

Judgment and Abuse -- Mark 14:53-65

by Travis Dean

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Please bow your heads with me for prayer.

Lord, we want to see Jesus like we've never seen Him before. He is why we are here. You have said in Your Word that one day we will be like Him for we will see Him as He is. May we get a taste of that today. In Jesus' name we pray, amen.

Our story is the second in a series in which Jesus surrenders Himself into the hands of the Sanhedrin. God had given them a criminal justice system that perfectly blended mercy and justice. Before our last story, we looked at five of seventeen protocols of the Jewish legal system that are a result of the research of the late Judge Harry Fogle. Today we will look at eleven of these protocols that relate to this story:

- (1) The accused is presumed innocent until proven otherwise.
- (2) A trial had to be performed in public during the day.
- (3) Each member of the court was required to act on behalf of the accused.
- (4) Conviction for an offense required two witnesses who agreed in every particular
- (5) Accused could not be required to testify against himself
- (6) A voluntary confession was not sufficient for conviction
- (7) Lying in court was perjury, punishable by death
- (8) A majority vote by ballot was required to acquit or convict
- (9) If the vote was to convict, one day was required for judges to ponder their decision
- (10) Meanwhile the accused remained innocent, and any judge who voted to convict the accused could change his vote for an acquittal, but any judge who voted to acquit could not revoke his earlier vote.
- (11) A unanimous verdict of guilty resulted in the acquittal of the accused

Let's now consider a summary of our story:

Jesus was taken at night from Gethsemane and brought before the Sanhedrin, who tried to find some evidence against Jesus in order to put Him to death. But in spite of many false witnesses, there was not enough evidence to convict Jesus. Some false witnesses accused Jesus of plotting to destroy the temple, but still their accounts did not provide a unified case. Finally, the high priest stood up and tried to get Jesus to respond to the accusations. But when Jesus continued to remain silent, the high priest called for Him to confess whether or not He was God's Son. Jesus at last spoke, saying, "I am." All members of the council then condemned Him to death. Afterward some abused and mocked Jesus.

This story is ultimately about Jesus Christ. So, we will spend our time now observing what He experienced. First of all, He experienced an effort to condemn. Mark 14:53 says that Jesus was brought before the high priest. Along with the high priest were assembled "all the chief priests, the elders, and the scribes". These three groups made up the Sanhedrin, the Supreme Court of the Jewish nation, which consisted of 71 members. A high priest was appointed as the chief justice of the court. In Jesus' day this appointment was made by the Romans whenever it was to their advantage. Their decision was based on who could offer the most money for the position. Since the Sadducees tended to be quite wealthy, though usually lacking in spirituality, one of them was usually chosen. John actually identifies the high priest that year as being Caiaphas (John 18:13).

It was the middle of the night when Jesus was brought from Gethsemane into Jerusalem. Why was this council assembled at such an hour? They were not acting as judges and jury in this trial as their job description stated. They were acting as prosecutors. Their actions were contrary to their own law in many respects (compare with the above protocols), and yet they wanted to look like they were following the legal system. It was a collection of questionable characters at best that was assembled that night. You may remember the crowd that accompanied Judas to Gethsemane. They were actually more like a mob with swords and clubs. We will find out shortly that they followed Jesus into Jerusalem. But what a night to be spent in this way! It

was the first night of the Passover. All respectable and honorable Jews were sleeping after the evening Passover meal. What a disgrace for the leaders of God's people to be plotting the death of His Son on the very festival that pointed to the Lamb of God, the Messiah!

Mark 14:54 makes reference to Peter who was present that night for Jesus' trial before the Sanhedrin. Mark says that he followed Jesus "at a distance" while he "sat with the servants" of the high priest. How sad! Earlier that night Peter had been by Jesus' side attempting to strike down one of the high priest's servants. How quickly Peter had changed his choice of companionship. John tells us how Peter got into the high priest's courtyard. John (the "other disciple") actually was present that night as well and put a word in for Peter, so that he was permitted an entrance (John 18:15, 16).

Mark 14:55 begins an account of the actual trial that night. And as we read through this account we will discover four stages to the Sanhedrin's attempt to condemn Jesus to death. The first attempt is revealed in verses 55-56. Mark says they "sought testimony against Jesus". You may remember that one of the protocols for the Jewish legal system was that two witnesses were required who agreed in every particular in order for someone to be convicted of an offense. Mark 14:55 reveals the result of this attempt as a complete failure. They could not find two people in that whole crowd who could give a unified testimony against Jesus. In the book, Desire of Ages page 705, Ellen White describes the state of the Sanhedrin at this point as being "in great perplexity". It reminds me of when my brother and I would go fishing as boys. We would be so excited to have caught the biggest fish in the group, only to discover that it had swallowed the hook. Neither one of us liked touching the slimy things, so we would argue about who was going to get the fish off the hook. The Sanhedrin had finally caught Jesus, but now they were at their wits end to condemn Him to death and still have the trial look somewhat legal.

Mark 14:56 reveals that many people came forward and "bore false witness" against Jesus. Such an act in a Jewish court was itself punishable by death (Deut. 19:15-21). How ironic that those trying to put Jesus to death brought upon themselves the death penalty. But the Sanhedrin dared not call for truthful witnesses. They would have only aided in Jesus' acquittal. In spite of the number of people called forward to testify falsely against Jesus, they could not provide two testimonies that agreed. Why was this so hard for them to accomplish? First, they were trying to falsify Him who was the Truth (John 14:6). The truth was so evident that their lies appeared to be but pitiful attempts. A second reason for this difficulty was that the Sanhedrin were walking a fine line. They themselves were divided on many issues. Both the Pharisees and Sadducees were members of the Sanhedrin. They disagreed on many theological points including the resurrection. The Sadducees actually agreed with Jesus' criticism of the Pharisees' traditions. So, these two parties tried very hard to keep the discussion away from these controversial topics, which made the false testimonies even harder to manufacture.

Mark 14:57-59 reveals a second stage in the Sanhedrin's attempt to condemn Jesus to death. They decided to focus all further testimonies on the topic of the temple. This was common ground for all Jews and even the Romans. If they could make it appear that Jesus had spoken against the temple, all involved parties would be turned against Him. But even in this attempt they had to call upon false testimonies. They knew that even here the truth would not accomplish their purpose." The false witnesses testified that they had heard Jesus say that He was going to destroy the temple and in three days raise up another one that was not man-made. Jesus had predicted that the temple would be leveled to the ground, but He had never said that He would be the one to do it (Mark 13:2). Jesus had also spoken of His own body as a temple that would be raised in three days (John 2:19). But neither one of these comments was sufficient to earn Jesus the death penalty - hence the need for false witnesses who twisted Jesus' words. But still more troubling for the Sanhedrin was that not even then could two witnesses provide a united testimony. What a clear disconnect this reveals among those working to put Jesus to death. They just couldn't get their act together.

We find a third stage in the Sanhedrin's attempt in Mark 14:60-61. This time the high priest in charge, Caiaphas, took things into his own hands. Verse 60 says that the high priest stood up. He was frustrated, angry, and desperate. The pretended veil of justice came off and he revealed himself clearly as the prosecutor, demanding Jesus to respond to all the accusations that had been made against Him. Apparently, up to this

point, Jesus had not defended Himself in any way. He had given the Sanhedrin nothing that they could use against Him. And even with the high priest's direct questioning, Jesus remained completely silent. He refused to react in kind.

With their attempt to condemn Jesus so far ending in failure, you can imagine that the high priest was about ready to blow his top. He couldn't imagine the thought of Jesus getting away and yet nothing he tried had worked. The high priest decided to force Jesus into testifying against Himself, thus condemning Himself. Once again he resorted to an approach that violated their own law. In Mark 14:61 he called for an involuntary confession. According to Matthew's account of this trial, Caiaphas actually put Jesus under oath in God's name (Matt. 26:63). He asked Jesus to tell the court whether or not He was the "Son of the Blessed". "Blessed" was a word used in place of Yahweh, the sacred name for God, which no one was allowed to speak.

Second, Jesus experienced confessing the truth. Jesus was a man of integrity and honesty. He honored God and His law. And when called to confess His relationship to God, He could no longer remain silent. In Mark 14:62 His answer was clear: "I am." These words take us back to Exodus 3 where the Lord appeared to Moses and referred to Himself as the "I AM". Jesus clearly stated His own divinity that night on trial. But He also did what He had told His disciples to do. In Matthew 10:32-33 Jesus instructed His disciples to confess Him before men, promising to confess them before the Father. But He had also warned them against denying Him before men, for He then would deny them before the Father. So knowing that His confession would be used by the Sanhedrin as sufficient evidence to convict Him of the death penalty, He did not shrink back. He confessed His relationship to the Father in no uncertain terms.

Jesus did not stop here, though. In Mark 14:62 He told the Sanhedrin that they would see Him sitting at the right hand of "the Power" (a name used in place of God's sacred name, Yahweh). Jesus had given a similar picture in Matthew 25:31-46 when He told the Parable of the Sheep and Goats. That night the Sanhedrin were sitting in judgment against Jesus. But the day was coming when they would all stand before Him in judgment. Should they condemn Jesus to death, they would receive the same condemnation on Judgment Day.

Third, Jesus experienced being condemned. Mark 14:63 records the high priest's response. He tore his clothes. He reacted dramatically. He wanted the court to see his pretended horror. He had hoped Jesus would say this, but he acted surprised. However, in his theatrical performance he committed a capital offense worthy of death. In Leviticus 10:6 God had given instructions to Aaron and his sons through Moses to not tear their priestly clothing under penalty of death. Caiaphas, the high priest, followed up his drama with a question directed at the members of the Sanhedrin council: "What further need do we have of witnesses?" For Caiaphas Jesus' words sealed the deal. In his mind Jesus' confession was enough to sentence Him as worthy of death. He was ready to end the trial without having heard any true witnesses or any word in Jesus' defense.

Caiaphas then characterized Jesus' words as blasphemy. By blasphemy he meant that Jesus had slandered God's name. In reality, Caiaphas' actions had slandered God's name, while Jesus had boldly testified of the truth. The rest of the council, though, were just as set on Jesus' death as Caiaphas was. Mark 14:64 says, "they all condemned Him." The vote was unanimous, which according to their own legal system, dictated Jesus' acquittal (See above protocol #11). Luke 23:50, 51 reveals, though, an interesting side note. Not all of the members of the Sanhedrin were present. Luke states that Joseph of Arimathea, a member of the council as well as a good and just man, had not consented to the Sanhedrin's unanimous vote. In other words, he (and others who sympathized with Jesus) had not been invited to the night trial. According to Rabbi Aryeh Kaplan, Jewish law dictated that the council could not convene unless all 71 members were present. So, Caiaphas and those convened the night of Jesus' trial may have pulled in some other people more in line with their agenda. Over and over again we see how crooked and corrupt this trial really was.

Last of all, Jesus experienced being abused. According to Mark 14:65, Jesus' condemnation was immediately followed up with acts of violence against Him. The "officers" (attendants of the Sanhedrin) were at least part of the instigators. Their actions were awful. They spit on Jesus, blindfolded Him, and hit Him. Mark records that the officers "struck Him with the palms of their hands". This action is from a Greek word which meant to "slap in the face". You may remember Jesus' words in Matthew 5:39: "Whoever slaps you on your right cheek,

turn the other to him also." Jesus practiced what He preached. As inhumane as this abuse was, let us not forget that Jesus had predicted this very abuse in Mark 10:33, 34. He knew what was coming when He first surrendered Himself into the hands of the Sanhedrin.

Let's now consider how Jesus is revealed as our example in this story. To be a Christian means to be a follower of Jesus. How do Jesus' actions reveal to us how to live as Christians in the 21st century? First of all, Jesus is revealed as our example in that He could not be agitated. That night in Caiaphas' courtyard, He was surrounded by liars, hypocrites, and godless men. The place was polluted with greed, arrogance, hot tempers, and complete chaos. The whole affair was a scam full of injustice and corruption. In contrast Jesus was composed and poised.

When I worked in construction, I was often surrounded by men with offensive language and rough characters. Whether it was a piece of wood or another worker, something would from time to time agitate them. I would hear swearing and see boards kicked and slammed around. Although I had my share of frustrating days, I usually kept my frustrations to myself. The other guys noticed this and often tried to get a rouse out of me. It was sometimes a real trial, but for the most part I stayed fairly composed.

While my composure was sometimes surface deep, Jesus' composure was experienced from the inside out. I invite you to turn with me to James 1:19-20. (Read) What is this "wrath of man"? Have you ever experienced it? It's in contrast with the phrase, "slow to anger". The "wrath of man" is like an explosive volcano. Inside our hearts are rumblings of discontent, anxiety, and frustration. And when agitated, these feelings often explode. I've often heard people defend their anger as righteous indignation. They refer to Jesus' actions when He cleansed the temple. But Jesus was not spontaneously reacting. His "anger" was not a sudden explosion. He had watched the corruption in the temple carry on every year since He was a youth. Over and over He had passed by the cheating and stealing without saying a word. And when He did throw the people out of the temple, it was not fed by pent up anger. He Himself said that everything He did was a response to what He saw the Father doing (John 5:19). His heart was like a river of peace. In fact, Isaiah 9:6 refers to Him as the Prince of Peace.

And so Jesus reveals that a healthy Christian is someone whose peace is like a river. I'm going to share with you three Scriptures that illustrate this. First, turn with me to Psalm 119:165. (Read) The peace that Christ had was great. It withstood the greatest chaos. This peace belongs to everyone of His followers. Second, turn with me to Isaiah 48:18. (Read) The peace of Christ was like a continually flowing river. It never stopped. This is the peace of every healthy Christian. Lastly, turn with me to Isaiah 26:3. (Read) Christ had inner peace because He had an inner connection with His Father. His mind was always fixed in communication with heaven. He completely trusted Himself to His Father. This is the experience of a healthy Christian.

Jesus is revealed in this story as our example in a second way - He knew His identity. When called to state His relationship to God, Jesus gave a clear, definitive answer. He knew that His true identity was not wrapped up in being the son of Joseph and Mary or in being a carpenter. It was not even in being able to work miracles and hold thousands spellbound with His teaching. His identity was centered on His relationship with God. His great strength came from knowing that He was God's Son. Interestingly, throughout Jesus' ministry God had been intentional in affirming Jesus as His beloved Son. And yet Satan and the religious leaders had been just as adamant in getting Jesus to doubt His true identity.

So, Jesus reveals that a healthy Christian is someone who is confident and secure in their identity. As a Christian my identity is not based on what I'm good at or what people think. I spent too many years of my life lonely, insecure, and empty because I was confused as to my true identity. I would like to share with you three Scriptures that are especially dear to my heart that refute loneliness, insecurity, and emptiness. First, turn with me to Ephesians 2:13, 17-19. (Read) God has taken care of my loneliness. In Christ I am not alone. He has drawn me near. He has taken me in. I am a part of God's household. I'm in God's inner circle. I used to often feel on the outer edges of my peers. But in Christ I find my true acceptance and identity. A second Scripture filled with hope is Romans 8:33, 34. (Read) God has acquitted me. It doesn't matter who condemns me. With all that God has done for me in Christ, I feel safe to make a mistake. I feel secure enough to be different. A third Scripture is John 15:15, 16. (Read) Because I am a part of God's inner circle, I have access

to privileged information. I have been assigned a mission to accomplish and a purpose to fulfill. Out of all the billions of people who inhabit planet earth, I am uniquely equipped for God's work.

Being confident of my identity in Christ sets me free to help others who are struggling with being lonely, insecure, and empty. I have something to tell them that is attractive and appealing. It was because Christ had a strong sense of his identity as God's Son that He was able to bless so many.

Each one of us has a family tree. My ancestors have left me a legacy that helps shape who I am. Because of my ancestor Adam, I was born with a selfish nature. Because my parents were both Seventh-day Adventists (SDA's) when I was born, I was raised with an SDA worldview and beliefs. But according to John 1:12, 13 when I believed in Christ, I received a new ancestor – Christ Himself. This new birth was an act of God. This is my new identity.

I want to leave you with a challenge. If you have not yet believed in Christ, you can do so this very moment. Confess to God your need of a Savior. Accept Christ's life, death and resurrection as your salvation. Invite Him to take control of your life. Start building a relationship with Him through prayer and Bible study. Your new identity will be the beginning of a whole new life in Christ. And here's my challenge to all of you who have started this journey: Live like He lived. Live like a child of God. Here's a great way to do that: make Jesus' mission statement your own. Do you know what His mission statement was? You can read it in Luke 4:18, 19. (Read) This is how Jesus spent His life. He preached the good news that God had come to set up His kingdom in their hearts. He healed those who were broken in spirit. He set free those who were slaves to sin and all its effects. He opened the eyes of the blind. As a follower of Jesus, I challenge you to make His mission statement your own.

Our closing hymn is a call to rescue the perishing. If you would like to accept this challenge, please stand with me and let the words in this hymn be your personal mission statement.

17 Protocols in the Jewish legal system

1. Conviction for an offense required two witnesses who agreed in every particular
2. Accused had right to employ an attorney or have one appointed for him
3. Accused could not be required to testify against himself
4. A voluntary confession was not sufficient for conviction
5. Circumstantial evidence was not acceptable
6. Hearsay evidence (relating what someone else said) was not allowed
7. No evidence could be produced unless the accused was present
8. Lying in court was perjury, punishable by death
9. A majority vote by ballot was required to acquit or convict
10. If vote was to convict, one day was required for judges to ponder their decision
11. Meanwhile the accused remained innocent, and any judge who voted to convict the accused could change his vote for an acquittal, but any judge who voted to acquit could not revoke his earlier vote.
12. A unanimous verdict of guilty resulted in acquittal of the accused
13. The accused is presumed innocent until proven otherwise.
14. A trial had to be performed in public during the day.
15. The Sanhedrin was the only court qualified to execute the death penalty.
16. The Sanhedrin acted not only as judge but also as the jury, so anyone on the court with a personal acquaintance of the accused or the facts was disqualified from taking part in the case.
17. Each member of the court was required to act on behalf of the accused.