

Condemned by the Righteous

Opening Prayer:

O Lord, God of my salvation,
When, at night, I cry out in your presence,
Let my prayer come before you;
incline your ear to my cry.

For my soul is full of troubles,
And my life draws near to Sheol.
I am counted among those who go down to the Pit.

(Psalm 88:1-4)

Scripture Reading:

Mark 14:53-72

They took Jesus to the high priest, and all the chief priests, elders and teachers of the law came together. Peter followed him at a distance, right into the courtyard of the high priest. There he sat with the guards and warmed himself at the fire.

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 man-made temple and in three days will build another, not made by man.'" Yet even then their testimony did not agree.

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.

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."

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.

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.

But he denied it. "I don't know or understand what you're talking about," he said, and went out into the entryway.

When the servant girl saw him there, she said again to those standing around, "This fellow is one of them." Again he denied it.

After a little while, those standing near said to Peter, "Surely you are one of them, for you are a Galilean."

He began to call down curses on himself, and he swore to them, "I don't know this man you're talking about."

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.

Video Presentation – Session 2 “The Garden of Gethsemane”

Key Insights:

- ✓ The walk from the garden of Gethsemane, across the Kidron Valley, and up to the high priest's home takes about twenty minutes: Jesus would have walked at night, probably barefoot.
- ✓ In antiquity, a prison was often no more than a pit or dry cistern. Jesus was likely lowered into a pit like the one found beneath the ruins of Caiaphas' house and perhaps held for five, six, or seven hours.
- ✓ While we focus on Peter denying Christ during his appearance before the Sanhedrin, we should remember that Peter was the only disciple to come to the place Jesus was to be tried.

Questions for Discussion:

1. Imagine what it would have been like to walk barefoot for twenty minutes up to where you were lowered into a pit, hands shackled about your head for several hours. What do you think Jesus may have been thinking? feeling? What would you be thinking? feeling?

2. Recall the image of the statue of Peter that depicts his three denials. What aspects of Peter and his betrayal did the sculptor want the viewer to consider?
3. The statement is made at the end of the video segment that “if there is hope for Peter, there is hope for us.” To what extent has that been true for you in your faith experience?

Book Discussion:

We need to step back from this scene for a moment to recognize its full import and appreciate its tragic irony. Christians believe that in Jesus, God walked in human flesh on this earth. He was in that sense like an emperor who so desires to know his subjects that he dons ordinary clothes and lives among them, with no one recognizing or understanding him. The God of the universe chose to walk in human flesh as an itinerant preacher, teacher, carpenter, healer – and pauper. He came as one of us. He healed the sick, forgave sinners, showed compassion to the lost, and taught people what God was really like. We must not miss the irony here: It was not the “sinners” who arrested God when he walked among us. Those who took him into custody and tried him were the most pious and religious people on the face of the earth. The God they claimed to serve walked among them in flesh, and they could not see him. They were so blinded by their love of power and their fear of losing it that they missed him. *(pg. 48)*

- In what ways would you say Jesus is still a threat to people’s way of life today?
- To what extent do you think people’s resistance to Jesus and his message is motivated by fear?

No one spoke up in the Sanhedrin. No one asked, “Is this really in keeping with our faith? How many times in recent history has the same thing happened – during the Holocaust, in Jim Crow America, in South Africa, at Abu Ghraib, and in your life and mine. How many times have we known something was wrong but were afraid to speak up? I am not talking about simply pointing out other people’s sins. We all know Christians who freely point out the sins of others; they are not being courageous, just obnoxious. I am talking about those times when you are part of a group about to do something that is clearly wrong or when you see injustice being done to someone and all it would take would be one person speaking up, but everyone remains silent. What would have happened if one or two or three of those Sanhedrin members had simply said, “this isn’t right, regardless of what we think about this man. It’s not in keeping with what God teaches us.” *(pg.52)*

- When have you chosen to be silent rather than speak up on behalf of the truth?

Finally, they look at Jesus; and the high priest said, “Are you the Messiah, the Son of the Blessed One?” (*Mark 16:61*) All Jesus had to do was to keep silent, and there would have been no grounds for conviction; instead he replied in a manner deemed blasphemous for Jews and traitorous for Romans.

Jesus’ response to this question of his identity brings together three Old Testament allusions, each of which assured his conviction by the Sanhedrin. Let’s consider each of these. Jesus’ first statement is easy to read as a simple, literal answer to the question, “Are you the Messiah?” Mark records it as two Greek words: “Ego eimi,” or “I am” (*Mark 14:62*) Caiaphas, though, realized this was not a simple declarative. The straightforward answer would have been, “I am he,” “I am the Blessed One,” or even “I am the Messiah.” But a simple “I am” in the Greek seems to point to something much more profound. (*pg.53*)

- Read Exodus 3:14. In light of this verse, when Jesus refers to himself as “I am,” who is he claiming to be?

Wrapping Up:

Imagine that you are Peter, slinking about the courtyard outside the house of Caiaphas. You linger near the edges among the flickering shadows because you are trying to hear what is going on inside the house and to avoid any contact with other people at the same time. Go inside Peter’s heart to sense his pain as he hears himself deny knowing Jesus. Listen with Peter’s ears to what you hear happening to Jesus inside the house.

Closing Prayer:

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and the God of all consolation, who consoles us in all our affliction, so that we may be able to console those who are in any affliction with the consolation with which we ourselves are consoled by God. For just as the sufferings of Christ are abundant for us, so also our consolation is abundant through Christ. Amen. (*2 Corinthians 1:3-5*)

For Further Study

Bible Study and Discussion

Exodus 3:1-14

- Because Jesus' suffering and death did not conform to the conventional messianic expectations of the day, the Gospel writers frequently appealed to the Old Testament to make sense of Jesus' mission and messiahship. How does the burning bush story in Exodus 3 help make sense of Jesus' response to Caiaphas in Mark 14:62?

Psalm 110:1-4

How does the allusion to Melchizedek give meaning to Jesus' role as God's Messiah?

Hebrews 5:7-9

- Reflect on the scene of Jesus' trial in light of these verses from Hebrews. How is it possible to hold to the claim that "God is love" and also hear Jesus' anguished plea, "Abba, Father....; remove this cup from me; yet, not what I want but what you want." (*Mark 14:36*)