

**Sermon for Sunday, March 11, 2012**  
**Dr. Dan Doriani**  
**Standing Firm in Trials**  
**Mark 14:43-50, 55-65**

*Mark 14:43-50, 55-65: 43 Just as he was speaking, Judas, one of the Twelve, appeared. With him was a crowd armed with swords and clubs, sent from the chief priests, the teachers of the law, and the elders. 44 Now the betrayer had arranged a signal with them: "The one I kiss is the man; arrest him and lead him away under guard." 45 Going at once to Jesus, Judas said, "Rabbi!" and kissed him. 46 The men seized Jesus and arrested him. 47 Then one of those standing near drew his sword and struck the servant of the high priest, cutting off his ear. 48 "Am I leading a rebellion," said Jesus, "that you have come out with swords and clubs to capture me? 49 Every day I was with you, teaching in the temple courts, and you did not arrest me. But the Scriptures must be fulfilled." 50 Then everyone deserted him and fled. [and they took Jesus to the Sanhedrin.]*

*55 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. 56 Many testified falsely against him, but their statements did not agree. 57 Then some stood up and gave this false testimony against him: 58 "We heard him say, 'I will destroy this man-made temple and in three days will build another, not made by man.'" 59 Yet even then their testimony did not agree. 60 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. Again the high priest asked him, "Are you the Christ, the Son of the Blessed One?" 62 "I am," said Jesus. "And you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Mighty One and coming on the clouds of heaven." 63 The high priest tore his clothes. "Why do we need any more witnesses?" he asked. 64 "You have heard the blasphemy. What do you think?" They all condemned him as worthy of death. 65 Then some began to spit at him; they blindfolded him, struck him with their fists, and said, "Prophecy!" And the guards took him and beat him.*

The world loves a complicated trial - the trials of Socrates, Galileo, and Jesus. Take Socrates for instance. Five hundred men of Athens voted to execute Socrates for corruption of youth. Socrates was seventy years old, he had defended the city of Athens in three wars and had taught philosophy in Athens for decades. Who kills philosophers?

But Socrates had the wrong political views. Pericles, the leader of Athens, had recently established the first democracy there. But Socrates opposed democracy. He thought ordinary people could not rule wisely. Athens suffered two anti-democratic rebellions, led by Socrates' former students. Socrates' cousin brief led a rule of tyranny that confiscated property and banished leading citizens. Now we see how Socrates came to grief. But how did Jesus come to grief, to condemnation?

Today, we don't yet see the condemnation of Jesus. We see him standing firm earlier, following the Father's plan, speaking and acting without fear.

### 1. Jesus arrested (**Mark 14:43-52**)

Jesus stands ready as his trial begins. The disciples have been sleeping and unprepared 14:40-46. But Jesus rouses them as Judas arrives, leading "a large crowd, armed with swords and clubs, sent from the chief priests and the elders of the people" (14:45-47). So then men come with swords and clubs to control the one who created metal and wood and everything else.

## Judas

During the Last Supper, Judas slipped out, found his way to the priests who wanted to arrest Jesus and led them to the Garden, where Jesus was. Jesus was still very popular. By arresting him in a garden, away from the crowds and authorities avoided an uproar. Still the priests send a number of temple guards plus some well-armed Roman soldiers, all ready for trouble (14:43).

At night, the soldiers probably couldn't spot Jesus. Therefore, Judas "arranged a signal with them: 'The one I kiss is the man; arrest him.'" Mark describes Judas two ways - as "one of the twelve" and as "the betrayer" (14:43-44). Judas spotted Jesus, went to him at once, said "Rabbi!" and "kissed him" (14:45). The title "Rabbi" is a lie, for Jesus is no longer Judas' teacher. The kiss on the cheek was a sign of affection between friends; now it's the worst treachery.

We'll never understand why Judas betrayed Jesus, but betrayals have a common thread. It's possible to be attached and never truly belong. It's possible to be attached to Jesus without belonging to him.

Judas traveled with Jesus, heard him teach, saw the miracles, even taught and healed beside him. Today it's possible to join the church, teach a class, lead a service project, and not know Jesus. Peter says "Make your calling and election sure" (2 Pet 1:10). We must know Jesus, love him. Otherwise, our activity is vain.

### **Disciples: resistance, then flight** (Mark 14:46-51)

When Judas kissed Jesus "the men seized Jesus and arrested him" (14:46). At once, John says, "Peter drew his sword and struck Malchus, servant of the high priest, cutting off his ear" (14:47, John 18:10). Several disciples thought of fighting, as they had swords. But Jesus ordered them to stop and healed the man's ear (Luke 22:49-50).

Let's pause to admire Jesus. In this dark hour, he stopped to heal the man. How often we say we can't help another person; we have problems of our own. Jesus is so sure of himself, in all his trouble! He can stop and help this man and shows us to help others, even when we are in need.

The disciples wanted to prove their loyalty. Peter wanted to fight for Jesus. But Jesus told Peter, "Put your sword back in its place" (Matt 26:52). Minutes later, the disciples succumb to abject fear. Jesus' conduct provides quite the contrast.

Let's remember that the kingdom doesn't advance by force but by the truth, by love and kindness, by justice. Not by smiting cheeks, but by turning a cheek.

### **Jesus: Power restrained** (John 18, Mark 14:48-49)

At each point Jesus is in control at his arrest. He masters the scene. Jesus controls himself, his disciples, even the soldiers. In John, when Judas and the soldiers came to the garden, Jesus asked them "Whom do you seek?" (18:3-4, English Standard Version).

They replied, "Jesus the Nazarene." Jesus said "I am he." The original is two words: *ego eimi*, that is, "I am."

As you may know, "I am" can mean two things. If someone knocked on the door of a friend and the friend asked "Who is it?" the common Greek answer was "I am" – like "It's me." But "I am" is also the name of God, Yahweh, in the Old Testament. God declares that he is the eternal, self-sufficient, pre-existing God, the great "I am."

The response of the soldiers shows what Jesus meant. When he said, "I am," the soldiers "drew back and fell to the ground" (18:6). The power of Jesus' voice, declaring the great "I am" displays his deity, knocked them down.

But since it is "the hour" of his death Jesus rouses them, asking, "Whom do you seek?" - "Jesus of Nazareth" they reply.

"I told you that I am he," Jesus answered. "If you are looking for me, then let these men go" (18:7-8). "Let these men go" is a command. Jesus tells the soldiers, "Arrest me, but let my disciples go!" They obeyed and let the disciples go, and the disciples fled. So we see that Jesus chose to lay down his life (John 10:18, Mark 14:50).

Peter draws his sword, but Jesus has no interest in weapons. He knocked the soldiers down once, with his voice alone. He could do so again. He could call legions of angels (Matt 26:53). But Jesus' kingdom doesn't advance by force. It advances by proclaiming the truth and living well. Our weapons are spiritual.

### The plan fulfilled (14:48-50)

Jesus didn't want a sword because that's not the way of the Kingdom. He didn't lead an insurrection, so there was no need to "come out with swords and clubs to capture" him. He taught in the temple courts every day. Why had they never arrested him there? Because the people loved him and the authorities knew that a public arrest might fail (14:48-49).

The leaders were right, so they came at night, and Jesus submitted to them because, "The Scriptures must be fulfilled" (14:49). Jesus chose to fulfill the plan of redemption. Earlier, Jesus told the disciples that when the leaders struck him, the shepherd, they would all scatter. They said, "No, we're willing to die with Jesus" (14:27-31). In fact, "Everyone deserted him and fled" (14:50). One young man ran right out of his robe when they laid hold of him (14:51-52).

All this fulfilled Scripture. Earlier, the disciples had forsaken everything to follow Jesus. Now despite their promise of loyalty, they forsake Jesus and fulfill the Scripture that foretold this. Jesus sees the prophecy, the divine plan in each event. His betrayal and arrest fulfill Scriptures (Mark 14:27, Matt 26:54). Jesus lived within God's plan.

I notice how we want to do what we please, have freedom to do what we want. But the Lord Jesus didn't do whatever he pleased. He followed the Divine plan.

### 2. Jesus on trial (14:53-56)

The officials now had Jesus in their control, and in secret so they could do what they wished. They sought Jesus' death, nothing less. To reach this goal, they needed to convict him of a capital offense. Since the Roman governor approved all executions, they had to find Jesus guilty of a capital crime in both Jewish and Roman law, so both would agree to execute him.

But how had Jesus broken Jewish law? And since he paid taxes and lived peacefully, how could the Romans condemn him? But the authorities had Jesus, so they took him to Caiaphas, the high priest. Peter, meanwhile, "followed him at a distance" into the priest's courtyard and "sat down with the guards" (14:53-54).

### **False witnesses fail (14:55-59)**

The soldiers took Jesus to an informal conclave of the Sanhedrin, Israel's supreme court, with the high priest Caiaphas, leading teachers and elders there. This was a preliminary hearing. Mark 15:1 says, "The whole Sanhedrin reached a decision" in the morning – to ratify decisions reached in principle this night.

Some call attention to legal flaws in Jesus' trials, such as a trial conducted at night, in haste, with few safeguards for the accused. But the authorities had a high opinion of their legitimacy. That's why they disregarded shaky witnesses. They might be willing to bend the law for their goals, but not break it. The problem with the trial is that there was no real quest for the truth.

Mark says, "The chief priests and the whole Sanhedrin were looking for evidence against Jesus so that they could put him to death." So they called many false witnesses (14:55-56). The witnesses were not false because they told lies. They are false because there is no genuine quest for the truth, only a quest for evidence against Jesus. The proceedings aim to *condemn* and execute Jesus, not try him.

The first witnesses accomplished nothing. Jesus' blamelessness made it hard to bring charges against him (John 8:46). But eventually two came forward, "We heard him say, 'I will destroy this man-made temple and in three days will build another'" (14:57-58). This is ominous because desecration of a temple was a capital crime.

This charge is a garbled account of Jesus' words. He had said the temple would be destroyed (Matt 24:2). Much earlier, he said, "Destroy this temple, and I will raise it again in three days" but he meant that if they kill him, he would rise in three days (John 2:19-21). They also saw him throw money-changers out of the temple. That probably looked like a desecration to them, even though it was not.

Yet the high priest noticed that their testimony was inconsistent. The court could see that the accusations were worthless. Jesus didn't even reply. Why should he? Would they listen? Proverbs 24:4 says, "Do not answer a fool according to his folly or you will be like him yourself." Sometimes we debase ourselves by answering a fool. So Jesus fulfilled the prophecy "He did not open his mouth" (Isa 53:7-8). As always, he follows the plan, stated long before in prophecy.

### **Jesus testifies (14:61-62)**

Since the false witnesses could not stand, the high priest tried a direct question. He asked, "Are you the Christ, the Son of the Blessed One?" (14:61). The question is not, "Are you the Messiah?" Messiah is a noble title, but most thought the Messiah would be a great human leader, fighting Roman oppression. To claim to be Messiah is bold, but not blasphemy. The question is, "Do you claim to be the Christ, the Son of God? Do you claim unique Sonship - deity?"

However Jesus answers, it will be used against him. If he says he is the Messiah, they will accuse him of rebellion against Rome (John 19:12). If he says he is the Son of God, they will accuse him of blasphemy. Jesus replies literally, "You have said so, but..." (Mark 14:64). That is, "what you say is true, but I must explain..."

When my children were young, I went to a basketball game with one of them. The building was sweltering and a fan keeled over in the stands near me. The cry went up, "Is there a doctor in the house?" My child, just six, knew people called me Dr. Doriani. She knew I wasn't a physician, but she shot me a glance. Someone noticed and asked, "Are you a doctor?" I said, "Yes, but... Not the kind that can help this man. I am a Ph.D., not a physician."

In that vein, when they ask Jesus, "Are you the Christ?" he must say, "Yes, but..." Jesus is the Messiah, but not the political sort. He continues, "You will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Mighty One and coming on the clouds of heaven" (14:62; Psa 110:1, Dan 7:13-14). Jesus is no rival to Rome. He is the eternal king, sitting on the right hand of the Father, ruling all peoples from heaven.

At his trial, Socrates never apologized for his teaching. He said he loved Athens too much to stop. The only way to stop him was to kill him. So they did. The truth is, Socrates embarrassed and opposed authorities at every turn. He stood firm, but he asked for his execution. Jesus stood firm to the end like Socrates. The difference is – he did not deserve his death in any way.

If the high priest wanted a genuine investigation, there was much to consider. Could Jesus be the Redeemer? He met many prophecies. He was from David's line, he performed mighty deeds, the people acclaimed him, yet a friend betrayed him.

#### Jesus condemned (14:63-65)

But the high priest had no interest in investigating. He didn't care to understand Jesus' precise claims. "Sitting at the right hand of the majesty" sounds like blasphemy! The priest makes a show of dismay when he "tore his clothes" (14:63). But he must have been thrilled, for he can use everything Jesus said against him. He declares his judgment, "You have heard the blasphemy! What do you think?" "They all condemned him as worthy of death" since blasphemers are liable to death in Jewish law (14:64, Lev 24:16). Further, the claim to be Messiah opens him to a charge that he is a rival to Caesar, so he is liable to death by Roman law.

After this, the officials "began to spit at him; they blindfolded him, struck him with their fists" and mocked him (14:65). That morning, the Sanhedrin ratified their prior decisions and led Jesus off to Pilate, who ordered his death (15:1).

#### Jesus stands firm and so shall we

Let's consider how Jesus stood firm and what can we learn from him. The events of this night teach us about Jesus and how he stood firm in his trial.

First, he faced the situation as it was and brought it before God. He asked, "Can this cup be removed?" No, but he had to ask. We should too. Once, when I was working on an especially daunting theological question, I found myself praying, "Lord, Could you make me a little smarter, just for a few days, so I can unravel this problem? No, but I had to ask. OK then give me insight, let me make the most of the abilities you gave me. And at least keep me from error."

Many of us face decisions that are so complex we must beg the Lord to make things clear. But if he doesn't, we can still ask Him to lead us to his will. We never have all the information we want: "All decisions are made on insufficient evidence." We have every right to ask for clarity or an easier path. We

may ask him to remove our "cup" - whatever it is. But whatever we ask, we stand firm by accepting whatever the Lord sends.

Jesus rested in the Father's revealed will – his law. At his trial, Jesus told the truth, as the law says. Peter was in great danger when he broke the law, let anger or panic rule him, and started them swinging his sword. We are safe when we trust God enough to obey his law. We stand firm when we rest in him.

This is not easy for Americans. I once gave a few lectures, then assigned a generic, "What is the point of the New Testament" essay to a group of Christian students. I read the essays and noticed that one after another spoke of freedom. I was baffled. My notes had nary a word about freedom. I've also noticed that if you suggest to a group of Christians that we spend some time giving thanks, one of the first two will give thanks for the freedom we have in America.

The word freedom does appear about twenty times in the Bible and most describe something good: freedom from sin or oppression. But freedom is easily abused. The Apostle Peter says, "Live as free men, but do not use your freedom as a cover-up for evil" (1 Pet. 2:16). Jeremiah says freedom can lead to lawlessness (Jer 34:15-17).

Freedom can create a lot of trouble. Thirty-five years ago, we gave freedom for no-fault divorce. Today many children are fatherless or motherless. A great deal of heartache, poverty, and loneliness has come from that freedom.

It's the political season. Do you see that each party appeals to the desire for freedom – to be autonomous, self-governing, self-directed. Our political parties stress different forms of freedom, but both say they will make us free. One party stresses economic freedom: Low tax rates so you are free to spend your funds as you choose; relaxed business regulations, school vouchers, so all can choose the school best for children.<sup>1</sup>

Another party stresses moral freedom. It offers freedom to marry, to structure families, to make reproductive choices, choices about abortion, euthanasia. Religion should stay private so it doesn't restrict anyone's free moral choices. Whatever your party, it appeals to freedom.

What has all our freedom gotten us? Freedom from a plan, a moral standard, social obligations? Vast debts, personal and national? Failed schools, high drop-out rates, high rates of crime and imprisonment? And as things fall apart, we cry that something must be done, so the government steps in, restricting freedom.

Jesus and the apostles see freedom another way. We find freedom within God's law and God's will. Even Jesus lived within the plan, the will, the commands of God. We accomplish more, we are free to be bold, to be strong in tests, when we plan to keep standing in that plan.

Clint Eastwood helps run the Monterey Jazz Festival and he invited a jazz-pop writer/singer name Jamie Cullum to play. Cullum was trying to finish an album at the time, but he thought, "If Clint Eastwood invites me I have to come." When he arrived Eastwood tossed him the script for the film *Gran Torino*.

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<sup>1</sup> Brooks, the Social Animal, 314-5

It tells the story of a bitter, bigoted Korean War veteran whose neighborhood is changing from Anglo to Vietnamese. He doesn't like it at all, but he learns to love and to sacrifice for his new neighbors. It's a dark comedy or a light tragedy. A film needs a score and a theme song and Eastwood picked Cullum. He also sent Cullum a simple tune that goes like this...

This was the basis for the score and the theme song. Cullum had liberty as long as he fulfilled two requirements: It can't be too dark and it must have the words "Gran Torino." Gran Torino doesn't rhyme with many things: casino, neutrino, cappuccino, maraschino. He also had to operate with givens: mood, key word, even melody. The result is beautiful song with four or five million hits on internet.

Cullum did his best work not as a free composer, but operating within a plan, with strictures that directed his work and made it better. So it was for Jesus, so for us.

Now I'm stressing what we can learn from Jesus' example in his trial. But I need to remind you that Jesus is more than an example. He fulfilled God's plan of salvation and died for us. We cannot imitate that, we can only receive it. That is the difference between Jesus and everyone else who stood strong in a trial.

So both Jesus and Socrates taught with passion, and refused to stop standing for their cause. They both preferred to die than to fall silent or lie. But Jesus far exceeds Socrates. Socrates was a teacher, and the record shows that pride, arrogance, and judgment tainted his teachings. But the closer we look, the more we see Jesus' moral beauty, which is greater than any man has known.

Yet Jesus outdoes others in a more profound way. We can stand firm like Jesus but also in Jesus, for he loved us and gave himself for us. He planned to give his life for us that we might live for him, now and always.