

FACING THE DARK, MARK 14:53-72

series

◆**Intro:** Kids can be quite creative when it comes to jabbing at each other. I've heard some go back and forth trying to out do the other with cuts and silly one-liners...

◆“You're so low, you play handball against the curb!”

◆“Oh yeah, well you're so low you have to look up to look down!”

◆“You're so low you could hang-glide on a Dorito.” (Really! the imagination of these young-uns!)

◆“Yeah, well you're so low you're the last one to get rained on and the first one to drown!”

◆It wouldn't surprise me if some of those kids grow up to be political activists. Truth be told, there are plenty of times that we feel low, or small, or insignificant. There are times when you wonder if you matter in the world. There are times when you feel alone, and tiny. Some kids even feel it on a bustling playground. Others even feel it while they strut their stuff on stage. People can feel it when they first enter the job market, and after thirty years of labor for a company. It's OK. I mean, it's not unhealthy to look closely at ourselves. It's easy to feel small, bad about ourselves, especially because we *do* fail often.

◆**1. Don't ignore your failures for they signal our need for a savior.**

◆Most people expend a lot of energy to not see their flaws, smallness, or the low spots in themselves. They hide from failure. They admit nothing. Instead we lie to ourselves and other saying that we're not embarrassed, we don't really care that they know what we did. We can handle it. Our text is a sort of challenge to that pride that keeps us from both seeing our need, and rejoicing in love given anyway.

FACING THE DARK, MARK 14:53-72

series

◆ In the passage there is a contrast of characters. Mark crafts his account to compare Jesus and Peter.

◆ Verse 53-54. What do you see? Peter is following Jesus to the Sanhedrin, the religious court.

◆ Verse 55-65. The camera angle switches and now we're looking over Jesus' shoulder inside the courtroom.

◆ Verses 66-72. The courtroom scene fades to black and we flash back to Peter outside in the courtyard.

◆ Mark has told us Peter's story in pieces, around Jesus' story, and thereby contrasts the two. Both Jesus and Peter are on trial. How does each one do?

◆ **A.** Lets start with Jesus. Everything is stacked against Jesus. He's in the Sanhedrin courtroom, which would be an elevated semi-circle or chairs so as to present the multiple judges staring down at the defendant. (If you've ever been to the courthouse downtown you may have noted the grandiosity of the structure. The heavy oaken doors loom 10' into the air. Why? There are no 10' people. The ceilings are even higher. There is plenty of stonework. The banisters are bulky and thick, made by giant hands. There are ornate carvings in all the trim. All of this serves to accent the weight of the law and the seriousness of the proceedings. Well, the Sanhedrin was similarly laid out.) All the lights are so-to-speak, trained on Jesus. Besides that there is a sinister by-passing of law! The Jewish legal system forbade night trials. And all this is taking place before the rooster crows, so we know that they are side-stepping good legal order!! On top of that, the process is backward: they arrest Jesus, and then look for

FACING THE DARK, MARK 14:53-72

series

something to accuse him of! (55). Once they fabricate some evidence they blatantly charge him with it. (56,59) No two people were telling the same story! So here's a case of guilty until proven innocent. Isn't it supposed to be the other way around? Furthermore, Caiaphas (nicknamed the "Inquisitor") was the high priest at the time. He had a reputation for terror and reigned on this supreme court 19 years, much longer than the average 4 years. According to Jewish precedent, a verdict is only passed at a subsequent, second session on a different day. That doesn't happen either. And lastly, the tenor of the whole scene has the upper crust, legal experts behaving like ruffians spitting and mocking, and taunting.

◆**B.** Peter's trial is far more casual and light by comparison. He's not in the spotlight. He's in the shadows of an outdoor fire where, if you didn't know the person, the flickering flames easily hide a clear face. (54) He is casually observed by a slave girl (67). Bear in mind that her status in that society was a few notches above the farm animals. One: she was a girl. Two: she was a slave.

◆So we have Peter, nervous and defensive before the equivalent of say, a prison janitor whose asking if they'd met. While Jesus is viciously attacked by the coiling Judiciary, spit upon and beaten without charge, Peter is pointed at by a mouthy maid. Jesus and Peter are both facing the hour of testing. Peter crumbles before a street urchin. Jesus stands strong before the high court.

◆*"if we are faithless, he will remain faithful, for he cannot disown himself."* 2 Timothy 2:13, NIV.

FACING THE DARK, MARK 14:53-72

series

◆ Jesus can be nothing other than he is: rock firm and true. HE confesses his identity as the Messiah (62) and boldly promises to judge those judging him, while Peter denies his identity. The last time someone in Mark's gospel said Jesus was the Messiah, it was in chapter 8 on the lips of Peter before Jesus predicted this very night. (31-33). Jesus foresaw his rejection, his trial, his death. Peter rebuked him then and Jesus' response was "Get behind me, Satan." So it is a flip flop that Peter does not confess his belief in Jesus here in the somewhat serene scene of the courtyard, compared to the mob mentality inside the courtroom.

◆ *C. What I think Mark wants us to see here is that Jesus is, and Jesus always will remain strong and faithful in his desire to love his people and take away their sins -though his beloved people are not. Peter, the Rock sank to the bottom. So low he had to look up to look down. Low enough to realize that we are not truly awed by God until we are disillusioned with ourselves. But do not hate yourself. There is something worse than self-hatred; it is self-centeredness: thinking that we will figure it out, that we have it in us to stand the test, that we will solve our troubles. That we will measure up for God. That we are such worthy followers that we would never deny the Lord we love. Not true. We do not measure up. We do not merit the attention of the Messiah.*

◆ Sometimes God lets us fall apart so that we finally see that it is he, not us, that can keep things together, and put things back. So I say it's not all bad to notice our failures. We are the Peter's of the world. Followers of a strong savior, though weak ourselves. No matter.

FACING THE DARK, MARK 14:53-72

series

Jesus cannot be unfaithful. He loves us in our faltering. And maybe it's in our faltering that we finally notice his fame!

◆2. When I am unable, I become most aware that God is.

◆Good Friday is a time to admit our inability and lostness and look to the power of the cross. God specialized in helpless situations. As the famed old preacher put it, "It Friday, but Sunday's a'coming!" Lets remember some things about the God who dies for the dead and then raises the dead!

◆1) In the beginning the earth was formless and void. It didn't look good. What if someone told you that *you* were formless and void? God gave form to the formless! 2) When Israel was on the beach of the Red Sea with the Egyptian charioteers causing an ever-nearing dust cloud, and the glint of spear tips flashing in the desert sun, -God created a path where there was no path! 3) When the widow with no husband has the rent due and the utilities shut off, and the cupboard bare, and the landlord coming to enslave her son -God created enough oil to keep filling the jars. "Get more empty jars" was her slogan that day, "God is filling them and not stopping." 4) When 5000 people had nothing to eat, God literally created bread and fish on the spot. (My me tee and I talked about this very story this week, 2000 years later. He, not a Christian, had heard it!) God is very nearby in helpless situations.

◆Mt 9:36* *When he saw the crowds, he had compassion on them, because they were harassed and **helpless**, like sheep without a shepherd.*

FACING THE DARK, MARK 14:53-72

series

◆ There is something about having nothing that catches the eye of God. There is something about nothing that moves the heart of God. Don't be silent about your nothings. Present them to God. He relishes wrestling splendor from a vacuum. He smiles when the inventory sheets tally zero. That's why we call him creator.

◆ *“For God, who said, “Let light shine out of darkness,” made his light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ. But we have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us. We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed. We always carry around in our body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be revealed in our body.” 2 Corinthians 4:6-10, NIV.*

◆ **Conclusion:** Here is the conclusion of the matter. Take a close look at Peter. I'll bet you can relate to Peter. He, after all, did follow Jesus. He was the only one in those shadows, gritting his teeth, hemming and hawing, and wanting to do right by his Lord. But in the end, he could not be who he desperately wanted to be. He saw his own fallenness. But don't let that stop you. Jesus stood strong *for* Peter. And Jesus stood strong *for* you. Fast forward some weeks later (John 21) and we see Peter, numb, sorrowful, and clearly having decided to go back to fishing because he didn't have what it took to be the disciple of a rabbi. But as he pulls the seaweed from his net, a stranger appears on the shore. He tells him where to throw his nets that are to this point empty. And then in an instant the

FACING THE DARK, MARK 14:53-72

series

nets are full! And Peter too knows in an instant who it is: it is he who specializes in something out of nothing.

◆We need to stop and see our nothing. We need to linger in the dark on Good Friday so that we really notice the light on Easter morning. Larry Libby put it, "I must not drive into God's provision station and ask to top off the tank. Better to coast in on fumes, with flats, and with an expired credit card. I must not come to the banquet table when mostly full and ask for just a sip of coffee and an after dinner mint. I must cry out in hunger."

◆"Hear, O my people, and I will warn you--if you would but listen to me, O Israel! You shall have no foreign god among you; you shall not bow down to an alien god. I am the LORD your God, who brought you up out of Egypt. Open wide your mouth and I will fill it. Ps.81:6f