

## I. Introduction

A. There has been a lot of legal drama in the news lately. Between the serious issues facing the city (issues that pivot around justice and racism and involve the police, attorney general and mayor) and the unfolding concerns about terrorism (both domestic and international) and radical Islam, all of which fuel debates about security, immigration and religious liberty – there is a lot of political noise and legal drama. As I mentioned a couple weeks back, that makes this moment a lot like the first century – a lot like the time of Christ. And today we see that.

B. In our Advent Series we have been looking at names for Jesus. So far we have covered Prince of Peace, Eternal Life and Alpha and Omega. Today the name (or title) is Christ.

1. As you may know, “Christ” is not Jesus’ last name. It is a title. It is the English form of the Greek word *Christos*, which is a translation of the Hebrew word Messiah.

2. The Jews’ were looking for God to fulfill a promise, first made in Genesis 3 and then repeated over and over. It was the promise to send an Anointed One to fix things. They had waited and waited. They kept hoping that this divinely appointed champion would show up, kick the Romans out of town and restore them to international prominence.

God’s plan was actually much bigger than that, but in our text today we watch as Jesus boldly makes the claim to be The One they were waiting for and so much more.

C. At the moment Jesus makes this claim He is on trial for his life – which is usually pretty dramatic. The specific charges he faces revolve around the claim that he had called for the destruction of the Temple.

1. As you may know, The Temple was pretty much everything for the Jews. It was the center of their life. It was the White House, Capital Building, Times Square, World Trade Center, Soldier Field, National Cathedral, Smithsonian Institute, Washington Monument, flag and Mall of America all wrapped into one. It represented the most important spot on the planet – the place where God and Mankind could meet.

2. The Temple – which had been designed by God and first built under Solomon – signified that God was with the Jews. They were his people. We cannot appreciate how important it was to them.

D. Well, the Jewish leaders did not like Jesus for any number of reasons – many very understandable: they were jealous of his popularity and frustrated that he always made them look like buffoons. But part of what was motivating them to go after him at this moment was a fear that he was going to start a riot which would bring a vicious backlash from Rome. So they are fishing for a way to undermine his popularity, have him arrested and then have him killed. And the issue they decide to run with is the charge that he was determined to destroy the Temple.

E. Now, in point of fact, He had not called for its destruction.

1. In Matthew 25 he had predicted it, saying that not one stone would be left upon another. And that had happened. The first Temple was built by Solomon. It was pillaged by the Babylonians in the 6<sup>th</sup> century BC and then rebuilt – in a small way – under Nehemiah when the Jews returned from exile. That Temple had been in place for 400 some years – the fires of the sacrifices had not gone out. Not long before Jesus was born, Herod the Great (who was a sociopath but called Great because of the buildings he built) had set out to rebuild the Temple. And do so on a grand scale so they'd love him. Herod had 10,000 men working on the Temple for close to 40 years - at that time of Christ.

2. And in John 2 we have Jesus saying "If you destroy this temple and in three days I will rebuild it." But at this point he wasn't talking about the building. He was talking about himself. He was the new Temple. He was the intersection of God and Man.

F. So, he had not called for its destruction, but he did predict its destruction. Which is what happened. The Temple Herod was working on is not there today. If you go to Israel all you see is some of the foundation stones, because in 70 AD the Jews did revolt against Rome and Rome's response was not only to put down the rebellion, they were so mad they set out to wipe out Jerusalem entirely. They even renamed it Palestine.

G. So, Jesus didn't call for the destruction of the Temple, but those were the politically expedient charges leveled against him. And as a result he is on trial. And if he loses the clear implication is that he is traitor and a terrorist and he will be put to death.

H. But as you will see, the prosecutor is having problem with the case. The witnesses do not agree with each other and the case is unraveling. But at that point, when a mistrial should be declared, Jesus says something that shocks everyone. Let me read this for us. We pick up in Mark 14:53. This is late on Thursday after the Last Supper, Judas's betrayal and Christ's arrest.

**II. V53 They took Jesus to the high priest, and all the chief priests, the elders and the teachers of the law came together. Peter followed him at a distance, right into the courtyard of the high priest. There he sat with the guards and warmed himself at the fire.**

A. As you likely know, it will not be a good night for Peter. He is about to deny that he knows Jesus.

**III. V55 The chief priests and the whole Sanhedrin were looking for evidence against Jesus so that they could put him to death but they did not find any. Many testified falsely against him, but their statements did not agree.**

A. This was not a fair trial. They had rounded up some witnesses – and probably paid them to testify. But the witnesses couldn't get their stories to line up, which meant (according to their own laws) that the trial should stop. The prosecutor doesn't have a case. But the trial is not called off.

**IV. V57: Then some stood up and gave this false testimony against him: 58 "We heard him say, 'I will destroy this temple made with human hands and in three days will build another, not made with hands.'"**

A. As I noted: 1) he was not talking about the building Herod was masterminding, nor did he say that he would destroy it. In John 2 he said, “If you destroy this temple I will rebuild it.” He was talking about his own body. He was the new Temple. He was the God-Man – the place where God and man intersected. And after they put him to death he would rise again.

**V. 58** “We heard him say, ‘I will destroy this temple made with human hands and in three days will build another, not made with hands.’” Yet even then their testimony did not agree. Then the high priest stood up

A. He is mad. The trial is not going as planned.

**VI. Then the high priest stood up before them and asked Jesus, “Are you not going to answer? What is this testimony that these men are bringing against you?” 61 But Jesus remained silent and gave no answer.**

A. Which is exactly how Isaiah had described things one thousand years earlier in his prophecy about Christ.

1. 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 its shearers is silent, so he did not open his mouth.

**VII. Again the high priest asked him, “Are you the Messiah, the Son of the Blessed One?”**

A. Please understand, what he was asking Jesus is not, are you God? He was not asking, “Are you claiming to be God, divine, the Creator, one with the Father, etc. etc. He is asking if Jesus is making a claim for David’s throne.

B. The Jews are expecting the Messiah to be like King David. They are waiting for someone to unite the people, defeat the Romans, amass political power and money. There was no expectation that he would be divine. David was called ‘a Son of God,’ but it just meant close to God. So, the High Priest is not asking Jesus if he is God. But Jesus rattles everyone by making exactly that claim.

**VIII. V62 “I am,” said Jesus.**

A. This is a very loaded term. This is “yes,” but it’s more than that. Remember, the name for God is YHWH, which roughly translates “I AM.” So when Jesus answers this question the way he does he gets everyone’s attention. They may have thought he was just being provocative, cheeky. But Jesus doesn’t stop there.

**IX. V. 62: “I am,” said Jesus. “And you will see the Son of Man”**

A. Stop everything. This is a let-there-be-no-doubt-about-what-I-am saying moment. The “Son of Man” is the title Jesus uses for himself, and though it sounds tame to us, it was a big, bold, in-your-face claim. It comes from Daniel 7, where we are told that the Son of Man will come in the clouds of glory – which are not earthly clouds, not water vapor, but the glory of God. And we are also told that when he comes it is to judge everyone.

**X. “And you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Mighty One and coming on the clouds of heaven.”**

A. In other words, you think this is a court. And you think you are a judge. And in one small sense I suppose you are right. But something much bigger is going on here. You are not actually sitting in judgment of me. I am the

ultimate judge of all. I am the Son of Man. And I will judge you. My work isn't to defeat the Romans and establish an earthly dynasty. I am going to defeat evil and establish an ever-lasting Kingdom.

B. There is a great moment in *A Few Good Men*, where Jack Nicholson – who is playing the part of Colonel Jessup, admits that he had ordered a “code red.” He is being cross-examined by Tom Cruise – who is not playing the High Priest but a Navy Lawyer – and through cross-examination gets Nicholson to agree to something. And in the process he unwittingly admits his guilt. Jesus is not guilty, but his claim right here – his testimony under examination – takes everyone’s breath away.

**XI. V63 The high priest tore his clothes.** This is a sign of outrage and grief. There is an explosion when he claims to be God and judge of all the earth. “**Why do we need any more witnesses?” he asked. “You have heard the blasphemy. “What do you think?” They all condemned him as worthy of death. Then some began to spit at him; they blindfolded him, struck him with their fists, and said, “Prophesy!” And the guards took him and beat him.** So, the court falls into pandemonium.

XII. This is a prominent passage, consequently it has received a lot of attention. Let me highlight three helpful treatments.

A. First, in *God in the Dock*, a collection of articles and essays, C.S. Lewis rather famously unpacks what is going on here. The title of the article is, *What are We to Make of Jesus Christ?*

1. Lewis starts by noting that the way he has framed the question is rather comic. He says, the question, “What are we to make of Jesus” is sort of like a fly asking what it is to make an elephant. Lewis says the real question is: what is Jesus going to make of us?
2. But then he says, we do need to decide how we are going to “solve the historical problem set us by the recorded sayings and acts of this Man. The problem is to reconcile two things.” On the one hand we have the depth and sanity of his moral teaching and his life. Lewis starts by saying, even Christianity’s critics admit that the things Jesus said are profound and the way he lived was sublime. “It is not sloppy idealism, it is full of wisdom and shrewdness. The whole thing is realistic, fresh to the highest degree, the product of a sane mind. It is moral truth at its purest and best.
3. On the other hand is the appalling nature of this man’s theological remarks. a famous article about these verses, arguing that the claim Jesus makes forces our hand – that the claim is so big and bold that it does not leave us many options. We can fall on our knees and worship or we can write him off as insane.
4. Lewis writes: There is no halfway house and there is no parallel in other religions. If you had gone to Buddha and asked him: ‘Are you the son of Brahma?’ he would have said, ‘My son, you are still in the vale of illusion.’ If you had gone to Socrates and asked, ‘Are you Zeus?’ he would have laughed at you. If you had

gone to Mohammed and asked, 'Are you Allah?' he would first have rent his clothes and then cut your head off. If you had asked Confucius, 'Are you Heaven?' I think he would have probably replied, 'Remarks which are not in accordance with nature are in bad taste.' The idea of a great moral teacher saying what Christ said is out of the question. In my opinion, the only person who can say that sort of thing is either God or a complete lunatic suffering from that form of delusion, which undermines the whole mind of man. If you think you are a poached egg, when you are not looking for a piece of toast to suit you you may be sane, but if you think you are God, there is no chance for you. We may note in passing that He was never regarded as a mere moral teacher. He did not produce that effect on any of the people who actually met him. He produced mainly three effects — Hatred — Terror — Adoration. There was no trace of people expressing mild approval.

5. No one said, "Isn't Jesus nice. It's this fun. Isn't this exciting. Jesus is stating that He is judge of all.

- a) It is an explosive claim. You can't be casual about it. You can't be mild and balanced. Jesus claims to be judge of all the earth. You can't say you believe in Jesus and then drop into church every so often.
- b) Jesus claimed to be judge

B. In his treatment of this exchange, Tim Keller:

C. Starts by noting that those who spit on Jesus may be responding with more integrity than those who say, "he's great" but then devote their time and attention in other directions.  
D. He then notes that when Herod questions him, Jesus could have said, "Yes, I am the Messiah and then gone on to say many different things. I am the fulfillment of the Law. I am the Creator of Heaven and Earth. I am the Paschal Lamb who takes away the sins of the world. But what he says is, "I am the judge. Why judge? Because He is in a courtroom and He is forcing us to see the paradox. He is the judge of all the earth who is not judging but is being judged. It's backward.

E. Edward Clowney, a 20<sup>th</sup> century author and pastor, has his own treatment on this passage. And he goes in some fascinating directions. He also notes that we think we are judging Jesus – making assessments of his value. We have put God in the Dock, so to speak. But – two key things to see here.

1. First, this is not the first time. In Exodus 17 God puts himself on trial. The Jews have left Egypt and are wandering in the wilderness and running out of water and they start to complain. In fact, they charge God with negligence. They blame him for getting them into the mess they are in. And God says to Moses, have the people assemble at the rock and bring your rod.

a) The rod was the symbol of great justice. And the rod of Moses was the rod he had used to smite the Egyptians. This meant there was going to be a trial. Moses probably thought that the people would go on trial. But when they get to the rock God says, "I will stand on the rock before the people." Before the people had always stood before him. But now he is standing before them. He is on trial.

b) Moses does as instructed. The people gather and God ends up delivering the water and the people are saved. And it's clear that Moses is confused because he had been thinking, "Why would God allow himself to be put on trial. He should have wiped them out.

2. It's at this point that Clowney tells a powerful illustration. Apparently after World War II there was a crisis in Germany. After the people clued in about the Holocaust they wondered, who should go on trial for this? Who is responsible? At first there was blame for the people themselves, but the people said "blame the soldiers." The soldiers said, "Blame our commanding officers." Who in turn said, "blame those commanding us. It just kept going up the list until finally they said, "We need to blame God." Which they did.

3. Clowney notes, this sounds crazy, but something even crazier has happened. God accepted the punishment. God – Jesus the Messiah – is both the judge and he is the judge who is judged. And this is the way that everything actually works.

a) If there is no divine judge there is no hope in the world. If there is no ultimate justice then evil runs amok, unchecked. People can get away with anything.

b) But if there is a divine judge what hope is there for us? Who can pass the test? If there is a God who knows all – our every thought and deed – then who can stand up to the scrutiny? No one!

c) What we have in Christ is a judge who was judged. We have a judge to eventually put evil down. But we also have a judge who accepted the penalty for our judgment so we can be redeemed.

F. This is amazing – it is amazing at levels that will take the rest of your life to appreciate.

G. Jesus is the judge who was judged – which is just what we need. He is the Prince of Peace; He is Eternal Life; He is the Alpha and Omega and He is the Messiah, the Christ, the Judge who was Judged.