

“Jesus on Trial”

by Pastor Steve Hammond on 1/26/2020
Text: Mark 14:53-65 at FBC of Newport, NH

//60 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?” 61 But Jesus remained silent and gave no answer.

Again the high priest asked him, “Are you the Messiah, the Son of the Blessed One?”

62 “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.”

63 The high priest tore his clothes. “Why do we need any more witnesses?” he asked. 64 “You have heard the blasphemy. What do you think?”

They all condemned him as worthy of death. 65 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.//

—Mark 14:60-65 (NIV)

Have you ever had to judge someone? I don't mean casually around a coffee table, which can also be problematic. But I mean in a court of law, or in some official capacity. I have never been called to jury duty. It's either because there's a policy against calling pastors to jury duty, or else it's because my name is never listed in the phone book, due to the fact I live in a parsonage. “Hello, is Mr. or Mrs. Parsonage there?” I've actually had people ask me that question. Upon which I tell them there's no one here by that name. It's like having a free unlisted phone number.

I have had to lead a deacon board in a matter of discipline against a member of a former church, but I'd rather not go into details on that. My father served on the jury of a murder trial up in Maine years ago. He said it wasn't like on TV. The evidence was very clear the man was guilty.

I would imagine a number of you either have such experiences or know someone who has. It can be very sobering. It can bring a lot of self-examination and thought about the whole process. Hopefully people take it seriously and are extra careful to make a right judgment. There's a reason our judicial system calls for such judgments to be made “beyond a reasonable doubt” for any pronouncement of guilt. (Note: it's not “beyond a shadow of doubt”) Reason and evidence keep us from rendering a judgment that is based on emotions or the flip of a coin. Reason is more reflective of justice.

But not everyone is reasonable when it comes to rendering a verdict at a trial. This is why there are juries of more than one person and why there are appeals and retrials. And it's why there are times when the verdict is wrong. Just plain wrong.

This was the case when Jesus was on trial, according to the scriptures and according to God's verdict at the appeal in His raising Jesus from the dead. At his official trial before the Jewish governing body of the Sanhedrin Jesus was found guilty of blasphemy and condemned to death. He also stood before Pilate, the Roman governor, who actually found Jesus innocent, but let him be condemned anyway, due to political expediency. Jesus was also judged by the crowd day by day, usually favorably, too. Until one day the wind blew such that the crowd yelled "Crucify him! Crucify him!"

There were a lot of ways people judged Jesus. Just as there are a lot of ways he's still being judged by people today. But I want to concentrate on Mark's record of the trial of Jesus before the Sanhedrin. Not only is it an insight into what happened historically, I believe it is also an insight into what happens with a lot of people since that trial. People who say they are looking for the truth about Jesus but aren't. They already have rendered their verdict in their hearts, but they're going through the motions of listening to testimonies, evidences and reasons so they can hopefully make their condemnation of Jesus carry enough weight to bury him. They would like nothing more than to see the last of Jesus forever.

So, here is how the trial went with the Sanhedrin. And here, too, is how it has gone with certain people ever since that trial. The outline is as follows:

- There is the outward appearance of a rational inquiry for what is true and just.
- Evidence and witnesses are presented but are found to be conflicting and inconclusive.
- Eventually the focus comes down to Jesus himself. But even though he has been preaching, teaching and performing wonders publicly for years, he repeats none of it for this deliberative body.
- When pressed to answer the charge of being the Jewish Messiah and even the Son of God, he answers affirmatively and adds that those judging him will be judged by him one day.
- Reaction to Jesus' claim is immediate. The claim in and of itself is assumed to be false and judged as blasphemous. There is no reason

or evidence given for this judgment. It is simply taken as beyond the belief of the one(s) making the present judgment. And so it must be false.

- Therefore Jesus is deserving of mockery, harassment and the most serious punishment possible: death, even death on a cross.

How many people today judge Jesus in exactly this way? Surely this ancient way of the Sanhedrin is what is behind a lot of modern people's supposedly intellectual judgments against Jesus. "Jesus is simply beyond what I will accept; therefore he must be false." They may or may not say this. But this is the summary of their heart toward him, either way. And they don't have to actually crucify him in order to harbor the same state of heart and mind as those upright, law abiding, Jewish leaders of Jesus' day.

So what do we make of this?

Some people are simply not looking for the truth about Jesus.

They may even look like they've done a lot of investigation and have a lot to say, but they've really been engaging in the appearance of a trial. All for the purpose of being able to say they've conducted a trial. This is so they won't just be giving you their opinion. They want to give you their judgment, their truth. They want to be on the right side of history, at least for the time being.

In truth, though, **they already have rendered their judgment against Jesus well before the trial.** The Pharisees and the Herodians, who hated each other, hated Jesus enough to want to work together to kill him by chapter three in the Gospel of Mark. I doubt the Sanhedrin, which had a number of Pharisees in its membership, was waiting to hold their judgment much longer than that.

Surely people today are no different when they have either already met Jesus or have heard about him through others and they clash. It could be a political thing, I suppose, like when he included the hated tax collectors in his company. It could be economic, like when he sent all those pigs over the cliff and ruined the pig herders' business. It could be religious, too, like when he healed people on the Sabbath.

But underneath those issues there was a core to the conflict: Sin. Idolatry. Hypocrisy. And putting one's self at the heart of measuring what is right and what is wrong.

Surely people today do the same thing. None of us on our own have gotten beyond those issues. All of us are fully capable of hating Jesus if we insist on measuring him according to ourselves, our judgments, our own

personal standards of righteousness. Especially when we resist his attempts to expose us and call us to repentance.

Not many people are good and eager about looking for opportunities to repent. How many of us, in our natural selves, are looking forward to have our sins exposed to the light of God's righteousness? Probably not many. It takes a powerful arresting and serious trial to bring most of us to that point in life. But that is exactly what Jesus has given us. As he himself is arrested and put on trial, he has also arrested the attention of everyone as this Jesus puts us all on trial. Caiaphas himself has been put on trial. Pilate's on trial. Israel has found herself on trial. And now the whole world is standing before Jesus with both judgment and grace in the balance.

Be careful then. This judgment doesn't go by superficial appearances. It doesn't favor our feelings, nor our favorite practice of idolatry. Jesus, by his very nature, confronts us and calls us to repent—and believe the Good News of the Kingdom of God.

If we judge against him... well, then, that's where we find there are **some people who are actually looking, not for a trial, but for a crucifixion.**

How many people judge Jesus today in very much the same way as did the Sanhedrin just before he was crucified? A lot. Probably most all of us at one time or another. And as long as we resist him we align ourselves with the judgment of the Sanhedrin.

We need to repent of that. We need to dare to have an honest trial, not only of Jesus, but of ourselves in the process. (Next week we'll look at the trial of Peter.) When we do this we will find that very trial and crucifixion to be the source of our forgiveness and a judgment of Jesus that brings praise to our lips.

Just like our call to worship today from Psalm 105. We'll give him praise and songs and glory in his name. We will look at his face and find strength. Then we'll tell of his wonderful acts, his miracles and the wonder of *his* judgments!