

Eastwood Baptist (PM, 25/3/18) **JESUS IS BETRAYED AND CONDEMNED** (Mark 14:43-65)

Introduction Have you ever been accused unjustly of anything? Most of us feel such injustice keenly, so I expect that most of you can think of an occasion. In this morning's passage, Jesus is the victim of blatant injustice, and Mark seems to draw attention to this.

Injustice and Violence (14:43-52) Our passage begins with injustice and the threat of violence. **Read v.43.** It is Judas, one of the Twelve, who leads the arresting party, and this large armed party comes from leaders of God's people, who might be expected to uphold justice. Mark wants us to see that loyalty and justice are being violated. But he probably also wants us to see that unjust men are not really in control: they are fulfilling Jesus' prophecies, and therefore the will of God the Father. Then our passage continues as it began. **Read vv.44-46.** A disciple has become a betrayer, and his act of outward respect is actually hostile. And a just man, indeed the only perfectly just man ever to live, is treated like a criminal. Next we see contrasting responses to injustice and the unjustified use of force. First there is the response of one of the disciples (we know from John's Gospel that it is Peter): **read v.47.** Peter responds to injustice and the unjustified use of force with angry violence. I think that most of us have some sympathy for Peter. But his response is not in line with his master's. **Read vv.48-49.** Jesus responds calmly and non-violently. Indeed, we know from Luke that he healed the servant's ear. He boldly points out the injustice of the arresting party's behaviour, but does so without violence, even verbal violence. And he also points out that something beyond the injustice is going on, that Scripture is being fulfilled, so it is not the armed men who are really in charge, but God. The most obvious scriptural reference is to Isaiah 53, particularly v.8a: **by oppression and judgment he was taken away.** Then Mark's account turns back to the disciples - **read v.50.** When Jesus disowns Peter's violence (implicitly here, but more plainly in other Gospels), the other disciples are not prepared to imitate Jesus' non-violent courage, and they all run away. The remaining verses in this section of the passage are an odd interruption to the flow of the narrative - **read vv.51-52.** By far the best explanation of this detail, I think, is that Mark is referring to himself, thus identifying himself as an eyewitness of this incident.

An Unjust Trial (14:53-59) This section begins with another personal detail, this time concerning Peter, but I'll skip over this because I'm not looking at the story of Peter's denial of Jesus this morning. So I'll pick up Mark's narrative at **vv.55-56.** Here we see perversion of justice by those who are meant to be guardians of justice, and they are unjust both in their

motives and their method. But Jesus' innocence comes through in spite of their unjust and dishonest actions. If we are meant to see Jesus as a positive model in this passage, we can certainly see the actions of the Jewish leaders as a warning. As Jesus' followers, we are called to act with justice and honesty, and we bring Christianity into disrepute when we fail to do so. Mark next tells us about a specific instance of the dishonesty of Jesus' accusers. **Read vv.57-59.** This false testimony would be puzzling if we only had Mark's Gospel to go on. But we know from John's Gospel that it is a distortion rather than a complete fabrication – Jesus didn't say exactly this, but he said something similar to this in a prophecy of his resurrection. **Read John 2:18-22.** Nonetheless, it is a distortion, and so false testimony, and once again the false witnesses fail to agree.

Injustice Confronted by Truth (14:60-65) Now the High Priest, probably frustrated by the failure of the false testimonies, tries to pressure Jesus into an answer – **read v.60.** He was probably hoping that Jesus would incriminate himself, but he is disappointed – **read v.61a.** Mark is drawing attention again to the fulfilment of Scripture – **read Isaiah 53:7.** The High Priest again attempts to draw Jesus into self-incrimination, this time by means of a direct question – **read v.61b.** His choice of question reveals that he makes the false assumption that Jesus is not in fact the Messiah.

This time Jesus does answer – **read v.62.** He truthfully acknowledges that he is the Messiah, but even now he prefers the title "Son of Man". Yes, he says, I am the Messiah, the anointed one for whom Israel has been waiting. But I am also the Son of Man, the glorious figure found in the prophetic writing of Daniel. This is the climax of our passage – here is truth asserted in the face of dishonesty and injustice. And Mark wants his readers, including us, to say "amen": this is the Jesus in whom we believe. This is the true Messiah, who died for our sins; this is the Son of Man, who overcame death and who will return in glory. But the High Priest and those supporting him reject Jesus' testimony, and mock him as though he were a false Messiah – **read vv.63-65.** But he is the true Messiah and the glorious Son of Man, so in supposing that they can condemn him they in fact condemn themselves. So it still is today. When we bear witness to Jesus people may reject our witness, but our witness is still true, and we are not answerable for their rejection of our witness.

Conclusion This passage reminds us that dishonesty and injustice often seem to triumph in our world, but God is in control, and will direct history ultimately to his conclusion. Meanwhile we are called to honour Jesus as Messiah and Son of Man, as our Saviour and Lord. And we are called to honour him not only with our words but also with our lives, to imitate Jesus' way of truth, justice and peace. If we do this, not everyone will be

impressed, but some will be. And they will take notice when we say that we are followers of Jesus Christ.