

Mark 14:53-72 (PM)

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[0 : 00] I wonder how you respond to pressure in your life. What is your default reaction when you're exposed to suffering? Have any of you ever experienced persecution or discrimination or hate because of who you are or what you believe? As the pandemic eclipsed the world, persecuted pastors of secret Chinese house churches, the so-called underground church, which meets illegally, made a bold decision.

Under lockdown, because no one could come together, they would start preaching online, publicly, no longer in secret, but now for all to see, without any regard for the inherent risks from the state. And their motto was, let the light shine in the darkness.

Victor Guo was one such pastor and he preached in one of these online services, which had been compiled into a book. He wrote, suffering is a test for us as Christians. It shows us whether or not we have cracks, whether or not our faith is genuine or is counterfeit. In our text in Mark 14, we look at two people who are under pressure, two men who are on trial. One is courageous and he tells the truth and he is beaten and killed for it. The other is a coward who lies to save his skin and is left broken and weeping alone in the darkness. These two trials, Jesus and Peter's, are placed together in Mark 14 to contrast one another. One shows us who Jesus is and why he came, and the other trial shows the cracks in Peter's faith when publicly put under pressure. The story answers three critical questions for all of us.

It answers who is Jesus. It tells us why has he come, and thirdly, how should we be responding to him? So that's where we're going tonight. Our text starts with Peter in verse 54. It's on page 850 in the Bible in front of you. We're told Jesus is led to the house of the high priest, and Peter follows at a distance.

When Jesus was arrested, four verses earlier in Mark 14, we're told that all of his disciples fled. They all left him, just as Jesus said they would in verse 27. And so Peter flees when trouble comes, but now he follows Jesus from a safe distance. I'm skeptical of anyone who follows Jesus from a safe distance. If Jesus is your savior, if he's your king and your lord, if you believe he is the way and the truth and the life, if he loves you and has freed you from your sin, if your life and eternal destiny are in his loving hands, then why would you follow him at a distance? Wouldn't you want to be as close to Jesus as you could possibly be? If you could be intimately close to the all-powerful, almighty God, if you could experience intimacy with the almighty, filled with his spirit of peace and love and joy, then why would you want to distance yourself from him? Peter slinks back into the shadows.

[3 : 46] Because he's afraid of suffering. He's afraid if he gets too close, then he'll get in trouble from the world.

So Peter still follows Jesus in Mark 14, but he doesn't want anyone to know it. He does not want to be implicated. He doesn't want to be put on trial or put under pressure or forced to stand up for his own faith.

He keeps a low profile. He hides outside while Jesus goes on trial in the house. Peter wants a safe, comfortable faith, so he finds a comfortable spot for himself by the fire while his master is bound and beaten and sentenced to die.

There's another Chinese pastor named Simon Liu who preaches, Those who are afraid of death and care about this life too much do not dare to serve the Lord. They will probably not face much persecution either.

Their faith is not worthy to be tested. If you love this world, then this world has already gotten a hold of your life. Your faith is dead.

[4 : 56] You believe, but you do not have faith in your belief. That's Peter in Mark 14, verse 54. He's afraid of death, so he dares not serve the Lord.

He's like a seed planted on rocky soil that's baking in the sun with no roots. When persecution arises because of the word, Peter withers and falls away quickly.

So as we come to the text, ask yourself, how close are you to Jesus tonight? How deep are the roots of your faith? Are you like Peter, following from a distance, in comfort and anonymity?

So the narrative starts with Peter and it kind of floats over him in the courtyard and now it pulls us into the house, right up to Jesus, to witness his trial.

And the first thing all of us should note about Jesus' trial is that it's a total farce. This is not justice. It's a mock trial. It's a total miscarriage of justice.

[6 : 04] The judges have already made their judgment. The trial is rushed through in the middle of the night in the house of the high priest. This trial short circuits all the procedures and circumvents the law that it's supposed to uphold in order to expedite Jesus' execution.

And the reason is obvious. The religious leaders are looking to put Jesus to death. We're told that explicitly in verse 55. Jesus' judges were totally partial.

They'd already decided he was guilty in deserving death. They'd paid Judas to betray him. They'd assembled the mob to arrest him. They'd been plotting his destruction in every step of Jesus' ministry.

Mark highlights the injustice in verse 56 by saying that witnesses gave false testimony against Jesus. And since it was all fabricated, none of the testimony agreed.

There are all these contradictory stories and statements that underline the injustice of the trial and the innocence of Jesus. It was all made up. It was baseless accusation.

[7 : 12] So at this point in the trial, the high priest, seeing that it's not going well, stands up and walks into the middle of the room. This scene is like a John Grisham novel. It's so intense.

And in verse 60, he says to Jesus, have you no answer to make? What is it these men testify against you? We're told Jesus remained silent and made no answer.

Why? If this trial is a joke, why is Jesus keeping silent? He could so easily speak up and condemn his accusers.

So why doesn't he? Jesus is revealing to us a critical, unthinkable reality. He's showing us why he came and why it matters for all of us today.

Jesus is not going to defend himself because being found not guilty is not his goal. Jesus has come to die.

[8 : 16] This is God's will. He's told us, the son of man came not to be served, but to serve and to give up his life as a ransom for many.

This whole scene is happening during the evening of the day of preparation. That's where all the lambs for the Jewish Passover were slaughtered in the temple in Jerusalem. One first century historian remarks that in Jerusalem over the Passover weekend on this day of preparation, 250,000 lambs would have been slaughtered in the temple to atone for the sins of Israel.

A quarter of a million lambs in one day, in one temple. The blood would spill down from the altar and form a river flowing out of the temple mount down the streets of Jerusalem.

The city would have been thick with the smell of blood and burnt offering during Jesus' trial. And Jesus, on that exact day, right after eating the Passover meal, here presents himself as the true Passover lamb.

The one who has come to bear the sins of the whole world and to experience the full justice of God's wrath on all human sin and the suffering we cause.

[9 : 38] Isaiah the prophet prophesies over this moment in Isaiah 53, verse 7. It's on page 614. Isaiah says that he was oppressed and afflicted, yet he did not open his mouth.

He was led like a lamb to the slaughter. As a sheep before her shearers is silent, so he did not open his mouth.

Jesus' silence reveals to us his innocence, but also his willingness to submit to the will of his father. He goes in silence to his death to atone for the sins of the world, in solidarity with the will of his father.

Jesus here isn't a passive, defenseless victim of injustice. He's in charge of what's happening, despite the appearance of the opposite. His silence actually demonstrates his agency.

He knows what he is doing and where it will lead. And now we reach the climax of Jesus' court case. Jesus doesn't answer the high priest, and so the chief priest now asks the question that ultimately will seal Jesus' fate in verse 61.

[10:51] He says, you are the Christ, the Son of the Blessed. Now remember, way back at the very, very, very beginning of Mark's Gospel, Mark 1, verse 1.

We're given the entire thesis of this Gospel. You remember how it begins? The Gospel begins, the beginning of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

We're told the entire point of Mark's Gospel is to tell us that Jesus is God's Christ and God's Son. Jesus is God's chosen King and God's beloved Son.

This is the good news, that Jesus brings God's kingdom to earth, and he invites all to repent and believe and receive this Gospel. That was 14 chapters ago, and so now here, from the lips of the high priest, we hear again the entire point of the Gospel.

Jesus is the Christ, the King, the Son of God. Jesus is the Lamb of God, the true Passover Lamb who takes away the sin of the world.

[12:02] He alone is the one who can take away our sin, because he alone is the perfect spotless Lamb, the King of the kingdom of heaven, the beloved Son of God. So the chief priest asks this unbelievably charged question.

And the readers of Mark remember it from the very beginning of the Gospel. And Jesus now, under incredible pressure, surrounded by false witnesses and enemies, for the only time in Mark, tells us who he is, knowing that his answer will cause his execution.

He's asked, are you the Christ, the Son of God? And verse 52, he says, I am. And you will see the Son of Man seated at the right hand of power and coming with the clouds of heaven.

Jesus here flips the script. He's not a vulnerable victim, helplessly in the hands of the chief priest.

He's the Christ. He's the Son of God. He will sit at God's right hand on God's own throne.

He's telling the chief priest that he is God's judge who rules and reigns over all. In his answer, Jesus is basically saying, I am equal with God.

[13:22] I am the Son of Man promised in the prophecy of Daniel who will come before God and give dominion and glory and a kingdom will be given to me. And you'll see my victory and my vindication because I'm the Messiah.

I'm the King of the kingdom of heaven. I'm God's own Son, His beloved. And all the things of God shall be given to me. That answers the question, who is Jesus?

The Gospel of Mark was written so that we may see that Jesus is the Christ and He is the Son of God. And now the second question, why has Jesus come?

Well, He's not come to sit on a golden throne and rule as a tyrant, but rather to serve, to give His life for us, that we may receive life in Him that will never end, that we may enjoy His glory and dominion and kingdom forever with God.

And after Jesus says this, the chief priest tears His clothes, a sign of absolute objection and fury.

[14:38] And all the priests on the spot without any procedure decide that Jesus now deserves death. The court case dissolves into violence as they beat Him up and mock Him.

Again, fulfilling a prophecy of Isaiah. Jesus reveals who He is with no concern for His well-being or survival. He's God's King and God's Son.

He will triumph over His enemies and bring salvation to all who believe in Him. In His trial, He shows us why He's come. He's come to die. His death is how He will save the world and bring His kingdom and prove His identity.

It's an incredible scene and it answers for us who Jesus is and why He came. We've watched God's King and God's Son be wrongfully condemned and bound and beaten and sentenced to death.

And the narrative now pulls back again out of the house, zooming us out and returning to Peter in the courtyard outside as he endures his own trial.

[15:45] This is who Jesus is. Now how does Jesus' closest follower respond? How does Peter respond? And how should we?

Look at verse 66. We're told Peter was below in the courtyard away from Jesus. And there one of the servant girls of the high priest comes and sees Peter seeking his own comfort by the fire and studying him.

She says, you were with the Nazarene, Jesus. Jesus was just tried before the entire religious council, the Sanhedrin, the highest court in the land.

He remained faithful under the most intense pressure and pain. Peter is comfortably sitting by a fire when he's casually confronted by a woman who's a slave.

In that society there was nearly no one lower or less threatening in the social ladder than this person. And yet Peter who's already distanced himself from Jesus now denies him altogether. [16:49] Verse 68. I neither know nor understand what you mean. It's a ridiculous answer. It's like saying I have no idea what you're talking about. Peter senses he's no longer safe at the fire.

So he moves further away from Jesus. Now to the gateway under the crow of the rooster. And the slave girl sees him again and she says to some bystanders this man was with one of them. These bystanders are anonymous. They're literally nobodies. They're even less dangerous than the slave girl of the high priest. And yet before them too Peter denies Jesus.

In verse 70 the bystanders now speak surely you're one of them you're a Galilean. Peter's rural regional accent betrays him. It's evident to everyone present that he's a follower of Jesus. But he denies it. He now invokes a curse on himself and he swears I do not know this man of whom you speak. See now Peter is far far away from Christ journeying further and further into the darkness into the cold of night.

[18:00] Peter won't even use Jesus name. Instead impersonally calling him this man. Peter flees from Jesus when pressure comes.

He denies him absolutely to attempt to save himself. Peter curses himself verbally but also literally because to pull away from Jesus is to curse yourself to a life lived in the darkness.

Life separated from the source of life. And so when the rooster crows as Jesus said it would Peter remembers what Jesus said and he breaks down and he weeps.

Life apart from Jesus is a life absent of blessing. A life cursed in darkness and destined for death.

Now it's easy for us to zoom out and say so what's the point of the story?

Don't be a Peter. It's easy to condemn Peter here as spineless and faithless and fallen. But are we so different?

[19:10] In the everyday trials of life at the water cooler or on the bus or in the classroom or at the kitchen table how do you answer when your allegiance to Jesus is questioned?

How close do you follow Jesus in your life? Do you welcome Christ to come with you into every room into every conversation every setting of your life?

Or do you keep a safe distance? Do you hide in the shadows? Deny or deflect when faith inevitably comes up? I certainly have.

I certainly do. Jesus' faithfulness unto death under the most pressured of situations reveals to us that he is the Christ and he is the son of God.

And the faithlessness of Peter should remind all of us of our own faithlessness and point us to the reality that all of us are indeed in need of saving.

[20:19] This passage shows that our hope is not in ourselves. All of us here, all of us watching online are like Peter. All of us are frail and susceptible to fall.

Another Chinese house church pastor proclaims, the Christian's hope lies in this. We are not stronger or purer than others. Instead, rather than believing in ourselves, we believe in Jesus, who upholds us when we fall, who comforts us when we give up, who strengthens us when our strength is drained, who loves us when we are in pain, and who does not give up even when we are hopeless about ourselves.

If you know the story of scripture, you know this is not the end of Peter's story. Jesus doesn't give up on Peter, even though Peter gave up on Christ. After Jesus' resurrection, he forgives Peter, he reinstates him, he commissions him, and he empowers him to be used to extend God's kingdom and God's glory.

This feeble, fallen failure is made by Christ to be the rock, Petros, upon which he builds his new temple, the church. Peter writes to early Christians, telling them that all of us who are in Christ are being made to be living stones, living rocks, living Peters, upon which together God's temple collectively is being built.

with Jesus himself as our cornerstone and where God the Holy Spirit dwells. See, Jesus did rebuild the temple in three days, just as he promised he would.

[21:57] The house of God's presence on earth is now his living body, which is composed of all these Peters who believe in him. In this life, if you follow Jesus, you'll be put on trial, either officially or in the court of public opinion.

I think it's getting increasingly difficult to follow Jesus in our city. The pressure to deny him and distance ourselves from him and keep comfortable in the darkness is ratcheting up year by year.

If you work in medicine or in education or on a university campus or if you have a family where the worries of the world are creeping in and the pressure to leave Jesus behind is growing, you need to recognize we are all in a time of trial.

So what will we do? Will you deny Jesus or devote yourself afresh to follow him? Will you suffer the social, professional, ethical, financial implications of allegiance to Jesus?

Will you keep watch and keep awake as the world seems to be growing darker by the day? Or will you fall asleep and slip into the shadows? Will we let the light shine in the darkness like our Chinese brothers and sisters have committed to do?

[23 : 24] All of us when put on trial will be tempted to distance ourselves from Jesus like Peter. But distancing yourself from the source of life and love and light from your Savior and your God is a very dangerous path to choose.

Instead, place your hope fully on Jesus Christ. Trust that he is God's king and God's son. Trust that he is bringing the kingdom of heaven to earth where all of us are invited to dwell with him forever.

I want to finish with the words of another Chinese pastor who preached publicly from his house this. Being a Christian in this world is simple.

simple. It is service and worship, prayer and thanksgiving, without regard for your own lives. Simple. Only when you stop worrying about your life can you live out your faith in this deadly world.

The road of faith goes uphill. If you do not progress, you will fall backwards. A faith without much effort does not know true belief.

[24 : 36] It is a faith not worth having. Friends, as we journey to Easter, let's follow Jesus on this uphill road that will lead to the cross and to the grave and then pass them both unto eternal life with him forever.

Thanks be to God. Amen.