

## Jesus on Trial

Mark 14:53–72

As we close out Ch. 14, we move deeper into the dark of night, both literally and figuratively. It is late Thursday night. The arrest of Jesus leading to the sham trial in the High Priest's palatial home is a violation of the law that the religious leaders say they uphold. The darkness of the night seems a metaphor for the darkness of their evil hearts. The light of a courtyard fire flickers on Peter's face and triggers what leads to his prophesied dark denial.

There is something in us that craves happy endings — even in sermons. As we work toward the resurrection, *happy ending* doesn't begin to describe the eternal victory that we will see. But before we get there, as we preach through these events one week at a time, it seems to get darker and darker at this point in the Lord's life. But the deeper the darkness of night, the more brilliant and transforming the light of the resurrection. So today, and for the next few sermons, we feel the heavy darkness leading up to the crucifixion. It's Thursday very late. But resurrection Sunday is coming.

John tells us he is first taken to Annas, the former high priest. Mark skips Annas and takes us immediately to Caiaphas, the current high priest and son-in-law of Annas.

**Mark 14:53–72** — <sup>53</sup> And they led Jesus to the high priest. And all the chief priests and the elders and the scribes came together. <sup>54</sup> And Peter had followed him at a distance, right into the courtyard of the high priest. And he was sitting with the guards and warming himself at the fire. <sup>55</sup> Now the chief priests and the whole council were seeking testimony against Jesus to put him to death, but they found none. <sup>56</sup> For many bore false witness against him, but their testimony did not agree. <sup>57</sup> And some stood up and bore false witness against him, saying, <sup>58</sup> "We heard him say, 'I will destroy this temple that is made with hands, and in three days I will build another, not made with hands.'" <sup>59</sup> Yet even about this their testimony did not agree. <sup>60</sup> And the high priest stood up in the midst and asked Jesus, "Have you no answer to make? What is it that these men testify against you?" <sup>61</sup> But he remained silent and made no answer. Again the high priest asked him, "Are you the Christ, the Son of the Blessed?" <sup>62</sup> And Jesus said, "I am, and you will see the Son of Man seated at the right hand of Power, and coming with the clouds of heaven." <sup>63</sup> And the high priest tore his garments and said, "What further witnesses do we need? <sup>64</sup> You have heard his blasphemy. What is your decision?" And

## 2

they all condemned him as deserving death. <sup>65</sup> And some began to spit on him and to cover his face and to strike him, saying to him, “Prophesy!” And the guards received him with blows.

<sup>66</sup> And as Peter was below in the courtyard, one of the servant girls of the high priest came, <sup>67</sup> and seeing Peter warming himself, she looked at him and said, “You also were with the Nazarene, Jesus.” <sup>68</sup> But he denied it, saying, “I neither know nor understand what you mean.” And he went out into the gateway and the rooster crowed. <sup>69</sup> And the servant girl saw him and began again to say to the bystanders, “This man is one of them.” <sup>70</sup> But again he denied it. And after a little while the bystanders again said to Peter, “Certainly you are one of them, for you are a Galilean.” <sup>71</sup> But he began to invoke a curse on himself and to swear, “I do not know this man of whom you speak.” <sup>72</sup> And immediately the rooster crowed a second time. And Peter remembered how Jesus had said to him, “Before the rooster crows twice, you will deny me three times.” And he broke down and wept.

### PRAY

The religious leaders make up the ruling Sanhedrin and have portrayed themselves as perfect keepers of the law now abandon all pretense. Mark tells us they have been plotting to kill him since he healed a man’s withered hand on the Sabbath, back in Ch 3. They have loved presenting themselves as the epitome of godliness, but their corrupt hearts have motivated everything about them. They have cherished their sin, and now it is fully grown and bringing forth death.<sup>1</sup> That is what corrupt hearts do — but those captivated by a corrupt heart also have blind eyes and cannot see it without the convicting power of the Holy Spirit.

The whole of the trial is full of violations and errors. We hope that any trial of any crime is to be held in a very public way with the goal of discerning truth. This sham is held in the middle of the night with no public notice in the private chambers of the high priest. Worst of all, the outcome of the trial was a foregone conclusion. They weren’t seeking truth.

**v 55** — [They were] **seeking testimony against Jesus**. They were pursuing every avenue to find something against him and were willing to manufacture anything from anyone to support a death sentence. They were not attempting to determine truth. Their agenda was not to find truth, but to kill the One who is the Truth. But they couldn’t find credible witnesses.

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<sup>1</sup> James 1:15

What do you do when you find no testimony and no evidence? Well, you entice people make it up, and vv 56 & 57 describe that charade. They parade some number of witnesses through, and I can't find any degree with each other. They go to his prophecy about destroying the temple and rebuilding it in three days. It is clear from the scripture that he's talking about his body, which they are about to hang on across, and he will be raised in three days. But they can't get any sense out of any of that.

Undeterred by fake and conflicting testimony, the high priest asks him questions rooted in his blind unbelief: **Are you the Christ, the Son of he Blessed?** It is a remarkable question because it indicates that they are clear about the claims that Jesus made about himself. They know that he claims to be the Messiah, the Son of God. In spite of the miraculous signs, in spite of the Old Testament pointers and fulfilled prophecies, they have chosen unbelief, and cultivated a murderous hatred for the Son of God. They will not be able to claim that they did not understand in the great judgment. They know.

**Had** there been any doubt, Jesus answers the question in a way that makes it absolutely clear to those who pride themselves in studying the Scriptures. He makes known his deity by quoting from **Psalm 110** and **Daniel 7**. Let's read those prophetic passages that point to the Son of God.

**Psalm 110:1** — The Lord says to my Lord:

“Sit at my right hand, until I make your enemies your footstool.”

**Daniel 7:13–14** — “I saw in the night visions, and behold, with the clouds of heaven there came one like a son of man, and he came to the Ancient of Days and was presented before him.

<sup>14</sup> And to him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him; his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom one that shall not be destroyed.

It had been granted to the prophet Daniel to see into the very throne room of heaven, and describe the glory and authority of the son of God — just like it was granted to the Apostle to look into heaven and describe the glory and authority of Jesus, the Son of God. I hope you heard the language of the call to worship from revelation, five and the striking similar language of Daniel 7. Behold your God: the one who has dominion and glory, and the kingdom overall. All peoples nations languages serve him because he has purchased them by his blood.

You will recall that one of the purposes of the Gospel of Mark is to introduce us to Jesus, the Son of God, the Messiah. In all the previous chapters every miracle, every encounter, every teaching has been underscoring who Jesus is. Now in this dark hour he continues to make it plain using the very words of Scripture of which these men are scholars.

They understand exactly that he says he is God's Son. But they reject him. That's what is happening in v 64 with the dramatic ripping of clothes that signaled that someone had insulted the holy name of God — an act of blasphemy. It would, indeed, have been blasphemy had one of them said it. But this was the Son of God, and he was speaking truth. But since they reject truth, they think they now they have what they were looking for. Leviticus 24:16 defines blasphemy as a capital crime and they will now demand that Rome put him to death.

It's shocking what this reveals about the willfully rebellious men. Consider the utterly unmerited love and grace of God through this lens: Self-righteous sinful men convict the sinless Son of God of evil while justifying and excusing themselves. They sentence to death the only One able to pay their death penalty for sin. Yet Christ willing ***laid down his life*** in order to save such wicked sinners. They did not take his life. He gave it willingly. He received this charge from the Father.<sup>2</sup> In so doing God made Christ, who knew no sin, to be sin for us that we might become the righteousness of God.<sup>3</sup> Those who turn to him — who look to him in faith are so counted righteous.

Do you feel the thunderous moral and spiritual dissonance between evil men who think they are righteous charging the only One who is righteous with sin? And then he willing goes to pay for that sin! See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God!<sup>4</sup> How can one wrap their mind around such un-earned love and grace?

***Why should I gain from his reward? I cannot give an answer.***

***But this I know with all my heart: his wounds have paid my ransom.***

At the cry of blasphemy from the high priest, it seems like most of the room converges on him to spit on him to beat him. It is a further fulfillment of prophecy in Isaiah 50:6 — I gave my back to those

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<sup>2</sup> John 10:18

<sup>3</sup> 2 Corinthians 5:21

<sup>4</sup> 1 John 3:1

**who strike, and my cheeks to those who pull out the beard; I hid not my face from disgrace and spitting.** Back in **Mark 14, v 65** — They **spit** on him, they beat him, they mock him, and **the guards received him with blows**. He gives his back to them.

This part of the trial concludes with this brutality. Next week we will see him taken first to Pilate, then to Herod, then back to Pilate. But before we leave this night, let's turn our attention to the High Priest's courtyard below where Peter seems himself to be put on trial by a servant girl.

The bitterest fulfillment of any prophecy for Peter now unfolds in the middle of the night as those warming themselves around a fire, starting with a young girl, recognize him as a follower of Christ. She first directs her accurate accusation against Peter. "You were with him." He lies and denies. ***I neither know nor understand what you mean.*** This muscular fisherman cowers at the statement of a teenage girl. A rooster crows. Soon the girl points out to others that Peter had been with Jesus. Again he lies and denies. Then, perhaps, as the group talks with each other with a little more light from the fire, they all agree: "You are one of his disciples." They say so, and a third time he lies and denies, now with anger, and cursing. And immediately the Lord's prophecy is fulfilled as the rooster crows a second time. Realizing this awful prophecy against him is fulfilled, he weeps bitterly.

How did he get here? We have had several hints that Peter would not have a great outcome — at least not yet. Let's consider a couple of those indicators and learn a lesson.

<p>But for me it is good to be near God; I have made the Lord God my refuge, that I may tell of all your works. Ps. 73:28</p>
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Look back up in **v 54** — **Peter has followed him from a distance**...

In **Mark 8:34** Jesus said anyone who would be with him had to follow him. That makes sense. Peter heard it, but edits and interprets the command for his own comfort. He is following, isn't he? But from a distance, so as not to be too closely identified with Christ or receive the hatred Christ receives. Peter determines to cut a middle path *between* close loyalty to the Lord, and the approval of the world. No such path exists. The Lord did not allow for it in the verses that followed back in **Mark 8** — **And calling the crowd to him with his disciples, he said to them, "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake and the gospel's will save it. For what does it profit a man to gain the whole world and forfeit his soul?"** (Mark 8:34-36) Jesus spoke in the binary: you are either actively following me, or you are actively following the world. You either love me, or you love the world. You either seek the approval of God, or the approval of man. **Beware the**

## 6

***beginning of backsliding in your heart that is revealed by distance between you and Jesus that you either tolerate or engineer.***

There is another cautionary lesson. Just before this, in v 34, Jesus told him to **watch and pray** so that he wouldn't enter into temptation. There is no indication there was much of either. He doesn't appear to have any awareness of the magnitude of the spiritual battle that he is entering. He just stumbles into it thinking he'll be OK. How foolish he was to trust his own strength and determination in a time of temptation. Though he swore he would not deny Christ, he just did so with gusto. He said he wouldn't abandon Christ though everyone else did, but he is already keeping his distance.

Have you determined you will never deny Christ? Do you imagine that in times of great spiritual struggle and difficulty you will have the determination and fortitude to resist and stand? Will you in your fearlessness cast down Satan and defeat all temptation, whether external or internal? Any effort we make to deliver ourselves in our own strength from temptation and sin will surely produce the same fruit of denial and failure that it did in Peter. Spiritual work is only accomplished by the Holy Spirit. If we are to be empowered by the Spirit of Christ, we must remain in Christ.

Our groups have just recently gone through John 15 and that serves as our powerful instruction for how to remain in Christ. So reaching back and understanding that we cannot accomplish God's will in human effort is part of the recipe, if you will. The rest of the recipe comes on the other side of the Cross of Christ and the grave of Christ. The guilt and shame of Peter's denial looms before us today. But the price of his sinful failure is about to be paid. And the power to ***not walk*** in this kind of failure is about to be given to us through the resurrection of Christ and the coming Holy Spirit who will indwell every believer with the resurrection power. We end in what must seem a very hopeless place for Peter. And if nothing further happened – if there were no cross and no resurrection – it would be utterly hopeless. We do well to feel that hopelessness. Let it be a reminder to us that if we do not embrace by faith the guilt- and shame-cleansing sacrifice of Christ and the life-giving resurrection of Christ, we will hopelessly fail — no matter how much noise we make on the front about never denying Christ. As we continue to sail into the headwinds of cultural contempt for Christ, let us grow deeply in our communion with Christ. Abide in him! And let us confess our sin and embrace the forgiveness found in the cross, and let us fearlessly and boldly walk forward in obedience in the resurrection power of Christ that defeats any threat to our souls.

**PRAY**