

OpenTheo

Matthew 26:57 - 26:75



Gospel of Matthew - Steve Gregg

In Matthew 26:57-26:75, Steve Gregg discusses the trial of Jesus by the chief priests and false witnesses. He explains that the witnesses' claims were inconsistent and did not meet the Jewish law's regulations. Jesus was mocked and beaten by the high priest trial, and Peter denied Jesus three times. However, Jesus later restored Peter's salvation and position among the apostles. Steve Gregg emphasizes Jesus' prediction of his second coming and the importance of standing firm in faith during times of trial.

Transcript

We're beginning at Matthew chapter 26 and verse 57. Jesus has just been arrested in the Garden of Gethsemane. Judas betrayed him.

Peter tried to defend him. Cut off the ear of Malchus, the servant of the high priest, and Jesus healed the man's ear. And Jesus submitted to the arrest, although he said he was capable, if he had wished to, of calling to his defense twelve legions of angels.

But he did not wish to do that because he said, how then would the scriptures be fulfilled? He was more concerned to see the scriptures honored and fulfilled, and to do the will of his father, than he was to escape his own death by crucifixion. And we read in the end of verse 56, then all his disciples forsook him and fled, just as he had predicted that they would. Now, a couple of those disciples eventually followed him at a distance, probably what they considered a safe distance.

One of those was John, and one of them was Peter. We'll later read about Peter as he followed at a distance, but he was still fairly cowardly and not willing to really take a stand for Jesus. He was just curious to find out what was going on and what would become of him.

We read in verse 57, And those who had laid hold of Jesus led him away to Caiaphas, the high priest, where the scribes and the elders were assembled. But Peter followed him at a distance to the high priest's courtyard, and he went in and sat with the servants to see the end. Now the chief priests, the elders, and all the council sought false testimony against Jesus to put him to death, but found none.

Even though many false witnesses came forward, they found none. But at last two false witnesses came forward and said, This fellow said, I am able to destroy the temple of God and to build it in three days. Now, we're told that the chief priests, the Sanhedrin, wanted to find some way to condemn Jesus of a capital crime, and yet he hadn't done any crimes.

That makes it a little hard, doesn't it? I mean, unless you're just going to say, Well, we don't care that you haven't done any crimes, we're going to kill you anyway. Which some, you know, dictators might do that kind of thing. But the chief priests still wanted to maintain the semblance of being religious and righteous men.

Remember, they were the religious leaders of the society. And therefore, they couldn't just say, I don't like you, so I'm going to kill you. They would hardly have any facade of being righteous men in a case like that.

And so they had to find some way to justify their evil intentions, to try to make it seem like they, you know, what else could they do, but put to death such a man as this. And yet, when a man has done nothing wrong, and the court is trying to find something wrong to execute him for, what are they going to do? They can't find any witnesses to tell of him doing some crimes, since he hasn't committed any crime. So it says they sought for false testimony.

It says they sought false testimony against Jesus to put him to death. Interestingly, it says in verse 60, and they found none, even though many false witnesses came forward. They found none.

Now, that's a strange wording, because it says they were seeking false testimony to put Jesus to death, but they couldn't find any, even though many false witnesses came forward. Now, is that contradictory or what? I mean, they were seeking false witnesses, and many came forward, but they couldn't find any. Well, what we have to understand is this, that the law of the Jews required not only that you have witnesses against a person, but you have to have two or more witnesses against him.

A man could not be condemned in a Jewish court unless at least two witnesses would bear witness to having seen him or heard him do something that was a criminal thing. Now, there were many false witnesses who were willing to come forward and say, well, he did this or he did that, but they couldn't find any two witnesses to say the same thing. And that's what we read, not so much here, but in the parallel account in Mark 14, 56.

It says that they sought witnesses, and many came forward, but their testimonies did not agree. Mark 14, 56. So, apparently these witnesses were sequestered until they were called in, and each one was to testify individually without the others knowing what he said.

And they couldn't find any two guys to agree on the same charge against Jesus. Many false witnesses came, but they all stood alone in their testimony without any confirmation from others. And it says, finally, they found two who came forward.

Now, that's, of course, the minimum number that you could have under the law. You had to have at least two witnesses. And they said, and apparently they said it independently of each other, they said, this fellow said, I am able to destroy the temple of God and to build it in three days.

This is worded a little differently in Mark 14, 59. They said, we heard him say, I will destroy this temple that is made with hands, and within three days I will build another made without hands. Now, that's a little more detailed.

And probably the fact is, since there were two witnesses and they were speaking independently, Matthew gives the testimony of one and Mark gives the testimony of the other. Their testimonies, however, were similar, because they both said that they heard him say he was able to destroy the temple and build it in three days. Well, Jesus never actually said that.

Jesus did say something a little bit like that, but it's very clear that in people passing the rumor around of what he had said, it had been changed. Because back in John chapter 2, Jesus had been confronted by the religious leaders, and they said, give us a sign that you have the authority to do these things. Namely, what he was doing was driving out the money changers out of the temple.

And they said, by what authority do you do this? Give us a sign. And he says, I'll give you this sign. He said, destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up again.

That is obviously the statement that Jesus made that these people were modifying. They may not have known they were modifying it. They may have heard it through the grapevine, and it may have changed.

Jesus did not say, I will destroy this temple, and I will build it in three days. He said, you destroy this temple, and I will build it in three days. And John tells us that he was not even speaking about the Jewish temple.

He was talking about the temple of his body, that if these men would kill Jesus, he would raise himself up again three days later. And that is his meaning. But he never did say that he would destroy the temple.

He simply challenged them to do so, and said, if you do so, I will raise it up in three days. So these witnesses misquoted Jesus. Now they may, as I say, they may have heard this statement of Jesus through the grapevine, and it may have been changed to the form that they give it here in.

But if so, they shouldn't be witnesses in court, because they say that they heard him say it. A witness who heard a rumor that this man said something, and someone told me that someone told him that someone told her that someone said this, that's not the kind of witness that stands up in court. In any case, even if they had told the truth, even if Jesus did say, I am able to destroy the temple and build it again in three days, although he might be thought to be crazy to say such a thing, yet is it really criminal to say such things? I mean, where is the law that says, thou shalt not say, you can destroy the temple and build it again in three days? There's nothing intrinsically blasphemous.

There's nothing intrinsically unlawful about making such a statement. And therefore, even though they finally found two witnesses to say something very similar to each other, what they said wasn't enough to condemn a man to death. I mean, I'm sure the council is scratching their heads saying, okay, we finally got him on something.

He said he could destroy the temple and build it in three days, but does that help? Does that help us to crucify him? I mean, on what grounds do you crucify a man because he said such a thing as that? And so they were kind of, you know, the trial really had come to a stalemate. They weren't going to let Jesus go, but they couldn't find any way to condemn him. So what happened is the high priest arose at Bacchaiaphus and he said to Jesus, do you answer nothing? What is it that these men testify against you? But Jesus kept silent.

Now, the high priest, the reason he broke in here is because they were getting nowhere with witnesses, so he thought he'd cross-examine the defendant. Actually, under Jewish law, there were certain regulations. These are not found in the Jewish law that God gave, but in the laws that the Jews had adopted for their own protocol in court, that it was illegal under their protocol for the high priest to cross-examine the witness if the other witnesses broke down and were unable to bring anything.

It was not right in the Jewish law for a high priest to try to bring condemning charges against a man when there had been no witnesses to do so. But that's exactly what the high priest is doing here. He's breaking their own custom.

He says, okay, listen, we're getting nowhere with these witnesses. Let's just talk to Jesus himself. I adjure you, don't you have anything to answer? These men are testifying against you, but Jesus kept silent.

And the high priest answered and said to him, I adjure you by the living God that you tell us if you are the Christ, the Son of God. Now, in other words, Caiaphas was putting Jesus under oath and saying, Swear by God, I'm adjuring you in the name of God, tell the truth. It's a different form of doing so, but it's the same kind of thing.

As asking a witness in court to tell the truth, the whole truth and nothing but truth, so help him God. It's swearing by God that Caiaphas was asking Jesus to say under oath

whether he was the Messiah. That's what the word Christ means, whether he was the Son of God.

Now, Jesus finally broke his silence, perhaps out of respect to his father, whose name had been invoked here by the priest, even though the priest hardly had any right to invoke it. But because Jesus did care about the honor of his father, and because the living God was invoked, Jesus, probably out of deference to God, said to him, It is as you have said. Nevertheless, I say to you, hereafter you will see the Son of Man sitting on the right hand of the power and coming on the clouds of heaven.

Now, when Jesus said, It is as you have said, he's agreeing, I am the Christ, I am the Son of God. From time to time I meet people who tell me that Jesus never claimed to be the Son of God. They say he only claimed to be the Son of Man.

People who say this prove that they've never done any homework, or they haven't looked very far, they haven't researched what they're saying. Jesus did claim to be the Son of God, although it is true that he claimed to be the Son of Man, and he did claim to be the Son of Man much more frequently than he claimed to be the Son of God. But you will find in the Gospels a number of times where Jesus makes it very clear that he is the Son of God, and this is one of them.

He was put under oath in court. Are you the Son of God? He said, Yes, I am. It is as you have said.

Now, he didn't stop there. Since he broke his silence, he decided to go on. And he said, Nevertheless, I say to you, hereafter, and that means sometime in the future, you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the power and coming on the clouds of heaven.

Now, I suppose most of us Christians understand this to be a prediction of his second coming. However, if it is a prediction of Jesus' second coming, one wonders how it is that Caiaphas and those present at that time could be said to be ones who would see it. Since they died, they are dead now, and Jesus has not come back yet.

One might argue, well, I guess Jesus will raise them from the dead to view it. But I don't know that that would be the most natural way to understand it. Jesus had earlier, in Matthew 16, 28, he said to his disciples, Some of you standing here will not taste death before you see the Son of Man coming in his kingdom.

And in Matthew 24, he also spoke of the Son of Man coming with the clouds of heaven and said, This generation will not pass away before these things are fulfilled. In other words, Jesus predicted twice that he would come, and he would come within the generation of those that were hearing him. And even once he mentioned coming with the clouds of heaven.

Those things are in this statement too. He says, You will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the power and coming on the clouds of heaven. And he said it to the Sanhedrin, the men living right then.

And it would seem that like the other statements he made, that the disciples would not all die, or that that generation would not pass before people see this. That when he spoke to Caiaphas and the chief priests, that he was saying that in their lifetime, they would see the Son of Man coming back in judgment and in power. Now, if he was talking about his second coming, then of course he missed his prediction.

But we don't believe, at least we Christians don't believe that Jesus could miss a prediction because he was not a false prophet, he was the true Messiah. And because of that, I would have to say Jesus' prediction did come true. And it may very well be, just as I believe his comments in Matthew 16 and Matthew 24 are, it could be that these words refer to his coming in judgment in 70 A.D., not his actual second coming, but the coming of God's judgment upon Jerusalem when the Romans came and destroyed that city.

This was spoken of in Scripture as God sending his armies. It was referred to as the vengeance of God upon Israel for the things they did to Jesus. It could certainly be said, using the same imagery that the Old Testament prophets use, that this was Jesus' coming in judgment upon them.

And whatever he meant, it did not set well with the hearers at the time. Caiaphas tore his clothes, it says. Now, tearing the clothes was a way of saying that one is greatly grieved and offended.

In many cases, it was a sign of repentance in Old Testament. But the tearing of the clothes basically is an expression of angst and shock and astonishment and being offended at something. And so the high priest acted as if Jesus had just committed blasphemy.

Now, there was, in fact, an Old Testament precedent for people being put to death for blasphemy. And since they were seeking charges against Jesus by which they could put him to death, the priest probably felt like, ah, we finally got what we need. He's blasphemed.

But when we think about it, what did Jesus say that was blasphemy? He said he was the Christ, the Son of God. But really, where in the precedent of Jewish law was it ever called blasphemy for someone to say he was the Messiah? Many Jews said they were the Messiah. They were not persecuted by the Sanhedrin for this.

They were usually persecuted by the Romans for saying such things. And these false messiahs were usually hunted down and killed by the Romans. But the Jews had never said it's a blasphemy for someone to say he's the Messiah.

And to say that one is the Son of God, likewise, is not in itself a blasphemy, since the term Son of God is vague enough that certain individuals are called sons of God even in the Old Testament. In other words, when Jesus said he was the Messiah, the Son of God, he did not say anything for which a precedent had been established to call that blasphemy. Now, when he said, you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the power and coming on the clouds of heaven, certainly it sounded like a statement that would be either made by a divine person or else a madman.

But it still is not the same thing as blasphemy. There's nothing in Jesus' statement that necessarily was the same thing as saying, I am God, or that in any way was disrespectful to the name of God, which blasphemy would be. However, the high priest and those who were with him had been trying all night to get Jesus to say something self-incriminating.

And Jesus had been silent up to this point. This is the first time he'd opened his own mouth. And so no matter what he said, they were bound to put a spin on it that would enable them to call it blasphemy.

And although Jesus didn't really say anything that was blasphemous, they decided that's the charge we're going to use. He's committed blasphemy. So in verse 65, it says, Then the high priest tore his clothes, saying, He has spoken blasphemy.

What further need do we have of witnesses? Yeah, they were tired of witnesses. The witnesses weren't working out very well. So he says, We don't need witnesses anymore.

We've heard him with our own ears. Look, now you have heard his blasphemy. What do you think, Caiaphas said to the court? And they answered and said, He is deserving of death.

Well, this was a foregone conclusion. It was not something they decided because of what he had said. They had decided before they ever arrested him that he is worthy of death.

And for that reason, they, of course, were just looking for an excuse to say this. Finally, they got their chance to say it. He's deserving of death.

Then they spat on his face, and they beat him. And others struck him with the palms of their hands, saying, Prophecy to us, Christ, who is the one who struck you? Now, we have more details on this in some of the other Gospels, how that Jesus was delivered over to soldiers to endure this kind of mistreatment. And they blindfolded him, and they struck him, and they said, Prophecy to us.

If you're the Messiah, you should be able to prophesy and tell us who it was that struck you. And so they mocked him. They hit him with the palms of their hands.

They spat on his face. And this is the indignity that the Jews of that time heaped upon the Son of God. And one need not wonder why it was that they were so deserving of the

punishment that came upon them when the Romans came and destroyed their city.

Now, Peter, we know, denied Jesus after this. And we read of it in the following verses, verse 69 through 75. Now, Peter sat outside in the courtyard, and a servant girl came to him, saying, You also were with Jesus of Galilee.

But he denied it before them all, saying, I do not know what you are saying. And when he had gone out to the gateway, another girl saw him and said to those who were with him, who were there, This fellow also was with Jesus of Nazareth. But again he denied it with an oath.

I do not know the man. And after a while, those who stood by came to him and said to Peter, Surely you also are one of them, because your speech betrays you. Apparently meaning he had an accent, a Galilean accent.

And Jesus' disciples were known to be mostly Galileans. Then he began to curse and swear, saying, I do not know the man. And immediately the rooster crowed.

And Peter remembered the word of Jesus, who had said to him, Before the rooster crows, you will deny me three times. And then he went out and wept bitterly. Here Jesus in his hour, presumably, I mean from the human standpoint, the hour of greatest need, Peter's friend Jesus is on trial for his life when he's done nothing wrong.

Peter does not even so much have the courage as to say, I'm his friend. I'm on his side. I'm one of his followers.

I protest this injustice. Peter is a wimp. And Peter realizes it after three times he denies Jesus.

Now, it's not even so much that Peter was specifically being challenged by the police on this matter. I mean, if it was the police challenging him, then he might say, oh, I'm going to be under arrest here. And, you know, fear might take hold.

Understandably, in a case like that, that maybe I'm going to be crucified. But this was just some people out there warming themselves in the courtroom, in the courtyard, I should say. And they recognized Peter or they recognized his speech, his accent and so forth.

And he was vehement that he did not know Jesus. Now, remember Jesus said, he that denies me before men, him will I deny before my Father, which is in heaven. Well, Peter denied Jesus before men.

And he would certainly be lost to this day, if not for the sequel to this, where Jesus actually on the Sea of Galilee at a later time after his resurrection, restored Peter to his natural, to salvation and to his position among the apostles. It actually says here that as

soon as he denied Jesus the third time, the rooster crowed. In Luke's gospel, it actually tells us that Jesus looked over at Peter at that time, which is very poignant, of course, because Jesus did not hear the denials of Peter, but he knew he had predicted it.

And he heard the rooster crow. And upon hearing the rooster, Jesus knew that Peter had done it and glanced out the window at Peter. And in a knowing sort of a glance, and Peter realized what had happened, and he went out and repented and wept bitterly.

You know, what Peter has done, many people have done. Many of us know better than what we're willing to say. We know Jesus, but we're afraid to speak up for him.

God looks at us knowingly, too, and he knows our cowardice. And if we are cowardly before men, Jesus said, I will not confess you before my Father, which is in heaven. I suggest that we not repeat Peter's mistake, but we go on to boldly proclaim Christ before men, even in the face of persecution.