

Jesus Was Tried In Our Place
Mark 14:53-15:15
Key Verse: 14:61,62

by Tony King

“But Jesus remained silent and gave no answer. Again the high priest asked him, ‘Are you the Christ, the Son of the Blessed One?’ ‘I am,’ said Jesus. ‘And you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Mighty One and coming on the clouds of heaven.’”

In this passage, Jesus was on trial. Jesus did not defend himself but he used his trial to clearly reveal his identity. In fact, this trial revealed the true nature of all those involved: the religious leaders, Peter and Pilate. Let’s think about who Jesus is and how we can have a clear identity in Jesus.

I. Jesus before the Sanhedrin (14:53-72)

First, Jesus was innocent. (14:53-59) Look at verse 14:53. “They took Jesus to the high priest, and all the chief priests, elders and teachers of the law came together.” After his arrest, Jesus was taken to the high priest. It was late but the chief priests, elders and teachers of the law gathered. They had waited a long time for this moment. Under the cover of night they would finally be able to carry out everything they wanted against Jesus without fear of the people.

From the beginning of the trial, the verdict had already been determined. Jesus would be put to death but there was no evidence to support this. So the trial was used to backfill the evidence. Look at verse 14:55. “The chief priests and the whole Sanhedrin were looking for evidence against Jesus so that they could put him to death, but they did not find any.” Even though Jesus’ enemies looked very hard they could not find any evidence of wrongdoing so they decided to make it up. Look at verse 14:56. “Many testified falsely against him, but their statements did not agree.” There were so many liars and evildoers in the courtroom ready to do away with Jesus but they couldn’t get their story straight.

Next some people remembered something Jesus had said and introduced a twisted version of it as evidence. Look at verses 14:57-58. “Then some stood up and gave this false testimony against him: ‘We heard him say, “I will destroy this man-made temple and in three days will build another, not made by man.”’” That is not what Jesus said. Jesus never mentioned “man-made,” and the temple to which he referred was his own body. His body would be destroyed. Then Jesus would be raised back to life on the third day. But the liars had twisted Jesus’ words so much that they couldn’t get their testimony to agree. (59)

The fact that Jesus’ enemies could not find any real or even false evidence against him is remarkable. Their foolishness only magnified Jesus’ innocence. If we want to find “dirt” on someone, we should go to that person’s enemies. Yet, Jesus was so innocent and pure that even a large group of his enemies could find nothing against him. This reveals that Jesus is no ordinary man. Jesus is holy and sinless God. Jesus is the perfect Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. We cannot die for another person’s sins because we each have our own sins for which we should die. But Jesus was sinless and guiltless. He alone could die for others’ sins. 2 Corinthians 5:21 says, “God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.” Jesus stood trial, not because he had committed a crime, but to save us from our sins.

Second, Jesus said, “I am.” (14:60-65) Look at verse 60. “Then the high priest stood up before them and asked Jesus, ‘Are you not going to answer? What is this testimony that these men are bringing against you?’” The high priest gave Jesus an opportunity to defend himself against the false testimony. Few things are more painful than being falsely accused. People naturally try all their best to defend themselves against false accusations. They even do this when the charges are true. One young man was pulled over for speeding. He knew he was speeding but he tried to defend himself to the police officer saying he had to go to a church meeting. Then the police officer gave him two traffic tickets, one for speeding and one for driving without his license and the young man had to appear in traffic court. His friends urged him to plea not guilty, saying that police officers never appear in traffic court. He entered a plea of not guilty. Then the judge called for the police officer who then stepped forward and said, “Yes, this was the person who was speeding and driving without his license” and “Yes, the radar gun was pointed at his

car.” Then a court appointed attorney encouraged this young man to change his plea to guilty and tell the judge he did not know what he was doing when he entered the first plea. He did so and by God’s grace was punished lightly.

On the other hand, Jesus was not guilty at all and yet he did not defend himself. Jesus did not have a court appointed attorney to defend him. What did Jesus do? Look at verse 61a. “But Jesus remained silent and gave no answer.” No one could remain silent in that situation but Jesus did. Jesus’ silence spoke louder than anything he could have said. Jesus’ silence spoke of his determination to obey his Father’s will for him to go to the cross and die for the sins of all people. Jesus’ silence meant that he would not allow even one word to come between him and the cross. Jesus’ silence reveals his divinity.

God had previously frustrated the false testimony so that none of it agreed. Together with Jesus’ silence, the trial was driven toward one question and one issue. Look at verse 61b. “Again the high priest asked him, ‘Are you the Christ, the Son of the Blessed One?’” The high priest was looking to charge Jesus with blasphemy, a crime punishable by death. Yet on this question, Jesus did not remain silent. Let’s read verse 62. “‘I am,’ said Jesus. ‘And you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Mighty One and coming on the clouds of heaven.’” Jesus said, “I am.” Jesus knew that this answer would send him to his death. Nevertheless Jesus clearly identified himself as the Christ. At the moment, Jesus was on trial and had subjected himself to the whims of evil men. But one day he would come again in power and glory to judge the living and the dead. One day all of them would be judged by Jesus. Jesus was not intimidated by evil people but had a clear sense of final victory.

Jesus told the high priest that he would see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Mighty One and coming on the clouds of heaven. This was good news for the high priest if he believed it. In fact, Jesus’ declaration is good news for anyone who accepts Jesus as the Christ. Hebrews 9:27-28 say, “Just as man is destined to die once, and after that to face judgment, so Christ was sacrificed once to take away the sins of many people; and he will appear a second time, not to bear sin, but to bring salvation to those who are waiting for him.” We see here that both Jesus’ silence and his words reveal that he is God.

Jesus’ words infuriated the high priest. Look at verses 63-64. “The high priest tore his clothes. ‘Why do we need any more witnesses?’ he asked. ‘You have heard the blasphemy. What do you think?’” The high priest and the whole Sanhedrin condemned Jesus to death because he said, “I am.” There was no other charge because they could find no evidence. All of the real evidence pointed to Jesus being the Christ but they did not accept it. Indeed, as much as this trial revealed Jesus’ identity as the Christ, the Son of God, so it also revealed the real problem of the religious leaders. They did not repent. At the critical moment, Jesus said, “I am.” Then, at the critical moment for them, the religious leaders hardened their hearts and condemned Jesus to death. This trial was as much about the true nature of Jesus as it was about the true nature of the religious leaders. Look at verse 65. “Then some began to spit at him; they blindfolded him, struck him with their fists, and said, ‘Prophesy!’ And the guards took him and beat him.”

Jesus answered only one question at the cost of his life. Let’s read verses 61-62 again. “But Jesus remained silent and gave no answer. Again the high priest asked him, ‘Are you the Christ, the Son of the Blessed One?’ ‘I am,’ said Jesus. ‘And you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Mighty One and coming on the clouds of heaven.’” Jesus made his identity the unavoidable issue before his accusers. The religious leaders thought they were trying Jesus but in reality they were all on trial before the Son of God. Each person must decide to either accept Jesus as the Christ, the Son of God or reject him like the high priest and the Sanhedrin members. Let’s accept Jesus as the Christ and have the forgiveness of sins and glorious hope of his second coming.

II. Peter disowns Jesus. (14:66-72)

Meanwhile, Peter was outside in the courtyard of the high priest. He had followed Jesus from a distance and then sat down with the guards, warming himself at the fire. Peter tried to blend in but someone took notice of him. The firelight had made Peter’s face visible. Look at verses 66-67. “While Peter was below in the courtyard, one of the servant girls of the high priest came by. When she saw Peter warming himself, she looked closely at him. ‘You also were with that Nazarene, Jesus,’ she said.” Peter’s heart sank. Peter had followed to see what would happen to Jesus but he was also afraid for his own life. If Jesus was convicted, Peter would be next. So he did what was understandable though not admirable. Look at verse 68. “But he denied it. ‘I don’t know or understand what you’re talking about,’ he said, and went out into the entryway.”

Peter tried to hide but the servant girl was relentless. To Peter this servant girl might have been the most frightening girl he had ever met. The servant girl let it be known to other people standing around that Peter was one of Jesus' disciples but he denied it a second time.

Look at verse 70b. "After a little while, those standing near said to Peter, 'Surely you are one of them, for you are a Galilean.'" By this time the servant girl's keen night vision had aroused much suspicion about Peter. Twice he had spoken out to deny that he knew Jesus but in the process he had given away his Galilean accent. With eyes all turned on him, Peter began to call down curses on himself. He swore to them, "I don't know this man you're talking about." He denied any relationship with Jesus for the third time.

Peter was a great contrast to Jesus. Jesus was inside saying to his accusers, "I am," while Peter was outside saying, "I don't know." Peter had an identity crisis. At one time, Peter proclaimed himself as the most loyal disciple, ready to die for his Lord. When that loyalty was tested, he denied Jesus three times. This was the fruit of his pride, his lack of prayer and his unwillingness to accept Jesus' words when it offended him.

Though Peter denied his Lord three consecutive times, some good came out of this. Look at verse 72. "Immediately the rooster crowed the second time. Then Peter remembered the word Jesus had spoken to him: 'Before the rooster crows twice you will disown me three times.' And he broke down and wept." Jesus had predicted that Peter would disown him three times before the rooster crowed twice. It happened just as Jesus said. At that moment, Peter saw himself as he really was. Peter was not the ultra-brave, super disciple, he had imagined himself to be. He was a weak and sinful man who was all bark and little bite. He was a weak and sinful man who could live only by the grace of Jesus. He needed to listen to Jesus and repent instead of talking to Jesus out of his pride. This was so painful for Peter to realize but it was the beginning of recognizing his true self before the Lord. Later Peter would go to prison for Jesus. According to church history, he would lay down his life for Jesus. Peter would become an indispensable man in God's salvation history. This was only possible, though, when he really saw who he was before Jesus – a sinner in need of repentance, grace and forgiveness. When he accepted who he was before Jesus, repented and received God's grace of forgiveness, he grew to have a clear identity in Jesus. Later Peter wrote in 1 Peter 2:9-10, "But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy."

Growing to have a clear identity in Jesus is very difficult. We cannot live by our pride or human righteousness. If the most loyal disciple disowned Jesus three times, we should not think we would do better. In the past, profanity played a significant part of my speech. After Jesus came into my heart the Holy Spirit cleaned-up my vocabulary. By now, I thought I was okay about not using bad words. In fact this year my prayer topic was not only to refrain from bad words but to speak good things and pray based on Psalm 34. However, one day last week, some high stress problems arose for our team at work. It was doubly stressful because we had made the same big mistake a week earlier but this time there were potential legal ramifications. I began to complain loudly and then a bad word flew out of my mouth in front of my co-workers. I really did not want to do that but I did in the heat of the moment. I felt so bad. I wanted to break down and weep like Peter. This happened exactly on a day when I did not meditate on God's word or pray in the morning. Ironically I did neither in my stress about preparing this message. Without listening to Jesus' word and prayer, I lose my identity as a child of God and a shepherd and become another worldly person. I learn newly that I am a weak and sinful man who can only stand here by the grace of Jesus and because many of you prayed for me. Jesus is the one who makes me strong and the one who makes me his servant.

We must recognize our true selves before Jesus and humbly accept his word through deep Bible study. We must pray earnestly so that we will not fall into temptation. And when we do fall, we must remember Jesus' words and repent. We cannot stand in our pride or willpower. However, when we stand fully in Jesus' grace, God gives us a clear identity as his child and his servant.

An early church father named Polycarp knew this well. He was arrested as an old man because of his faith in Jesus. If Polycarp simply said, "Caesar is Lord," he would have been released. However, he said, "For eighty-six years I served Christ and he never let me down. How can I deny my King who saved me?" Polycarp was then burned alive at the stake. To the end Polycarp proclaimed his faith in Jesus. Nowadays there is an ever-increasing anti-Christian pressure in our society. We may be tempted to keep quiet about our faith in Jesus but we must not be afraid. We

must boldly and clearly testify to our faith in Jesus. May God bless our Easter Bible conferences to be times when we proclaim and testify to our faith in Jesus.

III. Jesus before Pilate (15:1-15)

Jesus was tortured all night long but his trial was not over. Look at verse 15:1. “Very early in the morning, the chief priests, with the elders, the teachers of the law and the whole Sanhedrin, reached a decision. They bound Jesus, led him away and handed him over to Pilate.” Jesus was sent to Pilate, the Roman governor, because only the Romans could order executions.

Look at verse 15:2a. “‘Are you the king of the Jews?’ asked Pilate.” When Jesus stood before Pilate the charges were no longer religious but political. The title “king of the Jews” was messianic but at the time, it also carried a strong political meaning. Anyone who claimed to be the king of the Jews, a messiah figure, was taken very seriously by the Romans as a political threat. People like Theudas and Judas the Galilean had made such claims, caused civil unrest, and then were crushed by the Romans. (Acts 5:36-38) If Jesus was found guilty of setting himself up as the king of the Jews, the Romans would execute him. Jesus’ answer to Pilate’s question meant the difference between life and death.

Let’s read 15:2. “‘Are you the king of the Jews?’ asked Pilate. ‘Yes, it is as you say,’ Jesus replied.” Jesus did not qualify his answer or try to explain the spiritual meaning of “king of the Jews.” He plainly and truthfully said, “Yes, it is as you say.” Jesus is the king of the Jews. He was not a political king but a spiritual one. Jesus was not afraid of Pilate and he was not afraid to die. Jesus decided to go to the cross in obedience to his Father’s will.

Jesus’ answer set off the chief priests. They accused Jesus of many things in front of Pilate. Then Pilate asked Jesus, “Aren’t you going to answer? See how many things they are accusing you of.” Look at 15:5. “But Jesus still made no reply, and Pilate was amazed.” As he had done before the Sanhedrin, Jesus did not answer the false charges brought against him. He only answered the question about his identity. This amazed Pilate. Pilate had never seen anyone like Jesus who remained silent in front of his accusers. No one would remain silent over false accusations before someone who held the power of life and death – unless that person had made up his mind to die. Jesus was such a person. To the end, he obeyed his Father’s will for him.

Pilate knew that Jesus was innocent. An annual custom at the Feast saw the release of a prisoner whom the people requested. Pilate planned to make use of this custom and release Jesus. The crowd came up to Pilate and asked him to do what he usually did for them. Pilate asked the crowd, “Do you want me to release to you the king of the Jews?” The chief priests had already anticipated Pilate’s political maneuver and incited the crowd to ask for a prisoner named Barabbas. This put Pilate in a difficult situation so Pilate asked them, “What shall I do, then, with the one you call the king of the Jews?” Look at verse 13. “‘Crucify him!’ they shouted.” Their demand was completely irrational. Pilate asked, “Why? What crime has he committed?” Jesus had indeed committed no crime but they shouted all the louder, “Crucify him!”

Pilate thought that this trial was about Jesus, the king of the Jews, but the trial turned out to be just as much about him. Pilate could either release Jesus, a man whom he knew to be innocent, or he could send Jesus to his death. At the critical moment, Pilate showed his true colors. Look at 15:15. “Wanting to satisfy the crowd, Pilate released Barabbas to them. He had Jesus flogged, and handed him over to be crucified.” Pilate did not make a clear decision to follow the truth because he wanted to satisfy the crowd. In order to please people for a moment, Pilate sent Jesus, the king of the Jews, to his death.

IV. Conclusion

Jesus stood trial before the religious leaders and before Pilate. At any point, Jesus could have had himself released but he deliberately allowed his arrest and then trial to take him to his death. This reminds us of Isaiah 53:7-8a, “He was oppressed and afflicted, yet he did not open his mouth; he was led like a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is silent, so he did not open his mouth. By oppression and judgment he was taken away.” Jesus made it very clear though that they were putting him to death because he said he was the Christ. In so doing, Jesus fulfilled his mission as the Christ. This was his Father’s plan to save all peoples from their sins. Jesus was condemned to bear all of the punishment our sins deserved. Jesus was condemned to death so that we do not have to

be condemned if we receive him into our hearts. Romans 8:1 says, “Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus...” In short, Jesus was tried and condemned in our places. Thank you Jesus for standing on trial and taking upon yourself the condemnation and punishment we deserve. Thank you Jesus for declaring that you are the Son of God and that you will come again one day to judge the living and the dead. May God help us to accept what Jesus did for us and have a clear identity as his servant.