

The Abandoned King

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[0 : 0 0] Well, in our Bible reading this afternoon from Mark chapter 14, Jesus is on trial despite his innocence. He is found guilty and he is condemned to death. And so as we journey through the Gospel of Mark, as we have been doing on these Sunday afternoons, Jesus is moving towards his death.

And that is the very reason why Jesus came. Last week, if you were here, we looked at Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane, forsaken by his friends and facing God-forsakenness as he hung on the cross.

And now Jesus is on trial and he's being judged by those who want to condemn him to death. And that's what we're going to consider today. Because while Jesus was on trial back then, there's a sense in which people still continue to put Jesus on trial today.

In other words, they like to sit in judgment on Jesus. And yet it's a dangerous thing to do because while Jesus is being judged in this, our text, this afternoon, Jesus also claims, you would have read, that he is the ultimate judge.

And so it is a dangerous thing when it comes to sitting in judgment on Jesus. Because really, if he is the judge, it is his verdict on us that matters more than our verdict on him.

[1 : 1 9] So this afternoon, we're going to look at three simple points that are up on the screen. First of all, Jesus is judged. Secondly, Jesus is the judge. And then thirdly, what is the verdict by way of application for us?

So first of all, Jesus is judged. Now, as we set the scene here, our reading takes place at night, the night before Jesus was crucified. He'd been betrayed by Judas.

He had been arrested by the soldiers. And then he's taken for immediate trial by the religious authorities. And so just look at verse 53 again. We read, Now, the normal practice, procedure, and protocol for a trial was completely ignored here.

Here, standard Jewish jurisprudence was just chucked out the window. And so Mark tells us here that all the chief priests, the elders, the teachers of the law, they all came together.

They were all set for a nighttime trial with a crowd of witnesses. Well, why? Well, if you look verse 55, verse 56, 57, verse 60, what had happened was the religious authorities had already reached their verdict on Jesus.

[2 : 3 6] So they were looking for evidence against him, verse 55, for people to testify falsely against him, verse 56, verse 57, false testimony against him, and then people in verse 60 bringing testimony against him.

So all they wanted to do, because they'd given their verdict on Jesus, was simply to establish some charges against him in order to condemn him. So verse 55 says, The chief priests and the whole Sanhedrin were looking for evidence against Jesus, so they could put him to death, but they did not find any.

Now, the Sanhedrin was the high court, if you like, of the Jewish nation, made up of all of these people, chief priests, elders, teachers of the law, and the high priest would preside over the Sanhedrin.

He was acting like the judge, if you like, and they had the strictest rules to guard against any kind of miscarriage of justice. And yet here they are, arranging this extraordinary trial at night with the intention of reaching a guilty verdict on Jesus.

And so their goal was simply to condemn Jesus to death. But, of course, they couldn't condemn Jesus to death as a religious court. They would need the Roman governor to impose the death penalty on Jesus.

[3 : 58] And so the plan was to get Jesus handed over to the governor to be killed. And so they rented a crowd to testify against Jesus with witnesses to corroborate with their evil plan.

Verse 56 says, Many testified falsely against him, but their statements did not agree. Now, it was crucial for their justice system. It was crucial for the testimony of any witnesses to agree. But in this case, we read that didn't happen. And yet that didn't stop them. These religious leaders were prepared to kill an innocent man. Verse 57, Yet even then their testimony did not agree. So accusing Jesus of destroying the temple or saying he would destroy the temple was a serious accusation. And yet Jesus never actually said this. Jesus did predict that the temple would be destroyed.

We read that in chapter 13. Now, no doubt his words were twisted about the temple to be a threat against the temple. Because if there was a threat against the temple, it would sound like some kind of rebellion.

[5 : 18] And Jesus would therefore be a threat to public order. In which case, the Roman governor would be concerned if such a thing would happen. And yet still their testimony didn't agree.

And had it been any other trial, it would have been thrown out of court. But not this one. So Jesus' accusers would rather lie to condemn him to death.

Dishonest and deceptive when it came to reaching a verdict on Jesus. Now, before we move on, many people will still continue to judge Jesus today.

What I mean is, they may put Jesus on trial, as it were, they may pass judgment on Jesus. And yet the real truth about Jesus can matter very little in their assessment of him.

Because it is easy to falsely accuse Jesus or judge Jesus in order to reject him. It is easy to have a verdict on Jesus without really ever having investigated Jesus.

[6 : 22] It's quite simple to prejudge Jesus thinking he is like this, when really, in reality, he isn't. And perhaps you're here this afternoon and you really are still investigating Jesus and you want to find out more about him.

You're still not quite sure who he is, why he came, or what it means to follow him or be a Christian. And maybe you have misjudged Jesus. Maybe the Jesus that we find here in the Gospel of Mark is not the Jesus that you have in your head.

In which case, we need to see and discover who the real Jesus is. Now, I guess many of you here this afternoon have seen the hit musical Hamilton. I do know that some of you have actually been to London and you have seen the musical, the show in person.

And Hamilton, not the place Hamilton, nobody would write a show about the place Hamilton. But Hamilton, or the story of Hamilton, is about Alexander Hamilton, who is one of the least known founding fathers of America.

And yet, despite its universal praise as a great musical, the Hamilton writer, Lin-Manuel Miranda, he's been criticized over the historical accuracy of Hamilton.

[7 : 37] Have you heard that? So, shock horror, some of what you see in the play isn't really true. And to some extent, of course, a musical is a musical and every detail doesn't need to be factually and accurately correct.

And yet, when it comes to investigating Jesus, we do need to get Jesus right. We can't get Jesus wrong by misjudging him. Because if we misjudge Jesus, it would be a mistake.

Why would it be a mistake? Well, it would be a mistake because Jesus says he is the judge. And that's our second point. So, first of all, Jesus is judged. Secondly, Jesus is the judge.

So, the trial of Jesus was a complete farce. The religious authorities tried to condemn him. They couldn't get the result they wanted. And so, the high priest comes, the judge, he comes and he takes his turn, verse 60 and 61.

Then the high priest stood up before them and asked Jesus, are you not going to answer? What is this testimony that these men are bringing against you? But Jesus remained silent and gave no answer.

[8 : 47] Now, the high priest should have been the judge. But in his desperation to have Jesus killed, he turns into the chief prosecutor. That's a role that he takes on.

So, he wanted Jesus to answer him, but Jesus remained silent. Now, Jesus was fulfilling the prophecy of Isaiah chapter 53, the suffering servant, where we read that he was oppressed and afflicted, yet he did not open his mouth.

He was led like a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before its shearers is silent, so he did not open his mouth. So, Jesus is fulfilling what the scriptures had said about him.

And so, the high priest tries again. He puts Jesus on the spot and he asks him a direct question.

Are you the Messiah, the son of the blessed one?

So, he's asking if Jesus is the Messiah that everybody, all the Jews, were expecting would come.

They were expecting God's promised king to come and sort things out.

[9 : 48] And so, this time, Jesus answers. When he's asked point blank about his identity, he gives a direct answer. It's there in verse 62. I am, Jesus said.

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, for the first time in the Gospel of Mark, Jesus here publicly declares his true identity.

And it's a simple and it's a frank affirmation. I am, said Jesus. So, Jesus deliberately picks up on the name of God, the name that God gave himself in the Old Testament when he revealed himself to Moses at the burning bush in Exodus chapter 3.

And so, Jesus responds to the high priest by giving himself the divine name, I am. And by doing so, he doesn't just answer the high priest's question.

What he does is, he answers the question that Mark's Gospel has been asking us and challenging us to answer all the way through the question of who is Jesus. So, Jesus is saying something extraordinary here because essentially, what is he claiming?

[11 : 02] He is claiming to be God. He's saying, yes, I am the Messiah. I am God's promised king. And he goes further because he identifies himself as the son of man.

Now, by Jesus calling himself the son of man, he's bringing together two Old Testament passages and applying them to himself. So, he's referring to Daniel chapter 7.

That's where the son of man comes from. Listen to these words, Daniel chapter 7. In my vision at night, I looked and there before me was one like a son of man coming with the clouds of heaven. He approached the ancient of days and was led into his presence. He was given authority, glory, and sovereign power. All nations and peoples of every language worshipped him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion that will not pass away.

And his kingdom is one that will never be destroyed. So, if Jesus is saying he is the son of man, what he's saying is he is the one who will judge the world.

[12 : 08] He's the judge. And then when Jesus speaks of sitting at the right hand of the mighty one, he's picking up from another part of the Old Testament from Psalm 110.

Psalm 110 verse 1 says this, The Lord says to my Lord, sit at my right hand until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet. So, what's Jesus doing?

He is claiming the place of exaltation at God's right hand. And so, in both instances, Daniel 7, Psalm 110, Jesus is claiming he's the Messiah and he's the judge and he will judge the whole earth. He's saying he has all authority, all glory, and sovereign power. And he will come from the throne of God and the clouds of heaven and he will judge the world.

Now, this is an astonishing statement for Jesus to make. Because remember the context here.

What is happening? It's a trial. And Jesus is on trial for his life.

[13 : 13] And yet he responds to these expert religious teachers with scriptural allusions so that they are in no doubt about what Jesus is claiming.

Jesus completely turns the tables on them. Because there's a real dramatic irony here. Because while Jesus is being judged, he is claiming to be the ultimate judge.

And so, it's actually the religious authorities who are really on trial. They think they are judging Jesus as Jesus stands before them. But Jesus makes it clear that one day they will stand before him and he will judge them.

I wonder if you've ever seen the movie Terminator with Arnold Schwarzenegger. That's a generational thing. Those who are of my age will know Terminator because when we were kids it was the film.

Everyone else would be wondering what on earth is he talking about. But Terminator, who had Arnold Schwarzenegger, who then for some reason became the governor of California, he had a famous line in this film, Terminator.

[14 : 21] He would say, I'll be back. And what he meant was, yeah, the situation may not be ideal right now, but I will be back and I'll sort things out and I will put things right.

And whatever you're doing, you won't get away with it. And isn't that what Jesus is saying here to these religious leaders? He is essentially saying to his accusers, one day he will be back and he will judge them.

And so what we're being forced to see here is this paradox in the Gospel of Mark, which still exists in our world today. And the paradox says, Jesus is the ultimate judge of the world, and yet Jesus is also judged by the world.

Jesus here is the one standing in the dock. He is the one on trial, and yet Jesus is saying he's the one who should be in the judgment seat. And in fact, one day he will be in the judgment seat.

That is what he's promising here. And his hearers knew it. They knew exactly what Jesus was saying. Why? Well, because when Jesus says, I am the judge, they go completely ballistic.

[15:33] Look at verse 63. The high priest tore his clothes. Why do we need any more witnesses? He asked. You have heard the blasphemy. What do you think? They all condemned him as worthy of death.

Then some began to spit at him. They blindfolded him, struck him with their fists, and said, Prophecy. And the guards took him and beat him. So the high priest, ripping his clothes, that was a sign of the greatest possible shock, horror, outrage.

And so Jesus' claim to be judged was the final straw. And so they took his words as blasphemy. And that's when things get ugly and this trial turns into a riot.

Now remember, the people here were highly respected religious men, leaders, scholars, teachers, lawyers. And yet they completely lose the plot.

They're so full of hatred for Jesus that they behave like vicious animals. They literally take the law into their own hands by violently attacking Jesus and spitting on him and punching him, beating up an innocent man and condemning him to death.

[16:43] And yet it's all happening just as Jesus said it would because Jesus predicted so often in Mark, Mark 8, Mark 9, Mark 10, predicted that the religious authorities would condemn him to death and that is what they're doing.

And so this religious trial we know would lead into a political trial and it would result in Jesus' death. And the scenes here are utterly shocking. But what is more shocking is the fact that Jesus, who is the judge, would willingly be treated in this way.

The one with all power and all authority submits himself to this. Now, why was the judge prepared to be condemned?

Well, let's look at our third point. What's the verdict? First, Jesus is judged. Secondly, Jesus is the judge. And then thirdly, what is the verdict? What's the verdict for us?

What is the verdict for him? For us, first of all. Because people, we said earlier, put Jesus on trial today still. People like to sit in judgment of Jesus.

[17:49] They like to give their verdict on him. And for many people, their verdict on Jesus is a simple one. Well, Jesus is a good teacher. Or Jesus is a great example.

Or Jesus is a miracle worker. And that's their assessment, their judgment, their verdict on Jesus. It isn't that Jesus is God who will judge all the earth.

But to see Jesus as anything else than God is to mistake his identity. So if you're too quick to dismiss Jesus, it simply proves that you've never really understood Jesus.

Because the sheer magnitude of the claims of Jesus, when you understand them, mean that you will either love him or you'll hate him. Just look at the Sanhedrin.

Nobody was thinking, oh, Jesus is such a good teacher. He says such wonderful things. Isn't he such a great example? No. They hated Jesus precisely because they knew exactly what Jesus was saying.

[18:55] And they didn't like what he was saying. So they refused to accept him as the divine judge of all the earth. And so they dismissed his words of blasphemy and they rejected Jesus.

But if Jesus claims what he claims is true, then it's foolish, isn't it, to reject him and to dismiss him. Because surely if he is the judge, then we must bow down before him and submit to his authority. We must acknowledge that Jesus has authority over my life.

Because if you really hear the words of Jesus and if you really get what Jesus claims and if you really understand Jesus, then you will either love him or you will hate him.

The one thing you can't be is be indifferent to him. All that shows is that you're not really listening to him. And so the question for us all is what is our verdict on Jesus?

[19 : 57] Because if Jesus is who he says he is, God, and if what Jesus claims is true, that he's coming back to judge, we can't possibly ignore him, can we?

And so perhaps you have prejudged Jesus. Maybe you fail to take time properly to investigate Jesus for yourself. And perhaps you've given your verdict on Jesus without really taking a close look at the evidence.

Or maybe you're just still investigating Jesus. And the jury is still out because you have not yet reached a verdict on him. But if what Jesus claims is true, your life, my life, really depends on recognizing who he is and responding to him appropriately.

We don't want to get him wrong because we are in no position to stand in judgment of Jesus. If Jesus is the judge, he's the one who sits in judgment of us.

So what's the verdict for you, for me, but what is the verdict for him? What was Jesus' verdict? Remember Jesus said, I am the judge of the whole world. Essentially, that's what he's saying.

[21 : 10] And yet, he's the judge who was willing to be condemned. Well, why? So he could punish all sin and all evil without punishing us.

Just think, if Jesus is the perfect judge, then he's got to be completely just or else there is no hope for our world because only a divine judge can bring perfect justice against all sin and all evil.

Only a divine judge has the power to hold people accountable and to get the judgment absolutely right. And that is a fantastic thing.

Isn't that the justice we really long for in our world? for everybody to get what they deserve for all that they have done. But because Jesus is the perfect judge, it also means, well, there really is no hope for us.

Because if we are going to stand before him on judgment day and we must give an account of our lives, everything in our hearts, everything we've ever said, thought, and done, all the sin, all the wrong, if so, if we stand before Jesus as judge, then the verdict on us is guilty, isn't it?

[22 : 32] And so we want and we need Jesus to judge the whole world with absolute justice. But we don't want Jesus to judge us because if we're honest, we know we deserve to be condemned.

I read a fascinating play this week, it's called The Sign of Jonah by a man called Guenter Rutenborn. Now, Rutenborn was a German Lutheran pastor and he wrote his play, The Sign of Jonah, just after World War II.

Now, Rutenborn, he struggled with the legacy that was left by the Third Reich and the impact of the Holocaust. He couldn't make sense of all the evil and suffering that had happened.

And so, essentially, the question of his play is, well, who is to blame for all the suffering and evil in the world? And so, well, some say Hitler is to blame, some say the German people are to blame, some say God is to blame.

And so, as the play goes on, it discusses who is to blame for all of this. And the play is set up as a trial where all the different witnesses are called to come in and give their evidence.

[23 : 46] And they seek to place the blame for what has happened on various people and on various groups until it gets to the end of the play. And then all the characters in the play essentially blame God.

It's his fault. God let these atrocities happen. God could have stopped all of this, but he didn't. And so, all the characters find God guilty and they put God on trial.

They blame God essentially for man's inhumanity to man. And they demand that God pay for the sins of humanity. And so, the judge at the trial says this.

He says, I command you to inform God of the verdict. How shall we phrase it? And this is what the people say. The people come together and they imagine the worst possible fate, the worst possible suffering that God should face to pay for the sins of humanity.

And so, this is what the people say. God shall become a human being, a wanderer on the earth, deprived of his rights, homeless, hungry, thirsty, in constant fear of death.

[24 : 53] He shall be born to a woman somewhere along a country road, and the moans of other poor creatures shall ring in his ears day and night. He shall be surrounded by the feeble, the sick, the filthy, by people bearing marks of leprosy.

Rotting corpses shall bar his path. He shall know what it means to die. He himself shall die and lose a son and suffer the agonies of fatherhood.

And when at last he dies, he shall be disgraced and ridiculed. And so, that's humanity imagining the worst possible fate for God.

And then the play ends with the discovery all of this has already happened. It cleverly highlights that God has already been condemned.

God has served his sentence already through his coming, through his life, through his death on a cross. And the play is meant to show our arrogance as human beings to think that we have got the right to judge God.

[26 : 02] And yet, God has gone even further than we could possibly imagine through his willingness to come and take on our judgment, the judgment we deserve.

Because instead of coming to condemn us, what has God done? What is the story of Christianity? Well, God has come and he has borne the judgment for our sins. How?

In our place on the cross. Why? So he can welcome us by his grace. And so can you see that in Jesus Christ we have the perfect judge, the judge our world needs, the judge that our lives need you and me.

Jesus is the judge who was willing to be judged for you and to be judged for me. Doesn't the old hymn say, in my place condemned he stood?

That was the verdict for Jesus. Jesus was condemned by the human authorities. Yes, of course, we read that, but Jesus was condemned for my sin, for your sin.

[27 : 07] Jesus substituted himself for you, for me on the cross by taking our guilty verdict and by taking our punishment.

John Stott in his book *The Cross of Christ* beautifully captures this. Listen to what he says. He says, it is the judge himself who in holy love assumed the role of the innocent victim.

For in and through the person of his son, he himself bore the penalty that he himself inflicted. For in order to save us in such a way as to satisfy himself, God, through Christ, substituted himself for us.

Divine love triumphed over divine wrath by divine self-sacrifice. The cross was an act simultaneously of punishment and amnesty, severity and grace, justice and mercy.

He goes on, the biblical gospel of atonement is of God satisfying himself by substituting himself for us. The concept of substitution may be said then to lie at the heart of both sin and salvation.

[28 : 17] For the essence of sin is man substituting himself for God, while the essence of salvation is God substituting himself for man. man asserts himself against God and puts himself where only God deserves to be.

God sacrifices himself for man and puts himself where only man deserves to be. Man claims prerogatives that belong to God alone. God accepts penalties that belong to man alone.

So can you see how Jesus came to bear judgment on the cross? Isn't that amazing? That is the hope for you, for me, for our world. The only hope, the only way that perfect justice will come is through the cross of Jesus Christ.

And so whilst Jesus came, his first coming was to bear our judgment on the cross. One day Jesus will return to bring judgment. And so right now, only by repenting from our sin and by believing in Jesus Christ can we be set free from the condemnation that we deserve.

And so if we don't go to Jesus Christ for forgiveness for our sins, then we will be condemned when Jesus returns as judge. And so while we might be able to dismiss Jesus in this life, we'll never be able to dismiss Jesus forever.

[29 : 48] Every single one of us has an appointment with Jesus and we will be forced to keep it. Because Jesus is the judge. And so what really matters is not my verdict on him, but his verdict on me, his verdict on each one of us.

And what his verdict will be will be based on how we have responded to him, to how God has revealed him to us. And so the good news is that we have time and we have opportunity to trust Jesus now, to trust him as our saviour and to know him as our saviour before we meet him as our judge.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.