

Sunday, January 19, 2024 | Holy Week

Week 16 | Luke 22:63-71 | “Kangaroo Court”

Last week, we looked at the lowest point in Peter's life, the night he thrice denied Jesus Christ. While we acknowledged the lead apostles' failures, we also acknowledged that, in Christianity, there is strength in weakness. It was because Peter relied upon his own strength that he eventually failed. Thus, should we want to avoid his mistakes, we must rely upon the strength of another—i.e., God. For as the apostle learned so long ago, a healthy awareness of its weaknesses keeps a soul dependent on God's strength and not its own. So much so that the person entirely reliant on the Lord could say, as Paul said, "When I am weak, then am I strong." The **strongest** people are those who know they are **weak** and God is **strong**.

READ: Luke 22:63-71 (ESV)

⁶³ Now the men who were holding Jesus in custody were mocking him as they **beat him**. ⁶⁴ They also blindfolded him and kept asking him, “Prophecy! Who is it that struck you?” ⁶⁵ And they said many other things against him, **blaspheming** him.

⁶⁶ When day came, the assembly of the elders of the people gathered together, both chief priests and scribes. And they led him away to their council, and they said, ⁶⁷ “If you are the **Christ**, tell us.” But he said to them, “If I tell you, you will not believe, ⁶⁸ and if I ask you, you will not answer. ⁶⁹ But from now on the **Son of Man** shall be seated at the right hand of the power of God.” ⁷⁰ So they all said, “Are you the **Son of God**, then?” And he said to them, “You say that I am.” ⁷¹ Then they said, “What further testimony do we need? We have heard it ourselves from his own lips.”

According to Cornell Law School, a “kangaroo court” refers to “a court whose proceedings deviate so far from accepted legal norms that they can no longer be considered fair or just.”¹ To be clear, this term isn’t used in cases of *negligence* but in those where *malevolence* is evident (e.g., the conduct of the proceedings favored one side over the other, a stacked jury, collusion between a judge and one of the parties, etc.). As much as we hate to admit it, sometimes Lady Justice leaves her blindfold in her chambers, preferring that prejudice guide her rather than truth.

¹ General Editors, “Kangaroo Court,” *Cornell Law School*, https://www.law.cornell.edu/wex/kangaroo_court, [accessed, January 17, 2025].

In fact, kangaroo courts litter the historical landscape. In the summer of 1835, the "vigilance committee" of Nashville, TN, held a show trial in which they condemned Amos Dresser, a Presbyterian minister, for the distribution of abolitionist publications; he was stripped naked and whipped with 20 lashes.² In July of 1944, after a failed assassination attempt on Adolf Hitler, the People's Court of Nazi Germany arrested more than 7,000 people, executing 4,980 of them "on the barest of evidence."³ A more recent example of a mock trial is from April 2022. After publicly denouncing Russia's invasion of Ukraine, Vladimir Kara-Murza was arrested and given a 25-year sentence for "high treason" and for spreading "false information."⁴

However, the most egregious example of a kangaroo court is the trial of Jesus Christ. Though the man never broke Mosaic law, he was tried as a *heretic*. Though he never transgressed Roman law, he was convicted as an *anarchist*. The worst miscarriage of justice in history occurred over two thousand years ago in the judicial system of Jerusalem, and the Son of God was the target. But, as we'll see today, Jesus was no *victim*; he *volunteered*.

I want you to notice two things:

i. Vs. 63-65 – Jesus is **dishonored** by men.

At this point in the narrative, Luke picks up the pace. Consequently, he has to leave some content on the cutting room floor. For instance, though Luke mentions that the Lord was brought to the high priest's house (cf. 22:54), he doesn't relay what transpired, namely, an *informal* inquiry with Annas (cf. Jn. 18:19-24) and a *formal* one with Caiaphas (cf. Mt. 26:57-68; Mr. 14:53-65).

In the **informal** inquisition, Jesus was asked about his doctrine (cf. Jn. 18:19). At a glance, this seems reasonable until you consider that everyone already knew the things Jesus was teaching; it was the whole reason why he had been arrested in the first place! **Annas didn't want clarity about the Lord's teaching; he just wanted Jesus to incriminate himself.** This is evident by the fact that there were no witnesses accusing Jesus. Annas wanted to get him talking so that he could use Jesus' words against him. So, proper

² Wikipedia contributors, "Amos Dresser," *Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia*, https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Amos_Dresser&oldid=1264559139 (accessed January 17, 2025).

³ General Editors, "The July 20, 1944, Plot To Assassinate Adolf Hitler," July 16, 2021, *The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum*, <https://encyclopedia.ushmm.org/content/en/article/the-july-20-1944-plot-to-assassinate-adolf-hitler>, [accessed, January 17, 2025].

⁴ General Editors, "Vladimir Kara-Murza Stands Tall Against Putin's Kangaroo Court," August 1, 2023, *The Human Rights Foundation*, <https://archive.hrf.org/vladimir-kara-murza-stands-tall-against-putins-kangaroo-court/>, [accessed, January 17, 2025].

judicial procedures have been thrown out of the window, and the judge is clearly hostile toward the defendant.

In the **formal inquisition**, the Sanhedrin put on a better show, but only just. Rather than seek out *impartial* witnesses, Matthew tells us the Jews only sought out “*false [emphasis added] testimony against Jesus that they might put him to death, but they found none, though many false witnesses came forward*” (Mt. 26:59-60). In other words, though they found people willing to testify against Jesus, they found none who could bring a compelling argument. In fact, their best shot at the Lord was, “*This man said, ‘I am able to destroy the temple of God, and to rebuild it in three days*” (Mt. 26:61), which, of course, misconstrues what Jesus was actually talking about—i.e., himself. **But from a legal standpoint, such a statement is inconsequential**. Taken at face value, it makes it sound like the Lord is a harmless, crazy person, hardly deserving of the attention he’s been given. This is why we were told that “*Jesus remained silent*” (Mt. 26:63). He didn’t need to defend himself; these “*false witnesses*” were doing a good enough job of that on their own. Eventually, however, Jesus does break his silence. Prompted by Caiaphas’ question about whether or not he was “*the Christ, the Son of God,*” Jesus says, “*You have said so. But I tell you, from now on you will see the Son of Man seated at the right hand of Power and coming on the clouds of heaven*” (Mat. 26:64). In other words, “Yes, Caiaphas, I am the Christ, the Son of God.” Then we’re told that the high priest rips his robes and accuses Jesus of blasphemy (a capital offense), and the Sanhedrin confirms the accusation.

At this point, Luke’s narrative joins with his synoptic counterparts. Jesus is spit on (cf. Mt. 26:67; Mar. 14:65), mocked (cf. Lu. 22:63), beaten while blindfolded (cf. Mt. 26:67; Mar. 14:65; Lu. 22:63), and then asked, “*Prophecy! Who is it that struck you?*” And this was not a one-time occurrence. Mark says, “*The guards received [Jesus] with blows*” (cf. Mar. 14:65b), and Luke says, “*And they said many other things against him, blaspheming him*” (Lu. 22:65). Thus, the insults and the abuse just kept coming.

Now, notice that when Luke says these men were “*blaspheming*” Jesus, he uses the Greek word **βλασφημέω** (*blasphēmēō*) which, generally speaking, means to belittle, demean, or slander someone (cf. Ac. 13:45; 18:6; Tit. 3:2; Rom. 3:8; 1 Cor. 4:13; 10:30); but it is often used in relation to God (cf. 2 Ki. 19:6; Isa. 52:5; Mt. 9:3; Mk 3:29; Lk. 5:21;

Ro. 2:24; Rv. 13:6).⁵ Thus, as used in its current context, these men not only slandered an innocent man, but they also blasphemed God in the flesh.

While the mistreatment of Jesus was uncalled for, it wasn't unexpected.

The Lord himself predicted such a thing would happen in Luke 18:31-32, "And taking the twelve, he said to them, "See, we are going up to Jerusalem, and everything that is written about the Son of Man by the prophets will be accomplished. For he will be delivered over to the Gentiles and will be mocked and shamefully treated and spit upon."

Not only that, Isaiah 53:3 predicted that the Messiah would be mistreated too: "He was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief; and as one from whom men hide their faces; he was despised, and we esteemed him not."

So, what's the takeaway? While the mistreatment of Christians is uncalled for, it ought not to be unexpected.

READ: 2 Timothy 3:12-13 (ESV)

¹² Indeed, all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted, ¹³ while evil people and impostors will go on from bad to worse, deceiving and being deceived.

READ: John 15:18-20 (ESV)

¹⁸ If the world hates you, know that it has hated me before it hated you. ¹⁹ If you were of the world, the world would love you as its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you. ²⁰ Remember the word that I said to you: 'A servant is not greater than his master.' If they persecuted me, they will also persecute you.

READ: John 16:1-4 (ESV)

¹ I have said all these things to you to keep you from falling away. ² They will put you out of the synagogues. Indeed, the hour is coming when whoever kills you will think he is offering service to God. ³ And they will do these things because they have not known the Father, nor me. ⁴ But I have said these things to you, that when their hour comes you may remember that I told them to you.

ii. Vs. 66-71 – Jesus is honored by God.

According to Jewish law, any official judicial decision had to be made during the day.⁶ This is why Luke tells us, “*When day came [emphasis added], the assembly of the elders of the people gathered together, both chief priests and scribes. And they led him away to their council.*” As mentioned, Jesus has already gone through two inquiries, and the last of those, the Sanhedrin, already reached a verdict. Now, they just needed to formalize this whole ordeal. Thus, what transpires here is, as we talked about in the introduction, **a kangaroo court**. Even before this official hearing, Jesus’ conviction was a **foregone conclusion**.

When the “elders,” “chief priests,” and “scribes” said, “If you are the **Christ**, tell us.” They weren’t looking for answers; they were **manipulating** the system. “Christ” was a designation **periodically** misapplied, **pregnant** with meaning, and **prone** to misunderstanding. This is why Jesus rarely attributed the title to himself (cf. Mt. 16:13-20; Lu. 4:34-35; Jn. 4:26). **In the first century, the Messiah was regarded more as a warrior than a savior.** Thus, to use it without proper context and/or instruction would lead to wrong conclusions about Jesus. And that’s precisely why the Sanhedrin frame their question this way. If they can get him on record stating that he’s “**the Christ**,” then they can take him to Pilate and accuse him of sedition. Which is exactly what they end up doing. **Though they do not trust him, they want Jesus to admit to being the Messiah. They want to hang him on charges that they themselves do not even believe are true!**

But the Lord was no fool; he knew the game they were playing. Before giving a straight answer, Jesus says, “*If I tell you, you will not believe, and if I ask you, you will not answer.*” Jesus is making **two** points:

Firstly, **if he outright tells them, “I am the Christ,” they won’t believe his testimony, so why should he waste his breath (cf. Jer. 38:15)?** And given out this discourse pans out, the Lord was right (cf. Lu. 22:71). To be clear, this Jesus was not denying being the Messiah; his triumphal entry demonstrated he did not deny being the “King,” aka, the Christ (cf. Lu. 19:38-40).

Secondly, if Jesus asked them, “Do you think I’m the Christ,” they “will not answer.” **In other words, while they undoubtedly denied that Jesus was Christ, they could not defend their position; as such, they wouldn’t give him a straight answer (cf. Lu. 20:1-8).**

However, despite Jesus knowing they won’t believe him, he says, “*But from now on the **Son of Man** shall be seated at the right hand of the power of God.*” This response is nearly identical to

⁶ Bock, Darrell L., *Luke 9:51-24:53*, The Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament, (Grand Rapids, MI; Baker Academic, 1996), p. 1792.

what he said in his inquiry before Caiaphas (cf. Mat. 26:64). In two separate investigations, the Lord hasn't backed down his claims. But Jesus is doing more than simply sticking to his guns. His response reveals **two** important things:

First, he was asked if he was “the Christ.” In response, he affirmed that he was the “Son of Man.” Jesus cleverly avoids incriminating himself and equates the two titles (something the Sanhedrin never disputes).

Secondly, since “the Christ” is equivalent to “the Son of Man,” Jesus wasn't only claiming to be the Messiah but also the mysterious figure from Daniel 7.

READ: Daniel 7:13-14 (ESV)

¹³ I saw in the night visions, and behold, with the clouds of heaven, there came one like a **son of man**, and he came to the **Ancient of Days** and was presented before him. ¹⁴ And to him was given **dominion** and **glory** and a **kingdom**, that all peoples, nations, and languages should **serve** him; his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall **not pass away**, and his kingdom one that shall **not be destroyed**.

Thus, to claim the title of “Son of Man,” the Lord was claiming **vice-regency** with God himself (cf. Ex. 11:5; 12:29; 1 Ki. 1:17; 3:6; 8:25; 1 Chr. 17:16; Psa. 110:1; Eph. 1:19-23; Col. 3:1; Heb. 1:3; 8:1; 10:12; 12:2).⁷ By saying, “*from now on [he would be] seated at the right hand of the power of God,*” the Lord meant his ascension to the throne had **already** begun. It was happening at that moment in history and would continue into the future.

Admittedly, the implications of Jesus’ words **wouldn’t** be apparent to those unfamiliar with the OT, especially non-Jews, such as ourselves, who are living 2,000 years later in the modern West. In contrast, the Sanhedrin wouldn't have been confused. This is why they ask, “**Are you the Son of God, then?**” Clearly, they knew exactly what the Lord was talking about. They knew Jesus’ words were an **explicit** claim to God’s throne, something that would’ve been considered blasphemy since no human being could claim equality with God (cf. Phil 2:6). As Block explains,

“It was the essence of blasphemy since a human seated by God diminishes his stature.... One could stand before him [provided they were cleansed (cf. Isa. 6; Ezek. 1)], but one does not sit with him... Thus, when Jesus says that he can sit at God’s side, he profanes God’s person. If, however he is able to take the seat at God’s side, then implications

emerge about Jesus' person. The leadership understands these implications. **The defendant claims to be the Judge.** With strong irony, the Jews think that Jesus is on trial, but what they do to him does not matter, since he is the true Judge. The very remarks that the Jews think lower God's stature, in fact, show how exalted Jesus is."⁸

And then Jesus says to them, **"You say that I am."** Admittedly, this is a mild affirmation rather than an emphatic one; it's equivalent to saying, "This is what you're inferring" or, with a tinge of irony, "You have said it!"⁹ But we must remember he's not in a good faith argument and so would be careful how he phrases his words. Nevertheless, it is clearly not an outright denial of his divine status, thus confirming that he was the "Son of God."

Nevertheless, the council took it as a clear affirmation. At this point, the religious leaders felt they had all the evidence to convict. So, they said, **"What further testimony do we need? We have heard it ourselves from his own lips."** The council has no further questions.

So, what's the takeaway? Honor awaits those who **declare** the truth.

READ: Acts 7:54-60 (ESV)

⁵⁴ Now when they heard these things they were enraged, and they ground their teeth at him. ⁵⁵ But he, full of the Holy Spirit, gazed into heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God. ⁵⁶ And he said, "Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God."

⁵⁷ But they cried out with a loud voice and stopped their ears and rushed together at him. ⁵⁸ Then they cast him out of the city and stoned him. And the witnesses laid down their garments at the feet of a young man named Saul. ⁵⁹ And as they were stoning Stephen, he called out, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit." ⁶⁰ And falling to his knees he cried out with a loud voice, "Lord, do not hold this sin against them." And when he had said this, he fell asleep.

Jesus is almost always shown seated at the Father's right hand, so it is significant that we see him standing. Nowhere else is the Lord or God depicted this way. What do we make this? Considering this change in posture is in response to Stephen's martyrdom, we must assume that it demonstrates more than just Christ's honored status; it must also be a gesture that honored Stephen's sacrifice.

So, what's the takeaway? Dishonor awaits those who **deny** the truth.

⁸ Bock (1996), p. 1799.

⁹ Bock (1996), p. 1802

READ: Matthew 10:31-33 (ESV)

³² So everyone who acknowledges me before men, I also will acknowledge before my Father who is in heaven, ³³ but whoever denies me before men, I also will deny before my Father who is in heaven.

Deny the Lord before men, and the Lord will deny you before his Father. But honor the Lord before men, and the Lord will honor you before his Father.

Video Description:

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SPEAKER: Ben Hyrne, Pastor

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