

Mark 14:53-72 — Courage And Coward Under Pressure

October 18, 2020

Does anyone recognize the person standing next to me in the photo? Her name is Sidney Powell. She is the lawyer for Michael Flynn. One of the best parts of Pastor Appreciation Month is people give you



kind gifts. One family in the church gave me the privilege of hearing her speak.

She is an excellent lawyer committed to handling corruption in the highest levels of our government. Defending Michael Flynn is only one of her important cases. She has saved numerous people from corrupt government prosecutors intent on punishing people that are innocent in order to make a name for themselves. In her speech, she told how corrupt prosecutors destroyed Arthur Anderson, and as a result, 85,000 people lost their jobs. Many of the same corrupt prosecutors were able to put executives from Enron behind bars, even though they had nothing to do with the company's collapse. While we all know our courts are corrupt, I was astounded at the amount of corruption in our government that she revealed.

While our legal system was designed to ensure truth, justice, and fairness, often it is used as an iron fist to crush people's lives and reputations. Corruption in the courts is not just a modern phenomenon. It happened in the ancient world. It even happened in the trial of Jesus. This morning, we will see how unfairly Jesus was treated.

Last week, Pastor Jordan led us in an excellent study on the arrest of Jesus. Today, as we continue our study in the Gospel of Mark, we will study

Jesus' trial. Jesus endured two trials. Today, we will study his first trial, which was in front of the Jewish Sanhedrin. Next week, we will study his second trial, which was before the Romans. It was the Roman trial which led to his execution. Each trial has three parts to it. Jesus endured six court appearances between midnight and morning. They were nailing Jesus to the cross by 9 a.m. Friday and he would be dead by 3 p.m. We usually think of the wheels of justice turning slowly. When it came to killing Jesus, six trials took place in a few hours. That is break-neck speed.

As we study Jesus' Jewish trial before the Sanhedrin, the Gospel of Mark tells us about this trial from two vantage points. The first vantage point is from the eyes of Jesus. He was a model of courage under pressure as he was willing to lose his life to speak the truth. The other vantage point Mark used when he told us about the same events is from the eyes of the apostle Peter. He was a coward under pressure. He repeatedly lied to save his life, and as a result, he was left with guilt and shame. Mark wrote about Jesus' trial before the Sanhedrin from both Jesus' and Peter's perspectives to give us a contrast. How will we handle pressure when it is costly to follow Christ? Will we deny him like Peter or will we courageously proclaim him like Jesus and suffer the consequences?

Background

Before we turn to Mark, let me take you to Deuteronomy 16. Deuteronomy was a book written in about a month. It was written right before Israel entered the Promised Land after wandering in the wilderness for 40 years. Deuteronomy literally means the second giving of the law. It was a refresher course on God's laws for the new generation that would conquer the Promised Land.

Deuteronomy is a book filled with instructions on how God's people were to live. The book has instructions on spiritual life, social life, feasts, and a recapitulation of the Ten Commandments. Tucked into chapter 16 are instructions on the Jewish judicial system and how the courts were to operate.

“You shall appoint judges and officers in all your towns that the LORD your God is giving you, according to your tribes, and they shall judge the people with righteous judgment. You shall not pervert justice. You shall not show partiality, and you shall not accept a bribe, for a bribe blinds the eyes of the wise and subverts the cause of the righteous. Justice, and only justice, you shall follow, that you may live and inherit the land that the LORD your God is giving you.”
Deuteronomy 16:18–20 (ESV)

Through the history of Israel, there was great effort made to take these words seriously. The Jews developed a sophisticated judicial system. They were proud of their courts. The people that were fastidious about observing God's laws directing their spiritual and moral lives were also obsessed with truth and justice in their courts. They developed a system of courts, judges, prosecutors, and defendants that rivaled some of the best judicial systems the world has seen.

How did it work? At the time of Jesus, there was no portion of Israel considered lawless. There were synagogues in virtually every place. They served as centers of justice for their areas. If a town had 120 men, it had a little Sanhedrin. Twenty-three of the best and most godly men in the community were to sit on the local court. There was always an odd number so every case could be decided and split decisions couldn't take place. Smaller areas that did not have 120 men were still required to choose elders in their village and appoint them as judges. There was always be to an odd number --- three, five, or seven

were appointed and tasked with deciding the legal matters in the small community.

Just as our country has a Supreme Court, which is the highest court in our land, the Jews had a Supreme Court known as the great Sanhedrin in Jerusalem. There were 70 on the Sanhedrin plus the high priest, which made 71.

All laws were binding. All trials were done in public to avoid corruption. Those in the courts had the legal council of a prosecutor or a defender. No accusations of a crime were allowed without two or three witnesses. Being a false witness was very serious. Deuteronomy 19:16-19 tells us that if someone was a false witness and it was determined they lied in court, that person was punished with the punishment he was seeking to be done to someone else. That meant if you lied in a murder trial and it was discovered, you were killed. That cut down on false accusations because there was a high price to pay if you lied to the court. This is something missing in our courts. In our legal system, since false witnesses can make false charges without serious consequences, this leads to people lying under oath, which is something that rarely took place in Israel.

If a death penalty was given, 24 hours were required before the judgment was carried out in order to allow the opportunity for any last-minute additional evidence to surface that might change the verdict.

If you were a witness in a death penalty case, you had to be the one to throw the first stone to carry out the execution. That was a final step of authenticity.

No criminal could be tried at night. No criminal proceedings could continue into the night when they began in the day.

No judicial proceedings could take place on a holiday, such as Passover.

This gives you a sense of the Jewish legal system in place at the time of Jesus. It was all intended to create a fair and just legal system.

Having said that, Jesus' trial before the Jews broke every single law I mentioned. It violated every principle of justice and was illegal in every way. Let's read about it.

And they led Jesus to the high priest. And all the chief priests and the elders and the scribes came together. And Peter had followed him at a distance, right into the courtyard of the high priest. And he was sitting with the guards and warming himself at the fire. Now the chief priests and the whole council were seeking testimony against Jesus to put him to death, but they found none. For many bore false witness against him, but their testimony did not agree. And some stood up and bore false witness against him, saying, "We heard him say, 'I will destroy this temple that is made with hands, and in three days I will build another, not made with hands.'" Yet even about this their testimony did not agree. And the high priest stood up in the midst and asked Jesus, "Have you no answer to make? What is it that these men testify against you?" But he remained silent and made no answer. Again the high priest asked him, "Are you the Christ, the Son of the Blessed?" And Jesus said, "I am, and you will see the Son of Man seated at the right hand of Power, and coming with the clouds of heaven." And the high priest tore his garments and said, "What further witnesses do we need? You have heard his blasphemy. What is your decision?" And they all condemned him as deserving death. And some began to spit on him and to cover his face and to strike him, saying to him, "Prophesy!" And the guards received him with blows. And as Peter was below in the courtyard, one of the servant girls of the high priest came, and seeing Peter warming himself, she looked at him and said, "You also were with the Nazarene, Jesus." But he denied it, saying, "I neither know nor understand what you mean." And he went out into the gateway and the rooster crowed. And the servant girl saw him and began again to say to the bystanders, "This man is one of them." But again he denied it. And after a little while the bystanders again said to Peter, "Certainly you are one of them, for you are a Galilean." But he began to invoke a curse on himself and to swear, "I do not know this man of whom you speak." And immediately the rooster crowed a second time. And Peter remembered how Jesus had said to him, "Before the rooster crows twice, you will deny me three times." And he broke down and wept. Mark 14:53–72 (ESV)

We will look at Jesus' trial in two parts. First, we will see Jesus' courage and faithfulness in the midst of corruption and pressure. Second, we will see Peter's cowardice and crumbling while under pressure to save his life.

Jesus modeled courage under pressure.

As we look at Jesus' trial before the Jews, we need to realize the illegalities occur at the start. The verdict was in before the trial began. They had already made a decision to kill Jesus but didn't have a crime. They were now searching for a crime to convict Jesus so they could justify taking his life. His trial was backward from the beginning!

And they led Jesus to the high priest. And all the chief priests and the elders and the scribes came together. Mark 14:53 (ESV)

The chief priests, the elders, and scribes make up the Sanhedrin, which was the Jewish Supreme Court. At least a portion of them had already come together in the middle of the night because Judas got them together. Together they decided to move forward on Judas' offer to help them arrest Jesus in the garden. When they came together this time, it was undoubtedly a larger number of them than before. When it says they came together, that does not necessarily mean all of them were present. They were looking for a quorum to enable official business.

At this point, Mark and Matthew tell us about Jesus' main trial before the Sanhedrin in the house of Caiaphas. John tells us there was a pretrial that took place before the main trial. It is found in John 18. We need to briefly leave Mark and head to John to learn what happened. This pretrial was intended to be Jesus'

arraignment --- that is the formal reading or presenting of the charges against him that they would use to justify his formal trial and subsequent execution.

So the band of soldiers and their captain and the officers of the Jews arrested Jesus and bound him. First they led him to Annas, for he was the father-in-law of Caiaphas, who was high priest that year. John 18:12–13 (ESV)

Who is Annas? He was the father-in-law of Caiaphas, who was the high priest. Why did they bring Jesus to Annas? He was the evil brain behind the Sanhedrin. He was the real power behind the court. He had been high priest for five or six years 20 years earlier. Even though the high priest served for a lifetime, the Romans took him out of power. At this point, he was in his 80s. After the Romans removed him from power, the next five high priests were his sons. The current high priest, Caiaphas, was his son-in-law. Even though Annas wasn't in power, through his family connections, he worked behind the scenes influencing everything. Think of him like a mafia boss or a godfather. The sales of the animals in the temple and the money changers that worked in the temple were under Annas' authority. When Jesus cast the money changers and animal sellers out of the temple, that was a direct challenge to Annas and his authority. It was a threat to Annas' financial empire so Annas was eager to see Jesus and come up with formal charges against him.

While the rest of the Sanhedrin was still gathering at Caiaphas' house, Annas --- who was the evil brain behind temple operations --- was to come up with a charge against Jesus so they could execute him.

The high priest then questioned Jesus about his disciples and his teaching. John 18:19 (ESV)

What happened at this point was illegal. Annas didn't have a charge against Jesus so he questioned Jesus about his disciples and teaching, hoping Jesus would incriminate himself. This is illegal, even in our courts. It is against the fifth amendment in our constitution. You can't come up with a crime against someone simply by what they say when you have no crime, no witnesses, and no evidence against them.

Jesus answered him, "I have spoken openly to the world. I have always taught in synagogues and in the temple, where all Jews come together. I have said nothing in secret. Why do you ask me? Ask those who have heard me what I said to them; they know what I said." John 18:20–21 (ESV)

Jesus said to him, "I don't need to say anything. I am not going to let you twist my work to incriminate me. Nothing I have done is in secret. Ask people about me. Ask people what I have said and taught. You need an accusation from someone to have a crime."

Annas didn't like Jesus talking to him with authority and setting him straight.

When he had said these things, one of the officers standing by struck Jesus with his hand, saying, "Is that how you answer the high priest?" Jesus answered him, "If what I said is wrong, bear witness about the wrong; but if what I said is right, why do you strike me?" John 18:22–23 (ESV)

Jesus was absolutely right. If you have no charges and no witnesses against a person, you cannot bring a charge against that person. Jesus spoke the truth. It was just incredibly uncomfortable for Annas to hear it. Just because you are Annas and you are powerful doesn't mean you get to violate judicial rules to suit your purposes. Jesus had Annas cornered with the truth. The evil brain of the operation was frustrated. He gave up. He sent Jesus to his son-in-law without a charge because he could find no sin against him.

Annas then sent him bound to Caiaphas the high priest. John 18:24 (ESV)

This is the main trial, which is talked about in the Gospel of Mark. It is a mockery of justice in every way. There was no crime and no witnesses.

John 18:15 tells us the Sanhedrin met in Caiaphas' house for Jesus' trial. That was illegal. They were required to meet in the hall of judgment at the temple complex. They were also not allowed to meet in the middle of the night. The trial was to be in daylight and public. Also, by Jewish law, the Sanhedrin could not create a charge until someone formally accused Jesus of a crime. At this point, Annas could find no sin in Jesus' life. Jesus didn't let Annas attempt to twist his words into a crime against him. In addition, Jesus' trial took place during the Passover, which was a holiday. That was also illegal.

In Mark, before we go further in the trial, we get a glimpse of Peter.

And Peter had followed him at a distance, right into the courtyard of the high priest. And he was sitting with the guards and warming himself at the fire. Mark 14:54 (ESV)

Peter had great curiosity about Jesus and good intentions to follow Jesus, but he was about to blow it big time. For now, Mark wanted us to know where Peter was for what happened next. He was in the courtyard of Caiaphas' house, sitting with the soldiers that were part of Jesus' arrest team only an hour before, warming himself with them at the fire. Peter wasn't just trying to stay warm, he was trying to blend into the crowd. If they realized his identity, they would have arrested him too. I picture Peter with his hood over his head trying to stay hidden.

Caiaphas' house was a walled-off piece of property that most likely had four rectangular buildings with a large open-air courtyard in the center. While the Sanhedrin was inside one of the buildings on the second floor having Jesus'

mock trial, Peter was in the courtyard below sitting at the fire warming himself, trying to stay under cover.

When it came to the trial, the Sanhedrin needed to work fast, the trial needed to be done by dawn and there wasn't much time.

Now the chief priests and the whole council were seeking testimony against Jesus to put him to death, but they found none. Mark 14:55 (ESV)

They already decided the outcome would be the death penalty. Annas couldn't find a charge against Jesus and they needed to find a crime. What do you do when you don't have a crime? You hire false witnesses to create a crime. Remember the Brett Kavanaugh hearings? In the middle of the night, the religious leaders of the Jewish Supreme Court were running, getting the worst sort of characters out of bed and dragging them to court so they could lie under oath and accuse Jesus of a crime. So much for a society committed to truth and justice.

Now the chief priests and the whole council were seeking false testimony against Jesus that they might put him to death, Matthew 26:59 (ESV)

The parallel account in Matthew makes it clear they were not seeking true witnesses but false witnesses. It is always a bad idea when you have to wake people up at 2 a.m. and ask them to lie in court. That doesn't look good. How do you motivate liars for that kind of late-night work? If you pay people enough money, they will do almost anything. Just like they paid Judas to betray Jesus and they paid the Roman soldiers to lie about the resurrection of Jesus and say the disciples stole the body, here they paid false witnesses to lie about Jesus.

The problem with false witnesses rushed into court in the middle of the night to lie on the witness stand is they can't get their stories straight because they did not have time to plan their lies, which is exactly what happened.

For many bore false witness against him, but their testimony did not agree. And some stood up and bore false witness against him, saying, "We heard him say, 'I will destroy this temple that is made with hands, and in three days I will build another, not made with hands.'" Yet even about this their testimony did not agree. Mark 14:56–59 (ESV)

So they got their stories wrong. The best story they had against Jesus was when he said he would destroy the temple made with hands and in three days build another not made with human hands. That charge was similar to what Jesus said at the beginning of his ministry. It is found in John 2:19-22. While that is a close quote of Jesus' words, it selectively edited Jesus' words. John tells us that when Jesus spoke of destroying the temple and rebuilding it in three days, the temple he spoke of was his body. The false witnesses against Jesus took Jesus' words out of context to make it look like he said something he didn't say. Doesn't that sound like the modern media? Nothing has changed.

Another thing we should notice is the members of the Sanhedrin were only looking for witnesses against Jesus. They didn't look for any defendants of Jesus. There was ample evidence to defend Jesus, but they didn't care about that. They hid it from the court so they could achieve their goal, which was the execution of Jesus in a few hours.

The whole thing was illegal. It was a set-up job from beginning to end, designed to make it look like justice was served when in reality justice was perverted. Unfortunately, things were not going well at this point. The Jewish leaders were frustrated. In their rush job, their lying witnesses were useless

because nobody can keep their stories straight. The Sanhedrin had no crime against Jesus, so Caiaphas, the high priest, took matters into his own hands.

And the high priest stood up in the midst and asked Jesus, “Have you no answer to make? What is it that these men testify against you?” Mark 14:60 (ESV)

You can hear the frustration in his words. Annas was angry at Jesus but he couldn't find a charge against Jesus. The bribed witnesses had many accusations against Jesus but they couldn't keep their stories straight. Caiaphas said directly to Jesus, “Have you no answer to these charges?” Jesus didn't need to say anything to defend himself. The legal case against him was crumbling on its own without Jesus speaking a word. In spite of all the corruption in the Jewish high court, the legal system was working. They desperately wanted Jesus dead but no matter how hard they tried, they couldn't find a crime against him. Mark tells us how Jesus answered Caiaphas.

But he remained silent and made no answer.... Mark 14:61 (ESV)

Jesus just stayed silent. He didn't even give them an answer. This is exactly what the Scriptures said Jesus would do.

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 (ESV)

This was not the only time Jesus was known for his silence. He would be that way before Pilate when charges were leveled against him.

At this point, Caiaphas was desperate. He used a hail-Mary pass and played the blasphemy card because nothing else was working. In the Gospel of Mark, and many times in the Gospel of John, Jesus identified himself as the Son of God. If Caiaphas could get Jesus to claim that he was the Messiah, the very

Son of God, that would be a crime. Certainly Jesus wasn't the Son of God. They could execute Jesus on blasphemy, claiming to be God.

...Again the high priest asked him, "Are you the Christ, the Son of the Blessed?" Mark 14:61 (ESV)

Matthew tells us a few more details about the way Caiaphas asked Jesus this question.

But Jesus remained silent. And the high priest said to him, "I adjure you by the living God, tell us if you are the Christ, the Son of God." Matthew 26:63 (ESV)

Adjure you means to place someone under oath. This was the heaviest oath possible. They essentially said to Jesus, "You know God punishes liars. Under oath to the living God who hates liars and commands us to speak the truth, tell us if you are the Christ, the Son of God." Do you get the amazing paradox? They demanded Jesus speak the truth to them about his identity while they were hiring false witnesses to lie about him at his trial.

Jesus was quiet up to this point. He had expressed no anger or hatred toward anyone, even though they constantly lied about him and falsely accused him. The only thing Jesus had done was love people and heal Malchus' ear after Peter chopped it off. Jesus also knew that if he answered Caiaphas' question truthfully, it would push the Sanhedrin over the line. They would execute him for charges of claiming to be the Son of God when in reality he told the truth, because he is the very Son of God. In moment of courage under pressure, Jesus did not back down but spoke, even though he knew the consequences that would follow.

And Jesus said, "I am, and you will see the Son of Man seated at the right hand of Power, and coming with the clouds of heaven." Mark 14:62 (ESV)

This is a packed statement. First, Jesus said, "I am." He didn't just claim to be the Son of God but he used the very name of God in his answer. He is the great "I am." Then, Jesus took it up a notch. He brought together Psalm 110 and Daniel 7:13-14.

The Lord says to my Lord: "Sit at my right hand, until I make your enemies your footstool." Psalm 110:1 (ESV)

In this Psalm, David spoke about his Lord, sitting at the right hand of another person called Lord until all his enemies were made a footstool for his feet. In this Psalm, there are two people with the title of God, but one of them sits at the right hand of God. Jesus said, "David was talking about me. I sit at the right hand of God the Father. I am David's Lord. I will sit there until God the Father puts all my enemies under my feet, including you."

Then Jesus added in Daniel 7:13-14. That passage speaks about one like a Son of Man being given all power and authority over everything and everyone by the Ancient of Days. The Son of Man will one day come again in the clouds of heaven to judge everyone. Jesus identified himself as the one who is God but who is also a human being, the Son of Man, who was given all authority in creation by God the Father. Jesus essentially said, "Right now you are standing in judgment over me but one day I will return on the clouds of heaven and I will stand in judgment over you and over everyone. I am the Son of Man given the right to rule over everything in the universe by God the Father."

Jesus answered the high priest's question truthfully. This is the clearest self-designation of Jesus in the entire Gospel of Mark as to Jesus' true identity.

As you can imagine, the Sanhedrin didn't like it one bit. They considered his words to be the blasphemy they were hoping to hear.

And the high priest tore his garments and said, "What further witnesses do we need?" Mark 14:63 (ESV)

According to Leviticus 24:16, anyone who blasphemes the name of the Lord should be put to death. They were convinced Jesus' answer was a lie so he deserved to die. The problem is they completely ignored the last three years of Jesus' life that were filled with evidence that he spoke the truth. They conveniently forgot that he raised the dead, calmed storms with a word, healed thousands of their diseases instantly, and created food out of thin air. The evidence of Jesus' life backed up the claims Jesus made. Jesus is the Son of God because he did things only God can do.

"You have heard his blasphemy. What is your decision?" And they all condemned him as deserving death. Mark 14:64 (ESV)

The Sanhedrin took a vote. It was unanimous. Jesus must die. By the way, in the normal course of voting in the Sanhedrin, it was done in a different way. A scribe tabulated the votes one at a time. Each person had to give his vote singularly and identify the way he voted. The junior members of the Sanhedrin were always to vote first so they were not swayed by the senior members. That was the proper way to render a judgment in this court. This was different. This was mob rule. It was vote-by-mob. That was illegal. It was another mockery of their judicial system.

Incidentally, next week, we will see how the Jews brought Jesus to Pilate for his trial before the Romans. They brought him on completely different charges. They ignored the charge of blasphemy against God, which they used to

decide Jesus was worthy of death, and they created a completely different charge. That was another travesty of justice.

And they began to accuse him, saying, “We found this man misleading our nation and forbidding us to give tribute to Caesar, and saying that he himself is Christ, a king.” Luke 23:2 (ESV)

They brought Jesus to the Romans and accused him of telling people to not pay their taxes and claiming to be a king that wanted to replace Caesar. That was a lie. All of those centuries of carefully refining the judicial system so perfect justice was carried out were thrown away when it came to Jesus. Look how the 70 top elders, the Supreme Court judges of Israel, began treating Jesus.

And some began to spit on him and to cover his face and to strike him, saying to him, “Prophecy!” And the guards received him with blows. Mark 14:65 (ESV)

Spitting on someone is a way to show extreme disrespect. They also covered his face and began hitting him in the face. When you can't see a punch coming, you can't brace for the punch. Matthew tells us they also slapped him with the palms of their hands. The blood was running down Jesus' nose. It was running out of his mouth. His face was swollen and disfigured. His eyes were blackened. It hurt when the older men that were on the Sanhedrin hit him, but they were gentle compared to the temple guards and Roman soldiers that struck Jesus in the face as they followed the Sanhedrin's lead.

Why were they beating Jesus? They hated him and hit him because he spoke the truth about his identity, even when he knew it would enrage them and lead to his death.

None of this surprised Jesus. In Mark 10:34, he prophesied that this beating would take place. While Jesus courageously spoke the truth and suffered

the consequences, Peter, at the same time, cowered in fear and lied to escape the consequences.

Peter cowered in fear to escape the consequences.

While Jesus was on trial in front of the Sanhedrin from approximately -3 a.m. on Friday morning, Peter was in the courtyard of Caiaphas' house at the same time. Instead of being like Jesus, and speaking the truth and suffering the consequences, Peter lied big time to preserve his life.

This doesn't mean Peter was not a Christian. Peter was a Christian. He was a Christian that failed under pressure. We do the same thing all the time. We fail Christ under pressure. Peter failed Christ on a colossal level. We fail Christ every day on a lesser level. Jesus warned Peter that under pressure he would fail him. Jesus told Peter he would deny even knowing him three times before the rooster crows twice. Peter didn't believe Jesus. He was very overconfident in his own abilities. In Mark 14:29 he said, "Even though all fall away from you, I will not." Essentially Peter said to Jesus, "Jesus, I know most of the time you are right. You usually know what you are talking about, but you don't know me. You don't know how strong I am. You are right about everything, but you are wrong about me." In the Garden of Gethsemane, even though Jesus told him three times to wake up and pray for strength to face the trials he was about to face, instead of praying, he insisted on sleeping. He thought he was strong enough to handle Jesus' arrest and betrayal on his own strength. Let's pick up Peter's story.

And as Peter was below in the courtyard, one of the servant girls of the high priest came... Mark 14:66 (ESV)

Remember how the high priests' house was structured. It was a large estate in the city with walls on the outside of the property. There was likely four rectangular building on the property with a large courtyard in the middle. Jesus was in one of the large upper rooms in a building on the property when he was being accused by Caiaphas and the rest of the Sanhedrin. Peter was below in the courtyard. It was a cold night. He was with the Roman soldiers and temple guards, sitting around the fire warming himself, probably with his hood pulled over his head trying to stay incognito.

What was Peter doing there? It was incredibly risky to enter the property of the high priest and spend time around the fire in the middle of the night with the soldiers that arrested Jesus when you were one of the people they wanted to arrest, and when you cut off a guy's ear only an hour before!

What was Peter thinking to do this high risk operation? To his credit, he loved Jesus. He wanted to be there for Jesus. How did Peter even get into the estate of the high priest and get past security at the gate? John 18:16 tells us the apostle John was known to the family of the high priest and he used his leverage to get Peter past the security guard at the gate.

Luke 22:56 tells us this servant girl kept staring at Peter as the light of the fire illuminated his face. She knew she recognized him but didn't know where she had seen him before. Finally, the pieces came together in her mind and she blurted out her thoughts right in front of Peter and the soldiers warming their hands around the fire.

...and seeing Peter warming himself, she looked at him and said, "You also were with the Nazarene, Jesus." Mark 14:67 (ESV)

This was not unexpected. Jesus taught all week in the synagogue in front of thousands. Peter was with him the entire time. While the servant girl was proud of herself for finally recognizing a face, for Peter, her words were a jolt that caused his heart to skip a beat. With his hood over his head, he thought he had everyone fooled. Like a spy being discovered in a foreign land, he was suddenly unmasked. I think all the soldiers began staring at Peter. They went from warming their hands to putting them on the handles of their swords. I don't think Peter was prepared for this. That is often the way Satan works. He hits us when we least expect it in ways we don't see coming. Under this sudden pressure, surrounded by soldiers holding their weapons that were staring him in the face, the first thing that came to mind was to lie and cover his tracks.

But he denied it, saying, "I neither know nor understand what you mean." And he went out into the gateway and the rooster crowed. Mark 14:68 (ESV)

Peter, who was so courageous to stealthily enter the very home of the high priest to be there for Jesus, turned into a complete coward when suddenly put in a situation where he might lose his life.

It says that after this lie, Peter went to the gateway. He left the fire so people couldn't see his face by the fire's light. He went to the porch area, just inside the security gate. He hoped the shadows would provide the cover he needed.

And the servant girl saw him and began again to say to the bystanders, "This man is one of them." Mark 14:69 (ESV)

In Matthew 26:71, we learn this was a different servant girl, not the same servant girl, that recognized him the second time. Apparently there were other people standing just inside the gate of the Caiaphas' house while the mock trial

of Jesus took place. Even though Peter hid in the shadows, there were too many people. His identity couldn't remain hidden. This servant girl did not keep her sudden realization to herself either. She told the people around her, inciting a mob to begin surrounding Peter and eyeing him up and down. Peter was caught. He couldn't run. He was in a walled compound. He figured his options were to lie or die. He chose to lie again.

But again he denied it. And after a little while the bystanders again said to Peter, "Certainly you are one of them, for you are a Galilean." Mark 14:70 (ESV)

I think Peter's second denial was more blatant than his first. Peter's first denial came when he was taken by surprise. This second denial was a premeditated lie. The first time Peter was caught unaware. This time was a conscious choice. One problem with Peter's denials was the more he lied, the more he spoke. The more he spoke, the more people began to recognize his voice. Matthew 26:73 tells us the reason people began to realize he was a Galilean was because of his accent. It gave him away, revealing he came from the northern part of Israel in Galilee. Now everyone knew Peter was lying to save his skin.

By the way, John 18:26 tells us the bystander who said to Jesus, "Certainly you are one of them," was a relative of Malchus, the guy that Peter chopped the ear off of only an hour before in the garden! When a family member of a guy you tried to murder recognizes you, your goose is cooked. To get out of this one, Peter knew he needed to tell a whopper of a lie. He went with his biggest lie of the night.

But he began to invoke a curse on himself and to swear, "I do not know this man of whom you speak." Mark 14:71 (ESV)

When Peter began to swear, that doesn't mean he used four-letter words. It means he said something like, "I swear to God and hope to die if I am not telling the truth. I do not know the man named Jesus." Peter swore he told the truth, but he was lying through his teeth. The members of the Sanhedrin, which were lying through their teeth, asked Jesus to swear to tell the truth about his identity, and he did.

And immediately the rooster crowed a second time. And Peter remembered how Jesus had said to him, "Before the rooster crows twice, you will deny me three times." And he broke down and wept. Mark 14:72 (ESV)

The man who was so confident in his ability to stand strong and claimed he would never fail, failed Jesus miserably in a matter of hours. Peter suddenly realized he was not as strong as he thought. He was not as good as he thought. Judas had betrayed Jesus. Now Peter had denied Jesus three times. Luke tells us another interesting detail.

And the Lord turned and looked at Peter. And Peter remembered the saying of the Lord, how he had said to him, "Before the rooster crows today, you will deny me three times." Luke 22:61 (ESV)

Jesus' trial on the second floor was over. They finished beating Jesus with a bag over his head. Jesus' face was covered in blood. He was disfigured. His clothes were covered in sweat and blood from Gethsemane. Jesus was beaten to a pulp because he spoke the truth. As they led Jesus to jail for a brief period of time until they took him to Pilate for his Roman trial, Jesus' eyes met Peter's, as he walked across the courtyard. Jesus, the man who was beaten, disfigured, and about to die because he told the truth and Peter, the man claimed to be

courageous but lied repeatedly to save his skin. Can you imagine what Peter felt when Jesus' eyes and his eyes met in the glow of the courtyard fire?

I wonder if Jesus' words came to Peter's mind in that moment as he left and wept.

"For whoever is ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of him will the Son of Man also be ashamed when he comes in the glory of his Father with the holy angels." Mark 8:38 (ESV)

Application

What can we learn from these verses?

1. **Don't become like Peter and be overconfident in your spiritual strength.**

The Bible portrays Peter as a man with a great deal of self-confidence. He was confident that if there was a problem, he could fix it or handle it. He rarely thought he would fail. He was so confident in himself he went into the very courtyard of the house of Caiaphas when Jesus was on trial. That is bold. Peter learned that no matter how strong we think we are, When we are put under the right pressure, at the right place, at the right time, especially in the middle of the night, we can easily fall into sin. The Bible is clear, we must not be overconfident in our own strength but have a healthy respect for the weaknesses and sinfulness of our lives. How do we overcome these weaknesses so we can stand strong under pressure? Jesus prayed in the Garden of Gethsemane to get the strength he needed from God to endure the pressure he would face. At that time, Jesus urged Peter to pray for the strength he needed. Instead of praying, Peter chose to sleep. It is the same for us. The only way we can successfully face the pressures and temptations

of life is to pray, asking God for his strength instead of trying to be like Peter and rely on our own.

2. **As we follow Christ, expect there will be times where we need to choose between costly courage and cowardly denial.** In the first century world, the government would arrest you for following Christ. If you didn't deny Christ and worship the Roman emperor, you were killed. These verses ask us what kind of follower of Christ we will be when put under pressure. Will we have courage and admit to following Christ or will we be cowardly and deny him? Paying a price for following Jesus is not just something from the ancient past; it still happens today. If you admit to following Jesus in public, you will be shamed on social media. You will have people laugh at you. When Amy Coney Barrett was candidating to be a judge on the Supreme Court, she paid a price for her faith as senators tried to disqualify her because she is a Christian. In the end, all of us will, at times, be put under pressure for following Christ. The question is, "Whose path will you follow?" Will you be like Peter and lie to escape the consequences of following Jesus or will you be like Jesus and embrace the consequences of speaking the truth about your love for God and let God take care of the results even if you suffer and your life falls apart around you?
3. **We serve a God of second chances for those who repent of denying Jesus and run to him.** In many ways, Judas and Peter followed the same path. They both denied Jesus. They both failed Jesus. Judas was filled with shame. He ran from Jesus, hung himself and died. Peter was different. In the

midst of his brokenness, he repented of his sin. When he heard the tomb was empty, he was one of the first to run to see the tomb empty of the Jesus he loved. We read at the end of the Gospel of John how Jesus loved Peter. Jesus restored Peter and used him to lead the early church. I don't know about your life. I don't know how you have failed Jesus. I don't know how you have walked away from Jesus. I don't know how you have denied Jesus in big ways or little ones. While I don't know how you have denied Jesus, I do know that when we run to Jesus, just like Peter did, when we confess our sin and ask Jesus to forgive our sin, he will. He will forgive you. He will restore you. He will welcome you home. Just like Peter, he will use you for his kingdom in ways beyond what you can imagine.



Dr. Kurt Trucksess is ordained in the Evangelical Free Church of America. He enjoys reading, writing, and time with his family. Feel free to contact him at www.Christ2RCulture.com (www.c2rc.com)

© You are permitted and encouraged to reproduce and distribute this material in any format provided (1) you credit the author, (2) modifications are clearly marked, (3) you do not charge a fee beyond the cost of reproduction, (4) you include the web address (www.Christ2RCulture.com) on the copied resource.

