

JESUS WAS TRIED IN OUR PLACE

Mark 14:53-15:15

Key Verses: 14:61-62

But Jesus remained silent and gave no answer. Again the high priest asked him, "Are you the Christ, the Son of the Blessed One?" "I am," said Jesus. "And you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Mighty One and coming on the clouds of heaven."

Today's passage tells us how Jesus was tried before the high priest and the Roman Governor. He was falsely charged, tried in a kangaroo court, and sentenced to death by the politically motivated judges. Throughout the ordeal Jesus did not defend himself. However, he said one thing clearly -- that he is the Christ and he would come as the Judge of the living and the dead. This offended the religious leaders who promptly condemned him to death and turned him over to the Roman governor. Before the governor, Jesus declared that he was the king of the Jews. Pilate was puzzled by this self-incriminating statement. Other than that, Jesus remained silent and was determined to be the Lamb of God. As we study these accounts of our Lord Jesus' suffering, we should remember that Jesus was tried and crucified for our sins. He was tried in our place!

I. THE TRIAL BEFORE THE SANHEDRIN (53-65)

As we learned earlier, Jesus was arrested in Gethsemane by an armed mob led by a betrayer. They took him to the high priest, and all the chief priests, elders and teachers of the law (53). These religious leaders were the members of the Sanhedrin—the Jewish ruling council. Apparently, they had arranged in advance to hold the trial in the middle of the night. Let's think about how Jesus was tried before the Sanhedrin.

First of all, according to the Jewish law, it was illegal to hold a trial in the secrecy of the night. The Sanhedrin broke the law. Look at verse 55. *The chief priests and the whole Sanhedrin were looking for evidence against Jesus so that they could put him to death, but they did not find any.* They had already decided that Jesus was guilty even before the trial. They were now looking for evidence against him so that they could put him to death. In most judicial systems, a person is innocent until proven guilty. But the Jewish leaders were not interested in truth or justice. They were jealous of Jesus who was getting popular. They wanted to eliminate Jesus somehow and anyhow. Their



The False Witnesses Before Caiaphas by James Tissot

night court was a kangaroo court in that they were simply going through the motion to convict Jesus.

Look at verses 56-59. *Many testified falsely against him, but their statements did not agree. Then some stood up and gave this false testimony against him: "We heard him say, 'I will destroy this man-made temple and in three days will build another, not made by man.'" Yet even then their testimony did not agree.* According to the Jewish law, they needed at least two witnesses who agreed with each other in order to establish a charge (Dt 19:15). Many witnesses came forward, willing to make false statements on behalf of the prosecution. The problem was that their testimonies crumbled even without cross examination as they tried to make up stories. Someone stood up and gave a false testimony against Jesus about his claim to build a temple in three days. It is true that Jesus said, "Destroy this temple, and I will raise it again in three days" (Jn 2:19). Jesus said this after clearing the merchants and money changers from the temple. The Jews demanded him of a miraculous sign to prove that he had the authority to do such a thing. Jesus promised the miracle of his death on the cross for the sins of the world and his resurrection to open the door to the kingdom of God. The Jews did not understand the meaning of this promise. So they snickered at him and said, "It has taken forty-six years to build this temple, and you are going to raise it in three days?" Of course, the temple Jesus had spoken of was his body (Jn 2:20-21).

The Jewish judges did not punish the false witnesses for their obstruction of justice. Instead, they accepted their false testimonies because they were helpful in sentencing Jesus to death. Look at verses 60-61. *Then the high priest stood up before them and asked Jesus, "Are you not going to answer? What is this testimony that these men are bringing against you?" But Jesus remained silent and gave no answer.* Why did Jesus remain silent? Why didn't he defend himself against the false charges? It was because he had already decided to obey the will of God to become the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. After the prayer struggle at Gethsemane, Jesus said, "the Scriptures must be fulfilled" (49). He meant, "I must obey the word of God." Jesus remained silent, just as the Prophet Isaiah had prophesied about him long time ago. Isaiah 53:7 says: "He was oppressed and afflicted, yet he did not open his mouth; he was led like a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is silent, so he did not open his mouth."

However, Jesus was not silent on one question. Look at verses 61b-62. *Again the high priest asked him, "Are you the Christ, the Son of the Blessed One?" "I am," said Jesus. "And you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Mighty One and coming on the clouds of heaven."* The high priest had in mind a blasphemy charge that was punishable by death. This was the one question Jesus could invoke the Fifth Amendment (the right not to testify against himself) to avoid a guilty verdict. Jesus knew this. But he answered clearly, "I am." Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God. He identified himself as the Son of God. He gave the high priest what he was looking for. That was not all. He taught the presiding judge an important truth about the future. Jesus said to him, "And you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Mighty One and coming on the clouds of heaven." Jesus was being tried before the Jewish supreme court and was about to be sentenced to death. But Jesus declared before the chief justice that he would be sitting at the right hand of the Mighty God. Most of all, he

will be coming on the clouds of heaven as the ultimate Judge of the living and the dead. On that day, everyone including the high priest will have to stand before the judgment seat of God (Rev 20:11-15; Ac 10:42; 2Ti 4:1-2).

How did the high priest and Sanhedrin react to the truth? Look at verses 63-64. *The high priest tore his clothes. "Why do we need any more witnesses?" he asked. "You have heard the blasphemy. What do you think?" They all condemned him as worthy of death.* They became very angry when Jesus told them about his identity as the Son of God and his glorious second coming. They condemned him as worthy of death. But that was not all. The supreme justices turned into a lynching mob. Verse 65 says: *Then some began to spit at him; they blindfolded him, struck him with their fists, and said, "Prophecy!" And the guards took him and beat him.* They took turns to abuse Jesus. And our Lord Jesus remained silent. He did so in order to fulfill the Scriptures, that is, to obey the word of God. He remained silent in order to save sinners like you and me!

II. PETER DISOWNS JESUS (66-72)

Meanwhile, what was Peter doing? At the Lord's Supper, Peter had declared, "Even if I have to die with you, I will never disown you" (31). But he became scared when Jesus was arrested by the armed contingent and taken to the high priest. Verse 54 says that *Peter followed him at a distance, right into the courtyard of the high priest. There he sat with the guards and warmed himself at the fire.* Peter wanted to follow Jesus, but only at a distance. He was not ready to suffer with the Christ yet. He did not pray, so he was spiritually unprepared. He wasn't ready to bear the cross with Jesus. He didn't have a spiritual direction. So what happened in the courtyard that night?

Look at verses 66-72. *While Peter was below in the courtyard, one of the servant girls of the high priest came by. When she saw Peter warming himself, she looked closely at him. "You also were with that Nazarene, Jesus," she said. But he denied it. "I don't know or understand what you're talking about," he said, and went out into the entryway. When the servant girl saw him there, she said again to those standing around, "This fellow is one of them." Again he denied it. After a little while, those standing near said to Peter, "Surely you are one of them, for you are a Galilean." He began to call down curses on himself, and he swore to them, "I don't know this man you're talking about." Immediately the rooster crowed the second time. Then Peter remembered the word Jesus had spoken to him: "Before the rooster crows twice you will disown me three times." And he broke down and wept.*

It was unthinkable for Peter to disown the Lord, saying, "I don't know this man." But he did. Not just once or twice, but three times. His loyalty towards Jesus failed because it was based on his human feelings, not on the word of God. He failed because he depended on his self-confidence than on God. He didn't pray when Jesus told him to. When the rooster crowed the second time, Peter finally remembered the word Jesus had spoken to him concerning his betrayal (30-31). Peter broke down and wept. He repented. He failed miserably, but this event became an important turning point in his life, because he realized that he couldn't depend on his human confidence. We also fail as Jesus' disciples. But we should know that failure can be a stepping stone for our spiritual growth, if we remember the word of God and repent before him.

III. JESUS BEFORE PILATE (15:1-15)

Look at 15:1. *Very early in the morning, the chief priests, with the elders, the teachers of the law and the whole Sanhedrin, reached a decision. They bound Jesus, led him away and handed him over to Pilate.* The Jewish leaders had no right to execute a person (Jn 18:31). So they bound Jesus and handed him over to Pilate who was the Roman governor of Judea at that time. He was appointed by the Emperor Tiberius in A.D. 26. The Roman governor was in charge of the army of occupation, kept the taxes flowing to Rome, appointed the high priests, and decided cases involving capital punishment.

What was the main charge that the religious leaders brought to Pilate against Jesus? Apparently it was now a treason charge. They had sentenced Jesus to death on a blasphemy charge but they changed it to treason because it was politically expedient. They knew that Pilate would be concerned only with a charge of political nature, not a religious one.

The trial of Jesus before Pilate was similar to the one before the Sanhedrin. Jesus remained silent throughout the trial, except for one question. *“Are you the king of the Jews?” asked Pilate. “Yes, it is as you say,” Jesus replied.* Jesus was fully aware that to claim to be the king of the Jews was treason, because the Roman Emperor ruled the country. But he declared to be the king, because he is the King of kings. Of course, Jesus is not a political king. In John 18:36, *Jesus said, “My kingdom is not of this world. If it were, my servants would fight to prevent my arrest by the Jews. But now my kingdom is from another place.”*

Look at verses 3-5. *The chief priests accused him of many things. So again Pilate asked him, “Aren’t you going to answer? See how many things they are accusing you of.” But Jesus still made no reply, and Pilate was amazed.* After declaring to be the spiritual king, Jesus did not defend himself against the numerous charges. He was determined to be the Lamb of God. Pilate was amazed that Jesus did not defend himself. People try to defend themselves when they are accused. Even drug dealers hire most expensive lawyers to find some legal loopholes to get them off the prison. Jesus was innocent of all charges. But he didn’t defend himself. He made no reply. The Scriptures had to be fulfilled in order to save sinners like us.

As we read the accounts of the trial, we discover that Pilate knew about the real motive of the Jewish leaders. He knew that *it was out of envy that the chief priests had handed Jesus over to him* (10). He was fully aware of the innocence of Jesus. But Pilate was a politician. He was more interested in saving his career than in administering justice. One thing he really wanted to avoid was any sort of public disturbance in Judea. If news of a riot is reported to Rome, he could be fired. Many former governors had been fired that way. And he didn’t want that. So what did he do?

Look at verses 6-13. *Now it was the custom at the Feast to release a prisoner whom the people requested. A man called Barabbas was in prison with the insurrectionists who had committed murder in the uprising. The crowd came up and asked Pilate to do for them what he usually did. “Do you want me to release to you the*

king of the Jews?” asked Pilate, knowing it was out of envy that the chief priests had handed Jesus over to him. But the chief priests stirred up the crowd to have Pilate release Barabbas instead. “What shall I do, then, with the one you call the king of the Jews?” Pilate asked them. “Crucify him!” they shouted.

Pilate tried to compromise. He proposed that he grant Jesus a pardon. It was an attempt to sentence Jesus guilty but to release him. But the mob wanted to have Jesus crucified because the chief priests had stirred them up. They demanded Pilate to release Barabbas instead. Pilate did not want to risk political instability. He knew the truth but did not follow it. He let political ambition outweigh the truth that Jesus was innocent.

Look at verses 14-15. *“Why? What crime has he committed?” asked Pilate. But they shouted all the louder, “Crucify him!” Wanting to satisfy the crowd, Pilate released Barabbas to them. He had Jesus flogged, and handed him over to be crucified.* Pilate had Jesus flogged. This is such a simple statement. But the Roman flogging was a notorious punishment. The victim was stripped and his hands were tied behind his back. The lash was studded with sharpened pieces of bone and lead. Chunks of flesh were flying from the back of Jesus as the soldiers flogged him. Pilate thought the crowd would become sympathetic towards Jesus once they saw his terrible suffering. But they became more blood thirsty. Finally, Pilate relented and handed him over to be crucified.

In one sense, Pilate was on trial. He had the power to save the innocent man from the murderous hands of the religious leaders. But he decided to save his political career. According to Matthew, he tried to escape the responsibility of killing an innocent man. He took water and washed his hands in front of the crowd. “I am innocent of this man’s blood,” he said, “It is your responsibility” (Mt 27:24). But he could not escape the judgment of history. Pontius Pilate is forever known as the man who sentenced Jesus to death and crucified him.

In today’s passage, we learned how Jesus was tried before the religious leaders and the Roman governor. He was abused verbally, physically and mentally. He was humiliated. Finally he was condemned to death. Why? What crime did he commit to deserve such extreme punishment? We should never forget that Jesus was tried and crucified because of our sins! Isaiah 53:4-6 say: “Surely he took up our infirmities and carried our sorrows, yet we considered him stricken by God, smitten by him, and afflicted. But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed. We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all.”

May God help us to remember the sufferings of our Lord Jesus! Jesus was tried in our place. We are the guilty ones because we sinned before the Holy God. But Jesus was tried and sentenced to death. He shed his redeeming blood on the cross to save us. He became our Passover lamb so that when we stand before the judgment seat of God, his blood will represent us. We are declared not guilty because of his blood. May God help us to love him and serve him! May God help us to participate in the remaining sufferings of our Lord Jesus until he comes again on the clouds of heaven!