

Exegetical Notes, Mark 14:53-65

“The Great Court”

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Mark 14:53-65

Verse 53-54

They took Jesus to the high priest, and all the chief priests, elders, and 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.

- After his arrest, Jesus was taken to the palace of the high priest where Israel’s religious leadership was assembled.
- Cautiously, Peter followed Jesus. Peter made it into the courtyard of the palace and sat warming himself at the fire the guards had started there.

Verse 55-56

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.

- The Sanhedrin was the highest court in Israel. It was composed of 71 members. Its members were from three particular groups, chief priests, teachers of the law, and elders. The high priest presided at its meetings. The court met in the temple under ordinary circumstances. On this night their meeting was secret and, therefore, illegal. Its secrecy was assured when it was held at the high priest’s palace.
- The purpose of the meeting was to find evidence against Jesus that would justify his execution.
- Their efforts were confused because the false witnesses did not agree about what Jesus had done wrong. Because the witnesses did not agree with each other nothing could be determined against him.

Verse 57 -59

Then some stood up and gave this false testimony against him, “We heard him say, ‘I will destroy this man-made temple and in three days will build another, not made by man.’” Yet even then their testimony did not agree.

- There is no recorded statement of Jesus that corresponds to this accusation. The closest remark by Jesus is found in John 2:19. There Jesus speaks of the resurrection of his body. We are told that this was a false accusation so we should not be surprised that there is no remark to this effect in fact.
- The witnesses did not agree about what Jesus had said even in this.

Verse 60-61a

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? But Jesus remained silent and gave no answer.

- As no charge had been substantiated against him, Jesus was not required to answer or to make a defense, so he did not. The high priest’s action is an attempt to get Jesus to incriminate himself.

Verse 61b-62

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

- The high priest asked Jesus directly if Jesus was the Messiah. Jesus responded that he was and that the high priest would see the proof of it.

Verse 63-64a

The high priest tore his clothes. “Why do we need any more witnesses?” he asked. “You have heard the blasphemy. What do you think?”

- Blasphemy is saying things about God which are not true or showing improper respect to him. Because they did not believe that Jesus was the Messiah, the high priest considered Jesus’ remarks to be blasphemous.
- Since all the members of the court had heard Jesus’ remark, they all became witnesses against him. No other witnesses needed to be called. They had witnessed Jesus’ crime personally.
- Therefore, the high priest called for an immediate vote.

Verse 64b-65

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.

- They condemned Jesus to die since blasphemy was punished by death. They then lost their dignity and mocked Jesus giving him to the guards to be beaten.

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