THE TRIAL OF JESUS

Luke 22:63–23:25

Key Verse: 22:70

“They all asked, ‘Are you then the Son of God?’ He replied, ‘You say that I am.’”

Today’s passage is about the trial of Jesus. Most of us have never been on trial for anything. We’ve probably not been taken into police custody, questioned and had to stand before a judge—especially not for our faith. In the Bill of Rights, the American Constitution protects each individual’s free expression of his or her beliefs. But whenever we let people know we’re believers in Jesus, in a sense we’re all still put on trial. People start scrutinizing our every move and our every word. When the story of Jesus’ trial was first being circulated, Christians everywhere were being persecuted for their faith. Some would be put on trial and even executed simply because they said they believed in Jesus. For many, how Jesus acted during his trial became an inspiration and a role model. Just before his arrest Jesus prepared himself to resist the devil’s temptations through an anguished struggle in prayer (22:39–46). Now, as he encounters humiliation, physical abuse and intense accusations Jesus stands with strength, dignity and silence. In this study we want to think about what his silence and, especially, what his testimony mean to us. May God open our hearts and speak to us through his living word today.

Read verse 63. When he was arrested, all his disciples, including Peter, deserted him. Now Jesus looked like any other ordinary man: alone and poor—no followers, no trappings of authority, no power. In this vulnerable condition the guards were free to do anything to him. Sinful people love to abuse whatever power they may be given over others. So these soldiers began mocking and beating Jesus. Luke repeats the word “mock” twice (22:63; 23:11). Jesus was mocked. Jesus was so pure, so innocent, so good, so kind and compassionate, so giving. But these loud-mouthed and drunk, thoughtless and violent guards began mocking and beating him. To such brutish people, nothing is sacred.

Read verses 64,65. The guards especially mocked his reputation for being a prophet. Jesus *was* a prophet: everything he predicted came true. But he endured this mocking with total silence. When these things happened, it must have seemed like too much injustice. In fact, Jesus had predicted it would happen (18:31–33). His mocking fulfilled the prophecy of Isaiah 50:6: “I offered my back to those who beat me, my cheeks to those who pulled out my beard; I did not hide my face from mocking and spitting.” Jesus quietly surrendered to the mocking. Why? It was for us. It was to take away our shame caused by our sins. On the other hand, it was also to show us how to live in a godless world. 1 Peter 4:3,4 says, “For you have spent enough time in the past doing what pagans choose to do—living in debauchery, lust, drunkenness, orgies, carousing and detestable idolatry. They are surprised that you do not join them in their reckless, wild living, and they heap abuse on you.” When we choose to follow Jesus, we too will be mocked. Whenever we’re mocked for our faith, we need to remember what our Lord Jesus went through and be silent.

Read verse 66. Ever since he had cleared the temple and predicted God would strip them of their spiritual privileges, the religious leaders had been trying to kill Jesus. But because Jesus was so popular, they couldn’t (19:47; 20:19; 22:2). Now, however, with the help of Judas Iscariot, who betrayed him, they could arrest Jesus in the middle of the light while he was praying. Then the religious leaders spread the word, waking up all the other council members in the wee hours of the morning, to come to an instant trial at daybreak, so that they could move quickly and have Jesus executed on Friday before the Sabbath.

What were the charges? Read verse 67a. Who was the Messiah? God had promised King David that one day, one of his descendants would come to truly save his people and establish an eternal kingdom (2Sa7:13,14). This promise of a Savior King gave the people hope in the midst of their suffering and oppression. But the people were thinking of this promised Savior King as a political leader. They wanted a strong and humanly glorious messiah who could kick out the Romans and re-establish the independence and power of Israel. There were a number of men who took advantage of this, claiming to be the Messiah and trying to lead a political revolution. But not Jesus. Throughout his ministry Jesus never went around claiming to be the Messiah. Once he asked his disciples who he was, and when Peter said he was God’s Messiah, Jesus strictly warned them not to tell this to anyone (9:20,21). Instead of talking about it, Jesus did the things the prophets predicted God’s Messiah would do. Once, when John the Baptist was in prison, he sent messengers to ask Jesus if he were the Messiah. Jesus replied, “Go back and report to John what you have seen and heard: The blind receive sight, the lame walk, those who have leprosy are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the good news is preached to the poor” (7:22). Jesus let the facts of his ministry speak for themselves about who he was. Instead of claiming to be the Messiah, he often would refer to himself with a humble expression, “the Son of Man” (5:24; 6:5,22; 7:34; 9:22,26,44,58; 11:30; 12:8,10,40; 17:22,24,30; 18:8,31; 19:10; 21:27,36; 22:22,48). This title “Son of Man” meant a suffering servant. Jesus wasn’t afraid of saying he was the Messiah; he just didn’t want people’s wrong notions of the Messiah to hinder him from what he came to do. Now, when put on the spot, how did he answer? Read verses 67,68. Why did he answer like this, instead of just simply saying “yes” or “no”? It was because he wouldn’t reveal himself to those not really interested. Instead, he rebuked them for their cowardice. *They* would never take a stand on who he was, because it was too controversial (20:5–7).

Read verse 69. This shows Jesus' faith. He’d been arrested, mocked and beaten. He was these people’s prisoner, standing there like a criminal. Soon he’d be executed in between two criminals. It was total humiliation. But he didn’t think these things would be the end. He had his sights set on the final end. He believed that after obeying his will, God would raise him from the dead and exalt him to the highest place (Php2:9). At the right hand of the mighty God, Jesus is the one who gives the Holy Spirit; at the right hand of the mighty God, Jesus is Prince and Savior; at the right hand of the mighty God, Jesus is the Judge of the living and the dead (Ac2:33; 5:31; 10:42; 17:31). He’s on trial now, but he’s looking ahead to his ultimate end: glory and victory in the kingdom of God. Again, Jesus’ faith is the perfect model for us. Apostle Paul learned this faith and wrote: “Here is a trustworthy saying: If we died with him, we will also live with him; if we endure, we will also reign with him” (2Ti2:11,12a). Whatever we may be suffering now, Jesus wants us to be sure of his promise that as we’ll share his glory and victory in God’s kingdom (Ro8:17,18; Rev3:21).

Read verse 70. They all understood Jesus’ hope to be sitting at God’s right hand as an admittance that he was God’s Son. To them, this was blasphemy. They thought that anyone who claimed to be God’s Son was making themselves equal with God, and thus, they should die (Jn5:18; 19:7). Jesus knew very well that this was what they were after. But how did he reply? Read verse 70 again. Again, Jesus wasn’t claiming anything; he let them say it. But by not saying "no," he was, in a sense, signing his own death sentence. Read verse 71. When he answered like this, they were sure they had what they wanted to execute him.

Earlier, when Peter was trying to follow Jesus at a distance and was asked if he were a follower of Jesus, he denied it three times (22:54–62). But when Jesus was asked if he were the Son of God, he did not deny it, even though it cost him his life. It’s still costly to admit that we believe in Jesus. It can ruin friendships; we can lose family members and our reputation; in rare cases it might even cost us our lives. But Jesus wants us not to be ashamed of him or of his words (9:26). How easy it is to give in to peer pressure! How easy to hide our Christian identity, relax, and not have to struggle to explain our faith. How easy to identify ourselves based not on our faith but on a career path or job. May God help us tell people first of all that we’re a Christian. 1 Peter 3:15 says, “But in your hearts revere Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect…”

It’s the core of our Christian faith: Jesus was not just a man; he is the Son of God. The angel announced to his mother Mary that Jesus would be born as the Son of God (1:35). When he was twelve years old at the temple, he told the teachers that he had to be in his Father’s house (2:49). At his baptism, God’s voice said, “You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased” (3:22). Faith that Jesus is the Son of God was the core of the early Christian message. Apostle Paul after his conversion mainly proclaimed that Jesus is the Son of God (Ac9:20). Hebrews 1:3 says, “The Son is the radiance of God’s glory and the exact representation of his being, sustaining all things by his powerful word. After he had provided purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty in heaven.” When we confess our faith, we are rescued from the dominion of darkness and brought into the kingdom of the Son he loves (Col1:13). Today people have many opinions about Jesus. Some say he was a great teacher, a man of compassion, a humanitarian, a revolutionary, or one of the great prophets. Partly all these things are true. Jesus was a servant, a shepherd and a friend of sinners. But on trial he didn’t deny he was the Son of God. Why is his identity important? When we realize he is God’s Son, we can see that it was impossible for death to keep its hold on him (Ac2:24). More than that, when we confess our faith that Jesus is the Son of God, he becomes our Lord (Ro1:4).

In 23:1–25 Luke records Jesus’ trial before Pilate and Herod. Under Roman rule the Jews lost the right to execute people, so they had to get Pilate to execute Jesus (Jn18:31,32). When they brought Jesus to him and accused him of many things, Pilate immediately could tell there was no basis for a charge against him (23:4). When the chief priests insisted, Pilate found out that Jesus was from Galilee. So he sent Jesus to Herod, who also was in Jerusalem for the Passover. Jesus’ trial before Herod is unique to Luke’s Gospel. We see in verses 8–12 what a corrupt man Herod was. He was the one who had had John the Baptist beheaded because of his drunken birthday party and lusting after his stepdaughter (9:7–9; cf. Mt14:1–12; Mk6:17–29). Due to his guilty conscience, for a long time Herod wanted to see Jesus (23:8). Now Pilate sent Jesus to him in chains. Herod finally had his opportunity. He hoped to see Jesus perform a sign of some sort. He treated Jesus like a clown in a circus. When he plied him with many questions, Jesus gave him no answer (23:9). At that time Jesus was being vehemently accused by the chief priests and teachers of the law (23:10). But he was silent before his accusers. Finally, Herod and his soldiers ridiculed and mocked Jesus’ kingship, dressing him in an elegant robe. Herod was so flattered that Pilate sent Jesus to him that he decided to be Pilate’s friend.

In the rest of the passage Luke shows the injustice of Jesus’ trial. He repeats three times that there was no basis for a charge against Jesus (23:4,14,22). But the crowd wanted Barabbas, the well-known criminal, rather than Jesus, the holy One. People are still just like that. They would much prefer a corrupt rebel to a godly person. Pilate knew Jesus was innocent, but he gave in to the crowd. It’s still easy to give in to people instead of holding firm to the truth.

Today we thought about Jesus’ faith and hope while on trial. May God help us believe that Jesus is at the right hand of the mighty God, and believe our final victory and glory in him. We also thought about Jesus’ true identity as the Son of God. May God help us meditate on who Jesus is until we can confess in faith that he’s the Son of God. Finally, we saw how Jesus endured mocking, ridicule and great injustice, silently, like a lamb led to the slaughter. May God help us experience his love and grow in his image.