

The Trials of Jesus

Read Mark 14.53 - 15.20

MAKING THE CONNECTIONS & SETTING THE CONTEXT

1/ Jesus has been betrayed [handed over] into the hands of His enemies. Mark uses this word *paradidomi* 19 times in his Gospel – most of them with reference to Jesus. Jesus had forewarned repeatedly, especially in these last weeks leading up to this climatic event that **“The Son of Man is going to be delivered into the hands of men, and they will kill Him” [ch 9.31]**; and more specifically, **“See, we are going up to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man will be delivered over to the chief priests and the scribes, and they will condemn Him to death and deliver Him over to the Gentiles. And they will mock Him and spit on Him, and flog Him and kill Him...” [ch 10.33-34]**. That ‘hour’ had now come...

2/ This lesson will survey the numerous hearings and trials which will result in His final ‘condemnation’ and sentencing by both the religious leaders and council [Sanhedrin] ... and also the civil Roman governor, Pontius Pilate ... all as Jesus had foretold.

3/ There were six of these ‘hearings’ and appearances before the various authorities. They will succeed one another in rapid succession in a flurry of shuttling Jesus back and forth among them as they feverishly work to accomplish their evil designs – all the while fulfilling God’s redemptive purposes and plans: **“...this Jesus, delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men” [Acts 2.23]**.

4/ We will follow Mark’s account and only refer to the others which Mark doesn’t detail when they will help us see a fuller and clearer perspective of the significance of what was said or done in Mark’s accounting of these events.

5/ Here are the six specific ‘hearings’ which comprise the ‘trial’ events of Jesus:

[1] He is taken to Annas, the father-in-law of Caiaphas: **John 18.12-24**. John is the only Gospeler who records this appearance. Annas was the ‘godfather’ of this high priestly family which had become a political system of religious rule among the Jews. Although Annas was not the currently presiding high priest, he retained the ruling influence over everything that was done – nothing was done without his sanction and approval.

[2] He is then taken to Caiaphas, the acting high priest: **“Annas then sent Him bound to Caiaphas the high priest” [John 18.24]**. Caiaphas will preside over all the religious ‘hearings’ that will deliver Jesus finally to Pilate to be crucified.

[3] Jesus appears before the ruling council Sanhedrin ‘in session’ to be formally charged, condemned, and sentenced to death according to their ‘religious law’ [**Mark 15.1; Matthew 27.1; Luke 22.66-71**].

[4] Jesus appears before Pilate for His first ‘hearing’ before the Roman authorities.

[5] Jesus is then hurriedly shuttled off to appear before Herod, when Pilate hears from the chief priests that Jesus is a Galilean: **Luke 23.5-12**. **“But they were urgent, saying, ‘He stirs up the people, teaching throughout all Judea, from Galilee even to this place.’ When Pilate heard this, he asked whether the man was a Galilean. And when he learned that He belonged to Herod’s jurisdiction, he sent Him over to Herod, who was himself in Jerusalem at that time” [vv 5-6]**.

[6] Jesus is then returned to Pilate for the final sentencing to be crucified.

I / Mark 14.53-65 / Jesus before the chief priests: falsely accused and condemned on charges of ‘blasphemy’

1/ Mark will distill the first three appearances I have itemized above ([1] – [3]) into this one account, culminating with Jesus’ formal appearance before the ‘Sanhedrin in formal session’ in **ch 15.1**.

2/ The chief priests and scribes have been plotting to kill Jesus for probably over 1½ years by this time – going all the way back to **John 5.18: This is why the Jews were seeking all the more to kill Him, because not only was He breaking the Sabbath, but He was even calling God His own Father, making Himself equal with God.**

3/ Just like Jesus had come for His own holy ‘hour,’ so also these evil enemies also had their own ‘hour,’ ... except that their ‘hour’ was one of evil and darkness. As Jesus had exposed them in the Garden of Gethsemane when they came to arrest Him and take Him into custody: **“But this is your hour, and the power of darkness” [Luke 22.53].**

4/ v 55 / **“Now the chief priests and the whole council were seeking testimony against Jesus to put Him to death, but they found none.”** Matthew even adds the detail: **“Now the chief priests and the whole council were seeking *false* testimony against Jesus that they might put Him to death, but they found none...” [Matthew 26.59-60].** Truth doesn’t matter in this court proceeding. These murderous religious leaders have only one purpose: charge Jesus with some capital offense crime according to their ‘law’ that will justify them before the people for delivering Jesus to Pilate to be killed. But before they can make the charges against Jesus, first they have to get witnesses. We can assume that they have for weeks now been planting their ‘informers’ to be gathering this incriminating evidence and have even been setting ‘traps’ for Jesus **‘to catch Him in His words.’**

5/ v 56 / **“For many bore false witness against Him, but their testimony did not agree.”** This is so significant because Jesus Christ was so perfect in His Truth and Wisdom, never did He say anything that was false or against the true Law of God. Their false witnesses were inconsistent at the best ... and contradictory of themselves at the worst.

6/ vv 57-59 / **“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.”** This is the best and worst, most incriminating testimony they could come up with. YET...Jesus never said anything of the sort. What they attempted to do with this false testimony was to cobble together words that Jesus actually did say about their temple ... and, at the same time, re-word it, twist it, and construct a distorted narrative upon which to build their incriminating case. We would call it a ‘hoax’ narrative.

- Jesus NEVER said that HE would destroy their temple made with hands. He did pronounce that their temple would be destroyed by OTHERS [see ch 13.1-2 & Luke 19.41-44].
- Jesus had also said: **“Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up ... But He was speaking of the temple of His body...” [John 2.18-22].** NEVER did He prophesy that HE would re-build their physical temple ‘without hands.’

But, as we have said, truth is not their issue ... charging and convicting Jesus with some capital religious offense is their only end. AND, desecrating their ‘sacred’ temple was a most capital offense.

7/ vv 60-61a / **“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.”** He would maintain this non-responsive, silent posture all throughout His ‘hearings’ with the Sanhedrin and Pilate – except in those cases where a self-pronouncement of His Messianic identity was necessary to confirm and clarify who He actually is. As Isaiah had prophesied: **“He was oppressed, and He was afflicted, yet He opened not His mouth; like a lamb that before its shearers is silent, so He opened not His mouth” [Isaiah 53.7].** And Peter, who was witness to these oppressive proceedings [Mark 14.54], would later confirm Jesus’ humility and submission to His Father’s plan and pleasure: **“For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you might follow in His steps. He committed no sin, neither was deceit found in His mouth. When He was reviled, He did not revile in return; when He suffered, He did not threaten, but continued entrusting Himself to Him who judges justly” [1 Peter 2.21-23].**

8/ vv 61b-62 / **“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.” The high priest needs some admission, some self-confirmation from Jesus to ‘incriminate’ Himself of the charges they intended to press upon Him: that He was calling Himself ‘God,’ and making Himself equal with God. Jesus would not deny those ‘charges.’ However, what Jesus did was to credential Himself from the very Scriptures the Sanhedrin were professing to defend. He identifies, associates, and equates Himself with God, as God, by quoting two Scriptures:

- **Psalm 110.1:** “**The LORD says to my Lord: ‘Sit at my right hand, until I make your enemies your footstool.’**” So, if Jesus is the ‘my Lord,’ then who are the ‘your enemies’? They knew...
- **Daniel 7.13-14:** “**I saw in the night visions, and behold, with the clouds of Heaven there came one like a son of man, and He came to the Ancient of Days and was presented before Him. And to Him was given dominion and glory and a Kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve Him; His dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and His Kingdom one that shall not be destroyed.**”

9/ vv 63-64 / “**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.**” Thus, as far as the Sanhedrin council was concerned, the case was closed. Jesus had ‘blasphemed’ by desecrating the Sacred, Holy Name of the ‘Blessed’ [He who alone deserves our worship, praise, and blessing]. However, Jesus’ word will stand: He will come with authority and Power to judge them – and they will see Him when He comes! **See Revelation 1.7.**

10/ v 65 / “**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.** Again, just as Jesus had foretold they would do...

II / Mark 15.1-20 / Jesus is ‘delivered over’ to Pilate to be crucified

1/ v 1b / “**And they bound Jesus and led Him away and delivered Him over to Pilate.**” We must see and remember here why they needed Pilate’s involvement in Jesus’ death. As for the purposes of the Jewish Sanhedrin, Jesus must die. Problem is: they don’t want it to be at their hands. They want the Romans to put Jesus to death. Also, as we shall see from **John 18.31-32**, “**Pilate said to them, ‘Take Him yourselves and judge Him by your own law.’ The Jews said to him, ‘It is not lawful for us to put anyone to death.’ This was to fulfill the word that Jesus had spoken to show by what kind of death He was going to die.**”

The Romans, of course, had conquered and subjugated numerous nations and kingdoms and were occupying them under their dominion as vassal states. The Romans would allow the disparate nations as much liberty and leeway as possible to live under their own laws and by their own customs – as long as they did not jeopardize the sovereignty of Roman rule. But, as a rule, they would not allow the various subject nations to exercise capital punishment for fear they would use that liberty to execute anyone they suspected of being Roman sympathizers. So, if Jesus was delivered over to the Roman governor of the province of Judea, they would have to level some charge against Jesus that would violate *Roman law*.

2/ So then, *what kind of charges could they accuse Jesus of that would justify His execution by the Roman jurisprudence?* **Luke 23.2** gives us some insight to understand Pilate’s inquiry in our lesson passage: “**And they began to accuse Him, saying, ‘We found this man misleading our nations and forbidding us to give tribute to Caesar, and saying that He Himself is Christ, a king!’**” So, there it is! Jesus is presented to Pilate as a rival, rebel king to Caesar – a leader of insurrection and rebellion against the Roman rule. This will certainly get Pilate’s attention and gain traction with him. All the Roman governors were charged with and responsible for maintaining the peace in their jurisdictions, preventing rebel uprisings, and being sure Caesar’s sovereignty is not challenged.

3/ v 2 / “**And Pilate asked Him, ‘Are you the King of the Jews?’**” In other words, *‘Are you presenting yourself as a rival King to Caesar?’* Jesus will answer affirmatively: “**And He answered him, ‘You have said so’**” – though Jesus will go on to expand that He is, indeed, King, but not in the same sense Caesar is a king, and not in the sense of Pilate’s understanding ... nor in the sense that the Jewish leaders are trying to portray Him. **You can find a fuller exchange on Jesus’ confession of Kingship in John 19.33-38.**

4/ vv 3-5 / Again, Jesus remained silent in the face of His accusers and Pilate's inquiries.

5/ It was probably at this point that Pilate caught that Jesus was from Galilee and sent Him off to Herod, hoping to relinquish personal responsibility and having to make a judgment in His case. **See MAKING THE CONNECTIONS AND SETTING THE CONTEXT, /5, [5] above.** This would be only one of numerous attempts Pilate will make to escape and absolve himself from any personal involvement in judging Jesus.

6/ vv 6-15 / Enter Barabbas into the narrative. What an irony Barabbas is! Jesus is being falsely accused of being a rebel and insurrectionist against the Roman government. *Barabbas was just that!* Barabbas was in prison, not just for leading a rebellion and insurrection, but committing murder in the riot that ensued.

7/ Pilate's custom was to offer the Jews a 'peace offering' to appease and placate them during their prominent feast events: he would release to them one of the political/civil criminals that had been imprisoned. Here is another attempt to release himself from personal culpability: **"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."** It may very well be that, by this time, a larger crowd of feast attendees had gathered to witness the action. Maybe Pilate could 'go over the heads' of the Jewish leaders and appeal to the populace crowd. Maybe he could both absolve himself and, at the same time, underhandedly 'hit back' at the Jewish leaders who were so jeopardizing and inconveniencing him.

8/ vv 11-15 / **"But the chief priests stirred up the crowd to have him release for them Barabbas instead."** The Jewish leaders now have the 'upper hand' of influence in whipping up the crowd with their bloodlust. They will have nothing other/less than Jesus' death ... and the death sentence practiced by the Romans was *crucifixion*. **"And Pilate said to them, 'Then what shall I do with the man you call the 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 scourged Jesus, he delivered Him to be crucified." And thus was fulfilled numerous Scriptures: Jesus died 'the just for the unjust,' not only as our Substitute in salvation, but even then personally in Barabbas's place. Barabbas was sentenced to die for his own crimes and sin, but Jesus took his place at that time – just like He took our place to suffer God's judgment and just wrath against our sins as our Substitute.

9/ vv 16-20 / Jesus had already been scourged. This was not just a whipping with lashes or stripes – it was an excruciating punishment of its own. The scourge was a handle with braided leather lashes. Woven into the numerous strands of leather that made up the lashes were bits of sharp glass and metal. The criminal was bound and tied by his hands to a post. The executioner would lay the lashes across the back and midriff of the criminal, imbedding the pieces of glass and metal shrapnel into the flesh of the victim. When the strands were forcefully yanked back, the flesh of the victim would be shredded. The flesh would be deeply lacerated, and even the internal organs would be exposed and lacerated as well. Many victims of scourging did not survive this punishment even for anything further.

10/ But Jesus was led from the scourging into a larger staging area where probably 600 soldiers were gathered for the abusive spectacle. There, they further mocked Jesus by putting on Him a purple soldier's coat to spoof a royal robe, wove a crown of thorns to crush into Jesus' scalp to spoof a royal crown, gave Jesus a walking staff to spoof a royal scepter, and began to 'salute' Him with a celebratory chant they offered their Emperor to spoof the praises He should receive as the King of the Jews. They took the mock scepter/staff from His hand and struck Jesus over the head, further driving the thorns into His brow.

11/ Little did they realize they were fulfilling the predetermined purpose and plan of God – this was God's provision of Jesus Christ, the Son of God, as our Savior and Redeemer. The Cross is yet to come and the dreaded 'cup.' But Jesus will obey the Father's will and pleasure as He promised in **John 10.17-18: For this reason the Father loves me, because I lay down my life that I may take it up again. ¹⁸ No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down, and I have authority to take it up again. This charge I have received from my Father.**

"...by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross" [Philippians 2.8]