

## “You Will See The Son of Man”

### The Forty-Third in a Series on the Gospel of Mark

*Texts: Mark 14:53-72; Daniel 7:1-14*

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It's the middle of the night. Earlier that evening, Jesus and his disciples celebrated the Passover in an upper room in Jerusalem. When the Passover celebration had concluded, Jesus and eleven of his disciples left the city and went out to a familiar place called Gethsamane—a small olive grove on the slope of the Mount of Olives. While Jesus was fervently praying and while his disciples were struggling to keep awake, at the behest of the Sanhedrin, the twelfth disciple, Judas Iscariot, was leading a group of armed men to that place where he knew that Jesus and his disciples would likely go. And so it was there in Gethsemane that Judas kissed Jesus on the cheek, alerting the armed men who had followed him that this was the man they were seeking. After a brief fracas in which someone lost an ear, Jesus ordered all fighting to stop. As he voluntarily surrendered to these armed men, his own disciples panicked and fled into the darkness for safety. Despite their protests to the contrary, they had all fallen away, just as Jesus predicted. Jesus was now all alone. Soon, he will be standing before Caiaphas, the Jewish high priest, accused of blasphemy. After that, he will stand before Pontius Pilate, the Roman governor, accused of sedition—claiming to be king. Jesus was now just hours away from the cross when he will experience utter humiliation—he who knew no sin will be rejected by the father when the guilt of our sin is reckoned to him.

As we continue our series on the Gospel of Mark, we are in the final chapters of this gospel in which Jesus' messianic mission is rapidly coming to its inevitable climax—the cross and the empty tomb. We have taken a number of weeks to work our way through this material because the final six chapters of Mark are densely packed since they deal with those critical events associated with the last week of Jesus' messianic mission. As we proceed through these chapters, keep in mind that all of these events occurred very quickly and that by the time Jesus was arrested in Gethsemane on Thursday evening, many important things had already transpired earlier that evening. Not only had Jesus himself been predicting these events, but many of them fulfilled biblical prophecies written hundred of years in advance.

As we have seen, during the annual Passover celebration Jesus ate his final meal with his disciples. Knowing that his time was short, Jesus' final instructions to the twelve had to do with the institution of the sacrament of the Lord's Supper. Re-investing the traditional Jewish Passover with an entirely new meaning, Jesus spoke of himself as the Passover lamb. He declared that his forthcoming death and resurrection would save God's people from their sins, just as the blood of a lamb smeared on the doorposts in Egypt caused the death angel to “pass over” those protected by the sacrificial blood. Jesus went on to speak of the bread, which was broken and distributed during the meal, as his “broken body,” which he would give to turn aside the wrath of God. And then Jesus spoke of the wine in the cup as “my blood of the covenant which is shed for many.” Thus his shed blood would be to the New Covenant what the sacrificial blood of bulls and goats had been to the old. In effect, Jesus was saying that all of redemptive history pointed forward to his messianic mission, but especially to the cross, just hours away.

Having finished their last meal together and knowing that the time had come for him to suffer and die for the sins of God's people, Jesus wrapped-up the celebration of the Passover and then took the disciples out to the Mount of Olives, where he must prepare himself for what was about to transpire. Knowing that he was soon to be rejected by the father because the guilt of our sins was about to be imputed to him, Jesus nearly collapsed under the weight of his unfathomable burden. He prayed for strength for the

coming ordeal, crying out “Abba, Father” and pleading that the cup of wrath would be withdrawn from him. It would not. Jesus knew that all his disciples would “fall away” and stumble. When he returned to his disciples throughout his ordeal, he found them struggling to stay awake. Even when Jesus warned them to be vigilant—knowing that he was about to be arrested and taken from them—they were not only oblivious to Jesus’ plight, they seemed oblivious to their own. But when a band of armed men showed up when Judas betrayed Jesus with a kiss, the disciples—now wide awake—put up some feeble resistance before fleeing like cowards into the night. The Sanhedrin’s plan had worked perfectly. Jesus was in the custody of the Sanhedrin while the city was asleep, and by the time people awakened at first light, Jesus would already be in Pilate’s custody. It would be a done deal and at long last, the Sanhedrin would be rid of Jesus and the threat he posed to their self-righteous and faithless rule over Israel.

**A**nd so with Jesus now under arrest in Gethsemane, in the balance of chapter fourteen the scene shifts to Caiaphas’ house. Caiaphas was the Jewish high priest and presided over the meetings of the Sanhedrin.

Since we are so far removed from Jewish custom and law, a number of things need to be pointed out before we turn to our text. As we have seen throughout Mark’s account of Jesus’ messianic mission, the various events recounted have the ring of eyewitness testimony, with much of the material coming from Peter himself. But the account of Jesus’ arrest may have come from within the Sanhedrin, since at least two men, Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea were members of the Sanhedrin, yet were secretly believers. From Mark’s report, Peter may have been too far away to have heard the proceedings even though he was actually able to enter the courtyard, because he was trying so hard not to be noticed.<sup>1</sup> In verse 66 of this same chapter, Mark speaks of Peter being in the courtyard “below,” which may mean that the proceedings were held on the roof of Caiaphas’ house (which was often used as a place to sleep when it was warm, or as a place to relax, like a covered patio), or in a large room on the second floor. In any case, there is every reason to believe that this is a factual report.<sup>2</sup>

At the outset of Mark’s account, everything about this so-called “trial” signaled irregularity, in terms of how things were ordinarily conducted under Jewish law.<sup>3</sup> Under normal circumstances, if someone were to undergo a formal trial, such a trial must be conducted within the Temple. Witnesses must be produced and the defendant must be given a chance to respond to the charges brought against him. But since it was the middle of night on the Passover, the Temple was closed and preparations were being made for the large number of animal sacrifices the next day. That fact probably explains why these proceedings were instead held at the chief priest’s home. But many scholars feel that this shows the lengths to which the Sanhedrin would go to see to it that Jesus be charged with a capital crime (blasphemy) without the knowledge of the people—things were done in the middle of the night, in secret, and not in a public place. This would prevent people from rioting and blaming the Sanhedrin for the death of Jesus.

While there can be no question that it was the desire of the Sanhedrin to do whatever it was that they were going to do to Jesus *before* the people awakened, the evidence seems to point in the direction that this not a trial *per se*, but a preliminary inquest. Such an inquest would enable the Sanhedrin to deliver

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<sup>1</sup> Cranfield, *The Gospel According to Mark*, 429.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Lane, *The Gospel According to Mark*, 529-530.

<sup>3</sup> Lane, *The Gospel According to Mark*, 529-530.

Jesus over to Pilate with specific capital charges, so that Pilate would be the one to actually put Jesus to death, not the Sanhedrin.<sup>4</sup> That would allow the Sanhedrin to escape from the wrath of the people. Had the Jews actually conducted a trial at this point, they could have found Jesus guilty on the trumped-up charge of blasphemy and then have stoned him without even bringing the matter to Pilate—stoning was the penalty for such an act prescribed in Jewish law and Pilate had nothing whatsoever to do with internal Jewish matters. But the pilgrims in the city would have been furious if the Sanhedrin had done this.

So, it was much better to have an inquest and then present Jesus to Pilate along with a list of formal charges. That is why one of charges centered around Jesus' comments about the destruction of the Temple. If it seemed that Jesus was fomenting insurrection, then the Romans were much more likely to act. If the matter had to do with Jewish law and theological issues within Judaism, the Romans would not be interested. But the Romans were very concerned to keep the peace in Jerusalem with so many people present. That meant arresting and executing zealots, and as well as any who disrupted the peace.<sup>5</sup> So, it is important to keep both Jewish law and the local politics of this in mind, as these events unfold in the last part of chapter 14. The Sanhedrin's carefully arranged plan is coming to pass just as they had hoped that it would. Jesus would be dead, Rome would get the blame, and it would all be over.

With that, we turn to our text. After the disciples fled, leaving Jesus alone with an armed mob (basically men acting as police), we read in verse 53 that "*they took Jesus to the high priest, and all the chief priests, elders and teachers of the law came together.*" We do know that Caiaphas was the high-priest at this time and since a number of the members of the Sanhedrin quickly assembled in the middle of the night, this was all pre-arranged. Caiaphas was highly regarded and served for nineteen years as head of the Sanhedrin, when the average tenure for high priests was but four years. This lengthy tenure clearly meant that Caiaphas was able to deal effectively with the Romans and local politics.<sup>6</sup>

According to the Jewish historian Josephus, there were seventy members of the Sanhedrin and their deliberations were lead by the high priest. According to the *Mishana*, at least 23 members needed to be present in order to have a quorum. The fact that chief priest[s] are mentioned, indicates that a number of former high priests were also present. The elders came from the established ruling class in Jerusalem, and most of them were members of the party of the Sadducees. The teachers of the law were the experts in Jewish law and were associated with the Pharisees. No doubt, court clerks were also present, as were a number of armed men, who would keep order. Since Jewish law forbade the death sentence on a feast day—like the Passover—it was imperative that these men reach a verdict before daybreak.<sup>7</sup>

While the mob escorted Jesus the short distance from the Mount of Olives to Caiaphas' house, Mark tells us that "*Peter followed him at a distance, right into the courtyard of the high priest. There he sat with the guards and warmed himself at the fire.*" This information, of course, comes from Peter himself. Peter ran away when the mob arrested Jesus, very much afraid that he would be taken into custody. With his curiosity getting the better of him, Peter returned to the scene to see what was happening, hiding in

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<sup>4</sup> Cranfield, *The Gospel According to Mark*, 440.

<sup>5</sup> Cranfield, *The Gospel According to Mark*, 440.

<sup>6</sup> Lane, *The Gospel According to Mark*, 531.

<sup>7</sup> See the discussion of this in: Lane, *The Gospel According to Mark*, 531.

the shadows, watching. Since it was dark, it would have been easy for Peter to follow the crowd with their torches as they took Jesus to Caiaphas's home, which would have been large and secure—given Caiaphas' status as high priest—and therefore a suitable place to conduct an inquest out of the public eye.

As the hearing got underway, we learn in verse 55 that *“the chief priests and the whole Sanhedrin were looking for evidence against Jesus so that they could put him to death, but they did not find any.”* Jewish law required that there be at least two eyewitnesses who independently gave evidence to the judges in the presence of the accused. Once the testimony was given, the accused was given a chance to respond. If the accounts given by the two witnesses differed in the slightest detail the charges were dismissed.<sup>8</sup> This makes the declaration in verse 56 all the more significant. *“Many testified falsely against him, but their statements did not agree.”* Not only did the fact that “witnesses” were present in the middle of the night mean that this inquest was pre-planned, but the failure of these pre-arranged witnesses to agree on their testimony meant that the charges were completely trumped-up and that Jesus had done absolutely nothing wrong. But as Mark tells us, the Sanhedrin wasn't concerned with whether or not Jesus was innocent. They were looking for legal grounds to put him to death—and that is a flagrant violation of Jewish law.

Since the witnesses could not agree on their testimony, there was no legal ground to find Jesus guilty—a rather embarrassing situation. That meant that testimony of Jesus' guilt would have to be fabricated. According to Mark, *“then some stood up and gave this false testimony against him: ‘We heard him say, ‘I will destroy this man-made temple and in three days will build another, not made by man.’ Yet even then their testimony did not agree.”* We know from John's Gospel that Jesus did say *“destroy this temple, and I will raise it again in three days”* (John 2:19). But Jesus himself explained that he was talking about his own body—the true temple. The falsity of this testimony against Jesus is the insertion of the word “I,” making it seem as though Jesus was claiming that somehow he was going to destroy the temple. This was a serious charge because the entire Graeco-Roman world regarded the destruction of a place of worship as a capital crime.<sup>9</sup> Therefore, if someone were indeed to make a threat to destroy the temple, they would be subject to the death penalty without question. But Jesus never threatened to destroy the temple. The charge against him was utterly false. Everyone knew it.

The first witnesses could not agree, so other witnesses were found who made the charge that Jesus was speaking against the temple. But their testimony didn't agree either and it obvious that they were lying. By now Caiaphas was growing frustrated with the way things were going. Therefore he would interrogate Jesus personally. As we read in verse 60, *“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?’”* According to Jewish law, in order to be acquitted, Jesus was required to respond to any charges brought against him. But as we read in the first part of verse 60, *“but Jesus remained silent and gave no answer.”* Jesus knew what Caiaphas was doing. He knew that all of the so-called “witnesses” had contradicted themselves. Jesus had not done any of the things of which he was being accused. There was no basis for any verdict against him. That was clear to all. Jesus said nothing. He did not need to.

But Caiaphas will not accept Jesus' silence. His tactics should not come as a surprise however, because, throughout the entire week, the Sanhedrin tried to trip Jesus up whenever he entered the temple area by asking him trick questions. The high-priest asks Jesus one more question, clearly trying to trip him up.

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<sup>8</sup> Lane, The Gospel According to Mark, 533.

<sup>9</sup> Lane, The Gospel According to Mark, 533-534.

“Again the high priest asked him, ‘Are you the Christ, the Son of the Blessed One?’” This time Caiaphas asked a question that Jesus was willing and required to answer. “‘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.’”

That Caiaphas would even think to ask this particular question meant that the Sanhedrin was aware that Jesus was making messianic claims and that Jesus even regarded himself as Israel’s Messiah. Recall, that Jesus had been careful to keep these claims very low-key and made them only to his disciples. As we read in Mark 8:30 after Peter confessed that Jesus was the Christ, “*Jesus warned the [disciples] not to tell anyone about him.*” Some speculate that Judas revealed this claim directly to the Sanhedrin, but it is more likely that Jesus’ actions were all along messianic in nature. Jesus had also told the Parable of the Tenants and the various members of the Sanhedrin who were present knew that he had spoken this parable against them. In fact, the messianic implications were obvious. And so, in asking this question Caiaphas was hoping for an answer in which Jesus would incriminate himself.

Caiaphas got one. Only did Jesus openly and plainly affirm that he is the Christ (the Messiah) and the very Son of God, but Jesus went on to tell Caiaphas that he is indeed the figure spoken of in Daniel 7:13 and Psalm 110:1. As we saw in our Old Testament lesson, in verses 13-14 of the seventh chapter of his prophecy, Daniel wrote that “*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 peoples, nations and men of every language worshiped him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion that will not pass away, and his kingdom is one that will never be destroyed.*” In Psalm 110:1, David quotes YHWH, “*The LORD says to my Lord: ‘Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet.’*” Jesus quotes from both Daniel 7 and Psalm 110 and declares that these passages were written about him.

Jesus has not only declared to Caiaphas that he is the Messiah and the Son of God, Jesus now tells Caiaphas that he is one spoken of throughout the Old Testament who will preside over an everlasting kingdom, while reigning from an exalted position of great power—the power of YHWH himself. The implication is that what ever happens to Jesus, Jesus will stand in judgment over Caiaphas and all others who reject him on the great day of final judgment.<sup>10</sup> As Israel’s high priest, Caiaphas is obligated to recognize Jesus as Israel’s Messiah. While it appears to human eyes that it is Jesus who is on trial, the reality is that it is Caiaphas and Israel who are on trial before YHWH.<sup>11</sup>

Jesus’ answer outraged Caiaphas. According to verse 63, “*The high priest tore his clothes.*” This is the clear sign to all those present that Caiaphas regarded Jesus’ words as blasphemous and that he deserved to be summarily put to death. By tearing his magnificent priestly robes, Caiaphas is calling for an immediate verdict. The proceedings suddenly came to a close. “*‘Why do we need any more witnesses?’ he asked. ‘You have heard the blasphemy. What do you think?’*” All those present immediately agreed with the high-priest. Mark simply says “*they all condemned him as worthy of death.*” With the everyone in agreement with the high-priest, it was now open-season on Jesus. The members of the Sanhedrin were required to show their complete and total disapproval of Jesus’ supposed blasphemy in their presence. As we read in verse 65, “*Then some began to spit at [Jesus] they blindfolded him, struck him with their fists, and said, ‘Prophecy!’ And the guards took him and beat him.*” Jesus’ humiliation now reaches

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<sup>10</sup> Cranfield, The Gospel According to Mark, 445.

<sup>11</sup> Lane, The Gospel According to Mark, 537.

greater depths. Next, he must appear before Pilate. But the worst is still to come. Jesus will be rejected by his father. He must drink the cup of wrath. Only then will his humiliation be over.

**W**hile Jesus was on-trial before Caiaphas, and while Israel was on-trial before YHWH, another personal drama was playing out in the courtyard below. Peter is experiencing his own personal humiliation.

According to verses 66-68, Peter was about to do what had been unthinkable to him. *“While Peter was below in the courtyard, one of the servant girls of the high priest came by. When she saw Peter warming himself, she looked closely at him. ‘You also were with that Nazarene, Jesus,’ she said. But he denied it. ‘I don’t know or understand what you’re talking about,’ he said, and went out into the entryway.”* Jesus had told Peter he would do this very thing, and Peter stubbornly refused to believe him, loudly protesting that if even everyone else fell away, he would not. And yet, not long afterwards, *“when the servant girl saw him there, she said again to those standing around, ‘This fellow is one of them.’ Again he denied it.”* Just hours earlier, Peter is recorded in Mark 14:29 as saying, *“Even if all fall away, I will not,”* and here he is, doing that very thing a second time. But it is not over. *“After a little while, those standing near said to Peter, ‘Surely you are one of them, for you are a Galilean.’ He began to call down curses on himself, [a sign of protest, and an affirmation that he is not lying] and he swore to them, ‘I don’t know this man you’re talking about.’”* If Jesus’ humiliation has reached a much deeper level, so has Peter’s.

According to verse 72, *“Immediately the rooster crowed the second time. Then Peter remembered the word Jesus had spoken to him: ‘Before the rooster crows twice you will disown me three times.’ And he broke down and wept.”* Realizing the horrible thing he has done, Peter is absolutely crushed. He has denied knowing Jesus three times. His heart is pierced. He too now collapses under his burden, much as Jesus had done while in Gethsemane. Peter is learning that very difficult lesson about what it means to carry one’s cross and to be identified with Jesus in the presence of those who hate our Lord. Here again we see parallel story lines unfold. While Peter and the disciples were sleeping, while they were running off, deserting Jesus, and hiding out of fear, while Peter was denying that he even knew Jesus, meanwhile, Jesus was obedient unto death. He will drink the cup and save us from our sins.

**W**hat is in this passage for us, two thousand years removed?

There are two main points of application. First, three times Peter denied that he even knew Jesus, even though he boldly proclaimed that he would never fall away. By the time Mark’s Gospel was written some thirty or so years after Jesus’ death and resurrection, Peter’s story was well known in the church, and Peter was still the rock and one of the key leaders of the Christian church. The account of Peter’s stumbling would also have been very comforting to those Christians in Mark’s original audience, who were facing persecution from Rome and struggling to remain faithful to Christ. The point is that our salvation depends upon the faithfulness of Christ, not our own. The cup was not Peter’s to drink—it was our Lord’s to drink. In fact, Jesus drank all of it while suffering upon the cross.

That being said, God graciously turned Peter’s cowardice into a refining fire of sorts and brought Peter through his self-inflicted ordeal in such a way that Peter was actually strengthened and equipped to lead Christ’s church. Thus when we sin, stumble, run away, and hide in the darkness, never forget that God’s grace is much greater than any sin we may commit. When we find ourselves ashamed of Christ in the face of pressure from our non-Christian friends and family and do something stupid or cowardly, remember the case of Peter, who was forgiven by Jesus and whose faith was actually strengthened through this to the point that later on he was willing to die as a martyr because of his faith in Jesus.

That leads to a second point. When Jesus stood before Caiaphas, it looked to everyone present as though it were Jesus who was on trial—and in a certain sense he was. But the redemptive-historical reality was that it was the whole of Israel and its leadership—the Sanhedrin—which was on trial. Jesus was Israel's Messiah. Caiaphas and the others were obligated to declare him such. But instead of welcoming their own Messiah, the Sanhedrin was plotting to kill him. Why? Jesus exposed their self-righteousness for what it was. Ironically, when Caiaphas declared Jesus guilty of blasphemy, it was Caiaphas who was committing blasphemy against the Son of God. This sentence of death, brought down God's covenant curses upon both Israel and Jesus. The nation would be dispersed into the four corners of the earth, the city of Jerusalem was sacked and the temple was destroyed, even as we were being saved from our sins. Since it was it was Caiaphas and the Sanhedrin who were on trial before YHWH, their actions sealed Israel's fate, and sent Jesus to the cross so that we might be saved from that wrath of God. This is the clearest example we have of God turning evil to good.

The key to this whole passage is Jesus' assertion to Caiaphas that one day Israel's high priest will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of glory. This is a reference to the day of judgment. Jesus will return with great power and glory to judge all those who reject him and persecute his people (us). But until that day of judgment, Jesus' words remind us that just like his trial before Caiaphas, whenever God's people are persecuted, whenever they are mocked, deprived or even killed, it is the perpetrator who is actually on trial before God in heaven. Whenever someone persecutes us and speaks evil of Jesus, they are introducing evidence against themselves in the heavenly court. Barring repentance, they are heaping up wrath for themselves on the day of judgment. And so while we are just like Peter—weak, and at times cowardly—never forget that one day Jesus will return to judge the world, raise the dead, and make all things new. And all those who have hated Jesus, mocked him and persecuted his people, will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of glory. And yet, for those who are Christ's, we need not fear that awesome day, for Jesus, the completely innocent and spotless lamb of God, has already been found guilty for all our crimes. Little did Caiaphas know . . . Amen.