

THE KING OF KINGS: A STUDY OF MATTHEW

The King's Commission: A Study of Matthew 21–28

STUDY FIFTEEN

Who's Really on Trial?

Matthew 26:57–75

Jesus was declared guilty of crimes He never committed, endured punishment that should not have been inflicted, and suffered an excruciating death He did not deserve.

—Pastor Charles R. Swindoll

AFTER midnight, Jesus entered the darkest hours of the darkest of all nights. Judas had betrayed Him, the soldiers had arrested Him, and His closest friends had deserted Him. Now, the Jewish authorities, who had previously met at Caiaphas' house to plot "how to capture Jesus secretly and kill him" (Matthew 26:4), returned under cover of darkness to enact the next phase of their sinister conspiracy: to put Jesus on trial and sentence Him to die.

During this awful night of evil, however, God was in full control. According to His sovereign plan, the diabolical plot to murder the Son of God would become the means to save the world when Christ bore sin's curse on the cross.

At His arrest, Jesus reassured His disciples that everything was going according to God's plan: "This is all happening to fulfill the words of the prophets as recorded in the Scriptures" (26:56). Without realizing it, Jesus' enemies were following an ancient script crafted in God's eternal decrees, unwitting actors in the drama of redemption.

As we witness the troubling scenes of Jesus' trial and Peter's denials, let's keep one eye on God's higher purpose. During the night before Christ's crucifixion, at humanity's darkest hour, we will witness God working out our salvation as He turns the tables on the schemes of wicked men.



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Committed to Excellence in Communicating Biblical Truth and Its Application

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PREPARE YOUR HEART

The Lamb of God offered Himself just as the prophet Isaiah foretold:

*“He was led like a lamb to the slaughter. . . .
He was humiliated and received no justice.” (Acts 8:32, 33)*

As you prepare your heart for this study and the studies to follow, thank the Lord for His willingness to bear injustice and abuse for our sake:

Dear Father, Jesus gave thanks before breaking the bread at Passover, and now I give thanks as I receive the morsel of grace He offers me in Himself. Fill my soul with wonder, love, and praise as I witness Christ's suffering and remember He endured it all for me. In His name I pray, amen.



TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

Without the light of Scripture and the clarity of God's purpose, Peter was groping in the dark as he witnessed the horror of Christ's arrest and trial as they were playing out in real time. His mind was awchirl with confusion and fear. Read [Matthew 26:57–75](#), noting the parallels between Christ's experience inside Caiaphas' house and Peter's experience in the courtyard.

In a way, both Jesus and Peter were undergoing trials. Accusers hurled charges at both men, and juries (of sorts) declared verdicts. Jesus' trial occurred “on the record” before high-ranking officials, while Peter's trial took place unofficially in private conversations among servants. Let's take a closer look at the circumstances and determine for ourselves who was *really* on trial.



Observation: Jesus on Trial and Peter on Trial

Observe carefully the side-by-side accounts of Jesus and Peter at Caiaphas' house. Watch for the ways Matthew heightens the impact by contrasting the vile hatred toward Jesus inside the house and Peter's tragic denials in the courtyard.



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How does Matthew set the dual scene in *Matthew 26:57–58*?

Jesus on Trial—Matthew 26:59–68

The Sanhedrin, or “high council” (Matthew 26:59), consisted of seventy-one priests, elders, and scribes, with a quorum of twenty-three members required for an official meeting. Caiaphas, the high priest, presided over the trial.

How does Matthew describe the council members' futile attempts to legitimately charge Jesus, according to 26:59–62? What conclusion does Matthew want his readers to make about the validity of this trial?¹

Unwilling to even acknowledge the false accusation, “Jesus remained silent” (26:63). The frustrated high priest Caiaphas demanded “in the name of the living God—tell us if you are the Messiah, the Son of God” (26:63). What do you observe in Caiaphas' question?



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Jesus' messianic claim was different than the claims of other so-called messiahs who had come and gone before. According to [Matthew 26:64–68](#), what was unique about Jesus that drew the charge of blasphemy? What did their sadistic violence reveal about the true nature of these men?

Meanwhile, Peter sat in the courtyard, at a distance, watching to see what was going to happen. John's account adds that there was a fire, and, no doubt, faces were visible in the flickering of the fire. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll

Peter on Trial—Matthew 26:69–75

Although Peter stood in a courtyard, not a courtroom, he was still on trial when three witnesses accused him of following Jesus. According to [Matthew 26:69](#), [71](#), and [73](#), what were the accusations and who made them?

How did Peter's denials become increasingly insistent to the point of extreme, according to [26:70](#), [72](#), and [74](#)?



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Review *Matthew 26:31–35* and contrast Peter's boasting before Jesus' arrest with his denials afterward. What realization hit Peter after the rooster crowed, according to *26:74–75*?

There are times when tears reveal the first step toward repentance, and Peter's weeping is a case in point. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Interpretation: The Meaning of Jesus' Messianic Claim

Let's take a closer look at Jesus' response to Caiaphas' demand, "Tell us if you are the Messiah, the Son of God" (Matthew 26:63). Jesus said,

"You have said it. And in the future you will see the Son of Man seated in the place of power at God's right hand and coming on the clouds of heaven." (Matthew 26:64)

Jesus' remark, "You have said it," was the same he gave Judas earlier when Judas asked, "Rabbi, am I the [betrayed]?" (26:25). Jesus said, in so many words, "Yes, you are, you said it yourself." Similarly, Jesus said to Caiaphas, "Yes, I am, just as you say."

To prove His claim in 26:64, Jesus quoted Psalm 110:1 and Daniel 7:13 and applied these prophecies to Himself. What do these verses below teach about the deity of the Messiah? You may recall that Jesus previously used these verses to teach His divine nature in *24:30–31* and *24:41–45*.



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The LORD said to my Lord,
“Sit in the place of honor at my right hand
until I humble your enemies,
making them a footstool under your feet.” (Psalm 110:1)

“I kept looking in the night visions,
And behold, with the clouds of heaven
One like a Son of Man was coming,
And He came up to the Ancient of Days
And was presented before Him.” (Daniel 7:13 NASB)

Jesus had called David and Daniel to testify at Caiaphas' trial—and these witnesses didn't lie! Tragically, the religious authorities in Israel closed their ears to the voices from the past.



Correlation: Added Insight into Peter's Denials

Ironically, Caiaphas echoed Peter's confession at Caesarea Philippi, when Peter declared, “You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God” (Matthew 16:16). However, while Caiaphas was inside making Peter's confession, where was Peter? Outside making denials.

What insight does John give about the circumstances of Peter's first denial, according to *John 18:15–18*? (The disciple who asked the doorkeeper to allow Peter into the courtyard was likely John.)



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What was the connection between the servant in *John 18:26* and the man who Peter had attacked in Gethsemane? How could this servant have put Peter in grave danger?

What detail does Luke's account add (*Luke 22:60–61*)?

What do you imagine Jesus communicating to Peter in that moment?

Three things happened simultaneously: the rooster's crow, the glance from the Lord, Peter's realization of his denials. Jesus' prediction was correct, and Peter "went away, weeping bitterly." —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



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Application: Lessons from Peter

Bold Peter had declared Jesus as Messiah, the Son of God, in pagan Caesarea Philippi. In response, Jesus changed his name from Simon to Peter, the rock (Matthew 16:16–18). Sadly, when the hammer of persecution fell, the rock shattered.

We see ourselves in Peter's fault-lines. Failure is humiliating and devastating. It exposes our inadequacies and reminds us that we are not as impressive as we make ourselves out to be.

Have you had a "Peter" moment in which you fell short of what you vowed? If so, you can understand the bitterness of Peter's grief. What has been the fallout from your failure?

Peter was really the one on trial, and he lost. But we shouldn't judge Peter too harshly, and neither should we be too hard on ourselves. Jesus looks at us in our failure with the same look He gave Peter—not a look of disgust—but of compassion and with a tear of His own. In the end, according to John 21, Jesus restored repentant Peter and gave Him even greater responsibilities.

How might the Lord use your failure to prepare you for His next task for you?



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Remarkably, Peter's downward spiral of denials led him to higher heights of effectiveness. How can that be? Through his failure, Peter learned humility and gratitude—two rocklike qualities of any follower of Christ.



A FINAL PRAYER

Father, when I hear the rooster crowing its indictment of my failure, may my grieving soul fly swiftly to Your feet of mercy. Wash me in the spring of Your forgiveness. Set me on my feet again, tempered by the fire of my trials and filled with the courage of the Savior who never trembled. Grant me the grace to reenter the courtyard of my fears and, this time, stand firm. In Christ's name, amen.

ENDNOTES

1. “According to the Mishnah, no trials were supposed to occur during the night hours or during feasts (*Sanhedrin* 4:1). Trials were to be public, not secret . . . (*Sanhedrin* 1:6; 11:2). . . . Conviction required the agreement of two or three independent witnesses, who would be examined and cross-examined individually (*Sanhedrin* 3:6; 4:1; cf. Deut. 17:6–7; 19:15–20). . . . And when the trial was over, members of the Sanhedrin were to adjourn for lengthy discussion to weigh the evidence, and the voting for or against conviction was to be done in orderly fashion.” Charles R. Swindoll, *Swindoll's Living Insights New Testament Commentary: Insights on Matthew 16–28*, vol. 1B (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House, 2020), 264–65.

