

On Trial in Our Place: Testimony

⁵³ They took Jesus to the high priest, and all the chief priests, the elders and the teachers of the law came together. ⁵⁴ 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.

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 temple made with human hands and in three days will build another, not made with hands.’”

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 Messiah, 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.

⁶⁶ While Peter was below in the courtyard, one of the servant girls of the high priest came by. ⁶⁷ When she saw Peter warming himself, she looked closely at him. “You also were with that Nazarene, Jesus,” she said.

⁶⁸ But he denied it. “I don’t know or understand what you’re talking about,” he said, and went out into the entryway.

⁶⁹ When the servant girl saw him there, she said again to those standing around, “This fellow is one of them.” ⁷⁰ Again he denied it.

After a little while, those standing near said to Peter, “Surely you are one of them, for you are a Galilean.”

⁷¹ He began to call down curses, and he swore to them, “I don’t know this man you’re talking about.”

⁷² Immediately the rooster crowed the second time. Then Peter remembered the word Jesus had spoken to him: “Before the rooster crows twice you will disown me three times.” And he broke down and wept.

Listen to this Bible passage: **“But in your hearts revere Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have”** (1 Peter 3:15). Do you know what’s so interesting, shocking you might even say, about this Bible passage? Look at the person who, inspired by God, wrote the passage. Peter! This is the guy who shot his mouth off in Matthew 26:33 and claimed, **“Even if all fall away on account of you, Jesus, I never will,”** and then only a few hours later denies that he knows Jesus.

There Peter stood in that courtyard, standing trial you might say. A servant girl pressures him: **“You were with Jesus.”** **“No,”** he says and tries to sneak away. The servant girl follows Peter and says again, **“This fellow is one of them,”** and again Peter denies it. The bystanders chime in, **“Surely, you are one of them; it’s obvious you are from Galilee.”** And calling down curses, Peter swears, **“I don’t know the man!”**

Why is Peter so unprepared for this moment in the courtyard? Why is he so easily pressured by the servant girl and bystanders? Where’s the Peter who said, “I will never fall away”? Where’s the Peter who earlier pulled out his sword to take on the mob in the Garden of Gethsemane? What is he so afraid of? He is afraid for his life. That’s the reason, more than any other, that Peter denies Jesus. Peter isn’t afraid of the servant girl and bystanders as much as he is afraid of the guards who are within earshot of hearing Peter give his answers to the servant girl and bystanders. What would stop the guards from arresting Peter just like they arrested Jesus? Worse, what would stop the guards from doing to Peter what they were going to do to Jesus? Who of us wouldn’t be afraid for our own lives in a similar scenario?

But sympathy for Peter’s situation does not justify what he did. There is only one way to see what Peter did in that courtyard: PURE SELFISHNESS! Peter purposely denied knowing the One who would save his life from the curse of sin – and he did it by calling down curses to save himself. Yes, that’s as backwards and bizarre as it sounds. But it’s exactly what Peter did.

But before you are so aghast that Peter would do such a thing, ask yourself, “Is my denial any less selfish when I purposely try to hide my faith in Jesus?” Is it any less selfish when someone asks you what you believe and your first thought is how can I change the subject? Is it any less selfish when someone asks you why you don’t do what everyone else does, and you are searching hard for an excuse that they will accept? Is it any less selfish to disregard who you are in Christ just to avoid being looked down upon or singled out by the crowd?

What are you afraid of? Losing your reputation at the expense of Jesus’ reputation? Losing your standing at the expense of Jesus, who stood in your place? Losing your so-called friends at the expense of Jesus, your Lord and Savior? Do you really believe that you’d be better off doing such things? What could be more selfish? Worse, what could be more damning? Now you know firsthand why Peter wept bitterly.

But Peter wasn’t the only one put on trial in the wee hours of that Friday morning. There Jesus stood in Caiaphas’ “kangaroo court.” A parade of liars all took their turns on the stand to incriminate

Jesus. One false witness after another false witness, until the high priest said, **“Enough! I charge you under oath by the living God: Tell us if you are the Messiah, the Son of God.”** Can you feel the suspense in the room? What would Jesus say? Would he be as selfish as Peter was to save his life? No, just the opposite. He would state the truth, knowing he would be put to death for it, but also knowing he would save us as a result. Now you know how precious are the words we sang earlier in the worship service:

*Amazing love, oh what sacrifice, the Son of God giv’n for me!
My debt He pays and my death He dies, that I might live, that I might live.*

What could be more selfless? Greater, what could be more gracious and merciful? Now you personally know how much God loves you.

I have read the story and retold the story, but reflect on what you’ve heard: Two men stood on trial. Both were from Galilee. One stood inside the courtroom, the other stood outside the courtroom. Both were asked direct questions. One was asked, **“Are you the Son of God?”** The other was asked, **“Are you Jesus’ disciple?”** Their answers were the difference of one word. The one answered, **“I am,”** and the other answered, **“I am not.”** The one died on the cross for his answer, but because he did, the other one was forgiven for his answer.

Now do you understand why Peter would say, **“But in your hearts revere Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have”** (1 Peter 3:15)?

- Look at the One who stood in your place.
- Look at the One who was 100% prepared to die for your sins.
- Look at the One whose answer resulted in the sacrifice for your sin.
- Look at the One who died on the cross and rose from the dead so that you have a living hope.

When you see what Jesus did for you, you see the reason to revere him, the reason to be prepared to give an answer that points to Jesus with anyone who asks, and the reason to share the hope you have, the sure hope of forgiveness, salvation, and everlasting life with Jesus.

To put what I just shared in its most powerful perspective, listen again to Caiaphas’ question and Jesus’ answer: **“Are you the Messiah, the Son of God?”** Caiaphas asked. Jesus replied, **“I am.”** With Jesus’ answer, now focus your thoughts on the cross. What a testimony!

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ, the likelihood of you being put on trial like Peter was in that courtyard is ever increasing. Just a few days ago I read two different articles that reported attacks on Christian churches in our country more than doubled in the last year, from just less than 200 in 2022 to 436 in 2023. If attacks like that are increasing, how likely do you think it is that the personal attacks on Christians will increase?

The question is: Are you prepared for it? Are you prepared for the peer pressure from friends and family? Are you prepared for the prodding from society and social media? If you are out to save your own life in this world, you are not prepared. But if you understand that the One who stood in your place saved your life from the eternal punishment your sin deserves, and this is more important to you than anything else in the world, you are prepared. Then, when asked, **“Are you one of them who believes that Jesus is the only way of salvation,”** your testimony will be as direct as Jesus’ testimony, and you’ll say without any hesitation, **“I am.”**

“What shall we say in response to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all – how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things” (Romans 8:31-32).