

Mark 14:53-72: "...The Faithful Witness"

Intro: Fear is a part of everyday life – NO FEAR

Well here we come to a text that is all about fear and lack of fear and it all swirls around the topic of being a faithful witness to the truth!

Context: Here is the context, the hour has come – **And we will now get a glimpse of how Jesus will suffer not only at the hands of His enemies but from those closest to Him** – *As we consider what the Savior has done on our behalf and the depths of His love for us we have to come face to face with the REALITY THAT HIS SUFFERING WAS NOT ONLY PHYSICAL BUT IT WAS RELATIONAL, and mental, and most of all spiritual and yet it is all a part of God's plan for the redemption of the World*

- Mark now through another sandwich will draw our attention to 2 different trials:
 - o 1) **1) The most unjust trial the World has ever seen: Jesus before the Sanhedrin** – *My dad used to say often when we were growing up "Life isn't fair" and there can hardly be a better illustration of that than this trial*
 - o 2) **2) And Peter below in the courtyard** – *We will see both trials have witnesses and confession but they could not be more different* – As Mark will draw our attention now to the theme of WITNESS and it will become front and center as the word witness is used in various forms 7 times in less than 9 verses!
 - o **And what we will behold in these verses will be simultaneously horrifyingly violent but also strikingly beautiful** – *As CJ Mahaney says it, "as we see the Lion of Judah become the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the World!"* – All of this as we move one step closer to Golgotha

I. See the faithful witness (14:53-65)

(READ 53 – 54) Shortly before daybreak on Good Friday the mob of religious leaders and guards who had been led by Judas to Jesus now bring him before the Sanhedrin – *The Sanhedrin was a group of 71 including the High Priest (who Matthew tells us was Caiaphas) that consisted of 3 groups: 1) Chief Priests (mainly Sadducees) 2) Elders (mainly Pharisees) and 3) Scribes (Teachers of the Law)*

- The wording here is an indication that the Sanhedrin has come together in order to try this one they consider a troubler of Israel – *Under Roman rule this council was the highest Jewish authority but they could not impose Capital Punishment because only Rome had that authority!*
- Peter is following at a distance and Matthew says he follows Jesus to see what he thinks is the end as he stays below in the courtyard of the High Priest's home – *Now this should be alarming to us because merely a few hours before Peter had said he even be willing to die for Jesus and now he sits at safe distance to observe the trial of the man he loves* – One commentator said: "Peter has forsaken costly discipleship for safe observation"

(READ V. 55-61a) The farce trial begins and we know it is a farce with the words "*seeking testimony against him to put him to death*" – **They have a verdict in search of some evidence** – And from the outset Mark lets the readers know this is a kangaroo court because they cannot find any testimony against Him

- In great irony many come forward to break the 10 Commandments by bearing false witness against Jesus but even their false testimony will not agree – *Those who were to uphold the law should have been outraged at this violation of the Law but they would let nothing get in their way for their pound of flesh!*

Now we see more specifically at least one false charge brought against Him that He said he would destroy the temple – Now this is a serious charge as the temple was the center for their life and religion – *As close as I can come would be something where someone said they were going to burn all the bibles in the US and blow up the White House*

- So this was serious and if true would demand capital punishment according to Jewish Law – *The problem is that though Jesus said something similar He did not say He would destroy the Temple – He did say both that His body which He likened to the Temple would be destroyed and that the Temple would be destroyed (Mark 13) and but not that He would be the one destroying it!*
- But Jesus here is guilty until proven innocent but even on this charge their testimony does not agree – **In every generation there are attempts to discredit Jesus** – *And Mark is going to great lengths to show you cannot discredit him*

Now the High Priest who must be irritated that nothing is sticking take matters in to his own hands and directly questions Jesus and he is frustrated that Jesus wont answer – **Jesus in this moment is fulfilling something written of Him 700 years before by the Prophet Isaiah as He is silent:** *“He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth; like a lamb that is led to the slaughter, and like a sheep that before its shearers is silent, so he opened not his mouth.”* (Isaiah 53:7)

This whole thing is a farce, and unfair, as nearly every detail grossly violates Jewish legal rules prescribed in the Mishnah:

- 1) Jesus is never given a defense attorney as would have been demanded but is expected to defend Himself – *Interestingly there will be no mediator for the mediator!*
- 2) Capital trials were supposed to take at least 2 days so that each judge could take a night to sleep on what they have heard and they were not to take place at Night
- 3) The trial didn’t take place at the Temple Precincts but at the HP house
- 4) The fact that the eyewitnesses contradicted each other should have ended the trial – *It was demanded in the Law that in a Capital Case there had to be at least 2 witnesses that agreed against the charged so that they would never wrongly execute someone*
- 5) For someone, as Jesus will be, to be charged with Blasphemy they had to curse God’s name
- 6) Only Rome could give a capital charge

They so badly wanted Him dead that at every turn they short-circuited the law in order to expedite Jesus’ execution – *Josephus the Jewish Historian tells us they do something similar when they try James, the brother of our Lord*

- So we must ask, why? Well he threatens them, their authority, status, position in society and if what He says is true it will shake up their world (and it will shake up yours!) – *He indeed is a radical threat to their way of life but for their good as He has come to make the Temple obsolete by giving give man even greater access to God than the Temple ever could and to give infinitely greater forgiveness than the Temple sacrifices could give as the final sacrifice to put an end to sacrifices – They miss what kind of Messiah He is and what kind of Messiah they need – do you?*

(Read V. 61b) Now the High Priest takes on the role of prosecutor with a direct question which Matthew tells us he asks Jesus under oath – **The question he ask is what the whole book of Mark is about** – *Are you the Christ, the Son of the Blessed?* (this was simply a way to refer to God without using His name – Yahweh)

- Jesus is silent no longer as the faithful witness in the face of a farce and persecution – **And feel the force and weight of his answer (READ V. 62A)** *“I AM!”* – Jesus is unambiguous terms and with a clear answer connectes Himself to Yahweh who appeared to Moses and said I am!

- But Jesus doesn't stop there **(READ V. 62B)** as He connects Himself with the Son of Man from Daniel 7 and the King of Psalm 110 who will be given all Dominion and Power – *This is striking cause up until this point Jesus has shied away giving out the Messianic secret but the veil is now lifted* – But not only does he lift the veil on the messianic secret he turns from who He is to what He will do in giving the watching judges a holy warning that He will be returning in Judgment in the future by appealing to Daniel 7/Psalm 110

He is informing them that though they sit in judgment over him there is a day coming when you will not judge me but I will judge you – *Have you ever imagined what it will be like in judgment when Caiaphas comes face to face with the one he spit on*

- Up until this moment he has wisely veiled his identity because he knew they anticipated the wrong kind of Messiah and missed that the Christ must suffer – *And the mystery throughout the book has been “Who is this man?” and the tension has built to this moment but it remains a mystery no longer: I am the Messiah!*
- Why lift the veil now? *It is simple the hour has come to drink the cup of God's wrath and so Jesus now fully reveals His identity that He has not come to overthrow Rome but to offer His life as a ransom for many* – And He boldly states this knowing full well that His response will seal His death
- Mark Strauss notes, *“This audacious claim guarantees His execution!”* – *And we should be thankful because our eternal destiny hangs in the balance* – Revelation 1 calls Jesus the faithful witness and this is so because he tells the truth regardless of the consequences and He does so for you and me!

(READ V. 63-64) The HP immediately sees this as Blasphemous and a sure guilty verdict and in act that symbolized horror and shock he tore his clothes – *I couldn't help but think about MONGOLIAN WRESTLING COACHES who stripped down in protest at the Olympics in shock and outrage*

- The rest of the Sanhedrin follows his lead in condemning Jesus as worthy of death – *Sadly they give no attention to whether or not Jesus was telling the truth* – This was considered blasphemy because he claimed to have majesty and authority that belong to God alone but it could only be Blasphemy if it what He said was not true!
- It is very popular, especially among men like Bart Eherman to say Jesus never claimed to be divine – *These men knew exactly what Jesus was claiming here as they did in John 8 where He said before Abraham was I am* – Make no mistake about what Jesus is claiming!

Now things move from unjust to shameful as their anger and malice toward Him is no longer restrained **(READ V. 65-66)** – *(This was hard to study) Just imagine this scene and what He endured for sinners like us!*

- **They spit on Him:** *This isn't the guards at first this is the Shepherds of Israel with an act that was just as gross and disrespectful then as it is now* – This is just one of the things He endured for you!
- **They Blindfolded Him and struck Him:** *And once again our Lord returns to silence even as they mock him asking Him to prophecy* – *This is quite unbecoming and shocking behavior by the religious leaders and Law experts* – Can you just imagine a scene in any of our court rooms where the judge declares the man guilty then spits on him and punches him in the face?
- *The guards now follow in the steps of the abuse of this man they have observed from the Leaders* – *As they received this kind, innocent, loving man with their fists* – What a miscarriage of justice and it is only getting started!

This was hard to study as you see the ugliness of sin on full display but you also see the love of God for sinners on full display – *The cross (and all that led up to it) were necessary and now as the rejection of Christ is on full display we should be freshly amazed at His grace that He loved us enough to be condemned*

in our place spat upon, beaten, mocked, humiliated, and murdered for us – Oh treasure His work for us on the Cross as He is Stricken, Smitten and afflicted in your place and all of this predicted 700 years before!

- **(READ Isa. 53:3 and Isa. 50:6)** – *Ultimately, Jesus did this willingly for you and me as strangely enough after all the false testimonies against Him it is His own that put Jesus in this place* – SEE THE FAITHFUL WITNESS!

II. See the unfaithful witness (14:66-72)

(READ v. 66-68) Now we turn to a different sort of trial taking place below the room where Jesus is being tried as Peter will undergo examination from a Servant Girl – *Sometimes in our day we say things like, “I’ve got your back or I’d take a bullet for you” and just a few hours before Peter had pledged this sort of love and devotion to His friend and then along comes a servant girl* – Now put yourself in Peter’s shoes as the man you left everything to follow is above you being humiliated and now you have a chance to be a faithful friend and witness!

- But Peter doesn’t have Jesus’ back and seemingly fearful for his life he denies knowing Jesus or he essentially says something like we might today, *“I have no idea what you are talking about”* –
- He plays dumb and then in order **TO FURTHER REMOVE HIMSELF FROM JESUS** and the little girl he moves away toward the gate – *As my Dad a long time minister of the gospel said of this text, “THE ROCK IS BEGINNING TO CRACK!”*

(READ v. 69-70a) The servant girl is persistent and now directs others to Peter as well – *And again he denies and in the tense of the verb here indicates that he to use common language “went off” in this 2nd denial AS THE DENIAL INTENSIFIED!*

(READ V. 70b-72) Finally, several begin to chime in noticing because of his accent that he was a Jesus follower – *And I am afraid if you are familiar with this story you can miss the gravity of what is happening in his 3rd denial* – He so wants to break from Jesus that not only does deny him BUT HE BEGINS TO SWEAR AND CURSE as the intensity of his denials only increase!

- Peter uses the word Anathematize here literally saying God strike me down if I know this man – **Oh this is tough:** *The man you had left everything to follow who at this moment is right above you being humiliated and beaten and you wont even acknowledge that you know Him to the point that he wouldn’t even mention Jesus’ name* – WHAT JUDAS DID FOR PROFIT, PETER DID FOR FREE!
- How much has changed in less than four hours for Peter to go from I will die if I have to for you to not even uttering His name in the face of a little girl? – *This is a warning to us and a question we must grapple with* – Have you ever made promises to God that go out the window during times of fear?

He’s immediately confronted with his betrayal as the Rooster crows a second time and he is drawn back to the moment when Jesus had predicted all of this – *And Luke tells us at this moment Peter and Jesus make eye contact and Peter is so overwhelmed now that he like Jesus in the garden falls to the ground and he beings to weep* – Have you ever had a moment when you were so overwhelmed by your sin that you fell to the ground weeping?

- In many ways this scene is as gut-wrenching as the one taking place above – *Because while this shameful abuse and humiliation of Jesus is taking place His friend is ashamed to even mention His name* – Oh I have tried all week to put myself in PETER’S SHOES because we are not above this but thankfully as we will see this is not the end of the story for Peter or for us!

The differences in these 2 trials and the 2 witnesses could not be more stark as our Brother Mark highlights the sin of Peter and the grace of Christ: (GO QUICKLY!!!)

- 1) Both are being questioned but Jesus is being questioned by the most powerful Jewish leaders and stands strong while Peter is being questioned by a servant girl and cowers
- 2) Both are being charged with something that will get them in trouble however the charges against Jesus are false while the charges against Peter are true – *In a sense Jesus is attacked by false witnesses yet gives the truth while Peter is attacked by true witnesses but gives a false confession*
- 3) Both respond to the charges however Jesus declares the truth while Peter denies the truth
- 4) Both are near guards but Jesus will tell the truth despite the consequences while Peter will deny the truth to avoid the consequences
- 5) Both are bringing a curse upon themselves though Jesus is condemned unfairly and for others while Peter actually brings the curse upon himself
- 6) Both made predictions but everything Jesus has said comes true while all Peter said turns out as lies

One Implication for us: Peter without ever facing a formal trial denies Jesus without ever even using His name – *This warns us that a faithful witness to Jesus can most often is to be found (and can be most easily betrayed) in the every day actions and words of our life* – It is in the every day (not necessarily the dramatic) that we are called to be faithful to Christ at the water cooler, the coffee shop, the park, our neighborhood!

- **What kind of witness will you be? – *Lets not be to harsh on Peter as any of us could walk his path – But lets determine now before the heat hits what sort of witness we will be by setting our eyes on the faithful witness who gives us both the power and example to be faithful!***

Concluding Applications:

- 1) **There is forgiveness at the Cross – *The cross can silence our failure and our denials and our rightful condemnation* – He was spat upon, mocked, murdered and condemned so we would not have to be**

When you feel condemnation coming on don't look to the Rooster but to the Cross because your righteousness is there – *We cannot come away from this text and not be overwhelmed that forgiveness is ours in Christ* – Jesus ultimately drowned in His own blood for Peter's denial and for yours what grace (which leads to our 2nd application!)

- 2) **Let the substitutionary work of Christ make you a faithful witness – *Only when you realize that forgiveness is possible because another took your place will you have the power you need to be a faithful witness* – Everything turns around for Peter after the Cross and Resurrection!**

This passage has everything to do with Christ's substitutionary work on behalf of sinners – *Mark has beautifully shown that Jesus was on trial in Peter's place (and in the leaders' place), and in our place and would take the ultimate punishment not for His sins but for the sins of Peter, and ours* – Jesus experience human injustice in order to satisfy divine justice so that Peter will not ultimately be condemned for his betrayal (oh that's grace!)

- **In a sense, in this scene God stood in the dock while humans sat in judgment over Him but God substituted Himself for humanity in that dock and took the punishment humanity deserved – *This is the greatest news in all the world Jesus gets what you deserve and we get what He deserves when He became our scape goat on the tree (RG LEE!)***

Believer – *You should marvel at His work on your behalf and LET IT INCREASE YOUR AFFECTIONS FOR HIM and make you a more faithful witness for Him!*

- **Unbeliever:** This is the message we want you to hear most, there is forgiveness available because Jesus has put Himself where sinners should have been and taken the judgment that they deserve – **So please hear me you will face judgment when Jesus comes on the clouds and you will either face Him with Jesus as your mediator or on your own** – *Our plea is flee to Jesus by crying out LORD HAVE MERCY UPON ME A SINNER PLEASE SEE ME IN CHRIST AND NOT ON MY OWN and I promise you that if you make that cry maybe even right where you sit in faith He will hear you and you will be found in Christ!*
- 3) **Finally, Let the Resurrection make you a fearless witness** – It would not help us to leave the story here with Peter, as Paul Harvey used to say we need to hear the rest of the story

Something radically changes in Peter so much so that in about 50 days he will be back in front of the Sanhedrin threatened with his life – **Now being told to stop speaking about Jesus the one who in this passage he wouldn't even name** – **What changed in those 40 days or so?** *Well, Jesus wasn't dead anymore!*

- **The end of Peter's story isn't his collapse after the Rooster crowed** – *Jesus would meet him in Galilee after the Resurrection and would embrace him and restore Him* – JESUS IN HIS GRACE WILL NOT LET PETER BE DEFINED BY HIS PAST!

Everything changed for Peter after the Resurrection and ironically the very thing he was afraid of: Arrest, beatings, and crucifixion he would later willingly face – **John records for us Peter's restoration and but also Jesus' prediction of the end for him:** *"Truly, truly, I say to you, when you were young, you used to dress yourself and walk wherever you wanted, but when you are old, you will stretch out your hands, and another will dress you and carry you where you do not want to go."* (This he said to show by what kind of death he was to glorify God.) *And after saying this he said to him, "Follow me."* (John 21:18-19) THESE HAVE ALWAYS BEEN HAUNTING WORDS FOR ME THAT YOU WILL BE CARRIED WHERE YOU DO NOT WANT TO GO

- **Tradition tells Peter would ultimately die the martyr's death** – **Clement speaks of his death saying:** *"Let us take the noble examples of our own generation. Through jealousy and envy the greatest and most just pillars of the Church were persecuted, and came even unto death. ... Peter, through unjust envy, endured not one or two but many labors, and at last, having delivered his testimony, departed unto the place of glory due to him."*
- **And it is said by the church father Tertullian that Peter endured a passion like his Lord and that he was bound to the Cross** – **Legend has it he was crucified upside down because he did not believe himself worthy to be crucified like our Lord.**

What changed for Peter? *What if a man you loved and you left everything to follow was humiliated, beaten, crucified and died for you came back to life again?* WOULDN'T IT GIVE YOU A NEW VIEW OF DEATH?

- **Jesus though unjustly condemned here would later be vindicated by the Father as on a Sunday morning like this one He vacated a Palestinian Tomb never to be touched by death again** – **And ultimately His promise to you (and He keeps His promises) is that on the other side of death there is New Life**
- **If you see the Resurrection with eyes of faith you will understand that even if Islamic Jihadists cut your head off for your faithful witness** – **That's ok because Jesus puts heads back** – Let the Resurrection make you a fearless witness because you are one that knows death is not the end of the story for you!

There is a long line of saints who have stared down death with resolve as faithful witnesses to the gospel because of their hope in the Resurrection – ***In the reign of bloody Mary some 288 English Protestants would be killed for their faith***

- **Famously Hugh Latimer as he was being burned at the stake turned to his friend Ridley and said:** *“Be of good cheer, Ridley, and play the man. We shall this day by God’s grace, light up such a candle in England, as I trust will never be put out”*
- **At almost the same exact time as John Bradford was being burned at the stake he turned to his friend John Leaf and said:** *“Be of good comfort, my brother, for we will have a merry supper with the Lord tonight!”* and both are said to have lifted up their hands and prayed as they burned!

So what kind of witness will you be? *The good news believer is that there is forgiveness for our failures and our Peter type collapses* – Oh what it must have been like for Peter when he saw Jesus again for the first time!

- **And there is power in the work of Christ to make us faithful witnesses:** *“Be of good cheer brothers and play the man... Resurrection is coming! Be of good cheer sisters and play the woman... Resurrection is coming...Soon we will have a merry supper with the Lord!*