

Mark 14:53-72

“The Danger Of Distance”

We come today to the portion of Mark Ch 14 that contains both the trial and the denial. Christ's mock trial and Peter's denial. But before we get into that I want to get back to that scene from which we were gleaned last week there in the Garden of Gethsemane. You recall that Peter had refused to receive the fact that he would *ever* deny Jesus. He was willing not only to be *arrested* with Jesus but if necessary even to *die* with Jesus. and We've been noting the downward progression of Peter beginning with his pride. Oh it's true Jesus has been right about everything He's ever said so far, but somehow and for some reason He's wrong with this one... Though he would've never said it in those words that's the basic gist of what Peter was communicating. "I'm never going to deny you I'm willing to die with You." Jesus said to him that despite his honorable intentions he would deny and completely disown Him 3xs before the rooster crowed even that very night.

Now; fast forward with me a few hours later. Jesus has warred in His soul, He's cried out for alternative routes yet remained completely resolved to do the will *of* the Father regardless of what it might cost Him personally. He's received the strength He needs to follow through faithfully as He's submitted Himself in complete dependence *upon* the Father and He's roused His sleeping disciples for the 3rd time having warned them repeatedly to watch and pray to no avail. Now as He awakens them He makes known to them that His arrest is at hand and His betrayer is before them.

They're rubbing the blur out of their eyes to the sight of some 600 Roman soldiers with swords and an unknown amount of temple security type regulators with clubs, torches, and lanterns making their way toward them with Judas out in front of them. Judas presents himself front and center before Christ, kisses Him repeatedly with the pretense of affection so as to point Him out personally and we read in Vs 46-47.

Vs46-47

Now we read this and we can almost have a tendency to downplay it. "They sought to lay hold of Jesus, one of the guys cut off the servant of the high priest's ear, then Jesus began to talk sense into them..." Don't perceive this as a laid back scene in which an accidental dismemberment occurred. It was going down and believe me when I tell you this was on the edge of ugly, chaos and pandemonium was on the edge of outbreak and if it weren't for the Lord It's more than likely that the rest of His disciples would've met their end right there that night. Because you don't assault a man with a sword in an environment like that with 600 armed and ready Roman soldiers standing in front of you and think that it's going to be overlooked. That kind of action would invoke the wrath of Rome in an instant.

Because you shouldn't think that this disciple was a precision swordsman who took 1 ear off as a warning and if you try to get any closer I'm afraid I'm going to have to inflict some *serious* damage. These guys weren't soldiers, they were fisherman, more than likely he took a swing at his head and Malchus (the servant's name) ducked and only lost an ear. This was a hack and slash job from a man who was reacting out of anger and fear mingled with a

concentrated rust of adrenaline. and As we might imagine (the gospel of John tells us that) the man swinging the sword and doing the damage is Peter.

Remember the downward progression we've noted in him, he's gone from pride, to prayerlessness, to now what? He's acting *presumptuous*.

The Lord didn't tell him to make a move and gain the advantage through the element of surprise, he just acted on his own. Thinking that this deed will somehow display his devotion, in reality it's the fruit of his disobedience. He didn't walk in humility, he didn't watch and pray as he was instructed to personally, now he's acting presumptuously. Listen, *deeds* do not replace *devotion*, devotion is the seedbed from which our deeds are to spring. If we're not in prayer, if we're not responding in obedience to the word we'll often times act presumptuously which will generally only manifest *not* devotion but *disobedience*. The bible tells us that God has already ordained good works that we should walk in them, and we discover those works through that time of devotion, walking *with Him* in obedience *to Him*, in prayer *before Him*. Not through pride, prayerlessness, and acting presumptuously as it seems best to us personally/spontaneously.

What else are we able to glean from this "hack and slash" job with the sword? Was Peter wielding that sword with the intent to uphold some form of godly standard? No! He was all about doing damage, and this is what happens when we wield the "*sword*" (the word of God) in such a way as to make sure that people get *our "point."* We take their ears...by the time we're finished making sure we've gotten the proverbial point across they no longer have ears to hear, we've done nothing but damage. This is why it's so important that we learn to wield the sword of the Spirit skillfully, in such a way as to bring healing, not inflict further hurting. Some people do nothing but beat people with the scriptures, by the time they're finished you know why you're wrong, you're idiocy is exposed and here's a fist full of scriptures to prove it. The problem is that they haven't *helped* anyone, they haven't promoted *healing*, only further hurting. They've swung the sword and done nothing but damage.

Now, it's true that God's word exposes sin in our lives and we can't apologize for that. But administered correctly it also brings healing, it's like a surgeon's scalpel exposing the cancer but also removing the tumor. There's going to be some pain involved but ultimately it will promote healing in you, wholeness and soundness of spirit.

It's true that the law was given through Moses, and the law shows us our sin. But we can't stop there; because grace and truth came through Jesus Christ and The law was meant to lead us to Jesus. Sin exposed, opened up by the law, treated in Christ, now your sin is in complete remission. We receive the remission of sins in Christ.

Learn to wield the sword skillfully, with precision, don't hack and slash. Now Jesus can heal, we know from Luke's gospel that Jesus put a stop to the scene, picked up the ear and healed Malchus. If not there would've probably been 4 crosses that day instead of 3 (that is if all the disciples weren't executed on the spot) and in that we see the grace of the Lord toward Peter in giving him another chance. It's difficult to prove your ear was cut off when it's still on the side of your head...

But Christ was in control of this whole scene, we learn from John's gospel that when they came to Him, He went out to them and asked them whom they sought. When they told Him, "Jesus of Nazareth" He responded saying, "I am He" and this enormous mob all drew back and

fell down. The signal was being sent, “You aren’t taking me, I’m willfully going with you.” He asked them again, “Whom are you seeking?” They said, “Jesus of Nazareth” He said, “If it’s Me you want, let these guys go.” That’s when all the chaos broke out with Peter, Jesus put an end to it, rebuked them for the drama, let Peter know that He could call 12,000 angels if He wanted protection however the scriptures had to be fulfilled and with that we read in Vs 50 that they *all* forsook Him and fled, not just Peter, *all* of them abandoned Him.

Vs53-54

As you carefully reconstruct the “trial” of Christ you realize that He was actually “tried” or at least set before particular “powers that be” some 6 times. In Vs 53 we read that they led Him away to the home of the high priest. The home that’s referenced here is the home of Joseph Caiaphas who was the high priest appointed by Rome, son in law to the previous high priest (the one who seemed to wield the most influence in the eyes of Israel) Annas. We find out from John that before they took Him to the home of Caiaphas they took Him to the home of Annas where He was duly interrogated, from there evidently they came to the home of Caiaphas where the members of the Sanhedrin (the official council, supreme court if you will) of Israel was assembling in order to expedite this trial. The Sanhedrin was composed of 70 members plus the high priest, 71 total. Now we can deduct that not *all* of them were there that night because we’re told that they all consented to the death penalty and we know that Joseph of Arimathea had become a disciple of Christ and he held a prominent seat in the council. We also believe that Nicodemus who had come to Christ (back in John Ch 3) wasn’t there this night either. More than likely they called for the members to convene who were sympathetic toward the cause of putting Jesus to death. But He was brought before Annas, then Caiaphas, again before the Sanhedrin at day break, from there He went to Pilate, from Pilate to Herod, and back to Pilate.

You should also know (for what it’s worth) that this trial had several illegal features to it according to their own standards of legislation. For instance they were meeting at night, something they’d expressly forbidden when it came to legal/official trials because it was said that you couldn’t discern the faces of the witnesses sufficiently. Also the law said that they were to have 2 or more witnesses in order to establish something as fact something that we’ll see they didn’t have yet they continued to pursue the issue. There were just a # of things out of order here, none of which would deter the process because they were way more concerned for a conviction on a capital level than they were legal technicalities.

Now Mark begins to take us from one scene to the other demonstrating what’s going on simultaneously with Peter. So we get a shot of what’s happening with Jesus, then we get a “meanwhile” scene with Peter, back to Christ, back to Peter.

In Vs 54 we discover that Peter though he’d previously fled apparently gained enough composure to try and follow after Christ to at least see what was going to happen, Matt tells us that he wanted to see the outcome. He’d told Jesus that he wouldn’t deny him, perhaps this was an ill-fated attempt to somehow at least stay with in His proximity. But we’re already beginning to see more signs of his downward progression as his faith is being thrashed like wheat on the threshing floor of Satan’s sifter. How’s that? Don’t miss the details, (Vs 54) “Peter followed Him *at a distance*.” He didn’t want to be close enough *to* Him to be indentified *with* Him, he didn’t want people to recognize him as one of *His*.

Be careful when you find yourself wanting to keep a “safe distance” from the Lord, just far enough away so as not to be recognized as belonging *to* Him or identified *with* Him. You’re still wanting in on *salvation*, but you want to be careful regarding your personal *identification*. The yellow lights should be flashing, you’re sending the signal that you’re wanting to keep your distance, how far away can I still *follow*? “I can still see Him so I must be in some way with Him.” You’re treading on dangerous ground, it should never be a question of distance, “How far away can I still follow?” It should be a question of nearness, “How intimately, how closely can I follow after Christ, how near can I get?”

There should be a priority in pursuing Him, when you’re more concerned for distance than you are nearness let that serve as a warning to you.

2^{ndly} what do we see? He sat with the servants. “What difference does that make?” Think it through, it’s about 3:00 a.m. here, who are the servants that are there? This is a reference to the guards, and the servants that moments ago were in the garden coming against them. What was it 30 minutes, maybe an hour earlier that Peter was ready to fight these guys now he’s seeking to blend in with them... When you begin to distance yourself from the Lord take note the company you begin to keep. You’ll find yourself *separating* from the people of God and *integrating* with the people of the world. The psalmist wrote, *“Blessed is the man Who walks not in the counsel of the ungodly, Nor stands in the path of sinners, Nor sits in the seat of the scornful; But his delight is in the law of the LORD, And in His law he meditates day and night.”* Ps 1:1-2 Peter kept his distance, now he’s seated with the scornful.

3^{rdly} notice, “...and warmed himself at the fire.” Whose fire; the fire that warmed those who were in the world, the fire of the enemy. What am I saying? It seems so obvious looking back doesn’t it? Peter was not only cold physically, he was cold spiritually, he’d distanced himself from the Lord therefore he was seeking to “warm himself” in ways that were unhealthy for him, hanging out with the wrong crowd. We can begin to fill our calendars with so many activities (I’ve seen it time and again) that though we used to have a “front row follow hard” mentality when it came to the Lord and the things of the Lord, now we’re rather distant. You find yourself being drawn (like a moth to the flame) and enticed by the pseudo warmth of the world and those things that warm the world. I would dare to say that your desire to warm yourself by the fires of your old friends, hanging out in places or with people (doing things) that lend themselves to ungodliness will be directly proportionate to the distance that you’ve allowed between yourself and the Lord. Earlier that night Jesus had been *sweating* “as it were great drops of blood” (Luke 22:44), but Peter was *cold* and sat by the fire of the enemy.

He thought he was “blending in” under the cover of darkness, in reality he was exposed as he approached and sought warmth around the fire. The word, “Fire” is the word “Phos” it speaks of illumination, it points more to the light of the fire than the actual fire. The point is that he wasn’t hiding from anyone, he only thought he was. That’s always the way it is, we think we’re blending in, getting away with it, concealed under the cover of darkness, in reality you’re only exposing yourself.

My daughter Emily (2 in a week) and my son Isaiah (just turned 5) love to hide from me. The problem is they’re pretty bad at it, O they think they’re great, we might be standing in the bathroom getting ready for bed and suddenly they’ll duck behind a towel or pull a bathrobe over them and yell, “Dad come find me!” They think that because they can’t see me, that I can’t see

them. Sometimes they (mostly Emmy at this point) don't even cover their bodies, just their faces. If their face is covered, they must be invisible! Yet they're right there in plain view, so many times we're just that way with God. We think that if we cover our face, if our eyes are blinded through darkness, through sin, that if we can't see Him, He must not be able to see us. He knows right where you're hiding, and though you're trying to blend in with the darkness, there will be things that cast light on the fact of who you are... You don't fit in nearly as well as you think you do; if you belong to Christ it's only a matter of time before your true identity will be exposed. If you fit in with out question, perhaps you should think through a little more carefully if you've *ever* truly committed to Christ. Because if you're His, you just can't hide, you can't blend in successfully with the world, not for long.

Vs55-59

It's always harder to get lies to line up than it is to simply tell the truth. At this point the high priest is beginning to feel this thing slipping from his grasp, they can't even come up with good liars. Their stories are so contradictory there's buckshot all through them, they don't hold water. They tried to implicate Him on charges of desecrating the temple (a capital offense in the Roman world, didn't matter what kind of temple it was if you desecrated a place of worship you could be put to death) it was early on in the ministry of Jesus they were seeking a sign from Him. He said, "*Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.*" **John 2:19** The obvious reference was *not* to the temple they'd been working on for decades, He was speaking of His body in reference to the resurrection. Paul, in making a reference to our bodies in regards to the resurrection said, "*For we know that if our earthly house, this tent, is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens.*" **2 Cor 5:1** So Jesus was misquoted regarding the information and taken out of context in the implication.

You see, what is a *false witness*? People think of a false witness as a person who just blatantly lies; that's not always true. Obvious lies are generally just that. A false witness may have a line on the *information* (though that really wasn't the case here) but they twist it in such a way as to make the wrong *implication*, leading people to draw the wrong conclusion. Tragic that the religious leaders would purposefully seek to promote liars to accommodate their agenda.

60-61

Or to understand that another way, "Are You the Son of God?" Son of the "Blessed" meaning Son of the One who is worthy to be praised, or worshiped. Matthew tells us that at this point the high priest put Jesus under oath so as to seek a forced confession of sorts from Him. But this whole time one lie after the other, false accusation after false accusation, this thing is slipping away and so finally Caiaphas stands up and seeks to incite, or provoke the Lord into somehow incriminating Himself. "Do You hear what these guys are saying? What do you have to say for Yourself?" Jesus said nothing, didn't even acknowledge him. Now, He wasn't pleading the 5th. It was further fulfillment of prophecy, "*He was oppressed and He was afflicted, Yet He opened not His mouth; He was led as a lamb to the slaughter, And as a sheep before its shearers is silent, So He opened not His mouth.*" **Isa 53:7**

He didn't entertain their lies, made me wonder about how I respond toward people's lies about me. When someone lies about you how do you respond? Do you get all up in a huff and seek to set the record straight? Think about the witnesses Jesus could've called... "Yeah, I have

something to say for Myself. I'd like to call this former blind man to the stand to testify of Me, after him there's a man who used to be lame who's walking now I'd like him to take the stand. There's a # of people who used to be lepers who are now whole; we'll hear from them next. Beyond that (we'll skip the women and children) I'd like to call to the stand 5,000 men that I fed, then 4,000 more that I fed another time with a few loaves and a couple fish. I'd like the council to hear from Jairus' daughter and Lazarus whom I raised from the dead..." On and on He could've went building a case for Himself, but He didn't. Why? Because He'd committed Himself to the Father and entrusted the outcome to Him. Peter said this, *"For what credit is it if, when you are beaten for your faults, you take it patiently? But when you do good and suffer, if you take it patiently, this is commendable before God. For to this you were called, because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that you should follow His steps: 'Who committed no sin, Nor was deceit found in His mouth'; who, when He was reviled, did not revile in return; when He suffered, He did not threaten, but committed Himself to Him who judges righteously."* 1 Peter 2:20-23 How often do you commit your case to Him who judges righteously? What an incredible example the Lord was in this for you and me. Now is it always wrong to defend your position? No, the apostles did that throughout the book of Acts regularly, Paul did consistently throughout his epistles.

But it's important that we realize when to speak and when to remain silent. We're not to throw pearls before swine, or to give that which is holy to the dogs. The bible says, *"Do not answer a fool according to his folly, Lest you also be like him."* Prov 26:4 So there are times when an appropriate answer is appropriate, there are other times when the real issue isn't so much defending ourselves but whether or not we're going to trust God to defend us, and take care of us in the matter. I wish I could give you a rule of thumb as to when you're to do what. My advice would be to walk in the Spirit and the Lord will lead you according to the appropriate action in a given situation. The high priest asks Him directly and adjures Him under oath, "Are You the Christ, the Son of the Blessed?"

Vs62

Jesus gives him an answer and assures him of undeniable evidence. When He said, "I am." He used the words, "Ego Eimi" the name that God called Himself by when Moses asked God who he should say sent him to the Pharaoh and God said, "I AM that I Am", Jesus used those words here. The point being that He was answering clearly and concisely, there was no ambiguity in His statement. Then He referred to 2 messianic passages of scripture and applied them to Himself. Ps 110:1 Where God promises the Messiah a seat at His right hand, the place of prominence power and judgment, and Daniel 7:13-14 whereby the Messiah is referred to as the "Son of Man" and is again seen in the place of power, and position with all nations serving Him.

In essence Jesus is saying this, "You may be judging Me now, but mark my words the day is coming when I will judge you..." That statement should've staggered them into sobriety, "Wait guys, let's think about this for a minute..." Here's the question, who's really on trial here? Who's really the one being judged at this moment? Think about it because their judgment of Jesus is God's judgment of them, it's nothing new for Jesus to be on trial, He's on trial everyday in people's lives. People trying to make up their minds, declare their verdict concerning the Son of God. The fact is however that in reality we don't judge Jesus, He judges

us. To condemn Him, is only to condemn yourself...think the evidence through, consider carefully your verdict.

When Jesus said this He was claiming to be God in human flesh, and they knew it. A statement to them that was blasphemous (and would be if it weren't true) a crime of capital proportions.

Vs63-65

Where it says they struck Him with the palms of their hands, it could also be translated "with rods" the point being that they blindfolded Him and began to beat Him mercilessly in open mockery. Again the Lord becomes our example; not only did He turn the other cheek He gave the entirety of His body to be beaten and broken for you and me. *Isa 50:6, "I gave My back to those who struck Me, And My cheeks to those who plucked out the beard; I did not hide My face from shame and spitting."* *Isa 52:14" So His visage was marred more than any man, And His form more than the sons of men;"* Which is to say that they beat Him so brutally that by the time they were finished with Him He was so swollen and bloodied that He was really unrecognizable as a man. It would be difficult to even look upon Him with out cringing and wanting to turn away. As a matter of fact in Isa 53 we read, "And we hid, as it were, our faces from Him." The natural impulse was to look away from Him because He was so disfigured. Through it all Jesus stood firm; now we come back to Peter who is caving in under the pressure.

Vs66-68

Peter has disintegrated to the point whereby far from being ready to die for the Lord he shrinks at the remarks of a servant girl. We read that she "saw" him.

The idea is that she stared at him intently (no doubt in the light of the fire) then she put her finger on it, "You're one His followers aren't you?" Peter folds under the pressure, "I don't even know what you're talking about..." Then he begins to slip into the shadows, perhaps poisoning himself for a fast get away if necessary.

Vs69-70

Like someone from Jersey, or the deep south, their dialect gives them away. Here's the deal when you're a believer trying to fit in with the world it just doesn't work anymore. Your speech gives you away, you don't laugh at inappropriate things quite like you used to. You don't seem to be having as much fun as the rest of the gang, you've got too much of the world in you to be content in Christ, but too much of the Lord in you to be satisfied in the world, you just don't fit in. Your speech will betray you, you can get all offended and assure them that you're one of them, they won't buy it, it's not true.

Vs71-72

More on his response next time, for now here's what we need to see. As vehement as Peter was that he would *never* deny the Lord he was all the more vehement that he never *knew* the Lord. Where it says that he began to curse and swear, don't think of him tossing out obscenities, that would've probably been better. The word "curse" is the word "anathematize" it speaks of being devoted to destruction, like when Paul said that those who preach another gospel other than that which you've heard (Jesus Christ and Him crucified, salvation by grace through faith) let them be *accursed*; same idea here. Peter is swearing (as in the method employed by a court of law) that he never *knew* Jesus and if he does may he be condemned to

hell! That's the general idea of what's going on here. Heavy isn't it? Shows you again how far reaching the restoring love of Christ can be... (more on that next time).

Then that rooster crowed the 2nd time and what happened? Don't miss it, "Peter called to mind *the word* that Jesus had said to him." It wasn't the crowing of the rooster that brought conviction to Peter, it was the word at work upon him and stirring within him that brought him to the place of brokenness. The word of God will impact people's lives, it may not happen immediately but eventually God's word will have God's way in the hearts and lives of people.

Listen, don't miss the danger of distance. Don't see how far away you can get and still follow the Lord. Draw near to Him, don't warm yourself by the fires of this world, but let the fire of the Holy Spirit burn bright in you. Perhaps you've failed, we all have, let the Lord restore you today, turn around, come back, renew your 1st love...

Prayer Points:

Lord may we learn from Your word, if Your foremost apostle can fall prey to the enemies subtly certainly we can to. If any of us are beginning that downward progression Lord turn us around. Teach us to draw near to You, to walk closely with You and to take heed to Your word. We thank You Lord for the example You set, the love that You've displayed in the laying down of Your life for us, help us to lay down our lives, our wants, our will, for You.

If you've never given your heart to Christ, and today the Lord is dealing with you in a way perhaps unlike you've not known before. He's urging you to make today your day, then let me encourage you to open the door of your heart and let Him in. You've sinned, you've failed, you've not led a perfect life far from it. Welcome to humanity, we need a Savior. That's where Christ comes in, He shed His blood, and sacrificed His life, so that we might be forgiven and obtain everlasting life in Him. Why not receive it today?