

Main Idea: In Mark 14:53-65, we find out what religious people think about Jesus, for it’s there that religion put Jesus on trial. The account involves four scenes.

- I. Religion takes Jesus to court (53-54).
 - A. The most religious Jews were in charge (53).
 - B. Peter was in the background (54).
 - II. Religion presents its case against Jesus (55-59).
 - A. There was a lack of evidence (55).
 - B. There was conflicting evidence (56).
 - C. There was twisted evidence (57-59).
 - III. Religion puts Jesus on the witness stand (60-62).
 - A. Jesus did not respond at first (60-61).
 - B. Jesus responded to only one question (62).
 1. He is the Christ.
 2. He is the Son of Man.
 3. He is equal with God.
 4. He is coming again.
 5. He will be seen by all, even His enemies.
 - IV. Religion gives the verdict (63-65).
 - A. They condemned the Giver of life as being worthy of death.
 - B. They revealed the utter depravity of man.
 1. Religion cannot save for it cannot change the heart.
 2. Religion is a place where sinners hide in their pride.
 3. Religious people need what they don’t think they need, the Savior.
- Implications: Three lessons to consider...
1. We need to appreciate the Lord more fully.
 2. We need to be more like the Lord.
 3. We need to prepare to see the Lord.

Today we turn in our Bibles to the end of Mark 14. You say, “Pastor, don’t you know that three weeks from today is Christmas eve? Why go to a text that shows us what happened at the *end* of Jesus’ life? Why not a text that shows how He began it?”

Good question. And we’ll do the latter on December 17 and 24. But today and next week, we will stay in Mark 14. I’m convinced that one of most meaningful ways to prepare for the celebration of Christ’s birth is by reminding ourselves where it’s all heading.

Last week was *The Betrayal*. Next week, *The Denial*. This week it’s *The Trial*. This is why He came. He came in order to give His life as a ransom payment for sin-shackled hostages.

Scripture Reading: Mark 14:53-65

It was the saddest of nights, the night that religion put Jesus on trial. It’s staggering to ponder. One would think that of all people, *religious* people should have respected and honored someone like Jesus. After all, Jesus healed sick people, gave sight to blind people, taught truth that liberated people from spiritual bondage, and demonstrated unconditional and boundless love for all. Yet in the end the most religious people in Israel condemned Jesus to die.

Religion is often a barrier that keeps people from Jesus. The problem, we should clarify, isn’t religion. There is a good, God-endorsed type of religion, as James 1:27 puts it, a “religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless,” Religion that pleases

^{**}Note: This is an unedited manuscript of a message preached at Wheelersburg Baptist Church. It is provided to prompt your continued reflection on the practical truths of the Word of God.

¹ For a previous look at this passage, see the Mark series in 2006.

God is this [again quoting James]: “to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world.”

But unfortunately, religion in the hands of sinners quickly degenerates from “pure and faultless” to “corrupt and guilt-producing.” J. D. Jones describes it this way, “A religion which has degenerated into a formalism is worse than no religion. For the form of religion has a way of searing the conscience and deadening the soul... While religion when real and true is the savor of life unto life, the same religion when nothing but a cloak and an empty form becomes the savor of death unto death!”²

It’s true. When religion puts Jesus on trial, religion always does one of two things. Either religion modifies Jesus and turns Him into something He is not. Or, religion determines that Jesus must go.

As examples of the former, think of Islam. And the Mormons, and other cults. Even mainline liberal Protestants. They all believe in Jesus, but He’s a modified Jesus and most certainly not the true Jesus of the Bible. The true Jesus does not fit into their merit-based religious system.

And then there’s the other option. Religions that insist that Jesus must go. Secularism takes this approach. You say, “Secularists don’t believe in God. Secularism isn’t a religion.” But it most certainly is a faith-based religious system, committed to the tenet, not that God exists, but that He doesn’t exist. So if He doesn’t exist, then anyone who claims that He does, and also claims to be the way to Him (as Jesus did), must go.

In Mark 14:53-65, we find out what religion thinks about Jesus. There are four scenes in this sobering account. I’ll mention them at the outset, and then we’ll consider them carefully one by one, with implications to follow.

- I. Religion takes Jesus to court (53-54).
- II. Religion presents its case against Jesus (55-59).
- III. Religion puts Jesus on the witness stand (60-62).
- IV. Religion gives the verdict (63-65).

I. Religion takes Jesus to court (53-54).

Notice verse 53, “And they [the mob that arrested Jesus in Gethsemane] led Jesus to the high priest. And all the chief priests and the elders and the scribes came together.”

If ever a group should have been sympathetic to the Messiah, these men should have been! We’re talking about the *high priest* of Israel. This is the man who was given by God to His chosen people to be the go-between, the mediator between them and God. And also, the *chief priests*, God’s anointed representatives for His people. And the *elders* too, supposedly mature men who’d walked with God longer than others. And the *scribes*, the *teachers of the law*, men who copied the Scriptures and knew them better than anyone else in the land.

Let this sink in. These are the men behind the bench in this court of law. Mark makes it clear that...

A. The most religious Jews were in charge (53). The high priest was a man named Caiaphas (Matt. 26:57). Luke’s account states specifically that they took Jesus to the *house* of the high priest (Luke 22:54). When they arrived, it was past midnight. Not a good time for a decision-making body to deliberate, right? Yet as we’ll see, this judicial body isn’t interested in justice. They have another agenda in mind.

² J. D. Jones, p. 586.

And so, the Sanhedrin assembled to interrogate Jesus. The Sanhedrin was the supreme court of the Jews, composed of 71 members. Within its membership were Sadducees (the priests), Pharisees and Scribes (who were experts in the law), and respected men who were elders.

Before looking at this trial, it will help us to give a brief overview of what else Jesus faced that horrible night. He actually faced two trials, one conducted by the Jewish religious authorities, and the other by the civil Roman authorities. And these two trials involved other elements.

The Jewish trial involved three stages, which we can piece together by comparing the four gospel accounts. Mark tells us they took Jesus to the house of the high priest, which was Caiaphas. Actually, before arriving there the soldiers took the Lord to the house of Annas (see John 18:13).³ Annas was father-in-law to Caiaphas, the current high priest. Annas himself had been high priest at a previous time. Four of his sons and a son-in-law actually held the position after him which shows us that Annas was a man of great power and prestige in Israel.

The second stage of the Jewish trial is the one we'll be investigating in a moment, as recorded in Mark 14. In this second stage, Jesus was brought before the Jewish supreme court, the Sanhedrin. The assembly took place during the night which made the court proceedings illegal according to Jewish law.

That's why the third stage followed early the next morning (Friday morning), as indicated in Mark 15:1. As soon as day broke, as soon as Jewish law said it was legal for court proceedings to occur, the Sanhedrin reassembled and, as Mark 15:1 states, "held a consultation" (ESV). The NIV says they "reached a decision." Of course, as we'll see momentarily, this was mere formality for their "decision" about Jesus was reached during the illegal night trial.

Then, after the Jewish trial, came the civil, Roman trial. Mark 15:1 indicates that as soon as the Jews declared Jesus guilty of blasphemy, they sent Him to the Roman governor, Pilate, for another trial. We should note that the reason Pilate condemned Jesus to death was different from the crime for which the Jewish Sanhedrin ascribed guilt. The Sanhedrin said Jesus was guilty of blasphemy, but of course, the Romans could care less whether a man blasphemed the Jews' God. So a different charge was trumped up and thrown at Jesus during the Roman trial. Pilate condemned Jesus to death, not for blasphemy but for high treason. In other words, Pilate crucified the Lord, not because He said He was the Son of God, but because He said (or rather the Jews said He said) that He was King of the Jews.⁴

Our focus today is on the second phase of the religious trial. We've already met the presiding officials, the members of the Sanhedrin. Now, in the next verse Mark introduces us to someone else who was at Caiaphas's house.

B. Peter was in the background (54). Verse 54 says, "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."

Interesting. Peter is there. Just minutes earlier he had deserted Jesus and fled, as had the rest of the disciples (50). But now Peter is back, at least in the proximity of Jesus.

³ Caiaphas was the high priest who was acceptable to Rome. Annas, his father-in-law, was actually the high priest according to Mosaic Law. John's account says that Jesus was brought first to Annas. -J. McGee, p. 178.

⁴ Observation by J. D. Jones, p. 583.

Remember, earlier in the evening Peter had promised Jesus that he was ready to die for his Master, if need be (31). So now he has rejoined his Lord, albeit at a distance.

Mark says he stayed by the fire with the guards. I wonder if Malchus was there. Remember him? He's the guard whose ear Peter severed and Jesus healed in the garden.

It's easy to criticize Peter for hiding in the background, but at least he's in the background. There's no mention of the other disciples, save John. They're all gone, and Mark is going to tell us what happened to Peter in next week's passage.

So ends scene one. Religion takes Jesus to court. Now scene two.

II. Religion presents its case against Jesus (55-59).

In verse 55 Mark presents the Sanhedrin's agenda that that night, and it wasn't justice. The text says, "Now the chief priests and the whole council were seeking testimony against Jesus to put him to death, but they found none."

Again, these are priests, and priests are supposed to be holy men. God Himself established the priesthood in the Mosaic law. He gave these men the privileged assignment to represent His people before Him. But here the chief priests are standing in the very presence of God's Son, and they not only don't recognize Him, but want to kill Him! This is their unabashed, wicked agenda, to put Jesus to death.

But they have a problem. To accomplish their agenda, they need evidence, which they do not yet have. Hence the reason for this night time meeting.

So what happened in their search for evidence? A threefold process.

A. There was a lack of evidence (55). The end of verse 55 states (in the NIV), "But they did not find any." They couldn't find any factual basis to warrant killing Jesus. Of course, when someone has an agenda the lack of credible facts doesn't stop them. Nor did it here. First, no evidence. Then conflicting evidence.

B. There was conflicting evidence (56). Verse 56 says, "For many bore false witness against him, but their testimony did not agree." Notice the word "many". How do you determine truth? See who has the most number of people saying it? No.

Many threw false accusations at Jesus. In other words, lies and fabrications. They made up scenarios. They claimed to see and hear things from Jesus that didn't happen.

But the problem with lying, of course, is that it's difficult to keep multiple lies straight. So it happened in this courtroom. The lies contradicted each other.

By law, these men should have been charged with perjury for lying in a court of justice. According to Deuteronomy 17:6, two witnesses in agreement were necessary to find a man guilty and deserving of the death sentence. But that wasn't happening in this courtroom.

So the prosecutors took a different approach. They moved from a lack of evidence to conflicting evidence to twisted evidence.

C. There was twisted evidence (57-59). "And some stood up and bore false witness against him, saying, ⁵⁸ '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.' ' ⁵⁹ Yet even about this their testimony did not agree."

"We heard him say!" the witnesses asserted. The problem is, Jesus *never* said what they claimed He said. The only words of Jesus that even come close to this were words He spoke a couple of years earlier, recorded in John 2:19, "Destroy this temple, and I will raise it again in three days." He wasn't talking about the Jewish temple, but His own body. And He didn't say He would destroy the temple, but was stating the fact that the temple, His body, would be destroyed by others.

The witnesses are simply twisting Jesus' words, taking them out of context, and worse. They're outright changing His words to build a straw man case against Him.

Tennyson once said, "A lie that is all a lie, may be met with and fought outright; But a lie that is partly the truth, is a harder matter to fight."

It's a painful thing to be misrepresented. Perhaps you've felt such pain, or are feeling it even now. If so, He understands. He who was tempted in all points as we are, as Hebrews describes our Savior, truly understands. And cares, even for the liars who misrepresent Him. After all, He's about to die for liars too.

And so, the entire Jewish trial was a travesty.⁵ In point of fact, when the Sanhedrin tried Jesus, it broke its *own* laws. It did not meet in an authorized building, which it was required to do. It met at night, which was illegal. It met during one of the Jewish feasts, which also was illegal. Their law stated that trial witnesses must be examined separately and for their evidence to be valid, it must agree in every detail. This certainly was violated in Jesus' trial. If the verdict was death, a night was to elapse before the execution was carried out so the court might have a chance to change its mind if necessary.

But there's no justice in this courtroom on this terrible night. This is religion at its worst. And it brings us to scene three. One, religion takes Jesus to court. Two, religion presents its case against Jesus. Three, religion puts Jesus on the witness stand.

III. Religion puts Jesus on the witness stand (60-62).

Notice verse 60, "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?'"

Now there's an ironic question! *What is it that these men testify against you?* What is it? Nothing but lies, not even worthy of a response!

And this was Jesus' response, as verse 61 indicates, "But he remained silent and made no answer."

A. Jesus did not respond at first (60-61). See Him standing there, my friend. He simply stands there in silence.

We live in a society that is hung up on rights, and when people don't get what they think they *deserve*, they make noise. We hear it all the time.

"I've got a right to be happy."

"I've got a right to tell you what I think and how I feel."

"I've got a right to a good marriage, and if I don't have it, I've got a right to get out of it."

"I've got a right to a comfortable home, a job with good working conditions, a nice retirement, and plenty of spending money."

Rights. To people who dwell on 'rights,' the word 'injustice' is very distasteful. We don't tolerate injustice, particularly when it happens to us. We fight injustice. And certainly, there are times when we should. But I want you to reflect on something. *Jesus experienced injustice.* And how did Jesus respond? In silent submission.

You say, "Why didn't Jesus defend Himself? If His accusers were wrong (and they certainly were), then surely He could have exposed the fallacy of their accusations. Why didn't He? Why did He just stand there in silence?"

Why do you think He stood there in silence? Was He afraid? Was He simply unsure what to do next? Was He baffled by their response? Is He frustrated by these powerful

⁵ See Barclay, pp. 349-50

authority figures? Has He simply resigned Himself to the inevitable fate that these bloodthirsty men are going to take His life, so why speak up?

No. No. No. Why doesn't He speak up and save Himself? Because He came to give His life, not save it. He came for this very reason. He came to accomplish this very work that His Father had given Him to do, the payment of a ransom.

A ransom? Yes. He had come from heaven to earth to pay a ransom, to set free a people a people who were in chains and without hope. And the ransom price? He Himself was the price. As He had said earlier in Mark 10:45, He had come "to give His life as a ransom for many."

He had come to fulfill the prediction made seven hundred years earlier by the prophet Isaiah, in Isaiah 53:7, "He was oppressed and afflicted, yet he did not open his mouth; he was led like a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is silent, so he did not open his mouth."

Yes, my friend, Jesus endured great injustice. And He did it to pay the ransom payment for us, to set us free from our bondage to sin and give us eternal life. He gave His life for us, beloved. He chose to deny Himself His rights in order to bring about our good.

Are you thankful He did? You say, "How can I show Him I'm thankful for His payment?"

First, believe in Him. Acknowledge that your sin was part of the reason He paid the ransom payment. Repent, and receive Him as your Savior.

But let's not stop there. Our Gracious Savior calls on us, His ransomed people, to walk in His steps. This is how we show our appreciation to Him, by choosing to respond to our own suffering in the way He did to His.

It's significant that this is the application emphasized by the man who was there watching Him suffer that night. I'm talking about Peter. These are Peter's words written to suffering Christians in 1 Peter 2:21–25, "For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you might follow in his steps. ²² He committed no sin, neither was deceit found in his mouth. ²³ When he was reviled, he did not revile in return; when he suffered, he did not threaten, but continued entrusting himself to him who judges justly. ²⁴ He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. By his wounds you have been healed. ²⁵ For you were straying like sheep, but have now returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls."

To this we have been called, beloved. He endured suffering for us. Now let's endure suffering for Him, by walking in His steps.

John Paton chose to do so.⁶ Paton was a wonderfully used nineteenth century missionary to New Hebrides (now known as Vanuatu), a large group of Pacific islands northeast of Australia. After graduating from school and ministering in Scotland, he was sent to New Hebrides with his wife.

The land was occupied by cannibals. When they first set shore, the Patons couldn't speak the language of the native people. They knew that others who had come to New Hebrides were never heard from again. They went knowing that death for the sake of Christ was a very real possibility.

After only a few weeks on the island, Paton's wife gave birth to a baby. But the baby soon died, and a few days later so did his wife. For the next three of four nights, Paton

⁶ Story taken from J. MacArthur's "Grace to You" letter, 3/24/95.

slept on the graves of his loved ones to keep the cannibals from digging them up and consuming their bodies.

Perhaps many of us would have thrown in the towel and said, “This isn't fair. I've given my all for God's service, and look what I've received in return...*injustice*.”

But not Paton. In spite of the disastrous circumstances, he remained in New Hebrides. He devoted the rest of his life to reaching the land with the gospel of Christ. In his autobiography, Paton said that as the result of his ministry, he didn't know of a single inhabitant who had not made at least a profession of faith in Christ.

John Patton accepted the fact that Christ has not called us to a life of self-fulfillment, but rather to a life of self-denial, not to be served but to serve, even if that service involves hardship and at times injustice. He did not live for the approval of men but for the approval of his heavenly Father who promises heavenly reward for His obedient sons.

Look again at Jesus, my friend. See Him standing there, enduring injustice. When the questions were hurled at Him, He did not respond.

And then, He did. He was silent, silent, silent, and then He spoke. When did He speak? To answer one question. This one, at the end of verse 61. “Again the high priest asked him, ‘Are you the Christ, the Son of the Blessed One?’”

Who asked the question? The high priest did. He is so ‘religious’ he uses the title ‘Blessed One’ to avoid saying the name of God (which Jews considered blasphemous). How ironic. A man who is so religious that he won't say the name of God is about to authorize the killing of the Son of God.

The parallel account of Matthew 26:63 adds further light on how desperate the priest was for an answer: “The high priest said to him, ‘I charge you under oath by the living God: Tell us if you are the Christ, the Son of God.’”

Barclay comments, “He asked the very kind of question that the law completely forbade. He asked a leading question. It was forbidden to ask questions by answering which the person on trial might incriminate himself. No man could be asked to condemn himself, but that was the very question the High Priest asked.”⁷

It was at this point that Jesus broke His silence.

B. Jesus responded to only one question (62). When He was asked, “Are you the Christ?” This is the question that Jesus answers. And His answer? Verse 62, “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.’”

Although just a few words, Jesus communicated volumes with that reply. Indeed, He makes five truths perfectly clear by this testimony.

1. He is the Christ. Until this moment Jesus has kept His Messiahship veiled from the public. But now, in the presence of His enemies, He makes a public, clear statement, one that He knows will result in His death. *I am*, He says. He claims to be the long-awaited, promised Messiah.

You say, “I don't understand. Why did Jesus answer *this* question when He refused to speak earlier?”

I'm not entirely sure, but I do know this. By answering this question, Jesus is forcing His critics (and us) to face *the issue*. He claimed to be God's Chosen One, the Christ, not one option amongst many, but the only option, *The Christ*. That's His claim. That's the issue of all issues. What will we now do with His claim? What will we do with Him?

Yet there's more. By this simple statement Jesus made something perfectly clear.

⁷ Barclay, p. 350.

2. *He is the Son of Man.* “You will see the Son of Man...” Jesus used this title for Himself more than any other title. We see it 81 times in the Gospels. It may not mean much to our western ears, but it did to the Jews. It’s a messianic title, and it comes from the prophet Daniel. Daniel used it to predict the coming of an end time Deliverer who would come from heaven.

Listen to Daniel 7:13-14, “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.”

“That is Me,” declared Jesus. “I’ve come from heaven. I’ve been given authority and will be worshipped by all men. My kingdom will not pass away. I am the Son of Man.”

3. *He is equal with God.* Where did He say that He, the Son of Man, would be sitting? He said, “You will see the Son of Man *seated at the right hand of Power.*” The NIV reads, “at the right hand of the Mighty One.” This title, of course, refers to God. For Jesus to assert that He will sit at the right hand of God is to assert equality with God.

The imagery comes from Psalm 110:1, where David writes, “The LORD [that’s God] says to my Lord [that’s the coming Messiah]: ‘Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet.’” By His response to Caiaphas, Jesus is claiming to be the One of whom David prophesied in Psalm 110:1. This is a staggering claim.

And so is this.

4. *He is coming again.* “You will see the Son of Man...coming with the clouds of heaven.” Once again, this comes right out of the messianic prophecy of Daniel 7:13, where Daniel said, “There before me was one like a son of man, *coming with the clouds of heaven.*”

Let this sink in, my friend. Jesus is about to be sentenced to death, and He doesn’t intend to stop that death from coming, for it’s why He came. But He does make it clear that His death will not be His end. Indeed, He gives this prediction to the religious crowd that night. He tells them that He is coming again. He came the first time as a tiny baby in an obscure manger, but when He comes the second time He will come with the clouds of heaven. That is to say, He will come in great splendor and majesty. The first time, He came to die as a sacrificial lamb. But the second time, He will come from heaven as a majestic king.

And who will see Him then? Listen again to Jesus’ words to Caiaphas and the others, “I am, and **you will see** the Son of Man.” Stop there. Who will see? *You* will, Caiaphas. *You* will, elders and scribes. *You* will, every one of you will see.⁸

5. *He will be seen by all, even His enemies.* And what will they see? In the NIV Jesus says, “And you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Mighty One and coming on the clouds of heaven.”

Jesus says they will see Him doing two things. *Sitting.* And *coming.* You will see Me sitting at God’s right hand, and you will see Me coming with the clouds of heaven in triumph. Yes, you are judging Me now, for I am allowing you to do so. But the day is coming when I will come and judge you.

Dear friends, we will see Him, too. Every eye will see Him (Rev. 1:7). Every knee will bow before Him (Phil. 2:10). Every tongue will confess that He is Lord (Phil. 2:11).

⁸ The verb (“you will see”) is plural.

The question is, *are we ready to see Him?* If we know Jesus merely as a cuddly little baby in a manger, we're not ready. If we know Him merely as a man who did much good, we're not ready. To be ready to see Him, we must know Him as our Savior and Lord. Do you?

Religion takes Jesus to court. Religion presents its case against Jesus. Religion puts Jesus on the witness stand. Finally, scene four.

IV. Religion gives the verdict (63-65).

Notice verse 63, "And the high priest tore his garments and said, 'What further witnesses do we need?'" Stop there. Any *more* witnesses? The previous witnesses hadn't proven a thing but merely contradicted each other.

Now verse 64, "You have heard his blasphemy. What is your decision?" The sad fact is that he never even considered the possibility that Jesus' claim was true. Jesus told him the plain truth, that He was the Christ. The high priest willfully and deliberately shut his ears to the possibility. And having done so, he had only one other option, the one he chose. He called for Jesus' condemnation.

So did the others. In verse 64, "And they all condemned him as deserving death." Ponder that carefully. They *all* (this was unanimous). *Condemned* him (this was their judicial conclusion). As *deserving death* (the worst sentence possible).

A. They condemned the Giver of life as being worthy of death. Although they didn't recognize it, before them is the Person who gave them life. Even at this very moment He is giving them the breath they need to utter the words they are speaking. And with their words they say He deserves to die.

Unthinkable. Yet true.

But these religious men have a problem. What they've decided to do, they lack the authority to do. For starters, it's the middle of the night, and their court proceeding is illegal. Furthermore, only the Romans can authorize capital punishment.

So, they take a recess and propose to meet again at daybreak, when they conduct their "official" trial (15:1). Then, once they hit the gavel, they will send Him to the Romans for a civil trial, which Mark presents in chapter 15.

Verse 65 says, "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."

Allow me to remind you that these are *religious* people treating Jesus in such inhumane ways. How can this be?

B. They revealed the utter depravity of man. It's bad enough to condemn an innocent man. But to spit at him, strike him with one's fists, and to beat him mercilessly...this reveals the horrid condition of depraved hearts, even if those depraved hearts are tucked away inside a religious façade.

I believe we learn three realities about religion right here.

1. *Religion cannot save for it cannot change the heart.* These men read their Bibles, participated in worship services, gave money to charity, and did all sorts of other religious deeds. But their hearts were black with sin, and their condition was exposed the moment One who was truly righteous entered their presence.

The problem isn't Bible reading, participating in worship services, giving money to charity, and so on. The problem is thinking that religious activity merits favor in the eyes of God. It doesn't. It can't. Religion lacks the power to change a sinful heart.

2. *Religion is a place where sinners hide in their pride.* That's our fundamental problem. We are *proud*. We think we're okay, we're *good* people, in spite of the fact

that God declares in His Word that we are depraved sinners. If you had asked Caiaphas or the others that night, “Are you sure you are doing the right thing?” they would have answered, “Absolutely! We are doing God’s work! We are very religious!”

But their religion was merely a place where they could hide in their pride. Quite frankly, there are not a few people doing the same in churches this morning. They don’t see themselves as sinners in need of grace, but as good people doing good things for God.

3. *Religious people need what they don’t think they need, the Savior.* Simply put, religious people need what all people need. They need to be saved. They need the Holy Spirit to open their eyes so that they admit their hopeless condition as sinners. They need to place their faith in Jesus and the work He accomplished at the cross for them. They need to receive the Risen Jesus as their Savior and Master. They need for God to do for them what they cannot do for themselves, no matter how religious they have been.

Implications: Three lessons to consider...

1. *We need to appreciate the Lord more fully.* O what He suffered for us, beloved!

2. *We need to be more like the Lord.* Reflecting on that night Peter later wrote in 1 Peter 2:21, “To this you were called, because Christ suffered for you, *leaving you an example*, that you should follow in his steps.” Perhaps you are facing injustice, mistreatment by cruel individuals. Do you see the opportunity your Savior is giving you, to *follow in His steps*, and in so doing, to fulfill your calling and point people to Him?

We’ve looked at four scenes today, but we haven’t seen the final scene. The One the religious leaders rejected, the One who died for sinners on Calvary’s cross, the One who rose from the dead three days later and returned back to heaven, is now seated on His heavenly throne. The day is coming, perhaps today, when He will come with the clouds of heaven, and He who was unjustly judged by men will judge men justly. Therefore...

3. *We need to prepare to see the Lord.* Today is the day of salvation.

Closing Song: #338 “*At Calvary*” (all four verses)

December Benediction: 2 Corinthians 2:14 (ESV) “But thanks be to God, who in Christ always leads us in triumphal procession, and through us spreads the fragrance of the knowledge of him everywhere.”