

Jesus' Trial Before Annas

One Man to Die

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Bible Text: John 18:13-14; John 18:19-24

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We turn to John chapter 18 again for this short series leading up to Good Friday. The scripture reading is from John chapter 18. If you recall, two weeks ago we considered really the first 12 verses of John chapter 18. This afternoon, we consider especially verses 19 through 24. We begin reading at verse 12 and read through verse 24 and then also verse 28 to see where this is going. John chapter 18, beginning at verse 12.

12 Then the band and the captain and officers of the Jews [the temple police] took Jesus, and bound him, 13 And led him away to Annas first; for he was father in law to Caiaphas, which was the high priest that same year. 14 Now Caiaphas was he, which gave counsel to the Jews, that it was expedient that one man should die for the people. 15 And Simon Peter followed Jesus, and so did another disciple: that disciple was known unto the high priest, and went in with Jesus into the palace of the high priest. 16 But Peter stood at the door without [outside]. Then went out that other disciple, which was known unto the high priest, and spake unto her that kept the door, and brought in Peter. 17 Then saith the damsel that kept the door unto Peter, Art not thou also one of this man's disciples? He saith, I am not. 18 And the servants and officers stood there, who had made a fire of coals; for it was cold: and they warmed themselves: and Peter stood with them, and warmed himself.

Now these are the words of the text. We will no reread this but pay close attention here.

19 The high priest then asked Jesus of his disciples, and of his doctrine. 20 Jesus answered him, I spake openly to the world; I ever taught in the synagogue, and in the temple, whither the Jews always resort; and in secret have I said nothing. 21 Why askest thou me? ask them which heard me, what I have said unto them: behold, they know what I said. 22 And when he had thus spoken, one of the officers [one of the temple police] which stood by struck Jesus with the palm of his hand, saying, Answerest thou the high priest so? 23 Jesus answered him, If I have spoken evil, bear witness of the evil: but if well, why smitest thou me? 24 Now Annas had sent him bound unto Caiaphas the high priest.

And a better translation, and what I'm going to set forth in the preaching tonight is this, "Now Annas sent him bound unto Caiaphas, the high priest." So from Annas, he goes to Caiaphas. That's where you have the main trial before the Sanhedrin. And then verses 25 through 27, you have Peter denying Jesus again, and then the cock crows. And then verse 28, "Then led they Jesus from Caiaphas unto the hall of judgment." So two things to point out before we get into this. Notice how this passage that we're going to look at, verses 19 through 24, is flanked on either side by Peter's denial. Peter denies Jesus, then we have this hearing before Annas, and then Peter denies Jesus again. We'll touch on that at the end of the sermon. And then also to point out verse 24, which will be made clear in the preaching that now Annas sends Jesus unto Caiaphas and the Apostle John does not record that because the other three gospel accounts have already recorded that in sufficient detail so that John doesn't record it in his gospel account.

Beloved congregation of our Lord Jesus Christ, in our last sermon in this short series, we looked at Jesus being arrested in the garden and Jesus being put in bonds. That really marks a new phase in the sufferings of Jesus. Up to this point, Jesus has been able to move around freely. Up to this point, he could go where he pleased. But now, in the garden of Gethsemane, Jesus is arrested, he is put in bonds, and now you might say, it's truly the case that Jesus is being led as a lamb to the slaughter. He's put in bonds and he's being prepared for presentation on the altar. From this point on, it really is a direct path to the cross. In less than nine hours from now, Jesus will be hanging on the cross outside of Jerusalem.

Well, this Good Friday is coming up already this week Friday. We only have one sermon this evening to consider a bit more of what happens between the arrest in the garden of Gethsemane and Jesus nailed to the cross, and of all the different passages that we could look at, I've decided to look at this passage of Jesus being tried before Annas. This is a unique passage. It's another one of those passages in John's account that is not recorded for us in the other gospel accounts. This is something new that John records for us, but this is a passage that also gives us another understanding, a deeper understanding of who Jesus is and what Jesus endured for our salvation. We take as our theme tonight, "Jesus' Trial Before Annas," and we look at that theme under three points. First, Annas' questioning, second, Jesus' response or Jesus' answer, and then the officer's rebuke. We're going to work through these verses, especially verses 19 through 24.

Before we really get into the passage, there are a few things that maybe should be brought up so that we understand better what's going on here in this history. First, it might be helpful to take in the big picture and see where we are in these events leading up to the cross. It might be helpful to point out that there are really four stages of Jesus' journey to the cross. First, there's the arrest in the garden of Gethsemane, that's what we considered two weeks ago. Then there's the trial before the Jewish leaders, the religious leaders, the Sanhedrin, which takes place through the middle of the night from around 12:30 at night to around three o'clock, and then they break, and then around 5:30 in the morning, they meet again for their final making things formal and official. That's the second stage. Then third, there's the trial before the Roman powers, especially before

Pontius Pilate. That takes place in the morning from around six o'clock to around nine o'clock. And then fourth, there's the crucifixion itself, which takes place at nine o'clock Friday morning.

Now, if we narrow in on just Jesus' trial before the Jewish leaders, we should be aware that there are really three stages to this event, Jesus being tried before the Jewish leaders. First, there's Jesus' trial before Annas, which is what we're looking at tonight. Second, there is Jesus' trial before Caiaphas and the whole Sanhedrin. That's the significant trial. That's what's recorded for us in the other gospel accounts. That trial is where you have the false witnesses being brought against Jesus, "Destroy this temple and in three days I will build it up." You hear those false witnesses. That's the trial where Caiaphas is getting frustrated because the false witnesses don't agree with each other and he adjures Jesus by the Living God to tell everyone if he is the Christ, the Son of the Living God, and that's the trial where Jesus answers by saying that he is. Caiaphas rips off the clothes of the high priest that he's wearing. Jesus is declared worthy of death. And after that trial, Jesus is placed in a holding cell until later on in the morning. So that's the second trial before Caiaphas and the Sanhedrin, and then third, there's the meeting that the Sanhedrin holds early in the morning, right at the break of day when the Jewish leaders gather together one more time. They make things official. Everything is formal and proper. An official judgment is secured. And then they bring Jesus out to Pontius Pilate.

All of that is worth pointing out because I want to reiterate what I've said before, that the passage that we're looking at tonight, this event is a preliminary hearing, we might say. This is Jesus' trial before Annas. He's brought to the palace of the high priest in the middle of the night. Caiaphas, the high priest, still needs time to gather the members of the Sanhedrin together so that they can have an official trial among the lot of them and he needs more time and so Jesus is brought before Annas, the father-in-law of Caiaphas, so that Annas can use the time while they're waiting to try to get some information, some dirt from Jesus. That's what's going on here. Jesus is not tried here before the entire Sanhedrin. This is simply Annas questioning Jesus privately, trying to get information out of Jesus so that when he's brought before Caiaphas and the whole Sanhedrin, they maybe have some more information they can use against him.

Again, I point that out because that's not so obvious from the scripture reading and perhaps one of the biggest points of confusion is the fact that the text says that Jesus was tried by the high priest and of course, isn't Caiaphas the high priest? Well, as I already said, verse 24, the better way to translate that, especially in light of verse 13, verse 13, "They led him away to Annas first," and then verse 24, "Now Annas sent him bound unto Caiaphas the high priest." Well, isn't Caiaphas the high priest? Well, the reality is, according to the Romans, Caiaphas was the high priest. He was the one whom the Romans had put in that position as high priest but according to the Jews, Annas also was the high priest, and that's because according to the Jews, if you were put into office as high priest, then you were in that office for life. And so even if the Romans do what they might like to do, if they depose you from office, which is what they did with Annas, according to the Jews, you were still in office. So actually at the time of Jesus' crucifixion, there were two high priests in the eyes of the Jews, Annas and Caiaphas.

That's why, for example, in Luke chapter 3 verse 2, Luke tells us that both Annas and Caiaphas were high priests. And that's why in Acts chapter 4 verse 6, although Caiaphas is the official high priest, in Acts 4 verse 6, we read that Annas was the high priest. So here in John chapter 18, although Caiaphas is the high priest recognized by the Romans, Annas is also called the high priest and he is the one who gets to have this private preliminary trial with Jesus before Caiaphas is able to round up enough men so that Jesus can be tried before the whole body of the Sanhedrin.

That, first of all, I think is helpful as we look at this passage, and then second, I think it's also good to give a few comments regarding the legal system and the legalities or the illegalities involved in what Jesus is going through here. Just a few points to be aware of. First of all, a key feature of Jewish law was this, if a man was going to be prosecuted, if he was going to be charged with a crime, that charge had to come from someone who was a witness to the crime. And part of the significance of that is this, the Sanhedrin itself, the ruling body of the Jews, they were merely judges, you might say. That was their role, that was their calling. They were the ones who were supposed to rule on a case. They were emphatically not the ones who were supposed to make a case or argue a case. To put it in today's language, in Jewish courts, there was no prosecuting attorney for the state. If a charge was going to be made against someone, it had to be brought forth, not by the state or the leaders, it had to be brought forth by a witness and then the witness would have to present his accusation before the judges, before the ruling body. And the point is, what these Jewish leaders are doing in this whole trial, is entirely illegal. Their whole approach from start to finish, what Annis is doing here privately, is completely unjust and illegal. They are the ones pursuing charges against Jesus, when in fact, it's their calling to be the judge. They're not lawyers. They're called to be judges. Besides that, we need to remember that at this point in the events, there isn't even a formal accusation that has been brought against Jesus. Even his arrest in the garden was completely illegal. The judges don't have any charges being brought against Jesus. But this is how they behave, first they arrest him, and then they go around seeking for a charge, trying to find false witnesses, trying to glean dirt from Jesus, information that they might be able to use against him.

That, first of all, is important. Second, another key feature of Jewish law was this, if a witness brought forth a charge against someone, that charge had to be backed up by a second witness and Jewish law was very strict on this matter, so that unless the two witnesses charged the man with the exact same criminal act, and unless their statements fully agreed with each other, that person would not be subject to punishment. The point is, the witnesses had to agree on basically everything if their witness was going to be received and even considered before a court of law. And if you remember the details of Jesus' trial before Caiaphas and the whole Sanhedrin, these Jewish leaders just couldn't find two witnesses that were agreeing with each other on all the details of what Jesus had said and it was very frustrating to Caiaphas and these leaders.

Third, another key feature of Jewish law was this, that the judges were never to seek to condemn the accused. In a sense, not only were they supposed to be unbiased, but they were even supposed to look for every possible means to acquit the man, so that he could

be declared innocent. In a sense, it's similar to what we have today, you're innocent until proven guilty. That was the attitude that the judges, these are judges, that they had to take.

And then there were other key features of Jewish law as well, namely, the man who was being accused did not have to testify against himself. In fact, it was illegal. It was illegal for the judges to compel a man to give his own testimony. That's exactly what Annas is doing here in an informal way with Jesus and that's what Caiaphas ends up doing in the trial itself.

Also, the trial needed to be carried out in the middle of the day. If it was a capital, a trial with capital punishment involved, the death sentence involved, it had to be carried out from between the hours of nine in the morning and three in the afternoon. And then also, for those who were going to receive capital punishment, once that decision was made to execute a man, the actual punishment could not be carried out until the next day. All the judges were required to sleep on the decision that they made and then the next day, the court would have to reassemble and a new vote would be taken, a second vote, and only then could the sentence be officially passed and the execution of the criminal followed. And that's kind of what they do at 5:30 in the morning. They put him in the holding cell, and then right before they bring him to Pilate, they have their meeting again to make things look formal and official.

I bring all of this up not only because it shows just how everything about Jesus' trial was a travesty of justice and it was really a farce, it really was an act, it was a plot. These men are bent on murdering Jesus and they're trying to use the legal system to make it look good and it really shows the evil that lies in the heart of man. But I bring all of this up also because of this, Jesus knows the law and in the course of Annas' questioning, Jesus tells Annas very directly, "Why are you asking me?" That's verse 21. We'll get to that in the second point of the sermon, but let me bring it up right now. "Why are you asking me? Ask those people who heard my preaching and who heard my teaching. They are the ones you should be asking." Again, we'll look at that in the second point of the sermon, but hopefully all of this helps to set the stage for our understanding of what's going on, the interaction here between Jesus and Annas and what Annas is doing in this passage.

Well, that now leads us to the question, who is Annas? Well, there are a few things we can say. Annas was the father-in-law of Caiaphas. Annas had been installed by the Romans as high priest in AD 6. He was deposed by the Romans in AD 15. But although he was deposed, nevertheless, for all practical purposes, Annas by the Jews was still viewed as the unofficial leader of the Sanhedrin. As one commentator puts it, he was, "the ruling spirit of the Sanhedrin." Annas was the man who was responsible, to a large extent, for the actions of the Jewish Sanhedrin. Someone else might be presiding officer of the Sanhedrin, but Annas was the man to consult." And we can also assume that Annas was a very experienced man. He was a very manipulative and crafty man. He had skill in how to manipulate and twist the law. He knew how to control power. And that's also shown by how Annas was able to have five of his own sons installed into the office of high priest. He had five sons put in the office of high priest. His own son-in-law,

Caiaphas, was also high priest, and then he would also get one of his grandsons to be appointed as high priest. That shows you kind of the influence and the power of Annas. And of course, Annas and Caiaphas were of the same attitude when it came to Jesus, and as Caiaphas was determined to have Jesus put to death, we can imagine that Annas was on board with the plan and he was glad to help out as father-in-law in any way that he could help. And that's why here in the passage, while Caiaphas is busy trying to assemble the members of the Sanhedrin in the middle of the night, Annas takes the time to carry out this preliminary hearing.

And so there is Annas in the house of the high priest, questioning Jesus, and we read in verse 19, "The high priest then asked Jesus of his disciples and of his doctrine." Annas asked Jesus about his disciples and about his doctrine, teaching. And we should understand the nature of this questioning. Again, Annas is trying to get material for his son-in-law. He's trying to get information so that when they have the meeting of the Sanhedrin, they have material against Jesus. And so when Annas asks Jesus about his disciples, I think it's entirely legitimate to read into that and understand that what Annas is really asking is this, "Jesus, are you intending to start a political revolution? Jesus, are you involved in a secret society? How big is your organization, Jesus? Are you with your disciples preparing to have a conspiracy, to carry out a conspiracy against the existing authorities? Who are your disciples, Jesus? And really, how big is your following?" And you see what Annas' motivation is. If Annas can get information from Jesus that could make Jesus look like a revolutionary, well, that's all they need in order to get Jesus to be put to death by the Roman powers. That's exactly what they try to do in the morning when they present Jesus to Pilate. They try to present Jesus as a revolutionary. Remember what they got the people, they moved the people to say, "Whosoever makes himself a king speaketh against Caesar." And so that's what Annas is driving at with these questions about Jesus' disciples. If he wanted to know about Jesus' disciples, he could have talked to John or Peter. They were right outside. John was. John and the high priest knew each other. Then when Annas asks Jesus about his teaching, his doctrine, what Annas is trying to get Jesus to admit is that Jesus does have some kind of secret society and some kind of secret teaching. But even here, notice, what Annas is first concerned about. His first question is about Jesus' disciples and then about Jesus' teaching. Annas' main concern is the size and power of Jesus' following. This is where Annas thinks he will find grounds to accuse Jesus of sedition and Annas is hoping that Jesus might be so shocked and overcome by what just happened in the garden of Gethsemane that Jesus might start talking and give away information so that he incriminates himself. This is Annas' approach. This is how the religious church leaders of the day handle Jesus, and all of it shows how corrupt this Sanhedrin is and how illegal this whole trial is.

Well, as we move on in the passage, we turn next to the answer that Jesus gives Annas in verses 20 and 21. We read there, "Jesus answered him, I spake openly to the world; I ever taught in the synagogue, and in the temple, whither the Jews always resort; and in secret have I said nothing. Why askest thou me? ask them which heard me, what I have said unto them: behold, they know what I said." And there's a few things we need to point out about this answer. First, let's notice what Jesus actually says. Jesus says that he has never done anything or taught anything in secret. Jesus says that he's always done his work in

the full light of the day. He's always preached in the synagogues and in the temple. In the synagogues, the local churches in the towns and the villages around Jerusalem, where the masses of people went in and out, where the doors of the synagogues were never closed during the worship services, where there was no possibility for Jesus to teach in private. That's his point. And then in the temple, that is the place where the leaders of the people were ever present and where their censorship of what you said was always very strict. The leaders at the temple were always listening to what Jesus taught. So Jesus says, "I never taught in secret. I never taught anything that was hidden or that was secret. It was always in the public places of worship or at least public." And by implication, what Jesus says is that wherever he was, he never turned his back to the community of the people. He says, in effect, "I have never wanted to establish a secret society. I have never been a prophet of the desert out there by the Dead Sea promoting some kind of sect or secret society. I have never been interested in forming a secret society that was striving to take over the church institute or the political institute. I have never been double-tongued. I've never had this two-fold agenda that you might accuse me of, some outward public ministry of healing and preaching the gospel and some secret private ministry of building some kind of earthly enterprise. That's not who I am. That's not what I've done."

And then Jesus says, "Why are you asking me?" In effect, Jesus says, "You know full well that my teachings were always public. You had your spies following me all the time from Jerusalem to Galilee and back again. You have Judas Iscariot, one of my own disciples, to get your information from. But you have nothing. The way you're acting here, it's all a show." It's as if Jesus says, "All of this, all of this that you are doing, it's all an act. You're all a bunch of hypocrites. Woe unto you, hypocrites. You act as though you are perplexed about my ministry and my person, as if I have something to hide. You act as if you don't know anything about me," and the implication is this, "but it's all an act. You're questioning me. This very act of questioning me is itself a mask to cover up the enmity, the hatred that you have towards me. Why are you asking me?"

And then Jesus goes on and says, "Why are you asking me? You know who my disciples are. You know who my followers are. You may go to anyone who has crossed my path and ask them what I have taught, and they will be able to give you a summary of what I taught." And if you reread verse 20, and you notice how Jesus keeps saying "I" in verse 20, then perhaps you could take it that Jesus is making here even a contrast between himself and the rulers of the people, Annas and those who are in league with Annas. Verse 20, you could read it this way, "I spake openly to the world. I ever taught in the synagogue and in the temple whither the Jews always resort and in secret have I said nothing." And so the possible implication then is this, "Annas, you are the secret ones. You are the ones doing your work in the darkness of night. You are the ones who are having your private discussions behind closed doors. You are the ones who are hiding from the people what you actually think and what you actually believe."

Well, however that may be, however you want to read verse 20, the message Jesus is giving is clear, he has nothing to hide. But still, this answer of Jesus is perhaps a little difficult for us to understand and I think, I know when I first read these verses, it seems as if Jesus is coming off as a little evasive, as if he's not really answering their question

because Annas asks him about his doctrine and about his disciples and what Jesus basically says is this, "Why are you asking me? Ask those who heard me." And it comes off on first reading as if perhaps Jesus is not answering the question. Well, here we need to keep two things in mind. First, we should understand Jesus' answer like this, Jesus is not being evasive, but Jesus is merely pointing out that Annas is not behaving himself properly. Annas is not giving Jesus a proper trial. Jesus is basically telling Annas that Annas may not be questioning Jesus right now. This is not proper. It's illegal on Annas' part because according to the law, the judges may not compel a man to testify against himself. And so what Jesus is saying is this, "Don't ask me. Ask the witnesses. That's proper procedure. Ask those who heard me. They are the people you should be questioning. That's the legal way. That's the proper way to handle this."

So Jesus is simply telling Annas that this is not how a legal trial is carried out and second, we should understand that Jesus is emphasizing at the same time that all that he ever taught is clear. Everything that he taught is clear and out in the open. And what Jesus is emphasizing also is that Annas then, and all the rulers of the Jews, are without any excuse. When it comes to Jesus and his earthly ministry, the Jewish rulers cannot and may not claim ignorance. They may not play dumb. They cannot say, "We didn't know what Jesus was actually teaching." Jesus even points out, "The common people on the street who heard me, you can ask them what I taught because what I taught was intelligible. It was public and it never changed. I was consistent and honest in my teaching. So you educated rulers of the Jews who know the scriptures and who know what I taught, you are without excuse." And I think that's very significant as well because isn't that what wicked men do? Instead of being honest, they play dumb and then to clear themselves of any guilt of their wicked deeds, they claim ignorance. "We didn't know. We didn't know any better. If only this man's teaching was clearer, if only this man was more upfront with us about what he was teaching," and the reality is Jesus' teaching was always very clear but these are evil men who are trying to control these events so that they look like they are innocent and that they are righteous.

And in addition to this, what Jesus can also declare with these, what he also declares with these words is that he has been honest and he has been innocent as the prophet of God, right? That's who Jesus is, he's the prophet of God and what Jesus is able to say to God is this, "God, I as your prophet have spoken clearly and I am clear as prophet, I am clear of the blood of these men. Lord, do not let their hardening be charged to me as though I had acted sinfully in my relationship to them. Their unbelief, their rejection of salvation is not because of me. It's because of their own hardness of heart, their own willful blindness, their own self-deception." That's what the prophets in the Old Testament had to do again and again and that's, in a sense, what Jesus is doing here in his last hour.

And if you would walk through the whole trial of Jesus by these Jewish rulers, you would see all of this behavior that we've been looking at standing out very clearly. As we continue to go from this preliminary trial and we dabble into what's about to follow in the trial before Caiaphas, here are all the ruling elders of the Jews and they are striving and working as hard as they can to bring a charge against Jesus, all the while trying to conceal their own hatred for Jesus, and they can't find a charge that will stick. And Jesus is silent

pretty well the whole time; maybe you remember from the parallel accounts in the other gospels. Mark, for example, records how the false witnesses tried to bring accusations against Jesus. This is in the trial before Caiaphas, false witnesses bringing accusation against Jesus, "We heard him say, I will destroy this temple that is made with hands, and within three days I will build another one made without hands." And we read, "but neither so did their witness agree together." And then we read, "And the high priest," this is Caiaphas, "And the high priest stood up in the midst and asked Jesus, saying, Answerest thou nothing? Right? Why don't you speak up? Why don't you incriminate yourself? Why don't you engage with this? What is it which these witness against thee? Aren't you scared?" But he held his peace and answered nothing, and you can sense the frustration building, the hatred of the high priest building. Jesus is just not falling into their traps. They can't get anything on Jesus that looks legal. They can't get him to testify against himself and so as a last ditch effort, the high priest says, Caiaphas says, "I adjure thee by the living God that thou tell us whether thou be the Christ, the Son of God." And of course, that was illegal. This is the judge. This is the high priest of all people. The high priest was not even allowed to express an opinion or interrogate either the witnesses or the accused.

And besides that, Jesus didn't have to answer. But Jesus does answer. He is going to witness to the truth now of who he is. He confesses he is the Christ, the Son of God. And then the high priest ironically rips apart his garments. He declares Jesus is guilty of blasphemy, and they decide to put Jesus to death without giving Jesus even a chance to give his own defense, without even inquiring whether Jesus' statement is true or false. The high priest conveniently declares that they have no need of any other witnesses and they all declare Jesus is worthy of death.

Well, all of that pertains to the main trial that's going to take place after this event, the main trial before Caiaphas, that's how all this is going to end up, but now as we turn back to this preliminary trial before Annas, we read about the response to Jesus' words. Jesus gives his answer and one of the temple police goes ahead and strikes Jesus with the palm of his hand. We read in verse 22, "And when he had thus spoken, one of the officers which stood by struck Jesus with the palm of his hand, saying, Answerest thou the high priest so?" Perhaps this temple police officer was trying to look good in front of Annas, the high priest, trying to get a promotion maybe. Maybe this officer was taking offense at Jesus who was basically telling Annas that he was acting illegally and who dares talk to the high priest that way. Whatever the case may be, it shows us again the fact that Jesus is not going to receive a fair trial. Jesus expresses that this is not a fair trial, this is not how a proper trial is carried out and he gets slapped in the face for it. That's what all this amounts to. It's really a foreshadowing of what's going to happen with Jesus in the hours to come.

And then we read in verse 23, "Jesus answered him, If I have spoken evil, bear witness of the evil: but if well, why smitest thou me?" And that verse, those words can be taken in two different ways. Jesus could be saying, "If I have spoken evil just now, show me where I am wrong. Show me where I am wrong in my understanding of what a fair trial looks like." Or more likely, what I think Jesus is saying is this, "If I have ever spoken

evil, that is throughout the course of my whole earthly ministry, if I have ever spoken evil in anything that I have taught, bring the witnesses to make their testimony. But if there are no witnesses, then why are you treating me this way?" And again, Jesus is emphasizing that this is not how a legal trial is carried out.

And I think one of the main things we can see in this whole passage is that Jesus is going forward as one who is entirely innocent. Even the whole dealings, the whole legal proceedings, emphasizes that Jesus is a righteous man. The rulers of the Jews have absolutely nothing to bring against the man. And the significance for us, of course, is that that's exactly the kind of sacrifice that we need. We need a lamb who is without spot. We need a sacrifice, a sacrificial lamb without blemish so that he can be presented, not just before men, but so that he can be presented before God as the acceptable sacrifice. And that's what's so clearly shown even in the frustration of these religious leaders, there is no fault in Jesus. And then before Pilate, he washes his hands, he declares that three times, "I can't find any fault in this man." That's the sacrifice we need for our sins. One who is without sin, who stands in our place and who can make the sacrifice for the full covering of all our sins. That's in part what this passage is emphasizing.

And then what this passage is also emphasizing to revisit what I already said earlier, no one can play dumb before Jesus. No one can say that his teachings were in secret. No one can say that his teachings were unclear. Go to anyone who has sat at the feet of Jesus. Go to anyone who has sat in church under the preaching. Go to anyone who has read the scriptures and they can bear witness of who Jesus is. Now when I say that, I think that makes this very personal for all of us here this evening because what Jesus really says in the text, right, verse 21, "Why askest thou me? Ask them which heard me. They know what I've said." That makes it very personal for us because what Jesus really says in the text is this, "Go to the men and women at Grace Protestant Reformed Church. Go to them. You can ask them what I have taught. They know. They're steeped in my word. They've sat under the preaching of my word. Bring them before the judges. They can witness to what I have taught them."

And then the question that we should face when we hear that kind of word from Jesus is this, would that be what we do, that we actually bear witness of Jesus? Would we confess before judges like Annas and the Sanhedrin who hate Jesus, would we confess who Jesus is and what he teaches? Or will we deny Jesus? It's very striking, beloved, how John is inspired to give this whole account. I pointed it out just at the end of the scripture reading how this passage is placed between Peter's two denials of Jesus. Jesus says, "Ask the people, ask my disciples, they can witness regarding what I've taught them." And yet before he says that, Peter denies who Jesus is and after Jesus says that, Peter denies again that he even knows who Jesus is. And then you read the passage from that point of view and it makes Peter's denial more tragic because here, Jesus says, "Go talk to them," and Peter says, "I don't even know the man." And it makes Jesus' sufferings even more intense through all of this, because there is no one who's going to come to Jesus' defense. There's no one who's going to show up and speak on his behalf. Jesus is going to go to the cross alone.

We might say, there's no one, there's no one being honest with Jesus and who Jesus is, and I suppose the question then really boils down to this, am I honest? Am I honest with who Jesus is? Day to day in my daily living, in my decision making, am I honest with others about who Jesus is? And perhaps even more importantly, am I honest with myself about who Jesus is? These Jewish rulers, beloved, they were not honest. They knew his teaching. They knew him. They knew who he was. They just didn't want him as their Savior. They hated him and they refused to be honest about who he was and they refused to be honest about who they were and what they were doing. That's what this is all about too. They refused to be honest about what they themselves were doing.

We can be honest, beloved. We can be honest about who Jesus is, and we can be honest about who we are, who we are by nature, the sins we've committed, and we can be honest because by faith, we know that this Jesus of Nazareth is exactly the Savior we need. And when we're honest, this is what we confess, "Jesus, he is the Savior I need. He who is God in the flesh, the only begotten Son of God, who is my Lord, who willingly, voluntarily dies as a righteous man, a sinless man, but who dies for the sins of a sin-laden people, this is exactly the kind of man, the kind of Savior, the kind of mediator I need." And he is the Savior that I have because this is my Savior and this is your Savior we're reading about in this passage. This is my Savior going to the cross with me on his mind. This is your Savior going to the cross, enduring these injustices. Where we might be inclined to scream out in defense of ourselves, "This is not right!" Jesus says, "For my people, I go as the lamb to be the Savior of my people."

That's the Savior we need. That's the Savior we have. And when we say that, beloved, and we look at this passage and we continue to look at this history as we go to Good Friday, then let's lift our eyes up to the Lord and let's thank him for giving us hearts that do know Jesus, that love Jesus, that have the indwelling of the Spirit so that we are honest and so that we do embrace Jesus as our complete Savior. Jesus is mine. He's taught me who he is. His teaching is clear. He is the Christ. He is the Son of the living God, and he is my Savior. That's what the child of God says and all of this, this is all because of God. What grace God has shown to me. What grace God has shown to us. Amen.

Let us pray.

Our Father, we thank thee for this look into thy word and we know that all scripture is profitable for doctrine, for instruction, for correction, and instruction in righteousness, and we pray that through this preaching tonight also, we might be made more mature and thoroughly furnished to live in this week ahead in all good works to the praise and honor of thee, our God, and the praise and honor of thy Son, Jesus Christ, our Lord and Savior. In his name we ask it. Amen.