



Sunday School Lesson for June 19, 2005.
Released on June 15, 2005.

"Jesus Faced Opposition"

Printed Text: **Mark 14:53-65; 15:1-3.**
Devotional Reading: **Mark 14:17-21.**
Background Scripture: **Mark 14:53-65; 15:1-5.**

Time: A.D. 30
Place: Jerusalem

Mark 14:53-65

53 And they led Jesus away to the high priest: and with him were assembled all the chief priests and the elders and the scribes.

54 And Peter followed him afar off, even into the palace of the high priest: and he sat with the servants, and warmed himself at the fire.

55 And the chief priests and all the council sought for witness against Jesus to put him to death; and found none.

56 For many bare false witness against him, but their witness agreed not together.

57 And there arose certain, and bare false witness against him, saying,

58 We heard him say, I will destroy this temple that is made with hands, and within three days I will build another made without hands.

59 But neither so did their witness agree together.

60 And the high priest stood up in the midst, and asked Jesus, saying, Answerest thou nothing? what is it which these witness against thee?

61 But he held his peace, and answered nothing. Again the high priest asked him, and said unto him, Art thou the Christ, the Son of the Blessed?

62 And Jesus said, I am: and ye shall see the Son of man sitting on the right hand of power, and coming in the clouds of heaven.

63 Then the high priest rent his clothes, and saith, What need we any further witnesses?

64 Ye have heard the blasphemy: what think ye? And they all condemned him to be guilty of death.

65 And some began to spit on him, and to cover his face, and to buffet him, and to say unto him, Prophecy: and the servants did strike him with the palms of their hands.

Mark 15:1-3

1 And straightway in the morning the chief priests held a consultation with the elders and scribes and the whole council, and bound Jesus, and carried him away, and delivered him to Pilate.

2 And Pilate asked him, Art thou the King of the Jews? And he answering said unto him, Thou sayest it.

3 And the chief priests accused him of many things; but he answered nothing.

Today's Aim

Facts: to show how Jesus faced opposition from the religious leaders of His time.

Principle: to show that those who seek to follow God's mission will face opposition.

Application: to encourage students to follow God's mission for their lives and to expect opposition from the most unlikely people.

How to Say It

ANNAS. *An-nus.*

CAIAPHAS. *Kay-uh-fus* or *Kye-uh-fus.*

PONTIUS PILATE. *Pon-shus* or *Pon-ti-us Pie-lut.*

SANHEDRIN. *San-huh-drun* or *San-heed-run.*

Introduction

It is natural for us to do everything we can not to make enemies. We do not like to be opposed by others, for our preference is to be liked. There is benefit to be gained from enemies, however.

Socrates believed that every man needs a faithful friend and a bitter enemy, the one to advise him and the other to make him look around and outside of himself. There is value in having others oppose us, for if we handle the situation properly, we grow from it. We learn to be gracious and thoughtful if we do not react in anger and with sinful attitudes. Enemies can become a source of purging and cleansing even though we do not relish them.

Jesus' enemies, however, developed such a deep hatred for Him that they eventually determined He should be put to death. The opposition He faced early in His ministry gradually increased, especially among the religious leaders of Israel.

Taken to Trial (Mark 14:53, 54)

Jesus and His Enemies (v. 53)

1. Why was Jesus being led by religious authorities, and where were His disciples at this time (Mark 14:53, 54)?

When we put the details from all four Gospels together, we realize that Jesus was tried in two separate phases: first by the religious authorities and second by the Roman political authorities. Each of these two phases had three steps: an initial interrogation, a formal arraignment, and a sentencing. Mark, like the other Gospel authors, did not write all the details but gave us information he considered most important for his purposes in writing.

The fact that there were chief priests, elders, and scribes assembled with the high priest (Caiaphas) indicates this was a gathering of the Sanhedrin, come together for the arraignment. It was night-time and thus illegal, but they had probably been warned ahead of time that a meeting could be called at any moment, depending on the success of Jesus' arrest. The initial interrogation had already taken place before Annas, the father-in-law of Caiaphas (John 18:12-13, 19-24). The legal trial would proceed the next morning.

Although the disciples had scattered, Peter followed the action at a distance, ending up in the courtyard of the high priest's palace, which was an open area surrounded by the high priest's residence. Here he sat with the high priest's servants and officers, who were warming themselves around a fire because of the cold (John 18:18).

Plot to Eliminate (Mark 14:55-59)

Witnesses Disagree (vs. 55, 56)

2. Why was it a problem when there were not at least two testimonies that agreed about Jesus (vs. 55,56)?

The Sanhedrin is referred to here as "the council." This group was entrusted to carry out justice in every situation. In this case they were specifically seeking "for witness against Jesus to put Him to death." According to Deuteronomy 19:15, "One witness shall not rise up against a man for any iniquity, or for any sin, in any sin that he sinneth: at the mouth of two witnesses, or at the mouth of three witnesses, shall the matter be established." This became a problem for these men!

"Caiaphas, who had been high priest for a number of years, was a Sadducee and a crafty and hard individual, tied up with the corruption of the Annas Bazaars and their intriguing politics. Aided and abetted now by Annas with the chief priests and whole council, he made diligent search to secure false witnesses to testify against Jesus with the express purpose of putting Him to death. Many false witnesses came and gave their testimony but no agreement was found" (Shepard, The Christ of the Gospels, Eerdmans).

None of this was legal; it was done in complete violation of their own law. They were not to use undue haste in a trial or to seek or bribe witnesses. They were supposed to warn witnesses solemnly before they gave testimony, assuring them that if they did not speak the truth, the consequences would be severe. None of this was taken into consideration now because of their intense hatred of Jesus and their determination to somehow get the Roman authorities to declare that He should die.

3. What did two accusers finally agree on, and what happened then (vs. 57-59)?

By now it should have been evident that Jesus was innocent of any crime and should be set free. However, this was not a trial to establish justice; rather, it was being held to accomplish a predetermined purpose that was completely evil in its intent. Finally, two witnesses (Matt. 26:60) stood up with an accusation. Previously no two people had been able to coordinate their accusations, but finally two false witnesses had enough sense to get together and corroborate their story!

We cannot fail to see the hand of God in this situation. When we read the Gospel accounts today, it is clear that Jesus had never done anything wrong, and the holy character of our Saviour can be accepted without doubt.

The accusation now given was that Jesus had been heard to say that He would destroy the temple made by human hands and build another without human hands within three days. They were no doubt misinterpreting what Jesus said in John 2:19 nearly three years earlier. There He spoke of His body, not the literal temple in Jerusalem. Their testimony too was soon discredited.

To testify falsely is both a crime and a sin. To encourage someone to testify falsely also is both a crime and a sin. Many witnesses could have been found to testify in His favor, but none were sought or desired. When people treat us unfairly because we are Christians, will we be surprised? - Robert C. Shannon

4. It is sad that there was no one with enough conscience to denounce the council's corrupt behavior. How does one develop the strength of conscience required to stand up against powerful forces and denounce injustice? How can our church equip people for such acts of character?

We are prone to avoid conflict, to turn the other way when someone is acting unfairly (unless we ourselves are the victims). We need to cultivate an attitude of support and encouragement so when one of our own takes a stand, he or she will not feel alone. Examples will help. We need to hear stories of people who took a stand. Both Biblical accounts and modern examples will be useful. Whatever we do, we must equip our young people to look for the right path and not the easy path—the two are seldom the same!

**Heart of the Matter
(Mark 14:60-65)**

Who Are You, Jesus? (vs. 60-62)

5. What did Caiaphas eventually do, and what was he trying to accomplish (v. 60)?

Caiaphas was getting desperate! How was he going to get something out of Jesus that would be useful in convicting Him? He was amazed that with all the accusations being made, Jesus remained silent and refused to defend Himself. Caiaphas sees this and tries a new tactic: he attempts to get Jesus to incriminate Himself. A time-tested trial practice is to put the accused on the *witness* stand and hope for a misstatement. The text seems to indicate that at this point Caiaphas stood up and stepped forward in order to address Jesus directly.

"In Greek the first question expects a positive answer: 'You are going to answer Your accusers, aren't You?' The second question expects an explanation from Him: 'What is the meaning of the charges these witnesses are making against You?' But Jesus remained silent and gave no defense (cf. Isa. 53:7). His silence frustrated the court and brought its proceedings to a standstill" (Walvoord and Zuck, eds., *The Bible Knowledge Commentary*, Victor). It is obvious the trial was haphazard and hastily planned.

6. What do we learn about Jesus from His silence in the face of false accusations (v. 61a)?

Throughout the ordeal, Jesus had remained calm and silent, which, of course, only increased the frustration of those accusing Him. Jesus showed no evidence of anxiety or fear, no anger or desire for retribution, and no hurry to get things over with. There was simply a quiet self-confidence that stemmed from His trust in God the Father. Nothing was happening apart from His Father's will, so Jesus rested in that knowledge in spite of all that was happening against Him. In this He serves as a model for all of us.

None of us will ever go through a trial more difficult than this one. Life is not fair, and we have no assurance that we will not face difficulties. God, however, is gracious, merciful, loving, righteous, and kind. Even in the hardest situation, He

remains faithful to us. Jesus knew His Father so well before the trial began that He was able to trust Him as it unfolded. It is extremely important that we faithfully grow in our knowledge of God when times are pleasant so that we will be ready to trust Him when they get hard.

Jesus' Response (vs. 61b, 62)

7. What tactic was Caiaphas trying to use on Jesus (vs. 61b, 62)?

What Caiaphas wanted was for Jesus to say something that would lead to a charge of blasphemy, for the penalty for that was death. Finally, he asked Jesus pointedly, "Art thou the Christ, the Son of the Blessed?" In Matthew 26:63 we read that Caiaphas put Him under oath, leaving Jesus no option but to respond. "I adjure thee by the living God, that thou tell us whether thou be the Christ, the Son of God."

It was only then that Jesus answered, and He did not stop with a simple admission. He added that He would be seen at the right hand of God and coming in the clouds of heaven. Once again He referred to Himself as the Son of man. His prophecy was based on statements found in Psalm 110:1 and Daniel 7:13. Psalm 110:1 portrays Him as sitting at the right hand of God, and Daniel describes Him coming in the clouds of heaven to stand before the Ancient of days.

8. Surely Jesus knew the council's plan was in trouble. If He just kept quiet, He might even walk! But then He answered with a declaration that He knew would seal His fate. What kind of courage is required to take such a bold action? What was a time when you deliberately put yourself in jeopardy for the sake of a principle you couldn't compromise?

Jesus knew His answer would incite the council's wrath, but He dared not waver on this point. He knew it would lead to His death, but giving His life was the reason He came (Matthew 16:21-23; John 12:27). He knew His purpose, and He did not shy from it. As His followers, we, too, need to know our purpose. Equipping people to fulfill the Great Commission is vital. Our secular and pluralistic culture does not like the "exclusive" nature of the gospel, but we must share it. Allow your learners to tell how they have taken a stand to present the gospel at work, on the university campus, or elsewhere. Encourage those who face strong and/or repeated opposition.

Jesus' Rejection (vs. 63, 64)

9. What was Caiaphas' reaction to Jesus' claim (vs. 63, 64)?

Right away Caiaphas tore his clothes in a ceremonial but false display of grief and indignation over God's name supposedly being blasphemed by this man. His question was rhetorical, for he felt certain that no evidence beyond this blasphemy was necessary. Jesus could now be pronounced as deserving of death. He had incriminated Himself in front of the Sanhedrin, so no more witnesses were needed. They had heard His words with their own ears. The high priest knew how the Council would respond when he asked what they thought.

In reality, of course, Jesus' words were neither blasphemous nor irreverent of His

Father. We know that His claim was the truth. Those who were determined to destroy Him, however, would not accept even the possibility that He was divine. They resented Him and His message and were not looking for the truth. It has to be one of the most cruel injustices ever carried out in the history of mankind to put Jesus to death because of what He claimed. The sentence from the Sanhedrin was instant: "they all condemned him to be guilty of death" (v. 64).

Physically Abused (v. 65)

10. How and when was Jesus abused (v. 65)?

Once the religious authorities were convinced of Jesus' guilt, they cast aside all restraint in anticipation of demanding a legal trial before Pilate. Some began to spit on Him, which was one of the most contemptuous ways of showing anger and disdain in that culture.

To further humiliate Jesus, they blind-folded and beat Him and taunted Him to use His prophetic powers in some kind of demonstration for them. The officers slapped Him with the palms of their hands. According to Matthew 26:68, they then asked Him to tell who it was who had hit Him. We know Jesus could very easily have done exactly that, but again He exercised self-restraint and simply suffered in silence. In Jesus' determination to fulfill His Father's will, He endured many things He actually had the power to avoid.

Once again we are reminded of the importance of God's will for our individual lives. How willingly do we give up what is dear to us in order to be certain we are in His will?

11. The scene in the council chamber is almost more than we can bear. Civilized men (religious leaders!) stoop to the level of mob violence. What causes us to "lose control"? How can we safeguard ourselves from acting from sinful motives in our pursuit of doing what we believe is right?

The council members acted with what Paul called a "zeal ... not according to knowledge" (Romans 10:2). What made it far worse was the fact that their ignorance was willful. Their power had become more important to them than their mission, and they guarded that power jealously.

We can be guilty of the same sin when our positions, titles, authority, or preferences become more important to us than doing God's will. In such cases, opportunities for frank discussions of different ideas become occasions to "stand our ground" and to defend traditions. It's okay to be zealous for the Lord; we just need to be sure that our zeal does not overrule facts and principles.

Pilate (Mark 15:1-3)

12. Why did the chief priests rush to hold a meeting with the elders, scribes, and the whole council (Mark 15:1)?

Capital punishment trials were supposed to be held only in the daytime, never at night. The Jewish leaders, in their eagerness to sentence Jesus, had everything settled before daybreak, so they were ready early in the day (probably before 6:00 A. M.) to get on with the legal trial. The chief priests held a meeting with the elders, scribes, and all other members of the Sanhedrin. Luke 22:66-71 gives us the details of this final confrontation with Jesus before they took Him to Pilate.

Falsely Accused (vs. 2 ,3).

13. What did Pilate determine in his questioning of Jesus (vs. 2,3)?

The Jewish leaders did not have the authority to put someone to death; that was reserved for the Romans alone. That is why it was so important for them to take Jesus to Pilate and demand that Jesus be put to death. By holding the religious trials at night, they were ready to face Pilate as soon as he went on duty in the morning. Pilate had the authority to either ratify the sentence they pronounced or rescind it.

The question Pilate asked, "Art thou the King of the Jews?" (v. 2), shows that he wanted to be certain Jesus was not a threat to Caesar, as the religious leaders had charged (Luke 23:2). Jesus' answer indicated that He was a king but implied that His concept of kingship was different from Pilate's. John 18:33-38 contains a detailed explanation of this conversation. The result was that Pilate came to understand that the Jews were trying to get rid of Jesus on religious charges and that Jesus was not a threat to anyone.

Nonetheless, Pilate eventually sentenced Jesus to death. Still, that was not the end. Good news was yet to come.

Conclusion

This week we have seen how Jesus faced opposition to His mission. We too will face opposition when we seek to follow God's calling.

Prayer

Father, we come before You to thank You for the willing sacrifice of Your Son. How it must have hurt You to see Him condemned as a criminal! The death of Jesus at the hands of sinners was the greatest injustice in all of history. Yet, in Your providence, this injustice served to justify us, changing us from unrighteous to righteous through Jesus' blood payment of our penalty. For this we thank You, Jesus, and we give the Father all praise and glory. In Jesus' name, amen.

Thoughts to Remember

The death of the innocent One was history's greatest injustice, yet humanity's greatest hope.

Anticipating Next Week's Lesson

In our lesson next week we will see how the risen Jesus offers us hope in the midst of our despair. Study Mark 16:1-16.

A blessed Father's Day to all you Dads!

Lesson Summarized By

Willie Ferrell willie@jesusisall.com