

Justice Through Injustice

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[0 : 00] We are in the Gospel of Mark, chapter 14, where we have been camping out for a few weeks now in chapter 14. And this morning we're going to begin reading in verse 53 and read all the way down to verse 65.

And then next week we will finish chapter 14 before we move on to chapters 15 and 16, where we plan on finishing this Gospel on Easter Sunday as we look at Mark's account of the resurrection of Jesus.

So, if you guys are there in chapter 14, I want you to stand up with me as we read God's Word together. Mark chapter 14, verse 53.

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.

[1 : 06] For many bore false witness against him, but 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, the 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? 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 witness 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 to him, Prophecy!

[2 : 15] And the guards received him with blows. Father, help us to not merely see the physical anguish of Jesus as he nears the time of his crucifixion, but to see and understand what he has really borne on our behalf, so that our affections for him are increased a hundredfold.

One of my favorite, if not my absolute favorite verses in all of the Bible is 2 Corinthians 5, verse 21. And Apostle Paul, in that particular verse, describes Jesus as him who knew no sin. He says that God made him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

And this week I was, as I meditated on the trial of Jesus, I was hung up on that phrase that kept reverberating through my mind, He knew no sin.

And I want you to consider, before we look at the trial of Jesus, I want you to consider the implications of that particular statement, that Jesus knew no sin.

[3 : 47] The writer of the book of Hebrews tells us that Jesus was tempted in every way in which you and I are tempted, and yet, he was without sin. We have been following Jesus through the Gospel of Mark for over a year now.

We began our study of this book last January, January of 2012, the second week of January. We began to walk through the Gospel of Mark.

By the time we finish, it will have taken us exactly 52 sermons, because we've taken some breaks and looked at some other things. 52 sermons to walk through this book. But we started with Jesus in Mark, at his baptism in the Jordan River by John.

We saw his early ministry. We saw his ministry throughout Galilee, and now in Judea. And we have seen Jesus as we walked through this book. We have seen him heal the lame.

We have seen him give sight to the blind, cause deaf people to hear, and mute people to speak. We've seen him cast out demons. We have seen Jesus rebuke the hypocritical religious leaders of Israel during his day over and over.

[4 : 59] We've seen him angrily turn over, in righteous anger, turn over the tables of the money changers and chase them out of the temple. And we've seen him tenderly receive the children that his own disciples were trying to keep at bay, keep away from him.

We have seen Jesus praying quietly on a mountainside. We've seen him kneeling in the garden in anguish, crying out to his Father. And in all of these things that we have seen him do, we have never once seen Jesus sin.

Consider how astounding that is. Luke tells us that Jesus was about 30 years old when he began his ministry. So he was somewhere between 28 and 32.

That covers the word about when he started his ministry. Which means that he's in his early to mid-30s when he comes to trial here before the Sanhedrin. So for over 30 years, Jesus walked upon the face of the earth, encountering all the same sorts of things that you and I have to deal with.

Encountering the death of the loss of a loved one, dealing with the grief of rejection, dealing with the pain of others not wanting to associate with you, dealing with the sicknesses and illnesses of others, dealing with oppressing mobs and crowds, dealing now with the abandonment of his disciples.

[6 : 26] We have seen Jesus face the full spectrum of human experience, and he never sinned. He never told a little white lie to escape an awkward moment in an awkward conversation.

I mean, consider the fact that Jesus was never mean to his little brothers and little sisters. He never pushed one of them down. He never hit one of them. He never called them a name.

Not one time. Never disobeyed his parents. In all of his years, under Mary and his adopted father Joseph, he never disobeyed them. He never spoke a harsh word to them.

Never talked back to them. He never once dishonored his mother or father in any way. He never reacted in unrighteous anger.

Anger is fine, but unrighteous anger is wrong. And Jesus never had an anger that was not motivated by zeal for God and the things of God. Jesus never spoke harshly to those who didn't need a harsh word to correct them.

[7 : 31] He knew no sin. And yet now, here he stands on trial. Before we really look at his trial in detail here in chapter 14, I want to kind of give you the layout of everything that's happening so you can have a good mental picture in your mind of the events that are unfolding.

You can divide the trial of Jesus pretty neatly into two parts. There is his Jewish trial, his trial by the Sanhedrin, by the religious leaders of Israel. And then there is his Roman trial, his trial before the Roman leaders, namely Pilate.

But then you can divide each of those two major parts of Jesus' trial, each of those divide into three parts. So that what you get with his Jewish trial is John chapter 18 tells us that before Jesus was brought to Caiaphas, which we're reading about here, before Jesus was brought to Caiaphas, he was brought to a man named Annas.

Now Annas, years before, had been the high priest. But he was removed from his position by the Romans. But Annas was a shrewd man. We would probably look at him and think of him as almost a Godfather-like figure when it came to the temple precincts and all the things surrounding the priesthood in Jerusalem.

Because Annas, though he was removed from being the high priest, somehow was able to work it so that the next few high priests selected by the Romans, whether he had to bribe, bribe, or lie, or whatever he had to do, he arranged it so that his own sons succeeded him as high priest.

[9 : 09] And then I suppose he must have run out of sons because you arrive at Caiaphas now, who was his son-in-law. So Annas is this figure who's behind the scenes, sort of pulling the puppet strings and doing all sorts of things.

And John chapter 18 tells us that after Jesus was arrested in the garden, first he was brought before Annas, the former high priest, the godfather of the Sanhedrin, if you will.

And Annas very quickly grew frustrated with Jesus and sent him off to Caiaphas for a more official-type trial. You might consider his trial before Annas almost like a grand jury where he decided, yeah, he needs to go to trial.

Get him out of here. Take him down to the street, to Caiaphas' house, to the full meeting of the Sanhedrin. And then you get the second part of Jesus' Jewish trial, which we read about here in the Gospel of Mark, and about which we have the most detail, and we're going to consider this morning. But then there was a third part, early in the morning, to make the decision that they make in the middle of the night here, official, there was a very short-hearing meeting of the Sanhedrin.

[10:13] Then, of course, Jesus is shipped off to Pilate. He meets with Pilate. Pilate sends him to Herod, and he finds out he's a Galilean. Herod sends him back to Pilate, and those three things make up the three phases of this Roman trial.

So sort of two parts divided further into six parts, and we are right now in this middle part, part two, of the Jewish trial. And what I want you to see as we walk through this trial is the great injustice that Jesus suffers here.

Because almost every detail that we are able to discern about the trial of Jesus shows us that this was an illegitimate trial. That Jesus was wrongly, not only wrongly arrested, but he was tried in such a way that all of the rules that God had set up in the law, particularly in Deuteronomy chapter 16, to ensure that people receive fair trials and that the innocent are not condemned, all of the rules that God set up in his word to govern these sorts of trials are broken with the trial of Jesus.

So I'm going to point some of those out to you as we walk through. But I want to begin, look here in verse 53, we're told, this sets the stage that Jesus was led to the high priest, so we're talking about Caiaphas, and all the chief priests and the elders and the scribes came together.

Now when you have a description like that, we know that it's not just talking about a random gathering of leaders, this is the Sanhedrin. This is the group of elders in Jerusalem who would have been responsible for these kinds of trials.

[11:52] They are the standing jury in every trial. In fact, every city the Old Testament requires, every city that has at least 120 men living in it, is to select out a number of men to serve as elders or judges who decide all the cases within that city.

In a large city like Jerusalem, you would have had a much larger council which was to oversee all those other councils in all the small towns and villages throughout Israel so that if there were a case that could not be solved by the elders in a small town, it would be sent to Jerusalem to the Sanhedrin to be tried by them.

So this is the high court of the Jews to whom Jesus is brought. Now we get a strange note in verse 54 that sort of takes us out of the trial that's very important.

It says that Peter followed him at a distance, riding to the courtyard of the high priest, and he was sitting with the guards and warming himself at the fire. And then we don't hear anything else about Peter until we get to verse 66 and on down through verse 72 we learn about Peter's denials of Jesus.

And so you have to ask yourself the question, why did Mark decide to introduce Peter here in verse 54 and he doesn't get back to the story of Peter until verse 66?

[13:10] And the answer to that is very simple. Mark wants us, the readers, to see that what's happening with the trial of Jesus and the denials of Peter are happening concurrently. That is, they're happening at the same time.

He obviously can't tell you about two stories at one time because he's writing. So he introduces Peter, tells the trial, then tells about the denials of Peter, but what we are to understand is that as Jesus is on trial, Peter is sitting in the courtyard of Caiaphas denying Christ.

Now that's very important for one crucial reason. Jesus has told Peter already in verse 30, truly I tell you this very night before the rooster crows twice, you will deny me three times.

Jesus is telling Peter that before the rooster crows at its normal time, around about 3 a.m., you will have already denied me three times.

Which means that the trial of Jesus took place before Peter's final denial. So that the trial of Jesus must have taken place, just putting together all the time factors that we know about from Jesus having eaten a Passover meal with his disciples earlier in the evening, gone to the Garden of Gethsemane, and then being arrested.

[14:27] All of those sort of details, just putting all that together, means that this trial must have taken place roughly between the hours of 1 a.m. and 3 a.m. right in the middle of the night.

And that's important because the Word of God in Deuteronomy tells us that they are not to have a trial at night. No late night trial.

They must be had in the daytime. Why? Because nothing is to be sort of done in a secretive way. No one is to be tried so that everybody in the community is unaware of what's happening. Things are to be done in the light of day, quite literally. Things are to be done in the open. No secret trials. No condemning of someone in a back room and then punishing them.

Everything is to be done open and honestly. But we know, of course, that these priests and scribes have no interest in having an open, fair trial for Jesus.

[15:26] That he's condemned before he is arrested. They've already decided his fate, and we've already been told by Mark that they had already plan, chapter 14, verse 1, to arrest him by stealth and kill him.

So this is their plan. Their plan is to arrest him in the middle of the night by stealth so that the people don't find out because Jesus is popular with the common people. Arrest him secretly, try him in the middle of the night, condemn him to death.

That's the plan. The problem is it's against the law. it's an illegitimate trial from the very beginning. Not merely because they condemned him before he's arrested, but because they hold his trial secretly in the middle of the night.

Everything here begins on the wrong foot. And Mark wants us to see that at the beginning, before 3 a.m., this whole trial takes place. The whole thing.

Now, continue to read on with me. It says, in verse 55, that the chief priest and the whole council, so the whole centum, all centum, were seeking to establish testimony against Jesus to put him to death, but they found none.

[16:45] So now we're entering into the realm of actual eyewitness testimony because in addition to trials not being allowed to be held at night, the law emphasizes in Deuteronomy that a man cannot be condemned except on the basis of a two or three eyewitnesses.

So you cannot have someone come and accuse you of doing something and say that they saw you steal bread from the market. I saw him. He stole bread from the market and he deserves to be punished.

Well, who else saw it? Well, no one. I was the only one. You see that you couldn't be convicted on the basis of that. Two or three witnesses at a minimum are necessary. And so they're at least making some sort of surface effort to make things look good.

So they're trying to call witnesses, someone to come and bear witness that he's done something wrong. And look how this goes. Look how this phase of the trial goes. Verse 56, many bore false witness against him, but their testimony did not agree.

Well, of course not. They've rounded people up who were willing to do anything and these people can't agree in their testimony. In fact, there's a very specific note.

[18:04] Verse 57, 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.

Now, if they can prove that accusation, that might be worthy of death because the one thing that could not be tolerated in first century Jerusalem was the possibility of riot, the possibility of destroying anything held of such value among the people, the possibility of inciting anything that would be of a measure to destroy the actual temple.

So if they could have gotten this to stick, this may have been enough for them to bring him before Pilate for him to be crucified. But here's the problem. First of all, there's two problems here.

Jesus never said this. Jesus actually said, we read in John chapter 2, he said, destroy this temple and I will raise it in three days.

He never said that he would destroy the temple. He said, if you destroy the temple, I will raise it in three days. And then John tells us, sort of in parentheses, just off to the side, he was talking about the temple of his body.

[19:17] So Jesus was giving them a prediction, you're going to destroy the temple of my body. But guess what? Three days later, it's coming back. I'm going to raise it up. You cannot destroy me.

And yet here are these people who overheard it, twist it. Well, he threatened to destroy the temple and then said he could rebuild it in three days. And yet, even in that detail, we are told, verse 59, yet even about this, their testimony did not agree.

So it's an illegitimate trial in the middle of the night. They have failed to get two or three witnesses to agree that Jesus has done anything worthy of death.

So on two counts here, this trial should be dismissed. And yet, it goes on because we're told that the high priest stood up in the midst and he asked Jesus, have you no answer to make? What is it that these men testify against you? And then notice Jesus. But he remained silent and made no answer.

[20 : 22] Again, the high priest asked him, are you the Christ, the Son of the Blessed? Now, a straightforward question. Are you?

And this is the only thing that Jesus will reply to. You ask him directly who he is, he'll tell you. And he answers them, I am. And you will see the Son of Man seated at the right hand of power and coming with the clouds of heaven.

This is not the first time that we have heard this language from Jesus. I want you to turn back just one chapter. Chapter 13, verse 24.

It's a difficult chapter, but I told you that I think that these verses, verses 24 through 27, you can go back and listen to it online. I told you that I think these verses are about the second coming of Christ.

And Jesus says, In those days, after that tribulation, the sun will be darkened and the moon will not give its light and the stars will be falling from heaven and the powers in the heavens will be shaken and then they will see the Son of Man coming in clouds and with great power and glory.

[21 : 31] This is judgment language that Jesus has taken over from the book of Daniel and applied it to himself as the Son of Man. Now Jesus answers the high priest's question, I am not only the Messiah, I am the Son of Man predicted by Daniel and I'm coming back in judgment on you one day.

Well, that's not the way to wiggle your way out of a conviction. Yeah, by the way, I am and I'm coming back and you're in serious trouble. I'm not a work way.

Back to high priest, tears his clothes. What further witnesses do we need? He says, You have heard his blasphemy. What's your decision? So the ultimate charge they level against Jesus is blasphemy.

It's not the first time they've accused him of blasphemy in the Gospel of Mark. When he forgave the sins of people, they accused him of blasphemy and he answered that charge by saying, You think it's a big deal that I told this guy that his sins are forgiven?

I tell you what, I'll show you I have the power. And he looked at the crippled man and he says he's forgiven and he says, Stand up and walk. And then he walks. What's easy of you, he says, for me to say your sins are forgiven or demonstrate my power by telling him to walk?

[22 : 49] You question my authority, I'll display my authority. And so they accuse him of blasphemy. He claims to have the authority of God himself and now Jesus claims to be the son of man coming in judgment upon the world.

It's blasphemy in their eyes and they're right if he's not who he claims to be. If he's not the divine Messiah, if he's not the divine descendant of David, then they're right.

It is blasphemy. But there's a problem with their charge of blasphemy. Not only is he really and truly who he claims to be, but the law, again, that custom law, does not permit self-incrimination.

In other words, a person cannot merely confess to something and say, yep, I'm the guy who did it with no witnesses. You can't condemn him on that basis according to the law.

Because in that way, someone may take the rap, an innocent person may take the rap for a guilty person or a crazy person may just say that they've done something and there's no evidence or signs that they've actually done anything.

[23 : 55] So the law does not allow self-incrimination and there's no other testimony. The witnesses have failed to agree. There's no other testimony on the basis of Jesus' words alone.

The high priest and the rest of the council condemn him as worthy of death. So it's a trial in the middle of the night. They don't have the witnesses that they need and they condemn him based upon his own testimony, not the testimony of anyone else.

In every detail that Mark provides for us about the trial, it is an illegitimate, illegal trial. It is a great injustice that is perpetrated upon the sinless, spotless lamb of God.

You and I, I know, face injustice in the world around us and there are times when we are wrongly hurt.

There are times when we are confronted or when we are faced by painful things that happen between us and family members, between us and co-workers, between us and our friends.

[25 : 09] Painful injustices are done to us, but at the end of the day, ultimately, you and I were already deserving of God's wrath.

And so, any injustice, no matter how small or how great it might be that we experience in this world is overshadowed by the mercy that we receive in Christ that in Him we are forgiven and delivered from the ultimate judgment that we deserve.

And yet, here's Jesus who knew no sin, who was the spotless lamb of God, receiving great injustice. And He suffers most of it in silence.

Why would He do that? Why would He not stand up and defend Himself? Why not from the beginning say, hey guys, by the way, you can't try me, this is the middle of the night, this is illegal, let me go.

Why not do that? Why not declare His own innocence? Why suffer in silence? There's a key to the answer.

[26 : 18] If you remember last week at the end of the passage that we looked at last week, Jesus had predicted that His disciples would abandon Him, fall away.

Mark chapter 14, verse 7, you will all fall away for it is written, I will strike the shepherd and the sheep will be scattered, to quote from the book of Zechariah. And then, as Jesus is arrested, Jesus says in verse 49 for those arresting Him, day after day I was with you in the temple teaching and you did not seize me.

And then He says this, but let the Scriptures be fulfilled. And they all left Him and fled. That statement by Jesus, let the Scriptures be fulfilled, has a double meaning here.

Because on the one hand it refers back to His prediction from the book of Zechariah that His disciples would abandon Him and were told in the very next phrase, and they all left Him and fled. So, on the one hand, this is a fulfillment of the Scriptures from Zechariah that Jesus predicted and they all flee. But on the other hand, this happens in the midst of His arrest and He challenges them on why they're arresting Him and He allows them to arrest Him in order that the Scriptures might be fulfilled.

[27 : 34] Because everything, everything that unfolds in the next two and a half chapters, every bit of it is the fulfillment of God's Word and God's decree.

If you read in the book of Acts, we read there that Jesus was delivered up to Herod and Pontius Pilate, throws in all the Jews, that means these leaders here, and the Gentiles, that's the Roman soldiers, according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God.

There's nothing that unfolds in this unjust trial that was not ordained by God Himself. Not in one thing.

Bill read earlier, as we were singing, Bill read from Isaiah chapter 53 about the suffering servant of the Lord who is Jesus, that He opened not His mouth, we were in the hear of His silence.

Same passage, Isaiah chapter 53, a couple of verses down. It was the will of the Lord to crush Him. You see the connection between those things?

[29 : 02] The refusal of Jesus to declare His own innocence and the refusal of Jesus to confront them on their hypocrisy and the injustice of His own trial is the will of God.

In and through this great injustice, God will establish His own justice and righteousness. Because it is only through the death of Jesus that He did not deserve that you and I can be made right with God.

We are justified through faith in Jesus and our sins are counted as His and His righteousness is counted as ours. God made Him who knew no sin to be sin so that in Him we might become the righteousness of God.

All of that happens. It cannot happen apart from the unfolding of the Father's will that takes Jesus through an unjust trial with the Jews, an unjust trial with the Romans, and ends with Jesus hanging upon a cross bearing the curse that you and I deserve.

Ultimate divine justice because God passed over former sins and continues to pass over sins now. Ultimate divine justice could only be established through the injustice of Christ's trial so that an innocent man could be condemned and suffer as Caiaphas later says by accident one man suffering for the sins of many.

[30 : 35] That is why Jesus endures indignity. And we we must do no different than Him.

We must endure indignity in our lives. Whether it's a family member who has so hurt you and so hurt others that you love that you would rather not speak their name or see their face ever again.

God can do great things in and through the injustice that's been done to you through them. Not if you fight for your own name.

Not if you stand up and declare I'm innocent leave me alone everybody go away but perhaps if you endure it and understand it and see it and know that in and through all things God is working them to the good for those that love Him.

Whether it is a co-worker who has cheated you out of what is rightfully yours. Whether it's a friend who has so wronged you by their gossip or by the lies that they've told to others.

[31 : 53] whatever it might be whatever terrible things have happened to you they do not compare to the injustice done to the spotless Lamb of God and He suffered through it all without declaring His own rights so that the will of God might be accomplished and God might bring a greater good out of it.

And I think the same can be true for us. Although there are times when we have to say what's right and stand on principles and make sure that we're not wrongly abused I understand that.

But the goal the goal is never personal vindication. The goal should never be revenge and they get what is their due because vengeance belongs to the Lord the scripture says.

And if we believe as strongly as Christ that the scriptures must be fulfilled and the sovereign plan of God must move forward and take place and that may include like it did for Joseph our suffering for a long while so that God might accomplish His purposes.

We must as the writer of Hebrews says that Jesus endured the cross for the joy set before Him for the joy set before us that we have difficulty conceiving in the moment for the joy that is there that is promised in His word we must endure the cross that He's given us to bear.

[33 : 30] Oh scorning its shame the writer of Hebrews says yes we don't have to enjoy the pain that we endure that's that's sick that's not right but for the joy set before us to be able to endure without seeking our own vindication without seeking revenge but trusting that God is able He's able to work all things for our good.

Do you know what the good that Paul speaks of there is in Romans chapter 8? I want you to turn there and I want us to close with this because I think if we can see what the good is that God is accomplishing we'll be able to better see Him doing it in our lives.

It's Romans chapter 8 verse 28 that I keep referring to that you may know. He says we know that for those who love God all things work together for good for those who are called according to His purpose.

And then the next verse begins with the word because for those who before knew He also predestined. And here it is. Here's the goal of this. To be conformed to the image of His Son.

What is the good that God is working in the lives of His people through their pain and suffering?

What is the end that God has in mind for you as others hurt you and slander you and you endure it?

[35 : 05] What is He doing? He's conforming you to the image of His Son. Suffered silently and was vindicated by His Father through the resurrection of the dead.

It is the good that He's working in you right now to conform you to His Son. And it may be good things, pleasant things that He uses to do that, or it may be unspeakably painful things that He uses to do that.

But He is at work if you love Him, if you're called according to His purpose. It is not an easy thing to watch our Lord suffer in silence.

It is not an easy thing to be conformed to His image. In fact, we come to confess that we are unable to do what our Lord does.

we are incapable of setting aside our own rights, our own sense of justice for ourselves.

[36 : 13] We are incapable of that. But we believe that the Spirit that you have given to your people who dwells within us, we believe that He is able to so conform us to the image of Jesus, so transform our minds and hearts that that which is impossible for us to do, He can do through us.

Let us not be a people who grow bitter towards those who wrong us, Father, but let us be a people who see in that the work of our Heavenly Father, shaping us and molding us to look like Jesus.

It's in His name that we ask this. Amen. I want to ask you guys to... ..