

JESUS WAS TRIED AND CONDEMNED IN OUR PLACE

Mark 14:53-15:15

Key verses 14:61b-62

“Again the high priest asked him, ‘Are you the Messiah, 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 came into this world to do God’s will, to be the Lamb of God to take away the sin of the world. Facing such a task, Jesus’ soul was overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death (14:34), yet he did not shrink from it. Jesus struggled all night in prayer, saying, **“Yet not what I will, but what you will.”** Prayer strengthened him. He was ready. There is a time of prayer to know and decide to do God’s will, and there is a time of action. Jesus did God’s will, at great suffering upon himself, for our benefit. There are three things I learned through meditating on Jesus’ trials that I want to share in this message: (1) to see how beautiful Jesus is by looking again at the facts of his trials. (2) See the terrible need we have as sinners for a Savior (3) Jesus’ bearing the condemnation for my sin is a basic foundation of my relationship with him.

First, Jesus is tried and condemned by the Sanhedrin (14:53-72). Jesus faced his suffering with courage and meekness. He was betrayed by one of his disciples, even with a kiss (14:45). He was arrested in the garden by a mob carrying swords and clubs (14:48). All his disciples abandoned him (14:50). And so it was that Jesus was led to the home of the high priest in the dark of night, surrounded by enemies. **“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. Many testified falsely against him, but their statements did not agree. Then some stood up and gave this false testimony against him: ‘We heard him say, ‘I will destroy this temple made with human hands and in three days will build another, not made with hands.’”** Yet even then their testimony did not agree.” They had been plotting to kill Jesus from early on in his ministry, when Jesus healed a man with a shriveled hand on a Sabbath (3:6). They followed him everywhere, challenged him every step, but these enemies couldn’t put together any case against Jesus. The witness testimonies didn’t agree, because they were all fabrications. The one complaint they had was a strange quote of threatening the temple, twisting Jesus’ words, but even then they could not agree. On that dark

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night before a hostile court Jesus' innocence shines so brightly. Jesus is the sinless son of God, who committed no sin, and who gave life to those he ministered to. They only accepted false testimonies, but imagine the true testimonies that could have been shared, which Mark recorded for us: those who were healed from demon possession (1:26), Simon's mother-in-law who was healed of a fever (1:30), A man cured of leprosy by Jesus (1:41-42), a paralyzed man whom Jesus healed (2:12), Levi the tax collector whom Jesus welcomed (2:14), A men set free from a legion of demons (5:15), a woman healed by Jesus after 12 years of chronic bleeding (5:29) or Jairus, whose dead daughter Jesus brought back to life (5:41).The list goes on and on just in Mark's gospel of those healed and lives transformed by Jesus' life. Jesus' teaching, his raising his disciples, his influence was such a blessing to his people. He is the Holy and Righteous, merciful and compassionate God, who came to redeem his people.

Why was it necessary for Jesus to be tried and condemned by such a court like this? This wasn't his need or duty, he did this for us. In contrast to Jesus, human beings are not innocent. They say that the NSA, in the name of preserving homeland security, built a data center in Utah that stores all our phone calls, text messages, facebook posts, GPS locations, websites visited, email, dropbox accounts, banks, as well as medical records and history. Such data can easily be used to condemn, and that is just a human court. This is crucial issue for us because the Bible tells us that one day every one of us will be judged. John saw it in revelation: **"Then I saw a great white throne and him who was seated on it...And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Another book was opened, which is the book of life. The dead were judged according to what they had done as recorded in the books. The sea gave up the dead that were in it, and death and Hades gave up the dead that were in them, and each person was judged according to what they had done. Anyone whose name was not found written in the book of life was thrown into the lake of fire"** (Rev 20:11-15). What will those books say about me? I took advantage of others for my pleasure. I did drugs, practiced witchcraft, was sexually immoral, looked at pornography, I was a thief, I argued with my parents and gave a bad example to my siblings, leading them astray, I fought people and generally lived a rebellious lifestyle in a heavy metal band. I followed evil. After committing my life to Jesus in 1997, when Jesus set me free, I'd like to say at least these later years have been perfect. But I distinctly remember the moment I was finally free from the outward behavioral sins like smoking and swearing, I realized my pride, laziness and lust that didn't just go away. More than

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that, I did not do the good that God created me to do, but the evil I did not want to do I kept on doing. Still today I can be rude and hurt people, I'm impatient with my wife and children, often discouraged or irritated. I really don't want to have to answer for all these things and more that are recorded in detail on those books. What will be listed in those books under your name? Recognizing this shameful reality, Jesus' actions here to do God's will have great meaning.

“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?’ But Jesus remained silent and gave no answer” (60-61a). Jesus doesn't say much in these sections. But just like in music, sometimes the silence is most powerful. Albert Einstein is reported give this formula for success in life: “If **a** is success in life, I should say the formula is **a** equals **x** plus **y** plus **z**, **x** being work and **y** being play.” “And what is **z**?” inquired the interviewer. “That,” he answered, “is keeping your mouth shut.” Sounds easy, until faced with such difficult trials. I had a friend who was riding home from class at UIC in the rain. He stopped his bike to adjust his hood, when a man came out yelling at him, accusing him of breaking into his car. My friend was arrested and kept in jail for three hours. He was thinking about how he would deal with the charges, what he would say, and how he would defend himself. But then he thought about Jesus, who when facing his trials kept completely silent. He was amazed at the beauty of Jesus. The drawn out court battles served to help his faith in such a perfect Lord as Jesus. How often people want to justify themselves in great detail, speaking words without end. But Jesus remained silent. This was a willful act to take upon himself the condemnation and charges we deserved, to offer his sinless life as a sacrifice for our sins.

There is a legend of Martin Luther, that, during a serious illness, the Evil One entered his room and, looking at him with a triumphant smile, unrolled a big scroll which he carried in his arms. As the fiend threw one end of it on the floor, it unwound by itself. Luther's eyes read the long, fearful record of his own sins, one by one. That stout heart quailed before the ghastly roll. Suddenly it flashed into Luther's mind that there was one thing not written there. He cried aloud: “One thing you have forgotten. The rest is all true, but one thing you have forgotten: ‘The blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin.’” And as he said this, the Accuser of the Brethren and his heavy roll disappeared. This is why Jesus remained silent while being accused, so that his perfect holy blood may be accepted as an offering for sin (Isa 53:7, 10b).

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“Again the high priest asked him, ‘Are you the Messiah, 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.’” (61b-62). The high priest should have been the impartial mediator, but he became the accuser. He had all the power and position. But Jesus testified clearly, I am the Messiah. Jesus ignored all the other charges, but answered this one very clearly, so that the issue wasn’t about false testimony, but about Jesus’ identity. I learn three things from this key verse. (1) Jesus is coming again as judge and will bring about absolute justice. We often don’t see the justice we long for, in our own lives and in the world. Sometimes things just don’t make sense. Why did our loved one die so young, when we weren’t ready? Why do the evil seem to get away with it, and we suffer? But when Jesus comes again, all will be made right. He will wipe every tear from our eyes. There will be no more death or crying or pain (Rev 21:4). In view of this, we have great hope, and a message of hope for a suffering world. (2) Following Jesus is the road of suffering injustice, but leads to victory. The seal of the Moravian Church is a lamb encircled in Latin by the slogan: “Our Lamb Has Conquered; Let Us Follow Him.” The church this gospel was written to suffered intense persecutions simply because they loved Jesus and loved each other. Yet they endured these persecutions, looking to follow Jesus, in hope of his coming again. In our times Christians are being martyred and persecuted in ever increasing numbers. What they suffer is often unjust, for example the cities of Christians being exterminated in Africa and the Middle East due to the Islamic State. As Jesus’ death was not in vain, neither is theirs. As the 2nd century church Father Tertullian wrote: “The blood of the martyrs is the seed of the Church (*Apologeticus*, ch. 50).” We recently heard a lecture by Dr. Roy Oksnevad, the director of Islamic ministry at Wheaton college, how the evangelization of muslims is increasing, and what an opportunity we have in this country to share the gospel with them. But to do so we need to follow Jesus’ example. (3) The last thing I want to share from this key verse is the most important: Who is Jesus to me? Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God. He came as a sacrifice of atonement for sins to open the way for us to come to a relationship with God through the forgiveness of our sins. He is coming again as Judge. Those who reject or ignore him do so to their own peril. Jesus opens his hands and heart wide to receive any who would come to him. Today is the day of salvation for all who would trust in what Jesus has done.

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“The high priest tore his clothes. ‘Why do we need any more witnesses?’ he asked. ‘You have heard the blasphemy. What do you think?’ They all condemned him as worthy of death. Then some began to spit at him; they blindfolded him, struck him with their fists, and said, ‘Prophecy!’ And the guards took him and beat him” (63-66). The emotional hysterics of Jesus’ opponents here reminds us of the power of Satan in the world, working in and through those who reject Jesus. People can’t be indifferent about Jesus. They became violent and abusive, even to the point of spitting on him, and beating him. What a shameful way to treat the holy, perfect, Son of God! In this paragraph is the statement: **“They all condemned him as worthy of death.”** He was condemned to die as the Messiah, innocent and holy. He was condemned in my place. The abuse and humiliation are what I deserve because of sin, yet he was treated this way. He is the only one worthy of worship and devotion. Will I humble myself to receive him as who he is?

Let’s look back at Peter, who had followed Jesus right into the courtyard. Likely, he heard the ruckus in the house, the mocking, and the beating of Jesus who was condemned to death. This was hard to take. Then he was recognized by one of the servant girls of the high priest, who called him out: **“You also were with that Nazarene, Jesus”** (67b). But Peter denied it, and moved away. Again the servant girl exposed him, and he again denied it (69-70a). Finally, the people around him were embarrassed at his denials, and poked him: **“Surely you are one of them, for you are a Galilean”** (70b). Then Peter began to call down curses on himself. Surely Peter loved Jesus. He wanted to be with Jesus, even following him into that dreadful place of darkness, where Satan reigned. But he could not stand with Jesus as he thought. He did exactly what he thought he would never do, and denied Jesus three times. His willpower and discipline were completely overruled by his fear of suffering as Jesus did. The way of the cross was alien to Peter, and he could not take it as Jesus had.

We all love Jesus too, and are at various stages of following him and growing to be like him. But love for Jesus and a personal decision to follow are too weak a foundation to stand upon. Peter had to learn a very important lesson. Verse 72 reads, **“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.”** Peter’s identity had to shift from a confidence in his actions willpower, which are shifting foundations, to the words of Jesus alone. On what do you base your relationship

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with God? Later, Peter would be changed and stand on the foundation of grace alone (Ro 5:1-2). This was part of the process of Jesus helping Peter to come to this limitation. In our culture of western individualism, often we become just like Peter, confident in ourselves, or despairing at our weakness. Jesus gives us the way to grow when we trust his words and find our identity in his words.

Second, Jesus is tried and condemned by Pilate (15:1-15). Although the religious leaders had already decided to kill Jesus, they didn't just stone him secretly in the night. They instead met early in the morning one more time, perhaps claiming this as the public trial before people that was required by law. They decided to hand him over to Pilate, so that his execution would meet Roman law, and would be witnessed to by every Jew. They likely thought this was the best way to get rid of Jesus and also stamp out any followers he had in the court of public opinion.

Although they said the right words to Pilate, he wasn't fooled by their political wranglings. **“Are you the king of the Jews?” asked Pilate. ‘You have said so,’ Jesus replied”** (15:2). Jesus' answer to the high priest was strong and clear, **“I am.”** But his answer to Pilate was not so strong. In fact, as John helps us understand in his gospel, Jesus clearly helped Pilate to know that Jesus' kingdom is not a political kingdom, but a spiritual kingdom (Jn 18:36). Jesus did not come to overthrow Rome, as all nations rise and fall by God's own plan and purpose. Jesus' kingship is of an eternal kingdom that will never perish or fade away, but will conquer all kingdoms and fill the earth. We who belong to Jesus' kingdom have a citizenship not of this world.

The chief priests were a little worried their plan would fall apart, so they began to accuse Jesus of many things (3). **“So again Pilate asked him, ‘Aren't you going to answer? See how many things they are accusing you of’”** (15:4). In Roman court, silence meant guilt. **“But Jesus still made no reply, and Pilate was amazed”** (15:5). Pilate knew Jesus was not guilty. He saw through the hypocrisy of the chief priests, knowing they sought Jesus' death out of self-interest (15:10). He even said that Jesus had committed no crime (15:14). Yet instead of setting Jesus free, he tried to use a custom of releasing a prisoner at the festival. Perhaps he hoped the people would see him as a generous and merciful man. But he was not fighting just people. Satan was involved. Through the religious leaders manipulation, the people turned against Jesus, and shouted, **“Crucify him!” “Crucify him!”** **“Wanting to satisfy the crowd, Pilate released Barabbas to**

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them. He had Jesus flogged, and handed him over to be crucified” (15:15). Barabbas was a terrorist who had committed murder. Today he would have been hidden in Guantanamo, never heard from again. But that morning his chains were taken off, he was set free, and Jesus was taken and brutalized in his place. What a freedom he experienced, as Jesus was condemned in his place.

Jesus was flogged, as punishment by the Roman officers. This too was the cup of suffering Jesus drank to take away the sins of the world. In preparing this message, I came across a story by Dr. Alexander Whyte, an Anglican theologian of the late 19th and early 20th centuries. A man once dreamed that he saw a soldier cruelly flogging the sinless Son of God. The lash of the leaden studded whip cut deeply into Jesus’ quivering, blood-splattered flesh. “Oh the shame of it,” the dreamer said, as he rushed to stop the soldier. At that instant the soldier turned and in amazement, the dreamer recognized himself as the one wielding the bone-studded whip. The injustice and abuse suffered by the Son of God was not his weakness or his duty, but rather our evil, our iniquity and depravity, that was laid upon him.

In conclusion, I realize that in Jesus’ trials and condemnation lie the foundation of living the Christian life. We cannot trust in civil governments, or our own willpower, or the religious organizations we are involved in. They all failed, as we see in this passage. But we have a firm foundation upon which to build and to grow, and that is the sacrifice and suffering of our Messiah, tried and condemned in our places. His condemnation has bought our freedom. Romans 8:1 declares, **“Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.”**

Closing Guided Prayer for Meditation and Reflection

1. Father, your love is tangibly revealed in Jesus’ suffering. We take this time to look fully on him – his courage, his meekness, his innocence, his silence in injustice, his holiness and perfection. Lord Jesus, you are BEAUTIFUL. Draw our eyes up from this world and our issues to Jesus’ holy, lovely face.

(Pray 30 seconds)

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2. In contrast to Jesus' innocence, we tend to be self-righteous or self-condemned. Your word clearly tells us a day is coming when we will stand before Holy Jesus our Lord and Judge. The books will be opened. All our deeds, all our failure to obey will be revealed one by one. As Jesus' brutal flogging shocks us, give us time now to reflect on the horror we have done in our lives, humble us before those books, give us holy fear as we meditate on that dreadful judgment throne.

(Pray 30 seconds)

3. Yet Jesus, our Lovely Jesus, was beaten, mocked, spat upon, condemned in our places. He willingly came to be condemned and brutally treated as the Lamb of God for our forgiveness. Father, help us to examine our hearts. Your word says there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. Expose our false confidence as you did for Peter, and humble us now to make our calling and election sure – to surrender in trust in Jesus alone for our salvation, sanctification and life.

(Pray 30 seconds)

4. Father, the Moravians said: "Our Lamb has conquered: Let us Follow Him." By faith in Jesus' conquering victory and the power of our Risen Lord and the guidance of the Holy Spirit, lead us to follow Jesus in the way of the cross, the way of suffering, the way of service, the way of spiritual battle. Let us now remember those who are suffering in persecution now, and decide to follow Jesus, obediently carrying out the good work he gave us to make disciples.

(Pray 30 seconds)

5. Finally Father, your word is a double-edged sword. We have heard it. Let it not go out of our minds, nor the devil take it from us. Help us to respond personally in the way you have spoken to us.