



## BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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The Sermons of Dan Duncan

John 18: 12-24

Summer 2023

"God In The Dock"

TRANSCRIPT

Thank you Seth, and good morning to all of you. We are continuing our studies in the Gospel of John with chapter 18, and we're going to look at verses 12 through 24. We begin this text in the Garden of Gethsemane, and we read,

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

<sup>15</sup> Simon Peter was following Jesus, and *so was* another disciple. Now that disciple was known to the high priest, and entered with Jesus into the court of the high priest, <sup>16</sup> but Peter was standing at the door outside. So the other disciple, who was known to the high priest, went out and spoke to the doorkeeper, and brought Peter in. <sup>17</sup> Then the slave-girl who kept the door said to Peter, "You are not also *one* of this man's disciples, are you?" He said, "I am not." <sup>18</sup> Now the slaves and the officers were standing *there*, having made a charcoal fire, for it was cold and they were warming themselves; and Peter was also with them, standing and warming himself.

<sup>19</sup> The high priest then questioned Jesus about His disciples, and about His teaching. <sup>20</sup> Jesus 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. <sup>21</sup> Why do you question Me? Question those who have heard what I spoke to them; they know what I said." <sup>22</sup> When He had said this, one of the officers standing nearby struck Jesus, saying, "Is that the way You answer the high priest?" <sup>23</sup> Jesus answered him, "If I have spoken wrongly, testify of the wrong; but if rightly, why do you strike Me?" <sup>24</sup> So Annas sent Him bound to Caiaphas the high priest.

John 18: 12-24

May the LORD bless this reading of His Word, and bless our time of study in it together. Let's bow together and seek the LORD's blessing in this time. Let's pray.

Father, what a great privilege it is, and I say this frequently, the privilege to be with Your people on this Sunday morning. We thank You that it's dark outside and it's raining, and we know the blessing of that, and we thank You for that, the refreshment that comes with the rain, and the need that we have of it. So we thank You, LORD, but refresh us as we are in this place with our Bibles open, considering this event in the Lord's life, this beginning of the unfolding of the events of the end and the very purpose for which He came. Teach us and build us up in the faith and refresh us spiritually. Help us to understand the significance of what took place there in the garden, and then there in the palace of the high priest and the trial that Jesus underwent, and make the right applications of all of this to each and every one of us. As the Spirit of God knows, may He open our hearts to receive the ministry here and be built up in the faith through it.

LORD, it's a great privilege to be here, as I said. It's a great privilege to be teaching the Word of God, it's a privilege to be hearing the Word of God. It's also a privilege to do this, as priests, (which we all are), to come to the throne of grace and seek Your help for us personally, for us spiritually, and also to pray for others—to pray for their spiritual needs. And we are debtors to mercy alone, debtors to grace alone—all of us were dead in our sins; all of us were in rebellion against You when You found us and redeemed us at

the cross, and called us to Yourself, and gave us new hearts, new lives, and eternal life; Thank You.

And now bless us, LORD, as we look to Your Word, as we consider the text that we've read. Bless us. And bless us now as we sing our next hymn. Prepare our hearts for this time of study. We pray this in Christ's name, Amen.

*(Message)* In Madrid, Spain, there is a painting, a 17th century masterpiece titled, "Agnus Dei", ("Lamb of God"). It is the portrait of a white lamb, lying on a table; and it's in a sacrificial position, with its legs bound. But it lies calmly with its eyes open. It is a remarkable and moving work for its simplicity and obvious meaning, for it's an allegory on Christ—'Our Sacrifice'. The apostle Paul called Him, "Christ our Passover also has been sacrificed." (1 Cor 5:7).

We see Him in that way in John chapter 18, when He is arrested in the garden and led to the priest with hands bound. This began the Lord's trial with the high priest Annas, questioning Him; and in the process of questioning Him, finding in Him no guilt—just as a Passover lamb was required to be, an unblemished male. The Law required that the Passover lamb was to be kept in the home for four days where it could be observed and carefully examined before being killed.

We see that here in John chapter 18, verses 12 through 24—and really all of chapter 18. In each phase of His trial, (which was not only in a Jewish court, but also in a Gentile court), at the end of the trial, (at the end of chapter 18), Pontius Pilate declared, "I find no guilt in Him." (vs38).

It was near midnight when the soldiers came to Gethsemane, and verse 12 recounts they, "arrested Jesus and bound Him." John's the only Gospel writer to mention that 'the soldiers bound Him.' And he stressed it because it's recorded again in verse 24, "So Annas sent Him bound to Caiaphas the high priest."

Clearly, John included this for a reason. Did it remind him of Isaac, when Abraham took him to Mount Moriah to offer him up as a sacrifice; the one whom God called, "Your son, your only son, whom you love"? (Gen 22:2). The first thing Abraham did was bind him—and here Jesus, who is described in John 3:16 as God's only Son, "His only begotten Son", is bound.

Abraham was prevented from sacrificing his son, but the Father would, of necessity, sacrifice His. And the only thing that really bound Christ was the will of the Father—and Christ's will to obey. He had not resisted His captors; He was, "like a lamb... led to slaughter", as Isaiah prophesied in Isaiah 53:7. But first it was necessary that He should be examined thoroughly to show that He was unblemished—the 'spotless Lamb of God', the 'Passover lamb.' (see 1 Pet 1:19).

So in verse 13, John wrote that the Roman commander and the Jewish officers "led Him to Annas". Not, '*drove* Him to Annas', or '*dragged* Him to Annas', but "led Him", because He went *willingly*—which shows the absurdity of their actions. The innocent Son of God was arrested and treated as a common criminal. The One who came to free the world was made a captive by the world. But only in this way could the world have freedom by the Lord being, "numbered with the transgressors", as again Isaiah prophesied, (Isa 53:12), so that we might be set free by His sacrifice.

So He went willingly, as the author of Hebrews wrote, "for the joy set before Him", (Heb 12:2), which was to please His Father and to redeem His people. The pain of suffering was eclipsed by the joy of saving us.

The trial began at the house of Annas because, John wrote, "He was the father-in-law of Caiaphas, who was the high priest that year." (vs13). Annas was an old man and patriarch of a powerful family in Jerusalem. He had been high priest from the years AD 6 to AD 15, until he was deposed by the Roman governor, Valerius, (*Gratus*), who was Pilate's predecessor.

Which gives us some idea of the spiritual condition of the priesthood at that time. Under Mosaic Law, the high priest was appointed for life. But under Roman

occupation, the governor appointed and removed the high priest, (and Rome certainly wasn't looking for spiritual qualifications in those it put in that position). Those appointed to high priest were men of political and social influence—not spiritual character.

But though Annas had been deposed he continued to hold power and prestige, not only because he was the senior, 'ex high priest' but also because members of his family occupied that position. Five of his sons, a grandson, and a son-in-law, (Caiaphas), served as high priest. And Annas himself continued to be called 'the high priest', even though Caiaphas occupied that office. So Annas was the real power behind the office, and the power behind the Jewish establishment in Jerusalem.

He was a Sadducee, a member of the priestly party, and a fabulously wealthy man. The priests controlled the temple, and his family made lots of money from all the transactions that occurred there—the animals that were sold for sacrifice in 'the court of the Gentiles'. They had a monopoly on that business.

Alfred Edersheim wrote of this in his *History of the Times*, and stated that the rabbis called the market in the temple, 'the bazaars of the sons of Annas.' He was a powerful man. A recent writer called him 'The Godfather.' And it was to this powerful man that the Lord was brought first.

Annas' name means *to be gracious*. But Jesus knew He would receive nothing of grace or justice from him. The Lord had been a thorn in the side of this man, and really a thorn in the side of all of the Jerusalem establishment from the beginning of His ministry. In chapter 2, Jesus entered the temple and cleared out the market when He overturned the tables of the money changers.

Then in chapter 11, He overturned the theology of Annas, when He raised Lazarus from the dead. The Sadducees didn't believe in the resurrection. They were materialists; they were naturalists—religious men, but really secularists. Their beliefs are given for is in Acts 23, verse 8, in that they say, 'There is no resurrection, there is no angel, there is no spirit.' 'We don't have life after death', is what they believed.

So when Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead, it was a denial of their naturalism and a big embarrassment for them. In fact, it was the miracle that finally brought the chief priest and the Pharisees together, (two parties that despised one another), brought them together in a plot to stop Him—a plot to put the Lord to death.

Caiaphas was the leader. That was when he made his statement that John quotes here in verse 14, "It was expedient for one man to die on behalf of the people." He spoke better than he knew, and John explained that in chapter 11, (see verses 49-52), because he unwittingly prophesied the sacrificial death of Christ—"It was for His people." It certainly was for His people down through the ages, "from every tribe and tongue and people and nation." (Rev 5:9). And it was "expedient", (or *profitable*), that one die in our place because, as we've already noted, only in that way could we be saved if God provided a sacrifice as our substitute.

Well Caiaphas, of course, meant something very different from that. He was intending to preserve the status quo by preventing the Romans from reacting to a perceived political threat and destroying the land. Caiaphas, as high priest at the time, oversaw the meeting; he directed it, but Annas was, no doubt, in the thick of it. And now he has arranged to have Jesus brought to him first, so that, as William Barkley wrote, "He might gloat over the downfall of the presumptuous Galilean."

Maybe, but I think of Annas, a man of high position, a calculating man, a powerful man, as more cunning than petty. There was probably a more practical reason for beginning at his house: It gave Caiaphas time to call a sudden meeting of the Sanhedrin, the great court of the Jews, while Annas found something incriminating in Jesus. This phase of the trial is sometimes referred to as 'a preliminary hearing', or 'an inquiry'. It probably is better described as 'an inquisition'.

And as it got underway, we learn in verse 15, that Peter entered the courtyard of the high priest. In that way, John informs us that while the questioning was going on inside the palace, Peter was outside, warming himself by a fire with the enemy—and denying Jesus.

The inquiry followed two lines of questioning. Annas questioned Jesus "about His disciples, and about His teaching." (vs19). First about His disciples in order to learn of anything subversive among them that might prove that Jesus was a revolutionary and a threat to Rome. But He said nothing; He protected the disciples, just as He had in the garden.

But F. F. Bruce asked the question, "What could He have said? Not much to their credit." And that's true. They all had just deserted Him. The only one that had '*conspired*' was the disciple who was on the side of Annas and the priests. But all through His ministry, Jesus had done this; He had kept the disciples near to Himself and *kept them* out of trouble. Their understanding of the Lord's mission was incomplete, and their faith, as we've seen, is very weak. (That would change—and that would change very soon, for they would become publicly bold. Just months after this trial, in Acts chapter 4, Annas would meet them face to face when Peter and John were brought to the Sanhedrin and they confessed Christ— clearly, and boldly.)

But on this night, while His trial was on, Jesus protected His disciples, even while Peter was in the courtyard outside, denying Him—just as the Lord had told Peter He would do. He's the good shepherd; He protected His sheep to the end and wouldn't allow them to be drawn into His sufferings. They could have no part in His sufferings for only He could be the Passover Lamb—the atonement for us.

So He kept them safe from the priests who 'had their knives out' that night. He told Annas nothing about them: That's righteous—that's righteousness. That's putting others ahead of oneself and it's proof of the Lord's purity.

So Annas questioned Jesus "about His teaching." (vs19). And Jesus answered; verses 20 and 21, "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. Why do you question Me? Question those who have heard what I spoke to them; they know

what I said." His response denied Annas the information that he wanted, and instead corrected Annas for not following the proper legal procedures.

Leon Morris, in his commentary, explained that the correct legal form in a Jewish court was for the priest to bring forth witnesses—and first, witnesses for the defense. A case had to rest on the weight of witnesses, (and these witnesses would have been easy to find). Jesus indicated that, since He ‘spoke often and openly’. He had said nothing in secret.

Now Paul said the same thing in Acts 26 when he stood before the Roman governor, Festus, and the Jewish king Agrippa, when he was making his defense before them and a distinguished audience of noblemen and women in Caesarea. He told them, ‘Christ appeared to him on the Damascus road’. He ‘saw the living Christ’, and Christ sent him on a mission to turn the Gentiles “from darkness to light”. (vs18). His message of ‘the crucified, resurrected Christ’ was not invented by him—as he explained. ‘It’s in the prophets. Moses spoke of it.’ (verses 22-23).

Now that’s when Festus interrupted and shouted, ‘Paul, you are mad. Your great learning has driven you mad.’ (vs24). And Paul, of course, denied that. And then he said to them and that company, that he uttered “words of sober truth”, (vs25), and turned to King Agrippa, who he said ‘knew’ all of this. (vs27). He knew these things, "for", Paul said, "this has not been done in a corner." (vs26).

It all happened in the open; there were no secrets here. Paul wrote, in 1 Corinthians 15:6, of all of the appearances that the resurrected Christ made; to the women...to the disciples...in fact “He appeared”, as Paul put it, "to more than 500 witnesses at one time."

What Jesus did in Bethany, when He raised Lazarus from the dead, was common knowledge. John wrote that “many of the Jews saw what He had done”, and ‘some of those went back to Jerusalem and told the Pharisees what had happened.’ (Jn 11:45-46). There were a lot of witnesses to all the things Jesus did and taught. So whatever Annas



wanted to know, he could have learned by following the requirements of the Law—interviewing witnesses and presenting them. But he had not done that.

But then he wasn't seeking truth, but a charge, an indictment, by trying to trap Jesus in His own words and getting Him to incriminate Himself so that they would have grounds for persecuting and condemning Him.

Now this wasn't a formal trial, but it was still legal activity. And it is what men today, (guilty men), do in judging the innocent God. C. S. Lewis wrote on that: His critique of modern man's approach to God is, "Not being like that of an accused person approaching his judge. Just the opposite", he wrote, "Man is on the bench and God is in the dock." That's modern man; well, that's more than modern man but 'Man is on the bench, God is in the dock.'

"The dock" is the place in a British court where a prisoner stands during the trial. And 'Man' has made himself the judge of God. And, as I say, that's always been so, ever since Adam rebelled in the garden: Man has judged God's revelation—what God has said, His words; man has rejected it—whether it's natural revelation or special revelation; the testimony of creation or the revelation of Scripture. Either one is clear; "The heavens are telling of the glory of God." the psalmist said. (Ps 19:1).

But men rejected it. They do reject it; and instead of worshipping the Creator they worship the creation. That's a judgment, that's a verdict when people see the evidence and reject it. They do that with Scripture—they often read the Bible simply to criticize it. Even when it is clear, though, it's "*foolishness*" to them; that's 1 Corinthians 2, verse 14. They examine God's works and words and reject it all. They put 'God in the dock', and make themselves judge. Or, they judge God based on the failings of His people, (and tragically, we often fail). But Christ is the Savior, not His saints—and He never fails.

And that was demonstrated here in this preliminary examination by a priest, who was an enemy, and determined to convict Him of something, of anything—but couldn't.

"Why do you question Me? Question those who have heard what I spoke to them; they know what I said." (vs21).

It was all spoken openly to the world over the three years of the Lord's ministry; in the synagogues and on the hillsides of Galilee.—And in the temple in Jerusalem where He spoke daily and clearly and where Annas could have gone, he could have examined things for himself, as Nicodemus did one night. Or, as the Lord suggested here, 'Examine the witnesses', and could have brought them before him in this inquest. But he didn't, he didn't do any of that.

Nothing about Jesus interested Annas at all; it only alarmed him. Like Caiaphas, he viewed Jesus as a threat to his position and power, to his wealth, and to his way of life. —And so he hated the Light.

That's what's behind all of this: It is a love of sin—not a lack of information, not a lack of opportunity; it was a lack of interest. More than that, it was actual hostility to the Light. And that's what John wrote back in chapter 3, verse 19, "Men loved the darkness rather than the Light, for their deeds were evil." Men *loved* it—they still do; they *love* the darkness.

Just having Jesus in his presence must have been disturbing to Annas, especially since he wasn't getting the conviction he wanted—and, in fact, was being convicted by Jesus for not following the Law.

And that disturbed one of Annas' servants, because when Jesus said to him, (to Annas), 'Why do you question Me and not witnesses?', one of the officers standing there struck Jesus. Well, now things were getting physical—and it was just a sample of the rough justice, or injustice, that He was about to get that night.

The officer did it on the pretext of piety; he said, "Is that the way You answer the high priest?" (vs22). The Lord had said nothing wrong or disrespectful—it was the natural man's response to the Light. This word, "*struck*", means, 'to strike with the flat of one's hand', or 'to *slap* Jesus on the face.' That's painful. [I once heard Muhammad Ali explain what it's like to be punched by a heavyweight boxer. And he said that actually a

hard slap on the face is more painful than a punch in the ring. It's not more damaging, of course, but initially more painful.] And this was sudden, and it was unexpected.

And it was a cowardly thing to do for Jesus stood there defenseless with His hands tied. It was also illegal: No sentence had been passed; Jesus had not been found guilty of anything—and it was wrong, legally, to abuse a prisoner. But it was especially wrong to abuse the One, Matthew said, fulfilled Isaiah 42, verse 3, "He will not quarrel, nor cry out...A battered reed He will not break off, and a smoldering wick He will not put out." (Mat 12:19-20).

He was peaceful and kind; and the result of this abuse was to give further proof of His righteousness from His response to that blow that He received. An unexpected slap to the face would provoke an angry response from most people—not only because of the shock of it, the sting of it, but the indignity of it.

But true to Isaiah's description, the Lord didn't 'quarrel or cry out'. He didn't become angry. But neither did He back down. He respond calmly, He responded wisely; verse 23, "Jesus answered him, 'If I have spoken wrongly, testify of the wrong; but if rightly, why do you strike Me?' " Now, that took courage. The Lord stood alone among enemies, but He continued to challenge them and bear witness to their injustice, while bearing witness to His innocence and righteousness. —And doing it calmly.

He was bound; He was in their domain—yet He was in control at every moment. He held the officer to account for his action, (who couldn't answer Him, just as Annas couldn't answer Him). By His response at every moment and every indignity the Lord showed His life was "holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners", as the author of Hebrews wrote. (Heb 7:26).

And that was proven, not by friends who wanted to uphold His reputation, who would have a reason, an advantage, for showing His innocence. No, His innocence was demonstrated by His enemies: People who were desperate to undermine His reputation, to find some flaw in Him, or to trick Him into incriminating Himself.

But Annas could find nothing; there is no guilt in Christ. So knowing his inquest was futile, he sent Him bound to Caiaphas, the high priest, who by now had assembled the Sanhedrin. There He would again be examined, subjected to illegal procedure, and eventually falsely charged with blasphemy. But the truth is, He was again found faultless—innocent. That's the story here, the innocence of Christ, the righteousness of Christ—He demonstrated it under fire, with courage and calm, with complete control, and showed here, and again later, that He is unique of all men.

What impression did that make on Annas? Was he impressed by Christ's presence, by His poise, His dignity? Others throughout history have been. John Bowring was. He wrote the hymn,

In the cross of Christ I glory,  
towering o'er the wrecks of time;  
all the light of sacred story  
gathers round His head sublime.

Those are beautiful words. Those are true words. But Bowring was a Unitarian: Impressed with Christ's character and dignity, but as ignorant as Annas was of Christ's uniqueness, His *deity*.

It's not enough to think highly of Jesus the man. He is that, and the only perfect man. But infinitely more than that, He is the eternal Son of God who became man. He is the God-man. And He became man to be our substitute. And He demonstrated His qualification to be that, while under intense examination throughout the trial; that He is the spotless Lamb of God, our Passover, fit for sacrifice. That's why He came into this world, to be bound and sent to the cross. As the Dutch theologian Klaas Schilder stated, "He was bound in order that He might set us free."

Only His blood could remove our sin and purchase our salvation. That's how great His sacrifice was, but that's how great our sin is. That's how lost we were—that nothing short of the death of the innocent Son of Man could save us. We read this

chapter in John and we are appalled by the cruelty of Annas and Caiaphas. But the reality is, those men are just a window into our soul. We're made of the same stuff. James Boice wrote that, "Given the right situation and power, each of us would do exactly as Caiaphas or Annas did; we would attempt to get rid of Jesus."

Now that's grace; that's sovereign grace that He would come to die and save us, who by nature are enemies. But by His death He made us friends. —And more: Sons of God and heirs of God with a glorious and eternal future, and giving us a fruitful present, a new life *now*. He makes us *new creatures, forgiven, saints*, a people He is presently changing, so that we share His character, so that we are increasingly like Him, (like what we see here in this trial before Annas).

The more we see Him in Scripture, and study Him, and fellowship with Him, the more we become like Him. We grow, as Paul told the Corinthians in 2 Corinthians 3:18, we go "from glory to glory" in this present life. As you study the Word of God, as you consider the person and work of Christ, you are being "transformed" greatly, "from glory to glory", Paul said. He enables us to stand before the world as He did, to represent Him and the truth of the Gospel, and serve Him faithfully.

And this fallen, dark world needs that today. It needs faithful witnesses to God's free grace. May God make us that, make us those witnesses.

If you're here without Jesus Christ, maybe believing He was a great man, maybe even honoring Him as the greatest man, "towering o'er the wrecks of time", you're still lost—just as Annas was lost. So I challenge you, 'Put God in the dock', put Him on trial. Read the Bible. Examine the claims of Christ to see if they are true. But I warn you, others have done that to disprove all of this, only to see the truth of it and be brought to faith in the One who proved Himself the spotless Passover Lamb, who saves all who believe in Him. And if you do, it's by His goodness and grace, and we should be praising Him and thanking Him for that.

*(Closing Prayer)* LORD, someday we will all come to that final day. What a blessing to know "The Lord is our salvation", and the debt is paid in full, finished and complete at the cross of Calvary.

Jesus said, "It's finished." I can't add a thing to it. It's wrong to try. That's another gospel, not the Gospel of the apostles. Father, we thank You that He did it all. We couldn't have done it. We thank You that, in Him, through Him, we are righteous before You. We're saved forever.

And LORD, give us the desire to reflect that to others around us, and be faithful witnesses to Him, faithful as He was for us before this evil priest. Thank You for Him and His work, and what He willingly did for "the joy set before Him", to go to Calvary to save His people. Thank You for that.

Now the LORD bless you and keep you. The LORD make His face shine on you and be gracious to you. The LORD lift up His countenance on you and give you peace. In the name of Christ, Amen.

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