

Mark 14 is knit together by the themes of betrayal, desertion, and denial.

Jesus predicts three things in verses 18-31

- 1) one of the twelve will betray him (18-21)
- 2) all twelve will desert him (26-28)
- 3) and Peter will deny him (29-31)

Verses 43-72 then show the fulfillment of Jesus’ predictions:

- 1) Judas betrays him (43-49)
- 2) The twelve desert him (50-52)
- 3) Peter denies him (66-72)

Mark’s gospel has focused our attention on how Jesus predicts what will happen to him, and it happens just as he says.

Jesus is Lord.

The cross is not an accident.

The cross was no surprise to the Lord –

and neither were the events surrounding the cross.

Introduction: No Disciple Is Greater Than His Master (14:53-54)

Notice how Mark tells the story!

Verses 53-54 set up the two scenes of this sermon:

Jesus and Peter are both on trial.

Verse 53 sets up Jesus’ trial – the real trial as it were.

Verse 54 sets up Peter’s “trial” – out in the courtyard.

53 And they led Jesus to the high priest.

And all the chief priests and the elders and the scribes came together.

Then in v54 he mentions that Peter has followed Jesus:

54 And Peter had followed him at a distance, right into the courtyard of the high priest.

And he was sitting with the guards and warming himself at the fire.

So far, Peter is holding true to his word:

though all others fall away, Peter is still following Jesus!

But as we saw last time –

no one else but Jesus can survive this night.

Because where Jesus will stand firm – both in his silence and in his speech –

Peter will crumble.

His silence and his speech both fall short.

As France puts it,

“Jesus will go to his death, but with his witness to his mission undimmed;
Peter will escape, but at the cost of his integrity as a disciple of Jesus.” (598)

1. The Trial Before the Sanhedrin (14:55-65)

We should note that the *real* trial happens before Pilate.

The Jews did not have the authority to execute people,
and so the “trial” before the Sanhedrin
might be better called the “preliminary investigation.”

A “grand jury” might be the modern term for this:
they are examining the case against Jesus
to see if they can prosecute him before Pilate.

*55 Now the chief priests and the whole Council
were seeking testimony against Jesus to put him to death,
but they found none.*

Throughout Mark’s gospel we have seen the official opposition to Jesus.

They object to his views on Sabbath observance,
his claim to forgive sins,
and his mixing with “sinners” (2:7, 16, 18, 24; 3:2).

Jesus has been accused of being in league with the devil
and ignoring the purity laws (3:22; 7:1).

None of these, however, would be sufficient to invoke the death penalty –
at least, not before a Roman governor.

Certainly his claim to forgive sins would be blasphemous to the Jews,
but the Romans wouldn’t care.

They need testimony that will demonstrate that Jesus is dangerous –
a threat to the established order of Jewish society
(and therefore a matter of concern to Rome).

56 For many bore false witness against him, but their testimony did not agree.

Apparently they are conducting the investigation in a fairly honorable way.

They are seeking witnesses.

And apparently the witnesses are not allowed to hear each other!

(Otherwise they could simply say, “That’s right, I heard the same thing!”)

We often think that this is just a kangaroo court,
but Mark portrays it as a serious inquiry conducted by the rules of Jewish law.

Certainly the high priest and the scribes are already convinced of Jesus' guilt.
But you need to see that they are not monsters.

After all, they are the defenders of the Torah.

They are convinced of the rightness of their cause –
they are convinced that Jesus is a pretender;
if they are right, then all they need to do is keep examining witnesses
and the truth will come out!

As indeed, it will!

But if you think about all that Jesus has said and done,
you start to see that if Jesus is *not* who he says he is –
if Jesus *is* simply another Messianic pretender –
then the Sanhedrin would have been entirely right to proceed in this way.

*57 And some stood up and bore false witness against him, saying,
58 "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.'"
59 Yet even about this their testimony did not agree.*

Finally, they have something serious!

After all, Jesus *did* say, "destroy this temple, and I will raise it up in three days."
(though this is only recorded in John 2:19-22)

Mark calls these false witnesses because they twist Jesus' words.
They make it sound like Jesus is talking about raising up the earthly temple –
when in fact the only temple he will raise up is his own body.

Jesus will destroy the temple!
And Jesus will build another in three days –
but Jesus is not going to destroy the earthly temple for another 40 years!

But if Jesus has in fact made threats against the temple,
if he is scheming to destroy the most holy place on earth –
the place where earth and heaven meet! –
then he is indeed a dangerous revolutionary!

A couple notes on the charge:

- 1) the word here is not the general word for temple (*ieron*),
but the more particular word for sanctuary (*naos*)
- 2) Mark highlights the contrast between the two temples
with the words "made with hands" and "not made with hands."

It would probably be here that the witnesses get confused.
The only way that this saying makes sense is in the light of later Christian theology!

Hebrews 9:11, 24 will expound on the idea of a temple made without hands.
Solomon had spoken in 2 Chronicles 6 about how
“heaven of heavens cannot contain you,
how much less this house that I have built.”

Now Jesus is beginning to explain what Solomon had only begun to grasp.
He is the heavenly temple – the place where earth and heaven meet!

*60 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?”
61 But he remained silent and made no answer.*

This is a serious charge.
Six hundred years before there were prophets who had been put to death
simply for prophesying the destruction of the temple!
But of course, the high priests would have understood this.

If Jesus is simply prophesying, then they would be reluctant to kill him.

But the charge is that Jesus has claimed that he himself will destroy the temple.

Why does Jesus remain silent?
Too often we are told, “because he doesn’t want to clear himself –
He must go to the cross.”
But in fact Jesus *will* destroy the temple!

That’s what he told his disciples in Mark 13!

But now he is silent.
He could explain it all to them –
but he will not waste his breath on fools!
He is not here to teach them
(and they are not here to learn from him!).

But there were those in Jesus’ day who believed that the Messiah – the Christ –
would be the one who would rebuild the temple in the last days.

And that is why the high priest continues:

*Again the high priest asked him,
“Are you the Christ, the Son of the Blessed?”*

All through Mark’s gospel Jesus has been careful to avoid this title.
He did not want people to think of him as the Christ

precisely because as soon as he claimed to be the Christ
his “hour” would come!

But Jesus’ actions in the triumphal entry where he claimed to be the heir of David,
and his cleansing the temple – proclaiming his authority over “their” space –
prompts the high priest to summarize what he understands Jesus to be saying.

And while he remained silent before,
now he speaks:

62 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 one thing that Jesus says in Mark’s version of the trial
is the most damning thing he could possibly have said!

I am the Christ.
I am the Son of the Blessed!

And not just that,
but you will see the Son of Man seated at the right hand of Power –
you will see me seated on the throne of David at the right hand of the Father.
I am the heir of David –
not merely of David’s earthly throne,
but of the heavenly throne.

Jesus weaves together images from Psalm 110 and Daniel 7.
We have already seen in Mark 13
how Jesus identifies himself as the Son of Man of Daniel’s vision –
in which case, the “coming” is not a coming to earth,
but a coming to the right hand of the Father.

Jesus is claiming that the high priest and the Sanhedrin
will see him coming with the clouds of heaven to the right hand of God.

How will they see it?

As France puts it, “How they will see it is not spelled out.
But when the prisoner about to be condemned and executed
declares that his judges will see his God-given authority,
we are clearly in the realm of vindication.” (France, 613)

And yes, the resurrection is certainly the “vindication” of Jesus.
The ascension of Christ is certainly the vindication of Jesus.

But the high priest and the Sanhedrin are not witnesses of that.

How will they see the vindication of Jesus?
Because forty years later,
their temple – their house – will lie in ruins;
and *his* temple – his house – will be spreading like wildfire
throughout the Roman world and beyond!

This is why Jesus spoke of the destruction of the temple in Mark 13
with the language of Daniel 7.

When the temple is destroyed and the Jews are scattered,
while the church of Jesus Christ flourishes and grows,
that is the vindication of the Son of Man –
as he inherits the Kingdom of his father David,
as the glory of the nations floods into the heavenly Jerusalem.

But all of this depends on whether Jesus *is* who he says he is!
If you don't believe him, then you should respond like the high priest:

*63 And the high priest tore his garments and said,
"What further witnesses do we need?
64 You have heard his blasphemy.
What is your decision?"
And they all condemned him as deserving death.*

This is a no-brainer!
It is not blasphemy that Jesus has claimed to be the Christ.
It might be subversive – and they would certainly claim that it is bearing false witness –
but no one was ever accused of blasphemy for claiming to be the Messiah.

But Jesus has said that they will see him sitting at the right hand of God.
Some would have said that Moses and Enoch could sit with God.
But for Jesus to claim to be equal or greater than Moses and Enoch
would certainly open himself up to the charge of blasphemy.

He has claimed that he will be the ruler and judge at God's right hand
who will execute judgment over the nations –
and over *them*.

In other words, they understand Jesus to be claiming a higher authority than the priests –
a greater authority than the temple.

Either it is true or it is blasphemy!

*65 And some began to spit on him and to cover his face and to strike him, saying to him,
"Prophesy!"
And the guards received him with blows.*

Jesus begins to feel in his own body the judgment that he has come to bear.

But it is precisely here that Mark returns us to Peter, sitting outside.

I want to remind you that the different evangelists use different orders of events.

Luke and John tell the story of Peter's denial *before* Jesus is brought before the council.

Matthew and Mark tell the story of Jesus before the council *first*.

The effect of this is to heighten the contrast between Jesus and Peter.

Jesus has stood firm.

He has confessed the truth before men.

Peter had promised that he would stand firm?

How will Peter do?

2. Peter's Denial of Jesus" (14:66-72)

66 And as Peter was below in the courtyard, one of the servant girls of the high priest came,

67 and seeing Peter warming himself, she looked at him and said,

"You also were with the Nazarene, Jesus."

68 But he denied it, saying,

"I neither know nor understand what you mean."

And he went out into the gateway and the rooster crowed.

Peter has done better than the others.

At least Peter is *here*.

But when called upon to testify to the truth,

Peter's courage fails him.

As we saw last time, "the spirit is willing but the flesh is weak."

And no flesh besides Jesus will be able to endure the evil power of that night.

It starts with a slave girl – just one person (and the lowest and most menial).

69 And the servant girl saw him and began again to say to the bystanders,

"This man is one of them."

70 But again he denied it.

This time the servant girl accuses him before others.

When the false witnesses testified against Jesus,

he was silent.

When the servant girl bears true witness against Peter,

he denies his Lord and Master.

*And after a little while the bystanders again said to Peter,
“Certainly you are one of them, for you are a Galilean.”
71 But he began to invoke a curse on himself and to swear,
“I do not know this man of whom you speak.”*

Now the whole group come against him,
and rather than own the truth and confess the Christ,
Peter denies him –
and worse yet, he invokes a curse.

The word here is “anathema” –
which in the LXX is the word used to translate *herem* – to devote to destruction.

There is a question about the translation here:
Normally when one is invoking a curse on oneself
the reflexive pronoun is used (in Acts 23, for instance).
Literally this should be translated,
“But he began to anathematize and to swear...”

Who is he anathematizing?
It is possible that Peter was anathematizing himself,
but that is *not* what the grammar suggests.

Rather than confess Jesus as Lord,
Peter anathematizes Jesus.

Paul says that “no one speaking in the Spirit of God ever says ‘Jesus is anathema.’”

As Jerome once said,
“Lacking the power of the Spirit, Saint Peter trembled at the voice of a maidservant.
With the Spirit, he withstood princes and kings” (220)

*72 And immediately the rooster crowed a second time.
And Peter remembered how Jesus had said to him,
“Before the rooster crows twice, you will deny me three times.”
And he broke down and wept.*

Gregory asks why God permitted Peter such a horrific apostasy?
“This we know was a great dispensation of the divine mercy,
so that he who was to be the shepherd of the church
might learn through his own fall to have compassion on others.
God therefore first shows him to himself, and then places him over others:
to learn through his own weakness
how to bear mercifully with the weakness of others.” (222)

Our closing hymn is TH 248 “Ah, Holy Jesus”

In the second stanza, we take these words upon our lips:

2. Who was the guilty who brought this upon thee? Alas, my treason, Jesus, hath undone thee.
'Twas I, Lord Jesus, I it was denied thee: I crucified thee.

It was not Peter alone who denied Jesus.
Peter may have been the one who stood there –
but I was there too.

As Johann Heermann continues:

3. Lo, the Good Shepherd for the sheep is offered; the slave hath sinned, and the Son hath
suffered: for man's atonement, while he nothing heedeth, God intercedeth.

In that night there was no one who stayed awake.
In that night there was no one who stood by the Savior.

4. For me, kind Jesus, was thine incarnation, thy mortal sorrow, and thy life's oblation: thy death
of anguish and thy bitter passion, for my salvation.

For me.
And so Heermann concludes:

5. Therefore, kind Jesus, since I cannot pay thee, I do adore thee, and will ever pray thee, think
on thy pity and thy love unswerving, not my deserving.