

## **The Beginning of the End for the Great King**

### **Mark 14:53-72**

**Introduction:** 1) If you were to talk to my 4 sons and ask them what were some of their dad's favorite sayings as they were growing up I am sure one that would be at the top of their list would be, "Life is not fair." Most of us, given our life's experiences, would readily agree. Life often is not fair.

2) However, in the case of our Savior not only was life unfair, his final hours were unjust and illegal. Comparing all 4 gospels we discover Jesus endured 6 hearings or trials in a matter of hours, 3 ecclesiastical trials before the Jewish religious authorities and 3 civil trials before the Roman political authorities (Matt 26-27; Mark 14-15; Luke 22-23; John 18-19).

3) And, it is difficult to count up all the illegal violations that took place according to Jewish Law.

- 1) In capital cases like Jesus', trials at night were forbidden.
- 2) In cases where a guilty verdict was reached, a second day and session was required to ensure a fair trial.
- 3) Such a trial should not convene on a Sabbath or festival.
- 4) A charge of blasphemy could not be sustained unless the defendant cursed God's name, and then the penalty was to be death by stoning.

- 5) No formal meeting of the Sanhedrin ever took place in the temple precincts, the proper location for a trial.
- 6) Jesus was not offered or provided a defense attorney.

4) However pastor/theologian Sam Storms has pointed out that,

“Contrary to the opinion of some, Rabbinic law actually insists that the execution of a rebellious teacher take place on one of the three primary feast days to serve as a more visible example and deterrent to the people.” Furthermore,

- 1) The reason for his trial occurring at night is that criminals could not be executed on the Sabbath. If Jesus was arrested on Thursday night, things had to move swiftly if He was to be killed and buried by dusk on Friday, just before the start of the Sabbath.
- 2) “An all-night session of the Jewish authorities was demanded by the fact that Roman Officials like Pilate worked very early in the morning and then refused to take on new cases for the rest of the day. If Jesus could not be presented to Pilate early Friday morning, the case would drag on till after the Sabbath – along with mounting risks of mob violence” (D.A. Carson, *Matt*, EBC, 550).
- 3) Other irregularities are easily understandable once we remember two things: 1) Many of the legal procedures contained in Rabbinic law

were purely *theoretical* and were rarely if ever put into practice. 2)

These religious leaders were obviously motivated by *expediency*.

Such flagrant breaches of judicial procedure were of little concern to them when the hour demanded they take quick action. Simply put, when there is a will to quickly remove an undesirable enemy, a way will be found, the law notwithstanding! (Sermon Notes)

5) So, it is the beginning of the end for the great King. Religious and political authorities will conspire to put him to death. And, his closest companion will draw near only to deny that he ever knew Him. The end is near. He is all alone. How will things go for Him?

**I. Jesus makes the Faithful Witness as to who He is 14:53-65**

In Revelation 1:5 the risen and glorified Christ is called the “Faithful Witness.”

The word “witness” will occur in some form 7 times in just 9 verses of our text.

Under incredible duress and persecution Jesus will stand up and speak out, bearing clear testimony concerning who He is and what He will do (14:62). He knows it will seal His fate. He knows it is what He must do. Our souls and eternal destiny literally hang in the balance!

1) **A false witness will find a way to lie no matter the facts**

**14:53-59**

- Jesus was taken to the high priest, a man named Joseph Caiaphas, who held the office from A.D. 18-36. He succeeded his father-in-law Annas, who was removed by the Romans in A. D. 18, but who still wielded enormous influence. John 18:12 records that the soldiers actually took Jesus to Annas first. Then the 71 member Sanhedrin quickly gathered and convened for a night session to deal with Jesus (v. 53).
- Peter, alone apparently, “followed...at a distance right into the courtyard of the high priest” where he sat with the guards and warmed himself by an open fire (v. 54). He certainly deserves some credit at this point.
- The kangaroo court of the chief priest and Sanhedrin (“Council”) sought witnesses against Jesus but struck out! “They found none.” (v. 55). In fact the “false witnesses” they were able to enlist “did not agree” (vs. 56, 59). Some accused Him of saying He would destroy and rebuild the temple in 3 days (vs. 57-58). Jesus had indeed said something like this in John 2:19, but in reference to His body. “Destroy this temple,

and in 3 days I will raise it up.” The Jews mistakenly thought He was referring to Herod’s temple (John 2:20), but John makes clear He was, speaking of His body and the resurrection (John 2:21). No wonder that even concerning this, their testimony did not agree (Mark 14:59). Destruction of a worship place was a capital offense in the ancient world (Josephus 19.6.2), but the Scriptures require unanimous testimony from at least 2 witnesses for a conviction (Deut 17:6; 19:15; Num. 35:30). These lying witnesses summoned from their slumbers late at night simply could not get their stories straight. Still, as far as this tribunal was concerned, Jesus was “guilty until proven innocent” and He was not going to be found innocent. The Mishnah said, “ A Sanhedrin which as often as once in 7 years condemns a man to death, is a slaughterhouse” (Keller notes, 195). On this night they were determined to slay their victim.

2) **A true witness will always tell the truth no matter the consequences** **14:60-65**

- The trial of the Great King had not gone as planned. In fact it was a debacle. A farce. A sham. And the case is unraveling

and headed for disaster from the perspective of the religious leaders.

- But then the high priest Caiaphas rises (v. 60) and begins to interrogate Jesus himself. Any idea of judicial fairness and impartiality flies out the window. He asks Jesus to respond to the charges of the false witnesses (v. 60), “But he remained silent and made no answer’ (v. 61). Once more Isaiah 53 is fulfilled, this time it is verse 7, “He was oppressed and He was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth; like a lamb that is led to the slaughter, and like a sheep that before its shearers is silent, so he opened not his mouth.”
- No doubt full of frustration by now the high priest addresses Jesus again and asks Him, this time under oath according to Matt. 26:63, “Are you the Christ (the Messiah), the Son of the Blesses?” (v. 61). The “you” is emphatic and “Blessed One” is a title for God. Are you the Messiah, the Son of God (see 2 Sam.7:11-16; Psalm 2)? James Edwards notes the irony of the question, “The effect is to put a full christological confession into the mouth of the high priest!..his arch-prosecutor confesses his name! How ironic that in the Gospel of Mark the two most

complete christological confessions from humans occur in the mouth of those responsible for Jesus' death: the high priest in 14:61 and the centurion at the cross in 15:39" (Edwards, 446)

- Numerous times in Mark's gospel Jesus asked those who followed Him and those He healed to be silent concerning His identity. The time for the "Messianic Secret" has now come to an end. Called, under divine oath, to bear witness to His true identity, He does not flinch nor does He waver. He directly and openly affirms, "I am" (Gr. *ego eimi*). However, He does not stop there. He identifies the Messiah with Daniel 7:13-14's apocalyptic Son of Man and declares, "You will see the Son of Man seated at the right hand of Power [God], and coming with the clouds of heaven" (v. 62). Jesus weds Daniel 7:13-14 with Psalm 110:1 in identifying Himself as the Messiah and God's Son (see Mark 12:35-37). The One you now judge will come and judge you in the end. Today I stand before you, but there is coming a day when you will stand before me! A great reversal is coming!
- Jesus' words set the high priest off and resulted in an uproar of self-righteous indignation. The high priest tore, ripped his

[inner garment, nightshirt] garments and wailed, “What further witness do we need?” (v. 63). As far as they were concerned Jesus had convicted and condemned Himself with his own words. The high priest ruled He was guilty of blasphemy, a capital offense, and said 1) no other witnesses were needed (v. 63) and 2) ask what the verdict of the Council would be? Verse 64 records their criminal decision, “ And they all condemned him as deserving death.” At this point things move from unjust to shameful. Mark catalogues 4 heinous acts in v. 65: 1) they begin to spit on Him, and act as insulting then as it is today (cf. Num. 12:14; Deut 25:9; 30:10; Isa 50:6). 2) They covered His face, blindfolding Him for further mockery and abuse. 3) They began to strike Him with their fists taunting Him to “prophesy” as to who His attackers were (cf. Isa. 11:2-4). Once more our Lord remained silent (Isa. 53:7). 4) “The guards received Him with blows.” They joined the party and beat and slapped the innocent, kind, loving man who as Acts 10:38 says, “went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with Him.” It is hard to put into words the



severity of this miscarriage of justice. And this is just the beginning. It will get much worse.

## II. Peter models the unfaithful witness as to who He is for 14:66-72

- A very popular saying today is the phrase, “I got your back.” There is even a song entitled “I Got Your Back” by rapper T.I. Basically the idea is “I am your friend and I am watching out for you. I am watching out for what’s behind you as you are busy looking ahead. “ In other words you can trust me to look out for you, to even “take a bullet for you” if necessary. It is a pledge of devotion, loyalty and true friendship. Such friends are few and should be cherished as precious gifts.
- Peter had made such a pledge to Jesus just a few hours earlier. In v. 29 he said even if all the other disciples fall away I won’t. And in v. 31 he said, “if I must die with you, I will not deny you.” Well in v. 50 Peter had run away when Jesus was arrested just like everyone else. Now, however, we find him, and only him, drawing close to the place where our Lord is being held. Maybe he does have Jesus’ back. On the other hand, maybe he doesn’t.

### 1) Some say of Jesus: I do not know what you are talking about

14:66-68

- Peter is said to be “below in the courtyard” indicating Jesus was in a large upper room in the large home of the high priest , a man who had profited handsomely by using religion. A servant girl came (v. 67) and took notice of Peter “warming himself.” She looked at him and simply and directly said, “You (emphatic) also were with the Nazarene, Jesus” (v. 67).
- Her observation is correct. There is no doubt about it. Given his earlier promise of fidelity we are confident Peter will step up, play the man, and declare his loyalty. We, and Jesus most importantly, are sadly disappointed.
- Peter blatantly rejected her accusation saying, “ I neither know nor understand what you mean” (v. 68). You say I was with Jesus? I have no idea what you are talking about. Silly servant girl, you are as much a false witness as ...!
- To avoid further scrutiny Peter moved away out into the forecourt or gateway. “And the rooster crowed” (cf 14:30)! Apparently, the sound of this courtyard bird had no impact on or significance for Peter. He was too busy claiming ignorance of any knowledge of Jesus and trying to go undetected. He is destined to fail. This “rock” is beginning to crack!

2) **Some say of Jesus: I do not belong to Him**

**14:69-70**

- This servant girl was persistent and unrelenting in her (God's?!) pursuit of Peter. She, along with others (Matt 28:71; Luke 22:58) saw him again and again she began to say out loud to others, "This man is one of them" (v. 69).
- James Edwards well says, "a change in place is no substitute for a change of heart. Like a guilty conscience, the servant girl accuses Peter a second time" (p. 450).
- Peter is now on the spot, in the hot seat, in front of others. Here is his chance to "man up", regain his courage, and take a stand for Jesus for whom he had expressed undying loyalty. Unfortunately, he falters a second time, "But again he denied it." (v. 70). I am not one of His nor do I belong to Him and His rabble. Interestingly, the tense of the verb means he kept on denying that he belonged to the followers of Jesus. It was an extensive and repeated denial, not a one time slip of the tongue.
- The fracture of this rock is growing.

3) **Some say of Jesus: I do not even Know Him**

**14:70-72**

- Peter failed the Lord 3 times as He prayed in the Garden of Gethsemane (14:37-42). Now he fails Him 3 times in the

courtyard of the high priest. Initially he failed him by sleeping when he should have been praying. Now he fails Him by denying Him when he should have confessed Him. The rock named Peter crumbles and is pulverized under the pressure.

- Again the bystanders call at Peter, “Certainly you are one of them, for you are a Galilean” (v.70). We saw you with Jesus and your accent gives you away as well!
- This was all Peter could take! He anathematizes himself with a divine curse. “If I am lying may God strike me dead” is a modern idiom that captures well Peter’s sentiment. “I swear to God, and may I die if I am lying, I do not know this man of whom you speak” (v.70). Peter will not even mention Jesus’ name so as to distance himself even further from this now convicted capital criminal from Galilee.
- “Immediately” (v.72), Mark informs us, “the rooster crowed a second time.” Mark tells us Peter then “remembered” that Jesus had predicted to the precise detail his denial. This broke him and he, overwhelmed by this betrayal and cowardice, began to weep.” Luke 22:61 informs us that at the very moment he was voicing his 3<sup>rd</sup> denial Jesus “turned and looked

at Peter.” Sinclair Ferguson is most certainly correct when he says, “That look was to be his salvation, for he saw in those eyes not condemnation but compassion. That was the turning point in his life... Now, in this most painful and memorable of ways, Peter saw himself as he really was, repented, and was remade into the great apostle” (*Let’s Study Mark*, 252).

- Peter would repent, turn to Christ for forgiveness, and receive a full pardon. On the other hand Judas would only feel regret, run to the religious leaders to make amends, and go out and hang himself (Matt. 27:5). If only he had turned again to the Lord Jesus like Peter. Though his sin was great, he would have discovered that God’s grace was even greater.

### **Conclusion**

- Balthasar Hubmaier has been called “the Simon Peter” of the evangelical Anabaptist of the 16<sup>th</sup> century. The movement’s greatest theologian, he would see 6,000 believers baptized at Nikolsburg in 1526-27. And because of vicious and severe persecution, he would compromise and deny his commitment to Christ at least on two different occasions. And yet, like Peter, he would be brought by God to deep repentance and confession. In a

work entitled *Short Apology* he would write, “O God, pardon me my weakness. It is good for me that you have humbled me” (Estep, *The Anabaptist Story*, 63).

- On what appears to be a third occasion of torture, Hubmaier “grew strong” and with uncompromising fortitude remained true to Jesus. The date was March 2, 1528. One week later, on March 10, Hubmaier was burned at the stake with his precious wife nearby encouraging him to remain faithful to Jesus. Three days later she would be executed as well by drowning in the Danube River.
- As Hubmaier prepared to be burned, he shouted loud for the on looking crowd to hear, “O my gracious God, grant me grace in my great suffering.” As the flames engulfed his beard and hair, his last words were simple, “O my heavenly Father! O my gracious God!” “O Jesus!” Witnesses said that in his death “he appeared to feel more joy than pain.” Such is the grace of God poured out on any sinner, no matter what the sin, who flees to Jesus in repentance, who flees to God in his hour of need. The Great King in His passion has made it possible for all of us without exception! Praise His Name!