

The Trial of Jesus

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[0 : 0 0] Now reading Mark chapter 14 at verse 53. As you can see it's on page 851 of the church bibles. And they led Jesus to the high priest and all the chief priests and the elders and the scribes came together and Peter had followed him at a distance right into the courtyard of the high priest and he was sitting with the guards and warming himself at the fire. Now the chief priests and the whole council were seeking testimony against Jesus to put him to death but they found none. For many bore false witness against him and their testimony did not agree and some stood up and bore false witness against him saying, we heard him say I will destroy this temple that is made with hands and in three days I will build another not made with hands. Yet even about this their testimony did not agree and the high priest stood up in the midst and asked Jesus have you no answer to make? What is it that these then meant testify against you but you remain silent and made no answer. Again the high priest asked him are you the Christ the Son of the Blessed and Jesus said I am and you will see the Son of man seated at the right hand of power and coming with the clouds of heaven. And the high priest tore his garments and said what further witnesses do we need? You have heard his blasphemy what is your decision? And they all condemned him as deserving death and some began to spit on him and to cover his face and to strike him saying prophesy and the guards received him with blows. And then on to chapter 15 verse 1 and as soon as it was morning the chief priests held a consultation with the elders and scribes and the whole council and they bound Jesus and led him away and delivered him over to Pilate. And Pilate asked him are you the king of the Jews? And he answered him you have said so and the chief priests accused him of many things and Pilate again asked him have you no answer to make? See how many charges they bring against you but Jesus made no further answer so that Pilate was amazed. Now at the feast he used to release for them one prisoner for whom they asked and among the rebels in prison who had committed murder and the insurrection there was a man called Barabbas and the crowd came up and asked the crowd sorry and the crowd came up and began to ask Pilate to do as he usually did for them and he answered them saying do you want me to release for you the king of the Jews? For he perceived that it was out of envy that the chief priests had delivered him up but the chief priests stirred up the crowd to have him release for them Barabbas instead and Pilate again said to them then what shall I do with the man you call king of the Jews?

And they cried out again crucify him and Pilate said to them why what evil has he done but they shouted all the more crucify him so Pilate wishing to satisfy the crowd released for them Barabbas and having scarred Jesus he delivered him to be crucified. This is the word of God. Amen. We are working our way through the Gospel of Mark and we're nearly there to the very end we'll finish up next week and it is still if you've been with us the middle of the night on Friday morning the wee hours and Jesus is just a few hours away from being crucified. What we just read what Sheena just read for us is the trial of Jesus Christ. Now there have been a lot of famous trials court cases throughout world history you will know of many of them Socrates was condemned by the city of Athens for corrupting the youth and forced to drink the poison hemlock all the way to the 20th century probably the most famous court case in the 20th century was the trials of Nuremberg after after World War II but this this is the most important trial in human history this is the most famous trial in human history and I think it's fair to say that this is the greatest miscarriage of justice the greatest act of injustice in a court case in all of human history that's ever happened what does it teach us what does it what does it say to us in 2024 the main thing that this passage is calling on every single one of you today the main thing that it demands of us really this morning is that every one of us consider fresh a fresh who Jesus Christ is and respond to that to really do it to really think Christianity is a thinking religion and today we're being asked to really think and to say who is Jesus and then respond in the light of the answer to that question and so we're gonna see here first the greatest injustice that's ever been committed and then secondly the scandalous substitute and then finally the things that are getting in our way perhaps in following him so let's look at that together first the greatest injustice the the injustice of the passage is really the central focus in a lot of ways of the way Mark wrote this story for us it's very particular and in order to see that you've got to know a little bit about Jewish law and the Roman court system as well to understand the injustice that's taking place here the reading from verse 53 55 and following tells us that Jesus was arrested and that the chief priests and the whole council were trying to condemn him and so they bring him to the home of the chief priest in the middle of the night that's a Caiaphas mark doesn't tell us Caiaphas his name but in the first century in the Jewish legal system any criminal case had to be tried by what was called the Sanhedrin and the Sanhedrin consisted of Pharisees Sadducees priests and scribes the priests are the judges the chief priest is the chief judge in Jerusalem and the scribes are basically the legal counselors they know the law backwards and forwards the Pharisees often acted as prosecutors like the lawyers themselves and so he's made Jesus being brought in the middle of the night into the Sanhedrin to have a legal Sanhedrin a seating of the Sanhedrin the court you had to have 23 men 23 of these people and the other thing we see here is that they go straight to Caiaphas the high priest's house in the middle of the night for this court case and in Jewish law it's very particular all seedings of the Sanhedrin to try criminal cases have to be in the legal space the court itself and in

Jerusalem there was a court it was right next to the temple you cannot hold a court case in a person's house all right does that sound fair in 2024 if the if the courts tried to hold a criminal trial in the judge's house that would be a big deal and a bad thing right and guess what that's the same in Jewish law and the first thing we see here is that they take the first case straight to the judge's house that's illegal they can't do that and then the next thing we learn in Jewish law is that you cannot try a criminal case at nighttime because it's public and so anybody can have the chance to come and speak as a witness as testimony and that means it has to be during the daytime and what this takes place in the wee hours of the morning it's the middle of the night it's nighttime and they're in the judge's home so this trial is a sham it's a kangaroo court it's been it's an injustice from from before it ever starts and then when you get to verse 55 we learn that the chief priests and the whole council it says we're quote seeking testimony against Jesus now the chief priests and the council are the judges and like our law today in Jewish law it can never be the judge that goes out and gathers testimony against the accused right because the judge has to be impartial the judge has to be neutral and here it's the judge that went and tried to gather testimony against Jesus that's also illegal and it's very important even more to know a bit a bit about this the peculiar difference in our time I think I'm getting this right but the several lawyers in this room will help me at the end of the service I have no doubt that in the first century it's different from our time in our day someone can be accused of something but there's not enough evidence there's not enough there to charge them right the police might not even do anything with it because there's not enough evidence or the court might not hear the case in the first century it was different than that the court had to gather even for an accusation to be offered and so to have an accusation you had to have two to three witnesses all giving the same exact testimony it had to completely agree so if you if the court did not meet and you did not have two to three witnesses giving the exact same testimony it's not that there's no charge there's never even an accusation they would never even record that anyone was ever accused of anything now it's very very important to understand that detail in Jewish law because of what happens we read here that many many people bore false witness against him they tried to get witnesses to come in bring different accusations and none of the testimonies agree that's what we're told and it happened multiple times and then they tried to maximize it by saying this man said he would destroy the temple and then rebuild it in three days and so they tried to gather witnesses to go and say you know the temple that's the most precious place in Jerusalem it's the place to come and meet God this man said he was going to destroy it and he's gonna rebuild it in three days it took us 70 years to build it the first time there's no way and but the problem nobody's testimony agreed with exactly what he said now you need to know that because

[10:54] Caiaphas comes down off of the bench in verse 60 to 62 and he says to Jesus what say you against these charges and what does Jesus do he's silent why is he silent why because it was his legal right to remain silent why because there had been no accusation you see you can't you cannot formally accuse a person of anything unless two to three witnesses all agree about that thing in the midst of the court and nobody did everybody said something different and so there was no accusation Jesus is silent because that that was the his legal job he should have been silent nobody had accused him of anything he had nothing to say because he had nothing to respond to and so he was silent and because Isaiah 53 verse 7 in the Old Testament says 800 years before this ever happened that one day the Messiah would be oppressed and afflicted and stand before his accusers and open not his mouth this moment was planned according to the definite foreknowledge of God from 800 years before and Jesus had not been accused of anything there was nothing legal standing against him at all now that is so important because friends when you get to verse 61 and 62 there is a moment that happens like no other the most important words in some sense spoken in human history we might say just remember that they had no charge against him they had no accusation against him he could have gotten out that's the biggest emphasis I think Mark is offering us is that he could have walked away he could have walked away on multiple occasions and in verses 61 and 62 he speaks and what does he say Caiaphas Caiaphas is the head judge the high priest and he does something extremely illegal in Jewish law and it would be in our law I think as well he the judge comes down off the bench and starts trying to find a charge to pin on Jesus and he's yelling at him he comes down and he tries to charge him the judge can't do that and that's exactly what Caiaphas does and what does he say he says are you the Christ and you've got to read this story in the light of the parallel passages in the other gospels what we learn is that Jesus says yes I am the Christ he says I am here in verse 61 and 62 but there's a distinction here in the mind of the high priest in the mind of the the Sanhedrin that are meeting that day the

Christ is an office it's a role from the Old Testament Christ means the anointed one and the anointed one is the one that's been prophesied about from the Old Testament that would come and save Israel from exile save Israel from Babylon and now from Rome and that is what Caiaphas has in mind are you the Christ the one who was promised from the Old Testament to come and save us from our captivity from our exile from Roman occupation in the mind of this priest it is not necessarily the case that the Messiah of the Old Testament is going to definitely be God himself you see they just Caiaphas just thinks when the Messiah comes he's gonna be the son of David he's gonna be a human just like any other human except God will appoint him to get us out of exile to get us out from under Roman occupation so Caiaphas is saying are you the revolutionary are you the Christ the anointed one from the old from the Old Covenant the Old Testament that's gonna get us out of this Roman occupation mess do you think that's who you are and Jesus doesn't just say yes to that okay if you come down and look with me at verse 62 Jesus says when he says are you the anointed one

Jesus says quote I am he says three things he says I am you will see the Son of man seated at the right hand of power and coming with the clouds of heaven now look this is why this text is so scandalous jeep there was no accusation against Jesus there was no charge against Jesus Jesus was going to be able to walk away and then when he spoke and responded that question which he did not have to he didn't just say I'm the Christ no do you see what he's saying all throughout the Gospels every time we have two little words from Jesus when he responds to a question he says I am this happened in the Garden of Gethsemane in the Garden of Gethsemane he said I am and the soldiers fell on their faces before him in worship why he wasn't just confirming that he's the Christ he was saying I am God himself you know that I am is the divine name from the Old Testament it's from Exodus chapter 3 it's when God says I am who I am Jesus was saying I'm not just the Christ

Caiaphas I am God himself that's what he was saying and then he says and you know what else you will lift up your eyes and you will see the Son of man seated at the right hand of power that's from Daniel chapter 7 and Psalm 110 this vision of God's throne room where there's the Son of God seated at the right hand of power he was claiming that and then he takes it further in the third claim and he says in one day you're gonna see this Son of man me coming down in the clouds of glory those are not the clouds that are out today that's not what he's talking about they're not the stratus and the cumulus clouds outside no no he's talking about the glory cloud of God that came down upon Mount Sinai where God himself was in the glory cloud he's saying at three different levels three different ways I'm not just the human Christ I am God himself I'm the God man that is why Caiaphas rips his clothes off he rips his clothes it was a very formal act to tear your clothes in the Jewish court and you did that in any moment of hearing blasphemy and so he rips his shirt and the court goes outrageous it enters into total outrage it becomes an actual circus of hatred multiple illegalities occur when they hear him say this it becomes something other than a court they beat him they spit on him they blindfold him all the things that were not allowed in the law you could not even in a capital punishment situation you could not do that to the victim and to the perpetrator in Jewish law and they hit him you know they say they blindfold him and then they say prophesy what are they saying well he was blindfolded so they're saying tell us which one of us punched you tell us which one of us hit you if you really are the I am you can tell us our names of the ones that are beating you right now that's what they that's what was happening in this court now listen friends this brings every single one of us today to a choice I think and that choice is that as it's been said by others we must all right now avoid the very foolish thing that we could do and the very foolish thing we could do is say I find Jesus very interesting I find him to be a great moral teacher I find him to be something somebody that does sort of bring me back to church every once in a while I find him to be a person of intrigue that really matters for world history that that would be the foolish thing we must avoid that and instead we must come and hear what he's saying we can't say you know I'm so interested in Jesus I'm willing to come to church sometimes instead Jesus comes here and says I am the living God himself the anointed one of Israel he makes such a magisterial claim in this moment that it changed the world forever and you know in some sense the court enters into a circus of hatred and while they in one sense were entirely wrong and unjust in another way their fierceness was right because when you really do listen to what he claimed to be when you really do confront the true claims that Jesus makes of himself you have to either burst out in anger against him or give your whole life away to him you can never be merely interested you know he makes such a magisterial claim that he demands everything of us that we would give our whole lives away to him or that we would reject him totally that's the only way you can go any other any other choice is it's just not there it's not there at all when who do you say that he is this morning and the answer that you give to that question will mean a will mean everything it'll mean everything for your life forever now secondly when Jesus says I am God and he's being tried here by human court

what is the meaning in that that the one who claims to be God would be tried by the hands of a human court what is the meaning of that so secondly the scandalous substitute we learned the meaning of that I think in the second trial we read about here when he appears before Pontius Pilate in chapter 15 actually I did I'd never clocked to this before until studying this passage this week but Jesus Christ was actually tried in six different courts by four different judges we only read about three of those here in this passage you can see the actually what is the third one the second one's not mentioned here and then the third one takes place in chapter 15 verse 1 just very quickly Mark just tells us later in the morning the chief priests held a consultation with the other elders and scribes and the whole council and then they bound Jesus we learned in the other gospels that after he met with the small Sanhedrin in the middle of the night at Caiaphas house he was sent to the greater Sanhedrin in the morning the 70 Sanhedrin men that sat on the Sanhedrin in the bigger court the Supreme Court if you will and then they sent him to Pontius

[21 : 24] Pilate so by the time we get to Pontius Pilate he's already been tried this is sorry his fourth trial when he appears before Pontius Pilate he appeared before Caiaphas in his home and as the former chief priests in his home then he's taken to the greater Sanhedrin the 70 in the early morning and then he sent to Pontius Pilate so when you get to the story about Pontius Pilate here this is the fourth trial by the third judge at this point Pilate doesn't care at all in chapter 15 about this charge of blasphemy that's been given so the reason this is happening is because Jews the Jews are under Roman occupation and in order to try a capital case a case that demands execution the Rome has to sign off on that Jesus has been charged with blasphemy by the Jewish court and that means that normally he would have been stoned to death according to the law but because he's going to go and be tried by the Roman court that stoning will become execution by crucifixion because he's under the jurisdiction of

Rome here so that's why this happens in the 19th century and in the early 20th century it was very popular it was very popular in the Academy to say that the historicity of this account is suspect because there have never been any extra biblical data found about Pontius Pilate so in the 19th century in the 20th century it was a big movement to say we don't know that Pontius Pilate actually existed and so how can we really say that this happened and in 1961 a team of Italian archaeologists were digging in Caesarea and they uncovered an old stadium a gladiatorial type stadium in Caesarea that was built there and on it there was a plaque a little bitty plaque and inscribed in Latin a first-century plaque they dated it it said Pontius Pilate prefect of Judea has presented this tiberium to the Caesareans so now we know this is a very real account of what's going on here you couldn't make this up you couldn't make this trial up and now we have archaeological evidence to show that

Pontius Pilate was a very real man and as Jesus stands before him Pontius Pilate does not care in any way shape or form about blasphemy because he's Roman he doesn't follow the God of the Bible so he's not going to execute a man for blasphemy against the God of the Old Testament as the Jewish court charged Jesus so he asked him instead are you king why is Pilate asking that because the only reason Pilate's willing to execute somebody is because if they are a revolutionary that's trying to overthrow Roman occupation so do you think you're the king because we have a king we have a regional king Herod we have an emperor and it's not you and so he asked him that question and if you read the accounts in the rest of the gospels what you find out is that Jesus says yes I'm not only God I'm not only the Christ but I'm also the king and he gives enough for Pilate to actually understand what he means by that so we know that Jesus is saying to Pilate I didn't I didn't come to kick Tiberius

Caesar out of his throne I came to found a kingdom that is not of this world I came to found an upside-down kingdom one that you cannot yet understand until you see what's about to happen and actually we get the sense as you read these accounts that Pilate understood that and he sort of gets it and he says I don't see anything wrong I don't think we can charge this guy I'm not willing to execute him and that's the way it goes and in fact at multiple levels of Pilate's wife Claudia who was a big deal she was the daughter of the third wife of the emperor himself and she had come over far away from Rome far away from her home to marry this guy in Palestine and she had a dream and in her dream she said don't have anything to do with this man Jesus you know she believed he was innocent and that and that someone had spoken that to her in a dream at multiple levels Pilate knows he's innocent and that's why at the very end of this passage in verse 5 while all the chief priests all the scribes the

Jewish court and the soldiers and others are standing there accusing Jesus and trying to charge him and trying to get Pilate to kill him Pilate says Jesus Jesus doesn't reply he says you know are you gonna say something Jesus to all these charges all these accusations Jesus never says a word why because there was no accusation there was never a charge and because he's he was always going to stand silent as a sheep before the slaughter Isaiah 53 and it says that Pilate was amazed now why was Pilate so amazed by that and this is the point of the passage why was Pilate so amazed he was amazed because Jesus could have gotten out of it Pilate wanted to release him Pilate wanted to dismiss this Pilate saw there's no charges there's no accusations even he's not guilty of revolution he knew he could get out of it and that is why the scandal of the gospel the scandal of the text is that the God man himself would stand silent while he was innocent before a human court people he created what a great reversal of all order what lawlessness that God himself would be tried by a human court what lawlessness that the God of all the earth the judge of all the earth would be condemned while he's innocent by human beings who are guilty what lawlessness what disorder what chaos what a revolution it's exactly what should never be it's completely upside down and even more than that you know we learn here that Jesus Christ this is the God of all the earth this is the judge of humanity and he is the one sitting in the dock while human beings are on the bench the God of all the earth Jesus Christ who is the judge of the earth he should be in the dock well he should be in the bench while we're in the dock and yet it's exactly the opposite and even more what's the point of the passage why is Pilate so amazed Jesus is giving himself to it he's silent he could have walked away there were no charges there were no legal charges he could have walked away and yet he gives himself to it and that's the great scandal of the gospel the very end of the passage

[28 : 19] Pilate doesn't know what to do part of it the reason is because Pilate has had three very big problems with his relationship to Jerusalem over his tenure as a prefect of Judea I won't get into the details of those but things like building an aqueduct on the Sabbath day and all sorts of stuff that caused him a lot of problems and he was afraid of the Sanhedrin in a way and so he wants to pacify them so he does what the final six trial of Jesus Jesus is taken out to the stadium area the arena and the populace the people of the city gather and he does what was sometimes custom for a Roman prefect to do and a Roman king to do regional king you know about the gladiatorial games in Rome Rome had a lot of fun with putting those it occupied into situations of death like gladiatorial games the same thing was happening here the the Roman prefects often had fun with bringing out some criminals and saying pick somebody to go free and we'll we'll crucify the rest of them this was something that happened in the Roman system and this is what happens to Jesus they bring Jesus out they're being barabas this murder out who had started an insurrection against Rome and the people stirred up by the chief priests say crucify him crucify him crucify him you see this reversal do you see do you see the depths of what shouldn't be happening and the truth of it when when they shout crucify him when Jesus is silent here the Bible is trying to remind us so clearly that the judge of all the earth the one who should be judging us he's the one standing in the dock while we're the people the people of the world shouting crucify him crucify him we sit as the judges on the bench it's the reversal of all that should be the case and he does it he endures it he says nothing in order to save us now listen do you believe that today if you do who are you in this passage do you know who you are in this past who who are we in this passage we're not humanity is not only the crowd shouting crucify him our sins put him there but who else are we in this passage if you believe this today do you know we are barabas the guilty one walks free while the God of all the earth is condemned the man who deserved to die goes free but the Lord of heaven and earth he is judged he's condemned and Jesus Christ does it all because of his love for us his grace that's what's happening here it's such a reversal and it and look friends if you believe that you can say today I am saved by grace not by my performance I'm saved by grace not by being good I'm saved by grace because I have a great substitute I walked free he was condemned for me now let me close with this there sometimes can be things in our way of following this man a following Jesus and I'll say come back next week the story is not over good Friday is coming on Friday and Easter is coming the resurrection is coming come back next week he won't they won't keep him down but this man stood before the court of all the world and said I am God and he gave his life away in a radical reversal of all law so that we might walk free that's a grace what is what is preventing you this morning from following Jesus Christ perhaps what is preventing you this morning from following him with the whole of who you are even when you've heard his call already in your life what is preventing that and look if you if you think about it for

just two minutes and we'll be finished for two minutes the pilot you know pilot I think pilot was really close to actually saying I want to follow him I think pilot was close but in the end we read in verse 51 he wished to satisfy the crowd pilot was afraid of what everybody would think if he said what he thought about this man and sometimes we're prevented from following Jesus for the first time or to the depths because we're afraid of what everybody's gonna say and that that was pilots for Herod we didn't talk about Herod in this passage but he appeared before Herod and we learned there in the trial before Herod that Herod was intrigued by Jesus but he was too interested in his own in his own array of pleasure living a life of pleasure and Herod basically said you know I'm gonna have to change too much about me to follow this man I'm not willing to give away my the good time I'm having and sometimes we don't see the monumental claims that Jesus is making we say you know I just want to have a good time and we you know we're choosing mud pies and the slums instead of a holiday at the beach when we say that and you look at the soldiers and they spit at him and they beat him and they mocked him and really in the life of the soldiers there was just a playful indifference about him you know they were just coming to work that day and they just said yeah maybe I don't know he might be he might not be I'm not really gonna look into it and have you

Christianity is a thinking religion have you really looked at this have you really thought about it have you really explored the claim have you made it have you looked at it and made a decision don't be indifferent don't be indifferent like the soldiers Caiaphas and the priests were told by Mark Barry explicitly were envious of his of Jesus's popularity and potential power and that means that Caiaphas and the priests did not want to follow Jesus because they did not want to have to give away power they were too attached to the normal idols of this life they they wanted power they wanted money they wanted prestige and they thought if I follow him I'm gonna have to put some of that away that's temporary stuff that stuff comes and goes your circumstances can change in a moment and Judas he loved money too much to follow Jesus and the mob the pop culture the populace the crowds you know they all gathered from all over the world and they said crucify him crucify him why because the God next to them said it they heard the guy next to him they heard the guy they saw the guy next to him tweet crucify him and so they tweeted it too and you see popular contagion can prevent you from following Jesus Christ you can say you know I'm not willing to push against the grain of my culture the grain of my city all of these different ways and let me just say this as we close the final word if this man is the living God himself and he really did in the middle of history stand and say I will give my life away so that you can go free so that you can be forgiven it's the meaning of everything it's the meaning of your whole life it's the meaning of the world actually don't worry about what people think don't worry about your successes there's a little it's small don't worry about temporary stuff come and respond come and respond follow him in ways you haven't been follow him today for the first time God has every right to judge us but he let us judge him and that means that he actually judged himself for our sin and that's good news today come back next week for more let us pray Lord we thank you Jesus that you stood in our place we thank you that people like us can go free because you were condemned the horror the tragedy the injustice and yet the grace the glory and the mercy so I just pray today that somebody here would be helped to follow you Lord Jesus to see the majesty the greatness the historicity the bounty of your love for them and that all of us if we are Christians today would draw closer to you would put away our failures to follow you more deeply but we thank you above all that it is not performance but your performance that saves thank you

Lord Jesus as we come to you and sing sing a psalm sing to him help us to attune our hearts to you in this moment and we pray that in Christ's name