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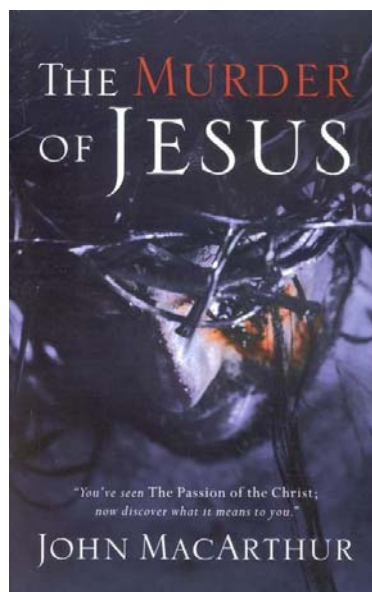
RELIGIOUS HOOPLA, HUCKSTERS & HYPOCRITES

["KANGAROO COURT OF THE HIGH PRIEST" – MATTHEW 26:57-75]

WEEKLY SUNDAY SCHOOL LESSON


MARCH 11 2007

FROM THE *MASTER WORKS* SERIES STUDY OF:



RELIGIOUS HOOPLA, HUCKSTERS & HYPOCRITES

[“KANGAROO COURT OF THE HIGH PRIEST” – MATTHEW 26:57-66]

peedy Morris was the basketball coach for LaSalle University from 1984 until 2001. He was shaving one day when his wife told him he was wanted on the telephone by *Sports Illustrated*. He got so excited over the prospect of national recognition that he hurried his shave and cut his face. Not wanting to delay the caller, he ran out of the bathroom, lost his balance, and tumbled down the stairs. Limping with blood and lather on his face, he finally got to the phone. “*Sports Illustrated*,” he panted. Imagine Morris’ disappointment when the voice on the other end said, “*Yet it is, and for seventy-five cents an issue you can get a year’s subscription...*”

It’s tough to be let down. It’s disappointing when you think someone is interested in you, only to find he is interested in your money. When salespeople do it, it’s irritating—but when people of faith do it, it can be devastating. It’s a sad but true fact of the faith: religion is used for profit and prestige. When it is, there are two results: people are exploited and God is infuriated.

As we continue with Week Two of our Bible study from John MacArthur’s book, *The Murder of Jesus*, today we move past last week’s lesson about the kiss of the traitor in the garden to something a lot worse. When Jesus is arrested and taken away by the Pharisees and Jewish leaders, we see their true colors as well as a lot of religious hoopla by some hucksters and hypocrites—especially the high priest.

Anyone ever been in a court of law or situation where you or someone else you observed felt unfairly treated? My wife tells a true story about when she was called for jury service several years ago. Beverly got chosen for the jury in a case where a young man or teenager was charged in an accident for running a stop sign and hitting another car. After all the testimony, Beverly still wasn’t sure whether the young boy ran the stop sign or not. In the jury room, the other jurors were all anxious to convict the

young man and go home and get back to their day's business. But Beverly wasn't sure still. The jury foreman was an older man, an upstanding citizen and deacon in our church—someone Beverly knew well. He told her that he bet the young man was making out with his girlfriend, who was riding in the front seat right beside him, and probably not paying attention to his driving when he pulled out and hit the other car. Beverly said she didn't hear any of that from the testimony on the stand, but the foreman said he just knew that's what happened. After much persuasion, Beverly changed her mind. The young boy was found guilty—though not based on testimony or evidence from the stand, but something an old died-in-the-wool confirmed bachelor just felt. Fair or not? The young man's one day in court ended in a conviction.

As we focus on another unfair trial experience—truly what can be called a kangaroo court conducted by the high priest—turn with me to **JOHN 18:12-13, 19-23 (NLT)**. Christ has just been arrested and the soldiers have taken him out of the garden. This is the section that gives us the record of the illegal, unjust trial of Jesus.

¹²So the soldiers, their commanding officer, and the Temple guards arrested Jesus and tied him up. ¹³First they took him to Annas, the father-in-law of Caiaphas, the high priest at that time. ¹⁴Caiaphas was the one who had told the other Jewish leaders, "It's better that one man should die for the people."

...

¹⁹Inside, the high priest began asking Jesus about his followers and what he had been teaching them. ²⁰Jesus replied, "Everyone knows what I teach. I have preached regularly in the synagogues and the Temple, where the people gather. I have not spoken in secret. ²¹Why are you asking me this question? Ask those who heard me. They know what I said." ²²Then one of the Temple guards standing nearby slapped Jesus across the face. "Is that the way to answer the high priest?" he demanded. ²³Jesus

replied, "If I said anything wrong, you must prove it. But if I'm speaking the truth, why are you beating me?"

Let me give you a little background. The Jews have always prided themselves on their sense of fairness, their sense of equity, their sense of justice. And rightly so. For they have basically a foundation of justice that has benefited the whole world. The sense of justice and jurisprudence that we have even in America, finds its origins in the Judaic justice system, as do all equitable systems around the world.

The Jewish system of jurisprudence and law and judgment was predicated on one Old Testament passage primarily and that is **DEUTERONOMY 16: 18-20**. Listen to what it says: *"You shall appoint for yourself judges and officers in all your towns which the Lord your God is giving you, according to your tribes, and they shall judge the people with righteous judgment. You shall not distort justice, you shall not be partial, you shall not take a bribe for a bribe blinds the eyes of the wise and perverts the words of the righteous. Justice and only justice you shall pursue that you may live and possess the land which the Lord your God is giving you."*

Now there you have God's bottom line standard for judgment and justice. Local judges, judging the people with fairness and righteousness, never distorting what is true, not being partial, never taking a bribe, justice and only justice. You pursue it in order that you may live and possess the land which the Lord your God is giving you. And throughout the history of the Jewish people, there has been that undergirding sense of justice and judgment as a standard for their system of jurisprudence.

Now, as they began to work out the practical application of Deuteronomy 16, in any area or region or locality where there were 120 men as heads of families, there was to be in that locality a local council. Wherever you had at least 120 men who were heads of families, you had enough people to constitute a local council. It was really a synagogue community. That

community was large enough to have a synagogue and then, of course, to have this local council. The councils became known as **Sanhedrin**. That is a Hebrew term but it is basically transliterated right off of a Greek term which means "sitting together." They were a group of men who came and sat together to make judgments, to decide issues of civil and criminal aspects.

So in any group of 120 men who were head of families, any locality, they would have a Sanhedrin, a sitting together council. The council would be made up of 23 men. Always an odd number, of course, so that in any voting there would always be a majority. These 23 men would be taken from the elders of the village. They acted as judges and jury in all matters. These councils or Sanhedrin constituted basically the government over a synagogue community. Now one of them on the councils whether small or large would be called the chief ruler. So in the New Testament gospels, when you read about the chief ruler, he is one who presides over that local council. But all of them served as a court.

Now in Jerusalem, which of course was the capital city, the great religious center of the life of Israel, there was what was called the Great Sanhedrin...the Great Council. This was composed most likely of 70 men who were elders, 24 chief priests, 24 elders, 23 scribes plus the high priest makes 71. So they got an odd number by including the high priest. They were the final court for appeal. Any person who felt that the adjudication made at a lower level was not fair could appeal to the Sanhedrin and the Supreme Court level in Jerusalem and under some conditions, no doubt, gain a hearing. They were the highest and ultimate ruling body in Israel.

Now, the Sanhedrin in terms of criminal procedure, guaranteed to a person who was under prosecution, several things. There were three primary things in relation to criminal procedure that the laws of jurisprudence upheld in the Sanhedrin guaranteed to a person. Number one, public trial...public trial. In other words, there was to be no hidden secret clandestine trials. Everything

was to be open and exposed so that no one could be framed and railroaded into some kind of execution, or some kind of penalty without just trial taking place. Secondly, the Sanhedrin guaranteed for any one brought in on a criminal procedure the right of self defense. That is there was to be a defender. There was to be someone who provided a defense for the accused. He had the right to bring in defense of himself in the mouth of other witnesses who could participate in the trial. Thirdly, no one could be convicted of anything unless convicted or proven to be guilty by two or three witnesses.

So, basically those three things: public trial, the right of defense, and a solid case based upon the evidence of more than one witness. Those things remain with us even today under the guarantee...the basic guarantee of courts in our own society. And so, that was in place by the time of our Lord. And that is very important to know as we get through this trial because you'll see how they violated all of these kind of things, and many more, as we shall see.

In the Jewish trial of Jesus Christ, and here's the key point, they violated every single law of justice and jurisprudence known to them. They violated every single one of them willfully so that the trial of Jesus Christ is THE most unjust trial in human history. It has to be for this court condemned to death the only truly innocent person whoever lived. It is a mockery of justice. It is a violation of everything in their system of jurisprudence. The axiom of the Sanhedrin was this, the Sanhedrin is to save, not to destroy life.

Well, that wasn't true in this case. No criminal trial could be carried through the night, this one was. The judges who condemned a criminal had to have a day in between before the execution and they had to fast all day, they didn't. They killed Jesus the same day. There had to be witnesses who witnessed against Him, there were none. There had to be defense, there was no defense. There was not even any indictment, there was no arraignment, there was no nothing, there was no crime. And

that and many other compile a list of things they did to violate the laws that they themselves affirmed.

Now let me give you another sort of basic thing you need to understand going into this. Jesus had two major trials...two major trials. First was a Jewish ecclesiastical religious trial and then a Roman secular political trial. And the reason is this, the Jews were an occupied people. Rome was in authority and control over them and the Jews did not have the right of execution. They couldn't kill a criminal. They didn't have the right of capital punishment. The Romans reserved that right. So, the Jews could condemn Jesus to death, but they couldn't execute Him. So whatever they could accomplish in their religious trial, they had to sell the Romans on because the Romans were the ones that would have to kill Jesus. And that is why you have to have two major trials. A trial before the Jews and then the evidence and the supposed evidence, and the supposed crime that Jesus commits is carried to the Romans who have to see this as a viable crime and a reason for execution and carry out the execution. So, you will see then as this trial unfolds, a Jewish aspect to the trial and a Gentile one as well.

Now I'm going to give you a further thought. The Jewish trial and the Gentile trial each have three phases. They each have three phases. So in total there's really six different trials Jesus was involved in. The Jewish trial began when Jesus was taken to Annas. Annas sent Him to Caiaphas and the Sanhedrin in the middle of the night. And then the third phase, Caiaphas and the Sanhedrin met again in the morning after dawn to try to legitimize their evil deed. And those are the three phases of the Jewish trial. Annas, then Caiaphas and the Sanhedrin, then Caiaphas and the Sanhedrin again in the morning.

Now, as we begin to look at the elements of the unjust illegal trial of Jesus, let's begin with the first aspect. The illegal, unjust confrontation. Look at **MATTHEW 26:57**. *"And they that had laid hold on Jesus, led Him away to Caiaphas, the high priest,*

where the scribes and the elders were assembled..." and we'll stop there.

Now Matthew says they led Him away to Caiaphas, the high priest. And that's true. But Matthew doesn't give us the phase before that. Matthew just goes right into the main trial. In order to get the first phase of it, we have to go to John chapter 18, so let's do that. And it's a very important portion of this story. In John chapter 18, we come to the first part, the illegal, unjust confrontation, the initial arraignment. Notice in verse 12, now John then helps us here to fill in the whole story. You know, in studying the gospels, it's a composite. The life of Christ is given in four different paintings, in a sense, each of which emphasizes different features and aspects of the same scene. And so, first He was led to Annas. He is bound.

Now, the idea of taking Him to Annas is that Annas is the brains behind everything. Annas despises Jesus Christ. Jesus is a threat to his security, his power, his prestige, everything. He resents Jesus' holiness because he's so utterly unholy. He resents Jesus' perfection because he's so utterly vile. Everything about Jesus causes him anger and he is under the direction, of course, of the great choreographer who's staging the whole scene here and that's Satan himself and all his demons. "This is your hour, Jesus said, and the power of darkness." And so they send Jesus to him in his house, which is illegal. It's illegal because it's at night and it's in his house and no such procedures were to occur like that.

Who is Annas? Annas had been high priest for about five or six years, but that was 20 years before this. He was not now the existing high priest, Caiaphas was. He was high priest that year, John 18:13 says. That's kind of interesting because under God's design, high priests were **high priests for life**. You didn't have them chosen every year or so. But it was becoming such a political position and it was bought and sold, in a sense, and then it was so connected with being able to bow the knee to Rome that high priests came and went rather rapidly. And from what I

understand of history, the Romans had actually pressurized Annas out of the office of high priest because he was amassing so much power. He was a wily and clever man. And so he had been pushed out as high priest after about five or six years, but still carries the name because a high priest was to be a high priest for life.

But when Annas went out as high priest, five of his sons and one son in law, **Caiaphas** who married his daughter, succeeded him, so he maintained control. It was "**in the family**," if you will. And he maintained this title of high priest and he was the boss. He was the head of racketeering. He was behind everything. In fact, all of the money changers and the selling and the buying in the temple, all of that was called "the bizarres of Annas." He got a piece of all that action. He was the big boss, if you will, in the temple mafia, the temple criminal proceedings of extortion. He controlled it all.

Jesus always the master of response. If you've got a case, give it. If you don't, why are you hitting Me? If I'm guilty, prove it. If I'm innocent, why are you hitting Me? Well, what did Annas do? Well, the only thing he could do. Verse 24, "Annas sent Him bound to Caiaphas." I mean, he was finished. What could he do? I mean, it's in the middle of the night. It isn't even three o'clock in the morning yet because the cock hasn't crowed. The cock crows at three. Cock crows from twelve to three, so it isn't even the end of the cock crow period when the cock crows to mark the end of that time, around three o'clock. And we know that it isn't three o'clock because Peter hasn't quite yet denied Him, so it's earlier than three o'clock, it's the middle of the night. Annas is in his own house in the dark clandestined night trying to pull off an arraignment, can't do it, winds up embarrassed. Has to have his servant slap Jesus in the face and then says, "Get Him out of here, take Him to Caiaphas." **JOHN 18:24** says, *²⁴Then Annas bound Jesus and sent him to Caiaphas, the high priest.*

So, He goes to Caiaphas with no indictment and no arraignment at all...no crime. Is this an illegal and unjust confrontation with

Annas? It is, it's in the middle of the night, that's illegal. It was without witnesses, that's illegal. There was no crime. There was no charge. Annas had no legal authority. He wasn't even an official prosecutor in any sense. And his home was an improper place to have such a thing. But don't be startled, that's just one of many illegalities. They just mount and mount and mount and mount and mount. Let's go back to **Matthew chapter 26:57**

*⁵⁷those who had seized Jesus led Him away to Caiaphas, the high priest, where the scribes and the elders were gathered together. ⁵⁸But Peter was following Him at a distance as far as the courtyard of the high priest, and entered in, and sat down with the officers to see the outcome. ⁵⁹Now the chief priests and the whole Council kept trying to obtain false testimony against Jesus, so that they might put Him to death. ⁶⁰**They did not find any, even though many false witnesses came forward. But later on two came forward, ⁶¹and said, "This man stated, 'I am able to destroy the temple of God and to rebuild it in three days.'"***

⁶²The high priest stood up and said to Him, "Do You not answer? What is it that these men are testifying against You?" ⁶³But Jesus kept silent And the high priest said to Him, "I adjure You by the living God, that You tell us whether You are the Christ, the Son of God." ⁶⁴Jesus said to him, "You have said it yourself; nevertheless I tell you, hereafter you will see THE SON OF MAN SITTING AT THE RIGHT HAND OF POWER, and COMING ON THE CLOUDS OF HEAVEN." ⁶⁵Then the high priest tore his robes and said, "He has blasphemed! What further need do we have of witnesses? Behold, you have now heard the blasphemy; ⁶⁶what do you think?" They answered, "He deserves death!"

The chief priests, the temple police, the elders, the soldiers take Jesus bound from Annas to Caiaphas. And Caiaphas is equally wretched, equally evil. Of course, anything Annas likes, he likes. Anything Annas hates, he hates. There in the same thing. And he is equally the manipulated tool of Satan. He is threatened. He is possessive. He is power hungry. He is greedy. He hates

truth. He hates righteousness. He hates holiness. He hates Jesus Christ.

You see, Jesus never got a fair trial. He was not condemned because of something He had done. He was condemned because of hate. And verse 60 says it, underline these words, "*But found none...but found none.*" Nobody succeeded. You say, "*Didn't anybody come?*" Oh yes, some came, sure. Verse 60 says, "*Though many false witnesses came, yet they found none.*" I mean, nobody could give a viable testimony. And the frustration mounts until at last two false witnesses came. Here come two that have gotten together and they got their story sort of together. "*And they say, This fellow said,*" verse 61, "*I am able to destroy the temple of God and build it in three days.*" All they could come up with was "this fellow said." That's remarkable. I mean, it's a big generalization. This fellow said? In Mark, the parallel passage again, 14 verses 57, listen to this, "These two witnesses said, I will destroy this temple that is made with hands and within three days I will build another without hands."

The illegality of this. These people were bribed witnesses. They misrepresented what He said. And no one could be executed for what He said anyway. And especially if it was true and where was His defense? It's absolutely illegal, every bit of it. An illegal confrontation with Annas, an illegal convening of the Sanhedrin and an illegal conspiracy against Jesus Christ. And in the midst of it all is all hell and earth and the worst that there is in the supernatural and the natural world come together against Jesus Christ, nobody can come up with anything...not anything.

IS 53:7

⁷He was oppressed and afflicted, yet he did not open his mouth; he was led like a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is silent, so he did not open his mouth.

1 PET 2:23

²³When they hurled their insults at him, he did not retaliate; when he suffered, he made no threats. Instead, he entrusted himself to him who judges justly.

That's it. No one to testify for Jesus. No evidence of anything. No proof that He indeed was not the Son of God. That's it. Verse 66, what do you think? Let's have a verdict. *"And they answered and said, He's guilty of death."* And they all start shouting back, and this is not according to judicial protocol at all. Where is the scribe who is recording? Where is the one who is writing down the "yeas" and writing down the "nays" and the waiting for each to give his vote with a pause so that each one knows the seriousness of his decision? It's a rabble. It's a mad mob, screaming for His blood. No justice. None at all. No vote, mob rule. He's guilty of death, He's a blasphemer.

And by the way, **Mark 14:64** says it was unanimous. They all chimed in. The usual careful vote was thrown out. No scribes to tabulate. This is mob rule. And the law of the Mishna said you had to postpone the vote for a death a day. Had to postpone the execution. No, they want Him dead fast.

In one final note, we have seen the illegal and unjust confrontation, convening, conspiracy, condemnation and the conclusion. I want to show you one more thing. And this will really tell you where their hearts were. The illegal and unjust conduct. Look how they respond. This is the supreme court of Israel. Listen, people, this is the religious aristocracy of Judaism. Verse 67, *"Then they spit in His face and punched Him and others slapped Him with the palms of their hands saying, Prophecy unto us, Thou Christ. Who smote You?"*

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