

The Day the Church Judged the Son of God

Mark 14:53-65

13 December 2020, 10:30 AM

Introduction:

In Mark's Gospel, we have for some time been looking at Jesus' final visit to Jerusalem.

- He had infuriated the highest court of the church from His very entrance in the city, where He rode in on a donkey (the custom was to walk into Jerusalem), fulfilling what was prophesied of the Messiah.
- He received honour and praise, and then He had taken it upon Himself to drive the merchants out of the temple precincts, charging them with profaning the house of God, declaring that it was meant to be a house of prayer for all nations.
- He made matters worse when they asked Him from whence He had His authority and He asked them of John's authority. When they refused to answer that, not wanting to admit that John was a prophet, Jesus refused to answer them.
- Then He told the parable of the workers in the vineyard where the workers reject the owner's servants when they come to collect the owner's share of the profits and then even reject the owner's son and kill him!
 - And this was the real issue.
 - The Sanhedrin were disturbed because they were the workers in God's house, but they had made themselves as the owners.
 - In their minds, Jesus was a usurper, and they were fully justified in stopping Him for the good of their nation.
 - It made matters even worse that Jesus had worked miracles that buttressed His claim to be sent by God, and that He was gaining popularity as a preacher.
 - Recently, He had bested them when they tried to trap Him with hard questions.

So we have seen how as soon as the opportunity came through Judas the betrayer to seize Jesus, they were quite happy to do so.

- Last week, we saw how they, with a great multitude (as if that would really help), went out in the night with Judas to arrest Him.
- To the dismay of Jesus' disciples and to the delight of the Sanhedrin, Jesus went quite willingly, mocking them for sending such a large multitude as if He were a robber.

Today we come to Jesus' trial—or perhaps we might call it a grand jury where they determine the charges that they will level against Him.

- As we shall see, they had already determined the verdict—that He deserved to die, but now they wanted to come up with reasons to justify this foregone conclusion.
 - People are like that.
 - Even when doing great wickedness, there is very often a desire to come up with ways to justify their deeds—at least partially.
 - For these members of the highest court of the church, this was all the more to be desired as you can see in our reading of today's text, Mark 14:53-65.

- Please give careful attention as I read this passage to you now.

Mark 14:53-65: And they led Jesus away to the high priest; and with him were assembled all the chief priests, the elders, and the scribes. ⁵⁴ But Peter followed Him at a distance, right into the courtyard of the high priest. And he sat with the servants and warmed himself at the fire. ⁵⁵ Now the chief priests and all the council sought testimony against Jesus to put Him to death, but found none. ⁵⁶ For many bore false witness against Him, but their testimonies did not agree. ⁵⁷ Then some rose up and bore false witness against Him, saying, ⁵⁸ “We heard Him say, ‘I will destroy this temple made with hands, and within three days I will build another made without hands.’ ” ⁵⁹ But not even then did their testimony agree. ⁶⁰ And the high priest

stood up in the midst and asked Jesus, saying, “Do You answer nothing? What *is it* these men testify against You?” ⁶¹ But He kept silent and answered nothing. Again the high priest asked Him, saying to Him, “Are You the Christ, the Son of the Blessed?” ⁶² Jesus said, “I am. And you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Power, and coming with the clouds of heaven.” ⁶³ Then the high priest tore his clothes and said, “What further need do we have of witnesses? ⁶⁴ You have heard the blasphemy! What do you think?” And they all condemned Him to be deserving of death. ⁶⁵ Then some began to spit on Him, and to blindfold Him, and to beat Him, and to say to Him, “Prophesy!” And the officers struck Him with the palms of their hands.

May the Lord add His blessing to His holy Word.

Here we see the extreme arrogance and folly of man:

- Here we have the Son of God being judged by His own church.
 - And even more remarkable than that, we have the church’s highest court concluding that He is worthy of death.
 - Last week, we saw how they supposed they could arrest the Son of God if they had enough forces and grabbed Him—so foolish!—
 - and this week, we see them take it upon themselves to judge Him.
- But we should not be too quick to criticize.
 - There is a sense in which every member of the church also judges Him—and all too often our judgment is twisted and unjust.
 - There is much for us to learn from this passage and much to humble us as we reflect upon our own folly and pride.

Today, we will consider five things about our Lord and His church that judges Him.

I. First, as background, let’s look at the gracious relationship that our Lord sustained with His church through the ages—the church that now judges Him.

A. In verse 53, we are told that it was the church that conducted this trial.

- It says: **And they led Jesus away to the high priest; and with him were assembled all the chief priests, the elders, and the scribes.**
 1. This is the great Sanhedrin, which was the highest court of the church.
 - They have sent to arrest Jesus by night that He might be brought before them so that they can judge Him.
 2. They are the representatives of the church in the day of Jesus even though they are hypocrites—very corrupt and full of unbelief.

- Jesus' parables have instructed us that not everyone in the church has faith—that with many of them, God is not pleased. This is often true of the leadership.
3. Surely we see this today—there are leaders who are openly immoral, who deny the Lord who bought them, who deny Jesus is God.
 - They set up a Jesus that they use to promote their causes and they use His name, but they hate the real Jesus who is revealed in the scripture—the Jesus who calls all men everywhere to repent and believe the gospel.
- B. God's faithfulness to preserve them as His people is outstanding.
1. They were the people that God called out to bring forth the Saviour of the world.
 - He came to Abraham and called him out, promising that from his offspring He would bring forth a son who would redeem the world.
 2. For two thousand years, from the time of Abraham, they constantly rebel—they pervert His worship, they turn to idols, they give themselves to their cravings.
 - Yet, time and again, He rebukes them and sends His chastisements to break them until they return to Him as their God and Saviour.
 - In the time of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, he rebuked them by His own words, then by judges, and then by prophets, in each age declaring that the afflictions they have are from His hand for the purpose of restoring them.
 3. And indeed, the only thing that keeps them from rejecting Him and ceasing to be His people is His word and chastening hand coupled with His saving mercy.
 - Again and again, He restores them and pardons them, all the more promising the Son who will come to redeem them.
 - They would have utterly rejected Him a thousand times if He had not prevailed with them in this way.
- C. It is still the same today, even though Jesus has now come.
1. Now we have the glorious gospel that reveals God's Son to us as our Saviour.
 - We have Him crucified for us, we have Him raised from the dead with the promise of our own resurrection, and we have Him ascended to heaven from whence He poured out His Holy Spirit to keep us and to go with us to gather people from all nations into His church, and we have His promise to come again to gather all who believe and are born of His Spirit to share glory with Him forever in a city of righteousness.
 2. Yet, even with all of this, we see that we are still prone to wander—to depart from Him as the generations go by.
 - As in the Old Testament, He continually chastens us and He raises up ministers of the gospel to call us back to Himself.
 - He is ever faithful and true to His covenant and so the church continues.
- D. And I say that the church in all her sin is the same church that judged the Son of God in the text that we read today in Mark 14.

1. Within that church, there continue to be those who, though like Caiaphas and the others claim to be God's people, continue to share in their wicked twisted malicious judgement of the Son of God.
 - There are many ministers in her—often in her highest seats of power, who condemn the Lord Jesus in whose name they conduct their ministry.
2. But always, there is a remnant of those who truly love Him and who truly believe.
 - But even these are very often skewed in their judgment of the Lord, something like Jesus' disciples were—here we have Peter, following at a distance and at last even denying Him.
 - But for the saving restoring mercy of the Lord, they would be ruined by sin.
 - So again, I say, as we go along looking at our text, let us be sure to see in ourselves this wretched tendency to judge the Lord instead of looking to His judgement of us.

TRANS> Now let's turn to our second consideration...

II. Consider from our text how eager the church of God is to find fault with His Son.

- A. We are told this straight out in verse 55—that the chief priests and the council who represented the whole church when Jesus came **sought testimony against Jesus to put Him to death.**
 1. Think of it.
 - The church that we are now a part of if we are numbered with God's people, has been given an opportunity to render her judgment about the gracious Son that God promised through the ages who came to redeem her.
 - And what is the church doing? She is looking to find some reason to put Him to death even though she cannot find any reason.
 - No indeed, He is holy, harmless, undefiled, and separate from sin.
 - The Father has declared that He is pleased with His Son.
 - He has gone about among the people doing good... but they want to find some reason—any reason—to justify putting Him to death.
 2. See how hard they work at it.
 - Verse 56 says that many came to bear false witness against Him, but their testimonies did not agree.
 - The word *agree* means *to bring together*.
 - The idea is that they could not get charges together against Him.
 - False witness can be given in two ways...
 - The first way is in accusing someone of doing something that they did not do—perverting the facts—saying that Jesus was a glutton and heavy drinker was a lie...
 - The second way of bearing false witness is in telling the truth about what a person did, but in saying that it was sinful when it wasn't—for

example, in accusing Jesus of healing people on the Sabbath Day as if that was sinful when it is not.

- This is often the way that godly people are accused—they are said to be perverted because they speak the truth about sin or in asserting that people will go to hell apart from Christ... or even in saying that He is the only Lord.
3. But you see that try as they might, they could not come up with any plausible reason to execute Jesus.
 - Essentially, all they accomplished was actually to show that there was no fault in Him.
 - As hard as they tried to find wrong, all they ended up doing was testifying to His innocence.
 - He alone is without sin.

B. But why was (and why is) the church so eager to find fault with Jesus?

1. Certainly, with these perverted leaders of the church, it was their aim to preserve their own authority.
 - They were using their positions to serve themselves.
 - They enjoyed receiving honour from men and they enjoyed the control they had over others so they could serve their own interests.
 - They did not want to relinquish that authority—even to the Messiah Himself!
2. But this is not the only motivation.
 - There is a desire in all men, because we are all sinners, to find fault with God so that we might blame Him for our own sins and feel better about ourselves.
 - We want to say as Adam did after he sinned, “It was the woman that you gave to me—she gave me the fruit and I ate.”
 - Notice, it is the woman *God* gave to him—it is God’s fault.
 - If we are sinning, we want to put the blame back on God.
 - Atheists are sometimes funny in this way—they say that they don’t believe that God exists, but if you talk to them, you find out that they hate God.
 - They want to blame Him for their unbelief.
 - And there is something of this in all of us—both inside and outside the church.
 - When we sin, it is because God did wrong to us—He gave us too many hardships (when the hardships are given to turn us from our sin and pride).
 - He was unfair—He did not take care of us—we are eager to find fault.
3. Closely connected with this is what Jesus said about people’s hatred of Him in John 3:19-20: **And this is the condemnation, that the light has come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. ²⁰ For everyone practicing evil hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his deeds should be exposed.**

- Jesus' righteousness exposes our sin—and we don't like that—so we try to find fault with Him so that His light won't be able to expose us so much.
- Sadly, many professing Christians testify that they do not believe Jesus was without sin, even though the Bible says plainly that He was without sin.
- And the thing that exposes us most of all is Jesus' very reason for coming into the world—it was, of course, to die for our sins.
 - His very coming and death on the cross testifies that we are very wicked—so wicked that He, the spotless Son of God, was the only one who could give a ransom for our sins.
 - We are all so sinful that nothing else could save us.
 - That is why it is so wrong to say that there are ways other than faith in Jesus by which people can be forgiven—such as doing the best they can.
 - This very belief in other ways of salvation, even if found in someone who claims to trust Jesus for their own salvation, is itself an effort to cover up the full light of Jesus that exposes us.

TRANS> So you see that there is a strong motivation, demonstrated on this day when Jesus was tried by His church, to find fault with the Son of God. They speak for us all.

- Nevertheless, try as we might, we can never come up with a case against Him that can stick.
- Despite our efforts to find fault with Him, He remains what He is!
 - And that brings us to our next consideration.

III. See how His church condemns Him for being our Messiah and the Son of God.

A. As crazy as that is, that is all they can find to charge Him with.

- See how this develops:
 1. In verse 57-59, we are told that some witnesses came forth declaring that Jesus had said something about destroying the temple made with hands and that He would build another without hands.
 - The word for temple used here was not of the entire temple complex, but of the sanctuary itself.
 - Jesus had said something similar to this—He had indeed claimed that He would become the temple—the place where sinners meet God.
 - Yes indeed.
 - As our Saviour who died on the cross, He is the only place where we can come to be reconciled to God—we draw near to God in His name, and by His merit and His sacrifice and His intercession...
 - We can only come to the Father through faith in Him.
 - Verse 59 says that their testimony of what He said did not agree—again, it did not come together to make a charge that could stand against Him...
 2. But this testimony seems to spark something in the high priest, who eagerly steps forward.

- These accusers, though they were not clear about what Jesus had said, were nevertheless unified in recognising that Jesus was claiming to have authority...
 - And gave the high priest an idea:
 - Look at how he comes forward in verse 60: **And the high priest stood up in the midst and asked Jesus, saying, “Do You answer nothing? What *is it* these men testify against You?”**
 - He is saying, “These are all bringing accusations about you. Even though they don’t agree, there must be something to them...”
 - Why don’t you answer them?”
 - He is offended that Jesus is not answering—and tries to dig it out Him.
 - But Jesus still does not answer even the high priest.
 - Verse 61 says: **But He kept silent and answered nothing.**
 - This is powerful—Jesus would not give these false witnesses the credibility of a defense—no defense was needed—no wrong had been done.
 - But then the high priest puts a direct question to Him.
 - Verse 61 continues: **Again the high priest asked Him, saying to Him, “Are You the Christ, the Son of the Blessed?”**
 - He is asking Jesus directly if He claims to be the Messiah (or the Christ), the Son of God...
 - The Jews did not use the name of God, so instead of saying “Son of *God*,” he says, “Son of the *Blessed*.”
3. And that is the question that Jesus is willing to answer.
- Not only does He fully affirm it, but He goes beyond that and emphasises that He will sit at God’s right hand and come in the glory cloud of God to judge!
 - Verse 62: **Jesus said, “I am. And you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Power, and coming with the clouds of heaven.”**
 - Not only did He affirm that He was the Messiah and the Son of God... He also claimed that the titles Christ and Son of God were names that carried more authority than these Jewish leaders thought.
 - Sitting on the right hand of Power means the right hand of God as one co-reigning with Him!
 - It is the exalted place described by David in Psalm 110—that Psalm that is quoted over and over in the New Testament where David said: **The LORD said to my Lord, “Sit at My right hand, till I make Your enemies Your footstool.”**
 - This means that Jesus claims that He is greater than David—that He is the One who will reign with divine power.
 - This He makes even clearer when He quotes of Daniel 7 where the Son of Man is said to ascend to the Ancient of Days where He is given everlasting dominion.

- In Daniel 7:13-14, Daniel says: **“I was watching in the night visions, and behold, *One* like the Son of Man, coming with the clouds of heaven! He came to the Ancient of Days, and they brought Him near before Him. ¹⁴ Then to Him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve Him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and His kingdom *the one* which shall not be destroyed.”**
- Coming with the clouds is always a picture of God’s sovereign power being exercised—to judge His enemies and save His people.
 - Jesus is claiming divine power for Himself.
 - His reign in the clouds will be seen in multiple ways when He is vindicated:
 - First, when He rises from the dead, showing that He is the Son of God with power.
 - Second, when He ascends into heaven and pours out His Spirit so that His disciples are transformed to preach the gospel with power.
 - Third, when He gathers multitudes from Israel and from the nations who are so devoted to Him that they gladly suffer for His sake.
 - Fourth, when He brings judgment upon Jerusalem in AD 70 showing that indeed He is the temple where sinners are united with God in place of the temple over which the Sanhedrin who condemned Him presided.
 - Fifth, at the last day when He returns in glory to render judgment upon all people.

TRANS> Yes, Jesus is claiming divine power for Himself here.

B. This is just what the high priest was looking for!

1. He pretends to be grieved by what Jesus said, but actually he is elated!
 - Now he has grounds for accusing Jesus, for His claimed divine honours for Himself—Jesus has claimed to be the Messiah and the Son of God.
 - You see what this noble priest does: verse 63: **Then the high priest tore his clothes and said, “What further need do we have of witnesses? ⁶⁴ You have heard the blasphemy! What do you think?” And they all condemned Him to be deserving of death.**
 - He feels so good now—condemning Jesus can be a righteous act. Jesus has claimed divine honours for Himself.
2. Of course there is a huge problem here.
 - Jesus has made a claim and this priest and the whole council do not investigate this claim to see if it is true.
 - They do not consider the signs and miracles that Jesus has done among the people—how that even on this visit to Jerusalem, He had raised Lazarus from the dead.

- The court does not consider Jesus' righteous life and the wisdom by which He spoke.
- They just assume that His claim is false.

C. The outcome is rather remarkable.

1. This, the highest court of the church that represented the church at this time condemns Jesus for being the Christ, the Son of Blessed!
 - His great sin, as far as they are concerned, is being the Messiah!
 - This was a sin because He was not the kind of Messiah they wanted.
 - They wanted a Messiah that would flatter them and give them even more power—not one that would expose their sin.
2. And isn't that so often the case with everyone who encounters Jesus?
 - We want a Messiah like a genie in the bottle that we can call upon to do whatever we want—not one that exposes the wrong in us.
 - The point is that those who reject Jesus reject Him for being a Messiah that they judge to be unacceptable to them.
 - They perish because they reject this Messiah for a Messiah that they want.
3. There is a great difference in a true believer in that we have come to see that we need this Messiah who exposes sin and redeems from sin.
 - We have put our faith in Him to save us from our sin.
 - But even in us there are still far too many ways that we reject Him.
 - We resist the light because we don't want to be exposed.
 - Nevertheless, He is very gracious and patient with us and continues His saving work that we have come to Him to obtain.

TRANS> But you see that for the unbelieving leaders of the church, the very offense they have with Him is that He—someone like Him that exposes their sin—should be the Messiah.

- They will not have a Messiah like that!

IV. See how great His church's hatred is for Him when He comes under our power.

A. It is a rare opportunity.

1. On this night, the Son of God is put into the hands of these men to do as they wish with Him.
 - They have charged Him to be worthy of death for being the Son of God when He is so disagreeable to them.
2. And now they have opportunity to show Him just what they think of Him.
 - Look at the shameful way they treat this one that God graciously sent to them, this one that came in the Father's love to redeem His people.
 - Verse 65: **Then some began to spit on Him, and to blindfold Him, and to beat Him, and to say to Him, "Prophecy!" And the officers struck Him with the palms of their hands.**
 - The spitting was their way of showing that they wanted no part with Him, no association with Him. That they despised Him.

- And blindfolding Him, striking Him, and asking Him to declare who had done it, was their way of mocking Him in view of the prophecy in Isaiah 11 that says of the Messiah that: **His delight is in the fear of the LORD, and He shall not judge by the sight of His eyes...**
- It is as if to say, “judge which one of us struck you without using your eyes.”

B. What a wretched display we have here of the perversion of man.

1. This is what the leaders of the church do to God on the day that He is put under their power.
2. This is what they think of the real Christ and how they treat Him when they can get away with it.
3. Of course I do not mean that the whole church is like that—God promises always to preserve a remnant by election.
 - But which of the prophets did they not reject?
 - We are all part of the problem—

V. Consider how much we need this Messiah to be our Saviour and Judge.

A. We need Him to be our Saviour and Judge because our judgment is so perverse that, if not for His salvation, we judge that He is not worthy to live.

- That is what we conclude about the Son of God.
- We agree with the perverted leaders of the church until He breaks us of our pride...
 - Think of it—so much pride that we deem the Son of God to be worthy of execution.
 - That is what is in us until He saves us.

B. This is what you all need to see.

1. We need Him to open our eyes to the truth—even the ugly truth about ourselves.
 - It is not so intolerable if only we will—in fact it is a great blessing to see our need of Him...
2. It is a great blessing because He calls us to put ourselves into His hands for salvation.
 - That is what He calls us to do—to look to Him to be saved—to come to Him for cleansing from our sin by faith in Him crucified.
 - Instead of judging Him, we need to look to Him to judge us.
 - Instead telling Him what we find to be wrong with Him, we need to ask Him to show us what is wrong with us.
3. And we can do that because He is there to save us.
 - We don't have exert ourselves to find fault with Him—we only need to come to Him to do what only He can do—transform us.
 - Do you know His saving work?
 - Are you happy with Him or do you reject Him?
 - Look to Him and be saved.