

Luke 22:63-71 The Beginning of Jesus' Trials, or God in the Hands of Angry Sinners¹

One of the most well-known and powerful sermons ever preached in America was titled "Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God." Jonathan Edwards first preached it in 1741. It's still considered one of the greatest sermons in the English language. The sermon vividly portrays sinners under God's wrath, on the very precipice of hell, dangling over the lake of fire from a spider's web. It was a very powerful sermon that led to many conversions.

In today's text, we find, not sinners in the hands of an angry God, but *God* in the hands of angry *sinners*. Jesus, God in the flesh, subjected himself to the abuse and false judgment of sinful man. In a very real sense, God was in the hands of angry sinners.

And it might seem as these evil men controlled Jesus' destiny. But we know that Jesus, not these men, is in full control of this process. He's willingly laying down his life as a sacrifice for our sins. These wicked men were unwittingly fulfilling God's plan.

Jesus had been arrested in the Garden of Gethsemane and taken to the home of the high priest. During the time that he was under arrest, he began to experience violent abuse.

Let's walk through the text and see how God was in the hands of angry sinners.

I. Jesus suffers abuse from the soldiers. .63-65

Jesus is being held overnight at the home of the high priest. These events happened early in the morning, sometime before daybreak.

¹ This title from Steven J. Cole, "Lesson 104: God in the Hands of Angry Sinners (Luke 22:63–71)," in *Luke*, Steven J. Cole Commentary Series (Dallas: Galaxie Software, 2017), Lk 22:63–71.

The soldiers here are most likely the temple guard, not Roman soldiers. By this time, Jesus has been interviewed by Annas and Caiaphas. But they have to wait for a while before they can convene the Sanhedrin, the high council of the Jews. So while Jesus is awaiting the next segment of his trials, the soldiers decide to have a little fun with him.

These are fellow Jews, people responsible to guard the temple. You wouldn't expect this kind of behavior from them.

- A. .63 They mocked him. The word (ἐμπαίζω) means “to make sport of.” The word implies contempt, scorn, and ridicule. So they are making fun of him, perhaps mimicking him or repeating some of his claims.
- B. .63end They “smote” him. This word (δέρω) means “to beat, to thrash, to strike.” The grammar here (pres act ptc) suggests continuing actions—they were beating him up.
- .64 “they struck him” – a different word (τύπτω) – “to strike a blow, to stamp a mark upon something.” To be struck in such a way was humiliating.
- C. .64end They asked him to prophesy.
1. Jesus was known as a prophet, so the soldiers are ridiculing him for his supposed prophetic abilities. If he were really a prophet, he could have told them who was striking him even while blindfolded.
 2. Of course, Jesus knew exactly who it was who hit him. He knew every detail of that soldier's life.
 3. Interestingly, Luke uses another word (παίω) for “smote” here. This word seems to emphasize a strike that would produce a sharp pain. The word is otherwise translated at “sting.”
 4. In the space of two verses, we find three different words for “strike.”

So the language here suggests that Jesus endured a thorough, humiliating, sharply painful thrashing at the hands of these soldiers.

Jesus has been accused, but not found guilty of anything at this point. So this beating is illegal.

- D. .65 In addition to that, they spoke blasphemously against him.

1. Blasphemy is slander or abusive language. One author called blasphemy the strongest form of personal mockery and [defamation].²
2. The grammar here (pres act ptc) suggests continuous activity—they were speaking blasphemously against him. They said “many other” abusive, mocking things against him.
3. So these soldiers are both verbally and physically abusive.

App: Unfortunately, people like this are still common today. They find pleasure in abusing others. They are vulgar, violent, and absolutely irreverent. They have no sense of honor or fairness. They amuse themselves by abusing others. People like that are in positions of authority today.

Historically, followers of Jesus have experienced hostility, opposition, and even persecution. We should be prepared to encounter this same kind of thing; we should not be surprised if people like these soldiers oppose and abuse us. It could happen to some sitting here this morning.

Trans: So at the very beginning of this process, Jesus experiences both physical and verbal attack.

II. Jesus endures a trial before the Jewish leaders. .66-71

Jesus had already been interviewed by Annas and Caiaphas. Luke doesn't tell us much about that, except that they brought Jesus into the high priest's house (vs. 54). We can safely assume that Caiaphas or Annas or both interviewed Jesus during that time.

- A. .66 The time—“as soon as it was day.” So that implies that the arrest and initial interview with the chief priests and the abuse from the soldiers happened before daybreak.
- B. .66b The people involved
 1. Elders of the people—heads of the family clans
 2. Chief priests—the chief priest were those in charge of the work in the temple. There was only one *high* priest, but there were several chief priests.

² Hermann Wolfgang Beyer, “Βλασφημέω, Βλασφημία, Βλάσφημος,” ed. Gerhard Kittel, Geoffrey W. Bromiley, and Gerhard Friedrich, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1964–), 621. Originally “calumniation.”

3. Scribes—teachers of the law. These people knew that what they were doing to Jesus was wrong and against the OT law, but that didn't stop them.
4. The Sanhedrin—"their council" (συνέδριον)
 - a) The Sanhedrin was the highest Jewish ruling body in Israel and was granted control by Rome over virtually all internal Jewish matters. It contained seventy members and a president, who was the high priest.³
 - b) This supreme council of the Jews normally met at a building near the Temple. The soldiers "led him into their council" (vs. 66end), so it seems that they brought Jesus to their council chambers, the place they normally met.
5. The council included the main leaders of the Jewish nation. This group spoke for the Jewish people as a whole.

Quote: It is evident that Jesus' death is the consequence of the relentless and overpowering presence of the Jewish leadership.⁴

Jesus had strong support among the common people, but almost all the official rulers of the Jews were against him.

Jesus had predicted that the leaders of the Jews would reject him.

Luke 9:22 [*Jesus said,*] "*The Son of Man must suffer many things, and be rejected by the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised the third day.*"

This was happening according to God's plan. These people are unwittingly fulfilling Jesus' prophecy; they are doing exactly what God's plan required them to do. Yet they are also doing what they want to do. God is sovereignly fulfilling his plan, and yet those operating within that plan are absolutely responsible for their own actions.

³ Robert H. Stein, *Luke*, vol. 24, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1992), 570.

⁴ Joel B. Green, *The Gospel of Luke*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1997), 791.

Quote: The purpose of God is brought to completion by the very ones who have most [ferently] resisted that purpose. More specifically, the Jewish leaders are provided all of the evidence they need to recognize Jesus as the Messiah, the Son of God; but, [they fail] to believe (as he has prophesied, v 67).⁵

App: There is no lack of evidence proving that Jesus is whom he claimed to be. We have all sorts of evidence leading to that conclusion. The problem is that “the natural man receiveth not the things of the spirit of God, neither can he know them” (1 Cor 2:14). The problem is that “the god of this world hath blinded the minds of them that believe not... (2 Cor 2:4). Rejecting Jesus is a spiritual issue, not a logical or intellectual one. People reject Jesus because they do not want him as their Lord. “We will not have this man to rule over us” (Luke 19:14).

C. .67 The question

1. “Art thou the Christ?”
 - a) The word “Christ” is the Greek translation of the Hebrew title “Messiah, anointed one.”
 - b) The Jews expected their Messiah to come and set up a kingdom in which the Jewish people would prosper and enjoy peace and security. That’s what they were looking for, and that’s why they rejected Jesus—he didn’t bring in a physical, earthly kingdom that they expected.
2. Of course, the leaders of the Jews knew that Jesus was claiming to be the Messiah. They knew that many of the Jewish people believed in Jesus as the Messiah. But they did not accept Jesus’ claims. Cf. John 1:11

D. .67b-69 Jesus’ responses

1. “You won’t believe me if I tell you.” Jesus knew that the Jewish leaders had no intention of considering the evidence. They were immune to proof; their minds were already made up. This was a sham trial. They were not looking for the truth.

⁵ Joel B. Green, *The Gospel of Luke*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1997), 793.

2. .68 “You won’t answer my questions.” I.e., they were not about to engage in a debate with him. It would have been impossible for him to mount a defense at this point. The Jewish leaders were unpersuadable.
3. .68b “You won’t let me go.” Nothing that Jesus could say would satisfy the Jewish leaders.

App: Jesus tells us that in some cases, we should not cast our pearls before swine (Mt 7:6). I.e., it’s useless to tell the truth to those who stubbornly refuse to accept it. Paul tells us that the Gospel is foolishness to many people (1 Cor 1:18). Sometimes, people will absolutely, categorically refuse the truth. They are simply not open to persuasion and will not even consider the proof. Jesus himself could appear before these people, and they would still refuse to believe. That’s how hard and wicked the human heart can be.

4. .69 I am the Messiah.
 - a) He calls himself the “Son of man.” That’s a well-known title from the book of Daniel.

In Daniel 7:13-14, the prophet has a vision in which one like the Son of man is given dominion, glory, and an everlasting kingdom. By using this title for himself, Jesus is claiming to be the fulfillment of that prophecy. All the members of the Sanhedrin would have understood the title that Jesus used for himself here.

- b) Jesus would “sit on the right hand of the power of God.” Only the Messiah had the right to that position.

Psalm 110:1 *The Lord said to my Lord, “Sit at My right hand, Till I make Your enemies Your footstool.”*

- c) So when you put it all together, Jesus is claiming to be the Messiah. He asserts that he is the fulfillment of these OT prophecies. He doesn’t say it directly, but he clearly implies it in terms the Jewish religious leaders would understand.

E. .70 Another question and response

1. “Art thou then the Son of God?”

- a) The Jewish leaders understood what Jesus was claiming. The only one who had the right to sit at the right hand of God was the Son of God, the Messiah.
- b) It seems likely that the Jewish leaders wanted Jesus to state openly that he was the Son of God. They could then take that claim to Pilate and charge Jesus with insurrection. The Romans would not be concerned about Jesus if he were merely a false prophet. But if Jesus were a political threat to the Roman system, then they would deal with him very harshly.

App: Note those two questions—“Art thou the Christ?” (vs. 67) and “Art thou then the Son of God?” (vs. 70).

How do you answer these questions? Is Jesus the Christ? Is he the Son of God? I.e., is he whom he claimed to be? In order to be saved, you must personally affirm that Jesus is indeed the Christ, the Son of the living God. Cf. Rom 10:9

If you don't affirm that truth, you cannot be saved. Acts 4:12.

- 2. .70b “Ye say that I am.” What does Jesus mean by that?
 - a) His answer is not a straightforward, clear-cut affirmation. It's affirmative, but in a roundabout way. It's as if Jesus does not think these people are entitled to a straight answer. He doesn't seem to want to give them the answer they are looking for.
 - b) By saying it this way, he emphasizes that the Sanhedrin identify him as the Messiah—“you are saying that I am.” It's something of an unwitting confession of Jesus' true identity in the mouths of unbelievers.

F. .71 The conclusion

- 1. The Sanhedrin had enough evidence to conclude that Jesus was whom he claimed to be—the Son of man, the Son of God, the Messiah.
- 2. The Sanhedrin understood Jesus to be affirming the question. To them, that was a claim to be equal with God. And that was blasphemous to them.

In a certain sense, they were right. If Jesus were *not* the Son of God, to claim that he was would be blasphemous. But of course Jesus' claim was true; he was the Son of God.

3. The Jewish leaders didn't need any further witnesses in this trial. They were satisfied that Jesus had condemned himself by his own words. They'd finally caught him saying something that they could use against him.
4. To the Jewish leaders, anyone claiming to be the Messiah, when he was not, was worthy of death.
5. The Jewish leaders now had an allegation they could take to Pilate, the Roman governor. By claiming to be the Messiah, Jesus is claiming to be a king, and that puts him in opposition to the Roman government. He's guilty of insurrection, which is exactly what the Jews charge him with before Pilate in the next passage.

As we consider this first trial that Jesus endured before the Jewish authorities, we must take a side. Either Jesus was whom he claimed to be, or he was not. If the Jews were right, then Jesus was a fraud, just another false prophet who is guilty of blasphemy. But if Jesus' claims are true, then he is the Son of God who today sits on the right hand of the throne of God. So who was right? Is Jesus whom he claimed to be, or is he a fraud and a false prophet?

If he was a fraud, then we can safely dismiss him and pay no further attention to him. But if Jesus was whom he claimed to be, then we must accept him as the Son of God.

The leaders of the Jews had multiple opportunities to accept Jesus' claims. They had enough proof that Jesus' claims were legitimate. But they were not interested in the truth. Jesus was a threat to them, and they wanted to protect their power. They abused Jesus and ran him through these illegal trials because they didn't believe in him.

Perhaps some of us here today are like those soldiers who abused Jesus—violent, blasphemous, irreverent, and vulgar. Many people are just like that today. They have absolutely no interest in Jesus other than to mock him and call him names. I hope that's not true of anyone here.

Perhaps some of us are more like the leaders of the Jews. You are more educated and refined than the soldiers were. But maybe like the leaders of the Jews, you've already made up your mind that Jesus can't be whom he claims to be. You don't want to consider his claims because if they are true, it will require you to change. If Jesus is the Son of God, you are obligated to submit to him and worship him. Perhaps you don't even want to consider that possibility.

The soldiers and the Jewish leaders had their opportunity to turn to Christ in faith. They had an opportunity to learn the truth from him, but they failed to do so. Don't make that same mistake. Your eternal salvation depends upon affirming Jesus claim to be the Son of God. If you think you can mock Jesus and sit in judgment of him, you'll find that *he'll* one day be sitting in judgment of *you*.

Jesus, God in the flesh, submitted himself to the hands of angry sinners. But one day those same sinners will be in the hands of an angry God.