



Mark 14:55–59

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. 56 Many testified falsely against him, but their statements did not agree. 57 Then some stood up and gave this false testimony against him: 58 ‘We heard him say, “I will destroy this temple made with human hands and in three days

will build another, not made with hands.”” 59 Yet even then their testimony did not agree.

Reflection

Today’s passage comes from Mark 14:55–59,

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with human hands and in three days will build another, not made with hands.” 59 Yet even then their testimony did not agree.

Jesus has been captured in the middle of the night and rushed to a speedy trial in a private residence. He has no legal representation and no support. It's just him against his accusers. He hasn't slept, it's the early hours of morning, and false witness after false witness is being brought forward to accuse him. Just one slip up and it will mean the death penalty.

Now of course, our modern sensibilities scream out at the injustice of this situation. Especially when we consider that these men are the earthly representatives of a God who is characterised by justice and

mercy. What's more, they were experts in the Old Testament law, a law since its inception that has been universally recognised as setting the very standards of justice. The Old Testament law became the envy of the nations and its guiding principles have gone on to become foundational to almost every Western international law code. Innocent until proven guilty. The punishment must fit the crime. The superiority of eyewitness testimony over circumstantial evidence and hearsay. These pillars of our judicial system come from the Bible. But what is going on in this all night hearing makes a mockery of both the Old Testament law and almost any law code of any land since.

Yet what is interesting, and perhaps even more damning, is that this 'trial' was also

likely in direct contravention of the Sanhedrin's own laws. We can't know for certain, but documents that survive from the period suggest that under the Sanhedrin's own laws: entrapment was illegal, night trials were forbidden, capital cases had to span at least two consecutive days, trials could only be conducted in the temple courts (not in private residences), defendants must be provided with a defense attorney, and the high priest could not intervene in proceedings – to name just a few.

And yet as students both of human nature and human history nothing surprises us in the way these events unfold. We've seen it all before. This is a kangaroo court. A foregone conclusion. A mere formality. As has happened right throughout histo-

ry, their hate is so great, they're only barely going through the motions before making their death-penalty recommendation to the powers that be, in this case, the Roman governor Pontius Pilate. Mark's words make this very clear,

55 The chief priests and the whole Sanhedrin were looking for evidence against Jesus so that they could put him to death,

The whole of the Sanhedrin are looking for false evidence in this false trial so that they can put Jesus to death. Just a note here as well. The Sanhedrin (the Jewish ruling council) in a full sitting was made up of seventy members plus the high priest. The seventy were made up of leading priests, teachers of the law and elders; split down

Sadducee and Pharisee party lines (with the Sadducees in the ascendancy). But, a mere twenty-three made up a quorum. And no doubt those in attendance hated Jesus the most, led by Caiaphas (the high priest) himself.

They were looking for false evidence against Jesus. But the problem with looking for evidence against Jesus Christ is that there is none. He never sinned. He is the only human being to have ever walked this earth who never put a foot wrong, who never spoke a loose word, and who never did not do anything he should have done. He did everything right. And so even in this travesty of a trial, with all the underhanded maneuverings of these wicked men, they fail to convict him. They've moved heaven and earth to find anything that Je-

sus might have said or done so that they could use it against him as evidence,

56 Many testified falsely against him, but their statements did not agree.

57 Then some stood up and gave this false testimony against him: 58

‘We heard him say, “I will destroy this temple made with human hands and in three days will build another, not made with hands.”’

This was a serious charge. Under almost any ancient law code desecration of a holy place was a capital offense. But of course, even in this, these false witnesses were mistaken. Jesus’ actual words, from John 2:19, spoken some three years ago were these,

19 Jesus answered them, “Destroy this temple, and I will raise it again in three days.” John 2:19

He didn't say that he was able to destroy the temple. In fact, he wasn't talking about the temple in Jerusalem at all. Not only were they misquoting him, they also had entirely misunderstood him. They said,

‘We heard him say, “I will destroy this temple made with human hands and in three days will build another,

But Jesus had actually said,

“Destroy this temple, and I will raise it again in three days.” John 2:19

The temple Jesus was talking about was

his body. The body that the Sanhedrin were about to vote to destroy. The same body that would rise again from the dead in three days' time. Which is a powerful thought to introduce on the lips of wicked men in these wicked proceedings against Jesus. The temple in Jerusalem, the old way of relating to God – the priesthood, the sacrificial system, the distance between God and man – is finished. It's about to be replaced by a new temple, the body of Jesus Christ, the last sacrifice for the sins of humankind, the new meeting place between God and humankind. The old is gone and the new is here. The old order of things is passing away, replaced by a new and better way of relating to God, that will ultimately bring in a new and better world, all through the person and work of Jesus.

“Destroy this temple, and I will raise it again in three days.”

In moments they will start to tear this temple down. Their trial ineffective, it will take Jesus to offer words that voluntarily condemn himself. He will offer those words and they will begin to destroy this temple. They'll spit in his face, strike him with their fists, they'll slap across the head and taunt him. They'll flog him, press a crown of razor thorns down on his head, dress him up like a fool so that they can bow and scrape in their mockery; and then they will crucify him. They'll tear this temple down stone by stone so that in three days he can rebuild it indestructible. And through the power of his indestructible life billions will rise imperishable; but their fate will be sealed.

Think & Pray

Take some time today to worship in the temple; the temple made of Jesus' body and his blood. Our new house of worship. The new meeting place between God and man. Intimate, gracious, eternal. Worship in this temple this today. The body of Jesus Christ, broken for you. The blood of Jesus Christ, poured out for you. His body broken and remade so that ours can be too. His blood shed that we might be healed and so that we will never die.

Meditate over the irony of this trial. The perfect man tried and found guilty by a courtroom of sinners. The one who will come again to judge the living and the dead put on trial. God become man, sentenced to

death in the most scandalous way so that when we come before the perfectly just trial that awaits every person, scandalously, we might be set free. All this by the precious blood of Jesus.

Confess your sins to him now in prayer. Your sins that would otherwise have condemned you but have now been wiped clean by his blood. Come to him in heartfelt repentance and worship. Drink your fill of his grace as you head out into this day that he has made. How can you bring him the glory that he deserves today?