

**“A FAIR TRIAL”**  
**John 18:12-14, 19-24**  
**Pastor Keith E. Gephart**

**INTRODUCTION**

We all want life to be fair; the fact is life is seldom fair. We all have to deal with inequities in life. Many turn their backs on God because of unfairness; some “Christians” backslide and become bitter because things happen that they deem “unfair.” Oft times believers struggle and live in miserable circumstances and dysfunctional relationships because of some past or present “unfair” situation or person (s). **We can go through life grumbling and unhappy—yes even miserable—filled with stress and anxiety—because our circumstances are “unfair.”**

We need to recognize that life has not been “fair” since the Garden of Eden! Sin has wrecked lives and ruined relationships and brought misery, sickness, ruin, and death.

Man has brought all of this upon himself, and individuals often bring on much of their own misery. Yet, we still love to blame others or blame God for our messes we create. True, some of our problems are not of our own making, but all of them are the result of sin and rebellion against God, and are made worse by the enemy of the Almighty and of our souls—Satan and his armies.

**Let us stop blaming God and others for our messes. Let us own up to our problems and learn to deal with them properly. When we are not at fault, it is not the problem or the unfairness that makes us miserable—it is our reaction to the problem and the unfairness that makes us so upset and miserable!**

Maybe it will help us if we understand that:

- *Jesus was not treated fairly.*
- *He went through the most miserable circumstances anyone ever had to endure.*
- *He endured what He did for our benefit.*
- *The results of His troubles, actual trials, and resulting death is our blessing.*
- *Happiness and peace result to those who trust in Him.*
- *His followers receive eternal life.*

**GET A GRIP! JESUS CHRIST WAS TRIED SO THAT YOU CAN TRIUMPH!**

In this passage we see from the experience of Jesus that *People make Life unfair, Procedures make Life Unfair, and Problems often go from Bad to Worse.*

**I. PEOPLE MAKE LIFE UNFAIR (12-14)**

Jesus did not really “have a chance” in this situation. *“All the cards were stacked against Him.”* But the beauty of all this is that He knew that everything He endured—all of the unfair treatment—was under the control and guided by the hand of His wise and loving heavenly Father! He said in v. 11: “The cup which the Father has given Me, shall I not drink it?” Yes He did—willingly! **So we should willingly drink the cup God gives us.**

#### A. Law Enforcement (v. 12)

1. The Roman cohort (600 troops; here likely a portion of that. They were stationed at the Fortress of Antonia at the northwest corner of the temple court.
2. The Commander—the “chiliarch” (literally a commander of 1,000 troops; here he is likely the equivalent of a “tribune”—the leader of a cohort.
3. The officers of the Jews (v. 3)—these are called “servants”—they are some of the Jewish “temple guard.”

*None of these people liked Jesus.*

- The Romans could “care less” about Him—except they wanted to preserve order, peace, and quiet. They had been fed misinformation from the Jewish leaders.
- The temple guard were under the orders of Jesus’ stated enemies—“the chief priests and the Pharisees” (v. 3). They would do whatever necessary to get Him back to their leaders.

#### B. Judicial Leaders (13-14)

*Since law enforcement was so much of a problem, maybe Jesus would fare better with the legal system. **NOT A CHANCE!** The legal system—the Jewish high court known as the Sanhedrin—was under the guidance and control of two men: **Annas** and **Caiaphas**. Who were they?*

1. Annas—John is the only Gospel to tell us that Jesus had a separate and informal hearing before Annas. What do we know about him?
  - His name is from the Hebrew Hananiah—“Yahweh is gracious.” Some variants of his name include Hanan, Ananus, Ananias.
  - He was Jewish high priest from 7-14 AD.
  - He was still the ruling spirit of the Sanhedrin and was the dominant member of the Jewish hierarchical machine. (Hendrickson).
  - He was so powerful and influential that he was able to see **five** of his sons become Jewish high priests over the 50 years following his loss of the high priestly appointment at the hands of the Romans. These sons were: Eleazer, Jonathan, Theophilus, Matthias, and Ananus. (The latter is the one who was responsible for the death of James the Apostle in AD 62.)
  - Moreover, he was able to see his son-in-law Caiaphas become high priest from AD 18-36. Also, one of his grandsons became high priest.
  - In the OT the high-priesthood was for life; many likely regarded him as the only legitimate high priest at this time. Thus it is not surprising here that Annas is still referred to as “high priest” (vv. 19, 22). In fact, in the two other places in the New Testament where Annas is mentioned, he is called “high priest” (Lk. 3:2; Acts 4:6).
  - Annas was responsible in a large degree for the actions taken by the Jewish Sanhedrin during all of Christ’s ministry and long afterward.
  - Someone else might be the presiding officer, but he was the man to consult.

- He was proud, very ambitious, extremely wealthy, and notorious for greed.
- The main source of his wealth was the proceeds from the price of sacrificial animals. (Compare the cleansing of the temple by Jesus on two occasions! Jesus declared that the Jewish leaders, led by Annas, had made the temple a “den of thieves”!)
- Even the Jewish Talmud stated: “Woe to the family of Annas! Woe to the serpent-like hisses.” The latter is likely a reference to the whisperings and conspiracies of Annas and his family members in bribery and influence over judges.
- Annas’ house may have been close to Gethsemane. There is a rabbinic tradition that states that the “booths of the sons of Annas” where the sale of many sacrificial animals took place was on the Mount of Olives under two cedar trees. Some believe that these “booths” were adjacent to the temple. We cannot be sure.
- It is likely that the night meeting described here occurred at this place—which apparently included a house wherein Annas lived—possibly along with his son-in-law Caiaphas, the current high priest.
- It is not surprising that Jesus was taken first to Annas. Likely the hope was that Annas would be able to lay the groundwork for the official trial by finding some basis for accusation against Jesus.
- Annas was likely relishing the opportunity to do damage to the man who had twice attempted to undo the source of his livelihood. He would like nothing better than to see Jesus destroyed.

**Now, what is the likelihood that Jesus could receive fair treatment from this man?**

2. Caiaphas—We have already seen that he was Annas’ son-in-law and that he was the current high priest during Jesus’ ministry (v. 13). “That year” does not mean that he was only high priest for one year, but that it was in **that eventful year, that most significant year** of Jesus’ trial and death that Caiaphas was high priest. What do we know about this man?

- He was Annas’ son-in-law and thus was loyal to the cause!
- He had already decided Jesus’ fate after the incident of Lazarus’ resurrection (John 11:50-51). John tells us in v. 14 that he determined it would be “expedient for one man (Jesus) to die on behalf of the people”—rather than for the people to die at the hands of the Romans.
- By making this statement, he had unwittingly prophesied of Jesus’ substitutionary death (11:51-52).

**Now, what is the likelihood that Jesus could receive fair treatment from this man?**

*Now, we have seen that neither law enforcement nor judicial leaders were either willing or able to give Jesus fair treatment. But what about the **procedures** themselves? Maybe those procedures could provide protection and fairness for Jesus? Actually, **Procedures also were unfair.***

## II. PROCEDURES MAKE LIFE UNFAIR (19-23)

### A. The Attempt to Make Jesus Condemn Himself (19-21)

#### 1. Question about His disciples and teaching.

- Jesus ignores the question about His disciples—He is still protecting them!
- Annas was more concerned about what success Jesus has had that he was about real legal issues. He was jealous of Jesus' success.
- Jesus uses the emphatic “I” (3 times) and “Me”. He does not want attention on His disciples.
- He has taught openly—always! This is in **stark contrast** with the sinister plots and schemes of the Jewish leaders.
- His teachings are out there for “the world” to hear. Anyone who came could listen—not merely His own disciples.
- He always used public places to teach—such as synagogues and the temple.
- “All the Jews” came together in places such as this.
- They could question any of these Jews who had heard Him. **They** know what Jesus has said.

#### 2. Jesus here in His answer was demanding that Annas follow appropriate Jewish law.

- He was not allowed to ask Jesus to condemn Himself.
- Witnesses for the defense were always allowed to speak first.
- Witnesses for the prosecution must be carefully questioned and they must be carefully warned to be accurate and fair in their statements.
- Annas made no attempt to secure proper witnesses.

### B. The Physical Abuse of Jesus (22-23)

1. The slap by the petty officer (maybe looking for promotion or recognition).
2. Jesus had not been rude in His speech; nor had He violated His “turn the other cheek” teaching. In fact, this passage shows us the proper way to interpret that teaching. Personal vindictiveness is forbidden, not calm and reasoned response.
3. His reference to not speaking wrongly seems to have primary reference to His Teachings—as elsewhere in this passage—not mainly to His recent comments to Annas.
4. Once again Jesus calls attention to the following of proper legal protocol—getting appropriate witnesses who have heard and can verify His teachings. They can show that Jesus has never been a trouble maker, insurrectionist, or heretic in doctrine.
5. If Jesus is not guilty, why did this man strike him? He had not even been properly tried!

**Everything about this “trial” was a farce. It was really a “mistrial.” There was no attempt here at a “fair trial.” THIS ENTIRE PROCEDURE (including what follows in chapters 18-19) WAS THE MOST SHOCKING TRAVESTY OF JUSTICE EVER PERPETUATED!**

Here we have a “greedy and serpent-like” Annas, the “rude, sly, and hypocritical” Caiaphas, the “immoral, ambitious, and superficial” Herod, and the “self-seeking and superstitious” Pilate! (Hendrickson)

Moreover, there were several illegalities based upon technical details of Jewish law:

- No trial for life was allowed to occur during the night. Yet this incident evidently took place between 1-3 AM.
- This arrest took place following a bribe to Judas.
- Jesus here is asked to incriminate Himself (v. 19). This was not tolerated in the Jewish legal system.
- Rabbinic law prohibited the sentence for a capital crime to be assessed the same day as the trial. The legal body had to wait until the next day after conviction.
- The outcome of the trial had already been decided before the trial began!
- The motive of the trial was envy. The Jewish leaders were losing their grip on the people; Jesus had publicly exposed their corruption and greed and had shamed them in front of the common people.
- On the surface they may have been of calm demeanor; underneath they were “vengefully nettled, convulsively agitated. They were thirsting for blood” (Hendrickson, 396).
- We will see even more travesties of justice in the ensuing passages.
- This event was **MURDER**—it was not a trial. There have been many other acts of miscarriages of justice in the course of human history, but **none can compare to this one!**
- **HERE WE HAVE THE HEAVENLY HIGH PRIEST BEFORE EARTHLY HIGH PRIESTS; WE HAVE THE HOLY ONE STANDING BEFORE WICKED SCOUNDRELS.**

Imagine, Jesus, the “holy, harmless Son of God” standing before such wicked sinners! **What deep humiliation!**

So in Jesus’ case, the **people made His life “unfair”**, the **procedures made His life “unfair,”** and now we see that **His problems go from bad to worse.**

### III. PROBLEMS GO FROM BAD TO WORSE (24)

Annas had been unable to uncover any information that could help him prosecute Jesus. Therefore in frustration he sends Jesus over to Caiaphas—who may have resided in the same large house where the inquiry had just taken place under Annas. It seems as though Jesus had remained bound during this entire proceeding—Annas sent Jesus “having been bound” unto Caiaphas the high priest.

John does not describe the proceedings before Caiaphas. The other Gospels do so. But one thing is clear, **Jesus’ “problems” are just beginning.** So it often is in our lives also.

### CONCLUSION

Life can be tough! In this passage we saw from the experience of Jesus that *People make Life unfair, Procedures make Life Unfair, and Problems often go from Bad to Worse.*

But, you have never gone through anything remotely like what Jesus experienced.

**GET A GRIP! JESUS CHRIST WAS TRIED SO THAT YOU CAN TRIUMPH!**

Life is not always fair. Praise the Lord that it isn't, or Jesus would never have died for our sins, we would not be saved, and we would not go to Heaven when we die!

**Accept the unfairness of life; stop complaining; live life to the glory of God.**

If Jesus could endure the cross, you can endure your troubles.