

The Final Hours: Trial
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Wasilla Bible Church
May 4, 2008

Let's pray.

Lord God,

I ask that You would just...that You would open our ears and eyes so that we can see Your truth, so that we can hear it, and so that we can know the truth of it. God, I ask that You would give us minds to understand and to comprehend Your truth, and that You would give us hearts to hold onto it.

And we pray this in Your name, amen.

We are in the tail-end of chapter 14 and beginning of chapter 15 in the book of Mark. And as you're turning there, I just want to give a quick recap just in case you've missed the last couple of weeks, or you've forgotten...just to remind you. We are looking at the final twenty-four hours of Jesus' life, and this final period of Jesus' life is covered in chapters 14 and 15 of Mark. It starts off with the preparation, where Jesus is preparing Himself and His disciples for His impending death. And then it moves into kinda the betrayal. This is where Jesus is in the garden, and He is betrayed by one of His closest friends. And by the end of it He is standing there, alone, totally surrounded by enemies as He's been betrayed by one of His closest friends; and the remainder of His friends have fled and left Him.

Today we're gonna be looking at the trial. We're going to see what was it that Jesus was killed for, what was the charge against Him, what was He condemned of. And then, next week, we'll actually look at the death of Jesus. But today we're gonna be starting here, in Mark chapter 14, verse 53. It says "They..." and the 'they' here is this mob, this crowd of people who came to arrest Jesus and haul Him to trial.

They led Jesus away to the high priest; and all the chief priests, the elders, and the scribes convened. Peter followed Him at a distance, right into the high priest's courtyard. He was sitting with the temple police, warming himself by the fire.

The chief priests and the whole Sanhedrin were looking for testimony against Jesus to put Him to death; and they could find none, for many were giving false testimony against Him, but the testimonies did not agree. Some stood up and were giving false testimony against Him, stating, "We heard Him say 'I will demolish this sanctuary made by human hands, and in three days I will build another not made by hands.'" Yet their testimony did not agree even on this.

Then the high priest stood up before them all and questioned Jesus. "Don't You have an answer to what these men are testifying against You?" But He kept silent and did not answer anything. Again the high priest questioned Him. "Are You the Messiah, the Son of the Blessed One?"

"I am," Jesus said, "and all of you will see the Son of Man seated at the right hand of Power, and coming with the clouds of heaven."

Then the high priest tore his robes and said, "Why do we still need witnesses? You have heard the blasphemy. What is your decision?"

And they all condemned Him to be deserving of death. Then some began to spit on Him, to blindfold Him, and to beat Him, saying, "Prophesy!" Even the temple police took Him and slapped Him.

While Peter was in the courtyard below, one of the high priest's servants came. When she saw Peter warming himself, she looked at him and said, "You also were with that Nazarene, Jesus."

But he denied it. "I don't know or understand what you're talking about." Then he went out to the entryway, and a rooster crowed.

When the servant saw him again, she began to tell those standing nearby, "This man is one of them." But again, he denied it.

After a little while, those standing there said to Peter again, "You certainly are one of them, since you also are a Galilean."

Then he started to curse and to swear with an oath, "I don't know this man you're talking about!" Immediately a rooster crowed a second time. And Peter remembered when Jesus had spoken the word to him, "Before the rooster crows twice you will deny me three times." When he thought about it he began to weep.

As soon as it was morning, the chief priests had a meeting with the elders, scribes, and the whole Sanhedrin. After tying Jesus up, they led Him away and handed Him over to Pilate. So Pilate asked Him, "Are You the King of the Jews?"

And He answered to Him, "You have said it."

And the chief priests began to accuse Him of many things. Then Pilate questioned Him again. "Are You not answering anything? Look how many things they are accusing You of!" But Jesus still did not answer anything, so Pilate was amazed.

At the festival it was Pilate's custom to release for the people a prisoner they requested. There was one named Barabbas who was in prison with the rebels who had committed murder during the rebellion. The crowd came up and began to ask Pilate to do for them as was his custom. So Pilate answered them, "Do you want me to release the King of the Jews for you?" For he knew it was for envy that the chief priests had handed him over. But the chief priests stirred the crowd so that he would release Barabbas to them instead. Pilate asked them again, "Then what do you want me to do with the one you call the King of the Jews?"

And again they shouted, "Crucify Him!"

Then Pilate said to them, "Why? What has He done wrong?"

But they shouted, "Crucify Him!" all the more.

Then, willing to gratify the crowd, Pilate released Barabbas to them. And after having Jesus flogged, he handed Him over to be crucified.

As we look at this passage, it's a pretty straight-forward passage, simple narrative. It's a pretty simple story. It's just the story of how Jesus went, and He went before this religious court, and they condemned Him to death. And then they took Him to the political court of the land, the Roman governor's court, and they took Him there. And again, Jesus was condemned to death. And then He was sent away to die, to have the execution carried out. It's not something that necessarily needs an extremely in-depth explanation. But what I do want to do is look at just this one passage here, this one part of this passage where it really talks about what it was that Jesus was killed for, what was He condemned for.

And what it is, is He's sitting here in this trial. What ends up happening is the chief priest, the elders, the scribes, the Sanhedrin—this ruling body of elders and religious leaders and everything else—this ruling body is trying to convict Him of something. They have this kangaroo court, this false court, where there's all kinds of trumped-up charges being thrown around, and Jesus isn't answering any of them. He isn't even bothering, because they can't even make 'em stick. They can't even get their own conspirators to get together good enough that they can actually convict this man of some sort of trumped-up charges. And so what ends up happening is this. Finally one of the chief priests, the chief priest...he gets so fed up with it that he comes and he finally asks Jesus a question that Jesus finally answers. And the question is this. He says, "Are You the Messiah? Is it true? Are You the Messiah, the Son of the Blessed One, the Son of God?"

And Jesus says, "I am."

All of the other charges He wouldn't answer...wasn't worth His time. The one thing that He would answer was the one question that they had about His identity. They all knew what He had done, and had not done; what they were still having an issue with was His identity. And so, finally, when the chief priest asked that right question, when he asks, 'Who are you? Are you really this guy, the Messiah, the Son of God?' Jesus says 'I am. But not only am I the Son of God. You will see Me coming in Power—the Son of Man. I am the Messiah, the Son of God, I'm the Son of Man...in one.'

The Messiah...what He's doing here is...it's almost as if they had this idea of what the Messiah is supposed to be, and He's saying, 'You finally hit the nail on the head. You don't fully understand the depth and the meaning of who I am, but yes, I am the Messiah, the Promised One, the Anointed One, the One to come; I am the Messiah, the Son of God, the Son of Man. And you will know the truth of it. One day you will know the truth of it, because I am the Messiah, the Son of God, the Son of Man.'

And that is where, all of a sudden, they start flippin' out. He's rippin' his robes and everything. They...he says, 'What else do we need? He's just condemned Himself for us. Case closed.' Why? Because He just made a claim to deity. He claimed to be the Son of God, the Son of the Most Blessed One. He claimed to be the Son of the Messiah. And there is no way that this man could be the Messiah. And so He has just committed blasphemy worthy of being killed. And so he says, "What do you say?" And what they all say is basically this—he says, 'You know what?' They say He's deserving of death. And so they start beating Him; they start tying Him up, beating Him, blindfolding Him, all kinds of things, spitting on Him, just disgracing Him. Why? Because they understood the claim that He was making. He was Messiah; He was Christ; He was the Son of God, the Son of Man in one.

What they do is then they take Him. See, they didn't have the authority to actually carry out a death sentence, because the Roman government was the only one that could carry out that sort of a death sentence. So what they do is they take Him to the Roman governor, the ruler over Palestine at this time, Pilate. And they take Him there.

And Pilate starts talkin' to Him, and he asks Jesus this simple question. He says, 'Are You the King of the Jews? Are You really this guy? Are You really the one that claims to be the King of the Jews?'

And Jesus says, 'You've said it.' 'Course, Jesus won't answer any of these other accusations that they try throwing at Him. And Pilate understands the fact that you know what? This guy is not a threat. He's not something...He's innocent...this kingdom...I mean, look back at the teachings of Jesus. The kingdom that Jesus talks about is not some political, earthly kingdom. It's not like He was coming in to set up an army and overthrow the Roman government. He was talking about spiritual matters and a spiritual kingdom.

Pilate tries figuring out a way to get Him off, and the crowd basically begins to start rioting. And to avoid a riot, what Pilate ends up doing is He hands Jesus over...he has his soldiers...he hands Him over to his soldiers and he says, 'Flog Him, beat Him, and crucify Him.' And what we end up seeing later...the list of the charges that's nailed to the cross above Him is that He was the King of the Jews. That's what Jesus was killed for—for claiming to be the Messiah, the King of the Jews, the Son of God, the Son of Man.

There's a big push today that Jesus never really made this claim. And we're gonna digress a little bit here; and bear with me here because you'll see where this fits in, ok? But we're gonna leave scripture for just a little bit and we're gonna look at how this kinda fits in.

What ends up happening is this. There's a lot of people today who say, 'Ok, Jesus...He really didn't make those claims, because...no. He didn't claim to be the Son of God; He didn't claim to be the Christ. He was just a good moral teacher.' I did this experiment with the high schoolers this past week as we were talking through this, and I asked them how many of them knew or had heard of Julius Caesar. Most of the hands went up, so I will choose to believe that the hands that did not go up is not because well, our high schoolers did not know about Julius Caesar. I'll choose to believe that they just didn't want to participate in the survey. So...but anyway, most of the hands went up. Asked them about a few other figures, but then other asked them about, you know, the Ides of March, and Julius Caesar being assassinated by his friend and other co-conspirators, and how many of them had heard that, and all kinds of things. But then asked them this—"How many of you think that that's how Julius Caesar died? That he died as part of a conspiracy and everything else?" And they had no trouble believing that.

The thing is we can take things as history very easily in other areas. And the interesting thing is that we have a whole lot less historical evidence that Julius Caesar even ever existed than we do of the fact that Jesus claimed to be the Christ, He claimed to be the Messiah, and He was killed roughly around 30 AD. That is one of the most historical verifiable facts in all of history. We can't prove historically that Jesus was the Son of God, or what He claimed was true, but we can show that Jesus claimed to be the Messiah.

What's the point? Well, first of all, first of all let me explain why I say...just a couple of examples of why I say that this is historically verifiable fact, at least as much as we can. There's a couple of quotes that I'm gonna put up. The first is by this man named Josephus. He's this Jewish general. He fought against the Romans; he was not a Christian; in fact, he thought Christians were off their rockers; he thought they were crazy. But he makes reference...he writes this history of the Jewish nation. And in it he makes a couple of references to kind of help frame certain events in history. And he's talking about this certain event and what he ends up talking about is yeah, that was roughly around the time that this guy, Jesus, who was supposedly this miracle-worker...He was supposedly the Christ...it was around the time that He was crucified. He goes on a little bit later, and he's talking about some more events, and about the destruction of the temple and kind of the events preceding up to that, and he makes reference to a man named James. He was the son...or excuse me, I mean the brother...of Jesus, the guy who was supposedly the Christ.

Now Josephus, he didn't believe this, but he's acknowledging the fact that this guy named Jesus was supposed to be...He claimed to be the Christ. Josephus didn't believe it, but he understands that Jesus claimed that.

You go on. Another example is this. There's this...there's this Roman governor, Pliny is his name. And he's writing to the emperor to ask for advice on how he should deal with these Christians, on the executions, the tortures, interrogations of these Christians, 'cause he wants to make sure that he handles them correctly as he's, you know, feeding them to the lions and such. So what ends up happening is he's talking about how he has investigated this Christian faith. And what he finds out is that these Christians, they actually believe that this Christ, this Messiah, really was a god. 'Course, he looks at it and he says it's just a bunch of silly superstition taken to an excessive level.

What's my point? My point is this...you would really have a hard time making the case that Jesus did not claim to be the Messiah, the Son of God. Why does that matter? Well, there's a quote that I really like, and I'm gonna put it up here, and I'll read it to ya. It's this...it's from C. S. Lewis, and he says

“I'm trying here to prevent anyone saying the really foolish thing that people often say about Him—'I'm ready to accept Jesus as a great moral teacher, but I do not accept His claim to be God.' That is the one thing that we must not say.”

He goes on and he says

“You must make your choice. Either this man was and is the Son of God, or else a madman, or something worse. You can shut Him up for a fool, you can spit at Him and kill Him as a demon, or You can fall at His feet and call Him Lord and God. But let's not come up with any patronizing nonsense about His being a great human teacher. He has not left that open to us. He did not intend to.”

This is where the rubber meets the road. You see a lot of people who would like to say Jesus was just a man and He was just some great, moral teacher. That is not a clear-headed possibility. You can make that claim, but you can not make that claim and be on good intellectual ground, philosophically speaking. See, there's only three options, kind of like what C. S. Lewis says. One—Jesus was a lunatic. He was a crazy man. Let's put it this way—if I stand up here and I am claiming to be God, and I really believe it, and I'm not God, then that's what we call delusional. That's what C. S. Lewis...he kind of makes reference...this is the sort of guy who belongs in a rubber room with a straight jacket, because I'm sorry, but if somebody thinks that they are God, they've got a serious...they've got some screws loose up here. That isn't somebody that we would qualify as a great moral teacher.

The other option is that...is that He was a liar, He knew that He was not the Son of God, He was not the Messiah, but He was trying...He was intentionally misleading people so that He could better gain power and authority and influence, for whatever reason—for His teachings, for everything else. That's what we call a cult leader. This is the sort of thing that somebody...you know, the FBI storms compounds to take care of these people, sort of a thing. You don't call David Koresh a great moral leader.

Those are the two options. The only third option, as C. S. Lewis points out, is that He really was who He said He was. People, a lot of times, try to give a fourth option. There's a man named Richard Dawkins. He's held up as a great atheist thinker. He is a very intelligent and brilliant geneticist, but he is not the most clear thinker when it comes to philosophy. You see, in this book, called "The God Delusion", he explains why he thinks that those who believe in God, or those who believe in this Jesus stuff—they're delusional. And what he says is he's referring to C. S. Lewis and how C. S. Lewis makes this claim of the three options. And what he says is this...he says there's a fourth possibility, and he's mocking C. S. Lewis. And he basically says C. S. Lewis really should have known better, because there's a fourth possibility and it's so obvious that he shouldn't even have to mention it. And it's a very sarcastic tone, and he says "It's possible that Jesus was simply mistaken." The thing is this...that's what C. S. Lewis is referring to as a lunatic. No matter how good my intentions are, no matter how honestly I am mistaken, to use C. S. Lewis' analogy, if I honestly am mistaken about me being a poached egg, you would say that I'm a lunatic. There is something wrong in my head if I...no matter how honestly I believe it, if I think I'm a poached egg there's something wrong in my head. It's a lunatic. I'm not a great moral teacher. There's somethin' wrong up here.

That's the same thing. There is no fourth option. Jesus was either a lunatic, a liar, or Lord. That's it. So here's the application here; here's the point of application for you. And this, in many ways, is a strong, firm foundation for the beginning of any clear thinking about Jesus. Because stuff like this...this is just an example of fuzzy thinking...that you can make this claim, but not if you also want to be a clear-thinking person. And so the point of application is this. You have to decide—who do you say that Jesus is? Is He a lunatic? Is He a liar? Or is He the Lord? Those are your three options. I think if you go through, whether you're a Christian or non-Christian, what ends up happening is this—if you go through the gospel of Mark you have to decide, or any of the other gospels, anything that we know of Jesus, you have to look at this and say, 'Ok, was this man crazy? Was He a liar?' If he's either of those two things, my straightforward, honest advice to you is this—if you can look at it and you can say this man was crazy, or if you can look at it and say this man was a liar, and you can say that with a clear conscience, then what I would tell you is stay away from this Christian thing as far as you can. Because at best it's a delusion; at worst, it's some sort of whacked-out, Satanic, messed up, superstitious cult.

But I have a deep, lingering suspicion that most people have a very hard time looking at Jesus and coming away with the idea that He's just some lunatic or some liar. Because as we look at His teachings, as we look at His life, what we end up finding...what we end up finding so regularly is that there's a weight and an honesty and a truth to what He says, to where we can't just dismiss Him as some lunatic or some liar. There's some sort of a weight and substance there that we just can't dismiss Him. That's why people end up saying things like 'He's a great moral teacher.' Really what's at the base of that is He's too serious and He's too weighty for them to just dismiss. But at the same time they aren't willing to say that He is who He says He is. Because let's put it this way—if He really is who He says He is, if He really is the Messiah, the Lord, then guess what? Whether you're a Christian or a non-Christian, all of a sudden you have to take His teaching, His life, His death and resurrection in a very, very different light.

So the point of application is this. If you are here today, whether you're a Christian or a non-Christian, ask yourself—is He a lunatic? Is He a liar? Or is He Lord? And if He's Lord, then guess what? You need to totally rearrange your entire life to be in line with what He says is the truth, with the fact that He is the only way to God, with the fact that He said, when He sacrificed Himself, He said "It is finished." He has paid for sins, and that is the only way for sin to be paid for. And we need to rearrange our lives around that truth of His identity, because, you see, Jesus...He came and He was killed because He actually had the audacity to believe and to claim that He was the Messiah, the Son of God, the Son of Man. And that's why He was killed.

Please stand.

Let's pray.

Lord God,

I do thank you for the fact that You've come, that You are the basis of truth, and that You've provided a way for us to know the truth. Lord, I ask that You would give us clear heads, clear thoughts, clear hearts, and that the truth of Your word, the truth of Your Son, would sink into the depths of our innermost being, and that we would be transformed, that we would experience Your grace.

We pray this in Your name, amen.