

First Baptist Church Merritt Island

Senior Pastor Titus Green

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Jesus on Trial

Mark 14:53-65

This morning, we are continuing our verse-by-verse study of the Gospel of Mark. And our text for this morning is one of the final steps on Christ's journey to the cross. Jesus is on trial before the Jewish high court, known as the Sanhedrin.

If you will allow yourself to consider what is really taking place, it's hard to process emotionally. No trial in the history of this world has been a greater miscarriage of justice than the trial of Jesus Christ. The perfect Son of God, the embodiment of love and compassion and goodness, was brought before a group of venomous religious leaders and sentenced to die.

Before we read Mark's account, let me give you our big idea so you can think through it as we read our text.

Big Idea: The trial of Jesus was marked by corruption, confession, and condemnation.

Mark 14:53–65

And they led Jesus to the high priest. And all the chief priests and the elders and the scribes came together. 54 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. 55 Now the chief priests and the whole council were seeking testimony against Jesus to put him to death, but they found none. 56 For many bore false witness against him, but their testimony did not agree. 57 And some stood up and bore false witness against him, saying, 58 "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.' " 59 Yet even about this their testimony did not agree. 60 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?" 61 But he remained silent and made no answer. Again the high priest asked him, "Are you the Christ, the Son of the Blessed?" 62 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." 63 And the high priest tore his garments and said, "What further witnesses do we need? 64 You have heard his blasphemy. What is your decision?" And they all condemned him as deserving death. 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.

It is almost unthinkable that this actually happened. The Creator of the Universe became a man. He lived a life of perfect love and righteousness, healing the sick and raising the dead. Yet, this middle-of-the-night kangaroo court has the audacity to condemn Him to die. They spit in His face. They cover up His head so He can't see where their blows will be coming from and ridicule Him by saying "Prophecy! If you can predict the future, then predict when and where our next punch is coming from." It's awful. It's hard to think about but let's walk through our text and see what there is for us to learn.

Verse 53 tells us that after Jesus was arrested in the Garden of Gethsemane, He was led to the high priest, where the religious leaders convened to hold this trial. Now, most people who are moderately familiar with the story of Jesus are aware that Jesus stood trial in front of a Roman leader named Pontius Pilate. We'll talk more about that next week. But you might be wondering which trial of Jesus

was the real trial of Jesus. And it can be a little complicated and confusing, so let me give you a brief overview.

As you piece together the four Gospel accounts, you find that the Trial of Jesus had two primary phases: the Jewish phase and the Roman Phase.

The Jewish Phase consisted of at least two steps.

1. Jesus was first brought to the home of a man named Annas. (John 18:13-23) He was a former high priest in Israel who apparently still had a lot of influence among the religious elite. History tells us that 5 of Annas' sons held the position of high priest at one time or another. His son-in-law, Caiaphas, was the current high priest. So, Annas is like the godfather of an organized crime family. He seems to be pulling the strings here and is the first Jewish leader to interrogate Jesus.
2. Jesus was then taken to the home of Caiaphas, the current high priest and the son-in-law of Annas (Matthew 26:56-68; Mark 14:53-65). Caiaphas likely lived just across the courtyard from Anna. At the home of Caiaphas, the High Court of Israel, known as the Sanhedrin, was convened. This is the same group that confronted Jesus earlier in the week in chapter 12. This is the trial that we find in our text. We'll come back to this in just a minute.

After the Jewish phase of Jesus' trial was concluded, they had to take Him to the Roman phase. This was necessary because Israel was under the rule of the Roman Empire. So, the Romans were the ones with all the real legal authority. Only a Roman leader could sentence someone to die. So, while the Jews were determined to put Jesus to death, they had to convince the Roman leaders to go along with their plan. That led to....

The Roman Phase of the Trial of Jesus. This phase consisted of three steps.

1. Jesus was taken to Pontius Pilate (Luke 23:1-5). Pilate was the Roman governor of the region. He allowed Jesus to be beaten but could not find anything deserving of the death penalty. Once He found out Jesus was from Galilee, Pilate decided to try and pass the buck of responsibility to another Roman leader...
2. Jesus was taken to King Herod (Luke 23:6-11). King Herod had been appointed by Rome to be a sort of puppet king over Israel. He knew about Jesus and had wanted to meet Him in person. Herod questioned Jesus but couldn't get anywhere and, wanting to avoid any political fallout, he sent Jesus back to Pilate.
3. Pilate questions Jesus again (Matthew 27:11-23; Mark 15:1-20). Again, Pilate can't find any real evidence of a crime deserving death, but he bent to the will of the Jewish mob and consented to have Jesus crucified. (next week)

So, Jesus was crucified under the authority of the Romans, but His execution was really the result of His trial by the Jews. And that's the trial we will focus on this morning.

So, let's dig into our text and see what we learn about the trial of Jesus.

THE TRIAL OF JESUS WAS MARKED BY CORRUPTION.

Mark 14:55-59 55

Now the chief priests and the whole council were seeking testimony against Jesus to put him to death, but they found none. 56 For many bore false witness against him, but their testimony did not agree. 57 And some stood up and bore false witness against him, saying, 58 "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.' " 59 Yet even about this their testimony did not agree.

You see the corruption of the religious leaders in multiple ways here. First, they were seeking testimony to put him to death. That means they already had their verdict settled before they called their first witnesses. They knew they wanted to put Him to death. We've seen this unfolding throughout the book of Mark.

Mark 3:6

The Pharisees went out and immediately held counsel with the Herodians against him, how to destroy him.

Mark 11:18

And the chief priests and the scribes heard it and were seeking a way to destroy him, for they feared him, because all the crowd was astonished at his teaching.

Mark 14:1

And the chief priests and the scribes were seeking how to arrest him by stealth and kill him,

This trial was a charade from the beginning because the religious leaders had already determined the verdict before the so-called trial began.

You also see their corruption in that they allowed false testimonies that didn't agree.

Mark 14:56

For many bore false witness against him, but their testimony did not agree.

In Deuteronomy 19:15-19, Jewish law stipulated that two or three witnesses had to present credible testimony for someone to be convicted of a crime. In the trial of Jesus, many witnesses came forward but none of their testimonies matched.

Mark says they were accusing Jesus of saying He would destroy the Temple and build it back in three days. That's a manipulation of the truth. Jesus did predict the destruction of the Temple, but He never said He was going to destroy it. In John 2:19, He also talked about the temple of His body being destroyed and raised after three days. But He didn't say what they claimed He said. So, they tried to use half-truths and manipulated facts to condemn Him.

So, in their attempt to pin some drummed-up charge on Jesus, the Jewish leaders were actually the ones breaking the law here.

Scholars have pieced together approximately 20 ways the Jewish leaders broke their own legal code during the trial of Jesus. Let me give you a few more examples in addition to what we can easily see in our text.

- Religious leaders were never to arrest and try someone in connection with a bribe. But Jesus' arrest was the direct result of bribing Judas Iscariot.
- No trial was to be held after sunset. But Jesus was tried in the middle of the night.
- No members of the Sanhedrin were to participate in an arrest. But the religious leaders were the ones who led the arrest of Jesus in the garden of Gethsemane.
- Trials were to be held in public, not secret.
- Sanhedrin trials were only to be held in the Temple complex in a court called the Chamber of Hewn Stones.

The trial of Jesus was marred by corruption at every turn. Some of you might wonder “why?” Why would these men who were tasked with upholding righteousness and justice break every rule in their book to manufacture the execution of Jesus?

Listen to the words of Jesus from the Gospel of John.

John 3:19-20

And this is the judgment: the light has come into the world, and people loved the darkness rather than the light because their works were evil. For everyone who does wicked things hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his works should be exposed.

In the trial of Jesus, we see a microcosm of sinful humanity. We see the lengths to which sinful men will go to reject the light and truth of Jesus. Jesus is a threat to the wickedness of men’s hearts. Simply put, people love their sin. That’s why they will go to any length to reject the truth about Jesus.

And the more things change, the more they stay the same. Our world is mired in the same sinful corruption that marked the trial of Jesus. Do you ever wonder why Biblical Christianity is opposed and attacked above all the world’s religions? Why are the supposed intellectual elites so fixated on attacking and discrediting Christianity? Why are so-called science and philosophy and the educational and political systems so set on attacking the Bible? According to John 3:19-20, the fundamental reason is that Jesus is at the center of Christianity, and people love their sin too much to repent and turn to Jesus.

People love their pride and materialism and unbridled sexual expression. People love darkness rather than light. So, the blind and sinful hearts of men have a vested interest in rejecting the person of Jesus. Science and philosophy and education and politics aren’t inherently opposed to Jesus. Sinful people in every field, including religion, are opposed to the truth about Jesus. Men love darkness rather than light. And like the religious leaders in our text, people will go to any length necessary to try and reject Jesus as Lord.

And, before we throw our stones at the religious leaders of Jesus’ day and the intellectual and political elite of ours, we had better remember something. Lurking in the darkness of our own flesh, there is an appetite that loves our own sin, too. We tend to shy away from the holy light of Christ that might expose us, as well.

That’s why we are okay with shining the spotlight on sins we aren’t prone to commit while we hold onto our secret sins in the shadow of our own lives. Greed, pride, materialism, gossip, lust, malice, and unforgiveness lurk in the shadows of our religious lives and it’s possible that we would go to great lengths to hold onto those sins rather than lay them down in repentance before Jesus.

So, what would it look like for you today to come before the holy light of Christ and say with the psalmist, “Search me, O God, and know my heart; try me and know my thoughts! And see if there be any grievous way in me and lead me in the way everlasting.”

May the corruption that marked the trial of Jesus be done away with in our own hearts and lives.

THE TRIAL OF JESUS WAS MARKED BY CONFESSION.

Mark 14:60-63

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?” 61 But he remained silent and made no answer. Again the high priest asked him, “Are you the Christ, the Son of the Blessed?” 62 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." 63 And the high priest tore his garments and said, "What further witnesses do we need? 64 You have heard his blasphemy.

Unable to drum up any real evidence against Jesus, the high priest turns to Jesus and asks Him to speak. But Jesus remains silent in the face of His accusers. This is a fulfillment of Isaiah 53:7. Then the high priest directly asks Him, "Are you the Christ, the Son of the Blessed?" Jesus responds, "I Am."

I AM is the covenant name for God. It's the name God shared with Moses at the burning bush in Exodus 3. It's a name that was so holy to the Jews that they wouldn't even say it out loud. That's why the high priest asks if Jesus is the Son of the Blessed. "The Blessed" is a reference to God. It's a way for the High Priest to refer to God without invoking the sacred name of God.

But Jesus claims that title for Himself. He confesses to be God Himself and Christ, the anointed Messiah God promised to send His people. But Jesus doesn't stop with that. He says these religious leaders will see the Son of Man seated at the right hand of Power and coming with the clouds of heaven. That's a reference to a prophecy from Daniel 7 in which the Son of Man will come and bring all the nations to an end and establish the eternal Kingdom of God on the earth.

Jesus is unmistakably confessing to be God in the flesh, the Messiah, and the King of God's Kingdom. That's why the high priest says Christ's response is blasphemy. Of course, it would be blasphemy for a man to claim to be God and the King of God's Kingdom unless He actually is God and the King of God's Kingdom.

This is the turning point of the trial of Jesus. It's the moment when everything changes. But let's not move too quickly here. In the confession of Jesus, there is a warning. Jesus says all the people present at this trial will one day see Him in all His glory. What's that referring to? It's referring to the Return of Christ and the day of judgment.

2 Timothy 4:1

I charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by his appearing and his kingdom...

Don't miss what's happening here. Jesus is standing on trial before the Sanhedrin, and as He confesses His identity, He says the day is coming when the Sanhedrin will stand on trial before Him because everyone will one day stand on trial before Him. You and I will one day stand trial before Jesus.

And what will be the turning point of our trial? It will be the same turning point as the trial of Jesus. The day of judgment will turn on whether we recognized Jesus for who He really is during our life on earth. Did we come to the place of recognizing Jesus Christ as our Lord and Savior? Did we bow before Jesus in humble faith and receive Him as our God and King?

Friend, there is no question more important to your everlasting soul than the question of who you believe Jesus to be. No question is more important than that.

So, who do you believe Jesus to be? Is He your Lord and Savior? Is your life bowed before Him in humble faith today? Is your life a confession that you truly believe Jesus is Lord?

That brings us to the final thing we see in our text about the trial of Jesus.

THE TRIAL OF JESUS WAS MARK BY CONDEMNATION.

Mark 14:64-65

You have heard his blasphemy. What is your decision?" And they all condemned him as deserving death. 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.

Jesus was condemned to die. As they spit on Him, they covered His face and beat Him. And every blow upon His body was a blow He took in our place. We talked about this last week, and it will be the focal point of our study over the next couple of weeks. Jesus endured the suffering we deserve. He was condemned to die in our place. Remember, the condemnation of Jesus that led to His crucifixion wasn't ultimately the plan of an angry mob. It was the plan of God to provide a sacrifice for our sin. Jesus went to the cross, where He suffered and died as an atonement for our sins.

If you are trusting in Jesus as your Lord and Savior, hear the word of God for you from *Romans 8:1* - *There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.*

Jesus was condemned so that you and I would be freed from condemnation. We don't have to fear the day of Judgment. If we have placed our faith in Christ, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. Thanks be to God for this unspeakable gift!