

“Appearances Can Be Deceiving”

Mark 14:43-15:15

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One of Aesop’s fables is “The Ant and the Chrysalis”

An Ant nimbly running about in the sunshine in search of food came across a Chrysalis (cocoon) that was very near its time of change.

The Chrysalis moved its tail, and thus attracted the attention of the Ant, who then saw for the first time that it was alive.

"Poor, pitiable animal!" cried the Ant disdainfully.

"What a sad fate is yours! While I can run here and there, at my pleasure, and, if I wish, climb the tallest tree, you lie imprisoned here in your shell, with power only to move a joint or two of your scaly tail."

The Chrysalis heard all this, but did not try to make any reply.

A few days after, when the Ant passed that way again, nothing but the shell remained.

Wondering what had become of its contents, the Ant felt himself suddenly shaded and fanned by the gorgeous wings of a beautiful Butterfly.

"Behold in me," said the Butterfly, "your much-pitied friend!

Boast now of your powers to run and climb as long as you can get me to listen."

So saying, the Butterfly rose in the air, and, borne along and aloft on the summer breeze, was soon lost to the sight of the Ant forever.

Appearances can be deceiving.

In anticipation of the soon-to-be-released movie “The De Vinci Code,” I’ve been reading a couple of Dan Brown’s books.

They are fast-paced and fun fictions.

But if cartoons of bombs sticking out of Mohammed's turban were blasphemous of Islam, Dan Brown's depiction of Christ and Christianity are certainly suspect.

He and many others in our day seem to thrive on taking what is unique and holy and suggesting it is at best merely common and contrived or at worst, plagiarized and fraudulent.

Fiction dressed in the garb of history has the appearance of reality but is deceptive and leads the uninitiated to question the whole of Christianity.

Have you heard of the supposedly "newly discovered" Gospel of Judas?

The publicity savvy marketers of National Geographic Television have timed the release of a special on it to coincide with this Christian Holy Week.

According to Thursday's New York Times article, the Gospel of Judas reveals that Jesus asked his close friend Judas to betray him to assist Jesus in getting rid of his physical flesh in order to liberate the divine self within.

Never mind that the text was first refuted 1800 years ago and found 30 years ago and then rediscovered 6 years ago – it is publicized as "newly discovered."

Never mind that the thesis of the book is a heresy well known to NT writers who countered it – it is publicized as shaking the roots of Christianity.

I quote from the NY Times: "As the findings have trickled down to the churches and universities, they have produced a generation of Christians who now regard the Bible not as the literal word of God, but as a product of historical and political forces that determined which texts should be included in the canon (Bible), and which edited out." (April 6, 2006 NY Times "Gospel of Judas Surfaces After 1700 Years")

So whether it's a novel or a very old book, appearances can be deceiving.

This idea of the deception of appearances came to me as I was studying the text for this week in our Easter-season series entitled "A Week That Changed the World."

As you know there are four accounts of the life of Christ that the early church determined met the criteria for inclusion in the Bible as inspired by God.

Like any four witnesses to important events, each Gospel writer comes with a different perspective.

What the witness-writer chooses to tell and **how** he tells it shapes the message he is trying to communicate.

The Gospel writer, Mark, is not just telling a story but is telling the story in a way that will best help those who read it.

As we now read again Mark's account of the arrest and trial of Jesus, I want you to be aware of **how** Mark tells the story.

I want you to particularly note how he weaves together two events occurring simultaneously.

And most importantly I want you to watch Jesus and Peter who I think Mark presents as the two main characters.

The account begins with Judas, but I don't think Mark sees Judas as the major character in this part of the story.

Mark 14:43-15:15

"Just as (Jesus) was speaking (in the Garden of Gethsemane), 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.

^{MK 14:44} Now the betrayer (Judas) 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 (John tells us it was Peter) drew his sword and struck the servant of the high priest, cutting off his ear.

^{MK 14:48} "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.

^{MK 14:51} A young man, wearing nothing but a linen garment, was following Jesus. When they seized him, ⁵² he fled naked, leaving his garment behind.

^{MK 14:53} They took Jesus to the high priest, and all the chief priests, elders and 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.

^{MK 14:55} 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.

^{MK 14:57} 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.

^{MK 14:60} 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?"

^{MK 14:62} "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."

^{MK 14:63} 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.

^{MK 14:66} 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.

^{MK 14:68} But he denied it. "I don't know or understand what you're talking about," he said, and went out into the entryway.

MK 14:69 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."

MK 14:71 He began to call down curses on himself, and he swore to them, "I don't know this man you're talking about."

MK 14:72 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.

MK 15:1 Very early in the morning, the chief priests, with the elders, the teachers of the law and the whole Sanhedrin, reached a decision. They bound Jesus, led him away and handed him over to Pilate.

MK 15:2 "Are you the king of the Jews?" asked Pilate.

"Yes, it is as you say," Jesus replied.

MK 15:3 The chief priests accused him of many things. ⁴ So again Pilate asked him, "Aren't you going to answer? See how many things they are accusing you of."

MK 15:5 But Jesus still made no reply, and Pilate was amazed.

MK 15:6 Now it was the custom at the Feast to release a prisoner whom the people requested. ⁷ A man called Barabbas was in prison with the insurrectionists who had committed murder in the uprising. ⁸ The crowd came up and asked Pilate to do for them what he usually did.

MK 15:9 "Do you want me to release to you the king of the Jews?" asked Pilate, ¹⁰ knowing it was out of envy that the chief priests had handed Jesus over to him. ¹¹ But the chief priests stirred up the crowd to have Pilate release Barabbas instead.

MK 15:12 "What shall I do, then, with the one you call the king of the Jews?" Pilate asked them.

MK 15:13 "Crucify him!" they shouted.

MK 15:14 "Why? What crime has he committed?" asked Pilate.

But they shouted all the louder, "Crucify him!"

MK 15:15 Wanting to satisfy the crowd, Pilate released Barabbas to them. He had Jesus flogged, and handed him over to be crucified."

May God bless the reading of his word!

PRAY

The story, told thus far, ends in apparent tragedy: Peter in broken despair and Jesus on the way to death.

But remember, appearances can be deceiving.

I think Mark's telling of the story rather dramatically demonstrates that Peter's apparent strength ends in weakness and Jesus' apparent weakness is actually a demonstration of sovereign strength.

Let's start with Jesus.

Jesus is often thought of in these scenes as pitiful.

He is betrayed, arrested, abandoned, denied, falsely accused, mocked, beaten, and condemned to die.

No doubt Jesus' pain was as intense as any human has ever experienced and no doubt his suffering was deeper than any other human has ever suffered.

But appearances can be deceiving.

Jesus is too often thought of as merely a victim.

What I want you to see is that throughout the arrest and trial Jesus is in complete control.

And in that I want you to understand that no matter how dark it may look in a world that seems to hate Christianity or how dark it may seem to you in your own experiences and questions, that in spite of the appearances, Jesus was and still is in complete control.

In our text Jesus' control begins with his betrayal.

It was the fulfillment of OT prophecy – Psalm 41:9 “Even my close friend, whom I trusted, he who shared my bread, has lifted up his heel against me.”

Jesus predicted the betrayal at the first Lord's Supper and even indicated Judas as the one who would betray him.

And after he prayed in the Garden of Gethsemane, he told the disciples that Judas was on his way.

The betrayal was in the plan and control of Jesus.

Jesus' arrest was not a surprise but was planned and allowed.

He knew exactly what was going to happen and when it was going to happen.

As he himself said when they arrested him, he could have stopped the whole proceeding if he had wanted to.

Matthew 26:52 "Do you think I cannot call on my Father, and he will at once put at my disposal more than twelve legions (50,000) of angels?"

The arrest was in the plan and control of Jesus.

Jesus predicted the desertion of him by his disciples during the first Lord's Supper earlier that evening when Jesus quoted *Zechariah 13:7* "Strike the shepherd, and the sheep will be scattered..."

It was necessary for Jesus to go this road alone.

As he said in John 13:33 "Where I am going, you cannot come."

This was not a group project.

Only God the Son could atone for sin by his death.

The desertion by his followers was in the plan and control of Jesus.

Look at what happens when Jesus stands before the High Priest.

The leaders were looking:

11:18 "for a way to kill him."

12:12 "for a way to arrest him."

14:1 "for some sly way to arrest Jesus and kill him."

14:55 "for evidence against Jesus so they could put him to death."

They were doing their best, using all their resources.

They arranged for false witnesses to say he had sinned against the law of God in various ways but the witnesses couldn't agree.

They got the necessary two witnesses to say that he was going to destroy the Temple in Jerusalem but even they couldn't agree.

For all of their efforts they couldn't produce what they wanted.

Jesus knew he was going to die but he was going to die to accomplish his purpose not theirs.

He was not about to die for any unrighteousness in him; he had not sinned.

Jesus directed the trial to one charge only that they could make stick and that only because he admitted to it.

Frustrated at the failure of their Kangaroo Court, the High Priest finally stepped down from his elevated chair and became not only judge but also the chief prosecutor.

Mark 14:61 "Are you the Christ, the Son of the Blessed One?"
In other words, "Are you the Messiah of God?"

And Jesus replied Mark 14:62 "'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."

"I am the Messiah and because of who I am I will sit as Deity and will come to be the judge of the earth."

If Jesus was going to die it would NOT be for crimes he had not done, it would be ONLY as the Messiah of God, the Son of God who had come to atone for the sins of his people.

He was "guilty" of only one thing, of being the Messiah and only of that one thing did Jesus allow them to convict him.

His conviction was planned and controlled by Jesus.

Look at Jesus being tried by Pilate.

The religious leaders couldn't carry out a death sentence because the Romans occupied their country.

So they had to take Jesus to Pilate to get a death sentence.

Because Pilate wouldn't care about religious issues, the leaders had to charge him with crimes against the state – sedition or treason.

But again their plan didn't work.

Even Pilate saw through their envy and false testimony.

Jesus would **not** be sentenced to die for any crime against the government.

When he went to death it would be for one reason only – because he was sinless God dying in the place of his people. And so Jesus controlled that trial as well to one conclusion only – he was not guilty and yet he would die.

Jesus was not a victim.

Even his refusal to speak and the beatings were the fulfillment of prophecy.

Isaiah 53:7 “He was oppressed and afflicted,
yet he did not open his mouth;
he was led like a lamb to the slaughter,
and as a sheep before her shearers is silent,
so he did not open his mouth.

It doesn't make it any less unjust or painful but every aspect of the experience was planned and controlled to one end:

1 John 4:10 “This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins.”

When I look more carefully at this arrest and trial, I don't see a weak victim.

I see a man with resolve, a focused attention and an incredible strength.

I see the perfect man, doing exactly what he had determined to do.

And he is doing it for me and for you!

It is the combination of his goodness and his greatness that makes him trustworthy.

Sovereign benevolence!

Now look quickly with me at Peter.

Oh Peter what were you thinking?

You were so full of yourself and so sure of yourself.

Jesus said all of you would desert him.

But you said, Mark 14:29 "Even if all fall away, I will not."

Jesus knew your heart, that all your confidence was in yourself, and he knew that would not be enough.

Mark 14:31 But you insisted emphatically, "Even if I have to die with you, I will never disown you."

Peter, you were out of your league and you didn't even know it.

And when you were in the Garden, Jesus told you to pray.

Mark 14:37 "Simon, are you asleep? Could you not keep watch for one hour? Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation."

Jesus was telling you to find your strength in him, not in yourself, but you didn't hear it.

When they came to arrest Jesus, you pulled your sword and took a swing at the High Priest's servant.

You drew blood.

What were you thinking?

You could take them on yourself?

And when you showed up again in the courtyard outside where they were trying Jesus.

What did you expect to do there?

With all of your strength were you still looking for a way to save the poor helpless Jesus from his circumstances?

What happened next, changed Peter forever.

A little girl accused the "strong" man Peter of being a follower of Jesus and Peter caved.

Not once, but three times, until he was shouting curses down on himself and the others declaring he didn't know this Jesus.

And when the rooster crowed the second time, Peter remembered Jesus' words that Peter would deny him.

Even while Jesus was shaping the outcome of his own trial, he was also shaping Peter.

For in that tragic experience, Peter realized the true limits of his own ability and character and he was crushed.

Only from that failure could Peter begin to trust in Jesus instead of himself.

Peter learned the failure of power and the power of failure.

Two stories intertwined: Jesus' and Peter's.

Appearances can be deceiving:

Jesus appears to be a victim but is actually in control.

Peter appears to be in control but is actually a victim of his own self-sufficiency.

Now back to the point of all this.

Who do you trust most?

When your faith is threatened,

- when God seems most distant,
- when Christianity seems to be under attack,
- when you are tempted to doubt God's ability or love,
- when circumstances seem to be overwhelming even for God,
- when Jesus seems so far away as to be useless in the present,
- and when God seems as weak as Jesus must have seemed to Peter, what will you cling to – appearances or the truth?

I'm increasingly convinced that the single greatest indicator of where our trust is centered is whether we pray or not.

In the Garden of Gethsemane, Peter trusted more in himself than in Jesus and he slept instead of praying.

When the arrest came, Peter trusted more in himself than in Jesus and he swung a sword rather than praying.

In the courtyard, Peter trusted more in himself than in Jesus, and he lied in fear rather than praying.

Whether it is in the work of the church or in our own lives, we reveal our self-confidence rather than Christ-confidence when we seek first to make things happen rather than first seeking the mind and power of God.

Pastor Ray Stedman wrote the following several years ago:
“When I look at Christianity today, I am sometimes appalled at the degree that we depend upon the flesh. I am amazed and intrigued as we look at the Scriptures to see that God always works in simplicity and with a low-keyed approach. God loves that. Our attempts, and the flesh's attempts, are almost always characterized by high gear, high promotion, and complexity. I learned long ago that when things start getting very complex, when you need finely tuned organizations to carry them out and hundreds of people -- somehow you've missed it; for God's work is characterized by simplicity.” (From “Jesus and the Priests” sermon on Mark 14/15)

Appearances are deceiving.

Our God is neither distant nor weak.

Zechariah 4:6 “‘Not by might nor by power, but by my Spirit,’ says the LORD Almighty.

Do we pray as if the changes we most need are truly dependent on God?

Additional resources on the next pages:

Outline of the text:

14:43-45 Judas' betrayal of Jesus

14:46-49 The arrest

14:49 "But the Scriptures must be fulfilled."

14:50-52 Everyone fled deserting Jesus

14:50 "Then everyone deserted him and fled."

(Mark doesn't talk about Jesus before Annas or before Herod)

14:53-65 Jesus before Caiaphas, the High Priest (Peter followed at a distance and sat in the courtyard)

14:55-56 tried to find evidence, false testimony that didn't agree

14:56 "Many testified falsely against him, but their statements did not agree."

14:57-59 some tried to testify about his temple destroying and rebuilding but they couldn't agree

14:60-61 High Priest asked if he would answer the charges but Jesus remained silent

14:61-62 High Priest asked if he was the Messiah the Son of God, Jesus said he was

14:61-62 "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."

14:63-65 High Priest said he condemned himself, guards beat Jesus

14:64 "They all condemned him as worthy of death."

14:66-72 Peter denies Christ three times as prophesied by Jesus

14:67-38 "You were with the Nazarene. "I don't know or understand what you're talking about,"

14:69-70 "This fellow is one of them. "Again he denied it."

14:70-71 ""Surely you are one of them, for you are a Galilean." He began to call down curses on himself, and he swore to them, "I don't know this man you're talking about."

15:1-15 Jesus before Pilate

15:1-2 Pilate asks Jesus if he is The King of the Jews and Jesus replies that he is.

15:2 ""Are you the king of the Jews?" asked Pilate. "Yes, it is as you say," Jesus replied.

15:3-5 Jews accuse but Jesus remains silent, Pilate asks if Jesus plans to respond but Jesus is silent and Pilate is amazed.

15:6-11 Custom to release a prisoner, Jews ask for Barabbas

15:9 "Do you want me to release to you the king of the Jews?" asked Pilate,¹⁰ knowing it was out of envy that the chief priests had handed Jesus over to him.

15:12-15 Jesus handed over to be crucified

15:15 "Wanting to satisfy the crowd, Pilate released Barabbas to them.

Text with commentary:

Mark 14:43-15:15

MK 14:43 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.

MK 14:44 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.

Judas' calling Jesus "Rabbi" and kissing him were both indications of respect but they were despicable charades that didn't mitigate his treacherous intent – the betrayal of his supposed Lord and friend.

The injustice of saying one thing and doing another of indicating respect and loyalty while betraying him is despicable.

John 18:10 says the sword-wielder was Peter but apparently he got away in the scuffle and the injured man was Malchus. . Luke 22:51 says Jesus healed the ear of the man.

Matthew 26:52-53 "Put your sword back in its place," Jesus said to him, "for all who draw the sword will die by the sword."⁵³ Do you think I cannot call on my Father, and he will at once put at my disposal more than twelve legions of angels?

MK 14:48 "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.

The Scripture to be fulfilled might refer to the way they arrested him: They came to arrest him with swords and clubs like he was a common thief: Isaiah 53:12 "He was numbered with transgressors" or it may refer to the way all his followers deserted him. Zechariah 13:7 "Strike the shepherd, and the sheep will be scattered..." the same passage Jesus cites in 14:27

MK 14:51 A young man, wearing nothing but a linen garment, was following Jesus. When they seized him, ⁵² he fled naked, leaving his garment behind.

Mark only emphasizes the desertion of Jesus by noting that ALL deserted him

MK 14:53 They took Jesus to the high priest, and all the chief priests, elders and 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.

High Priest (Caiaphas) the chief priests (meaning those who had held the high priest position in the past) the elders (influential families with property in Jerusalem, and "teachers" were the scribes – middle class lawyers. The Sanhedrin (14:55) was made up of 70 but a quorum was fewer. Still, there were many people in that room.

If the Mishnah(A.D. 200) is correct the men would sit on elevated seats in a semi-circle with a seat for the accused and a seat for witnesses in the center.

Here Mark introduces Peter's situation to us. Mark is clearly attempting to show that this is going on at the same time.

Poor Peter is loyal enough to find out what is happening but too afraid to come any closer.

MK 14:55 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.

The OT required at least two witnesses agreeing on the details.

In spite of apparently arranging for witnesses ahead of time, the leaders couldn't find two who agreed sufficiently to convict.

The leaders tried to use legal means but it is obvious they had their minds made up (v55 "looking for evidence against Jesus so they could put him to death") whether they met the legal requirements or not.

11:18 "looking for a way to kill him."

12:12 "for a way to arrest him."

14:1 "for some sly way to arrest Jesus and kill him."

14:55 "looking for evidence against Jesus so they could put him to death."

MK 14:57 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.

Threat to destroy the Temple was serious.

It was "false" testimony both in the fact that Jesus had NOT said that he would destroy the temple and in the fact that they couldn't get witnesses to agree on what Jesus had said.

MK 14:60 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.

Seeing that the prosecution is getting nowhere, Caiaphas apparently steps into the middle of this. Jesus' silence was frustrating their attempts at trapping him and so Caiaphas cuts to the chase by asking in essence, "Are you the Messiah?"

Again the high priest asked him, "Are you the Christ, the Son of the Blessed One?"

"The Christ, the Son of the Blessed One" is two ways of asking the same question – are you the Messiah. "Son of the Blessed One" is not a reference in Caiaphas' mind to Jesus deity but to his Messiahship. (Lane, Mark, 535)

"A Messiah imprisoned, abandoned by his followers, and delivered helpless into the hands of his foes represented an impossible conception" of the Messiah. Certainly such a person was an imposter and blasphemer making a mockery of the promises of God. (Lane, Mark 36)

MK 14:62 "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."

Jesus clearly claims to be the Messiah of God.

"sitting at the right hand of the Mighty One" – "mighty one" is clearly a reference to the most high God.

"sitting at the right hand" is equally clearly a reference to Jesus' privileged position of highest honor.

The religious leaders thought he lacked credibility; Jesus says they will see more than enough evidence eventually.

*Psalm 110:1 "Sit at my right hand
until I make your enemies
a footstool for your feet."*

Daniel 7:13 "there before me was one like a son of man, coming with the clouds of heaven.

By saying "I am" and by citing the prophecies concerning the Messiah, Jesus is very clearly claiming to be the Messiah.

MK 14:63 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.

This open confession of Jesus' status was more than enough for Caiaphas and the others. Tearing his clothes was a dramatic expression of sorrow and distress at having heard blasphemy. The blasphemy was diminishing God's majesty and honor by Jesus' apparent mockery of the Messiah.

Blasphemy was punishable by death (Leviticus 24:16)

A capital sentence however could not be carried out by the Jews but only by their Romans overlords.

Verse 65 with its physical abuse was indicative of their rejection of Jesus' claim. These were standard ways of conveying repudiation of his claim.

Jesus had predicted:

10:33-34 "We are going up to Jerusalem," he said, "and the Son of Man will be betrayed to the chief priests and teachers of the law. They will condemn him to death and will hand him over to the Gentiles, ³⁴ who will mock him and spit on him, flog him and kill him. Three days later he will rise."

14:27 "You will all fall away," Jesus told them, "for it is written:

"I will strike the shepherd,

and the sheep will be scattered.'

14:30 "I tell you the truth," Jesus answered, "today--yes, tonight--before the rooster crows twice you yourself will disown me three times."

Mark now flashes back to Peter.

It is while v65 is happening that v66ff is occurring.

The juxtaposition of the two scenes is deliberate.

While the people are heaping scorn on Jesus, so too is Peter.

Mark 14:29-31 "Peter declared, "Even if all fall away, I will not."

MK 14:30 "I tell you the truth," Jesus answered, "today--yes, tonight--before the rooster crows twice you yourself will disown me three times."

MK 14:31 But Peter insisted emphatically, "Even if I have to die with you, I will never disown you." And all the others said the same.

MK 14:66 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.

MK 14:68 But he denied it. "I don't know or understand what you're talking about," he said, and went out into the entryway.

The servant girl probably meant the question not only as an accusation but an embarrassing one at that.

Peter denies his relationship with Jesus.

"Denied" Denial requires a previous relationship.

In anxiety for his own safety he denies.

He also moves away to avoid further contact.

MK 14:69 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.

She apparently followed him and suggested to the others standing around that he was "one of them."

Apparently in the same way as before Peter denies it.

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

MK 14:71 He began to call down curses on himself, and he swore to them, "I don't know this man you're talking about."

Did Peter's Galilean accent give him away?

He invoked a curse on himself if he was lying – to make his denial seem more credible. "May a curse fall on me if I'm not telling the truth."

He also cursed those accusing him if they are wrong.

Peter wouldn't even use Jesus' name – "this man."

Jesus had said, Mark 8:38 "If anyone is ashamed of me and my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, the Son of Man will be ashamed of him when he comes in his Father's glory with the holy angels."

"As Jesus confesses (his deity) under immense pressure and hostility that seals his fate, Peter capitulates under the gentlest of pressure and lies to save himself." (Garland, Mark, 566)

The Younger Pliny (c. 110) said that when he threatened Christians with harm if they didn't deny Jesus, real Christians refused to do so. (Epistles 10.96.3, 10.96.5 in Garland, Mark, 567)

The early Christian leader Polycarp was threatened and told to recant his allegiance to Jesus or die. Polycarp replied, "Eighty six years I have served him and he has done me no wrong. How can I blaspheme my King who has saved me." (Martyrdom of Polycarp 9:3 in Garland, Mark, 567)

MK 14:72 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.

The previous crowing of the rooster didn't catch Peter's attention, probably because roosters crow all the time.

But this time it did when he remembered Jesus' earlier words.

Peter couldn't stay away in Gethsemane, he tried to protect Jesus in the arrest but fled immediately, he followed at a distance and hid out in the courtyard where he finally denied Jesus.

He broke down and wept

*The poet, Charles Mackay, wrote,
Oh, you tears,
I'm thankful that you run.
Though you trickle in the darkness,
you shall glitter in the sun.
The rainbow could not shine if the rain refused to fall;
And the eyes that cannot weep are the saddest eyes of all.*

MK 15:1 Very early in the morning, the chief priests, with the elders, the teachers of the law and the whole Sanhedrin, reached a decision. They bound Jesus, led him away and handed him over to Pilate.

*The Jews try him for blasphemy, the Romans try him for treason.
Therefore the Jews had to find a way to change the charge to get the Romans to kill Jesus for them.
Pilate came to Jerusalem as a Roman Prefect in A.D. 26 and was harsh in his treatment of the Jews.*

*Just at the Christians who first read Mark's gospel were being mistreated by the Romans so they would understand that their Lord had already been there before them.
Heb 4:15 tempted as we are and yet without sin.*

MK 15:2 "Are you the king of the Jews?" asked Pilate.
"Yes, it is as you say," Jesus replied.

Apparently the indictment handed to Pilate had been changed so that treason was the charge and thus Pilate immediately asks, "Are you the King of the Jews?"

Jesus' response certainly hints at what Pilate would have known – that there is a difference between a claim to the earthly crown and a claim to some religious messiahship.

MK 15:3 The chief priests accused him of many things. ⁴ So again Pilate asked him, "Aren't you going to answer? See how many things they are accusing you of."

MK 15:5 But Jesus still made no reply, and Pilate was amazed.

Apparently the sedition charge didn't stick and in the chief priests accuse him of many other things (Luke: inciting to riot, failure to pay taxes, in addition to his royal pretensions.)

Pilate tried to get Jesus to respond. As we learn from the other gospels, Pilate had difficulty accepting the so-called evidence against him. (In John 18:33-38 Jesus makes it clear that his kingship is not a direct threat to Rome.)

Jesus' silence is indication of his intent.

He could have argued his way out of the Roman court but he doesn't because he is on a mission – a mission of redemption through substitutionary death and resurrection.

MK 15:6 Now it was the custom at the Feast to release a prisoner whom the people requested. ⁷ A man called Barabbas was in prison with the insurrectionists who had committed murder in the uprising. ⁸ The crowd came up and asked Pilate to do for them what he usually did.

MK 15:9 "Do you want me to release to you the king of the Jews?" asked Pilate, ¹⁰ knowing it was out of envy that the chief priests had handed Jesus over to him. ¹¹ But the chief priests stirred up the crowd to have Pilate release Barabbas instead.

Pilate didn't think Jesus was guilty of a capital crime but he didn't want to just acquit him and upset the Jewish people so he opted for a Passover amnesty program thinking that the people would ask for Jesus to be released.

But Pilate also didn't mind "sticking it to" the Jewish leaders by refusing their demands. He could accomplish both a little good will with the people while also denying the Jewish leaders what they wanted – all if the people would select Jesus to be released. But the people fooled him by asking for Barabbas.

MK 15:12 "What shall I do, then, with the one you call the king of the Jews?" Pilate asked them.

MK 15:13 "Crucify him!" they shouted.

MK 15:14 "Why? What crime has he committed?" asked Pilate. But they shouted all the louder, "Crucify him!"

Is it likely that the crowd, barely a week earlier, had so pinned their hopes on Jesus as a liberator that when they saw him stripped, beaten and "helpless" before Pilate they realized he was not what they had hoped and they turned on him? Were disappointment, embarrassment and then anger responsible for their quick abandonment of Jesus?

MK 15:15 Wanting to satisfy the crowd, Pilate released Barabbas to them. He had Jesus flogged, and handed him over to be crucified.

Flogging was a terrible experience sometimes ending in death because of the severity of it.

Leather straps to which were tied pieces of bone or stone were used to whip the body until bone and inner organs were exposed.

There was no limit on the number of times they could be struck.

Only after the flogging was Jesus sentenced to die by crucifixion.