

“God on Trial: Injustice in Jerusalem”
The Gospel According to Mark 14:53-65
January 13th, 2019

One of the most famous trials in American history took place in the year 1925. Officially known as *The State of Tennessee versus John Thomas Scopes*, it was followed closely by the whole country. Better known as the “Scopes’ Monkey Trial,” high school teacher John Scopes was put on trial in Dayton, Tennessee for teaching evolution. As it would turn out, the trial was phony – it was a sham.

After Tennessee became one of three states to pass laws banning the teaching of evolution in state-funded schools, the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) took out newspaper ads looking for a test case with which to challenge the law.

The town fathers of Dayton saw this as an unprecedented opportunity for self-promotion. They weren’t trying to stop Scopes at all. In fact, he was in on the deal – they asked his permission before prosecuting him. Further, Scopes wasn’t even the regular biology teacher. He was a popular football coach who taught biology only as a substitute teacher. Everyone agreed on the plan at Robinson’s Drug Store, where the prosecutors swore out a warrant that was handed to the accused.

Soon the entire nation would be riveted by the controversial trial that was born as a Public Relations ploy. Scopes’ defense attorney, Clarence Darrow, didn’t even try to get Scopes acquitted. He wanted him convicted so that they could appeal to a higher court and generate more anti-creationism publicity.

The “Scopes’ Monkey Trial” was a travesty of justice. But, an even more important and world-wide trial was an even bigger mockery of justice. I refer, of course, to the arrest, trial, sentencing, and execution of God the Son, Jesus Christ.

We’re deep into the 14th chapter of our weekly study of Mark’s account of the gospel of Jesus Christ. Today’s passage (**Mark 14:53-65**) contains the first of two trials to which our Lord Jesus was subjected – the trial before the Jewish religious elite. In two Sundays, Lord willing, we’ll examine the second trial, which was before the Roman government.

The passage of Scripture, which we studied last Sunday morning, detailed how Jesus was taken into custody (**Mark 14:43-52**). Jesus was betrayed to both the religious and civil authorities by one of His inner circle – Judas Iscariot – a man Jesus had called to serve by His side as an apostle. Judas revealed His true colors when he contacted the authorities – men who hated Jesus - and they cooked up a dastardly plot to capture God the Son.

Mark 14:53-65:

“And they led Jesus away to the high priest; and with him were assembled all the chief priests, the elders, and the scribes. ⁵⁴But Peter followed Him at a distance, right into the courtyard of the high priest. And he sat with the servants and warmed himself at the fire.

⁵⁵Now the chief priests and all the council sought testimony against Jesus to put Him to death, but found none. ⁵⁶For many bore false witness against Him, but their testimonies did not agree.

⁵⁷Then some rose up and bore false witness against Him, saying, ⁵⁸“We heard Him say, ‘I will destroy this temple made with hands, and within three days I will build another made without hands.’ ” ⁵⁹But not even then did their testimony agree.

⁶⁰And the high priest stood up in the midst and asked Jesus, saying, “Do You answer nothing? What is it these men testify against You?” ⁶¹But He kept silent and answered nothing.

Again the high priest asked Him, saying to Him, “Are You the Christ, the Son of the Blessed?”

⁶²Jesus said, “I am. And you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Power, and coming with the clouds of heaven.”

⁶³Then the high priest tore his clothes and said, “What further need do we have of witnesses? ⁶⁴You have heard the blasphemy! What do you think?”

And they all condemned Him to be deserving of death.

⁶⁵Then some began to spit on Him, and to blindfold Him, and to beat Him, and to say to Him, “Prophesy!” And the officers struck Him with the palms of their hands.”

It's not hard to see where God is in this passage. As the passage opens with verse 53, God is being led away from the Garden of Gethsemane by the detachment of religious leaders and Roman soldiers. In John's gospel account, he observed that Jesus was “arrested...and bound.” (**John 18:12**) Let that sink in - Jesus, the Word of God, described as being bound! The irony is that in **2 Timothy 2:9**, the Apostle Paul asserts, “...the word of God is not bound!” Those seizing Jesus that night in the Garden may have thought they had Him secure in their chains; but mere chains will not contain Jesus! He is the eternal Son of God! He is fully in control of how the events are being carried out here. He could very easily have turned the tables on this detachment of armed soldiers! But, He willingly submitted to “the miseries of this life.” (WSC, Q27) For Him, that required the sacrifice of His life for the people He came to earth to save.

Verse 53 says that Jesus was led away to “the high priest.” John identifies the high priest in his gospel account – “Caiaphas.” John also records that Jesus was taken to “Annas” before He was taken to Caiaphas. Annas had previously served as high priest, appointed in the year 7 AD. Caiaphas became high priest in the year 25 AD. Annas was Caiaphas' father-in-law; it is likely that the cohort was following some form of protocol; itself quite interesting since that didn't seem to matter in what would take place in the trial!

Scripture doesn't record what happened when Jesus stood before Annas, but that was the first step of Jesus' trial before the Jewish leaders. How ironic that these heads of the Jewish nation were combining together to kill their own Messiah, and, in the words of JC Ryle, “judging Him who will one day come in glory to judge them and all mankind.” (Ryle, 327)

Mark's account begins with the second step-an appearance before the Sanhedrin. Caiaphas was the leader of the Sanhedrin, which is the assembly pictured in verses 53 and 55. The Sanhedrin was the supreme council of the Jewish people. Its origin is traced back to the 70 elders Moses formed in **Numbers 11:16-17**.

Here in **Mark Chapter 14**, this council is anything but benevolent and kind toward Jesus. They tried to find multiple witnesses who would condemn Jesus to death. But, as verse 56 reveals, corroborating testimony was difficult to find. It was required, according to **Deuteronomy 17:6**,

which reads, “Whoever is deserving of death shall be put to death on the testimony of two or three witnesses; he shall not be put to death on the testimony of one witness.”

With verses 57-59 of **Mark Chapter 14**, other false witnesses hearken back to the incident when Jesus drove the money changers from the temple at the beginning of His earthly ministry. Their words in verse 58 are also what we find in **John 2:19**, “Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.” Where they thought Jesus was speaking about a building, He was actually speaking about His body. Even so, no two witnesses could agree.

“In contrast to these false witnesses, our Lord stood before the Sanhedrin as the ‘faithful and true witness’ of **Revelation 1:5** (Ferguson, 247). Verse 60 pictures the high priest, Caiaphas, standing to interrogate Jesus.

You know about Job, don’t you? Who doesn’t right? For 36 chapters of the Old Testament book bearing his name, Job receives criticism from his friends, he is scorned by his wife, and, he questions God. As **Job Chapter 38** opens, we have a decidedly different turn of events. God speaks – this is **Job 38:1-2**:

“Then the LORD answered Job out of the whirlwind, and said:

² “Who is this who darkens counsel

By words without knowledge?

³ Now prepare yourself like a man;

I will question **you**, and you shall answer Me.” (*Gulp!*)

Even so, Caiaphas poses a question to Jesus – it’s in verse 60, “Do You answer nothing? What is it these men testify against You?” *What’s Jesus response?* Silence (verse 61). There’s nothing to answer; no substantiated accusation had been made. There was nothing to respond to! As such, we see Jesus fulfilling **Isaiah 53:7**, “...He was led as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before its shearers is silent, so He opened not His mouth.”

In his gospel account, Matthew notes that before Caiaphas asks Jesus a second question, he puts Jesus under oath (**Matthew 26:63**). In **Mark 14:61**, Caiaphas asks Jesus, “Are You the Christ, the Son of the Blessed?” “Blessed” is a name for God. Despite their gross errors about Jesus’ identity, these religious leaders are sticklers for the small things. In calling God “the Blessed,” Caiaphas is taking pains not to speak God’s name. It doesn’t seem to bother Him at all that He’s guilty of blaspheming God here!

For the first time, Jesus clearly reveals Who He is here in verse 62. He replies, “I am. And you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Power, and coming with the clouds of heaven.” Jesus agreed that He was the Christ, the Son of God and the Son of Man. In his vision, the prophet Daniel said (**Daniel 7:13-14**), “...*One* like the Son of Man, coming with the clouds of heaven! He came to the Ancient of Days, and they brought Him near before Him. Then to Him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve Him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and His kingdom *the one* which shall

not be destroyed.” “Jesus, whom the Sanhedrin proposed to judge, was claiming to be the king and judge of all the earth!” (Ferguson, 248)

With verses 63 & 64, Caiaphas and the Sanhedrin condemned Jesus for blasphemy. But, they couldn't sentence or put Him to death. That was something the Roman government had to do. Verse 65 illustrates starkly the type of behaviors of religious men who reject Jesus – spitting, beating, and mocking God and His children.

We're not far from this in our day; God's people are treated poorly simply because they profess saving faith in Jesus. One day last week, I was listening to Albert Mohler's podcast, "The Briefing." He related the following persecution facing Christian leaders in Holland.

In 2017, a group of evangelical Christians adopted a statement that became known as the Nashville Statement. This statement affirmed a biblical understanding of gender, sexuality, and marriage.

News comes this past week that 250 Dutch Christian leaders, pastors and other leaders, have signed the Nashville Statement. One of the headlines coming from the Netherlands is so ominous as to tell us that the Dutch government is deciding whether or not the very signing and publication of the Nashville Statement by those Christian leaders is actually a violation worthy of criminal prosecution. Listen to the language used in this report, "The document, signed by around 250 hardline Protestant ministers, states that marriage is the 'covenantal, sexual, procreative, lifelong union of one man and one woman' and that 'it is sinful to approve of homosexual impurity or transgenderism.'"

Those words are what virtually every Christian church, every Christian denomination throughout the last 2,000 years would have believed and affirmed without question. Now, in 2019, that's enough, at least in the Netherlands, to have these pastors identified as "hardline Protestant ministers."

Back in 2001, the Netherlands became the first government on earth to legalize same-sex marriage. By any measure, the Netherlands is now one of the most secular of societies. One report from 2015 indicates that 82% of citizens in the Netherlands indicate that 59% indicated that they had never even once in their lives entered a church building.

It's no wonder the people of the Netherlands have drifted from their once firm Reformed and Christian roots. 6 in 10 adults have never even been inside of a church building!

“Let us leave (this) passage with a deep sense of the reality and certainty of our Lord Jesus Christ's second coming. Once more at the very end of His ministry, and in the face of His deadly enemies, we find Him asserting the mighty truth that He will come again to judge the world. Let it be one of the leading truths in our own personal Christianity. Let us live in the daily recollection that our Savior is one day coming back to this world...to gather together and reward His people, and to punish fearfully all His enemies.” (Ryle, 330)

God has given many of you salvation from your sins. Jesus was tried, spit on, and beaten for you. Some of you are yet beyond God's grace; you haven't bowed to the King Who endured rejection and torture for your sins. He is coming back to earth. *Will He come back for you?*