



The King's Ransom

Matthew 20:28

Text

Matthew 26:57-75

Topic

In order to convict Jesus the Jewish authorities produce a number of false witness

Title

"The Witness Pathetic Program"

Introduction

Chuck Norris has made something of a comeback on social media as a hero. Here are a few of the most recent on-line Norris-isms:

- When Chuck Norris was born, the only one who cried was the doctor. Never slap Chuck Norris.
- Death once had a near-Chuck Norris experience.
- Chuck Norris and Superman once fought each other on a bet. The loser agreed to start wearing his underwear on the outside of his clothes.

We like our heroes that way - tough, in control, undefeated.

Jesus seemed anything but heroic to the Jewish ruling council, the Sanhedrin. They arrested Him, accused Him of blasphemy, sentenced Him to death, spitting in His face and beating Him with their hands while mocking Him.

What kind of hero lets Himself be treated that way?

If Jesus is the hero of the Gospel, then in His absence the heroes and heroines are those whom He chooses to follow Him and to proclaim the Gospel.

Peter, one of Jesus' closest disciples, seemed anything but heroic as he followed Jesus from a distance, then denied Him three times.

Let's face it, both Jesus and Peter seemed to fail. But we know the sequel:

- Jesus rose from the dead and ascended to Heaven. He conquered sin and death and now offers all mankind the forgiveness of sins and eternal life. Having been "lifted up" on the Cross, His grace is at work on men's hearts, to free their wills to choose or reject the Gospel.
- Peter would give the first testimony of Jesus in the Church Age. Once afraid of a servant girl, he would be fearless before a mocking crowd. Three thousand men and women were saved.

We're going to talk a little bit about power and failure, with an emphasis upon our failures being overcome as we seek the Lord.

I'll organize my thoughts around two questions: #1 Do You See Jesus' Power Despite His Apparent Failure?, and #2 Do You Seek Jesus' Empowering Despite Your Actual Failures?

#1 Do You See Jesus' Power Despite His Apparent Failure?

(v57-68)

We *do* see the Lord's power as He answered the Sanhedrin, but it's because we know the rest of the story.

Try to put yourself in this scene without reference to what we know happened afterwards, Let's pretend you don't know anything past Jesus' trial.

The only power being wielded seemed to be by the Jewish ruling authority.

Mat 26:57 And those who had laid hold of Jesus led Him away to Caiaphas the high priest, where the scribes and the elders were assembled.

These who assembled were the Jewish Sanhedrin - or, at least, a majority of it. Let me quote from a Jewish source that describes them:

The ancient Jewish court system was called the Sanhedrin. The Great Sanhedrin was the supreme religious body in Israel during the time of the Holy Temple. There were also smaller religious Sanhedrins in every town in the Land of Israel.

... sources describe the Great Sanhedrin as an assembly of 71 sages who met in the Chamber of Hewn Stones in the Temple in Jerusalem. The Great Sanhedrin met daily during the daytime, and did not meet on the Sabbath, festivals or festival eves. It was the final authority on Jewish law and any scholar who went against its decisions was put to death.

The Sanhedrin judged accused lawbreakers, but could not initiate arrests. It required a minimum of two witnesses to convict a suspect. There were no attorneys. Instead, the accusing witness stated the offense in the presence of the accused and the accused could call witnesses on his own behalf. The court questioned the accused, the accusers and the defense witnesses.

This assembly was wrong; it was illegal:

- This meeting was pre-dawn, not in the daytime.
- It was at Caiaphas' house, not in the Temple.
- It was during a festival, Passover.
- And they had ordered the arrest with a view to condemning Jesus to death.

Mat 26:58 But Peter followed Him at a distance to the high priest's courtyard. And he went in and sat with the servants to see the end.

It took some courage to follow Jesus into that hostile courtyard. Not only was Peter a close associate of Jesus, but Peter had assaulted the servant of the high priest, cutting off his ear.

Peter saw what happened next.

Mat 26:59 Now the chief priests, the elders, and all the council sought false testimony against Jesus to put Him to death,
Mat 26:60 but found none. Even though many false witnesses came forward, they found none. But at last two false witnesses came forward

If a person gave false witness to the Sanhedrin, the prescribed penalty was death. But not on this night, because *everybody* was a false witness.

You'd think that these guys would have been better prepared. Their whole mock trial was about to fail - until, finally, two false witnesses came forward who said the same thing.

Mat 26:61 and said, "This fellow said, 'I am able to destroy the temple of God and to build it in three days.' "

This is like accusing Jesus of terrorism. They charged Him with threatening to destroy the Temple.

Did He? Of course not. Here is what Jesus actually said about destroying the Temple: "Destroy **this** temple, and I will raise it again in three days" (John 2:19).

- First of all, He wasn't speaking about the Temple in Jerusalem, but the temple of His body. It was a reference to His crucifixion and resurrection.
- Second, He wasn't the one who was going to do the destroying. He said, "if **you** destroy the temple of My body..."
- Third, His promise was to "raise it up again," *not* destroy it.

Even a first year law student could get this charge dropped.

Mat 26:62 And the high priest arose and said to Him, "Do You answer nothing? What is it these men testify against You?"

The accused was supposed to defend himself. That's the way the Sanhedrin system worked. No defendant remained silent... Until Jesus.

A little insight as to why He remained silent. After His arrest, because of where they were and where they were going, Jesus would have been escorted through what was called the Sheep Gate. It was an entrance into Jerusalem, and in particular it was the entrance through which the sacrificial lambs would be brought to the Temple.

Thus did Isaiah prophesy,

Isa 53:7 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.

Furthermore, in a few short hours, Jesus would be crucified - just at the very time when the Passover lambs were being slain in the Temple.

Mat 26:63 But Jesus kept silent. And the high priest answered and said to Him, "I put You under oath by the living God: Tell us if You are the Christ, the Son of God!"

"Christ" comes from the Greek word *Christos*, meaning "anointed one" or "chosen one." This is the Greek equivalent of the Hebrew word *Mashiach*, or "Messiah."

In the Old Testament the person anointed with oil was regarded as having been singled out by God as having special powers and functions. As time passed, among the Jews, the term gradually came to refer to a deliverer, himself a descendant of David, who would restore Israel to the golden age she enjoyed under the rule of David.

"Son of God" did not mean, to the first century Jews, what it means to us. Here is a quote from the *Jewish Encyclopedia*:

[Son of God is] a term applied to an angel or demigod, one of the mythological beings whose exploits are described in Genesis 6:2-4, and whose ill conduct was among the causes of the Flood; in many passages "gods" and "judges" seem to be equal (Exodus 21:6); and it is applied to the real or ideal king over Israel (Second Samuel 7:14, with reference to David and his dynasty). "Sons of God" and "children of God" are applied also to Israel as a people (Exodus 4:22 and Hosea 11:1).

They ultimately conclude, "the term by no means carries the idea of physical descent from, and essential unity with, God the Father. The Hebrew idiom conveys nothing further than a simple expression of godlikeness."

Jesus was the "Son of God" like other Israelites in that He was a descendant of Abraham; and in that He was the real and ideal descendant of David. But the term meant more when applied to Him: it expressed a nearness to God other Jews did not possess.

Thus could He say, "if you've seen Me, you've seen the Father" (John 14:9), and "I and the Father are one" (John 10:30). He called God the Father "Abba," a term of endearment, the equivalent of saying *Daddy*, that no Jew ever used.

Was Caiaphas asking Jesus if He was God? Or was he asking Him if He was the anointed one, the deliverer, the Messiah?

Either way, Jesus goes beyond what Caiaphas asked, and made a definite claim of deity.

Mat 26:64 Jesus said to him, "It is as you said. Nevertheless, I say to you, hereafter you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Power, and coming on the clouds of heaven."

Yes, He was the Christ, the Son of God, as Jews understood it. And He was also the unique Son of God, as He had presented Himself in His life and ministry - as one with His Father.

But He was also "the Son of Man."

Now, to us Gentiles, Son of God seems to carry more weight than Son of Man. We think Son of God means deity, whereas Son of Man means humanity.

But we've said that, for a Jew, Son of God can, in fact, mean a mere man. In common, everyday Jewish culture, it did not signify deity.

Not so Son of Man. The term "Son of Man" is used in Scripture in contexts of Jesus' deity.

- For example, the Bible says that only God can forgive sins (Isaiah 43:25; Mark 2:7). Then it says, as the Son of Man, Jesus had the power to forgive sins (Mark 2:10).

- Jesus will return to earth as the “Son of Man” in clouds of glory to reign on earth (Matthew 26:63-64). Jesus is citing Daniel 7:13 where the Messiah is described as the "Ancient of Days," a phrase used to indicate deity (Daniel 7:9).

When Jesus was asked by the high priest whether He was the “Son of God,” He responded affirmatively, declaring that He was **also** the “Son of Man,” that He was God, Who would come in power and great glory.

The high priest clearly understood Jesus' claim to be God:

Mat 26:65 Then the high priest tore his clothes, saying, "He has spoken blasphemy! What further need do we have of witnesses? Look, now you have heard His blasphemy!"

In the Gospel of John, the Jews arguing with Jesus tell us what they considered blasphemy:

John 10:33 The Jews answered Him, saying, "For a good work we do not stone You, but for blasphemy, and because You, being a Man, make Yourself God."

When Caiaphas tore his robe and accused Jesus of "blasphemy," it was because he understood Jesus was claiming to be God.

Mat 26:66 What do you think?" They answered and said, "He is deserving of death."

Mat 26:67 Then they spat in His face and beat Him; and others struck Him with the palms of their hands,

Mat 26:68 saying, "Prophecy to us, Christ! Who is the one who struck You?"

We read in Isaiah,

Isa 50:6 ... I did not hide My face from shame and spitting.

The shame of it speaks for itself. G. Campbell Morgan commented, "As one reads this story one wonders more and more at the greatest miracle of all, the patient suffering of the spotless One."

Ironically, just at the moment they were mocking His ability to prophesy, His prophecy to Peter - about the rooster crowing - was being fulfilled.

Jesus seemed powerless, not powerful; defeated, not victorious. To all observers, His mission seemed a failure, despite all He had accomplished up to that point.

Do you see His power? Of course you do. It was power under control, for the good of humanity - including those who were abusing Him. He would rise from the dead... Ascend into Heaven... Sit at the "right hand of the Power" (which was a Jewish way of referring to God without speaking His name)... And come back on the clouds of Heaven - a reference to His return to establish a Kingdom upon the earth.

We mentioned that Jesus came through the Sheep Gate, and kept silent like a lamb led to the sacrifice, to be crucified just as the Passover lambs were being slain. You probably recall John the Baptist identifying Jesus, at His baptism, as "the lamb of God Who takes away the sins of the world."

In Heaven, seated at the right hand of God, Jesus is still identified as the lamb. When He steps forward in the Revelation, to begin the judgment of the earth that will occur prior to His coming on the clouds, He is described like this:

Rev 5:6 And I looked, and behold, in the midst of the throne and of the four living creatures, and in the midst of the elders, stood a **Lamb** as though it had been slain...

Rev 5:11 Then I looked, and I heard the voice of many angels around the throne, the living creatures, and the elders; and the number of them was ten thousand times ten thousand, and thousands of thousands,

Rev 5:12 saying with a loud voice: "Worthy is the **Lamb** who was slain To receive power and riches and wisdom, And strength and honor and glory and blessing!"

Something more is indicated by Jesus' choice of words. When He said, in verse sixty-four, "**hereafter** you will see," the words can be translated "**from now on you** will see."

He wasn't merely saying that, in some distant future, that He would return. That's true, of course; but that's not the whole story.

He said **from now on**; from this point going forward; "you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Power, and coming on the clouds of Heaven."

How so?

You will "see" Him as He is revealed to the world, in His absence, by His followers, as they proclaim the Gospel. His power and rule will be evident in and through them.

History bears witness that Jesus' prediction is true. The original disciples turned the world upside-down with the Gospel; and it's been changing lives ever since, in every generation, in every culture where it has been introduced.

For the most part, the Gospel has been spread while Jesus and His followers seemed weak and powerless failures. Governments have tried in vain, however, to silence believers, to no avail.

It cannot be stopped. But we certainly wouldn't have thought the Gospel would get out of the first century based on the example of Peter in the courtyard of the high priest.

#2 Do You Seek Jesus' Empowering Despite Your Actual Failures?

(v69-75)

Normally we discuss, for our own exhortation, the reasons for Peter's abysmal failure, e.g., he "followed from a distance," and his prayerlessness in the Garden of Gethsemane.

Now I'm all about encouraging myself and you to prayer, and to closing any distance between us and Jesus.

But is that really why Peter failed? Couldn't we argue that he failed to give a testimony about Jesus because he had yet to receive the Holy Spirit?

After He rose from the dead, Jesus instructed His small band of followers to wait for the promise of the Father, which He called the baptism with the Holy Spirit.

On the Day of Pentecost, the promised baptism came from Heaven. Then this same Peter addressed a mocking crowd of thousands and gave an incredible apologetic for Jesus being the God-man Who alone can forgive us our sins and save us for eternity.

Three thousand were saved.

Was that the same guy? Well, yes and no. It was Peter, but now baptized with the promise of the Father, the Holy Spirit.

What I see in Peter, in the courtyard of Caiaphas, is that failure is inevitable without the baptism of the Holy Spirit.

Sadly, I fail just as miserably - **with** the Holy Spirit available to me! And so do you (at times).

We need to be encouraged to be baptized with the Holy Spirit, and to only pursue serving the Lord as we are led by the Spirit.

And we need to be encouraged to repent, when necessary, and let the Lord fill us with His Spirit again, and use us.

Mat 26:69 Now Peter sat outside in the courtyard. And a servant girl came to him, saying, "You also were with Jesus of Galilee."

Mat 26:70 But he denied it before them all, saying, "I do not know what you are saying."

Peter was not questioned before a hostile court, or even an angry mob. Peter's fear made a servant girl a fierce adversary, and he cowered in fear before her.

Mat 26:71 And when he had gone out to the gateway, another girl saw him and said to those who were there, "This fellow also was with Jesus of Nazareth."

Mat 26:72 But again he denied with an oath, "I do not know the Man!"

Peter's sin of denying his association with Jesus grew worse with each denial. First, he merely lied; then he took an oath to the lie; next he will curse and swear.

Mat 26:73 And a little later those who stood by came up and said to Peter, "Surely you also are one of them, for your speech betrays you."

Mat 26:74 Then he began to curse and swear, saying, "I do not know the Man!"...

William Barclay notes, "so ugly was their accent that no Galilean was allowed to pronounce the benediction at a synagogue service."

Sitting in the courtyard, surrounded by danger and nonbelievers, Peter represents all of us as we daily venture out into a hostile world.

You see a few of the ways Peter represents us in the comments made about him. The first comment was that Peter was with Jesus. If you are a Christian, it doesn't take long for people to see that you have been with Jesus. When you get saved, God the Holy Spirit comes to live inside you. He begins to radically affect your motives and behavior. You change – and people see that there is Someone with you.

The next comment directed toward Peter was that he was one of them. He had hung-out with the other followers of Jesus.

When you get saved, you want to be around other believers. You start attending a fellowship; you get involved serving in it. People begin to see you are one of them.

Then they busted Peter because of the way he talked. In his case, it was his Galilean dialect. In your case, your language is affected as you are with the Lord and among His people:

1. First, you quit cursing – usually without even trying to.
2. Second, you begin to use a vocabulary unique to the Bible and Christians. Words like fellowship, rapture, justification, sanctification, and spirit-filled sneak their way into your speech. Phrases like ‘the flesh’ fall off of your lips.

You and I, everyday, are sitting in the world. It might be a dinner table at home, or a water cooler at work, or a classroom at school. We want to tell others about the Lord, not deny Him in any way.

We fail. Sometimes, abysmally.

Mat 26:74 Then he began to curse and swear, saying, "I do not know the Man!" Immediately a rooster crowed.

Mat 26:75 And Peter remembered the word of Jesus who had said to him, "Before the rooster crows, you will deny Me three times." So he went out and wept bitterly.

Peter remembered the word of the Lord. Think of it: a particular rooster had been appointed by God to crow at this exact moment.

If the Lord could fulfill His prediction of a crowing rooster, then He could and would certainly fulfill the promise He had also given as a word to Peter earlier that evening:

Luk 22:31 And the Lord said, [Peter, Peter]. Indeed, Satan has asked for you, that he may sift you as wheat.

Luk 22:32 "But I have prayed for you, that your faith should not fail; and when you have returned to Me, strengthen your brethren."

Peter "went out and wept bitterly." We say he *repented* - not just because of the tears, but because he returned to the Lord and was restored.

One writer said, "repentance is best evidenced by our abounding in the contrary grace and duty."

I'm liking the word 'abysmal' today. I have been an abysmal spiritual failure at times. I'm guessing, so have you. You might have recently failed the Lord; you might be failing Him even as we speak.

Maybe you will fail Him tomorrow, as some trial gets dropped into your life that shakes you to the very foundations of your faith. You might be called upon to take a stand for Jesus that could cost you your job or your family. In many places around the world, it could cost you your life.

Repent. Return to the Lord; return to your first love. It's really that simple, because God's grace is available to you, and it is sufficient for you.

"From now on," Jesus said, people would see Him sitting at the right hand of God, poised to return.

People see Him in you; they see Him through you; they see Him by your testimony.

There is nothing quite so powerful as a transformed life.

Not merely a reformed life. It's great when a person can reform themselves. *Biggest Loser* testimonies are awesome as folks shed hundreds of pounds by strength of their will and discipline. Transformation is something internal; something spiritual; something that can only be accomplished by God residing in us.

People need to see Christians doing things **no one** *can* or *would* do apart from God. Not by our effort and discipline, but by our dependance upon the Lord.