

Sermon Title: A Sentence In Search Of A Crime
Scripture Text: Mark 14:53-65

Speaker: Jim Harris
Date: 1-12-20

I haven't actually counted, but it seems that Mark Chapter 14 is his whopper chapter. We're going to go through Verse 65 today. I don't remember any other chapters in Mark that long—there's so much here. We come today to the trial of Jesus Christ, the night before He was crucified. Whether you're reading Matthew or Mark or Luke or John, this enters a portion that can be hard to read. Some of it is stomach-turning gross. It *will* produce a reaction in you, perhaps of horror. But whatever grabs you from this—I promise, whatever you imagine it might have been, it was worse than that, and it is more than you could ever fathom.

This is the only trial in history of an innocent man. Now, there have been trials where someone was innocent of the crime of which they were accused, and some people have been falsely convicted. This is the only trial of an innocent man ever in history, because He was the only innocent man ever in history—He "knew no sin" (2 Cor. 5:21; NASB, and throughout, unless otherwise noted). For Him to be declared guilty, for Him to be sentenced to death, tells you that what happened that day was a terrible day for justice.

We're going to pick up right where we left off. We could spend a lot more time on this passage and its parallels in Matthew and Luke and John, and we would gain much from that, but we're going to keep moving; we're going to try to stay with Mark's pace and his progress through this. There are points at which we need to pull in a verse here or there from the other Gospels, and we will do that.

The elapsed time in the life of Jesus Christ that we're going to deal with today was less than three hours. This occurred in the wee hours of Friday morning. By 9:00 a.m., He would be on the Cross; by 3:00 in the afternoon, He would be dead; by nightfall, He would be in the grave. Everything that He endured that day, He didn't deserve (see Matt. 3:17; Heb. 7:26)—but I did, and you did. He took all of this for *us* (1 Pet. 3:18; cf. Is. 53:5-6).

Now, as we've been doing, let's set the stage. This is like watching an episode of a series of events, and so we will try to put the picture together for you. Consider the characters that you're going to see today. This portion has a significant cast: There are the leaders of the Jews, and especially the members of what you might call their "high council," which is known as the Sanhedrin. There will be special roles played by the High Priest Caiaphas, and by his father-in-law, a former High Priest named Annas. The Jewish part of Jesus's trial includes a number of smaller roles by people that were swept along by the sovereignty of God into this scene, and you're going to see God use even the most wicked deeds and words that are said in this passage (Acts 2:23; 4:27-28). So during this time, you're going to see reference to Peter and, in the other Gospels at the same time, to Judas Iscariot; they occupy the spotlight briefly, and we're going to see that, especially for Peter's case, next Lord's Day. It's the *worst* day of Peter's life. It's the *last* day of Judas's life.

When the trial shifts over to the Roman phase, which we won't see until we get into Chapter 15 in Mark, the judges become Pilate, who is the regional governor, and Herod Antipas, who is the regional "monarch," if you will; he got one fourth of what was the kingdom of King Herod the Great. Present at both of these trials is a whole bunch of false witnesses, rounded up to try to make a case against Jesus.

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The Roman phase of the trial is going to wind up before morning; the Jewish phase of the trial didn't start until after midnight; so all this takes place in a matter of hours, and the Jewish phase was the first part. You can see, if you want to, a chart of the six phases of the trial—the three Jewish phases and the three Roman phases (see the last page of this transcript). I'm not going to go into the details of all of that, but I wanted to show it to you so you can look it up, if you would like to. The Romans are going to wind up doing the bidding of the leaders of the Jews, who demanded that Jesus be crucified. That's the Cast of Characters.

Now, the Scene: It all takes place in Jerusalem. The Jewish Trial starts out in the home of Annas, and then it moves over to the home of Caiaphas, and then winds up, apparently, in the Sanhedrin's "council chamber," if you will. You might think, "How could they pull all that off in just three hours? Well, you have to understand: the home of Caiaphas is probably also the home of Annas, in the sense that it was one compound.

I was thinking of the apartment building that Marsha and I lived in when we were first married; it was two stories of apartments in a rectangle around the edges, and everyone entered from a courtyard in the middle, and there was a gate to get into the courtyard. The homes of Annas and Caiaphas would have been fancy. They had gotten filthy rich by ripping off the people, selling the rights to sell those sacrificial animals for overinflated prices, and charging exorbitant rates for exchanging money; so they would have had a nice place. They were relatives—extended family—and typically, that would be where a wealthy extended family would be. So to go from Annas's place to Caiaphas's place was probably just a matter of walking across the courtyard; that's all there was to it.

The Roman phase begins at the palace of the Roman authorities—perhaps in the Fortress Antonia, on the corner of the walled city of Jerusalem. Then it went to Herod's headquarters, and then back to the palace again; and as I say, we'll see that in Chapter 15 when we get there.

Now, put the Storyline together. I'm not going to give you all the details; but as I say, it takes place in the first few hours before daylight on Friday. Jesus had spent Thursday night eating the Passover Meal with His disciples, and then He taught them extensively. Judas left to go do his evil deed. Jesus taught the other 11 everything that we have recorded in John 14, 15, and 16. Then came His great prayer, recorded in John 17, and His ongoing prayers in the Garden of Gethsemane, which led to His betrayal and arrest. And we're going to rejoin the story at Mark Chapter 14, Verse 53, just when Jesus has been arrested.

Now, understand that I'm trying to give you the big picture, and also stay faithful to Mark, so we've got to walk a balanced line here. Mark gives us, if you will, only part of the story—not because he was leaving something out because he didn't want us to know it, but he wrote for his audience. We're going to follow what he says; he was writing for the Romans—he didn't give a whole lot of attention to all of the details of Jewish laws and regulations and all of that. So you can see the big picture here by looking at that chart (on the last page of this transcript), but we're going to stay with Mark.

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The Jews took Jesus into custody—that's something they had wanted to do for a long time—and now, they need to come up with some reason to have Him killed. The sentence has already come in; they knew *exactly* what they wanted to do—they were going to kill Jesus! This is all a pretense; this is a sentence in search of a crime—that's what they're doing.

First, they took Him to the home of Annas, and they brought in a stream of witnesses to accuse Him, but they couldn't get two of them to agree. And it's strange, how they were stuck on their law that they had to have two witnesses agree (Deut. 17:6), while they broke all the rest of the laws about how to go about having a trial.

Then, they sent Jesus to the home of Caiaphas, where *finally* they got two people to pretty much say the same thing. We'll see how twisted it was, and we'll see how, eventually—according to the high priest—they convicted Jesus, who is God, of blasphemy for the crime of being God. There's a lot of wickedness in that.

Then they apparently took Jesus to the Sanhedrin council chamber, where they confirmed the verdict that He is dangerous, and He must be killed. Ah, but that presented them with a problem: The Jews, living under Roman law, did not have the authority to put anyone to death (see Jn. 18:31). That's why there had to be a Roman trial as well.

So, first to Pilate. And it's interesting: having concluded that He's guilty of blasphemy—which is not what the witnesses said, but that's alright...I mean, you know, close enough—when they get over to the Roman trial, the charges completely morph! Now they claim that Jesus was guilty of the crime of not paying taxes, and of claiming that He was a rival king and He was going to take down Rome, so He should be regarded as dangerous to Rome. Interestingly, Pilate found Him "not guilty."

So Pilate passed Him off, and His accusers, to Herod Antipas. Hard to say which one of those two—Pilate or Herod Antipas—is the more wicked; they're both pretty much awful. Little was accomplished there, except this time, Jesus was also ridiculed and mocked, and then Herod Antipas sent Jesus back to Pilate.

Again, after hearing unsubstantiated accusations, Pilate found Jesus "not guilty." Oh, is that frustrating! You want him to kill this guy, and he says He's "not guilty"! Well, we're going to see what a weasel of a politician *he* was; he caved in to the demands of the mob, rather than following the evidence and doing what was right.

The point is: Mark included what he deemed most important for his readers, and so we have the key elements here of the Jewish part of the trial; and when we get to Chapter 15, we will have the key elements of the Roman's part of the trial. And in the middle of it, the next Lord's Day we're going to see what Mark tells us about Peter. So our passage zeroes in on the Jewish part of the trial, and not even all three phases of that. I call it "A Sentence In Search Of A Crime." We're going to go from Verse 53 to Verse 65 in Mark 14, and you're going to see The Foregone Conclusion, The False Witnesses, and the Fuming High Priest.

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Starting out with The Foregone Conclusion. As we look at this section, the hearing before Annas has already taken place; it's recorded only in John 18. Mark probably left it out because Annas didn't really hold any official position—it was sort of a courtesy to him, because he was like the grandfather of the mafia family but he wasn't the one who actually did the hatchet jobs on people. He was a trusted advisor to these wicked hypocrites, but it was the current high priest, Caiaphas—who was also Annas' son-in-law—he held the actual position of authority (Jn. 18:3, 24). Verses 53 and 54—"They led Jesus away"—right after He had been arrested—"to the high priest; and all the chief priests and the elders and the scribes gathered together." That means the whole Sanhedrin was present. "Peter had followed Him at a distance, right into the courtyard of the high priest; and he was sitting with the officers and warming himself at the fire."

Now, just a little bit about Peter—he's going to occupy our time next week. You can only imagine what was going through his mind as he sneaks into this gathering. He even had to talk his way in. He loved Jesus, didn't want to leave Him—he wanted to be with Him, and yet he hadn't learned to handle his own pride and impetuosity. Remember, he had promised—he wasn't going to let Jesus die; he wasn't going to abandon Him. He would have been a lot smarter to stay away, but that's not Peter's style. So we'll see about him next time. But notice: Peter and the rest of the crowd were in this "courtyard of the high priest"—that's the center area with the various residences surrounding; it was all part of the same complex.

So the formal so-called trial gets started. It was illegal, not to mention immoral. The whole thing that was going on was wrong. According to Jewish law, no trial was allowed at night. No execution was ever allowed on a feast day or a holiday, like Passover. And according to the laws of the Pharisees, no case that had the potential of involving capital punishment could begin *even on the eve* of a major holiday. Add to that: Jesus has already been arrested as the result of a bribe, and they had taken the money improperly from the temple treasury to pay off Judas. Also, a Jewish law did not permit a sentence to be pronounced until the day *after* the accused had been convicted. So you've got a wrongly-arrested guy, illegally arrested, with a kangaroo court going on; and from beginning to end, it goes on in three hours, on the day of a feast. There's just about approximately *every single thing* wrong with that. But if you're going to break *that many laws*, it's no problem to bring in a few false witnesses! You see, it was a foregone conclusion! The whole purpose of this sham of a trial was to kill Jesus; that's what they were doing. It wasn't a trial; it was a *murder!*

So let's look at these False Witness. Verses 55 through 59—"Now the chief priests and the whole Council kept trying to obtain testimony"—so what are they doing? These are the *judges* going out, seeking testimony to say a certain thing; they are *suborning perjury*, if you want to use modern terms! They're looking for people to lie! They were "trying to obtain testimony against Jesus to put Him to death, and they were not finding any. For many were giving false testimony against Him, but their testimony was not consistent. Some stood up and began to give false testimony against Him, saying, 'We heard Him say, "I will destroy this temple made with hands, and in three days I will build another made without hands." ' Not even in this respect was their testimony consistent."

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They were having a real problem! Even the people that *twisted* what Jesus said couldn't make their twistums match up with each other. It had to be frustrating for them. So these insanely jealous, hypocritical spiritual leaders just couldn't stand the fact that Jesus had won over so many followers by His teaching. They were enraged that He had exposed their hypocrisy and challenged their authority in public. And now, they're having trouble getting people to help them with murdering Him.

The accusation that finally seemed to stick was that Jesus was a defamer of the temple. They conflated what He said in John 2:19, where He said: "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up." He was referring to "His body" (vs. 20)—He was talking about His resurrection. He *had* mentioned the destruction of the temple—*that* was going take place in A.D. 70—and they kind of mixed those two things together and changed the words a little bit, and that's how they got the accusation that they said could stick—close enough to validate for themselves what they had already decided they wanted to do: the death sentence in search of a crime worthy of death. Truth meant *nothing* to those guys that night; facts were irrelevant.

Now, I would point out: There *is* something that came up that night that's worthy of a death sentence. What is it? The *witnesses* should have been executed. If they had obeyed their own law, Deuteronomy 19:16-19—"If a malicious witness rises up against a man to accuse him of wrongdoing, then both the men who have the dispute shall stand before the Lord, before the priests and the judges who will be in office in those days. The judges shall investigate thoroughly, and if the witness is a false witness and he has accused his brother falsely, then you shall do to him just as he had intended to do to his brother. Thus you shall purge the evil from among you." They were trying to kill Jesus and they were lying, so what's supposed to happen to them? They are supposed to be executed.

And by the way: I *know* that's in Deuteronomy; I *know* that's in the Old Testament. But I also know that God doesn't change (Mal. 3:6; Jas. 1:17b). We aren't Israel; we don't take our cases before the judges. But I have seen, *in real life*, people tell lies about other believers and have *exactly* happen to *them* what they thought should have happened to the one that they lied about (see Prov. 26:27; cf. Est. 7:10; Ps. 109:17). This is serious stuff. Those who accused Jesus of a capital crime should have gotten capital punishment.

The Sentence In Search Of A Crime—It's a Foregone Conclusion. There are the False Witnesses; and that brings us to the punchline here: The Fuming High Priest—Caiaphas. Mark Chapter 14, Verses 60 and 61—"The high priest stood up and came forward and questioned Jesus, saying, 'Do You not answer? What is it that these men are testifying against You?' But He kept silent and did not answer. Again the high priest was questioning Him, and saying to Him, 'Are You the Christ, the Son of the Blessed One?' "

Now, Jesus could have refuted the lies; I mean, He knew the truth, right? But He also knew, that would make no difference, and He remained silent—and therefore was the most dignified one of the whole crowd; He refrained from giving any hint of credibility to these proceedings. But His silence made Caiaphas mad, and so Caiaphas, essentially, put Jesus under oath.

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Matthew—writing for the Jews—gives more of the little insights into aspects of the Jewish law, and we read over in Matthew 26:63 how it was that Caiaphas, in essence, forced Jesus to be under oath (see Num. 5:19, 21). Mark didn't include these words, but at this point, "The high priest said to Him, 'I adjure You by the living God'—in other words, under an oath, so that you'll be punished if you don't tell the truth—"that You tell us whether You are the Christ, the Son of God.' " Now, that's interesting! I thought it was all about Him saying He was going to destroy the temple! *Now*, all of a sudden, it's about what He *taught* and who He *was*. Now, if you're in a real courtroom with any integrity whatsoever, if somebody made such a quick, total change of subject and charges, the defense would object on the grounds of logical and legal whiplash! He's changing what they were talking about here.

But *this* time, under oath, Jesus spoke simply the truth, and He rubbed in by including words about the Messiah from Daniel 7:13 and 14. Mark 14:62—"Jesus said, 'I am.' " Oh—Remember the last time He said "I Am"? He could have knocked them all on their backsides again! But He's saying, "Yes, I am the Messiah." He said, "I am; and you shall see"—and here are the words from Daniel 7 that refer to the Messiah—"You shall see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of Power, and coming with the clouds of heaven."

So what is His answer when Caiaphas says, "Are You the Christ, the Son of the Blessed One?" His answer is: "Well, yes, I am the Messiah—like I've been saying and showing you for over three years (Jn. 4:25-26; 15:24). Yes, I am the Son of God. Yes, as a matter of fact, I *am* God (see Jn. 5:18; 8:58)—at least you heard what I *said*, even though you reject it." And then, His words from Daniel 7: "And you haven't seen anything yet. It's going to be a lot different when I come next time, in power and glory, and set up My kingdom, and you and your ilk are completely excluded." (Lk. 13:28)

Well, at that moment I'm sure Caiaphas had to be giddy with his delight. They finally had Jesus in their clutches. They hadn't caused a riot, because they did it all under the cover of darkness—big, brave, honest men that they were. And now, they had a twisted trumped-up charge that they could pin on Him. Never mind his total disregard for truth. Never mind that this high priest—who was supposed to be the great spiritual leader of Israel (Mal. 2:7)—is driven by murderous rage and jealousy (Mat. 27:18). Never mind that justice has *nothing* to do with the decision that they reached. Caiaphas—he was going to make the most of this moment. He was the high priest; he was *masterful* at keeping up appearances; his toolbox of hypocrisy was well equipped, and he put it all on display.

He leads the Sanhedrin Glee Club in a great performance of hypocrisy here: Verses 63 and 64—"Tearing his clothes"—why would you do that? (see Lev. 21:10) Well, that was a symbolic way of saying, "We've just heard blasphemy!" You would tear your clothes; you're showing righteous indignation; you're showing anger at lies; you're siding with God because He has been demeaned somehow. Never mind, Jesus *is* God, and He was telling the truth! *They* said it was blasphemy. So it says: "Tearing his clothes, the high priest said, 'What further need do we have of witnesses? You have heard the blasphemy; how does it seem to you?' And they all condemned Him to be deserving of death."

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Do you see what they did? Their Messiah came. They rejected Him. They opposed Him publicly, at every turn, for over three years. They plotted for over a year, how they were going to snatch Him and murder Him. They bribed Judas to betray Him. They arrested Him without cause. They suborned false witnesses. They accepted false testimony. They came to a false conclusion. Then, they twisted even the testimony that they heard, to change their false conclusion to a *different* false conclusion. And *this* time, "We don't even need witnesses! You all heard it!"

So, in case you have any doubts that the leaders of the Jews had deteriorated to the lowest possible point of apostasy and false religion, remember: their high priests is still wearing his priestly getup; and probably the others who were there wore theirs. All the outward trappings of their pomp and their *supposed* spirituality—and what are they doing? They're condemning the Son of God. Here's how they treated their Messiah: Verse 65—"Some began to spit at Him"—you know, I *don't think* that's in the job description of a high priest...or a low priest, or anybody else. "Some began to spit at Him, and to blindfold Him, and to beat Him with their fists, and to say to Him, 'Prophecy!' " Harmonize that with Matthew 26:68; they hit Him with fists when He had His head covered and was blindfolded, and then said, "Prophecy to us, You Christ; who is the one who hit You?" He *could have*. And by the way, He could have deflected every one of their blows, so that as they swung at Him, it recoiled and hit *them* in the face. He didn't, because He took upon Himself what we deserve (Is. 53:5-8; Rom. 5:6; 1 Pet. 3:18). It says: "And the officers received Him with slaps in the face."

Centuries before this, Isaiah had predicted how Israel would one day—those alive at that day—come to faith in Christ (see Rom. 11:26-27), and look back on this (Zech. 12:10; 13:1); and we have that recorded in Isaiah 53, Verse 3—"He was despised and forsaken of men"—the Sanhedrin despise Him; His own guys were in hiding—"A man of sorrows and acquainted with grief; and like one from whom men hide their face, He was despised, and we did not esteem Him."

Well, that ends the Jewish phase of Jesus's trial. He endured it all—not because *He* deserved it; He endured it all because of your sin and mine (Heb. 2:10, 14-15, 17). It was going to get even worse—much worse—but before we move to that Roman phase of the trial, we're going to follow it as Mark does; we're going to see how Peter was dealt with that night; and we will see that unfold next week, Lord willing.

But, where do you think *you* would have been that night? Wouldn't it be nice to say you would have stood there with Him? Well...none of the Apostles did, and the one who tried wound up more ashamed than the rest of them. Remember, there was even that young man after the 11 had scattered, and Peter was there, and there was that young guy in the garden; and when push came to shove, he was more willing to run through the streets naked than to be identified with Jesus. We would have been just as shameful. But, that's *our Savior* going there for us (Gal. 2:20b). The leaders of the Jews were hell-bent on maintaining their power; they were just like Pilate and Herod Antipas, except that they pretended to be spiritual about it—Pilate and Herod were just political and military hacks.

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What's *your* style? What is it that comes to *your* mind when you think about doing this? I bet, if I said, "What sin do you battle most often?"—you probably wouldn't have to take a whole lot of time to answer that, would you? You'd say, "Well, let me get out my list!" But do you crumble under pressure, like Peter did? Are you a phony like Judas was? Do you do whatever is expedient to keep your own power and influence, like the politicians did? Do you profess to follow Jesus, but you look for places to hide rather than standing firm for your faith? Look: He died *for all of us* so that we can stand complete in Him today! (Col. 2:10)

Whatever it is that comes to your mind when I say, "What's your favorite sin? Or, "What's the one you battle the most?"—I can tell you one thing for sure; you need to know that what is demanded as our response here is to understand: Christ died for *your* sins; He didn't deserve *any* of this. You and I deserve it, and worse. But He endured it all so that He could bear the just and full eternal penalty for your sins so that you can stand today, *completely justified* in His righteousness (Rom. 8:1, 33-34; 2 Cor. 5:21; Phil. 3:9).

What *is* our response? If tears come to your eyes, don't feel badly about that! That's what He did for you. Ah, but what will you do when you go out of here? There'll be somebody who might want to put you on the spot and say, "Ah! *You're* one of those Christians!" What are you going to do in *that* moment? What are you going to do when it's *you* in the crosshairs, like Peter was; or *you're* the one just kind of sneaking around watching what's going on, and somebody says, "Oh, you were with those Christians!"—are you going to let them grab your sheet, and you're just going to run away, in your shame and spiritual nakedness? I sure hope not! This demands a response. Only *you* know what the response is that *you* need to make.

Let's pray:

Our Father, how we thank You for Your clarity in showing us who our Savior is, and what He did for us. And Father, we know we need to respond. Yes, we need to make that big response of turning to You and embracing the Savior. Most here have done that, I'm sure. But we need to respond to You every day, Lord: "Yes, I will speak Your truth in love. Yes, I will stand firm. Yes, I thank You for the riches of Your grace, and for every spiritual blessing in the heavenlies, so that whatever man may do to me, I am safe in Your hands."

Lord, You know the need of each heart here. Please, don't let anyone go away without calling out to, embracing, loving, and following this wonderful, crucified, risen Savior. Make us faithful, we pray. And as we so often sing in the New Year: May all who come behind us find us faithful. Make it so, in Jesus name. Amen.

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THE SIX PHASES OF THE TRIAL OF JESUS
Sourced from *A Harmony of the Gospels*
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Religious Trial

First Jewish Phase, before Annas	John 18:12-24
Second Jewish Phase, before Caiaphas	Matthew 26:57-68 Mark 14:53-65 Luke 22:54
Third Jewish Phase, before the Sanhedrin	Matthew 27:1-2 Mark 15:1 Luke 22:66-71

Civil Trial

First Roman Phase, before Pilate	Matthew 27:11-14 Mark 15:1-5 Luke 23:1-5 John 18:28-38
Second Roman Phase, before Herod	Luke 23:6-12
Third Roman Phase, before Pilate	Matthew 27:15-26 Mark 15:6-15 Luke 23:13-25 John 18:39 - 19:16