. Meanwhile, the high priest questioned Jesus about his disciples and his teaching.

These appear to be innocent questions on the surface. However, the intent behind the questions was to entrap Jesus and his disciples. If Annas could find something in their teaching that smacked of sedition against Rome, he could be recognized as one who took another insurrectionist.

John 18:20—“I have spoken openly to the world,” Jesus replied. “I always taught in synagogues or at the temple, where all the Jews come together. I said nothing in secret. Why question me? Ask those who heard me. Surely they know what I said.” When Jesus said this, one of the officials nearby struck Him in the face. “Is this the way you answer the high priest?” he demanded.

Jesus follows the law in calling for witnesses to confirm His innocents. The servant, fearful that the multitude might testify on His behalf, strikes Jesus in order to silence Him.

John 18:23-24—“If I said something wrong,” Jesus replied, “testify as to what is wrong. But if I spoke the truth, why did you strike me?” Then Annas sent him, still bound, to Caiaphas the high priest.

Annas, having nothing further to say, sends Jesus to his son-in-law, Caiaphas.

TRIAL #2 – BEFORE CAIAPHAS (Matthew 26; Mark 14; Luke 22)

John does not cover the trial before Caiaphas, but focuses on Peter’s denial. Matthew records that Caiaphas attempted to entrap Jesus by demanding a response to his statement, “Tell us if you are the Christ, the Son of God” (Matthew 26:63).

TRIAL #3 – BEFORE THE SANHEDRIN (Luke 22)

The procession moves from Caiaphas’ house to the court chambers in the temple to meet with the chief priests, elders, scribes and the whole council. This was the illegal night trial when Jesus was arraigned about two in the morning. They set aside well established law to accomplish their desire to destroy Him. They knew their verdict. But they took Jesus to Pilate because the right of execution could only be rendered by the Roman government.

THE THREE ROMAN TRIALS

TRIAL #4 – BEFORE PILATE (John 18:28-40)

John 18:28—Then the Jews led Jesus from Caiaphas to the palace of the Roman governor. By now it was early morning, and to avoid ceremonial uncleanness the Jews did not enter the palace; they wanted to be able to eat the Passover.

This has confused many because the Passover had been eaten the night before. This refers to the Feast of Unleaven Bread which accompanied the Passover, and for which it was necessary to keep oneself undefiled from leaven. They did not want to enter the place of a Gentile lest they should touch leaven in some way and thus be defiled.³ Jewish oral law gives evidence that a Jew who entered the dwelling places of Gentiles became ceremonially unclean.⁴

John 18:29-32—Pilate came out to them and asked, “What charges are you bringing against this man?” “If he were not a criminal,” they replied, “we would not have handed him over to you.” Pilate said, “Take him yourselves and judge him by your own law.” “But we have no right to execute anyone,” the Jews objected. This happened so that the words Jesus had spoken indicating the kind of death he was going to die would be fulfilled.

It was predicted over one thousand years before that Jesus would not die by the Jewish method of stoning, but by the Roman method of crucifixion (*Psalms* 22). Lest we forget, God is in control of all events and working out His will despite the “free will” of man and the “right” to make our own choices.

John 18:33-35—Pilate then went back inside the palace, summoned Jesus and asked him, “Are you the king of the Jews?” “Is that your own idea,” Jesus asked, “or did others talk to you about me?” “Am I a Jew?” Pilate replied. “It was your people and your chief priests who handed you over to me. What is it you have done?”

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Jesus did not answer Pilate's question concerning His kingship because if He would have answered "No," Pilate wouldn't have thought He was a king at all. If He had answered "Yes," Pilate would have thought He was a king according to the Jewish standards, which would make Him a threat to Caesar.

John 18:36-37—Jesus said, "My kingdom is not of this world. If it were, my servants would fight to prevent my arrest by the Jews. But now my kingdom is from another place." "You are a king, then!" said Pilate. Jesus answered, "You are right in saying I am a king. In fact, for this reason I was born, and for this I came into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone on the side of truth listens to me."

This is Pilate's critical moment. Jesus has just responded, "You have said the truth. I was born a king. The work of a king is to make people face things the way they are, to unveil the truth. Therefore, everyone who loves the truth will listen to me." Jesus is testing Pilate to see whether he really loves the truth. Next is Pilate's reply.

John 18:38a—"What is truth?" Pilate asks.

This is a cynical response of one who doesn't believe that there is an answer to the question. The retort proved that he was not among those whom the Father had given the Son.⁵

John 18:38b—With this he went out to the Jews and said, "I find no basis for a charge against him."

This was a sentence of acquittal. Had Pilate been a man of truth, he would have dismissed the charges and let Jesus go. But, he feared that the Jews would riot or revolt and the news would get back to Caesar. A revolt could cost him his job or perhaps his life. So instead of releasing Jesus after finding him not guilty, Pilate decided to place the blame on the local tetrarch, Herod.

John 18:39-40—But it is your custom for me to release to you one prisoner at the time of the Passover. Do you want me to release the "king of the Jews?" They shouted back, "No, not him! Give us Barabbas!" Now Barabbas had taken part in a rebellion.

Thus far we have covered four of the six trials, three Jewish trials and one Roman trial. They represent the greatest miscarriage of justice of all time. There was absolutely no compliance with the laws of that day in any of the six separate trials. Let's look briefly at some of the illegalities.

The trial before Annas was illegal because (1) It occurred at night and court proceedings were to occur during the day; (2) The law did not allow for preliminary examination; (3) Jesus was not told the crime for which He was accused; (4) Witnesses must present the charges and there were none; (5) The accused could not be compelled to testify against himself; (6) It occurred in a house, not in a hall of judgment; (7) Annas had no legal authority.

The trial before Caiaphas was illegal because: (1) It occurred in Caiaphas' home in a large room adjacent to the courtyard, not in the Hall of Judgment; (2) It also was held at night; (3) It was not open to the public.

The trial before the Sanhedrin was also illegal because: (1) The judges were acting as prosecutors; (2) They were suppose to investigate the charges brought against Jesus; (3) They compelled Jesus to testify; (4) The High Priest pronounced Jesus guilty before a vote was taken, if a vote was ever taken; (4) Jesus was physically abused, when he should have been protected; (5) Bribery was not to be tolerated, yet that is how Jesus was betrayed.

In spite of everything that the world tried, they could not find one thing wrong that Jesus did. He proved that He is without sin.

One cannot help but see that divine intervention led to Jesus' conviction. It was absolutely essential to God's plan for our redemption. Without the unjust trials and the judgment of death for Jesus, we would not have salvation. The reason we have mercy is because Jesus did not have justice.

As we reflect on all the accounts of His trials, they should cause us to appreciate more deeply the injustices He endured and the price He paid for our salvation. He went to the cross because of His desire to bring glory to the Father and His sacrificial love for His own. What a Savior!

What are three things you can do this week to express your love and grateful appreciation to your Savior for so great a salvation?

1. J.C. Ryle, Ryle's Expository Thoughts on the Gospels, Volume Four, Baker Book House, Grand Rapids, MI, 1997 p.227
2. The Preacher's Outline & Sermon Bible, Volume 5, Leadership Ministries Worldwide, Chattanooga, TN, 1998, p.334
3. Ray Steadman, The Way of the Cross, The Ray E. Steadman Library, Catalog No: 3874, 1985
4. John MacArthur, The MacArthur Study Bible, Thomas Nelson Bibles, World Publishers, Nashville, TN, 1997, p.1622
5. Ibid, MacArthur, p.1622