

## **A Testimony of Eternal Significance**

The Gospel of Mark: Mighty and Mild / Mark 14:53-65/ August 4, 2024

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### **Introduction:**

Throughout history there have been many attempts to discredit the gospel of Jesus Christ. Once Satan knew he was defeated by the death and resurrection of Jesus, he has been working to spread doubt and confusion about the gospel. One attempt has been to discredit the deity of Jesus Christ. If one denies Christ is the Son of God, they can deny both His claims and His work. If you take away Christ's divine nature, you remove His glory. If you lay aside the truth that Jesus Christ is God, you lose the weight of God's love and mercy at the cross. Church, this is a truth the enemy doesn't want you to believe. Early attempts accepted Christ as the Messiah but suggested He was only a man. Some even agreed to the virgin birth but denied the preexistence of the Son. Later attempts came from Arianism, which believed in the preexistence of Christ, but held that He was the first created being by God instead of God Himself. This false teaching led to the formation of the Nicene Creed which says, "We believe in one God, the Father almighty, maker of heaven and earth, of all things visible and invisible. And in one Lord Jesus Christ, the only Son of God, begotten from the Father before all ages, God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God, begotten, not made; of the same essence as the Father. Through him all things were made. For us and for our salvation he came down from heaven; he became incarnate by the Holy Spirit and the virgin Mary, and was made human. He was crucified for us under Pontius Pilate; he suffered and was buried. The third day he rose again, according to the Scriptures. He ascended to heaven and is seated at the right hand of the Father. He will come again with glory to judge the living and the dead. His kingdom will never end." (Nicene Creed A.D. 381). The early church knew the importance of connecting Christ's divine nature with His work, so they sought to combat Satan's deception with this creed. Despite this, there are still attempts to discredit this truth today and we need to know how to combat it. One place in scripture to confirm the truth of Christ's divine nature is found in our passage today where Mark helps us see,

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Many details in this story point to one truth as the focal point, starting with the scene is set. Look at verses 53-54, "And they led Jesus to the high priest. And all the chief priests and the elders and the scribes came together. 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." Following the betrayal and abandonment Jesus in the garden, we see Him led to the high priest with all of the Sanhedrin coming together for a trial. In verse 54, we discover Peter he followed at a distance and ends up in the courtyard of the high priest. Mark will turn our attention back to Peter in the courtyard in verse 66 to recount his denial of Jesus. Note how Mark intentionally places Peter's denial in time with Jesus' trial. Through this, he establishes a contrast between Jesus' affirmation of the truth with Peter's denial of it, drawing our attention to the truth Jesus affirms. With the scene set, look now at verses 55-59, "Now the chief priests and the whole council were seeking testimony against Jesus to put him to death, but they found none. For many bore false witness against him, but their testimony did not agree. And some stood up and bore false witness against him, saying, '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.'" Yet even about this their testimony did not agree." As Mark details the trial, he starts with the council's intent clearly spelled out. They arrested Jesus without evidence and are seeking to convict Him of something that would sentence Him to death. Note the emphasis on their failed goal in these verses. In verse 55, they found no testimony worthy of death. Then, twice in verses 56-59, Mark points out how several false testimonies did not agree. Mark ensures we understand they could not fill the laws requirement of two agreeing witness found in Numbers 35 and Deuteronomy 17 & 19. Before we move on, consider the particular charge singled out, "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.'" This appears to serve two purposes for Mark. First, it reveals the central cause of the Sanhedrin's disdain for Jesus.

From the moment Jesus condemned the temple and religious body of Israel in Mark 11, they have been seeking to destroy Him because it meant their removal from power. This claim will later fuel their mocking during His crucifixion. While this charge wasn't able to convict Jesus, we see it's pivotal role in His rejection by the Sanhedrin and most of Jerusalem. Second, it appears to serve as a reminder that Christ would building something far greater than the temple. Interestingly, Mark uses a Greek term for temple that designates the sanctuary, instead of using a term for the whole temple complex (R. T. France, *The Gospel of Mark: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, 606). He is also the only gospel writer to include the contrast of a temple "made with hands" and one "not made with hands." Later New Testament authors often refer to God dwelling in a place not made with hands. In Acts 7:48, Stephen says, "the Most High does not dwell in houses made by hands." In Acts 17:24, the apostle Paul says, "The God who made the world and everything in it, being Lord of heaven and earth, does not live in temples made by man." The author of Hebrews speaks of Christ's work in Hebrews 9:11-12, saying, "through the greater and more perfect tent (not made with hands, that is, not of this creation) he entered once for all into the holy places." Then in Hebrews 9:24, "Christ has entered, not into holy places made with hands, which are copies of the true things, but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God on our behalf." Paul, in Ephesians 2, and Peter in 1 Peter 2 both speak of how the church is being built into a temple and dwelling place of God, with Christ as the cornerstone. In the false testimony of these witnesses, Mark appears to be pointing to the greater reality they failed to realize. The temple was a copy of the holy places, and its destruction meant it was no longer part of God's purposes. Christ was entering into the true holy places to make a one-time sacrifice that would lead to something much greater than the temple being built, a permanent dwelling place of God not made with hands, to exist for all of eternity. Notice what happens next in verses 60-62, "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?' But he remained silent and made no answer." Pause there. The focus shifts to the high priest as he indignantly rises to his feet and asks Jesus to respond to the testimonies against Him. Yet, Mark doubles down on how Jesus said nothing, saying, "he remained silent and made no answer." This alludes to the suffering servant of Isaiah 53 who wouldn't open His mouth when oppressed and afflicted. It also signifies the climax is coming as the tension is heightened. Pick back up in verse 61 to see the climax of this story, "Again the high priest asked him, 'Are you the Christ, the Son of the Blessed?' 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.'" Our translations don't capture the full force of the question here. As James Edwards notes, "In the original Greek the wording is put in the form of a statement with a question implied (' "You are the Christ, the Son of the Blessed One?" '). The 'you' is emphatic, and 'the Blessed One,' a Jewish expression for God's name, means none other than "God's Son." The effect is to put a full christological confession into the mouth of the high priest!" (James R. Edwards, *The Gospel according to Mark*, 446). Prior to this, if you remember, Christ has silenced demons who declare His true identity and told the disciples to keep it a secret, but in verse 62 Jesus simply and emphatically agrees with the high priest's testimony, saying "I am." Then, He links Himself to the Son of Man from Daniel 7:13-14 and the Lord David spoke about in Psalm 110:1. One who would be presented before God and given an eternal glory and kingdom. And God Himself who would sit by the Father's side, reigning until all His enemies would be made His footstool. Note how Jesus not only confirms He is the Christ and the divine son of God but says the high priest would see this come true. It wouldn't only be Christ's followers who would perceive this truth, but those who refused to acknowledge it would discover it is true when they see Him reigning at the right hand of God. As many scholars point out, this is the "Christological climax" of this gospel. Do you remember how Mark opened this gospel? "The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God." His point wasn't to give Jesus another title, but to declare He was God the Son. That truth is declared by demons early in the gospel, the High Priest here, and a Roman Centurion when Jesus dies. All characters who are opposed to Jesus.

Even those opposed to Jesus proclaim the truth that He confirms. Jesus is the Son of God. Church, this is the testimony we must believe. This is a testimony of eternal significance. I see two reasons for its significance. First,

### **1) This Testimony Seals Christ's Fate**

One continued attempt to discredit Christ's deity is an attempt to suggest that Jesus never claimed to be the Son of God. That is hard to maintain when we observe and understand the reaction to Jesus' confirmation of the high priest's testimony. Look at verses 63-64, "And the high priest tore his garments and said, 'What further witnesses do we need? You have heard his blasphemy. What is your decision?' And they all condemned him as deserving death." Do you feel the weight of this reaction? According to the rules of the Mishnah, when blasphemy is proven, the judges in place are called to stand and tear their clothes to express their grief over the offence (m. Sanh. 7:5). The High Priest's actions emphasize the blasphemy of Jesus. He then asks for the whole council's decision, and "they all condemn him as deserving death." What is the blasphemy? It wasn't the claim to be the Messiah. Edwards notes how, only one century after this, a Rabbi openly declared the revolutionary leader Bar Kokhba to be the Messiah. That didn't condemn Bar Kokhba to death, and people continued to believe this even after he eventually died. The blasphemy is claiming to be the "Son of the Blessed." "Blessed One" was a title only used for God in biblical literature. In a Jewish context, it can only point to the Eternally Blessed God. Christ confirming He was the Son of the Blessed was essentially putting Himself in the same place of honor as God. As Edwards rightly comments, "Blasphemy was not breaking a holy commandment or even profaning a holy place, but the audacity to ascribe God's honor to oneself, or to equate oneself with God. It was the claim to be God's Son (v. 62), not Messiah, that sealed Jesus' fate before the Sanhedrin" (James R. Edwards, *The Gospel according to Mark*, 449). Note how everyone in this moment knew who Jesus claimed to be, leading them all to consider Him blasphemous and sealing His death penalty. Then we discover this is the testimony that started the tortures Jesus would face in verse 65, "And some began to spit on him and to cover his face and to strike him, saying to him, 'Prophecy!' And the guards received him with blows." This moment alludes back to Jesus' third passion prediction in Mark 10:34, where He declared He would be mocked, spit on, and flogged before being killed. It was after this prediction that Jesus told the disciples the Son of Man came "to give His life as a ransom for many." This testimony is eternally significant because it sealed his fate, starting the process that led to His death. A death that provides our only hope, because only the Son of God could bear the full weight of God's wrath for our sin and live. The second reason this testimony holds eternal significance is because

### **2) This Testimony Anticipates Christ's Future**

Jesus not only confirmed who He truly was, sealing the conviction of blasphemy they desired to charge Him with, but He also pointed to His determined future. Look at verses 62 again, "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.'" As I mentioned earlier, this proclamation combines Daniel 7:13 with Psalm 110:1, both of which point to a future of sovereign authority over all things. When does this take place? Hebrews 10:12-13 provides us with the answer, saying, "But when Christ had offered for all time a single sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God, waiting from that time until his enemies should be made a footstool for his feet." After the sacrificial death of Christ on the cross, and His resurrection, Jesus ascended to the right hand of the Father, having been given the dominion, kingdom and glory Daniel spoke of. To this day, He continues to be at the right hand of power, ruling and reigning until the consummation of that kingdom after all of His enemies have been made a footstool for His feet. This testimony anticipates that future reign which began at His resurrection, as Jesus proclaims in Matthew 28:18, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me." Family, this truth should embolden our hearts because it is with this authority that He sends us out to make disciples of all nations and promises to be with us until the end of the age. We don't worship and proclaim a Lord with limited authority to accomplish what we ask for. We sing of a Lord and Savior who has been, and always will be seated at the right hand of power. We don't serve a distant or impotent King.

We serve the sovereign ruler of all things. Let this truth raise your expectations of what your Saviour can and will do in and through you. Let it speak peace to your heart and lead you to know that your King is working all things according to the purpose of His will.

**Conclusion:**

As the worship team is coming to lead us in a time of reflection and response, the question is what will you do with this testimony? Will you accept the testimony of who Christ is and place your trust fully in Him? God the Son took on flesh and stood in your place on the cross, bearing the condemnation for your sin. Will you see that He provides your only hope and turn to Him for mercy and grace in your time of need? Or try to deny the truth of God's Son given for you? If you have accepted the truth of who Christ is and what He did for you, will you trust that He is seated at the right hand of power? Family, you can run to the King who holds all authority in heaven and earth. Will you trust that He is faithful to provide all that you need and more? Will you confess Him before others? Will you treasure Him above all things? Will you believe He has the power to overcome the hardest of hearts with the truth of the gospel? Will you live purposefully to bring Him glory because it all belongs to Him? What will you do with this testimony? We invite you to respond however the Lord leads. You can come to kneel before him as a physical act of humility, sit and reflect, or stand and sing to proclaim your trust to others around you. This morning, we will take time to respond with one song before witnessing people step forward in baptism, proclaiming their faith in this testimony. When it comes time to witness their baptisms, let their response encourage your own. Pray with me as we lean into God's grace together.