

*Where we start . . .*

What do you think is the biggest “road block” in the minds and hearts of most people to Jesus’ invitation to life? Why are people sometimes so resistant to respond to Jesus’ offer of life?

*What we read . . .*

As you reflect back on the Gospel of Mark, what have been the leading causes of conflict between Jesus and the religious leaders who oppose Him? What is at the heart of the conflict?

As you know, ultimately Jesus’ conflict with the religious leaders comes to a head. Read Mark 14:53-72.

What is your overall impression of the “hearing” held by the Council?

What kinds of concerns do they raise about Jesus?

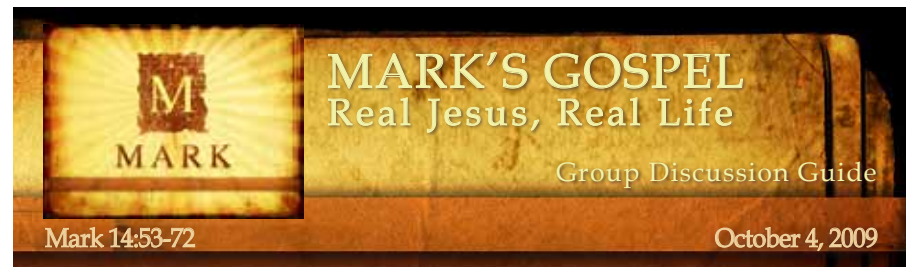
When the chief priest asks his question, he betrays what is of greatest concern to him. What really is the issue that is driving the conflict?

What is the issue raised by the servant girl’s questions to Peter? Why does he dismiss her charges?

*Why this matters . . .*

When it comes right down to it, the conflict that the religious leaders had with Jesus was anchored in . . .

Why is it critical for you to “get” what it is that was at the heart of the reason for their opposition?



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*Diving in . . .*

Isn't it interesting that you can talk with most people about the things that Jesus was said to do, but if you start to talk about *who He is*, you might well run into trouble and controversy. Unchurched people might well be comfortable with the "good things" Jesus did, but when we start to identify Him as the Messiah, the Son of God, the final Judge . . . sparks can fly! And that is at the heart of the conflict Jesus had with the religious leaders. They weren't simply concerned with what He did; they objected to who they thought He claimed to be. Jesus Himself is the issue.

*Discussing . . .*

Perhaps the opening question will highlight the varying ways people respond to Jesus. It seems that many, even many who never darken the door of a church, are happy to affirm that Jesus "did good things." It is only when we try and speak about who He is and what that means that the conversation gets shut down. The opening question is simply a way to explore these two dimensions of response to Jesus: responding to what He does and responding to who He claims to be.

As we get into the passage, that distinction will become evident.

Begin your discussion of the passage by a backward glance into Mark. You might review, before the discussion time, some of the passages in Mark that highlight Jesus' conflict with the religious leaders. (See, for example, Mark 2:1-12; 2:23-28; 3:1-6; 11:15-19.) If needed, encourage your people to read some of these passages as they discuss their recollections of the conflicts that have ensued between Jesus and the religious leaders.

What is at the heart of this escalating conflict? Although precipitated by Jesus' actions, it appears that the real issue centers on just who Jesus thinks He is. His actions and His words are an affront to the religious because they carry implications for His identity—an identity that they do not want to affirm or embrace.

After reading the passage for this week (14:53-72), try and surface this distinction between concern over Jesus' actions and (the real issue) concern over Jesus' identity.

The Council that meets is the Sanhedrin. This is a group of ruling elders and leaders of Jerusalem who were granted a significant degree of legislative

and judicial power by Rome. They even had the authority to pronounce a death sentence; but they couldn't carry out such a sentence without the approval and support of Rome.

It is clear from 14:55, that from the start, this Council was intent on putting Jesus to death. They were opposed to Him even as the proceedings began. And although the hearing was, in that sense, superficial and a sham, it was carried out with something of an air of propriety.

When the first witnesses were called, however, it became clear that it would be hard to pin anything on Jesus. Why? Because, He basically had been going around doing good! So, witnesses (false witnesses that is!) tried to raise issues that might bring a verdict against Jesus, but there wasn't enough substantial agreement to warrant a charge sticking.

What is worth noting is that in the first round of charges—dealing with what Jesus had done or taught—Jesus remained silent. He didn't answer back. This would seem to indicate that Jesus did not think such issues needed to be addressed; they weren't really the center of the problem.

It wasn't until the chief priest directly addressed Jesus and asked Him about His identity, that Jesus replied. Here was the heart of the issue. Jesus was facing them not, primarily, because of what He had done but because of who He was. That was what they couldn't handle.

Jesus' reply to the question put to Him was clear and unmistakable. He emphatically affirmed that He was the "Christ" (the Greek language even conveying a greater emphasis than might be evident in most English translations). And then Jesus used references from Psalm 110:1 and Daniel 7:13-14 to affirm His identity as the Messiah, the anointed of God, the One who rules with God, and the One to whom all will one day answer. Pretty clear! Pretty convincing! And the chief priest made it clear that was the heart of the issue for him as well.

When we turn our attention to Peter, in the outer court, the issue of identity is still in view. The servant girl wanted to know whether Peter was "with" this Jesus; that is, whether he would identify Himself with this Jesus. She didn't ask: "Did you do this or that?" But "Aren't you with *Him*?"

This is part of what needs to be highlighted in reflecting on this passage.

Notice the first sentence in the *Why This Matters* section of the notes:

When it comes right down to it, the conflict that the religious leaders had with Jesus was anchored in . . . *who Jesus claimed to be!*

This has always been and will always be what is at the heart of Christianity. The Gospel is not primarily about "doing things." It's not even simply about the "good things" Jesus did. The Gospel is about what a particular someone did . . . and the identity of that Someone is the critical component. The religious leaders stumbled over Jesus' identity. But those who claim to take Jesus at His word need to embrace His identity.

Who do you think He is? What difference does that make in the way you live?