

Mark 14: 53- 72
A Tale of Two Trials

After the kiss of death from Judas, the guards take Jesus to the bring him before a kangaroo court of the Sanhedrin. The four gospels give their own accounts of the proceedings with Jesus before the Sanhedrin and also with Peter out in the courtyard.

We see the tale of two trials. Jesus is accused of various religious violations and Peter is accused of being a follower of Jesus.

53 They led Jesus away to the high priest; and all the chief priests and the elders and the scribes gathered together. 54 Peter had followed Him at a distance, right into the courtyard of the high priest; and he was sitting with the officers and warming himself at the fire. 55 Now the chief priests and the whole Council kept trying to obtain testimony against Jesus to put Him to death, and they were not finding any. 56 For many were giving false testimony against Him, but their testimony was not consistent. 57 Some stood up and *began* to give false testimony against Him, saying, 58 “We heard Him say, ‘I will destroy this temple made with hands, and in three days I will build another made without hands.’ ”

59 Not even in this respect was their testimony consistent. 60 The high priest stood up *and came forward* and questioned Jesus, saying, “Do You not answer? What is it that these men are testifying against You?”

61 But He kept silent and did not answer. Again the high priest was questioning Him, and saying to Him, “Are You the Christ, the Son of the Blessed *One*?” 62 And Jesus said, “I am; and you shall see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of Power, and coming with the clouds of heaven.”

63 Tearing his clothes, the high priest **said*, “What further need do we have of witnesses? 64 You have heard the blasphemy; how does it seem to you?” And they all condemned Him to be deserving of death. 65 Some began to spit at Him, and to blindfold Him, and to beat Him with their fists, and to say to Him, “Prophecy!” And the officers received Him with slaps *in the face*.

66 As Peter was below in the courtyard, one of the servant-girls of the high priest **came*, 67 and seeing Peter warming himself, she looked at him and **said*, “You also were with Jesus the Nazarene.” 68 But he denied *it*, saying, “I neither know nor understand what you are talking about.” And he went out onto the porch. 69 The servant-girl saw him, and began once more to say to the bystanders, “This is *one* of them!” 70 But again he denied it. And after a little while the bystanders were again saying to Peter, “Surely you are *one* of them, for you are a Galilean too.” 71 But he began to curse and swear, “I do not know this man you are talking about!” 72 Immediately a rooster crowd a second time. And Peter remembered how Jesus had made the remark to him, “Before a rooster crows twice, you will deny Me three times.” And he began to weep.

Luke 22:59 After about an hour had passed, another man *began* to insist, saying, “Certainly this man also was with Him, for he is a Galilean too.” 60 But Peter said, “Man, I do not know what you are talking about.” Immediately, while he was still speaking, a rooster crowd. 61 The Lord turned and looked at Peter. And Peter remembered the word of the Lord, how He had told him, “Before a rooster crows today, you will deny Me three times.” 62 And he went out and wept bitterly.

We pick up from last week when all the disciples left Jesus and fled away. We don’t know what most of them did, but we get some brief narratives about Judas, John, and Peter. This passage in Mark tells us about Peter.

He had been so boastful about his resolve to stand by Jesus even when Jesus told him that before the rooster crows twice, you will deny me three times. Peter insisted that he would die with Jesus and would NOT deny him (v. 30-31). All the others said the same thing.

v. 53 Jesus was led to the high priest...

CONTEXT: (Sproul; Constantinou; Akin)

The high priest at this time was Caiaphas, who was the son-in-law of Annas, and Annas was perhaps the most powerful Jew in the land. We know that Caiaphas reigned from AD 18 to AD 36.

Annas and his five sons had become high priests. Now it was his son-in-law Caiaphas in the office. This one powerful family dominated the religious culture of the Jewish people and the social/political relationship with Rome.

What is remarkable about this mention of Jesus' being led away to the high priest and the assembly of the Sanhedrin, which was the ruling body of the Jews, is that they did not take Him to the customary meeting place of the Sanhedrin. Normally, the Sanhedrin assembled at a place called the Chamber of Hewn-Stone, but this was the only time in recorded Jewish history that a trial was conducted at night, which was illegal, and at the home of the high priest. (Sproul)

In cases where a guilty verdict was reached, a second day and session were required to ensure a fair trial. Such a trial should not convene on a Sabbath or festival. In addition, a charge of blasphemy could not be sustained unless the defendant cursed God's name, and then the penalty was to be death by stoning, not crucifixion. In Jesus' case no formal meeting of the Sanhedrin ever took place in the temple precincts, which was the proper location for a trial. Nor was Jesus provided or even offered a defense attorney.

In short, this "trial" violated just about every principle and procedure that were normally practiced in those days.

At this point, though surrounded by men, Jesus is alone. He has no allies. He is being led down the path of being utterly forsaken.

v. 53-59 False witnesses

Those brought in to bear witness against Jesus could not agree in their claims against him. The Sanhedrin listens to the various witnesses hoping to hear something that would enable them to give a death sentence. No such testimony was given, but Jesus was guilty until proven innocent, and those in charge weren't going to allow that to happen. According to the Jewish law, those who bear false witness were guilty of a crime punishable by death, but the religious court was willing to overlook that technicality for the night. Despite all the questioning and false testimony, Jesus remains silent.

v. 60-65 Caiaphas takes over

The High Priest takes over the interrogation of Jesus. Enough of Jesus remaining silent; he wants to get to the heart of the matter as he asks the direct question, "Are You the Christ, the Son of the Blessed One?" Given all that was at stake, he may have expected a "NO" answer while hoping for a "Yes".

Jesus answers truthfully. **62 And Jesus said, "I am; and you shall see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of Power and coming with the clouds of heaven."**

That imagery is loaded and there is no longer any need to hide his identity and mission. (Ps 110:1 Dan 7:13-14) Jesus tells the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth and is killed because of it.

This whole situation is so messed up from a human perspective that we must stop and give consideration to what it means.

It means that through the sin, rebellion, and brokenness of this world, the only way of salvation for any of us is for the Eternal Son to take on humanity and suffer and die in our place. The one who is the Truth is condemned by those who should have known the truth. Their hearts, and OURS, were so hardened that only the death of the Son of God could deal with our sin.

The ultimate in hypocrisy comes when they accuse the Eternal Son of blasphemy.

It would have been blasphemy for the High priest or anyone else to make the claims that Jesus made, but not for Jesus.

What we see are sinful actions and decisions covered over by pious gestures - the high priest rips his garments in “righteous anger.”

Religious law says that each member of the Sanhedrin must cast a vote when passing sentence. But now there is no vote. The verdict is passed by simple consensus as they began to beat, mock, and slap Jesus.

v. 66-72 – The narrative switches to the “second trial” with Peter

In this trial of Peter, he faces accusations of being “one of them”, and Peter ends up fulfilling the prophesy of Jesus rather than fulfilling his own boasts to stand with Jesus.

Jesus is asked questions and answers truthfully in v. 62. Peter is asked questions and lies and denies.

** The inclusion of the story about Peter’s denial gives me more confidence that the NT account is TRUE. Why else would they put this in there? It’s not only true, but those who copied the gospel had such regard for the sacred text that they did not edit it out.

The fact that this episode of Peter’s denial is included sends a message to all believers for the past 2000 years. Grave sin followed by repentance can bring restoration and a fruitful life. When we fall, we should not despair; we should rise up again in repentant faith clinging to Christ our hope and righteousness.

EX: You can imagine the pressure that must have come from some to leave out that bit about Peter’s denial. “It might hurt the cause. It would be bad for Peter’s reputation as a leader in the church.”

Compare this with today’s cancel culture where someone says something crude, thoughtless, or ugly as a teenager or in their 20’s and it is brought up 10, 15, 20 years later to destroy his/her credibility.

Fifty days after the resurrection, Peter preached a sermon and 3000 people were saved. He wasn’t merely forgiven and restored by Jesus; he was put in a position of leadership. He became the “rock” that Jesus had predicted.

In the Bible, the church is never presented as pristine. Remember that Mark is seen as relying heavily on Peter for this presentation of the Gospel. As seen in the other gospels, the authors seem to go to lengths to show their own weakness and failure. There is a deep gospel truth in these narratives, and in the OT narratives.

Christianity isn’t about making us look good, but to show how good Christ is. The reality of grace means that we don’t have to pretend to be better than we are or to be better than “them.”

The church is a place for grace that can only be explained by the Holy Spirit’s work in our lives.

It is not a grace that excuses or promotes sin. (Titus 2) It is grace that **12 instructs us to deny ungodliness and worldly desires and to live sensibly, righteously and godly in the present age, 13 looking for the blessed hope and the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Christ Jesus, 14 who gave Himself for us to redeem us from every lawless deed, and to purify for Himself a people for His own possession, zealous for good deeds.**

There are two sides to the grace coin:

- It enables us to be honest about our own failures and sin
- It will keep us from being quick to shoot the wounded among us.

We are prone to forget the reality of our own sin while we focus on the failures of others. All of our sins deserve the wrath and curse of God.

We should not read the narrative of Peter and the other disciples without asking, “Would I have stood by Christ if I had been there?”

The original audience had to make that call regarding the threats from Rome that they were facing at the time.

Every generation of the church has faced the threats of compromising to the culture on issues related to the person and work of Christ and the message and implications of Biblical teaching. Those voices of compromise come from outside and inside the “church” at large. The early church felt the pressure from the pagan Romans and the unbelieving Jewish leaders. The church in every age and every culture has felt the pressure at some point. Hypocrisy and cowardice are a constant threat to the church.

EX: sadly, in our day we see Christian influencers, churches, or denominations caving in to the cultural pressure on issues of creation norms as related to morality, the value of life, and marriage.

The collapse in some of those areas today is the fruit of the collapse on theological issues over 100 years ago. Perhaps you’ve heard the saying, “Politics is downstream from culture.”

Well, culture is downstream from theology. When our understanding of God changes then it impacts our understanding of human value as those made in His image. The theological collapse in America is typified by what happened 103 years ago.

EX: 103 years ago (1922) Harry Emerson Fosdick, one of the most influential ministers in the country, preached a sermon that expressed his concern that the Fundamentalists would win. His concern was that the intolerant forces in the church would gain a voice in proclaiming that Christians should hold to special miracles such as the Virgin Birth, the inspiration of scripture, the atoning work of Christ for sinners, and the second coming of Jesus.

The truth handed down through the scripture must be held on to. We see that in the life of Peter after he meets the resurrected Christ. He does become the “Rock” that Jesus said he would be.

Fosdick and those of his ilk, then and today, think it is hurtful or cruel to tell another person about God’s standards and the reality of sin. It is seen as problematic to point out that we’re all bigger sinners than we dare admit. Actually, it is a good and loving thing because only when we see the depth and reality of our sin will we see our need for a Savior. And it is through faith in Jesus that we learn that we are also more loved, forgiven, and accepted than we dare imagine.

Without an awareness of our own sin- maybe even our own hypocrisy and cowardice – we won’t flee to the one who is the Friend of Sinners. If that’s the case, then we are left on our own to try harder to do better hoping that we’ve done enough. But the message of scripture is the bad news that we can NEVER do enough. The GOOD NEWS is that Jesus lived the life we should have lived and died the death we should have died.

In Luke we get a final look at Peter in the courtyard...

Luke 22:59 After about an hour had passed, another man began to insist, saying, “Certainly this man also was with Him, for he is a Galilean too.” 60 But Peter said, “Man, I do not know what you are talking about.” Immediately, while he was still speaking, a rooster crowed. 61 The Lord turned and looked at Peter. And Peter remembered the word of the Lord, how He had told him, “Before a rooster crows today, you will deny Me three times.” 62 And he went out and wept bitterly.

One great takeaway from this passage is that our faith does NOT rest on the righteous behavior of Biblical characters or even Christian role models; it rests on the perfect righteousness of Jesus.

...AND the perfection of Jesus is displayed before us at the Lord’s Table.

THE TABLE

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