

“No Middle Ground”
November 9, 2014

Mark 14:52-72

CORE: There is no middle ground with Jesus. He said, “Whoever is not with me is against me, and whoever does not gather with me scatters” (Matthew 12:30). He is either an *offensive stone* or the *Chief Cornerstone*. In this passage, there are 4 very different spiritual responses to Jesus.

1. RELIGIOUS SPIRIT. (Seeks to remove Jesus)

Under the influence of a religious spirit, these religious leaders **hated Jesus**. **That’s why they sought to remove Him.**

- They arrested Jesus in the middle of the night, afraid of the people
- They first took Him to the home of Caiaphas, the high priest...
- Then, to Pontius Pilate, the Roman governor.
- Back and forth between the Jewish religious leaders and the Roman leaders (NOTE: The Sanhedrin could enforce civil laws. Only the Romans could enforce a death sentence at a criminal trial.)
- One problem: they couldn’t find two witnesses who could agree on their stories. No collaboration = no charges filed.

- **The religious spirit is (at its core) anti-Christ.** (NOTE: Religious people killed Jesus)
- **Because it “refuses to come to Jesus to experience life”, it results in joyless, powerless, lifeless existence.**
- **It holds up a graceless standard that no one can attain. “A form of godliness” that “denies the power of God.”**
- **It is ultimately fickle; it can shout “Hosanna” one day and “Crucify Him” the next.**

2. POLITICAL SPIRIT. (Seeks to accommodate Jesus)

This spirit finds its home in **fearful hearts**. Filled with mistrust, it strives to **protect itself**—then **project all of the blame** for problems on others. Afraid of taking risks, making mistakes, losing credibility—yet, at the same time, it “traps” others in their words, gracelessly judging and condemning them. It ultimately uses people for personal gain. It’s all about self-protection.

- Pilate (and most Roman leaders) lived in **constant fear of betrayal** (NOTE: Rome experienced one year known as the “Year of the Caesars” when 4 successive leaders overthrew one another in the course of one calendar year!)
- Pilate **“washed his hands” of any responsibility** in the death of Jesus
- He respected Jesus. He even seemed to “honor and respect Him”—but only if it brought him **personal advantage**.

3. OFFENDED SPIRIT. (Rejects Jesus)

Peter did all he could do (in his own strength) to defend Jesus. He strongly declared his zealous intentions: "I will never deny You. I will even die for You!" In a moment of anger, he struck Malchus, servant of the high priest. Peter fully expected Jesus to thank him. Instead, Jesus rebuked him in front of the crowd. Peter **chose anger**. Which turned to **resentment**. Which festered into outright **revenge** and **rejection** of Jesus!

- **Disappointment with God—left unchecked—can open the door to an offended spirit.**
- **RE: John the Baptist, Jesus said, "Blessed is he who is not offended in Me" (Luke 7:23).**
- **The offended spirit moved John the Baptist from "Behold, the Lamb of God" to "Are You the One, or should we look for another?" (Luke 7:19)**
- **Huddled in the courtyard of the virtual palace, the home of Caiaphas, the high priest, Peter vehemently denied any connection with Jesus.**
(NOTE: The peacock was commonly used in wealthy homes as both a "time piece" and a "watch dog"; it crowed to announce daybreak)

4. YIELDED SPIRIT. (Trusts, obeys, follows, honors, surrenders)

Jesus modeled it as He remained silent while accusations were hurled at Him. His words taken out of context. His motives misinterpreted. Abandoned by His friends.

He finally broke His silence when asked, "**Are You the Messiah?**" **He said, "I AM."** **He spoke the name of God. In shock, the high priest tore his own robe. The name of God, "Yahweh" was *not* to be spoken. Yet, this man claimed He IS God!**

What followed is a horrendous display of irreverent hatred—as Jesus is beaten, spit upon, and mocked—blindfolded while being beaten, asked to prophesy who is hitting Him as proof of His divinity.

Yet, Jesus stood. Yielded to His Father. Trusting. (NOTE: He could have given in to the religious spirit—He certainly knew enough scriptures! He could have politically conceded—in an effort to protect Himself. He easily could have fostered offense toward both His accusers and His Father!)

CLOSING

There is another yielded spirit in this story—the man in verse 52. "A certain young man" could very well have been John Mark, author of this gospel. The same one referenced in Mark 10:17ff—the "rich, young ruler" who found it hard to surrender his attachment to wealth/property.

But he did! Just as Peter, too, would come to ultimate surrender to Jesus!