



Sermon for the Lenten Service 5 (16th March 2018)

Greeting: Grace from Him Who is and Who was and Who is to come. Amen.

• **The Reading for this Devotion is written in Mk 14, 53-72:**

- ^{ESV 53} And they led Jesus to the high priest. And all the chief priests and the elders and the scribes came together.
- ⁵⁴ 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.
- ⁵⁵ Now the chief priests and the whole Council were seeking testimony against Jesus to put him to death, but they found none.
- ⁵⁶ For many bore false witness against him, but their testimony did not agree.
- ⁵⁷ 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.
- 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?"
- ⁶¹ But he remained silent and made no answer. Again the high priest asked him, "Are you the Christ, the Son of the Blessed?"
- 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."
- ⁶³ And the high priest tore his garments and said, "What further witnesses do we need?"
- ⁶⁴ You have heard his blasphemy. What is your decision?" And they all condemned him as deserving death.
- ⁶⁵ 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.
- ⁶⁶ And as Peter was below in the courtyard, one of the servant girls of the high priest came,
- ⁶⁷ and seeing Peter warming himself, she looked at him and said, "You also were with the Nazarene, Jesus."
- ⁶⁸ But he denied it, saying, "I neither know nor understand what you mean." And he went out into the gateway and the rooster crowed.
- ⁶⁹ And the servant girl saw him and began again to say to the bystanders, "This man is one of them."
- ⁷⁰ 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."
- ⁷¹ But he began to invoke a curse on himself and to swear, "I do not know this man of whom you speak."
- ⁷² 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.

• ***Dear Brothers and Sisters under the Cross of Christ!***

- This passage jumps to life when one reads "God" in the place of Jesus: And they led "God" to the high-priest. Now the chief priests and the whole Council

were seeking testimony against “God” to put Him to death, but they found none. How crazy is this! On the Sabbath day the chief priests and the whole Sanhedrin were in the temple worshipping God, the very ONE they were now trying their utmost best to get killed!

•Of course, they didn’t realise, they didn’t want to believe, they, the religious elite, could not believe that this man was who He said He was, the only begotten Son of God. In three days He would rebuild the temple He had said. Jesus was speaking of His Body which would die and resurrect on the third Day. But even in this regard their witnesses did not agree. None of the testimonies agreed- *which were not God sent*- so all of it was thrown out as false testimony, even by their own proceedings. So, in the end, there was only one possibility left, there was only one last testimony to count on, the testimony of Jesus Himself!

•John the Baptizer was killed. He could not be summoned as witness. What about Jesus’ disciples? Well, one followed Jesus into the courtyard, but we know what happened to him. He was trialled by a servant girl and he, the zealous, enthusiastic and bold spokesperson for the disciples, denied Jesus fully! He would also not be helpful as a witness. Not at this stage!

•Here a very important lesson is given with regard to witnesses about Jesus. So-called outside witnesses which atheists and other agnostics and almost the whole world loves to give so much credit will in the end not be sufficient testimony at all, because those were looking at the situation from the outside. They had the least chance of knowing what was actually going on. They can at best give proof that Jesus existed, which in any case no serious historian denies.

•It can be shown that the people of those ancient times knew this- they were not as backward as we moderns make them out to be- they did not pay as much attention to all these outside witnesses, as our generation tends to do. They were much more interested in the insider’s witness and then evaluate the best evidence so to speak.

•So, we come back to Jesus being the most important and only reliable witness in His trial. If He would deny that He is the Son of God or that He ever said so, there would have been no witness of a case against Him! How ironic: Human kind trials God, yet in the end *we have no witness from our side against God!!* How absurd and it immediately reflects how corrupt humankind is.

• Only ONE witness was left: Jesus Himself. The only thing the high-priest could do to save the verdict against Jesus, was, to ask Jesus Himself. Hopefully He would answer. So, Mark records it like this: the high priest asked Jesus and says (present tense) to Him: **“You are the Christ, the Son of the Blessed?”**

Depending on the tone of the voice this utterance can either be taken as a confession or as a question. The high priest understood it as a question, of course. And Jesus answered: Ego eimi- *“I AM, and you will see the Son of Man seated at the right hand of Power and coming with the clouds of heaven.”* Jesus claims for Himself to be I AM, that is translated into Hebrew JHWH, the I AM who I AM. And the leaders of the Jews will only see Him again on Judgement Day, when He will come with the clouds of heaven, as the Son of Man, as prophesied in Daniel 7.

• They, the Jewish leaders, His enemies, won't see Him when He is resurrected. They will only see Him again on the Last Day. Then it will be too late for grace. Then He comes for judgement.

• The high priest understood very well what Jesus had said, namely that He had claimed to be JHWH, the I AM- this was clear blasphemy to him and the rest of the Sanhedrin. Indeed, what further witness did they need?

• ***What further witness do we need!*** This is indeed a great statement which we as Christians can echo, but with a different direction than the high priest had meant it. One thing is certain: Jesus did claim to be I AM, Himself! Jesus did claim to be JHWH. The high priest interpreted this statement as blasphemy, whilst for us it proves that Jesus is God and He said so Himself. The high priest fully understood it as such, that is why he tore his clothes and was happy that they had something truly blasphemous according to their laws.

• Therefore, this statement of Jesus wipes away all conspiracy theories that supposedly, only later on, Christians or Emperor Constantine invented the deity of Jesus. It wipes this nonsense completely from the table. Whoever claims something like that flat-out denies the core witness of the New Testament Scriptures!

• ***What further witness do we need!*** The answer is none. In the end it was only Jesus' witness that led to His death! God gives witness of the truth, and the religious elite, that claim to worship Him, that claim to know Him, take it as blasphemy, as a lie. And they allow that God's only begotten Son is treated like

their prisoner: They began to spit on Him, they began to mock Him and the guards struck Him with the palm of their hands, made by Him!

- How was this possible? They couldn't see God in Jesus, because they had the wrong idea of God in their hearts!
- And those who should have known better, Peter and the rest of Jesus' disciples, were also not capable to believe in Jesus any more, for one reason: They also had hoped for a strong Messiah. One who would really change the world, one who would rebuild paradise, one who would be able to unite all people behind himself.
- But, what were they experiencing, an utterly weak man, with no obvious signs of God that spoke to the common sense of humankind. They reasoned, when He should have made use of His divine powers they knew He had, namely when He rode into Jerusalem, He instead became really weak, almost saying nothing before the trial to try and show His innocence. He was not fighting back at all. In fact, He openly confessed what the Sanhedrin wanted to hear to finally get Himself nailed to the Cross.
- A God who becomes weak seems to be an impossible solution for humankind. If women are ill-treated, what do we do, we try to empower them to fight back against their aggressors. It is the only way that works to ward off crude violence in this fallen world. I agree. But it is not God's way of dealing with sin. Trying to solve things by fighting back will get you as far as curbing the violence in its crudest forms.
- However, it will never succeed in rooting out the problem. God knew the only way, namely He needed to begin a new people, a new breed, if you want, born from above, by water and the Spirit, a people that needed to go through death and resurrection. This type, this breed is the anti-type of fighting and power and violence and pushing for entitlement and going on the barricades to fight for whatever. In its godly wisdom the congregation of Christ employs the weakness of God in this violent world and in the end overcomes darkness and evil through utter weakness. That is the New Way of Christ. He invites all of us to remain on His road of weakness and suffering towards the real NEW World. Glory be to Jesus! **Amen.**
- *The Grace of our Lord Jesus Christ and the Love of God and the Communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all. Amen.*