

A Tale of Two Trials: Jesus & Peter

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[0 : 00] Over the past few weeks, we have been preparing for the cross as we've looked at Mark chapter 14 together. And far from being an accident, far from being a mistake, the death of Jesus on the cross was a deliberate and costly choice.

Listen to the words of Jesus, spoken some time before the events of that first Easter week. Jesus said this, that he might save sinners.

Well, we're in the last of our studies in Mark chapter 14. So why don't you turn with me in your Bibles there to Mark chapter 14, page 851 in the blue church Bibles there.

And we're picking up the story from verse 53. Judas has just brought with him the crowd from the chief priests and the scribes to arrest Jesus, and he's been arrested.

And we're picking up the story now in chapter 14, verse 53. And they led Jesus to the high priest.

[1 : 47] And all the chief priests and the elders and the scribes came together. And Peter had followed as 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. But their testimony did not agree.

And some stood up 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 men testify against you? But he remained silent and made no answer. Again, the high priest asked him, Are you the Christ, the Son of the Blessed?

[3 : 03] 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've 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 to him, Prophecy.

And the guards received him with blows.

And as Peter was below in the courtyard, one of the servant girls of the high priest came, and seeing Peter warming himself, she looked at him. And she said, You also were with the Nazarene, Jesus.

But he denied it, saying, I neither know nor understand what you mean. And he went out into the gateway, and the rooster crowed.

[4 : 08] And the servant girl saw him and began again to say to the bystanders, This man is one of them. But again, he denied it. And after a little while, while the bystanders again said to Peter, Certainly you are one of them, for you are a Galilean.

But he began to invoke a curse on himself and swear, I do not know this man of whom you speak. And immediately, the rooster crowed a second time.

And Peter remembered how Jesus had said to him, Before the rooster crows twice, you will deny me three times. And he broke down and wept.

Amen. Well, before we consider this, let's pray together, shall we, to our Heavenly Father. Heavenly Father, our King, our Creator, we give you thanks for your Word.

I pray you would help us now to listen to it, to have our eyes opened and our hearts softened, so that we might respond with faith, that we might repent and believe in the good news about Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

[5 : 46] So help us now, we ask it for your sake, and we ask it in the name of Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen. Amen. As a teenager, I really got into John Grisham's legal novels, A Time to Kill, The Pelican Brief, The Firm.

I'm sure many of you have dipped into one or two of John Grisham's books at some point. I love a good legal drama, and especially when it got to the courtroom. I love the tension.

The characters you've grown to know and love through the story are facing that crucial moment in court. The lawyers circle around. The jury weighs the evidence.

Their fate, their very life perhaps, hangs in the balance. Dramatic enough in a book or a film, how much more dramatic and tense than reality?

Few things can be more dramatic than to be on trial for your own life. And that is exactly what we have here in Mark chapter 14. Jesus faces an absolute sham of a trial.

[7 : 03] His very life hangs in the balance. Peter, likewise, faces a trial of his own. His own life perhaps under threat.

Jesus stands firm, resolute, determined. Peter denies his master. It's a sobering passage and yet not without hope.

Just cast your eyes over Mark chapter 14 as we've been considering these verses over the last few weeks. Events are moving quickly now. Only a few hours have passed since verse 12 of chapter 14.

Jesus eats the Passover meal earlier in the evening. Then he goes to the Mount of Olives with his disciples and then on to the Garden of Gethsemane to pray into the night. And later on that night he is arrested.

He's betrayed by one of the 12. And by verse 53 it's dark. It's cold. And Jesus is brought to the high priest and to the whole council.

[8 : 13] It's a hastily put together trial. It's swift. It's controversial. Jesus moves ever closer to his crucifixion. Jesus the king and judge of all the earth is condemned to death by men.

Jesus innocent in every respect is willing to die and he does it even for the closest of disciples who betrays him. So we have three points.

First point looking at verses 53 to 65. Jesus although entirely innocent is condemned to death. We bristle at any sort of injustice don't we?

The slightest whiff that something's unfair and we kick up a fuss. Even more so when it comes to the legal system. That's meant to be above reproach. It's meant to be fair isn't it?

Yet here we have more than just a slight miscarriage of justice. This is an astonishing blatant disregard for the legal process.

[9 : 24] Dawn has not yet even broken and yet all the chief priests elders scribes have come together to condemn Jesus. It's a hastily put together sham of a trial.

It's a kangaroo court. All principles of justice and law are totally disregarded. It's a shameful farce. Illegal. Unjust.

Just look at the summary of the trial that we have in verse 55. Now the chief priests and the whole council were seeking testimony against Jesus to put him to death.

But they found none. Now for anyone who's read through Mark's gospel that is in no way a surprise. He is the perfect sinless son of God.

No true court of justice could possibly have secured a guilty verdict against Jesus. He was utterly innocent. Mark goes out of his way to make that point.

[10 : 24] Verse 56 Many bore false witness against him. Their testimony did not agree. And again verse 57 Some stood up and bore false witness against him.

Again verse 59 Yet even about this their testimony did not agree. The case against Jesus has got nothing to stand on.

It falls apart. But when the high priest presses Jesus to respond to the testimony against him Jesus makes no answer.

Why should he? Why dignify such lies with any response at all. He was utterly innocent in every regard. But when the high priest asks him if he is the Christ, the Messiah, the Son of the Blessed, Jesus does respond this time.

Jesus here answers the central question in Mark's Gospel. Back in the very first verse of the entire Gospel Mark introduces his account like this.

[11 : 32] He says the beginning of the Gospel about Jesus Christ, the Son of God. Mark has written his account so that his readers, so that you and I might know Jesus Christ, the Son of God. And here, at this trial, Jesus is confronted with the question that goes right to the heart of who he is. And he answers. Jesus is the promised Messiah. He is the Son of God. But he says more, and you will see the Son of Man seated at the right hand of power and coming with the clouds of heaven. Everyone in that room would have known what he meant. everyone would have known what he meant when he talked about the Son of Man. In the book of Daniel, chapter 7, the Son of Man comes from the throne of God to earth. And he comes in order to judge the earth. That is simply astonishing. Jesus, in a few short words, confirms his identity.

[12 : 49] And he is nothing less than God. He is the promised king. The one all the Old Testament looked forward to. He is judge of all the earth.

Ironic, isn't it? Given the courtroom that he was in when he spoke those words. The judge of all the worlds, the Son of God, the great king, is being judged. How ludicrous. How pathetic. The high priests, the chief priests, the elders, they had got it so terribly wrong, hadn't they?

They were putting the ultimate judge on trial and condemning him to death. It ought to have been the other way around. It should be Jesus on the bench and those priests in the dock.

They should have been the ones who are being judged. And yet, isn't that just how our world behaves? Perhaps it's how you have treated Jesus. We think we are the ones who have the right to judge him, to put him on trial.

[14 : 00] But really, it's the opposite. The reality is this, as Jesus says, he is the judge. And you and I are in the dock.

He should be in the judgment seat. And we should be the ones in chains in the dock. Perhaps you need to, this Easter, give Jesus a fair hearing to look at the evidence.

Don't make the mistake that the high priest and the others in the religious establishment made. Don't put yourself as judge over him. That is just folly.

He is judge of all the worlds. And one day, every one of us will have to face him as judge. It's the great courtroom none of us can escape from.

It's no mere drama. It's reality. Jesus was utterly innocent. Yet they condemned him to death.

[15 : 01] It's all going horribly wrong, isn't it? Jesus abandoned by all those closest to him. Now he's on death row and it's a short queue. But far from being unplanned and out of control, this was the plan.

The innocent king and judge of all the world is condemned to die. He himself bore our sin in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness.

It was the plan. Jesus has said so three times already in Mark's gospel, that he was going to die.

This was part of the plan. Jesus condemned to die.

Mark's camera has been steadily trained in on the courtroom and its goings on. But now he pans out and down into the courtyard below and here we find Peter.

And it's a tragic scene as we witness another trial. Our second point as we look at verses 66 to 72. Peter, a professing disciple, denies Jesus.

[16 : 19] Peter has followed Jesus at a distance. He's the only one of the disciples to do so. All the others have fled for their lives. But Peter, fresh from his declaration that if I must die with you, I will not deny you, he follows.

But at a distance. And on three occasions here in these verses, we find Peter under questioning twice by one of the servant girls of the high priest and then by a group of bystanders.

And contrary to Jesus' experience in the dog, the testimony against Peter is true. The servant girl is right, isn't she, when she recognizes Peter as one of Jesus' disciples.

The bystanders are right, aren't they, when they assert that he is one of them. In each case, Peter denies Jesus. He's afraid, isn't he?

He's seen everything that's been happening. He knows this is not going to end well for Jesus. He knows that Jesus' life is in grave danger. He knows that if he identifies himself as one of Jesus' followers, then his life is also likely to be in danger.

[17 : 32] It's understandable, isn't it? for Peter, it was one thing to profess allegiance, to state without hesitation that he would never deny his master, and quite another to see his profession through.

It was just a matter of hours after stating in the strongest possible terms that he would never deny Jesus, that he does just that. The very thing he promises not to do, he does.

Peter professes to be his disciple and yet he lets him down. Now if you've been a disciple of Jesus for any length of time, then you'll know that we are just like Peter.

You profess to be his disciple and yet you let him down. When the pressure was on just a little at work with the neighbour, with a family friend, when the pressure was on you denied Jesus.

You distanced yourself from him. You distanced yourself from some of his more unpopular sayings and doings. We're just like Jesus aren't we?

[18 : 46] Sorry, we're just like Peter. Anyone who thinks that they are better than Peter, that they would never let down Jesus, needs to take a long hard look in the mirror and be real for a minute.

Peter, although willing to follow at a distance, he just loved himself too much to be able to endure the consequences of all out faithfulness to Jesus.

Is that not just what you and I are like? We just love ourselves too much when it comes to the crunch. But for the true follower of Jesus, when you really see what you're really like, when you see clearly the ways in which you let Jesus down, and we all do, you deny him perhaps, it breaks you. It broke Peter. Look at him, look at that moment when he realizes the moment that the echo of the rooster's crow fading into the silence, he broke down, he wept.

And that is the moment of hope for Peter. You see, our third point is this, Jesus went to his death for the guilty who repents. When he realized what he had done, Peter repents, he breaks down, he weeps.

[20 : 19] That is the great difference between him and Judas. Both in slightly different ways betrayed Jesus. But one was lost, the other saved.

Peter was broken as he realized he had denied Jesus and he wept over his betrayal. If you read on through the New Testament then you'll know that Peter was wonderfully and graciously restored. He went on to become one of the leading men in the church. Now we may not be Peter but we are like him in our weakness and in our sin and we do let Jesus down.

But we can know restoration and forgiveness as we despair of ourselves and hope in Christ. That is true for any follower of Jesus who denies him and repents.

Jesus went to his death for sinners. He didn't go for those who don't need him. He didn't go for perfect people. He went for people just like you and me who let him down.

[21 : 33] The question is will you see your own brokenness and sin? Will you see your need for forgiveness? That is what matters. That is why Jesus went to the cross.

as chapter 14 of Mark closes. The first rays of sunshine break the horizon as the rooster crowed.

A new day was dawning and it was this new day that brought with it the tragic yet glorious death of Jesus. Tragic in its injustice.

Tragic that the king and judge of all the world was crucified on a Roman cross by man. But glorious in what his death achieved for sinful man. Mocked by insults harsh and crude.

In my place condemned he stood. Sealed my pardon with his blood. Hallelujah. What a savior.

[22 : 44] What do you make of the cross of Jesus? What is your verdict I wonder? Repent. Believe.

That is the message we hold out. That is the appeal Mark makes to each one of us here this afternoon. Repent and believe for this is Jesus Christ the son of God and he died so that you might have life.

Amen. Let's pray shall we as we respond. Thank you father for this gospel the gospel that speaks of Jesus Christ the son of God.

Would you open our eyes to see the truth about Jesus? Jesus we give you thanks and praise for the death he died, the ransom he paid, the cup he drank, the blood he shed so that you would pass over us on the day of judgment.

Would you give us grace to repent and believe? Would you help us to deny ourselves and follow you? and for those moments that we have denied you, that we've let you down, we are sorry father and we look with hope to the cross and we look with hope to the certainty of future in resurrection life.

[24 : 27] we pray this in Jesus name, Amen.