

Jesus' Defense before Annas  
John 18:19-24  
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We have gathered here this Lord's Day for a double purpose. We have gathered here to hear Christ proclaimed and to see Christ portrayed. This is truly a dynamic combination when done in spirit and in truth, when done in sincerity and in integrity, when done true from the heart and true to the Bible. Word and sacrament is a powerful combination when the Holy Spirit is present to open our ears to hear and to open our eyes to see.

The message of Jesus is proclaimed verbally, and we cry out, "Faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God." The message of Jesus is portrayed visually, and we cry out, "Sir, we would see Jesus! For everyone who sees the Son and believes in Him has everlasting life, and Jesus will raise him up at the last day."

We see the bread and the wine, and we are reminded that Jesus is our spiritual food and drink. He spiritually nourishes us and makes our heart glad. He sustains our spiritual life, and enables us to grow spiritually.

The verbal word is proclaimed to all, but the visual word, the sacrament, is administered only to some. It is administered only to those who have identified with Christ through baptism, only

to those who possess the years and ability to partake meaningfully and responsibly, only to those who profess faith in Christ, only to those who live a life credibly consistent with that profession.

There is a message for those who do not now partake. The message is a challenge to pray for the gifts of faith and a credible profession and the spiritual maturity to partake of this blessed meal meaningfully and responsibly. Those who do not partake should want to, and should seek that privilege.

There is also a message for those who do partake. The message is a challenge to act out one's faith, to acknowledge symbolically one's dependence upon Jesus for spiritual nourishment and growth. The message is a challenge to identify publicly with Jesus and to renew one's covenant commitment to Jesus.

The sacrament of baptism is like the marriage ceremony. It is that initial act of commitment which is done only once and done once for all. The sacrament of the Lord's Supper is like the daily kiss, the daily reaffirmation of one's commitment, the frequent and regular restatement of one's love and devotion.

In preparation for the Lord's Supper, let's now consider our text and see what we can learn about the saving work of our Lord on our behalf.

On the way to the cross, Jesus endured a number of judicial trials before corrupt individuals. Jesus was willing to submit to

these judicial travesties so He could be our Advocate when we stand in the dock before Holy God. This is a part of the price Jesus had to pay to redeem us. This is a part of the cost Jesus had to bear to offer us the unsearchable riches of His grace.

Our passage for today is about the first of these sham trials. After Jesus was arrested and bound, He was brought first to the house of Annas, who is here referred to as the high priest. The official high priest was then Caiaphas, who was the son-in-law of Annas. And yet Annas is also referred to as the high priest on more than one occasion in the New Testament. Annas had once been the official high priest. A Roman procurator had appointed Annas high priest in 6 A.D., and then another Roman procurator had deposed Annas and appointed someone else as high priest in 15 A.D. Although Annas was then no longer high priest, he nevertheless remained the dominant influence over the Jewish Sanhedrin and the Jerusalem religious hierarchy. Someone else might be the official high priest and the official head of the Jewish Sanhedrin, but Annas was the real head of the Sanhedrin. Besides that, Annas somehow managed to keep the high priesthood largely in his family. In the years that followed, those who were high priest in Israel included five of his sons, one son-in-law and one grandson. So at the time of Christ's trial, Caiaphas was the official high priest, but the real power of that position belonged to his father-in-law Annas. Thus both were high priests in different senses. Caiaphas was the official high priest, and Annas was the virtual high priest, the one with the real power of the office.

Jesus was first brought to Annas so that this older man of experience might have a chance to question Him while his son-in-law Caiaphas assembled the Sanhedrin for a more official but no less corrupt trial. Caiaphas had weeks before decided that Jesus must die, and now he and his father-in-law are looking for an excuse to ask the Roman procurator Pilate to execute Jesus. First Annas and later Caiaphas examine Jesus not to determine if Jesus is innocent or guilty. They simply want to find a basis for having Jesus executed.

Let's consider first the two parties at this preliminary hearing, Annas and Jesus. Annas here represented the Aaronic priesthood of that day. The Aaronic priesthood was a real priesthood with a real ministry in terms of the old Mosaic ceremonies. The Aaronic priesthood also was a type of the coming Messianic priesthood. The high priest in Israel had a turban with a golden plate engraved with the words, "Holiness to the LORD" and the high priest in Israel drew near to God on behalf of God's people through the blood of sacrifice. In these ways, the Aaronic priesthood was truly symbolic of the priestly work of the Jesus. Jesus truly was "Holiness to the LORD." He was holy, harmless and undefiled. He lived a sinless life. He was innocence and integrity personified. And Jesus would draw near to God on behalf of a sinful people through the blood of the ultimate sacrifice, His own death upon the cross. The blood of bulls and goats never took away sin, but the blood of Jesus would. He was the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.

As Annas and Jesus faced each other, Annas represented the Aaronic priesthood, but all that was left was a corrupt shell

devoid of any of its Messianic substance. Outwardly the high priest in Israel oversaw the temple worship of Holy God. Yet inwardly the priesthood at that time was full of dead men's bones. It was but a whitewashed tomb. The family of Annas administered the temple worship as a corrupt business. They had turned the temple first into a house of merchandise and then into a den of thieves.

Before Annas stood Jesus, who was indeed God's Messiah. Jesus had cleansed the temple in Jerusalem twice, once near the beginning of His public ministry and once near its end. On both occasions, Jesus drove out the merchants and overturned the tables of the moneychangers. Jesus was a threat to the priestly hierarchy represented by Annas. As the prophet had said,

Malachi 3:2

2 "But who can endure the day of His coming? And who can stand when He appears? For He is like a refiner's fire and like launderer's soap."

Here we have Annas standing in judgment over Jesus, trying to eliminate Jesus because Annas cannot endure the pure and righteous judgment of Jesus. The corrupt priest is examining the pure Lamb of God who is without blemish and without spot. Jesus is God's truth, but all Annas sees is a threat to his misuse of God's house. Jesus is God's sacrifice, but all Annas sees is One who must be sacrificed so his family can continue its corrupt ways.

We have looked at the two parties, Annas and Jesus. Let's next look at Annas' question. We read that Annas asked Jesus about His disciples and His doctrine. There is a significance in the order in which Annas addressed these two topics. First, he asked Jesus about His followers, and secondly he asked Jesus about His teaching.

Annas is here thinking like the pagan Pilate, who a few hours later will ask Jesus the cynical question, "What is truth?" When one rejects the true and living God, truth as a universal, absolute standard no longer exists. All that remains are the opinions of people. What becomes important is not truth but power, because the opinion which becomes the truth of the day is the opinion with power behind it, the power to impose it upon others.

So Annas' first concern is not the content of Jesus' teaching but the success of Jesus' efforts in building up a following. How successful have you been, Jesus? How powerful is Your following, Jesus? What sort of threat do You represent, Jesus?

Annas asked this question both out of concern and out of curiosity. He asked it out of concern that Jesus was indeed gathering a significant following. When Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead and then entered Jerusalem in His triumphal entry, the Pharisees had cried out, "Look, the world has gone after Him!" It was because of that concern that they had sought to arrest Jesus secretly under the cover of darkness with the traitorous help of Judas Iscariot.

Annas was concerned, and yet I think he also was curious. Why were those in the inner circle of Jesus' followers almost exclusively lower class Galileans? Why had Jesus not given this privileged place to the privileged few who exercised the most pull and opened the most doors and gave the most prestige?

Annas wasn't concerned about whether Jesus' movement had heaven's blessing. All he was concerned about was whether it was a worldly success. He could not understand this Jesus who came first and foremost not to build up a power base but to reveal God's truth. He could not understand this Jesus who called the weak and foolish of this world that through them He might confound the wise and powerful of this world to the glory of God.

We need to take care that we have the mind of Christ and not the mind of Annas. How do we evaluate a church? Is our first concern what the church is teaching or who is going there? Is our first concern whether the church has heaven's blessing or whether it is a worldly success? Is our first concern whether the church is exalting Christ, or whether it has the potential of exalting us and meeting our perceived needs?

We have looked at Annas' question. Let us lastly look at Christ's response. We can analyze Jesus' response from a legal perspective in which Jesus was challenging Annas' methods. Annas was conducting not a fair trial but an interrogation. Annas had not been hearing witnesses and considering evidence. He had instead been probing for a confession and self-incrimination. Jesus challenged this interrogation and exhorted

Annas to call in witnesses and to have a genuine trial instead of a kangaroo court. Calling in witnesses to answer these questions should not be difficult because Jesus had been teaching openly in the synagogues in Galilee and in the temple in Jerusalem. Witnesses could answer Annas' question in proper legal form without interrogating Jesus.

There is that note in Christ's words, but I believe we can also analyze Christ's words as a testimony to the nature of Christ's mission. We saw that with Annas, the concern was disciples first and teaching second. With Jesus, the order is properly reversed. He first talks about the nature of His teaching.

His teaching was open both in the sense of being honest and open in the sense of being public. I am reminded of that computer term WYSIWYG: the abbreviation for "what you see is what you get."

Now Jesus was not denying that He taught His disciples more in depth in private sessions. Sometimes Jesus would teach in parables to the public but only explain them in detail to His followers. The Gospel accounts are very clear that Jesus did this, and Jesus was not here denying that practice. What Jesus is here saying is that all His teaching was cut from the same cloth. His more private teaching was but the further unfolding of what He had taught in public.

Jesus is denying that He has two kinds of teaching, a deceptively harmless kind for public consumption and a much more revolutionary sort for His innermost followers. This is a

characteristic of both religious cults and political revolutionaries.

There are cults which deny the basic message of the Bible, but that is not their public message. In public, they try to sound orthodox. Yet as one advances in the group, the truly radical nature of their teaching is revealed, gradually and slowly so as not to cause the frog to jump out of the ever warming pot.

Also, there are revolutionaries who try to form sleeper cells. They try to appear innocent and to blend into the cultural background. But the members know that they have revolutionary convictions and plans, and that they are waiting for the right moment to reveal their true nature and to fight for their cause openly.

Jesus said that he was leading neither a secretive religious cult nor a secretive revolutionary group. He taught His truth openly, publicly, honestly.

Jesus said that He also taught His truth effectively. All Annas had to do was to subpoena those who heard Jesus teach, and they would know what He had said.

Jesus was saying that His teaching was not secret, and neither was it overly intellectual. It was neither esoteric nor abstruse. His teaching was not some technical, hard to understand philosophy. Intellectually it was not hard to grasp. Even a child could understand Jesus' basic message about repentance and salvation.

Jesus' message was not intellectually hard to grasp. It was, however, morally hard to accept. That was the problem. As Jesus told Nicodemus, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of heaven. What Jesus taught is light, but the problem is that people love the darkness of their sinful ways.

We should follow Jesus' example. We should teach Jesus' truth openly. We should teach Jesus' truth with a simplicity so that even a child can understand the basics of our message. And we should pray for God to work in people's hearts so that they will be attracted to the light of this message and be willing to come out of the darkness of unbelief.

Jesus told Annas that Annas could go and get any of Jesus' disciples and they could tell him what Jesus taught. This reminds us that Jesus expects us to know His truth. We are to be students of the Word, students of the teaching of Jesus. We should know the truth, and we should be willing to testify to that truth even before those who are hostile to it.

Jesus expects us to confess Him before men. A willingness to do that is one of the marks of Jesus' disciples. And Jesus promised that if we will confess Him before men, He will confess us before His Father in heaven. Jesus will confess before the heavenly Father not that we are sinless, not that we deserve heaven or are too good to go to a devil's hell. Jesus will confess that we are sinners who have trusted in Him as their legal Advocate. He will hold out His pierced hands and say, "I have already suffered for this person's sins. The law has been satisfied, and the law does not seek double punishment.

Therefore, in mercy forgive this one and accept Him, even as He has accepted Me in faith.”

One way we can confess Jesus before men is to eat at Jesus’ table. We will have that blessed opportunity today.