

“Performing the Priest’s Profound Prophecy”

John 18.12–14; 19–24

¹²So the Roman cohort and the commander and the officers of the Jews, arrested Jesus and bound Him, ¹³and led Him to Annas first; for he was father-in-law of Caiaphas, who was high priest that year. ¹⁴Now Caiaphas was the one who had advised the Jews that it was expedient for one man to die on behalf of the people.

¹⁹The high priest then questioned Jesus about His disciples, and about His teaching. ²⁰Jesus answered him, “I have spoken openly to the world; I always taught in synagogues and in the temple, where all the Jews come together; and I spoke nothing in secret. ²¹Why do you question Me? Question those who have heard what I spoke to them; they know what I said.” ²²When He had said this, one of the officers standing nearby struck Jesus, saying, “Is that the way You answer the high priest?” ²³Jesus answered him, “If I have spoken wrongly, testify of the wrong; but if rightly, why do you strike Me?” ²⁴So Annas sent Him bound to Caiaphas the high priest. [NASB]

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I. Introduction

I remember on our first trip to Scotland in 2004 (before we had the handheld GPS), we had hiked up on a hill behind Ettrick (where a very dear friend of mine was the minister until he died in 1732). After hiking beyond the visibility of the last cairn, we found this fascinating mound on the ground with at least 7 different kinds of intriguing moss. So we spent the next several minutes looking down at this collection, taking pictures of it from different angles. After awhile, we thought it might be time to head back to the car.

But when we looked up and around, we had no idea which direction the car was; all the surrounding hills and vales looked so much like the one we had thought was our landmark, and the vale from which we had ascended had vanished. I wouldn’t call it *panic*, but we were rather bewildered. And when, a couple years later GPSs became available, I didn’t need much convincing. (Well, in fact I’m a geek and I of course needed no convincing to buy such a cool gadget; it was Cassy who didn’t need *much* convincing.)

We humans have an innate fear of being lost, which I suspect feeds our compulsion to build, produce, and purchase devices such as GPS units to help us find our way home. I wonder if Annas wished he had a GPS unit. He did not seem to know—or even *want* to know—that one was standing, bound, right in front of him. The scene that unfolds before us is the scene of someone terribly bewildered, namely Annas. He was God’s steward of all the maps and all the directions, namely the Hebrew Scriptures. He also had a marvelous judicial system. But he insisted on using none of them... and did not see in front of him the One to Whom all those maps and directions led.

Not included in John’s account but worthy of our attention here, is an immediately related scene related in Matthew, Mark, and Luke. John reveals the Perverted Court... upon which Matthew, Mark, and Luke expand. But they also include the Perfect Confession that takes place within the Perverted Court. So let’s peek in on the perverted court, then the perfect confession.

II. Perverted Court

If the previous passage (last week) may be hailed as hideous, this one might be labeled as ludicrous. At least one word makes it so: *bound*. The Roman battalion, along with the commander and officers of the Jews—all of whom had been rendered powerless and pinned to the ground by Jesus’ word “I AM”—have now arrested Jesus and *bound* Him. Just like Samson had been bound. Whether by ropes or by leather thongs, Samson didn’t have to wheedle his way out of his bonds like Houdini or the Escapist. He simply broke the ropes and thongs as if they were a single strand of old rotted thread.

What a joke! Bind Jesus with rope, with brass fetters, titanium cuffs? Do you think He can’t vaporize any of them without even looking? Okay, this is ludicrous... but it is also evidence that Jesus was intent on fulfilling the Law in every jot and tittle... even the laws that require a criminal like you and me to be bound.

So, while Samson was a *type* of Christ, a picture looking forward to the Reality, this scene is more closely akin to the Apostle Paul—when he was still Saul—*binding* all who called on the name of Jesus, bringing them to Jerusalem to be tried by the priests.^{act9.2,14,21} Jesus *willingly* allowed Himself to be bound, that He might satisfy the Law for all who believe in Him. Persecuted disciples submitted to the chains, that in their binding they might show their willingness to be bound to Christ and to life in Him.

Ludicrous on the one hand; lamentable on the other. This was a legal system that, more than any other in history, provided the maps, directions, compass, and gps for just mercy and

merciful justice. More on that in a moment, but first two pieces of context. One, Annas, and two, Caiaphas.

Annas was father in law of Caiaphas, who was high priest at that time. Annas had been high priest, but was deposed by the Romans (who didn’t entirely believe in separation of church and state) in AD15. By the Jews, Annas was still considered a high priest. In fact, if they made movies back then, he might have been called the Godfather of the high priests; five of his sons and his son-in-law were high priests in succession. Annas never lost his sway. Never *really* lost his position. Jesus was led to Annas before he was led to Caiaphas, the official (in Rome’s opinion) high priest.

Caiaphas was the unscrupulous son-in-law of Annas. Caiaphas was the one who unbeknownst to himself had made one of the most profound prophetic statements in the history of the world. Back in ch11 the chief priests and Pharisees were wringing their hands in agitation. They had said, ^{11.47}“What are we doing? For this man is performing many signs. ⁴⁸If we let Him go on like this, all men will believe in Him, and the Romans will come and take away both our place and our nation.’ ⁴⁹But one of them, Caiaphas, who was high priest that year, said to them, ‘You know nothing at all, ⁵⁰nor do you take into account that it is expedient for you that one man die for the people, and that the whole nation not perish.’”

Okay, I don’t mean to be name-calling. Let’s remember something. Recently I received an email recounting how one minister had chided his congregation for expecting pagans not to think or act like pagans. We have no business expecting unbelievers to act like believers or to value all the things believers value. Love unbelievers—God made them in His image and He loves them—but don’t expect them to think or act just like you. (Unless, of course, you tend to think or act just like them.) Another minister told his congregation it was strange to think that public schools that are of the world should teach and model things that are of heaven. Get involved to influence them, if you will, but don’t expect public school boards to value the same things you value.

There is a similar principle here. These chief priests were doing their job. They were stewards of the teaching and worship of the Lord. It was their responsibility to maintain the purity of doctrine and worship... and to protect the people from heretics and Messianic impersonators! And... it was the priest’s position to offer sacrifices pleasing to the Lord on behalf of the people. So it is a wee bit unsound to think these priests shouldn’t be doing their job... to say nothing of all this happening according to the predetermined plan and foreknowledge of God!^{act2.23}

So they were ignorant of what they were doing! That does not hinder God a bit from using the instruments He put in place to do His bidding. In this case, His instruments are those filling the office of priest, which office has the distinct privilege and responsibility of offering sacrifices for substitutionary atonement. God sent Jesus for the priests to kill as the sacrificial Lamb.

But now let’s consider the deplorable way in which these priests broke the trust of their position. Many books have been written on the Hebrew judicial system, but if you want a nice compressed summary, you’ll find one in James Boice’s commentary on John. I will compress that yet further, with the following points.

One, the Hebrew judicial system was astonishingly pro-defendant. The extreme measures and level of redundancy therein to safeguard against the remotest possibility of an unjust sentence are unexcelled in the world and in history. The regard for the sanctity of life in capital cases makes the most benign systems today look inhumane if not hostile.

For example, there were 71 members (judges) in the court, called the Sanhedrin. These were all highly trained, qualified, and reputable judges. Regarding witnesses, they had to give testimony to the whole of the crime; if they just saw a portion of the crime, like an assailant running away, they could not give any witness. The plurality of witnesses (at least two) had to agree in every particular detail of the crime. Any discrepancy in their testimony would invalidate the whole testimony. Another thing: the witnesses were *themselves* the accusers. Witnesses were not there merely to add information, they bore the responsibility of *accusation*. And on that note, any witnesses found to be false would bring upon themselves the punishment for the crime they were accusing the defendant of.

Trials for capital crimes had to take place in daylight hours, to remind those involved of being in the full view of God. The judges were to take the defendant’s side... and were to *do everything possible to bring an acquittal*. The judges were *never* to promote accusation. Finally, an initial vote as “guilty”, and the resulting sentence, could not be pronounced on the same day. This, again, was to allow for any opportunity for favorable evidence to be brought forth and thus hopefully to bring acquittal.

The purpose of this legal procedure review is for you to see how far the authorities had strayed in their envious commitment to ridding themselves of this threat to their authority. How strange, then, to see Jesus absolutely, completely, perfectly, willingly submitted to the entirety of their rightful authority! Jesus came to *fulfill* the Law, not to break it or subvert it!

That is why Jesus, by His answers, is simply telling Annas, and Caiaphas, and the rest of the Sanhedrin to follow proper legal order. Jesus told Annas that it was the burden of *witnesses* who had seen His “crime” to bring accusations... it was *not* the Priest’s job! If Annas had any sense about him, he would have been relieved by this bit of advice, and said, “Oh yeah! You’re right! I don’t have to be loaded with this nasty job!”

And the officer who struck Jesus was acting so far outside the protective system of the court it is sickening. Annas was no dummy. He recognized right quick that Jesus knew the Law and wasn’t about to skirt it. So, still bound with threads no stronger than a single strand of spiderweb filament to Jesus, Annas sent Jesus on to the full court under Caiaphas.

As He goes, you may remember two things. First, it is NOT the court system that was broken here. It was the hearts of men who pervert justice for their own wicked pleasure. And second, Jesus abides completely in the Law, to fulfill every last letter of the Law... even for as many of these Sanhedrin who might eventually come to believe in the One they—and you and I—condemned to the cross.

III. Perfect Confession

It was a perverted court, and I will not go into the details provided by the other Gospel writers. But now I will turn to the Perfect Confession uttered in the very midst of that perverted court. John does not include this, and I’m not sure why, except possibly that it has been the focus of his entire gospel.

I shall read you the account as Mark gives it; Matthew and Luke are very similar. ^{Mk14.55}Now the chief priests and the whole Council kept trying to obtain testimony against Jesus to put Him to death, and they were not finding any. [Clearly they were not doing their duty of taking the Defendant’s side!] ⁵⁶For many were giving false testimony against Him, but their testimony was not consistent. [False testimony, and no sign of retribution against those who brought it! Inconsistent testimony—well, this seemed to slow down the proceedings a *little*, but did not bring the required acquittal.]

⁵⁷Some stood up and began to give false testimony against Him, saying, ⁵⁸“We heard Him say, ‘I will destroy this temple made with hands, and in three days I will build another made without hands.’” ⁵⁹Not even in this respect was their testimony consistent. ⁶⁰The high priest stood up and came forward and questioned Jesus, saying, “Do You not answer? What is it that these men are testifying against You?” ⁶¹But He kept silent and did not answer. [Jesus was only following proper judicial procedure in refusing to respond to inconsistent witness.]

[So far, all to no avail. The priests were foiled; Caiaphas floundered. All seemed lost to their endeavors against the Redeemer. The high priest was in an unenviable position. If he couldn’t pull this off, who could? Would Jesus slip through their fingers yet once more? But then it happened. Caiaphas had a brilliant breakthrough in his scheming mind. Caiaphas had found the clincher. The high priest would get his profoundly prophesied sacrifice for the people. It was checkmate and Caiaphas knew it.]

Again the high priest was questioning Him, and saying to Him, “Are You the Christ, the Son of the Blessed One?” That was brilliant. Matthew tells us that Caiaphas had put Jesus under oath to answer: ^{Mt26.63}“I adjure You by the living God, that You tell us whether You are the Christ, the Son of God.” The high priest had the right to do that; and Jesus, fulfilling the Law, could not refuse to bear witness to the Truth at this point. It’s what He came to do. So, of course in the Sanhedrin’s mind, Jesus would either renounce and give up all his influence and fade into the fabric of the countryside, or He would utter a blasphemy worthy of death—assuming His utterance was false.

⁶²And Jesus said, “I AM; and you shall see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of power, and coming with the clouds of heaven.” It is not possible for us to imagine the astonishment in the eyes of that assembly. Even those who expected Jesus to say such a thing, could not have anticipated the effect in their soul. The divine name “I AM” had just leveled a whole Roman battalion in the Garden. Don’t imagine it had no effect here. But there is more. Jesus does not permit them the luxury of thinking He is a lunatic with a God complex. No, Jesus invokes again the Divine Name, I AM, and then Jesus applies the most explicit prophecies of King David ^{Ps110.1} and apocalyptic Prophet Daniel ^{Dn7.13} to Himself. There can be absolutely no mistaking that Jesus is fully declaring Himself the Christ, the Anointed One, God come in the form of Man to deliver God’s people unto eternal life. Just as the Law, the Prophets, and the Writings of which Caiaphas was steward said He would.

There is absolutely no back-peddling from this. Listen closely, you who sit here. You are *forced* to take one side or the other. You have no other option. You either side with Caiaphas and the Sanhedrin and assume that Jesus *had* to be dementedly demon-driven. Or you believe that Jesus is I AM, the Anointed of God, the Messiah, the Christ, the ONE by whom God has determined to deliver His people.

You have no other choice. You must either, with Caiaphas, ⁶³Tear your clothes, and say, “What further need do we have of witnesses? ⁶⁴You have heard the blasphemy; how does it seem to you?” And if so, you *must* condemn Jesus to be deserving of death. Or, you *must* embrace everything Jesus has said here, in the simplest of terms for He spoke in the simplest and clearest of terms, and you *must* cast yourself into His embrace with all abandon. You must—and you have already or you will—choose one or the other of these two paths.

Both paths will lead you to God. One, to God to receive His righteous anger for so wickedly rejecting the Beloved whom He sent to suffer this indignation before those entrusted to bring the good news of the coming Messiah. Or the other, to receive unto your account all the perfect obedience to the Law that Jesus offered in this very room in your behalf, while He was

condemned to receive all the rebellion your sins and mine and the elect among the Sanhedrin have raised against Him.

By which of these two paths will you go to God? All paths lead to Him... but in fact the “all” consists of only two. One under judgment and the other under grace. The high priest who was charged with taking the defendant’s side stood up boldly to condemn the Righteous One, but our Great High Priest will *always* take your side and mine.

They led Him bound. Ludicrous. Or is it? Ropes, brass fetters, iron chains, titanium cuffs. They’re all pretty strong; you and I would have a hard time getting out of them. But they are not *that* strong. Not as strong as a simple piece of cloth. I’m not talking about mylar. I’m talking about simple, linen fabric... saturated with ointment. Can you name for me a binding that is stronger and more unbreakable than ointment-saturated linen graveclothes? Did you *ever* see somebody wiggle or break their way out of those? Not even Houdini or the Escapist could pull off that trick.

Have you ever seen someone escape this infinitely strong linen?

Jn11.43⁴³“When He had said these things, He cried out with a loud voice, ‘Lazarus, come forth.’
⁴⁴The man who had died came forth, bound hand and foot with wrappings, and his face was wrapped around with a cloth. Jesus said to them, ‘Unbind him, and let him go.’⁴⁵Therefore many of the Jews who came to Mary, and saw what He had done, believed in Him.”

Have you ever seen someone escape this infinitely strong linen?

Jn20.6⁶“And so Simon Peter also came, following him, and entered the tomb; and he saw the linen wrappings lying there,⁷ and the face-cloth which had been on His head, not lying with the linen wrappings, but rolled up in a place by itself.⁸ So the other disciple who had first come to the tomb then also entered, and he saw and believed.⁹ For as yet they did not understand the Scripture, that He must rise again from the dead.”

Now you have.