Jesus Was Tried in Our Place

Mark 14:53-15:15

Key Verse: 14:62 “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.”

Today’s passage is about Jesus’ trial before Sanhedrin, the leading group of Jesus’ day and Pontius Pilate, the Roman governor. Peter’s denial is also added. Unlikely before we will have a case study based on the casting members who appear in today’s passage. They are the Sanhedrin members, Peter, Pilate, Barabbas, and Jesus.

First, Sanhedrin.(53-65) Sanhedrin is the Jewish ruling council of Israel in Jesus’ day. They were made up of 71 members who were mostly educated, wealthy, and high-class people including the priests. They had authority to make an important decision and sentence related to their law and religion. Verse 53 says that they all gathered in the house of the high priests to discuss about the case of Jesus. Verses 55-56 say that they 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. Some stood up and said that Jesus would destroy the temple and rebuild another, but their testimony did not agree, either. (57-59)

Then the high priest stood up and asked Jesus, “***Are you not going to answer? What is this testimony that these men are bringing against you?***” (60) The high priest asked a question to Jesus to catch him in his words. **But Jesus remained silent and gave him no answer**. (61) Jesus didn’t answer him because he had no reason to defend himself from their false testimonies. Jesus was already determined to obey God’s will and die on the cross for the sins of the world. Again, the high priest asked Jesus. “***Are you the Messiah, the Son of the Blessed One***?” (61b) How did Jesus answer him? Look at verse 62. “***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***.” Now Jesus gave the high priest a clear answer that he is the Messiah who is sitting at the right hand of God and coming on the clouds of heaven. His answer was the fulfillment of the prophecy of Daniel. (Da 7:13-14) Jesus meant that he is the one who fulfills Daniel’s prophecy about the Messiah. When he said, “I am” (*ego eimi*), he had the same authority and power as when God said “I AM WHO I AM” in the burning bush at the Mount Sinai in the book of Exodus. (Ex 3:14) When Moses asked who God is, God answered him that he is the self-existent Almighty Everlasting Creator God. Messiah in Hebrew is Christ in Greek, which means ‘the Anointed One’. In other word the Messiah is the Savior of the world who saves his people from their sin and death. He will come again in the cloud to judge this world.

When the high priest heard Jesus’ answer, he tore his clothes. Tearing clothes shows his extreme anger. The priest said, “***Why do we need any more witnesses? You have heard the blasphemy. What do you think***?” (63,64) The high priest said that Jesus had committed blasphemy by defiling God’s name, which could sentence as a death sentence. The Sanhedrin members all condemned Jesus as worthy of death. (64b) Then some began to spit at him. They blindfolded Jesus, struck him with their fists, and said, “Prophesy!” (65) The Sanhedrin, including the high priests and teachers of the law, the elders, were the leaders of their people. They must have been a good guide, teachers, and shepherds for their people. But they became an evil political group who wanted to remove their opponent with false accusation. They are those who intentionally oppose the truth and reject Jesus today. They persecute Christians and damage the church of God.

Second, Peter (66-72) Peter was known as an erring disciple which means the one who made many mistakes even though he was one of the top disciples of Jesus. When Jesus predicted the falling away of his disciples, Peter insisted his loyalty for Jesus. He said, *“Even if all fall away, I will not*.” (14:29) According to verse 54 he followed Jesus in a distance into the courtyard of the high priest when Jesus was arrested. He sat with the guards and warmed himself at the fire. He followed Jesus, but could not identify himself as his disciple. He hid himself behind the crowd. Soon his identity was caught by a little girl, who asked him, “***You also were with that Nazarene, Jesus***.” (67) But he denied it saying, “***I don’t know or understand what you’re talking about***.” Peter moved to another place, but the girl challenged him again. Peter denied again. He denied the third time and immediately the rooster crowed the second time. (72) What Jesus had predicted about him came true. Jesus said, “*Before the rooster crows twice, you will disown me three times*.” (72) When Peter remembered Jesus’ word, he broke down and wept. (72) Why did he weep? He wept because he realized that he was wrong. His tears were the expression of repentance. It was not only for remorse of his mistake, but also for gratitude of Jesus’ grace. Jesus knew Peter’s weakness. Jesus wanted to protect Peter from self-accusation by telling his denial in advance. There are many Peters today who follow Jesus in distance out of fear. They hide their identity as Christians behind the crowd.

Third, Pilate (15:1-15) Pilate was more popular than any other actor except Jesus. His name appears in the Apostle’s Creed as the one who persecuted Jesus. Pilate was a Roman governor who controlled the entire area of Judea in Jesus’ day. He was a professional politician who knew how to get along with the colonial people. When the Sanhedrin brought Jesus for death sentence and execution, Pilate asked Jesus. “***Are you the king of the Jews***?” (2) At that time the Sanhedrin, the Jewish ruling council, had the authority to make death sentence, but no power to execute. So, they brought Jesus to Pilate who had authority to execute. They also knew that Pilate would not execute Jesus under their religious charge of blasphemy. The Roman empire allowed the freedom of religion among her colonial people and would not be involved in any religious conflict. Pilate knew that the Sanhedrin accused Jesus of the king of the Jews. When he asked Jesus, “Are you the king of the Jews?”, he meant if Jesus stood against Caesar, the Roman Emperor. Jesus answered him, “***You have said so***.” Jesus meant that he is the King of the Jews, the Messiah. At that time the Jews believed that the Messiah would come as the king of the Jews. Jesus admitted that he is the King of the Jews who came as the Messiah.

Look at verses 3-5. “***The chief priests accused him of many things. So again Pilate asked him, “Aren’t you going to answer? See how many things they are accusing you of.” But Jesus still made no reply, and Pilate was amazed.***” In a criminal court the accused is allowed to defend themselves. Pilate saw many criminals who had defended themselves as a maximum degree. But Jesus remained silent. Pilate was surprised. Pilate realized that he was entangled with the Jewish religious conflict. So, he got an idea to get out of that game. There was a Jewish custom at the festival to release a prisoner whom the people requested. At that time there was a man named Barabbas who had been imprisoned because of insurrection and murder. Pilate wanted to use this pardoning custom for Jesus. He said to the crowd in verses 9,10. “***Do you want to me to release to you the king of the Jews?” asked Pilate, knowing it was out of self-interest that the chief priests had handed Jesus over to him***.” Pilate thought that he would please the crowd if he released Jesus because Jesus was called their king. Pilate seemed to do his best to release Jesus. In other gospel he washed his hands proclaiming that he was innocent from Jesus’ blood. But he did not stand on the side of truth to the end. He did not perform his job based on justice. He compromised with the crowd to save himself and to continue his political career. When the crowd shouted for the crucifixion of Jesus, he handed Jesus over to be crucified. Look at verse 15. “***Wanting to satisfy the crowd, Pilate released Barabbas to them. He had Jesus flogged, and handed him over to be crucified***.” Even though he made efforts to set Jesus free, he failed because he did not stand on the side of truth to the end. He is responsible for the death of Jesus, the Messiah. Pilate like people are those who compromise, not stand on the side of the truth.

Fourth, the crowd. The crowd is a crowd who consists of all kinds of people. Some of them praised Jesus when he entered into Jerusalem riding on a donkey. Others tasted the bread of life when Jesus fed the five thousand with five loaves and two fish. The same people now turned back against Jesus and shouted for his death. Look at verse 11. “***But the chief priests stirred up the crowd to have Pilate release Barabbas instead***.” The crowd had no truth in them. They were like chaff blown by the wind. They are like people whose roots are not in Christ, but in their benefit and convenience.

Fifth, Jesus the King of the Jews (62) Through the trial under Pontius Pilate Jesus’ innocence was proved even though he didn’t say a word to defend himself. He had now enough reason to be released so that he could humiliate all the Sanhedrin members who had falsely accused him. He could have been free instead of Barabbas if he wanted. Then, why did he keep quiet and not defend himself? He kept quiet and did not defend himself for you and me. He was innocent, but condemned and tried in our place. He did not open his mouth to obey the will of God. 1 Peter 2:22-24 says, “*He committed no sin, and no deceit was found in his mouth.” When they hurled their insults at him, he did not retaliate; when he suffered, he made no threats. Instead, he entrusted himself to him who judges justly. “He himself bore our sins” in his body on the cross, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; “by his wounds you have been healed.*” Amen!

Barabbas was one of the luckiest persons in the world. He was released because of Jesus. There is a thing known as Barabbas’ testimony: “Each day I was waiting for my last day on this earth. At the sound of the door opening, I thought that that hour has come. The day my name was called, I came out among the crowd who shouted for my name. The place I was brought was not the execution site, but the courtyard of Pilate. I was freed in front of a man named Jesus of Nazareth. People said that I was released because of him. The man saw me with his bloody eyes, pure and tender. Heavenly peace came upon me. Eternal joy overwhelmed my heart. I was free! I was free not because what I have done, but because what he has done! By his wounds I have been healed! By his death, I have been saved!”

We are modern Barabbas. We are the ones who should be tried and condemned because of our sins. I have to pay the price for my sins on the cross. But Jesus became a substitute for me. He paid the price of my sins, and he died in my place. Because of Jesus I am free. Because of Jesus I am released. By the merit of his death, I am saved. By his wounds I am healed. Praise Jesus. Today I ask you to remember what happened in the courtyard of the high priests and of Pilate. I ask you to hear his words, to see his face, and to believe his name. He was tried and condemned in your place. Let’s praise the name of Jesus and give thanks to him! Amen