

INTRODUCTION

The right to a trial is a cherished American freedom. I heard a funny story about a cowboy who lived during the Wild West days who 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!"

Americans are fascinated with trials. In 1999, MSNBC asked Americans to respond to this question: "What was the trial of the 20th century?" The #1 answer was the Trial of O.J. Simpson in 1996. Next was the 1946 trial of the Nazi War Criminals. Number 3 was the Clinton impeachment trial; #4 was the Scopes Monkey trial in 1925; and #5 was the Lindbergh baby kidnapping trial in 1935.

Today, we are going to study the arrest and trial of Jesus. When we left Jesus last week, He was in the Garden of Gethsemane in such agony that drops of blood appeared like sweat on His forehead. He begged God to take the bitter cup of suffering away from Him, but He finished by saying, "but not my will, but yours be done." Let's pick up with Luke 22:47:

While he was still speaking a crowd came up, and the man who was called Judas, one of the Twelve, was leading them. He approached Jesus to kiss him, but Jesus asked him, "Judas, are you betraying the Son of Man with a kiss?"

When Jesus' followers saw what was going to happen, they said, "Lord, should we strike with our swords?" And one of them struck the servant of the high priest, cutting off his right ear.

But Jesus answered, "No more of this!" And he touched the man's ear and healed him.

Then Jesus said to the chief priests, the officers of the temple guard, and the elders, who had come for him, "Am I leading a rebellion, that you have to come with swords and clubs? Every day I was with you in the temple courts, and you did not lay a hand on me. But this is your hour—when darkness reigns."

The next verses contain Peter's denial of Jesus which we considered a few weeks ago. Let's pick up the story in Luke 22:66-71

At daybreak the council of the elders of the people, both the chief priests and teachers of the law, met together, and Jesus was led before them. "If you are the Christ," they said, "tell us."

Jesus answered, "If I tell you, you will not believe me, and if I asked you, you would not answer. But from now on, the Son of Man will be seated at the right hand of the mighty God."

They all asked, "Are you then the Son of God?"

He replied, "You are right in saying I am."

Then they said, "Why do we need any more testimony? We have heard it from his own lips."

(23:1-25): Then the whole assembly arose and led him off to Pilate. And they began to accuse him, saying, "We have found this man subverting our nation. He opposes paying taxes to Caesar and claims to be Christ, a king."

So Pilate asked Jesus, "Are you the king of the Jews?"

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

Then Pilate announced to the chief priests and the crowd, "I find no basis for a charge against this man."

But they insisted, "He stirs up the people all over Judea by his teaching. He started in Galilee and has come all the way here."

On hearing this, Pilate asked if the man was a Galilean. When he learned that Jesus was under Herod's jurisdiction, he sent him to Herod, who was also in Jerusalem at that time. When Herod saw Jesus, he was greatly pleased, because for a long time he had been wanting to see him. From what he had heard about him, he hoped to see him perform some miracle. He plied him with many questions, but Jesus gave him no answer. The chief priests and the teachers of the law were standing there, vehemently accusing him. The Herod and his soldiers ridiculed and mocked him. Dressing him in an elegant robe, they sent him back to Pilate. That day Herod and Pilate became friends—before this they had been enemies.

Pilate called together the chief priests, the rulers and the people, and said to them, "you brought me this man as one who was inciting the people to rebellion. I have examined him in your presence and have found no basis for your charges against him. Neither has Herod, for he sent him back to us; as you can see, he has done nothing to deserve death. Therefore, I will punish him and then release him."

With one voice they cried out, "Away with this man! Release Barabbas to us!" (Barabbas had been thrown into prison for an insurrection in the city, and for murder.)

Wanting to release Jesus, Pilate appealed to them again. But they kept shouting, "Crucify him! Crucify him!"

For the third time he spoke to them: "Why? What crime has this man committed? I have found in him no grounds for the death penalty. Therefore I will have him punished and then release him."

But with loud shouts they insistently demanded that he be crucified, and their shouts prevailed. So Pilate decided to grant their demand. He released the man who had been thrown into prison for insurrection and murder, the one they asked for, and surrendered Jesus to their will.

Judicial experts have pointed out there were many aspects of Jesus' trial that rendered it illegal. For instance it was against Jewish law to conduct a trial at night, or during the Passover festival. Jewish law required an accused man have at least two witnesses speak on his behalf, and the accused would not be asked to testify. Finally, any prisoner sentenced to death was given at least 24 hours between the judgement and the execution. Because of this breach of Jewish jurisprudence, the judgement of the Jewish Sanhedrin and Pilate must be overturned. This morning, I'd like for us to reconvene the trial. At this time each of you are being empanelled by the Chief Justice of the real Supreme Court. Ladies and gentlemen of the jury, please raise your right hand a repeat after me: I do solemnly swear that I will consider the evidence brought before this court and I will render a verdict about Jesus Christ. So help me God.

Now, I’d like to call four witnesses to testify: The first witness is one of the twelve disciples of Jesus:

1. JUDAS: “I HAVE BETRAYED INNOCENT BLOOD!”

Judas Iscariot, please take the stand. I have but one question to ask you. “Was Jesus guilty of the crimes for which He was charged?” Judas’ answer can be found in Matthew 27:4: “I have betrayed innocent blood!” Thank you, Judas, you may leave.

On the night He was arrested, Jesus had finished praying when He saw a line of torches weaving their way down through the Kidron Valley from the city. Judas was leading them. When the mob entered the garden, Judas walked right up to Jesus and was preparing to kiss him. The kiss was the pre-arranged signal to identify Jesus—after all, in the darkness of the Garden, it would have been easy to arrest the wrong guy. Jesus asked Judas, “Judas, will you betray the Son of Man with a kiss?” Jesus revealed He knew what was going on—He even knew the signal. Jesus was giving Judas one more opportunity to think about the big mistake He was about to make. Jesus was saying, “Judas, stop for a minute and think about the consequences of what you’re about to do.” But then Judas kissed Him.

Before you make big mistakes, I think you’ll hear Jesus ask you, too. “Will you betray the Son of Man with premarital sex?” Stop and think about it. “Will you betray the Son of Man with adultery?” Stop and consider the consequences. “Will you betray Me with your worry, your pride, your anger?” Stop and think.

Later Judas realized what He had done and He took the 30 pieces of silver and threw it back at the Jewish leaders. Then Judas went out and hanged himself. He never returned to Jesus, like Peter, and experienced His forgiveness. Could Jesus have forgiven Judas? Certainly. I believe Jesus already had forgiven him—Judas just never received the forgiveness Jesus offered. Next week we’ll see Jesus hung on the cross and said, “Father forgive them for they don’t know what they are doing.” The prayer certainly included Judas. Jesus died to forgive everyone’s sins—including Judas. But you’ll never experience God’s forgiveness until you come to Him in faith.

There’s a great lesson here for the followers of Jesus. Those of us who have truly been forgiven are to forgive others in the same way in which we have been forgiven. So, hidden in this scripture, we find a note from God: You don’t have to wait for an apology to forgive someone who has hurt you.

Judas never came crawling to Jesus begging Him to forgive him—Jesus just forgave him. Do you have a Judas in your life? You may feel as if you have been betrayed and hurt by someone. They have abused your trust and wounded you in a way that is still painful even though it happened years ago. What are you waiting for? Do you want them to crawl and beg you to forgive them? Do yourself a favor—forgive them anyway. Nothing will make you more miserable than carrying about a bitter spirit of unforgiveness. Arthritis is pretty painful, but there’s something worse than arthritis—*grudgitis*. When you harbor unforgiveness it makes your food taste bad, it keeps you from sleeping well, and it will send you to an early grave.

I would like to call the next witness, the servant of Caiaphas, the high priest. This witness was present in the Garden of Gethsemane when Jesus was arrested. I call to the stand:

2. MALCHUS: “I OPPOSED HIM, YET HE HEALED ME!”

We’re told in John 18:10 that Malchus was the name of this servant, and Simon Peter attacked him. Malchus, what do you have to say about Jesus of Nazareth? Malchus says, “I opposed Him, yet He healed me!”

Malchus, tell us what happened that night. “I’d been told by my boss, Caiaphas, that Jesus was a treacherous blasphemer—another phony Messiah. I was convinced the best thing to do for the good of the nation was to get rid of this dangerous fraud. I was in line with the other guys when I heard someone shout, ‘There He is! That’s Jesus, let’s get him!’ As I moved forward to pin his arms I didn’t notice the big fisherman behind him. I saw the flash of a sword out of the corner of my eye and my brain registered that this big guy had a sword and he was trying to chop off my head. At the last instant I ducked, but it was too late. The sword glanced off the side of my head and it sliced off my right ear.

I screamed in pain and fell to my knees. I reached up and my ear was gone—my hand came back full of blood! I thought, “What a disaster! I’ll be scarred for life!” I saw my mangled ear lying in the dirt. With a roar of pain I was getting ready to jump up and nail that guy with the sword. But as I looked up I heard Jesus telling him to get rid of his sword. What happened next changed my life forever. This madman—this imposter—then reached down and picked up my severed ear. With a look of love and compassion I’d never seen before in human eyes he placed the ear back on my head and closed His eyes. In a split second, my ear was reattached as if it had never been severed! I thought I had imagined it all, but the blood was all over my robe. In that one instant, I realized this man really was the Son of God. I came into the garden to arrest Him, but as they drug Him away I just stood there touching my ear. I don’t care what Mr. Caiaphas says, this man is no imposter. He really IS the Son of God.”

Thank you, Malchus, you may step down. What a testimony. Once again, there’s a personal lesson each of us can learn from Malchus. Here’s God’s note: Sometimes followers of Jesus will hurt you. Every church has several folks like Simon Peter who are quick to draw their swords and strike out in anger. Maybe you had a bad experience with a church or a pastor, or a deacon, or a Sunday School class and you’ve been spiritually injured. The reason some of you are watching on television is that you can’t bring yourself to gather with the followers of Jesus. I know it ought not to be so, but you can find some of the meanest people on earth in the church—it’s because many of them, like Peter, think it’s their job to forcefully defend the Lord when Jesus can take care of Himself, thank you very much. Jesus told Peter, “Put away your sword, don’t you know that I could call 12 legions of angels?” That’s about 72,000 angels. In the Old Testament, one angel killed 185,000 Syrian soldiers in one night, so a few thousand would have wiped out Jerusalem. Peter drew a sword and almost messed up God’s plan. Let’s face it; the Christian army is the only army that shoots its wounded. If you deal with people, you’re going to get hurt.

Robert Miller used to be on our staff. He had a refreshing way of cutting through all the fluff and speaking the truth. He showed me a funny card one time. On the outside, there was a nice religious picture and it said, “God loves you.” You open it up and it said on the inside, “but the rest of us think you’re a jerk!” Have you ever met anyone like that in church? If you hang around me enough you know there are times I act like a jerk—that’s when I’m operating in my flesh, not walking in the Spirit.

I suspect there are literally thousands of people who don’t have any problem with Jesus, but they’ve been hurt by members on His church. The church isn’t perfect, but it’s still the Body of Christ. Jesus is waiting right now to reach out to you and heal the wound one of His followers has inflicted on you. Some of you do not let Jesus heal you because you like to take that bloody ear to show everyone else what happened to you! “Boo hoo hoo, sniff. Look, my bloody ear. Look what she said to me. Look what he did to me, sniff!”

Why don’t you say right now, “Lord, I’ve been cut off, cut down, cut through and through—it wasn’t Peter, but it was somebody else. I’m hurting, Lord. Will you help me?” Right now, visualize Jesus reaching out to you and caressing your face, saying, “be healed, my child.”

The third witness I call to the stand is the Roman governor:

3. PONTIUS PILATE: “I FIND NO GROUNDS FOR THE DEATH PENALTY!”

Sir, you are the final legal authority in Jerusalem. You had the chance to interview Jesus at length. What is your expert legal opinion of the charges brought against Him? Pilate says without hesitation: “I find no grounds for the death penalty!” He said it once in verse 4 and again in verse 14, and a third time in verse 22.

Thank you Pilate, you may step down.

If Pilate issued a not-guilty verdict three times, how did Jesus end up getting crucified? Pilate gave in to the pressure of the crowd. During Pilate’s day, Israel was a hotbed of terrorist activity and violence—much like today. Pilate represented the Roman Empire to enforce their cherished *pax Romana*—the peace of Rome. But Pilate’s tenure had been far from peaceful. There were constant uprisings and he had massacred hundreds of Jews.

Being governor of Judea was not a prized position. Pilate was already looking forward to his next promotion that would get him out of Israel. He didn’t want to do anything to jeopardize his future career track.

John tells us the Jewish leaders told Pilate, “If you let this man go, you are no friend of Caesar. He claims to be a king, and anyone who claims to be a king is an enemy of Caesar!” (John 19:12) That settled it. Pilate cared more for his career than for Jesus or for his own soul.

Here’s another note from God: You can know the truth and still reject it. Pilate met Jesus and heard Him say, “I am a king, but my kingdom is not of this world.” He was exposed to the truth, but in the end, Pilate chose his own personal security rather than God’s truth.

There are many people who do not believe Jesus is the Son of God. They claim to be seeking the truth about God. But some of them cannot find God for the same reason a bank robber can't find a policeman—they aren't really looking. Most people in America have *heard* the truth about Jesus, they just don't believe it. In most cases, the reason people reject the truth is not because they have an intellectual problem with Jesus—they have a moral problem—they don't want to give up their sin. Their own personal desires are more important to them than God—just like Pilate. You can know the Bible and still go to hell—knowing the truth is not the same as embracing the truth. The last witness I call to the stand today is:

4. BARABBAS: "I WAS SET FREE—HE DIED AS MY SUBSTITUTE!"

What do you have to say about Jesus of Nazareth? With a clear voice Barabbas says, "I was set free—He died as my substitute!"

Tell us in your own words what happened. "I had been in jail for the past week after leading a group of rebels against the filthy Roman oppressors. We had broken into an armory near the fortress of Antonio and killed some of the guards. I had received a death sentence and was waiting to be executed. I didn't think it would be during Passover since execution wasn't allowed during the holiday. But we had heard they were going to crucify three men that day.

I could hear the crowd in the streets. All I heard was people calling my name, "Barabbas! Barabbas!" The next thing I heard was the crowd yelling, "Crucify him! Crucify him!" I just knew they were talking about me! Then I heard the soldiers coming. I tried my best not to be afraid, but all I could think about was my wife and children, and how they would be all alone. I thought about all the mistakes and bad choices of my life. I didn't want to die!

Then, I heard the door open. I knew I was out of time. The guard said, 'Barabbas!' I said, 'That's me.' He said, 'There's a man named Jesus who is going to die in your place. He is going to be nailed to the cross we had prepared for you.' I said, 'What's going to happen to me?' The guard said, 'You are free to go. Now get out of here before Pilate changes his mind.' As I ran out of the cell, I saw Jesus. He had been beaten, and there was a crown of thorns on His head. But as I looked into His eyes I saw that they were clear, and He seemed to smile at me."

Thank you, Barabbas, you are dismissed. Each of us has a great deal in common with Barabbas because the Bible teaches that Jesus died as our substitute. Peter wrote: "For Christ died for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous to bring you to God." (1 Peter 3:18) Barabbas was a criminal (unrighteous) and Jesus was a perfect man (the righteous), yet Jesus died in his place to bring Barabbas to God. Even though you may not be a murderer, you and I are the unrighteous ones, and Jesus is the Righteous Son of God who died for us.

Here's another note from God: My Son died so you can be set free. You and I stand guilty, like Barabbas. We were in line for our eternal punishment, and Jesus stepped in and took our place. There is a beautiful song written by Gordon Jensen that expresses this glorious thought:

I was guilty with nothing to say.
They were coming to take me away.
But then a voice from heaven
Was heard that said,
“Let him go. Take me instead.”
A crown of thorns, a spear deep in His side
And all the pain, it should have been mine.
Those rusty nails were meant for me,
But Christ took them, and He let me go free

The chorus says:

I should have been crucified.
I should have suffered and died.
I should have hung on that cross in disgrace.
But Jesus, God’s Son, took my place.

When Pilate brought Jesus before the Jewish people he asked a very important question. In fact it is life’s most important question everyone must answer individually. He asked, “**WHAT SHALL I DO WITH JESUS?**” That’s a question that can’t be avoided or evaded. You *will* answer it in one of two ways. There are only two choices.

1. Will you choose to CRUCIFY HIM?

That’s what the crowd cried out to do. Crucify Him! Crucify Him? They said, we don’t want Jesus. We don’t believe He is the Messiah or the Son of God. The writer of Hebrews warns about the dangers of crucifying Jesus afresh when we refuse to repent. (Hebrews 6:6) If you are rejecting Jesus as the Divine Son of God, it’s as if you have the hammer in your hands and you are pounding the nails into His flesh.

You’ve heard these four witnesses speak on behalf of Jesus. If you are wondering why there is no witness to speak against the Lord, there is—the devil himself. Certainly, there is an adversary the Bible calls Satan, the accuser of the brethren. He was there that day whispering into the ear of Pilate, “Don’t let Him go! Ask the crowd!” He was there whispering into the ears of the mob, “Crucify Him! Crucify Him!” He’s invisible but he is here testifying against Jesus.

Satan is slicker than a \$3 lawyer. He doesn’t utilize an open attack on Jesus, he utilizes two courtroom tactics: distraction and delay. It was said during the Scopes trial in 1925, the brilliant attorney Clarence Darrow would insert a long wire into his cigar before smoking it. When William Jennings Bryan would be speaking to the jury, Darrow would light the cigar. The ashes of his cigar would not fall because of the wire. As he smoked the cigar down, the members of the jury would be paying more attention to the ashes on his cigar than to William Jennings Bryan. Satan uses the same strategy today. He wants to fill your mind with so much junk that you are too distracted to think seriously about Jesus. He knows most of us already have SADD—Spiritual Attention Deficit Disorder. If you break through Satan’s distractions, then he uses delay. He wants you to *wait* before you make your decision about Jesus. Put it off until a more convenient

time. Satan will never tell you there's no God, or no heaven. He'll never even try to get you to believe there's no hell. He simply wants you to believe there is no hurry.

2. Will you choose to CROWN HIM?

The only other option other than rejecting Jesus and crucifying Him afresh is to confess Him as the Lord, the ruler, the King of your life. There is no middle ground when it comes to Jesus. If you don't accept Him, you reject Him. Jesus said, "He who is not with me is against me." (Matthew 12:30). You will either crucify Him by your rejection or you will crown Him as Lord of your life.

There is one more witness—another invisible One. He is the Holy Spirit of God. Jesus said, "When the Holy Spirit comes, He will testify of me." Right now, will you listen to that still small voice in your heart? What is the Holy Spirit saying to you right now?

CONCLUSION

Jesus Christ, the accused is here today. He said, "Where two or three people are gathered in my name, I am there in the midst of them." As He stands before you today, what is your decision? Ladies and gentlemen of the jury, have you made your decision? What is your verdict?

The verdict about Jesus is always unanimous, because it is a jury of one—nobody else can cast your vote. Parents and grandparents would love to cast the vote for their children and grandchildren, but you, and you alone can decide.

But 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 poem that says: What will you do with Jesus? Neutral you cannot be. One day your heart will be asking, "What will He do with me?"

OUTLINE

1. JUDAS: "I HAVE BETRAYED INNOCENT BLOOD!"
2. MALCHUS: "I OPPOSED HIM, YET HE HEALED ME!"
3. PONTIUS PILATE: "I FIND NO GROUNDS FOR THE DEATH PENALTY!"
4. BARABBAS: "I WAS SET FREE—HE DIED AS MY SUBSTITUTE!"

For Christ died for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God. *1 Peter 3:18*

WHAT SHALL I DO WITH JESUS?

1. Crucify Him?
2. Crown Him?



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To put it in Texas terms, “You’re mighty welcome to use any and all of my ingredients; just make your own chili!”

For the Joy...
Pastor David Dykes