

**Mark 14:53-72** (& Jn 21.15-19)

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Main point – Testify to the truth about Jesus.

Imagine you live in Rome, in 250 AD.

The Roman Emperor Decius, issues an edict, (**SLIDE**) demanding that every person prove their loyalty to the Roman gods.

By offering a publicly supervised sacrifice.

When you've done so, you receive a certificate to show you've sacrificed.

If you don't, you will be killed, even burnt alive.

What would you do?-----

Large numbers of Christians refused, held to their faith, and were executed.

Many, like the great scholar **Origen**, were tortured and survived. (**SLIDE**)

He was physically broken, and died 4yrs later.-----

Yet others sacrificed to the idols.

Or through bribery, got forged certificates saying they had.-----

And now, a few years later, many who had denied Christ, were with tears, hungering to be welcomed into the church and receive the Lord's Supper.

Is that acceptable?-----

Could I, who lost loved ones, or who suffered torture, accept back into our congregation others who'd denied Christ to escape suffering?-----

Should truly repentant people be forgiven, and welcomed back?-----

And so began a schism in the church. An elder in Rome, Novatian, said Christians who denied the faith & lapsed, could not be re-admitted to the Supper.

Whereas the Catholic Church bishops decided that upon assured repentance and penance, they could be restored.-----

Our passage today calls us to boldly profess Christ, and our faith in him.-----

Yet if we fail to testify as we ought, is their forgiveness?----

We'll consider that too.

We're covering the last part of Mark's Gospel in the lead up to Easter.

[9 & 11am – The 5pm service has been looking at the end of Mark's Gospel since Feb, but I know we're just jumping into the middle of Mark 14, so let me set the scene.] **SLIDE**

[5pm – But let's cover a quick **recap** of where we've come in Mark's Gospel this year]

5 days before Jesus' death, in Mark 11, Jesus entered Jerusalem on a donkey, praised by the people as king.

But the Jewish leaders started looking for a way to kill him. (11.18)

Over several days of questioning, they were unable to entrap him, as Jesus silenced them, with his phenomenal wisdom and truth.

Jesus has warned his followers of the suffering to come before he returns.

Then in **ch14** we focus in-on his impending death.

Jesus shared his last Supper with the disciples, predicted Judas' betrayal, that his disciples will all abandon him, and that Peter will deny him 3 times.

Jesus has prayed in the Garden, and 3 times he asked his disciples to pray with him.

But what happened?

3 times they failed to pray that they would not stray.-----

The coming cross was a dreadful thought for Christ.

But he commits himself to the Lord's will, with a calm conviction.-----

[5pm – As Andy said two weeks back, Jesus is our champion, he's clutch.

And you can trust Jesus with your sin, with your fears, your failures]

Jesus was betrayed by a close friend, stabbed in the back,

And in v46-52 arrested by an armed mob sent from the Jewish leaders.

He's been deserted by his friends, even by Mark, the likely author of the book in **v52**.

So Jesus has been taken to the high priest's palace, and the 70 member Jewish ruling council, the Sanhedrin, assemble.

[This was made up of the chief priests and high priest who presided, the elders - influential lay leaders and often land-owners, and the scribes - largely middle-class Scripture lawyers and teachers.]

**And this brings us to my first point, The Testimony about Jesus.**

(SLIDE) In Mark's Gospel he regularly uses a literary technique now called, a Markan sandwich.

Mark mentions Peter in the high priests'; courtyard in **v54** – like bottom piece of bread. Then he goes on to talk about Jesus, in the middle, before coming back to Peter in **v66**, the top piece of bread.

Mark is telling us these events happened simultaneously, and he's wanting us to compare Peter's response, with Jesus', in the middle of the sandwich.

Peter might feel that he's the meat in the sandwich, caught in a difficult position, but how much more is that true of Jesus?----

In considering the testimony about Jesus, **v55** says the whole Sanhedrin were looking for testimony against him, to put him to death.

This is not a fair trial. They've already made up their minds about Jesus' guilt, even before hearing formal evidence.

And the Sanhedrin meeting for a capital trial at night, in private, and on the eve of the feast were all against proper procedure.

On all counts this gathering is illegal.-----

Yes, one can argue this is a preliminary hearing & that's why they meet again in **15 v1**, to formalize their decision.

Yet we shouldn't expect justice from this court.

The witnesses' false testimonies don't match up.

Then a new charge comes.

**In v58**, Jesus' words have been twisted.

It seems they are referring to Jesus words in **John 2**, where he said, (**v19, SLIDE**) "Destroy this temple, and I will raise it again in three days." (& Mk 13.2]

It's a serious charge one could be executed for.

Yet Jesus never said, he would destroy it.-----

The conflicting testimony should all be disregarded.

Jesus can't be discredited, as he can't be today.-----

But the high priest runs with it.

This trial seems just for show.-----

But Jesus' notice his response, **v61**:---

'He kept silent and did not answer.'-----

I know people, even at Bundy, who've gone to court and heard lies, and not received justice. And it's so very hard.

If lies were told about me in court I'd want to defend myself and the truth to come out, n' justice to be done.

But Jesus submits to injustice. It's phenomenal!-----

Jesus gave no answer, no defense, to the high priest.-----

Isaiah 53 speaks of the Suffering servant, pierced for our transgressions.

And [as Andy referred to last time] **Isa 53v7** says, (**SLIDE**)

He was oppressed and afflicted, yet he did not open his mouth.

...and like a sheep silent before her shearers, he did not open his mouth."

In remaining silent Jesus fulfills Scripture.

**We come to Point 2, the Testimony of Jesus.**

In **v61** [cutting to the chase] Jesus is asked straight out:

"Are you the Messiah, the Son of the Blessed One?"

Son of the Blessed One, means Son of God, because Jewish rabbis would often avoid using God's name.

And Jesus does answer this question , with "I am".(SLIDE)  
 "I am", the name of God, which the Lord revealed to Moses in the burning bush.(Ex 3.14)  
 Here in **v62**, Jesus reveals the truth about himself.  
 He is God. And equal to God.

And he immediately goes on to explain: "And you will see the Son of Man seated at the right hand of Power and coming with the clouds of heaven."

The title, 'Messiah' or Christ, was popularly misunderstood then, with people's political hopes. Still, Jesus admits he is the Messiah – the promised King.

Which **Psalm 110 says(SLIDE)** he will sit at God's right hand.

But He's more than a human Messiah.

This man, about to be crushed n' killed by the authorities, declares he will be seen universally as the heavenly Son of Man, from **Daniel ch7(SLIDE)**.

That's a divine figure, directing the course of history, ruling over the nations, and accepting worship from peoples.-----

And vindicated by God, he will come again on the clouds of heaven, symbolising God's presence. He will return as the judge.----- [see also Rev 1.5-8]

The secret of Jesus' identity has finally been exposed.

[cf. telling the demons who knew the truth from the start – 1.24-25,34]

And it's ironic that the statement comes from Jesus' enemy who doesn't believe it.

Jesus is the final and ultimate judge, and all people will stand before him one day.

But here, before the Jewish leaders and the high priest himself, Jesus gives a true confession, a true testimony of who he is and what he will do.-----

Jesus speaks the truth about who he is and what he will do.

And the Jewish leaders get it – for they charge and convict him of blasphemy – defaming God and smudging his honour, by giving his honour to a man.-----

Jesus testified that he was the Son of God,. the God-man.

Without even considering whether his claims may be true, they doom him.-----

To them this man was an upstart, dangerously deluded.

Even a threat to the good order of Jerusalem, and their power.-----

The Jewish council condemn him as deserving death.-----[Lev 24.15-16]

And so, Jesus the blasphemer, is blindfolded n' beaten, spat on and slapped.-----

Like cruel bullies they are entertained at his expense.-----

He is called to 'prophecy', but ironically, they, in their abuse are fulfilling a prophecy he made earlier.(SLIDE)

**Mark 10:33**, 'the Son of Man will be betrayed to the chief priests and teachers of the law.

They will condemn him to death and will hand him over to the Gentiles, who will mock him and spit on him, flog him and kill him. Three days later he will rise."-----

Jesus spoke the truth but suffered injustice as a consequence.

Which he will endure and go through to take our judgement, die our death;

to forgive our sin.-----

In 165 AD, the Romans are also trying to force Christians to sacrifice to their idols.

A man called Justin, called **Justin Martyr** appears before the judgement of seat of the Roman prefect Rusticus, who questions then commands Justin obey, or else face merciless punishment.-----

And Justin Martyr said, "we can be saved because of our Lord Jesus Christ, even after we have been punished. This will become salvation and confidence to us at the much more fearful and universal judgment of our Lord and Savior."

Other martyrs echoed his sentiment. "Do whatever you want. We are Christians, and we don't sacrifice to idols."-----

They were flogged then beheaded.-----

Yet this suffering for speaking the truth about Jesus still happens.

**17 yr old Anila met Perveen at school in Pakistan** in 1997. Their friendship grew and Anila gave Perveen a Bible and taught her Christian songs.

And Perveen taught them to her younger sister when the parents weren't home. Their parents were strict Muslims and weren't happy when they found out. Eventually Anila invited Perveen to a Good Fri service and Perveen heard the Gospel and accepted Jesus.

Perveen's parents were furious, and when pressured to marry a Muslim she ran away. Anila got accused of kidnapping her, and she was arrested, and slapped and beaten in front of her parents for 9 hrs.

She was taken to prison, and was horribly tortured and repeatedly whipped.---

Perveen was stabbed to death by her brother for turning to Christ.

Anila was eventually released from prison but would not deny Christ.

She said, 'I have seen the world' and it has nothing good. Jesus is my peace'.

With the strength of God's Spirit we can stay faithful as we testify to Christ too.---

[Jesus Freaks, Voice of the Martyrs]

Coming back to Mark 14 Mark finishes the sandwich by bringing us back to Peter.

And we come to **Point 3 and Peter's failure to testify.(SLIDE)**

When Jesus was arrested Peter had run away, but followed at a distance.

Right into the courtyard of the high priest, to join the captors.-----

As Jesus gives his true testimony before the high priest, Peter has the chance to give his before a servant girl-----

Maybe, in **v67** she'd seen him with Jesus in the temple.

And Peter denies it: "I don't know what you're talking about", and walks away.

Then she comes over and includes others – 'This man is one of them'.

Again he denies it.

As he does a third time too, when it seems his Galilean accent gives him away.-----

But now Peter even calls down curses on himself.

Maybe saying, 'May I be cursed/ punished by God if I am lying'.

He solemnly swears, I don't know this man Jesus.-----

A blatant lie, to save his skin.-----

His threefold sleeping in the garden is now matched by a threefold denial.

He had said he would stand with Jesus regardless of what others did, yet he fails.

The spirit was willing, but the flesh had indeed proved weak.-----

Jesus had confessed the truth about himself to the high priest.

Peter fails to confess the truth before a servant girl.-----

The courage and faithfulness of Jesus is such a contrast.

And when the rooster crows for the second time, probably about 2 or 3am, he remembers Jesus' words, and filled with regret, bursts into tears.-----

**Why does Mark include this sorry story?-----**

He wants his readers, and God wants us, to understand that Jesus, the man inside, is steadfastly faithful to God, in contrast with the morally weak follower outside.

Jesus is utterly alone as the faithful servant of God.

The disciples are men with grievous flaws, with feet of clay.

But Jesus is the heroic Son of God & Son of Man.----

He's the only faithful one, only Super Saviour.(**SLIDE**).

Only He is worthy to die for others. And he does.-----

Maybe some of us are inclined to make excuses for Peter, especially because we see our weakness in him.-----

But unless we see the heinous offensiveness of his sin, we cannot understand the bitterness of his remorse.

Nor the depth of his repentance, or the riches of his great restoration.

If you think Peter's sin or your sin isn't that bad, ultimately you'll think the cross and redemptions Jesus brings isn't that great.

And will rob Christ of his glory.-----

But if we're inclined to judge Peter too severely, we need to examine our own lives.

How many times have we denied the Lord, in word or deed?

Or lost opportunities to share the Gospel with others?-----

Many times I've kept quiet about Christ cos I want to keep the peace.----

Peter was sorry for his sins and wept over them.----- Do we?-----

So coming back to my question at the start, Can a person be forgiven, after they have denied their Lord?-----

Absolutely! [Eg Rom 3.22-24; Lk 18.33-34; Eph 2.8 despite Matt 10.33]

If you repent n' turn from sin, to Christ in faith, you can & will be forgiven.

The example of Peter proves this.

In **John 21** the resurrected Jesus meets and speaks with Peter, and asks him 3 times to affirm his love for Jesus.

Three times Peter denied Christ, and now he answers three times that he loves him.

Jesus forgives Peter and helps him make a true testimony.-----

He goes on to share openly(**SLIDE**) that Jesus is Lord and Messiah.(Acts 2.36)----

So if you know you've failed Jesus, turn back to him, and trust him for forgiveness.

Confess your sin, grieve it, hate it, rely on Jesus, and move on in grace.

**Thinking practically** about us: When someone asks you if you are a Christian what will you answer?-----

If Jesus is your Lord and Saviour, could you say anything else but 'YES, I am'?---

Don't deny your Lord, or lie or deceive others that you are with Jesus.-----

We're not living in Iran, but **Rico Tice**, author of the **Christianity Explored course**, rightly says in his book **Honest Evangelism,(SLIDE)**,

we're in a culture of growing hostility to Christianity.

Many people really don't like the Gospel. Sometimes they express politely or not.

But if we are going to talk about Jesus you are going to get hurt. It is going to sever some relationships. It is going to provoke people. Someone will mock you, wound you or dislike you. Not every time, our circumstances will vary, but we will face rejection enough of the time to give us second thoughts.

And I know what it's like to have second thoughts.

Rico says, I don't particularly like getting hurt. So there's a painline that needs to be crossed if I tell someone the Gospel., but I want to stay on the comfortable side of the painline. But we cross the painline out of love for the lost, and for the honour of the Saviour of the world. We don't know what response we get until we cross the painline and speak up, and risk it.

But there are spiritually hungry people out there.

And that's what you'll find when you tell others about Jesus.

Risk hostility to find those who are hungry.-----

And let's learn from **Sam Chan's advice, in How to talk about Jesus,(SLIDE)**

He says, when we move into a new place, we visit all our neighbours, two houses left and right, and several across the street.

We give them a simple gift, fruit, wine, and a card with our names on it and numbers. Then we ask for their names, and write them down.

We give them a little gift around Easter and Christmas, something we've baked.

And we ask them a favour, cos relational trust is built by asking for peoples' help.

Then they are happy to ask us for favours.

Then we invite them to a Christmas or birthday gathering or a BBQ.

And it's at such times that we can ask, powerful questions like:

What are you hoping for in life?

Where do you want to be in 5 or 10 yrs?

Why is such and such important to you?

What do you believe about God?  
What do you know about Easter?  
What do you know about Jesus?-----

As we listen it can open doors for us to share.

Share a better story of who we are, why we are here, of relationship with God and the life and hope Jesus brings.

Asking questions can open doors to speak of Jesus.

In the lead up to Easter can you ask someone a thoughtful question?-----

Pray for faith to make the most of opportunities to testify to the truth about Jesus.

The deepest need of every human being, is to know Jesus as their Lord and Saviour.

I believe Neil left us a faithful example of testifying to the truth, and speaking about Jesus at every opportunity, didn't he?

We're forgiven through him.

So even when you're crossing the pain-line, testify about the one who gave his life for you.

Let's pray