

# The Trial of Jesus

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- [ 0 : 0 0 ]     The scripture reading this morning is from the book of Mark, chapter 14. If you're visiting with us, it's our habit to go basically passage by passage through a book of the Bible.
- And so we've been in the last week of Jesus' life for a couple weeks now, and now we're reading starting at verse 43 in chapter 14. And we'll read to verse 65.
- And immediately, while he, that is Jesus, was still speaking, Judas came, one of the twelve, and with him a crowd with swords and clubs from the chief priests and the scribes and the elders.
- Now the betrayer, that is Judas, had given them a sign saying, The one I will kiss is the man. Seize him and lead him away under guard.
- And when he came, he went up to him at once and said, Rabbi, and he kissed him. And they laid hands on him and seized him. But one of those who stood by drew his sword and struck the servant of the high priest and cut off his ear.
- [ 1 : 2 9 ]     And Jesus said to them, Have you come out as against a robber with swords and clubs to capture me? Day after day I was with you in the temple teaching, and you did not seize me.
- But let the scriptures be fulfilled. And they all left him and fled. And a young man followed him with nothing but a linen cloth around his body. And they seized him.
- But he left the linen cloth and ran away naked. 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. 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.
- [ 2 : 3 4 ]     Yet even about this their testimony did not agree. 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. 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.
- 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.
- 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. Amen.

This is God's Word. So like I said, We've been in the book of Mark for the last several weeks now. And the reason we've been in the book of Mark for several weeks is because Mark spends a lot of time in the last week of Jesus' life.

[ 3 : 42 ] To put it in perspective, if you think about it, Mark has 16 chapters. And six of those chapters are only about the very last seven days of Jesus' life, plus the resurrection.

And that's astounding. And the reason is because Mark is telling us something, just like the other gospel writers who have almost the same proportions. Mark is saying the most important part about what Jesus came to do on this earth is not the way that he lived.

It's actually the way that he died and what that death means and what happened after that death. And so this morning we're looking at the trial of Jesus when he's before the council of the Jewish leaders.

And I just want to ask three questions that this passage presents to us. The first one is, What is truth? What is the truth here? The second one is, Where is the power in this passage?

And the third question is, Why the silence? Because you notice Mark makes a point of saying that for a lot of his trial, Jesus didn't say a word. And a lot of the gospel writers pick up on that.

[ 4 : 49 ] So why is that important? Why the silence? So the first question is, What is the truth? And we're asking that question because this is a courtroom scene and the purpose of a courtroom is to get to the truth.

You know, I want the truth. And what you find very quickly in this passage is that the one thing that these Jewish leaders don't care about is the truth. They've come here with a purpose.

And you see that in verse 55. It says, The chief priests and the whole council were seeking testimony against Jesus to put him to death, in order to put him to death. And so they don't care about the truth.

But what they do need is a legal reason, a legal justification to put Jesus to death so that they can bring him to the Romans for that purpose. And they need that justification even if it has to be invented.

And of course, it says, you see here in the passage, they run into a problem because they've got all these witnesses who are prepared to bear false testimony, but they can't get them to agree. And, you know, the one witness we hear about is where it says that one person claims Jesus says that he can, he'll tear down the temple and he'll rebuild it in three days.

[ 5 : 59 ] And that kind of, if you know the gospel as well, that kind of sounds like something Jesus said, but Jesus never made the claim that he would tear down the temple. He just prophesied that one day the temple would fall.

And they can't get the witnesses to agree, but here's the great irony of this whole courtroom scene. They so desperately want to find something false that they can pin on Jesus.

But do you see what they actually condemn him for is the one thing that's true about him. So it says there in verse 61, the high priest looks at Jesus and he says, are you the Christ, the son of the blessed?

And Jesus says, I am. And that's what condemns him is him admitting who he really is. And that's a really important point, not just in this trial, but for the whole book of Mark, because this is actually the first time in the book of Mark that Jesus finally admits who he really is.

You know, Mark 1.1 says, this is the gospel of Jesus Christ, the son of God. But you never hear that statement made by Jesus in the whole gospel. About halfway through, he admits to being the Messiah, but that's not the same thing as saying that you're the son of God, because a lot of Jews believe that the Messiah would be a human being.

[ 7 : 15 ] And so that wasn't quite the claim as saying you're the son of God. So here he is, finally in the court in the last day of his life, and he says, I am. I am the son of the blessed. And you see the response.

The high priest tears his garments. And with that claim that I am the son of the blessed, they believe they have all they need to put Jesus away.

And there's a lot of ways to think about this trial. You could say, and this is true, this courtroom is the greatest injustice that any human court has ever carried out.

Jesus is the one person who you could ever look at and say, this man is truly innocent of all crimes. And here he is condemned to death. And the irony is, he's condemned to death for the one thing that is true about him.

But what I want you to notice is, the council understands one thing correctly. They get one thing right, which is the gravity of Jesus' claim, the weight of it.

[ 8 : 24 ] You know, here is a man who claims to be the son of God. And the Jewish leaders understand that if that is true, if that claim is true, then you have to bow down and worship him right now.

And if it's false, then this man is claiming to be God. And he cannot be allowed to continue to do this. Everyone's going to do the assumption that if you commit blasphemy in the Jewish community, the sentence is death.

This is the gravity of this claim. And what is interesting is that Jesus offers them no middle ground. And this is something about Jesus that we often forget and that our world has to wrestle with is that Jesus, he never gives us the luxury of taking a middle ground opinion on him.

You see, I've said this before, C.S. Lewis called this the great trilemma of Jesus' identity. Jesus must either be a liar and he says he's the son of God but he's not.

Or he's a lunatic he thinks he's the son of God but he's not. Or he really is who he says he is. And C.S. Lewis would say the one thing Jesus cannot be is merely a good teacher because what good teacher would ever claim to be God if he wasn't?

[ 9 : 40 ] And that's the one thing the counsel gets is that Jesus is not offering them a way out of the situation. He's saying you either have to worship me as the son of God or you have to condemn me as a liar but you can't choose a middle ground.

And that's what Christianity does to our world. You know, we come to Jesus and a lot of times Jesus is a lot of things to us, right? We just sang about how Jesus is a friend.

Jesus, what a friend for sinners. And that's true. He's a friend. We call him that. Jesus is our brother. Jesus is, you know, Jesus may be something unique to you.

He's the person who helped you out of the deep darkness that you were in. He's the person who helped you wrestle with your depression. All that is true. And yet, what Mark is working towards throughout his whole gospel is to say Jesus is so many things but if you're ever going to find the real Jesus, if you're ever going to see him for truly, who he truly is, you have to come to grips with the fact that he claimed to be the son of God.

And if that's true, then the only appropriate response is to either deny that claim and walk away from him completely or to bow down and worship him and give him everything that you are because that's what the claim demands.

[ 10 : 58 ] And that's the story of Mark. You know, Mark 1.1, Jesus is the son of God, never brings it up until this trial and what Mark is doing is he's accumulating evidence. You know, he's giving this gospel to you and he's saying you read the story and you make of it what you will.

Here's a man, he did all these things. What conclusion should you draw from it? And that's what the trial is the climax of is some people hear all the evidence and they say it can't be.

But Mark is saying this is the gospel of the son of God. This is the good news of the son of God. A lot of us, you know, if you're a Christian, you accept this, that Jesus is the son of God and the challenge for us is to remind ourselves of that truth.

You know, if Jesus is not the son of God, then you just throw him out of your universe and he means nothing. If he is the son of God, he becomes the center of gravity, right? He becomes the true north for your compass and what, the challenge for us is to wake up every day and reorient ourselves to what is true.

That's what this question, this trial is asking is what is the truth? And if it is true, how do you respond to that? And maybe, you know, if you walked away with no other question today than just this one, it's what do you believe to be true?

[ 12 : 14 ] You know, do you believe Jesus is the son of God? And if that is true, this is an open-ended question for you. What do you think that should mean for your life? You know, what should happen if you believe that he is the son of God and he's the maker of everything?

What is the truth? And Jesus is so committed to the truth in this passage that he's willing to admit it even if it cost him his life.

And he does. And we'll come back to Peter in two weeks, but a lot of writers, people who talk about this passage, they argue that Mark intentionally weaves the story of Peter into the trial scene.

So, you know, it opens with saying that Peter was standing far off watching Jesus because Mark is saying here's two ways to handle the truth. One is to say like Jesus to say what is true and the other is to be like Peter who knows the truth but he doesn't have the courage to follow through with the truth.

He just stands back and watches and eventually runs away. But that's two weeks from now. Come back. So that's the first question. What is the truth? And the truth is that Jesus is claiming here to be the Son of God.

[ 13 : 26 ] But the second question is where is the power? Where is the power in this passage? Because a lot of this passage is just about strength and about power.

You see, right when they come to Jesus in the garden, it's all about establishing their power over Jesus. So Judas tells these men, if you're going to get Jesus, you better come armed, come with clubs, come with swords.

And so they do that. And there's another gospel account that says that actually a legion of soldiers came to arrest Jesus. And, you know, if you believe that Jesus is the Son of God, that's humorous, right?

Because you just think if I come with 25 men with clubs and swords, that'll be enough to hold down the Son of God. But they're trying to show force and they're trying to show we can bend this man to our will.

We can bring him into submission and bring him to a trial. And that was not effective for Jesus. I mean, that didn't impress Jesus. But you see it impressed everyone else around him.

[ 14 : 28 ] You know, I said a couple weeks ago, the theme of chapter 14 is the abandonment of Jesus. Everyone leaves Jesus. And that climaxes here. It says at the end of the garden scene, everyone walked away from Jesus.

And the highlight, I don't know if this surprised you when you read it in verse 51. Do you remember that there's this young man, this young nameless man who just runs away naked?

Mark just throws that in with no explanation. And we don't know. We don't know who this is. What I would like to believe, and some people think this is true, is that the nameless young naked man who runs away is Mark.

And this is Mark writing himself into the story. And he's saying, you know, this happened and he knows it was him. But we don't know. But we do know it's a symbol. It's symbolic of what happened to all the disciples.

They saw the power of the crowd that was behind Judas and they ran away. They all fled. Symbolically, they all fled away naked with nothing in their hands. They were just terrified.

[ 15 : 32 ] But Jesus remains. And then you get to the courtroom and, you know, clearly the council is in charge. They're the ones asking the questions and they're the ones forcing Jesus to answer.

And then it gets to this ugly point right there at the end where they put some kind of a cloth over Jesus' head. And you see what they're doing. They put a cloth over his head and then they begin to beat him.

And because he can't see, they're asking him to prophesy. Use your power. Tell us which one of us just hit you. This is cruel. This is cruel and unusual punishment. And it's all the way of showing Jesus that he may think he has power, but he has no power.

No power at all. It's a scene where Jesus looks, he looks like the definition of powerless. And that's how everyone in the scene judges him.

And the only person who disagrees with that is Jesus himself. And you know that in his comments that he makes. So when he admits to being the son of God, he says, I am.

[ 16 : 30 ] And then he continues and he says, This is probably a kind of a riff off of the first verse of Psalm 110, which we saw a couple chapters ago where David says, The Lord said to my Lord, Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies my footstool.

So it's this prophecy where one day the Messiah will come and God is going to put him at his right hand and through the power of God, the Messiah will reign and will put all his enemies under his footstool.

And Jesus is basically saying, One day this is going to happen and it's going to be me that will be the Messiah. Jesus saw more in the courtroom than anyone else could ever see.

And because he believed that God was with him and he believed that his chains were not an indication whatsoever of whether God was with him or not and whether or not God had the power to move in this moment.

And, you know, all of us, we're human beings. All of us struggle to judge what, where is true power and part of that we love.

[ 17 : 49 ] You know, we love stories where the little guy, you know, gets one on the big guy. You know, maybe you've got a big strong guy and then a little boy who's able to, a little guy who's able to beat him up and it's because, you know, the big guy looked more powerful but the young guy had more training for instance.

You know, during the Olympics, do you remember there was that American, I think his name was Steven Nudrozik who did the pommel horse and he was such an unassuming guy. He had really thick glasses and almost the whole gymnastic event, he just sat there and just thought to himself.

But when he got up on that pommel horse, he put everyone else to shame and we love those stories where someone who looks weak is secretly powerful and the gospel is like that but taken to the infinite degree because in the gospel you will have someone who actually has no power and yet because of the power of God they're able to show a kind of strength or power is able to be used as a result of something they do that they could have never done for themselves.

What we often want is power that you can see. We want wealth, we want influence, we want numbers and when you do those things often it can be because we don't believe that divine power can actually work.

That's the position of the Jewish council. How could a man so weak ever really have the power of God in him? And you know Christianity has always struggled with an image problem and the image problem is we look weak.

[ 19 : 30 ] We look so weak. Paul puts it like this in 1 Corinthians 1.22 he says, Jews demand signs and Greeks seek wisdom but we preach Christ crucified a stumbling block to Jews and a folly to Gentiles.

Paul had this strange way of talking about the gospel where he would say the gospel is really foolishness if you don't believe in it. It makes no sense to the world but to us who believe in it it is the power of God for salvation.

And that's what faith. Faith is believing in the power of God even when you can't see it. And that's what our religion is founded upon in part.

Think about Abraham. Abraham was told that he would bear a son and yet there's no way that he could have ever done that in his own strength. He was an old man and God says you will bear a son and the one thing Abraham going for him was that he believed God and then after all this waiting after all this seeming this long time where it seems like there is no power here God brings a son for Abraham and that's what you see in the trial too.

Jesus in the trial is believing that even though the power of God is not visible in this moment at all that God is still powerful and that God will still use his power to raise Jesus from the dead and to allow him to rule with power and you know the point here is not if you believe hard enough you're going to see the power of God if you believe hard enough and ask God for the things that you want you'll see the power of God the point is God always moves in the direction of his promises his power always moves in the direction of his promises you know so we could we could broaden this and we could say do you believe that God has the power to save anyone you know it's easy to believe that God has the power to save your very nice neighbor who doesn't go to church but do you believe he can save the drug addict that you know the guy who when you get around you're nervous because you don't know what this guy is going to do do you believe that God can save that person because that's that's where that's where you see the power of the gospel is when God saves someone that you truly understand could not be saved in any other way and no one can be saved apart from the power of God or I could put it like this do you believe you know have you struggled with a sin for years and and grown tired of that struggle do you believe that God has the power you believe that he has the power to help you kill that sin to work in your heart so that that sin can be put to death once and for all you know it's easy to say

[ 22 : 26 ] I believe in Jesus it's another thing to say I trust him I believe that he has the power to change who I am who feels so often so unchangeable and that's what it means to be a Christian part of it is to believe in the power of God and that it goes in the direction of his promises and that's what Jesus is believing in here he's going through a tremendous amount of suffering but he believes that one day he will sit at the right hand of the father that's where the power is but the last question I want to ask is why the silence why the silence so Mark makes a point of saying that Jesus was silent you see it in 61 he's asked all these questions verse 61 but he remained silent and made no answer and what you get the picture you get from all the gospel accounts when Jesus is dealing both with the Jewish community and with the Romans and Pilate is that Jesus for most of the part stays silent he doesn't answer the accusations that are made against him and so why is that what's the point here and there's a scriptural reason the scriptural reason you can point to is Isaiah 53 so in

Isaiah 53 7 there's a prophecy about who the Messiah will be and one of the things that says about him is he will be oppressed and he will be afflicted yet he opened not his mouth like a lamb that is led to the slaughter and like a sheep that before it shears is silent so he opened not his mouth one reason Jesus is silent is because there was a prophecy that said that he would be and Jesus always had an eye towards the prophecies I mean he would often talk about I'm doing this so that the scriptures can be fulfilled for instance he would say that often and so we can say well just because the scripture said he would be silent that's why he was silent but I think that that prophecy is pointing towards a theological truth a reason for his silence that goes beyond the scripture itself and it's this Christ came in order to be judged in our place he came to bear punishment he came to be judged and that's a really interesting idea an odd idea if you think about how so often the

New Testament talks about Jesus as the one true judge so in John chapter 5 Jesus says the father judges no one you know we often think about Jesus the father is the great judge and Jesus as the great lawyer who's on our behalf but a lot of times the Bible talks about Jesus like he's the true judge Jesus says the father judges no one but has entrusted all judgment to the son you remember that the famous passage in Matthew 25 of the sheep and the goats where Jesus says when the son of man come he will come to separate the sheep from the goats or in the apostles creed that we just read we said I believe that Jesus will come to judge the living or the quick and the dead so the Bible over and over again says Jesus is a judge and Jesus will judge but I think that actually emphasizes the gravity of what is going on here because here is the judge the one true judge who has come into this courtroom in order to be judged a couple weeks ago

I was invited to go sit in on a local court hearing for a couple hours just to see what it was like and to pray while I was there and it was a real jarring experience for me because I have not spent a lot of time in court in my life you'll be happy to!

but what really struck me was how the judge was really the center of gravity these things will sound obvious to you but when you see it with your own eyes it really strikes you the deference that everyone in that courtroom showed the judge when you addressed him you said yes judge no judge and when I was there there were a lot of people who!

[ 26 : 28 ] were brought before the judge to plead guilty so they were coming admitting their guilt there wasn't a trial here and the purpose was for the judge to hand down a sentence and there was such I don't know if anxiety is the right word but there was clearly a fear of the judge not because he was an evil man but because he had the power to sentence people and so there was such a reverence towards the way you had to serve it was intimidating let me put it like that and you could see this man in this moment has real power that you don't see in many other areas of life and I say that to say Jesus is the one true judge of the universe that's what the Bible says about it if it's intimidating for you to be in the local county court how intimidating must it be to stand before the judge of the universe where all of your sins everything you've ever done in secret is exposed before him and yet theologically what is going on in this passage is here is the one true judge of the universe and yet he's not standing in this courtroom to be judged it's as if he is coming down from the bench and he is standing in the place of the ones who have come to be judged he's standing in the place of the judge of the accused so that the accused can go free that's that's the gospel this morning it's that the judge who has the power to condemn every person for our sins in the gospel he steps down from the bench and he stands in the place of the accused and takes the punishment that belongs to them now

I think in Paul's words you could say the Greeks hear that and they say that is foolishness what weakness to have a judge who is so powerful and yet he would step down from the bench and act and be so mistreated by human beings and be so be wrongly accused and be mocked and beaten by them and that that is Paul says in the eyes of the world that is foolishness that is true weakness and it's folly and yet what Paul says and what the gospel says is that this is the power of God for salvation for those who believe and I want to just close with that last phrase for those who believe because you know if anybody ever takes your place if anybody ever does something for you that you couldn't do for yourself what do you feel you feel gratitude if you're like me you're immediately thinking how can I pay them back I don't want to owe this person and the problem is when

Jesus comes down from the bench and he takes that punishment assumed in that is that you'll never be able to pay him back you could try to work for eternity and you could never earn back that kind of a gift and so the only thing you can do is believe in it Paul says this is not the power of salvation for those who give Jesus an IOU for what he does it's the power of salvation for those who believe he puts it like this in 1 Corinthians 1 21 he says in the wisdom of God the world did not know God through wisdom but it pleased God through the folly of what we preach to save those who believe and so the only question this morning is where we started what is the truth do you believe do you believe that there is a God like this who would come down from the bench and stand where you should be standing because he loves you let's pray heavenly father help us never to stop standing in wonder at the power of the cross and at the

God who loved us so much that he became man in order to take our sins upon his shoulders and stand as the great sin bearer in your son's name we pray amen