

INTRODUCTION

Easter is three weeks from today. We're counting down the last 94 hours before the disciples discovered the empty tomb. I'm calling this "94 Hours that Changed the World." We've already walked with Jesus from the last Supper to the Garden of Gethsemane where He prayed and was arrested. In this message we'll start the countdown at hour 86:00 and talk about His trial and torture. The next message is "CSI Golgotha: Who Killed Jesus?"

Mark 15:1-20: "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. 'Are you the king of the Jews?' asked Pilate. 'Yes, it is as you say,' Jesus replied. The chief priests accused him of many things. So again Pilate asked him, 'Aren't you going to answer? See how many things they are accusing you of.' But Jesus still made no reply, and Pilate was amazed. Now it was the custom at the Feast to release a prisoner whom the people requested. A man called Barabbas was in prison with the insurrectionists who had committed murder in the uprising. The crowd came up and asked Pilate to do for them what he usually did. 'Do you want me to release to you the king of the Jews?' asked Pilate, knowing it was out of envy that the chief priests had handed Jesus over to him. But the chief priests stirred up the crowd to have Pilate release Barabbas instead. 'What shall I do, then, with the one you call the king of the Jews?' Pilate asked them. 'Crucify him!' they shouted. 'Why? What crime has he committed?' asked Pilate. But they shouted all the louder, 'Crucify him!' Wanting to satisfy the crowd, Pilate released Barabbas to them. He had Jesus flogged, and handed him over to be crucified. The soldiers led Jesus away into the palace (that is, the Praetorium) and called together the whole company of soldiers. They put a purple robe on him, then twisted together a crown of thorns and set it on him. And they began to call out to him, 'Hail, king of the Jews!' Again and again they struck him on the head with a staff and spit on him. Falling on their knees, they paid homage to him. And when they had mocked him, they took off the purple robe and put his own clothes back on him. Then they led him out to crucify him."

In this message, we're going to isolate three episodes and discuss the meaning then and the meaning for our lives today. First, there was an episode of silence in which Jesus was tried. Then there was an episode of substitution in which Barabbas was released. Finally, we'll examine the episode of suffering in which Jesus was tortured before the cross. Then, the message will conclude with a retrial of Jesus of Nazareth.

1. SILENCE: An innocent man falsely accused

The right to a trial is a cherished American freedom. A cowboy who lived during the Wild West days was arrested for stealing horses. The judge said, "You are accused as a horse thief, how do you plead?" The old cowboy said, "Not guilty!" The judge said, "You have a choice. You can be tried by a panel of three judges or by a jury of twelve of your peers." The cowboy said, "I don't understand that word 'peers' who would they be?" The judge explained, "A jury of your peers means that they are people just like you." The cowboy thought for a second and said, "I'll take the judges. I don't want twelve horse-thieves judging me!"

Jesus wasn't afforded a fair trial. His trial had both a Jewish phase and a Roman phase. In the final verses of Mark 14 we read Jesus was arrested in the garden. The only Jews who were allowed to legally have weapons were the Temple police, so these were the men who bound Jesus and led him up the same steps he had earlier descended after the Last Supper. They carried him to the house of Caiaphas, the High Priest. This was the like a police station, because there were barracks and prison cells there. By this time it was after midnight and Jesus was probably placed in a holding cell. We've found the archeological ruins of this facility, and there is an ancient cistern where prisoners were placed. It was dark and lonely there.

Word was sent out throughout Jerusalem and the 23 members of the Jewish Sanhedrin were summoned from their beds to conduct a hasty trial for the rabble-rouser from Nazareth. It was a kangaroo court. Trials at night were illegal. False witnesses had been found who claimed they heard Jesus say He would destroy the Temple and rebuild it in three days. Jesus said very little in His defense, but Caiaphas accused Him of blasphemy and they declared Him guilty and deserving death. The Jewish court could not issue a death sentence, only the Romans could.

So, early the next morning, Jesus was taken to Pilate. Pilate was the Roman governor, so the Jews said, "This man is claiming to be king. That's treason. What are you going to do about it?" Pilate questioned Jesus, "Are you the king of the Jews?" Jesus said, "You said it." Then the Jews started flinging all kinds of accusations against Jesus. But in the face of these withering accusations, Jesus didn't say another word. He didn't try to defend Himself. This was in fulfillment of the Old Testament prophecy found in Isaiah, "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." (Isaiah 53:7)

This is a prophecy we've been studying in WEBS. The lamb was subjected to two indignities. First there was shearing. That speaks of disgrace. A lamb's wool is its strength and glory, and when it is sheared, it looks naked and frail. Jesus endured the indignity and shame of torture and crucifixion without speaking up in His defense.

When I was in New Zealand a few years ago, we visited a working sheep ranch and one of the ranch hands demonstrated how to shear a sheep. He grabbed the lamb roughly and pinned its head between his legs and then proceeded to remove the wool. The lamb never once made a sound. I stood there watching the lamb, and there was a time that it seemed like the lamb stared directly into my eyes with a sad look. I was shaken for a moment as I realized this was a picture of how Jesus faced His shame and indignity without speaking a word.

Most legal experts agree Jesus didn't receive a fair trial. In fact, when Israel became a nation again in 1948, they established a Supreme Court. According to Moshe Smoira, the first president of the Israeli Supreme Court, some of the first cases filed before the Israeli Supreme Court were petitioning for a retrial of Jesus Christ. The court ruled they no longer had any jurisdiction over the matter. Hang on to that thought, because at the end of this message, we're going to reopen the trial of Jesus.

2. SUBSTITUTE: A guilty man graciously excused

Pilate wanted to release Jesus. So he figured out a plan. Since it was Passover, it was a custom to release a guilty prisoner. After all Passover was all about averting judgment. When the death angel saw the blood of the Passover lamb in Egypt, he passed over, and judgment was averted. The firstborn lived on.

Pilate asked if he could release Jesus as this Passover Pardon, but religious leaders were stationed in the crowd. They stirred up the mob by saying, "Tell him to release Barabbas. Tell him to release Barabbas."

The Bible says Barabbas was part of the insurrection movement against the Romans and had committed murder in the process. There was a Roman cross waiting for him. But in the last moment, he suddenly found himself free, and Jesus was sentenced to die on the cross that had been prepared for him.

To be honest, I've never liked Barabbas. I've always been a little angry about this guy. He was a murderer and he got off Scot-free. I want the crowd to yell, "Release Jesus! Crucify Barabbas!" But instead they yell, "Release Barabbas! Crucify Jesus!"

Barabbas, a scoundrel, a sinner, a murderer, was declared innocent and Jesus took his place on a cross meant for him. When I look inside myself I realize the reason I don't really like Barabbas is because I AM Barabbas. We're in the same sandals. You are Barabbas, too. We're the guilty ones. We're the scoundrels, but we get to go free and Jesus died in our place.

Steve Tye has written a song entitled, "I am Barabbas." It says: "A guilty man, a dissident; A murderer without repent; For all my heinous crimes I am condemned. No offering can pay my debt; No sacrifice or feigned regret; A hellish destination is my end. What Man would choose to take my place? I am Barabbas. I was destined for a tree. But I was pardoned by the God who died for me. For His blood was spilled upon my cross and bought my liberty. Now I live beneath the shadow of the cross."

Like Barabbas we deserve the punishment for our sins. Way back in the Old Testament, God gave us His perfect law, The Ten Commandments. No person has ever been able to keep the law perfectly. We're all guilty. Barabbas was a murderer, and you say, "Well, I've never murdered anyone." In the Sermon on Mount Jesus said, "You've heard it said don't murder, but I say if you're angry enough to kill someone, you're guilty of murder." Hopefully, you've never murdered anyone, but what about anger? Have you ever been made enough at someone that if looks could kill...if thoughts could kill...they'd be dead? You're as guilty as Barabbas.

Barabbas deserved death, but Jesus became his substitute. You don't have to understand the Bible to understand what a substitute is. If you're a basketball player on the bench and the coach says, "Go in and take #12's place." You run onto the court and #12 sits on the bench. You become his or her substitute. We deserved to suffer for our sins, but Jesus came into the game and we got to sit on the bench of grace.

That Bible says, "He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; by his wounds you have been healed." (1 Peter 2:24)

I'm a curious kind of guy, and I'd like to know what happened to Barabbas after he was pardoned. I wish Paul Harvey had researched and given us "the rest of the story." Did Barabbas watch Jesus being scourged and say, "Thanks?" Did he follow Jesus to the cross and say, "Thank you?" Did he follow and say, "That should have been me. That should have been my blood." We don't know the rest of Barabbas's story. But we know the rest of Jesus' story. Regardless of what Barabbas did, we should look at the cross and say, "Thank you! Thank you! Jesus, that should have been me hanging there."

3. SUFFERING: A strong man shamefully abused

Before Jesus ever reached the cross, He faced unspeakable torture at the hands of the cruel Roman soldiers. A squad of three soldiers usually performed a flogging. The prisoner was stripped and his hands were tied above his head to a ring in a wooden post. Then two of the soldiers stood on each side with a flagrum in their hands. This was a leather whip of nine thongs with pieces of metal or stone embedded in the end of each thong.

Dr. C. Truman Davis, a physician who has studied the medical aspects of the crucifixion published this report about the flogging of Jesus: "The heavy whip is brought down with full force again and again across Jesus' shoulders, back, and legs. At first the heavy thongs cut through the skin only. Then, as the blows continue, they cut deeper in the subcutaneous tissues, producing first an oozing of blood from the capillaries and veins of the skin, and finally spurting arterial bleeding from vessels in the underlying muscles... Finally the skin of the back is hanging in long ribbons and the entire area is an unrecognizable mass of torn, bleeding tissue." ("The Passion of Christ from a Medical Point of View," *Arizona Medicine* 22, no. 3, March 1965, p. 185)

There are accounts of Roman soldiers flogging prisoners to death. But the point of flogging was to bring them close to death so the crucifixion time would be shortened. Perhaps you saw the movie, "The Passion of Christ," or the movie out now, "The Son of God." But no movie could ever truly show the horror of the torture of Christ.

After the flogging, Jesus was taken inside the fortress where an entire company of Roman soldiers came and continued to torture him. In mockery they put a purple robe on his wounded back and twisted a crown of thorns and crushed it on his head. They blindfolded him and struck him in the face and head with a club. At the end of the torture sessions, Jesus was unrecognizable. We know that because it was part of the prophecy about him. The Bible says, "There were many who were appalled at him—his appearance was so disfigured beyond that of any man and his form marred beyond human likeness." (Isaiah 52:14) "He was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows, and familiar with suffering. Like one from whom men hide their faces he was despised, and we esteemed him not." (Isaiah 53:3)

A poem about the suffering of Jesus was written in the Middle Ages, and in the 18th century, J. S. Bach put it to music. He used a haunting minor key to accompany the words. "O sacred Head,

now wounded, with grief and shame weighed down. Now scornfully surrounded with thorns
Thine only crown: How pale Thou art with anguish, with sore abuse and scorn! How does Thy
visage languish, which once was bright as morn!"

Three episodes, but one truth: An innocent man was falsely accused; a guilty man was graciously excused; and a strong man was shamefully abused.

CONCLUSION

As I mentioned earlier, I'm calling for a retrial of Jesus. I'm going empanel all of you as members of the jury. You can't ignore or postpone this jury summons. Everyone has to offer a verdict based upon the question Pilate asked the crowd. "What shall I do, then, with Jesus who is called Christ?" (Matthew 27:22) The crowd chose wrong. They cried out to crucify. Today, we're reopening the trial, so what say you?

Ladies and gentlemen of the jury, the evidence I present to you are the claims of Jesus. These are exhibits Alpha through Omega. Jesus went about claiming to be God. He claimed to forgive sins, which only God can do. He claimed He has always existed. He claims He is returning to judge the world at the end of time. Many witnesses verified these claims. So what is your verdict? There are four choices.

1. Was He a Liar?

Jesus clearly claimed to be God, but if he knew he wasn't, that makes him nothing but a sinful deceiver. Liars have some selfish motive. Either they want personal gain, or they want to protect themselves from harm. If He was a liar, what did he gain? He died owning nothing but the clothes on His back, and when faced with the opportunity to defend himself, he was silent. That would have been the perfect time for a good prevarication. If Jesus was intentionally deceiving people, that doesn't make him a good teacher, it would make him one of the most evil teachers of history. He spoke against hypocrisy and taught honesty. If he was a liar, he was also a hypocrite. Yet when you study the teachings of Jesus, you discover a moral standard based on kindness, unselfishness, and forgiveness.

2. Was He a Lunatic?

He made outrageous claims about being God, and if he believed he was but really wasn't then he was deluded. Scholars as far back as Aristotle taught that staring at a full moon too long would drive a man crazy, eventually the English word "lunatic" was coined to describe someone who was moonstruck.

Was Jesus the most self-deceived egomaniac of history? There are plenty of people who have delusions of grandeur, and most psych wards have at least one person who claims to be God. But when you look at the other symptoms of those in the psych wards, you see that every other part of their life is out of balance. When you look at the life and teaching of Jesus you see His wit, wisdom, and love for others.

3. Was He a Legend?

This choice is not often considered, but some atheists in our post-modern culture have suggested the followers of Jesus invented His supernatural claims after His death. They turned a simple man into a myth. This theory is being spoon-fed to college freshman all across America. And freshmen, in their great wisdom, are saying, "Oh, okay, now I understand. Jesus was just a legend like Hercules or Superman."

For instance, famous atheist, Richard Dawkins, points out in his book, *The God Delusion*, that the four gospel accounts have many discrepancies. That is, they don't agree on the details. Let me address this view from two directions. First, the fact that we have four slightly different accounts of the life of Jesus actually convinces me they are genuine descriptions of Jesus. If there was a plot to promote a myth, there would probably only be one fabricated written account. What would happen if I called four of you up on the stage and gave you a pad and pencil and asked you to draw my picture from four angles—front, back, left, and right? There would be four pictures and none of them would be identical, but they would all be pictures of the same person. Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John were writing from different perspectives and to different audiences, their slight variations only prove their authenticity.

The second answer to the legend theory is this: If the followers of Jesus fabricated this story, what would have been their motive? Deception is motivated by greed or self-promotion. What happened to these early Christians? They were arrested tortured and killed. They died penniless and in agony. And not one of them refuted the reality of the resurrection of Jesus. They all died believing with all their hearts that they would join Jesus in heaven.

4. Is He the Lord?

The only other option is that Jesus is who He claimed to be. He is the one and only Son of God who existed before Abraham was born. He claimed to forgive sins. Now I can forgive you if you step on my toe or steal my money. But Jesus claimed to be able to forgive the sins of everyone who ever steps on anyone else's toes or anyone who steals anyone else's money. Only God can do that.

Ladies and gentlemen of the jury, it's time for you to announce your verdict. You may be thinking, "Well, I don't think He was a liar, a lunatic, a legend, or Lord. He was just a great teacher. I'm sorry, that's not a viable option. As the great Oxford Professor of Literature C.S. Lewis wrote: "There's a foolish thing that people often say about Him: 'I'm ready to accept Jesus as a great moral teacher, but I don't accept His claim to be God.' That is the one thing we must not say. A man who said the sort of things Jesus said would not be a great moral teacher. He would either be a lunatic—on a level with the man who says he is a poached egg—or else he would be the Devil of Hell. You must make your choice. Either this man was, and is, the Son of God: or else a madman or something worse. You can shut Him up for a fool, you can spit at Him and kill Him as a demon; or you can fall at His feet and call Him Lord and God." (*Mere Christianity*, p. 55)

Be careful how you decide your verdict, because Jesus had very direct words to say about people who do not accept His claims. He said, "If you do not believe that I am the one I claim to be, you will indeed die in your sins." (John 8:24)

As you decide your verdict about Jesus remember one day, the situation will be reversed. He will be the judge and we will be the ones on trial. There's an old song by Albert Simpson that talks about answering the question Pilate asked, "What will you do with Jesus?" The chorus says, "What will you do with Jesus? Neutral you cannot be; Someday your heart will be asking; What will He do with me?"

These 94 hours have changed the world. When you vote to crown Jesus as Lord of your life, then these 94 hours will change your world as well.

OUTLINE

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What's Your Verdict?

"What shall I do, then, with Jesus who is called Christ?" *Matthew 27:22*

1. Liar?
2. Lunatic?
3. Legend?
4. Lord?

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For the Joy...
Pastor David Dykes



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