Morning Service

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Preacher: James Ross

[0:00] Amen. So, again, with the rest of the church around the world, we're following this journey! And for this Sunday and next, we're going to see that Jesus is put on trial, as it were, by the world.

So, this week we'll focus on the Jewish religious authorities and their trial, and next week we'll think about the trial in front of Pilate, who represents the Roman Empire. And this week and next, we'll think about questions of the identity of Jesus. What does it mean that Jesus is a king, and what kind of kingdom does he have? We'll think about the truth claims of Jesus.
One of the fascinating things that we'll see as well is that there is in both of these trials something of a turn. You know, this is a courtroom scene. Maybe many of us, we enjoy courtroom dramas.
Well, here is a moment when Jesus is in the dock, but he will, in effect, put the world on trial. Maybe something similar happens. I was thinking about, you know, a figure like Nelson Mandela, or you can maybe think about other political prisoners. When they are put on trial by whatever regime is over them, they will often use that trial as a moment to speak of their innocence and to speak against the system so that the system itself goes on trial. And I think we can see something similar in what Jesus does. And I think we'll see both this week and next, but especially this week, there is a challenge in Jesus' words, the challenge to consider what Jesus says, His truth, and then to live in light of it. But we're also going to see as we think about the trial of Peter, that there is comfort from Jesus when we mess up, when we fail. This is a message that I need, and I imagine for many of us that we need this message that there is because of Jesus and His passing, His trial, hope beyond failure, because Jesus truly is the Son of God and the Savior. So, let's get into our text, and let's recognize the fact here that Jesus is put on trial. In verse 12 and verse 13, we see it. This is an informal trial. It happens at nighttime. It's in front of the high priest, and that's significant. So, Annas is the high priest that year, and the high priest is the very head of the religious system. So, here is the one man who absolutely should know his Bible, and he should be following the signs, and he should be leading the people in worship of Jesus. But instead, what do we see? We see hostility.
[2:53] Jesus represents threat, this man thinks, and so he wants to get rid of him. Verse 19 is a key verse, because it gives a focus for the trial. It tells us what's the basis for the charges that are brought.

And we might think, why is Jesus being questioned about His disciples? Well, so much of the confusion around Jesus is what kind of king does he claim to be? Is he claiming to be this great political figure?
Is Jesus a revolutionary leader? And if he is, will his followers create an uprising now he's been arrested and put on trial? So, think about what's happening in Turkey at the moment. An opposition leader is arrested, and the followers of the opposition take to the streets. So, they have this fear. Annas has this fear. He is desperate to keep hold of power and standing. Jesus has always been challenging that. And so, in the end, what we see is that this man, Annas, is going to hand Jesus over to be executed.
Shortly after this, Jesus will be taken to Pilate, and Pilate will say to the Jews, listen, take him and judge him by your own law, and they will say, in verse 31, we have no right to execute anyone.
[4:26] So, they want this innocent man to be executed all the while trying to keep themselves pure and ritually clean. But their great hope is that if they can get rid of Jesus, then they can end this Jesus movement, and they can go on living their lives being in control. And what we see, of course, as the story unfolds, is that they are very, very wrong. But the second thing that Jesus is put on trial for is not just his disciples, but verse 19, he's also questioned about his teaching.

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And this is hugely significant. This is a key factor that John's gospel brings out, because this brings us towards the truth claims that Jesus makes. This very much relates to his identity, and it also speaks to us of his mission. So, John's gospel records from really early on, actually as early on as chapter 2, that there is hostility towards Jesus that just continues to grow. There are those within the religious system who are desperate to execute, to kill Jesus.
And so, on our screen, we're going to find four of them. The first is from John chapter 5, verse 17 and 18.
This is in the midst of Jesus talking to the religious authorities, and he says to them, "'My Father is always at work to this very day, and I too am working.' For this reason they tried all the more to kill him." Not only was he breaking the Sabbath, but he's even calling God his own Father, making himself equal with God. So, they hate Jesus and want to kill Jesus, because they understand he is saying, "'I am equal with God. I have a unique relationship with my Father.'" It goes on in John 8, "'Very truly I tell you,' Jesus answered, before Abraham was born, "'I am.'" At this, they picked up stones to stone him, but Jesus hid himself, slipping away from the temple grounds. Remember, "'I am.'" I am is the great Old Testament name of God. Jesus says, "'I am the eternal Son of God.'" And so, they pick up great stones to try and stone him. John chapter 10, we read it. We see it again there.
Jesus says, "'I and the Father are one.'" And that again leads his opponents to want to stone him. And significant there is that Jesus has just called himself the Good Shepherd. And that was a great title in the Old Testament of the true leader of God's people. In fact, God said, "'I am the shepherd, and I will send the King I choose, and he will be your shepherd.'" And Jesus says, "'I am God and God's King, the Good Shepherd, the true leader,' and they want to kill him." And then in John chapter 11, this is after Jesus raises his friend Lazarus, just after he says, "'I am the resurrection and the life.
[7:30] Whoever believes in me, even though they die, they'll live," we discover this plot to kill Jesus, the one who gives life, the one who is life. They would get rid of him. And so, he is put on trial because of these remarkable claims that he makes that John records for us. So, for Annas, as he acts as judge over Jesus, he thinks Jesus is guilty as charged. So, he'll happily in verse 24 bind Jesus and send him away. In verse 30, he'll call him a criminal. In verse 32, he'll ask for him to be executed. Because Jesus claims to be equal with the Father, to have a unique relationship to the Father, and to be God's King sent into the world to be the promised Savior. And Annas says, no.

Of course, part of every courtroom drama hinges on which of the arguments will win the day. You think of any book that you've read, any TV series, or even if you've been to court, there are so many arguments, and the jury has to decide, well, which is true? Which opinion holds sway? For you and me today, it's a very simple question. Who is telling the truth about Jesus?
We've got these Jewish leaders who are saying, Jesus is a liar, and he is dangerous, he is a threat. Or we have Jesus and his personal testimony about himself. I am God, I am a good shepherd, I give life, I am equal with the Father, I am sent on a mission to save.
And as we think about who is telling the truth, that leads us to our second point, and pushes us towards following our verdict to where it naturally leads. But here's our second point, that Jesus, having been put on trial, Jesus then puts the world on trial. It's one of the striking things, that in both of these trials, both before the Jewish religious authorities and next week we'll see in front of Pilate and Rome, Jesus turns the tables. As Jesus takes to the stand, he will put his accusers on trial. We hear him and see him act with great courage and with great conviction and clarity. And particularly as he speaks to Annas and the religious leaders, he focuses attention on truth, his truth and their response to the truth. Look with me at verse 20. As Jesus is on trial, he says,
I have spoken openly to the world. I always taught where all the Jews come together. I said nothing in secret. What's his point? He says, my truth is public, it's open. And then he goes on to say, why question me? Ask those who heard me. Surely they know what I said. So, there are witnesses who heard the truth and who can bear witness to the truth. And then in verse 23, after he's been slapped in the face, he said, if I said something wrong, testify as to what is wrong. But if I spoke the truth, why did you strike me? So, again, the focus is on the truth. If I'm telling the truth, why are you accusing me of doing wrong? If I'm telling the truth, why are you mistreating me and are you ready to reject me? So, here is Jesus putting the world on trial in this way. He says to you and to me, are we ready both to hear the truth of Jesus and to respond to the truth of Jesus? And it becomes really clear, according to Jesus' own words, and according to the testimony of the Bible, that the Jesus we

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encounter in the Gospels, in Matthew, Mark, and Luke, and John, he's either true and real and changes everything, or he is nothing and is of no value. There's really no middle way based on what Jesus says about himself.
[12:12] I think this is really relevant to us. Here's one way I think it's relevant. So, maybe you saw in February down in London, there was this huge gathering. It was a convention called the Alliance for Responsible Citizenship. And so, it meets, I don't know if it meets every year, but certainly it met this year. So, there was over 4,000 delegates gathered from lots of big foundations like the Davos Foundation, many keynote speakers, and there was lots of good things going on.

One thing that is now being recognized by many people is that, you know, the Christian heritage that our country was built on, that's generally been good for society. And so, there were lots of speakers saying, we need to recover this. We need to recognize that what Christianity teaches is and always has been good for society in so many ways. But there was a problem in that for the vast majority of people that spoke, their understanding of Christianity was limited to, it is good and it is useful.
Most of them did not think it was true. There was really powerful speeches from guys like Jordan Peterson. Christianity is really good and useful, but Jesus, Jesus is a symbol. He's not true.
He's not true. Maybe that's our idea today. It's certainly the idea of many as we're recognizing, do you know what, what Jesus teaches, what the Bible has taught is good for building society, but we don't need to necessarily take its truth claims really seriously. Compare that with this quote from Oz Guinness, a Christian apologist evangelist, age 83, spoke at this conference.
Here's what he said. So, here's some of what he said. You can watch it on YouTube, amazing speech. Is the God of Sinai, the God of the burning bush, the God of the burning mountain, and our Lord Jesus with the call of Galilee, are these things true or not?
[14:16] The Christian faith will not do anything for civilization if it's viewed as useful. It will do nothing for civilization if we turn it into a psychological version of whatever. It will only be true and effective if it's understood to be true and you have enough people who are citizens who have an ultimate loyalty to what they see as ultimate reality. Do we hear what he's saying there? He's saying, here's your choices. Jesus is either true and speaks truth, or he is nothing. He is either ultimate reality that deserves ultimate loyalty or he is a no person and a no thing, no power, no value.

There's no middle ground if we take Jesus and the claims of the Bible seriously. I think it's really significant. So, maybe we're here today and we're asking the question, what's Christianity all about? Fundamentally, Christianity is about Jesus and his truth.
Here is Jesus and he says, I am the eternal Son of God and I have come into this world in order to live and then to die in order to save people from sin and to give the gift of eternal life. And after dying, he would then rise again the third day before returning to heaven. Christianity is all about the truth of who Jesus is and what Jesus has done. But maybe we're here today and we would identify with that idea that we find church to be useful, we find Jesus to be useful. Here is a good moral foundation to build on. Here is the way to build a better society, a better neighborhood. Maybe it just gives us a sense of peace and well-being to be around, life is crazy busy and it's nice, to have a few moments quiet.
Well, Jesus wants each one of us to know that we need more than that. And fundamental to that is to engage with what Jesus says about himself, to listen to his claims of truth, because the claims of truth are huge and life-changing. To think about it, the God who decrees everything, plans everything, planned to send his own Son to enter into human history, to truly die a self-sacrificial death, in the first instance, to heal our hearts, to deal with the sin that separates us from God, to bring us back into loving relationship with God, before then sending his followers out in order to bring healing to society. So, we've seen that Jesus is put on trial, but as that happens, he puts the world on trial by asking the question, what do you think about my truth?
But the third thing we need to see is that there is at the same time another trial happening just outside of the main courtroom. Peter is put on trial, and what John deliberately does is he interweaves these. So, we have a bit of Jesus' trial, then some Peter's trial, then Jesus and Peter, and it's in order to show us the striking contrast between the two. There's a striking contrast between the opponents in the trial. So, for Jesus, he is facing the great forces of the world, the Jewish religious system, and the power of the Roman Empire. For Peter, his opposition takes the form of the form of a servant girl whose job is to open and close the door. Some servants gathered

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round a fire to stay warm. But perhaps even more significant, the contrast is between the outcomes of the trial. So, we see Jesus, and he stands with courage, and he is faithful, and he passes the trial, he passes the test. But we see Peter three times denying being a friend of Jesus. He falls in his test.
[18:51] There is fear, and there is unfaithfulness. Here is Jesus, and he has so many times in his ministry said, I am the great I am. And did you notice Peter saying, I am not? You aren't one of the man's disciples too, are you? Verse 17, he replied, I am not. Verse 25, Peter was standing there warming himself by the fire, and they asked him, you aren't one of his disciples too, are you? He denied it saying, I am not. He doesn't deny Jesus' identity. He doesn't deny that Jesus is his Lord and his King, but he denies his identity as a follower. What made Peter do that in that moment of intense trial for Jesus, as he's passing the test? What made Peter fail? What makes us, more importantly, I think, fail our test?

For those of us who are Christians, can we look back, maybe even we don't have to look back very far, and think about missed chances to speak, to say a good word for Jesus?
Can we look back on times when we've kept our head down in the classroom or in the office when when talk of faith and belief came up? Can we think of moments in our lives where we have avoided public statements of what we believe, whether with family or friends or with people who we thought were hostile to us? I think one of the wonderful things about the Bible having the story of Jesus is it makes us realize here is a disciple of Jesus and he gets it. There is honesty. There is a struggle here that I think we can probably all relate to. And one of the wonderful things about Peter is that he also reflects on his failure and after many years he writes a letter. It's known in the Bible as 1 Peter. And in that letter in chapter 3 we find one answer as to why I think he struggled in a moment and why we might struggle. And Peter having learned from that experience wants to give encouragement and comfort. So in 1 Peter chapter 3 and verse 15, as he writes to people who are beginning to find it really hard to be a follower of Jesus, he said, in your hearts revere or fear and honor Christ as Lord.
Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have.
[21:38] You need the right fear and the right hope. And we fail, I think we have maybe we have many reasons why we fail, but one reason certainly why we fail is often we have a wrong fear. The Bible talks a lot about the fear of man. So often when we stay quiet or we deny Jesus it's because in that moment we have the fear of man rather than the fear of the Lord. And often when we stay quiet and we fail Jesus it's because in that moment we have fixed our attention on the wrong hope. Because we place our hope in social acceptance or comfort or avoiding embarrassment over reminding ourselves and others over the real eternal hope that we have in Jesus. When we lose sight of Jesus and his truth, typically we will give in to fear that people will seem bigger to us than God. And we will give other things value and priority rather than Jesus and his good news. Peter felt it. I felt it. I imagine many of us have felt it.

It's so important for us as Peter says by bitter experience we need to honor Christ as Lord and we need to recognize the hope that Jesus gives. I've shared this before. Before being minister here I was working in Glasgow as an international student worker for a number of years and that meant every, especially September time, September time, sometimes in August as well, walking the streets around the universities in Glasgow, walking up to people who were strangers to me to kind of welcome them to the city, to try and strike up conversation, to try and talk to them about Jesus and invite them to church and to Bible studies and those kind of things. And for those of you who know me you'll know that is not something that would come easy to me. That's not my natural happy place. For some people it is. And so for me to do that, for me to be able to survive in that kind of reality, I find myself often praying along very similar lines to Peter. I'll be walking towards campus reminding myself Jesus is bigger and better than my fear and my awkwardness. And that what people need more than anything is to meet Jesus and to hear good news.
And I can't allow my social awkwardness or sense of embarrassment to come between people and the chance to discover their Creator and their Savior. We need to learn to revere Christ as Lord and remember the hope that Jesus has offered to us and that He offers to others. I think we need the reflection, the prayer of Peter, his focus, the hope that Jesus has offered to us. And we know that it's never easy to stand up for Jesus. We're always in a minority, a moral minority, a minority in how we think. But we understand that it's so vital for our mission and it's so vital for people's ultimate

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hope and salvation.
But there's one last thing that we need to think about because we recognize that Peter was put on trial and he failed. And I wonder if you're here today and you feel somewhat like Peter.
You can look back, you think, man, I've blown it so many times. Or even you're here today and you feel like such a failure again. Here's the last thing we need to see and it pushes us towards the end of the Easter story. And it's this, that Jesus gives hope after the trial. I wonder if you've ever stopped to wonder why is it that the Bible and the gospel writers so often tell these very honest stories of failures of major figures? Why is it that John records Peter's story for us with brutal honesty?
[26:08] Well, one reason at least is so that it might give us hope. And especially as we think about how John chooses to end his gospel. So, John in chapter 18 records, here's the spectacular failure of Peter.

Here's where he gets things horribly wrong. But by the time we get to John chapter 21, here's the wonderful forgiveness of Jesus and here's the restoration of Peter. In John chapter 21, we've gone beyond the trial scene. We've gone to the cross where Jesus has died. And we've come to the empty tomb. We've seen Jesus appear to his disciples. And then in chapter 21, we have Jesus cooking a barbecue for his friends around another fire. And Jesus chooses to speak to Peter three times in that chapter asking him, do you love me? For all those times that Peter denied Jesus, he gives him a chance to confirm that he can confirm that? Yes, yes, Jesus, I do love you. And three times he's asked then, well, if you love me, go and feed my lambs, feed my sheep. Here is Peter being restored to fellowship with
Jesus and being restored to service by Jesus. Here is Peter. He's been a key figure. But he can testify, I failed terribly. But he knows that Jesus didn't fail. And Jesus, the one who didn't fail his test, gave Peter fresh hope. And if he did it for Peter, he can certainly do it for us.
We sometimes sing some songs written by Sovereign Grace, a music ministry. Bob Coughlin is their main songwriter. And he tells about a story of a three-year period in his life of anxiety and stress that was creating various illnesses in him. And he tried going to various doctors and he couldn't find help. And eventually he confessed his sense of hopelessness to a pastor. And the pastor said to him, words that surprised him somewhat, he said, do you know what, I don't think you're hopeless enough.
And he was confused. And he said, what do you mean? And the pastor said to him, if you are completely hopeless, you'd stop trusting in what you think you can do to change the situation and start trusting what Jesus Christ has already done at the cross. And he said, then the light went on. And for the next, I think he said three months afterwards, he found himself so often praying, I am a hopeless person.
[28:59] But Jesus Christ died for hopeless people. And you and I, we need to believe that that's true.

That where Peter failed in his test and where we fail in our test, that Jesus passed the test. He was faithful in the trial. He was faithful on the cross. He is perfectly faithful for people like us who are unfaithful. And the story of Peter and the story of the cross and the resurrection reminds us there is life-giving hope from Jesus beyond our failure. There is the promise that you and I, we can be forgiven.
We can be restored to fellowship with God. We can be restored to useful service even when we mess up spectacularly. Because there is real power in the truth of Jesus. He really is equal with God. He really does have a special relationship with God. He really does act with the authority of God. He really is God's King who came to save and to rescue. And when we understand that, and when we let that power into our heart and our life, do you know, then we have the power to stand, then we have the power to speak, and then we know that it's power to forgive us even when we fail. Because Jesus never fails. Let's pray and give thanks to Him.
Lord Jesus, we thank you for your faithfulness in that trial scene, standing for truth, recognizing your great claims to be none other than the eternal Son of God and the promised Saviour King. And we thank you that that that truth has the power to change our lives, to bring us forgiveness, to bring us into relationship with our God, and to give us hope even when we mess up and fail you. We thank you that when we are unfaithful, you are faithful. That you forgive us and you cleanse us, and you restore us, and you can send us out to serve you. And so we pray that each one of us, we would know that message, that it work its way deep into our hearts, giving us solid and eternal hope beyond all our failures, resting all of our hope in Jesus, our faithful Saviour King. We pray in His

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name. Amen.

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