



Mark 14:60–65

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.

Reflection

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, he’s been roughed up, beaten, insulted, in a

deliberate and callous attempt to unsettle him. It's the early hours of morning, the sun just cresting the horizon, Mark tells us that false witness after false witness have been brought forward to accuse him throughout the night. Just one slip up meaning the death penalty. There has been no slip up, the witnesses contradicting themselves and making a mockery of the judicial process. But as Mark shows us in today's passage at the conclusion of the 'trial', it doesn't matter. The outcome was a foregone conclusion from the start. The Jewish ruling council (the Sanhedrin) want Jesus dead and they are willing to go to any lengths to see it happen.

Now of course as we touched on yesterday, 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 defence 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 history, 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 paints a picture of Jesus standing before the greater part of the hastily gathered Sanhedrin. They'd been dragged from their beds in the early hours of the morning while Jesus was made sport of by his guards. Jesus is bruised, bloodied and bleeding but somehow his presence is not diminished. Mark captures for us the final moments of this travesty of justice. They're trying to trap Jesus, to catch in him his own words, to have him utter

blasphemy and thereby under their own law be guilty of a capital crime at which point they hand him over to the Romans with the recommendation of swift execution. And so, verse 61,

‘Are you the Messiah, the Son of the Blessed One?’

If you are God’s anointed king, tell us. We’re sure the Romans will like to hear about a pretender for Caesar’s throne.

Mark’s Gospel has left us in no doubt that Jesus is the long promised Messiah from the Old Testament. Messiah is Hebrew, the Greek translation is Christ, a noun that has been used as Jesus’ title many times in Mark. But Jesus has been reticent to use it, given its political overtones, and

his need to teach and train his disciples before his death. And even here, to claim the title would have meant an instant end of the trial, but that is okay, because that is exactly Jesus' intentions.

‘Are you the Messiah, the Son of the Blessed One?’ 62 ‘I am,’ said Jesus.

Jesus knew he was going to die. He'd arranged it this way. He'd orchestrated this moment since before the beginning of time. He is the Messiah and so he tells them, plainly, and if that wasn't enough, just to make sure, he adds,

‘And you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Mighty One and coming on the clouds of heaven.’

‘You dream of a trumped-up political Messiah, a label you so hypocritically are now trying to pin on me so that you can pass me off as a revolutionary to the Romans. But let me tell you about the true Messiah, a far greater Messiah than you have ever imagined, I AM the Son of Man from Daniel 7.’

The Son of Man was Jesus’ awesome title of choice. The Gospels have eighty-two instances of its use and most of those are found on the lips of Jesus. This is who is standing before them. This is the one on whom they are about to pass judgment. The Son of Man, the Messiah before whom all politicized messiahs melt away. He is ‘the Son of Man’, and ‘his dominion is an everlasting dominion, and his kingdom

is one that will never be destroyed' (Dan 7:14). He sits at the right hand of God, and he is coming in the clouds to judge the world. One day every man in that room will stand before Jesus given all authority, glory and sovereign power and they will be judged with utter impartiality for the sins they have committed amongst which this false trial surely stands pre-eminent.

Those members of the Sanhedrin who were biblically literate seem to catch the drift of Jesus' bold declaration. No doubt some are shocked into silence at the authority in his voice, his devastating knowledge of the Scriptures and the gravity of their situation. In Luke's version, others shout out in anger,

'Are you then the Son of God?'

Jesus doesn't deny it. He hasn't denied any of their charges. He's just made sure they would later be aware of exactly who they were condemning to death, they were passing judgment on the one who would come again to judge the living and the dead. The Messiah, the Son of Man, the Son of God. Jesus replies, no denial,

‘You say that I am.’ 71 Then they said, ‘Why do we need any more testimony? We have heard it from his own lips.’ Luke 22:70–71

And Jesus' fate is sealed. Or rather, the fate of his accusers. The Messiah. The Son of Man. The Son of God. Blasphemy. Now to convince the Romans that he is deserving of death.

Think & Pray

With what time remains today you might like to again, like yesterday, think back over this scene – the titles of Jesus and the irony of this trial. Here we see 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 with perfect justice subjected to a false 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 through the sacrifice, the substitution, of the man put on trial in our passage today. All through his precious blood poured out in our place.

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 will you respond to what he did for you in this day ahead?