



## **Week 2 - Before the Council**

Jesus continues to endure suffering as his Passion unfolds. Betrayed by a close friend, he faces arrest at the hands of desperate religious leaders who have now gathered to sit in judgment over him. Above all, they seek to accuse him of crimes that would justify his death. They gather false testimony and bring Jesus to a private place. They want Jesus' death, and they want it now. Nothing will stop them.

Jesus does not waver in his pursuit of his purpose. He refuses to engage in high priests' games and uses very few words to defend himself. In fact, he is almost passive before the council. Today, we explore Peter's actions, the priests' role, and the violence that unfolds upon Jesus.



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**Begin** by praying for God's presence to be with the group and guide its discussion.

*Those who arrested Jesus led him to Caiaphas the high priest. The legal experts and the elders had gathered there. Peter followed him from a distance until he came to the high priest's courtyard. He entered that area and sat outside with the officers to see how it would turn out.*

*The chief priests and the whole council were looking for false testimony against Jesus so that they could put him to death. They didn't find anything they could use from the many false witnesses who were willing to come forward. But finally they found two who said, "This man said, 'I can destroy God's temple and rebuild it in three days.'"*

*Then the high priest stood and said to Jesus, "Aren't you going to respond to the testimony these people have brought against you?"*

*But Jesus was silent.*

*The high priest said, "By the living God, I demand that you tell us whether you are the Christ, God's Son."*

*"You said it," Jesus replied. "But I say to you that from now on you'll see the Human One sitting on the right side of the Almighty and coming on the heavenly clouds."*

*Then the high priest tore his clothes and said, "He's insulting God! Why do we need any more witnesses? Look, you've heard his insult against God. What do you think?"*

*And they answered, "He deserves to die!" Then they spit in his face and beat him. They hit him and said, "Prophecy for us, Christ! Who hit you?"*

*[Matthew 26:57-68]*

# The People

- Peter is the only disciple following Jesus during this passage despite Jesus' rebuking him earlier. Why is Peter following him? What might Peter be feeling?
- Caiaphas and the chief priests take center stage. They have likely been following Jesus' ministry for a long time. What role do they play here? What do you think motivates them?
- Who is spitting in Jesus' face and beating him? What do these actions reveal about the perpetrators? Why do you think the events turned violent?

# Jesus

- Jesus remains silent in the face of false testimony. Why do you think he refused to defend himself or tell his story?
- Jesus answers the second question with, "You said it," and gives a bold answer about the future. Why does Jesus allow others to define him here?
- What do you imagine Jesus' emotional state was given his response to the questions?
- The violence committed against Jesus closes out this section of scripture. Matthew does not describe Jesus' response. How do you think Jesus responded? Why?

# Us

- Peter follows Jesus even though Jesus' rebuked his violence in the garden and predicted his denial. How difficult would it be to follow a leader or friend who did that? Would you still follow Jesus after that? Why or why not?
- How difficult would it be for you to remain silent while facing untrue allegations? When have you remained silent in a similar situation? When have you used words or actions instead? What were the outcomes?
- Jesus was not always silent. He taught with words and actions for years before this event. How do we know whether to be silent or to speak?
- It is easy to condemn Caiaphas and the chief priests for their treatment of Jesus. Their demands of him are not unique. Jesus is often not who we want him to be. For example, we demand instant fixes but rarely get them, or we decry suffering that continues despite our prayers. This leads many people to view Jesus and God negatively or deny them. Think about a specific struggle you have been through. What can we do when it feels like Jesus is silent?

**Close** by praying for each person to know how to bring peace and trust God.