

Playing Church with a “User-Friendly God”

Matthew 26:57-68 - NCBC, September 26, 2021

Main Point: **Playing church rejects that Jesus is God.**

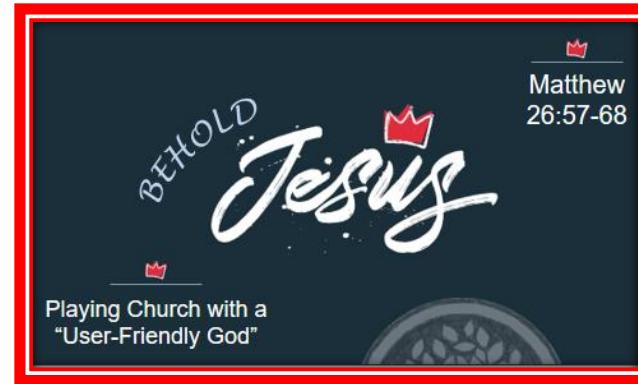
- Playing church suppresses the truth about Jesus (57-61)
 - But Jesus is your righteousness
 - But Jesus is your sacrifice
- Playing church serves your own version of Jesus (62-64)
 - But Jesus is your eternal judge
 - But Jesus is your eternal king
- Playing church commits blasphemy by persecuting Jesus (65-68)
 - But Jesus is the fulfillment of God's promises
 - But Jesus is God in the flesh

Application: **Repent of misjudging Jesus and embrace Jesus as God.**

Opening Announcements:

- Men, you are all invited to a **special Discipleship Dinner** on Saturday evening, **October 9th, at 6:30pm** here in the Family Center. Pastor Tysin Smith will be speaking, and the evening will encourage our faith and relationships together. Please signup today!

<<Jesus Strong and Kind>>



Amen. Our God is strong, and He is kind. He is sovereign, and He is good. And He has revealed Himself to us in the person of Jesus, His Son. So let's open our Bibles to **Matthew 26 verses 57-68** where we *Behold King Jesus* in one of the 6 mock trials He endured in the early morning before His execution.



If you need a Bible, simply raise your hand and we will gladly give you one. You need your own copy of God's Word to read every day. There's no better book you could ever read than the one God wrote! So please, use the Bible that you have, or take one from us today and start reading it for yourself as much as you can. Because only God's Word can reveal Jesus' true identity to you.

Now I want to quickly celebrate what God is doing through all of your prayers, financial partnership, and sacrificial ministry in our After-School Program. As you know, last month God allowed us to launch a Christ-centered after-school program in response to our community surveys.

Now 5 days a week, over thirty students get off the bus here after school and are met by an amazing team of you who love these children, share the Gospel with them, teach them, tutor them, and play games and just befriend these children and their families.

Church – this is amazing front-lines evangelism that God is doing right here – 5 days a week – through your faithful prayers and partnership. We aren't exaggerating when we describe this program like a year-round VBS. The ministry significance of this effort is immense, and already we are seeing how God is using this to bring Himself glory in people's lives.

But this kind of frontlines Gospel work will always be opposed by Satan. Therefore, please remember our After-School Program in your regular prayers. Pray for our amazing staff. Pray for the children whom God has brought us, with all their own needs. Pray for our ministry to parents, grandparents, and guardians whom we serve every day through this ministry. Pray for God to glorify Himself and protect us from evil.

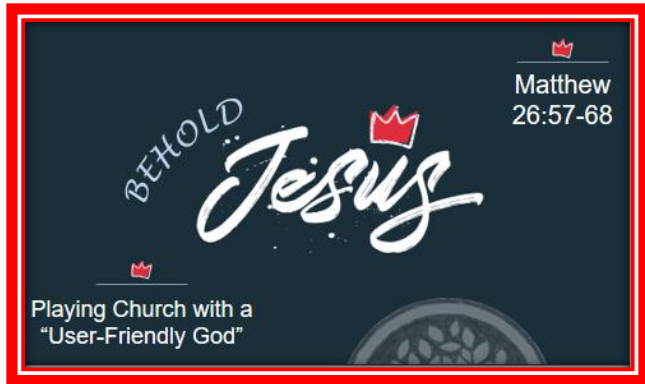
After all, our God is strong, and He is kind. And He is pleased to work through our weakness to bring sinners to salvation and set captives free! So go team Jesus... God is working in and through you!!

The 6 Trials of Jesus		
Religious (Jewish)	1. Before Annas	Jn 18:19-24
	2. Before Caiaphas at night	Mt 26:57-68
	3. Before Sanhedrin in morning	Mt 27:1
Civil (Roman)	4. Before Pilate	Mt 27:2, 11-14
	5. Before Herod Antipas	Lk 23:6-12
	6. Before Pilate	Mt 27:15-26

Now today we turn our attention to the 2nd trial that Jesus endured before His cross. Because when you combine all four Gospel accounts, we see Jesus had a total of 6 mock trials before He was executed. First He had three religious trials before the Jews, and then He had three civil trials before the Romans.

Our Scripture today, **Matthew 26:57-68**, provides a detailed description of what happened during this second Jewish trial... when Jesus was brought before the High Priest Caiaphas and the rest of the Sanhedrin – or ruling Jewish council – in the middle of the night.

The irony of this kangaroo court is tragic. The evil of false religion exposed here is graphic. And the blameless supremacy of Jesus is exalted through it all.



So let's stand together in honor of the reading of God's Word, as I read from **Matthew 26** in the English Standard Version, starting in **verse 57**,

⁵⁷ Then those who had seized Jesus led him to Caiaphas the high priest, where the scribes and the elders had gathered. ⁵⁸ And Peter was following him at a distance, as far as the courtyard of the high priest, and going inside he sat with the guards to see the end. ⁵⁹ Now the chief priests and the whole council were seeking false testimony against Jesus that they might put him to death, ⁶⁰ but they found none, though many false witnesses came forward. At last two came forward ⁶¹ and said, "This man said, 'I am able to destroy the temple of God, and to rebuild it in three days.' " ⁶² And the high priest stood up and said, "Have you no answer to make? What is it that these men testify against you?" ⁶³ But Jesus remained silent. And the high priest said to him, "I adjure you by the living God, tell us if you are the Christ, the Son of God." ⁶⁴ Jesus said to him, "You have said so. But I tell you, from now on you will see the Son of Man seated at the right hand of Power and coming on the clouds of heaven." ⁶⁵ Then the high priest tore his robes and said, "He has uttered blasphemy. What further witnesses do we need? You have now heard his blasphemy. ⁶⁶ What is

your judgment?" They answered, "He deserves death." ⁶⁷ Then they spit in his face and struck him. And some slapped him, ⁶⁸ saying, "Prophecy to us, you Christ! Who is it that struck you?"

This is the reading of God's Word. Please be seated.

Let's pray.

There's nothing more important for you and me than what we believe about God. A.W. Tozer is famous for saying the most important thing about you is what comes to mind when you think about God. After all, if you have a low view of God, and you believe God is just simply a more powerful and smarter version of yourself, everything else in your life will be out of focus as well.

If you have a low view of God, you will stand over the Scripture when you study it, to make the Scriptures conform to your own predetermined doctrines and pride.

If you have a low view of God, you will despise His ways that you do not understand and will ultimately remake a god in your own image.

A low view of God treats Jesus like a Divine "Santa Claus" who fundamentally exists to serve me. A low view of God prays only to change God's mind, rather than to submit my own will to His.

You see, only a biblical view of God is strong enough to pull us out of our self-worship so that we can actually love and serve people who are different than us.

Only a high view of God is powerful enough to humble our pride and empower our courageous faithfulness in making disciples.

Only a high view of God can bring revival and repentance to hearts. Only seeing God as He truly is will keep us from imbalance in our doctrines, devotion, and duties together in the church. Only seeing God for who He truly is will offer hope to the parent of the prodigal, or the addict who is enslaved to sin, or the oppressed who is suffering great injustice.

After all, knowing the true God is the greatest cure for all of our problems. We were created to know God and worship Him for who He is. Yet, the knowledge of the Holy now seems to be the greatest “unknown cure” for all people...even tragically in the church. We’ve so succumbed to a level of man-centeredness in our religion that we’ve become content serving a “user-friendly” god of our own making. We selectively chosen which of Jesus’ attributes we are going to celebrate and which we reject. We dress up our man-made version of Jesus in religious garb and play church together in the comfortable space of the puny and tame god that we have fabricated for ourselves.

But loved ones, God is not like us. He is the Creator, and we are His creation. He is Lord, and we are His slaves.

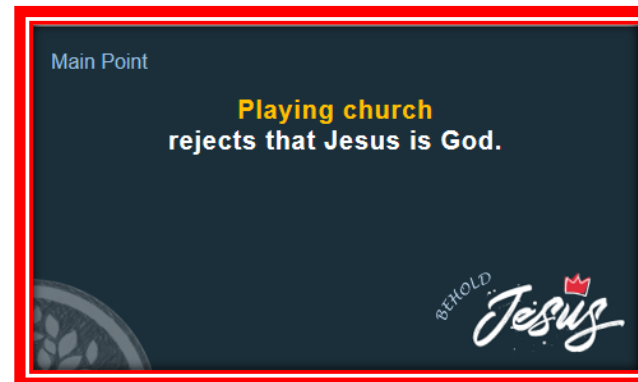
And to refuse to worship a God we cannot fully understand is to fundamentally judge God, while just playing church.

Tragically, it is quite easy to “play church” isn’t it? To play the part of a Christ-follower on our “public outside,”

while our “private inside” selectively rejects parts of who Jesus is and what He demands from me. But “playing church” is as far as false religion can ever take you.

Today’s Scripture exposes the detailed anatomy of false religion. The evil of those who claim to represent God while they are actually blaspheming God is tragically ironic.

And so as we walk through this mock trial together, we will discover three different ways that,

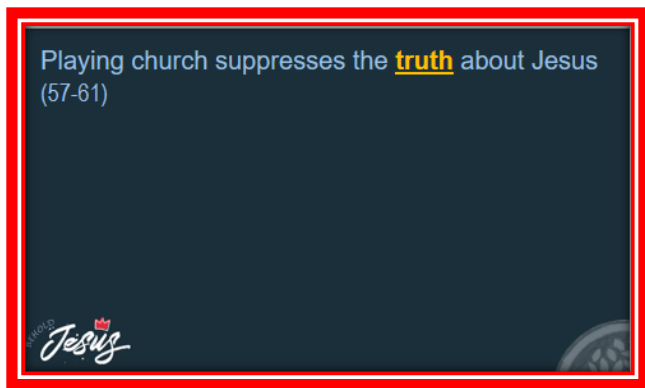


Playing church rejects Jesus as God.

This is a sober study for us this morning, but there could hardly be a more important focus for our attention together. We must learn from the religious unbelief in Caiaphas and the rest of the religious leaders in this text, and behold Jesus as the Divine King that He truly is!

For only seeing Jesus as He truly is will save us from the ironic blasphemy of all false religion who simply plays church with a “user-friendly god.”

So let’s first learn how,



Playing church suppresses the truth about Jesus.

Verse 57 picks up the account to tell us what happened after Judas and temple guard arrested Jesus and all the disciples deserted Him.

After a brief trial with the former High Priest Annas, (referenced in **John 18**¹), those who seized Jesus led Him to Caiaphas the high priest, where the scribes and the elders had hurriedly gathered in the middle of the night to capitalize on Judas' betrayal.

Remember this wasn't according to Caiaphas' plan: they had wanted to avoid any arrest of Jesus during the Passover celebration.² And in fact it was illegal for the Sanhedrin to convene and produce any judicial judgments at night. But when Judas arrived ready to betray Jesus on Thursday evening, they couldn't pass up the opportunity. Unwittingly they actually fulfilled God's Divine plan for Jesus' death at just the right time.³

Verse 58 tells us that Peter⁴ was given enough courage to get close enough to see how this was all going to turn out. Perhaps it was Peter's eye-witness account that Matthew later relied on when writing this Gospel?⁵

But **verse 59** makes the evil intentions of this kangaroo court explicit:

The chief priests and the whole council were seeking false testimony against Jesus that they might put him to death.

Note this: their verdict was already determined. Now they just needed to fabricate the right evidence that supported their judgment against Jesus, and then they would feel "religiously justified" in their murder of Him.

Can you see the willful blindness of false religion here?

These Sadducees were willfully turning a blind eye to the fact that they were blatantly breaking God's law in many ways, while they were still seeking to obey selective parts of God's law in order to stay "religious."

So listen carefully: whenever you just play church...and you're more focused on how things look on the outside to others, rather than how your heart actually is before God. Whenever you are more concerned about your religious traditions and your religious systems more than you are with letting God be God... you're just playing church. And playing church always leads to suppressing the truth about who Jesus truly is.

¹ John 18:13-24

² Matthew 26:5

³ Matthew 26:2; 1 Corinthians 5:7

⁴ And also John, c.f. John 18:15-16

⁵ Even if not, 2 Peter 1:20-21 reminds us that what Matthew recorded was the very words of God, and are therefore true and trustworthy.

What truth about Jesus were these hobby Christians rejecting here?

First, Caiaphas and his cronies willfully rejected that Jesus was righteous. **Verse 60** emphasizes the integrity of Jesus when they couldn't even find two liars who could agree that Jesus had anything worthy of death.

Verse 61 makes it seem like they finally got two lairs to agree in the early morning hours about what Jesus had said about His death and resurrection three years earlier, as recorded in **John 2:19**. But **Mark 14:59** points out that even these two testimonies eventually fell apart and proved unable to condemn Jesus to death.

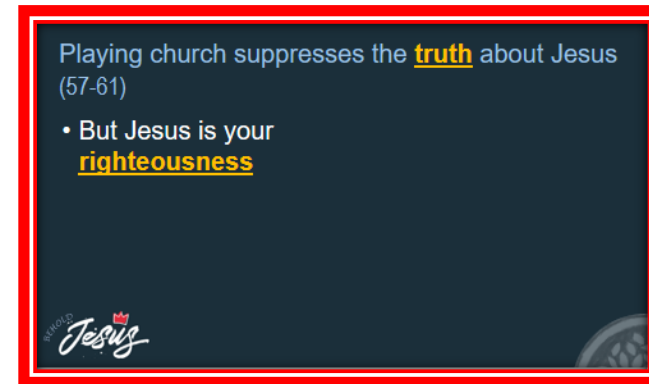
So Caiaphas and his court were denying that Jesus was righteous, and second, they were rejecting that Jesus came to deliver His people from sin by dying and rising again after 3 days.

Now at first, we might question whether Caiaphas really understood that Jesus had promised to rise from the dead after 3 days. But if you flip over to **Matthew 27 verse 63**, this same group of religious leaders ask Pilate to make the tomb secure for three days since they remembered how Jesus said He would rise from the dead on the third day. So these religious leaders clearly understood that Jesus intended to die and rise again, but they suppressed this truth and refused to believe anything that threatened their own self-made religion.

Jesus was a threat to their temple economy. He was a threat to their pride. He was a threat to their ability to comfortably continue their fickle worship to a tame god.

And so they willfully suppressed the truth about who Jesus really was, while affirming their own willful unbelief.

So church, let me make this very clear for us today. Playing church will suppress the truth about Jesus,



But Jesus is your righteousness.

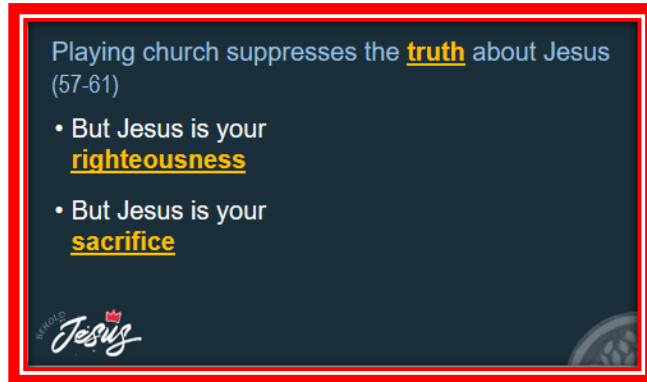
Make no mistake about it, only Jesus can satisfy the righteous requirements of God's law on your behalf.

Playing church is an exercise of self-reliance and self-righteousness. So if you've become intoxicated by your own self-righteousness, wake up and realize your only hope for a righteous standing before our Holy God is if your life is hidden in Christ's.

You must not suppress this truth: Jesus is Holy. He never sinned. He's always satisfied God's law. Jesus has loved God perfectly, and loved His neighbor perfectly. Without exception. No matter what others may think of Him, Jesus is perfectly righteous...and the only

way you can experience a God-pleasing righteousness for yourself is through faith in Jesus.⁶

In other words, contrary to the willful blindness of the Sanhedrin,



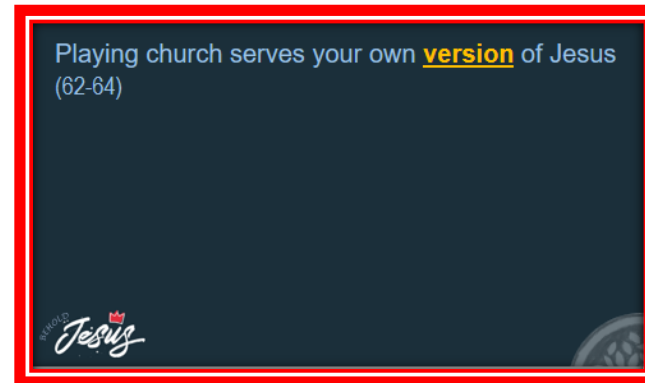
Jesus is your sacrifice.

Jesus died in your place, to pay the penalty that your sin deserved. Yes, this is offensive to human pride. Yes, all false religion rejects such humbling truth.

But this is the biblical view of our God. God Himself died for undeserving sinners who were unable to do anything to merit or earn our salvation. When we were unable to save and rescue ourselves, God saved us. All by His grace, not of works lest we would boast.⁷

So don't be like Caiaphas, loved ones. Don't play church. Embrace Jesus as your righteousness. Embrace Jesus as your sacrifice that alone makes you pleasing to God. Jesus died and rose again 3 days later to put your pride and self-righteousness to death, to

mercifully give you the freedom of joyful love. Jesus is no man-made god... but as our text goes on to show us,



Playing church will only serve your own version of Jesus.

Because in **verse 62**, Caiaphas did something that was illegal for the High Priest to do: he stood up, and he interjected his own voice into the judicial proceedings.

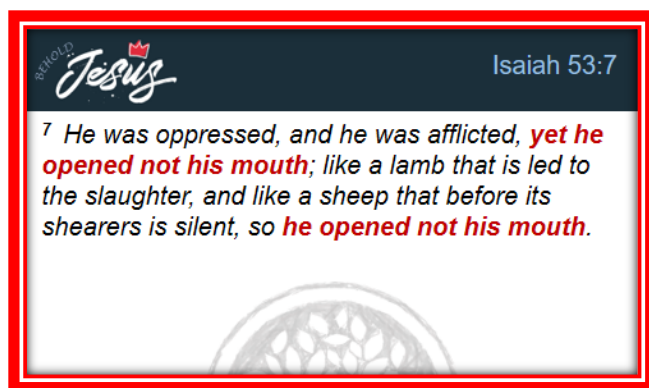
The high priest wasn't supposed to do this. The Sanhedrin was to be trusted with the legal proceedings, and the high priest himself was to stay out of the fray.

But Caiaphas is running out of time. In his haste, he can't get any of the liars to agree. The morning is coming to soon expose their unjust proceedings to all the Passover pilgrims in the city.

And so in his frustration, Caiaphas tries to goad Jesus into engaging with the liars around him.

⁶ 1 Corinthians 1:30-31; 2 Corinthians 5:21

⁷ Ephesians 2:8-9



But in fulfillment of **Isaiah 53**, Jesus remained silent. *Like a lamb that is led to the slaughter, ... he opened not his mouth.*

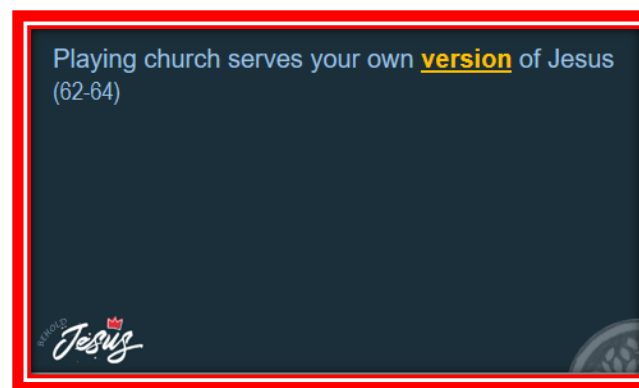
So Caiaphas does the only thing He knows to do: He puts Jesus under oath, and asks Him directly,

Are you the Christ, the Son of God?

Are you the promised Messiah from God that fulfills all of our Old Testament Scriptures? Are you really God?

And Jesus' reply in **verse 64** is interesting, isn't it? Because Jesus doesn't directly answer yes... but instead says, "Yes, but I wouldn't say it the same way that you do."

You have said so...



In other words, and listen carefully, Jesus knew that Caiaphas and the religious leaders had made up their own version of who the Messiah was to be, and what the Messiah was to do.

For Caiaphas, the Messiah was a nationalistic military leader who would help throw off Rome's rule, strengthen the Sadducees' religious systems, and serve his earthly prosperity. According to Caiaphas' way of thinking, the Messiah would be on his side, not against him and the rest of Judaism.

Caiaphas had made the Messiah in his own image, and refused to believe that the real Messiah wouldn't affirm his own religious constructs.

So what about you? Have you exchanged the truth of God for lie, by creating a more "user-friendly god" that affirms your own lifestyle, or simply exists to provide for your own needs?

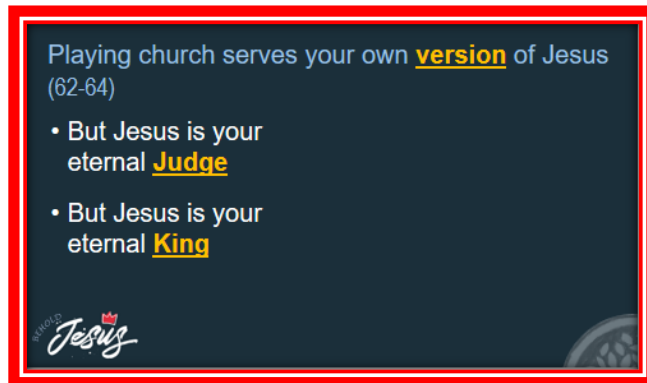
Loved ones... I want us to consider carefully how Jesus responded to Caiaphas under oath. **Verse 64** offers a Mount Everest view of who Jesus is... that is far higher than how we often think of Him!

Jesus basically said this in **verse 64**: Yes... I am the Messiah, but I'm not the kind of Messiah that you have imagined in your own mind. I'm not the version of Jesus that you are expecting.

But I tell you all ... and note the "you" here is plural so Jesus is speaking to all the Sanhedrin ... from now on you will see the Son of Man seated at the right hand of Power and coming on the clouds of heaven.

Translation: Yes, I'm the Messiah. But that means that my future is seated at the right hand of God – in fulfillment of **Psalms 110:1** – and I will be your judge – in fulfillment of **Daniel 7, verses 13-14**.

Yes, I'm the Messiah, but that means that you are condemned, for all authority has been given to me, and all my enemies will be made my footstool!



You see, loved ones, when we play church we tame God in our minds, and we fit Him neatly into comfortable theological boxes that we can understand and accept.

But look carefully at what Jesus says in **verse 64**. Jesus is your eternal judge. And Jesus is your eternal king.

No one has more power and authority than Jesus. No one has a higher standard of righteousness and justice than Jesus.

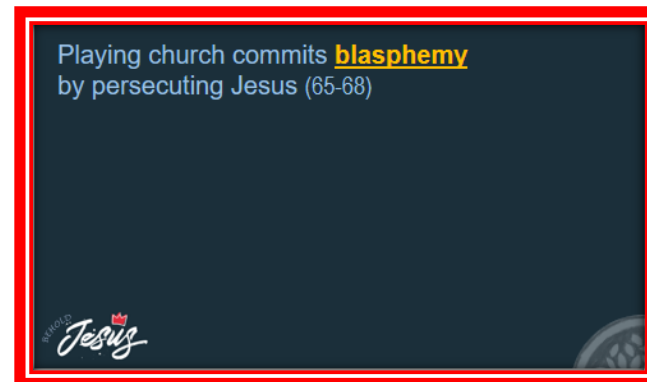
When we play church, we think we are able to judge Jesus. But here Jesus sets the record straight. He clearly reveals Himself as God, and then warns the accusers that they are about to become the accused.

Loved ones... we must allow God to be God. Jesus does not ultimately exist to make us healthy, wealthy, or wise. Jesus is Lord, and He will judge every soul according to the righteous standard of His perfect law on the last day.

Only those who believe in His righteousness and sacrifice will be accepted.

So will you repent of trying to reinvent God in your own image? Will you recommit to studying the Scriptures and allowing the Holy Scriptures to reveal who God truly is in all of His glory?

Because here's the horrific irony that I pray we can all learn from today:

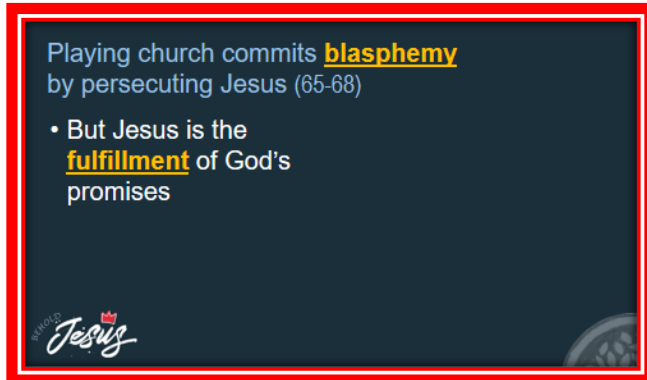


Playing church commits blasphemy by persecuting Jesus.

Isn't it ironic that while the high priest tears his robes and pronounces Jesus guilty of blasphemy, in fact he is the one committing blasphemy?

Because Jesus actually told the truth, but lying men refused to accept the truth against all the evidence.

Caiaphas and his court refused to consider the evidence for Jesus' clear claim that He was God. Since the evidence didn't fit their own self-serving preference, they thought it was better to murder Jesus than give any serious consideration to the fact that He may indeed be telling the truth.



But Jesus is the fulfillment of God's promises. Everything that God has promised and told His people from the beginning of time is ultimately fulfilled through Jesus.⁸ Jesus, as He truly is, is the only hope for God's people!

So make no mistake about it, loved ones. When you accept God's Word as true, it clearly points to the deity of Jesus as the Messiah, the Son of God. The only way to know the real Jesus is to read the Scriptures and believe the Scriptures' description of Him... even when you don't fully understand or agree with what the Scriptures say.

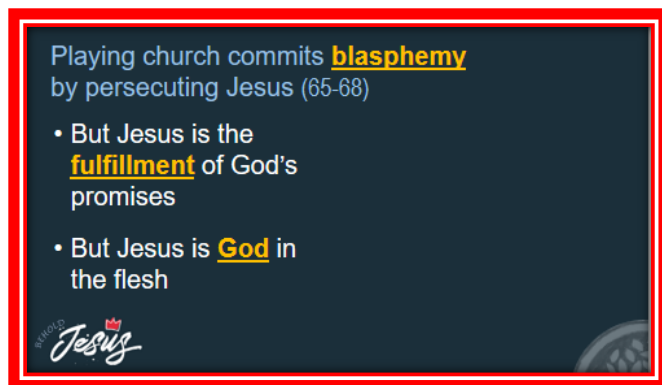
God's Messiah would be:	Scripture
Born in Bethlehem	Micah 5:2
Born of a Virgin	Isaiah 7:14
Descendent of King David	2 Samuel 7:12
Preceded by a figure like Elijah	Malachi 3:1; 4:5
Doing many great works	Isaiah 61:1-2
Entering Jerusalem on a donkey	Zechariah 9:9
Betrayed by a close friend	Psalms 41:9
Despised & rejected by His people	Isaiah 53:2-3

For example, just think about all these Scriptures that the high priest would have likely had memorized...but in his blind unbelief, he refused to consider their witness for the truthfulness of Christ.

Micah 5:2 taught that Messiah would be born in Bethlehem. Jesus was. **Isaiah 7:14** said the Messiah would be born of a virgin. Jesus was. Jesus was a descendent of David, fulfilling **2 Samuel 7**. He was preceded by a figure like Elijah, fulfilling **Malachi 3**. He did many mighty works in the witness of the entire nation, in fulfillment of **Isaiah 61**. He entered Jerusalem on a donkey in fulfillment of **Zechariah 9**. He was betrayed by a close friend in fulfillment of **Psalms 41**. And even in this kangaroo court, **Isaiah 53** was being literally fulfilled as His people despised and rejected Him.

⁸ 2 Corinthians 1:20

But religious unbelief cares more about traditions and culture than about what God's Word actually says. So loved ones, make no mistake today:



Jesus is God in the flesh.

Jesus is not just a little smarter or stronger than us. Jesus is not just a better version of us. Jesus is God. And because Jesus is God, He is worthy of all of our worship and obedience and praise... even when our flesh doesn't like it, or His Lordship seems inconvenient for us in the moment.

When you are only playing church, you will always reject this truth, and you will diminish the glory of Jesus to be something that your own mind can understand and your own religion can accommodate.

And then you will do what you ought not to do, because look at what happens now in **verse 67**:

Then they spit in his face and struck him and some slapped him, saying, "Prophecy to us, you Christ! Who is it that struck you?"

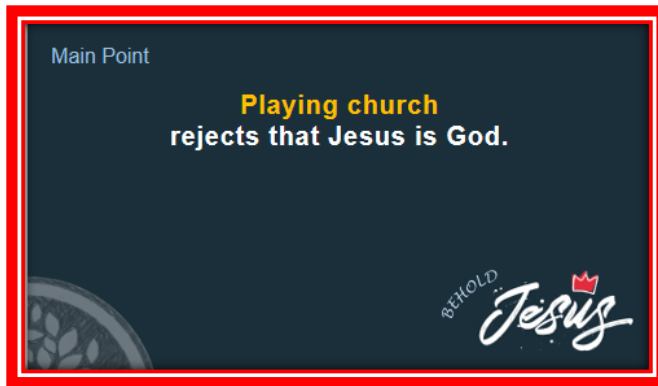
Jesus had just said He was going to assume the place of highest honor – at the right hand of Power. So they spit in His face... the greatest act of shame possible for a Jew.⁹

Jesus had just claimed to have all authority in fulfillment of **Daniel 7**, so they struck his face to prove they had more power than Him.

Jesus had just claimed to be God in the flesh, so they slapped Him and mocked His refusal to prophesy and show them that He indeed possessed God's omniscience.

You see, Caiaphas and the leaders were self-affirmed in their verdict. The fact that Jesus refused to claim honor, power, and omniscience for Himself was proof to their evil minds that they had given the right verdict, and that Jesus could never be God.

⁹ C.f. Isaiah 50:6
Page **11a** of 14

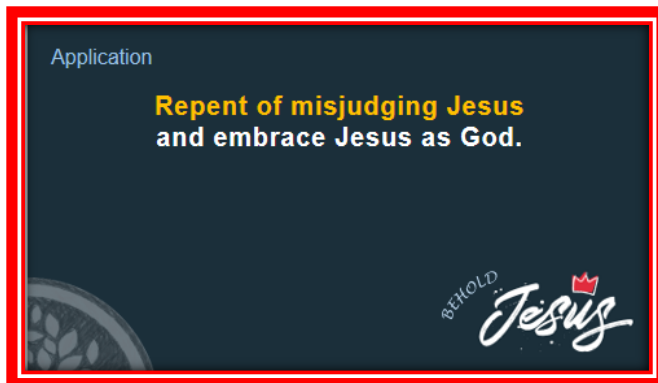


But playing church will always reject Jesus as God.

Because when you're just playing at religion, your own self is your final authority, and you will always reject the witness of any Scripture that inconveniently contradicts your own preferences.

So then what should we take away from this study today?

I believe we must humbly,



Repent of misjudging Jesus and embrace Jesus as God.

This admittedly takes a lot of grace. Only a humble heart will be willing to acknowledge where I've constructed my

own version of a user-friendly god in place of the biblical Jesus.

So pray for faith and humility, and then ask yourself these questions:

- What most embarrasses me about Jesus or biblical Christianity? What does the Scripture say about whatever embarrasses me?
- Are there any attributes of God, or biblical doctrines, that I despise and reject contrary to the clear witness of Scripture?
- Do I fundamentally trust myself, or God, for my eternal destiny?
- Are there any biblical commands that I'm willfully refusing to obey?
- What first steps can I take to renew my mind with a biblical view of God, contrary to any cultural view of God that I may have adopted?

Because here's the wonder of God's gospel, church: God has purposefully revealed Himself to us so that we can know Him just as He is! God has shown us His glory in the person of Jesus Christ! O come to know Him as He truly is, and worship Him. For there is no God like our God! Only Jesus is perfectly righteous, and sacrificial in His provision for you. Only Jesus is the eternal Judge and King for all people for all time. Only Jesus is God in fulfillment of all the Scriptures.

So believe on Him. Worship Him. And Love Him. He died and rose again in your place so that you could truly live forever with Him, and never again have to play church with a self-made, user-friendly, god.

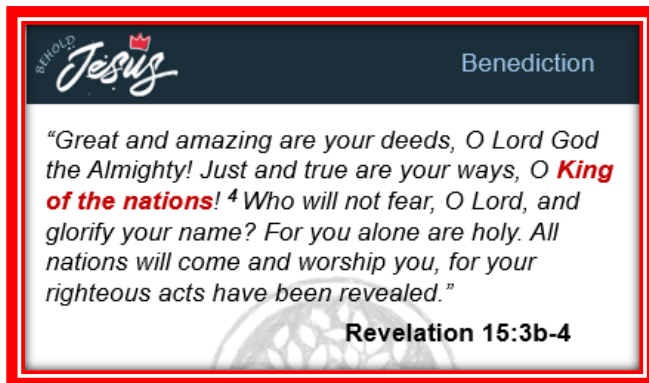


Let's pray.

<<Jesus Shall Reign>>

Let's pray our benediction together:

<<Music Ministry Info Luncheon TODAY at Noon in the Intersection Café. Come explore the wide range of service opportunities in our music ministry! All are invited!>>



Great and amazing are your deeds, O Lord God the Almighty! Just and true are your ways, O King of the nations! Who will not fear, O

Lord, and glorify your name? For you alone are holy. All nations will come and worship you, for your righteous acts have been revealed.
Revelation 15:3b-4



Recommended Resources on Playing Church:

- Leviticus 24:16
- Deuteronomy 16:18-20; 19:16-19
- Psalm 38:12-14; 50:21; 110:1
- Isaiah 50:6; 53:7
- Daniel 7:13
- Mark 14:53-65
- Luke 22:54-71
- John 2:19; 18:12-24
- Romans 1:18-32
- 1 Peter 2:22-24
- <https://str.typepad.com/weblog/2014/05/remember-hands-when-arguing-for-jesus-deity.html>
- <https://answersingenesis.org/jesus/jesus-is-god/is-jesus-god/>
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6hRvOg4G81o> “A Puny God” by Steve Lawson
- *The Darkness and the Glory*, Harris
- *Made in Our Own Image*, Lawson
- *Attributes of God*, Pink

Growing Deeper: Life Group Questions

1. Review Matthew 26:57-68. What do you find most ironic about how the religious leaders and Caiaphas were acting throughout this “kangaroo court”?
2. Compare John 2:19, Matthew 26:60-61, and Mark 14:57-59. What did Jesus originally mean when He said what He said in John 2 (c.f. 2:21-22)? In light of Matthew 27:63, how did these leaders interpret Jesus’ words from John 2:19?
3. Read Daniel 7:13-14 and Psalm 110:1. These are the verses Jesus’ references in Matthew 26:64. What is Jesus communicating to all the Jewish leaders (the “you” in v. 64 is plural) in this statement?
4. Compare Isaiah 53:7 with Matthew 26:63, and Isaiah 50:6 with Matthew 26:67. How was Scripture being fulfilled to prove that Jesus was God at the very time when the religious leaders were accusing Him of being a fraud?
5. Which truths about Jesus are you most likely to suppress or despise? How are you most tempted to make Jesus in your own image? Are there any ways that you are living which you believe are pleasing to God which in fact are bringing harm to Jesus and His body?