**Jesus’ Trial and Our Trial**

March 29, 2020

Mark 14:53-15:15

Key Verse 14:62 “‘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.’”

Today’s passage is about Jesus’ trial before the Sanhedrin and before Pilate, the Roman governor. Jesus did not defend himself but he used his trial to clearly reveal his identity, that he is the Messiah who will come again to judge the living and the dead. Even though Jesus was on trial, everyone involved, the religious leaders, Peter and Pilate, were on trial, and they were all found guilty. We are also on trial in this world to show our identity as children of God. Eventually, we will be on trial before our King Jesus. I pray that we may have a clear identity like Jesus.

**First**, Jesus before the Sanhedrin (14:53-65). Look at verse 14:53. “They took Jesus to the high priest, and all the chief priests, elders and teachers of the law came together.” After his arrest, Jesus was taken to the high priest. From the beginning of the trial, the verdict had already been determined. Jesus would be put to death but there was no evidence to support this. So the trial was used to find the evidence. It was a kangaroo court. In order to kill Jesus, the religious leaders disregarded all the rules. They were not supposed to meet at night or during any of the Jewish festivals. They were not supposed to bribe witnesses to commit perjury. Now some people remembered something Jesus had said and introduced a twisted version of it as evidence. Look at verses 14:57-58. “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.”’” That is not what Jesus said. Jesus never mentioned “man-made,” and the temple to which he referred was his own body. His body would be destroyed. Then Jesus would be raised on the third day. But the liars had twisted Jesus’ words so much that they couldn’t get their testimony to agree. (59) Jesus stood trial, not because he had committed a crime, but to save us from our sins. 2 Corinthians 5:21 says, “God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.”

Look at verse 61a. “But Jesus remained silent and gave no answer.” No one could remain silent in that situation but Jesus did. Jesus’ silence spoke of his determination to obey his Father’s will for him to go to the cross and die for the sins of all people. Look at verse 61b. “Again the high priest asked him, ‘Are you the Messiah, the Son of the Blessed One?’” The high priest was looking to charge Jesus with blasphemy, a crime punishable by death. Yet on this question, Jesus did not remain silent. Look at verse 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.’” Jesus said, “I am.” Jesus knew that this answer would send him to death. Nevertheless Jesus clearly identified himself as the Messiah. At the moment, Jesus was on trial and had subjected himself to be tried by the evil men. But one day he will come again in power and glory to judge the living and the dead. One day all of them will be judged by Jesus; All of them will stand before Jesus to be tried. Jesus was not intimidated by evil men but had a clear sense of final victory.

Jesus’ words infuriated the high priest. 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?’” The high priest and the whole Sanhedrin condemned Jesus to death because he said, “I am.” The one Israelite who should have been most ready to recognize and receive the Messiah was loudest in his condemnation. Jesus made his identity the unavoidable issue before his accusers. The religious leaders thought they were trying Jesus but in reality they were all on trial before the Son of God. Each person must decide to either accept Jesus as the Messiah, the Son of God or reject him like the high priest and the Sanhedrin members, because when Jesus comes again in glory, we will all stand before Jesus to be tried.

**Second**, Peter’s trial (14:66-72). Meanwhile, Peter was outside in the courtyard of the high priest. He had followed Jesus at a distance and then sat down with the guards, warming himself at the fire. His following Jesus at a distance is true both spatially and spiritually. It reveals his half-hearted commitment. Peter tried to blend in but someone took notice of him. The firelight had made Peter’s face visible. Look at verses 66-67. “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.” Peter’s heart sank. Peter had followed to see what would happen to Jesus but he was also afraid for his own life. If Jesus was convicted, Peter would be next. So he did what was unimaginable. Look at verse 68. “But he denied it. ‘I don’t know or understand what you’re talking about,’ he said, and went out into the entryway.” Peter tried to hide but the servant girl was relentless. To Peter this servant girl might have been the most frightening girl he had ever met. The servant girl let it be known to other people standing around that Peter was one of Jesus’ disciples but he denied it a second time.

Look at verse 70b. “After a little while, those standing near said to Peter, ‘Surely you are one of them, for you are a Galilean.’” By this time the servant girl’s keen night vision had aroused much suspicion about Peter. Twice he had spoken out to deny that he knew Jesus but in the process he had given away his Galilean accent. With eyes all turned on him, Peter began to call down curses on himself. He swore to them, “I don’t know this man you’re talking about.” He denied any relationship with Jesus for the third time. Peter was a great contrast to Jesus. Jesus was inside saying to his accusers, “I am,” while Peter was outside saying, “I don’t know.” Peter had an identity crisis. Just a few hours ago, Peter proclaimed himself as the most loyal disciple, ready to die for his Lord, saying, “Even if I have to die with you, I will never disown you.” When that loyalty was tested, he denied Jesus three times. This was the fruit of his pride, his lack of prayer and his unwillingness to accept Jesus’ words when it offended him.

Look at verse 72. “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.” Jesus had predicted that Peter would disown him three times before the rooster crowed twice. It happened just as Jesus said. At that moment, Peter saw himself as he really was. Peter was not the ultra-brave, super disciple he had imagined himself to be. He was a weak and sinful man. This was so painful for Peter to realize but it was the beginning of recognizing his true self before the Lord. None of the disciples were there to witness his denial. It means that Peter himself confessed his sins to the other disciples. Even in his failure, he had courage to confess his sins and accept God’s forgiveness. Later Jesus reinstated him as the top disciple and the leader of the early church. According to church history, he would be crucified upside down. Peter would become an indispensable man in God’s salvation history. Later Peter encouraged the suffering Christians to have a clear identity in Jesus Christ. He wrote in 1 Peter 2:9-10, “But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.” In Jesus failure is not the end. Jesus can restore our failure.

We must have clear identity as children of God living in this world. It is our trial in this world to have clear identity. An early church father named Polycarp was arrested as an old man because of his faith in Jesus. If Polycarp simply said, “Caesar is Lord,” he would have been released. However, he said, “For eighty-six years I served Christ and he never let me down. How can I deny my King who saved me?” Polycarp was then burned alive at the stake. To the end Polycarp kept his identity in Jesus. Of course, we are not facing such persecution in Canada. However, in this time of social distancing, we are all on trial. When no one is watching over you, are you behaving as a child of God? Are you taking care of yourself spiritually, such as daily prayer and Bible reading? Eventually, we will all stand before Jesus to be tried. 2 Corinthians 5:10 says, “For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each of us may receive what is due us for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad.” I pray that you may maintain clear identity as children of God in this time.

**Third**, Jesus before Pilate (15:1-15). Jesus was tortured all night long but his trial was not over. Look at verse 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 religious leaders could have executed Jesus by themselves for blasphemy, but then their method of execution would be stoning. Jesus was sent to Pilate, the Roman governor because they wanted to crucify Jesus. It was the Roman method of executing condemned criminals. By crucifying Jesus, they wanted not only to kill Jesus but also to humiliate him and stamp out his followers. Who would want to follow a crucified criminal? But in doing so, they fulfilled the Scriptures that Jesus had to be crucified in order to save us from God’s curse. (Gal 3:13)

Look at verse 15:2a. “’Are you the king of the Jews?’ asked Pilate. ‘You have said so,’ Jesus replied.” The chief priests condemned Jesus for blasphemy. But when they accused Jesus to Pilate, they accused him of rebelling against Rome. The title “king of the Jews” means the Messiah but at the time, it also carried a strong political meaning. Anyone who claimed to be the king of the Jews, a messiah figure, was taken very seriously by the Romans as a political threat. People like Theudas and Judas the Galilean had made such claims, caused civil unrest, and then were crushed by the Romans. (Acts 5:36-38) If Jesus was found guilty of setting himself up as the king of the Jews, the Romans would crucify him. Jesus’ answer to Pilate’s question meant the difference between life and death. Jesus is indeed the king of the Jews. He was not a political king but a spiritual one. He is the King of kings and Lord of lords. He will reign forever all the kingdoms of the world. However, Jesus did not try to explain the spiritual meaning of “king of the Jews.” He plainly and truthfully said, “You have said so.” Jesus was not afraid of Pilate and he was not afraid to die. Jesus decided to go to the cross in obedience to his Father’s will.

Look at verse 15:5. “But Jesus still made no reply, and Pilate was amazed.” As he had done before the Sanhedrin, Jesus did not answer the false charges brought against him. He only answered the question about his identity. This amazed Pilate. Pilate had never seen anyone like Jesus who remained silent in front of his accusers. No one would remain silent over false accusations before someone who held the power of life and death. Pilate knew that Jesus was innocent. Verse 10 says, “knowing it was out of self-interest that the chief priests had handed Jesus over to him.” Pilate was not interested in truth and justice. He just wanted the matter to go away. So he planned to make use of the custom at the festival to release a prisoner whom the people requested. Pilate asked the crowd, “Do you want me to release to you the king of the Jews?” The chief priests had already anticipated Pilate’s political maneuver and incited the crowd to ask for a prisoner named Barabbas. This put Pilate in a difficult situation so Pilate asked them, “What shall I do, then, with the one you call the king of the Jews?” They shouted, “’Crucify him!” Their demand was completely irrational. Pilate asked, “Why? What crime has he committed?” Jesus had indeed committed no crime but they shouted all the louder, “Crucify him!” Pilate thought that this trial was about Jesus, but the trial turned out to be just as much about him. Pilate should have released Jesus, a man whom he knew to be innocent, but he did not make a clear decision to follow the truth because he wanted to satisfy the crowd (15). In order to please people for a moment, Pilate sent Jesus, the king of the Jews, to his death and freed Barabbas. It is a parable of our redemption—the guiltless one delivered to die in order that the guilty might go free.

Jesus stood trial before the religious leaders and before Pilate. This trial reminds us of Isaiah 53:7-8a, “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. By oppression and judgment he was taken away.” Jesus was condemned to bear all of the punishment our sins deserved. Jesus was condemned to death so that we may not be condemned.

In this passage, we learned that Jesus used his trial to clearly reveal his identity, that he is the Messiah who will come again to judge the living and the dead. Even though Jesus was on trial, everyone involved, the religious leaders, Peter and Pilate, were on trial. We are also on trial in this world to show our identity as children of God. Eventually, we will be on trial before Jesus. May God bless you to be able to stand before Jesus unashamed.

Big Idea: We are all on trial to show our identity as children of God