

Sam Storms  
Bridgeway Church  
Gospel of John #39

### **The Torture and Trials of Jesus**

**John 18:13-14, 19-24; Mark 14:53-65; 15:1; John 18:28-38a; Luke 23:8-12; John 18:38b-40**

There are a number of things in this world that make my blood boil. Like you, I become enraged when I hear of a child being abused, or perhaps of a wife being physically assaulted by her husband. My reaction when I hear of a vulnerable and elderly widow being scammed out of what little money she has provokes only a slightly less intense anger in my heart.

I say this simply to draw your attention to a somewhat all too common occurrence in our court system. Now, don't get me wrong. I'm incredibly grateful for our legal system here in America. I thank God for the many honest, hard-working, law-abiding attorneys who are there to help us. But on occasion, even when they do their very best, circumstances beyond their control, or an honest mistake made by a prosecutor or defense attorney, as well as the unethical choices made by others, or perhaps the perjured testimony of a key witness, undermine justice. I'm profoundly grateful for the laws that exist to protect the innocent and to convict the guilty. But every once in a while, as happened in the acquittal of O. J. Simpson, I wonder if justice is being served.

Don't get angry with me if you think Simpson is truly innocent. I only cite him to illustrate what most people believe was a miscarriage of justice. But today I want us to look closely at the single greatest miscarriage of justice that has ever occurred. I'm talking, of course, about the trial and conviction of Jesus.

I can remember reading about the trial of Socrates while I was at OU. In the year 400 b.c. he was brought up on two charges: (1) he was accused of not worshiping the gods which the State recognized and worshiped, and (2) he was accused of corrupting the youth in the city. The prosecutor in this case demanded the death penalty. There were some 500 people who sat on his jury, a majority of whom voted to convict.

Socrates was given the option of going into exile to avoid the death penalty, but he turned it down. He had plenty of opportunities to escape, but chose not to, insisting that such would be contrary to his ethical principles. He spent his final day on earth debating with friends about the immortality of the soul, after which he drank the poison Hemlock, and died.

Don't think that I'm comparing the trial and death of Socrates with that of Jesus! After all, Socrates was only a man on trial for his own sins and eventually died solely for himself. Jesus was not only a man but also God who was on trial for no sin of his own, and died, not for himself, but for others.

#### *The Two Trials of Jesus*

When the four gospels are combined and compared, we discover that Jesus had **two trials**, one Jewish or religious, and one Roman or civil. The need for two trials is clear: the Jewish Sanhedrin wanted to dispose of Jesus, but blasphemy was insufficient grounds. Furthermore, they were not permitted to conduct executions. Therefore, they remanded Jesus to the custody of Pilate and portrayed him as a seditious and rebellious threat to the peace of the empire, hoping thereby that Jesus would be condemned to death.

These trials each had 3 stages or parts:

**The Jewish trial** consisted of (1) an informal examination before Annas (John 18:12-23); (2) a hearing before the High Priest Caiaphas and the Sanhedrin; and (3) the formal trial and decision early in the morning, at which time Jesus was sent to Pilate (Mark 15:1).

*The Roman trial* consisted of (1) an initial examination before Pilate (Mark 15:2-5); (2) the interrogation by Herod (Luke 23:6-12); and finally (3) the concluding appearance before Pilate (Mark 15:6-15; John 18:38b-19:16).

Liberal critics who don't believe in the inspiration of Scripture try to tell us that the material we have in the four gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, couldn't possibly be authentic because of the numerous illegalities that occurred. For example, they point out that according to Rabbinic law, in capital cases such as this, trials at night were forbidden. Furthermore, two days were required for such a trial, and only on the second day could a verdict of guilty be declared. Jewish law also provided for the private interrogation of witnesses and there was a prohibition of capital trials on feast days. Add to this the fact that the proceedings apparently took place in the home of Caiaphas and not in the temple precincts, as one would expect, the fact that Jesus was neither offered nor provided with a defense attorney, and the fact that he was charged with blasphemy without actually blaspheming in the legally defined sense, which required that the name of God be pronounced, all add up to numerous irregularities that should lead us to conclude that the gospel authors just made it all up.

But:

(1) Contrary to the opinion of some, Rabbinic law actually insists that the execution of a rebellious teacher take place on one of the three primary feast days to serve as a more visible example and deterrent to the people.

(2) The reason for his trial occurring at night is that criminals could not be executed on the Sabbath. If Jesus was arrested on Thursday night, things had to move swiftly if he was to be buried by dusk on Friday, just before the start of Sabbath.

(3) Furthermore, "an all-night session of the Jewish authorities was demanded by the fact that Roman officials like Pilate worked very early in the morning and then refused to take on new cases for the rest of the day. If Jesus could not be presented to Pilate early Friday morning, the case would drag on till after Sabbath – along with mounting risks of mob violence" (D. A. Carson, 550).

(4) Finally, the other irregularities are easily understandable once we remember two things: First, many of the legal procedures contained in Rabbinic law were purely *theoretical* and were rarely if ever put into practice. Second, these religious leaders were obviously motivated by *expediency*. Such flagrant breaches of judicial procedure were of little concern to them when the hour demanded they take rapid action. Simply put, when there is a will to quickly remove an undesirable enemy, a way will be found, the law notwithstanding!

Now, why do I bring this up? Why do I bother you with such details? Simply because I want you to see and be reassured by the accuracy and integrity and inspiration of the Bible.

Today, our Scripture reading will be quite lengthy. I have combined the various narratives of the gospel accounts so that we can read of each phase of these two trials as they happened, in chronological order.

### ***The First Religious (Jewish) Trial of Jesus***

#### **(1) Appearance before Annas**

First they led him to Annas, for he was the father-in-law of Caiaphas, who was high priest that year. It was Caiaphas who had advised the Jews that it would be expedient that one man should die for the people (John 18:13-14)

The high priest then questioned Jesus about his disciples and his teaching. 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. Why do you ask me? Ask those who have heard me what I said to them; they know what I said." 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?" 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?" Annas then sent him bound to Caiaphas the high priest. (John 18:19-24)

## **(2) Appearance before Caiaphas and the Sanhedrin**

And they led Jesus to the high priest. And all the chief priests and the elders and the scribes came together. . . . Now the chief priests and the whole council were seeking testimony against Jesus to put him to death, but they found none. For many bore false witness against him, but their testimony did not agree. And some stood up and bore false witness against him, saying, "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.'" Yet even about this their testimony did not agree. And the high priest stood up in the midst and asked Jesus, "Have you no answer to make? What is it that these men testify against you?" But he remained silent and made no answer. Again the high priest asked him, "Are you the Christ, the Son of the Blessed?" And Jesus said, "I am, and you will see the Son of Man seated at the right hand of Power, and coming with the clouds of heaven." And the high priest tore his garments and said, "What further witnesses do we need? You have heard his blasphemy. What is your decision?" And they all condemned him as deserving death. And some began to spit on him and to cover his face and to strike him, saying to him, "Prophesy!" And the guards received him with blows (Mark 14:53-65).

## **(3) The Sanhedrin sends Jesus to Pilate**

And as soon as it was morning, the chief priests held a consultation with the elders and scribes and the whole council. And they bound Jesus and led him away and delivered him over to Pilate (Mark 15:1).

### *The Second Civil (Roman) Trial of Jesus*

#### **(1) Jesus Appears before Pilate**

Then they led Jesus from the house of Caiaphas to the governor's headquarters. It was early morning. They themselves did not enter the governor's headquarters, so that they would not be defiled, but could eat the Passover. So Pilate went outside to them and said, "What accusation do you bring against this man?" They answered him, "If this man were not doing evil, we would not have delivered him over to you." Pilate said to them, "Take him yourselves and judge him by your own law." The Jews said to him, "It is not lawful for us to put anyone to death." This was to fulfill the word that Jesus had spoken to show by what kind of death he was going to die.

So Pilate entered his headquarters again and called Jesus and said to him, "Are you the King of the Jews?" Jesus answered, "Do you say this of your own accord, or did others say it to you about me?" Pilate answered, "Am I a Jew? Your own nation and the chief priests have delivered you over to me. What have you done?" Jesus answered, "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." Then Pilate said to him, "So you are a king?" Jesus answered, "You say that I am a king. For this purpose I was born and for this purpose I have come into the world—to bear witness to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth listens to my voice." Pilate said to him, "What is truth?" (John 18:28-38a; and Mark 15:2-5).

#### **(2) Appearance before Herod Antipas**

When Herod saw Jesus, he was very glad, for he had long desired to see him, because he had heard about him, and he was hoping to see some sign done by him. So he questioned him at some length, but he made no answer. The chief priests and the scribes stood by, vehemently accusing him. And Herod with his soldiers treated him with contempt and mocked him. Then, arraying him in splendid clothing, he sent him back to Pilate. And Herod and Pilate became friends with each other that very day, for before this they had been at enmity with each other (Luke 23:8-12).

#### **(3) Final Appearance before Pilate**

After he had said this, he went back outside to the Jews and told them, "I find no guilt in him. But you have a custom that I should release one man for you at the Passover. So do you want me to release to you the King of the Jews?" They cried out again, "Not this man, but Barabbas!" Now Barabbas was a robber. (John 18:38b-40).

### *Comprehending the Kangaroo Courts*

Now, needless to say, I don't have time to comment on every aspect of each phase of these two trials. I will instead focus in on the more important elements in each one.

The high priest before whom Jesus appeared was Caiaphas. He had succeeded his father-in-law, Annas, in 18 a.d. However, since Annas had been deposed by the secular authorities, he was still called high priest (inasmuch as tradition dictated that only death could remove one from office). This explains why in John 18 both are referred to as high priest. They were both hypocritical, cunning, and ruthless. Someone has said,

"For the absolutely sinless One to be subjected to a trial conducted by sinful men was in itself a deep humiliation. To be tried by such men, under such circumstances made it infinitely worse. Greedy, serpent-like, vindictive Annas; rude, sly, hypocritical Caiaphas; crafty, superstitious, self-seeking Pilate; and immoral, ambitious, superficial Herod Antipas; *these* were his judges!"

The reference to "the whole council" in Mark 14 refers to the Sanhedrin which was composed of 3 groups: priests, teachers of the law, and elders. There were 70 members plus the high priest; 23 constituted a quorum.

At a typical trial the members of the Sanhedrin sat in a semi-circle on elevated seats so that they all could see each other. To their right and left stood two court clerks who recorded the minutes of the proceedings. A seat for the accused and for any witnesses was placed in the center.

In capital cases, condemnation required the unanimous evidence of at least two witnesses (cf. Deut. 17:6; 19:15; Num. 35:30). Any discrepancy between their respective depositions and the evidence was ruled inadmissible. That these witnesses were immediately available implies that they had been previously alerted that Jesus would be arrested. Yet they were unable to agree with each other until some came forward contending that Jesus had threatened to destroy the temple. The incident to which they refer is recorded in John 2:19-22. The obviously misquote him and twist his words, for Jesus never said, "I will destroy this temple." He said to them, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up." Of course, Jesus was referring to the temple of his own body, the only real place where people come to find and meet with God.

Why didn't they call for testimony from the countless lepers he had cleansed or the demonized he had delivered or the paralytics he had healed or the prostitutes he had forgiven or the dead he had raised? I suggest that even had these appeared in court it would not have been enough to turn the hearts of the council. Such was the depth of their hatred of Jesus and their determination to be rid of him.

The accusation was serious, for in the ancient world the destruction or desecration of a sacred place was regarded as a capital offense (see Jer. 26:1-19). The mere threat of violence against the temple was regarded by the Sanhedrin as a crime meriting the death penalty.

Obviously irritated and frustrated by the failure to secure competent testimony against Jesus, Caiaphas takes matters into his own hands and directly interrogates him (Mark 14:60-61).

"Are you the Christ, the Son of the Blessed?"

Jesus' response consists of a combination of two OT texts that were unmistakably messianic: Psalm 110:1 and Daniel 7:13. By quoting these two texts, Jesus declares without equivocation that he is indeed the Son of God, the Messiah, the One who is to be exalted to the place of supreme authority and majesty and who will execute judgment on just such as these who dare stand before him this day.

The law defining “blasphemy” was ambiguous, but at minimum was the idea of dishonoring God by diminishing his glory or by depriving him of rights to which he alone as God is entitled. What exactly did Jesus say that constituted blasphemy?

- (1) Some suggest it was his claim that *he* would be seated at God's right hand (Psalm 110:1), together with his claim to be the Son of Man described in Daniel 7:13.
- (2) Since Judaism expected the Messiah to provide miraculous proof of his identity, the idea that one so helpless and hapless should claim to be the anointed one could only be blasphemous, for it made a mockery of God's promises to his people.
- (3) Finally, in Judaism it was believed that God alone had the right to announce and enthrone the Messiah. Anyone who claimed the office before God had crowned him as such would be regarded as having infringed upon the divine prerogative.

Listen again to our Lord's response: “And Jesus said, ‘I am, and you will see the Son of Man seated at the right hand of Power, and coming with the clouds of heaven’” (Mark 14:62). This passage has been a problem for many to interpret, for in what sense can it be said that the high priest and those with him would “see the Son of Man seated at the right hand of Power and coming with the clouds of heaven”?

To answer this, we first need to understand what the reference to the “clouds of heaven” means. The “clouds of heaven” was a phrase often used when referring to the appearance or intervention of Yahweh on behalf of his people or in judgment. For example,

- the ‘pillar of cloud’ in the wilderness wanderings (e.g. Exod. 13:21-22; 14:19-20,24; 33:9; Ps. 78:14; 99:7);
- the cloud in which Yahweh descended or hovered over the tabernacle (Exod. 34:5; 40:34-38; Num. 9:15-22; Deut. 31:15);
- the cloud associated with the temple (1 Kings 8:10-11; Ezek. 10:3);
- the cloud in Ezekiel's vision (Ezek. 1:4,28);
- the clouds associated with eschatological theophanies (Isa. 4:5; Ezek. 30:3; Joel 2:2; Nahum 1:3; Zeph. 1:15).

See also Isa. 19:1; 2 Sam. 22:12; Job 22:14; Ps. 68:34; 104:3; Mark 13:26; 14:62; Rev. 1:7. It's important to remember that “coming with/on the clouds of heaven” was not an ancient form of space travel but a powerfully symbolic way of referring to divine intervention, judgment, or providential preservation of his people.

But what is meant by his “coming”? Is Jesus talking about his “coming” from heaven to earth at the end of history, what we know to be his Parousia or Second Coming? No. Now, make no mistake. Jesus will come in the clouds of heaven at the end of history to consummate his kingdom and judge his enemies. But that is not what he is describing here.

The “coming” of the Son of Man is an allusion to ***Daniel 7:13-14*** which speaks not of a descent from heaven to earth but of a “coming to God” in heaven to receive vindication and authority. This “coming” refers to an event whereby the authority and dominion of Jesus are vindicated over the Jewish establishment which has rejected him. Let's look at 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” (Daniel 7:13-14).

This is a vision not about a descent from heaven to earth; not about the second coming of the Son of Man at the close of history, but rather ***a vision of the Son of Man in heaven coming to the Ancient of Days, God the Father, to receive***

***his kingdom.*** A new kingdom, a new and everlasting dominion is being established to replace the failed regimes of previous empires. ***Again, this is not about the Second Coming of Christ at the end of history but about his enthronement as King and Lord in the very middle of history. He is describing not a 21<sup>st</sup> century event but a 1<sup>st</sup> century event!***

Standing in the presence of the high priest and members of the Sanhedrin, Jesus declares, “You will see the Son of Man seated at the right hand of Power and coming with the clouds of heaven.” These to whom Jesus spoke are obviously not now alive. Jesus must be referring to an event in their first-century life spans. Jesus is saying that Caiaphas and others alive at that time will witness his vindication as the one True Prophet; they will see events that testify that Jesus is indeed the Messiah, the King of kings and Lord of lords.

When God judged Israel in 70 a.d. for her rejection of Jesus as the Messiah, the city and temple were destroyed. In this way Jesus was vindicated as the true Son of Man and all power in heaven and earth was vested in him. In other words, the destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple and God’s judgment on Israel in 70 a.d. is all about Jesus! It’s about who he is, how he reigns as sovereign; it’s about the truth of who he claimed to be and the extent and duration of his dominion over all creation.

Jesus was telling those present that they would witness the sign of his enthronement in heaven: namely, Jerusalem’s destruction on earth. Thus ***the "sign" of the Son of Man being enthroned and vindicated in "heaven" is the destruction of Jerusalem and its Temple on “earth”.*** What that generation will “see” or perceive and understand is the universal authority and dominion of King Jesus being vindicated and made known in the judgment of God on Israel. The covenant nation that rejected Jesus as King is now experiencing the consequences of his enthronement and vindication at the right hand of the Father. For “seeing” as a reference to “understanding”, see John 12:40 (Isa. 6:10); Acts 26:18; cf. 1 Kings 8:29,52; 2 Kings 2:16; 6:20; 19:16; Isa. 35:5; 42:7,16; see also Luke 24:31; also note Mark 1:44; Luke 17:22; John 3:3,36; Rom. 15:21

The reaction of Caiaphas and the rest of the Sanhedrin is quite dramatic. The symbolic act of tearing one’s garments was an expression of either sadness or rage, either of sorrow or indignation. Here it is an act of remarkable hypocrisy! Caiaphas is putting on some kind of show! Acting as if he is overwhelmed with grief, he is secretly rejoicing that he now has the proof necessary to obtain a conviction. Since the death penalty could only be applied by the imperial authority of Rome, this kangaroo court ends with the decision to hand Jesus over to Pilate to secure his conviction.

#### *An Unspeakably Heinous Act*

But before he is sent to Pontius Pilate, he is spit upon and beaten and mocked.

That Jesus was blindfolded, hit, and asked to identify his attacker was based on a Jewish test by which the Messiah was to be revealed (see Isaiah 11:2-4). Since it was believed that Messiah will use neither eyes nor ears, he must judge by the sense of smell. Thus this treatment of Jesus is but another taunt based on his claim to be the Messiah: “If you are truly who you claim to be, you should be able to identify your attacker without seeing him!”

Spitting on someone and the inflicting of blows were conventional gestures of rejection and humiliation (cf. Job 30:10; Num. 12:14; Deut. 25:9; Isa. 50:6). Throughout Jewish history, people would go to Absalom’s tomb in the Kedron valley outside Jerusalem and repeatedly spit on it as an expression of their disdain for Absalom’s treatment and betrayal of his father King David.

One almost hesitates to comment at all on such an inconceivable and despicable act as spitting in the face of the Son of Man. William Hendriksen explains:

“The face which these underlings – with the wholehearted permission and co-operation of their utterly selfish, sadistic, and envious superiors – now covered with their spittle was the one that had smiled upon large throngs of people whom he instructed to love even their enemies. It was the face which used to break into a smile at the approach of a child. It had been in the habit of beaming graciously upon publicans who became penitents. It could glow with righteous indignation when the Father’s house was being desecrated, or when the widow’s

rights were violated, her needs ignored. In days gone by, it had become overspread with gladness when something good could be said about a friend. Above all, it was the face that mirrored the heart of the heavenly Father in all his holiness, displeasure with sin, and – last but not least – love and tenderness. It was into **this** face that these men were spitting! Surely, unless by the miracle of God's grace they should still repent, they would, on this day of the ultimate fulfillment of the prophecy . . . of him who was now a prisoner, be saying to the mountains and to the rocks, ‘*Fall on us and hide us from **the face** of the One who sits on the throne and from the wrath of the Lamb*’” (Rev. 6:16).

### *The Kingdom of Christ*

As Jesus stood before Pilate, he declared: “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” (John 18:36). Jesus doesn't mean his kingdom isn't “for” this world. It most certainly is. It is, in fact, the only hope for this world. Neither does he mean that his kingdom isn't meant to exist on this earth or that his kingdom is only found in heaven. His point isn't geographical. Rather he is saying that the power of his kingdom and its principles do not come from earth or from anything that humans can create or do. His kingdom derives its power from a purely spiritual source. The kingdom of Christ will indeed one day manifest itself fully on the new earth, but that is because of what God will do through the power of the Holy Spirit and not because of what anyone will do politically or militarily.

In this way Jesus makes it clear that he has no intention of leading an armed military revolt against Rome and trying to establish an earthly kingdom by force. His kingdom consists of the spiritual power of truth. It was for this purpose, to declare the truth, that Jesus came into the world.

### *Conclusion*

The torturous treatment of Jesus and his two trials reveal several things of eternal importance.

He who is the eternal and infinitely righteous Judge of all mankind is himself brought before the transient and corrupt judgment of men.

“And they all **condemned** him as deserving death” (Mark 14:64).

He who is the very embodiment of Truth itself, the one by whom alone truth is known to be true, is here declared to be a liar.

“For many bore **false witness** against him” (Mark 14:56).

He whose creative design was for men to use their God-given hands in the service of purity and love is now the object and target of their brutal fists and angry blows.

“And some began . . . to **strike** him. . . . And the guards received him with **blows**” (Mark 14:65).

He who grants breath and speech to all men is now himself the focus of their slander and mockery.

“**Prophesy!**” (Mark 14:65).

He who graciously gives saliva to our mouths must now experience the humiliation of having it spit back in his face in derision and shame.

“And some began to **spit** on him” (Mark 14:65).

He whose knowledge and discernment are perfect and infinite is here taunted and challenged in a child's game to identify his assailants.

“And some began . . . to **cover his face** . . . saying to him, ‘Prophesy!’” (Mark 14:65).

You must make a choice. There is no third way. There is no other alternative. There is no middle ground. Either you believe him and trust him and embrace him as Lord and Savior, or you join with those who mistreat him and mock him, spit in his face, and eventually crucify him.

Finally, why would Jesus submit to this indignity? Why would he allow himself to be so horribly slandered and mistreated and mocked by hell-deserving sinners? The answer is simple: he was motivated by his love for the glory of his Father and by his love for you and me!