

Were You There at His Trial

Text: Matthew 26:57-68; 27:1-2, 11-25.

I got so annoyed at some of the things I read in the paper.

I have been particularly annoyed with a couple of things that I have read in the past week.

I begin to wonder if we have a justice system or a legal system.

I'll give you some examples...

A stalker takes to the field during the One Day cricket final...

Disrupts the game and makes a spectacle of himself.

Andrew Symonds flattens him with a beautiful shoulder charge.

The papers and radio the next day has lawyers saying that the stalker should sue Symonds for assault, using excessive force...Come on!

Tony Mokbel finds lawyers to again argue some technical hitch that again stops him being brought back to Australia to face justice for crimes he has been charged with.

We ask...where is the justice...where is the fairness in all of this!

John Grisham has a fantastic way of writing his stories to make our blood boil with innocent people unjustly accused of committing crimes.

Their fate is often in the hands of a prejudiced jury.

We find these stories quite disturbing.

The trial of Jesus was infinitely more tragic than any novel created by a gifted author

Not only was Jesus innocent of the accusations made against Him,

He was innocent of ever committing a sin.

If ever there was a great miscarriage of justice,

it took place on that dark and prejudiced Jerusalem night.

The thing that amazes me is that it all took place in one dark night.

Jesus was arrested late on Thursday evening...

condemned to die early Friday morning!

In all of history, no trial stands out with such a blatant disregard of justice as do the trials of Jesus.

There were six of them in all, each illegal,

Each without one piece of evidence being produced from any of the witnesses.

Yet in spite of the groundless accusations, Jesus was handed a death sentence.

There was no attorney to plead His case,

even His closest friends had abandoned Him on this night.

We need to walk our way through these trials,

Sit in and see what happened...

And ask ourselves where we stand on the issue of who Jesus is.

No one was ever treated as unfairly or as unjustly as Jesus.
We need to sit in on what happened and see where we fit into the picture.

In Matthew 26, the leaders take Jesus to the high priest.
There is a series of trials...Annas (father-in-law of the High Priest Caiaphas).
Then High Priest
Followed by Sanhedrin...the whole lot of leaders.

The point was always the same...
“everyone was looking for false evidence against Jesus so that they could put him to death.” (59)

How many of you have heard the expression “My mind is made up. Don’t confuse me with the facts?”
That’s true here.
The leaders have their minds made up...
They want to get rid of Jesus who is stirring the hearts of the people.

Jesus remains silent in front of the false accusations...
The high priest is frustrated.

But he has one final card to play.

In verse 63, he says "I charge you under oath by the living God: Tell us if you are the Christ, the Son of God."

And Jesus says “Yes, it is as you say.”
(Literally the Greek text says “You said it!...You finally got something right!)
But let me explain what it means for me to be the Christ. In the future, you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Mighty One and coming on the clouds of heaven.”

In other words, “You’re sitting in judgment over me right now. But in the future, I’m going to be sitting in judgment over you! If you don’t accept who I am now, you’re going to find out who I am later!”

Instead of Jesus being on trial...he is putting the leaders on trial.
He’s saying “I you want to be right with God, then you need to accept the truth of who I am!”

We too are all members of that same jury Jesus is standing in front of.
We are all asked the same question... ‘What do you think of Jesus?’
If you have read the gospels, heard his teaching, followed his life...

Then you need to answer ‘What do you think of Jesus?’

Maybe you think of Him as a policeman in the sky, punishing you when you do wrong.

Think again...Jesus says in Matthew 11:28-30,

"Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light."

Or maybe you think of Jesus as a nice person. But he's not powerful enough to do anything about your problems.

Think again...Jesus says in Matthew 28:17

“All power is given to me in heaven and on earth.”

Or maybe you think of Jesus as someone far away. Someone who doesn't care what happens to us.

Think again...Jesus says in Matthew 28:20,

"I am with you always, to the very end of the age."

Or maybe you think of Jesus as one saviour among many other saviours.

Think again...Jesus says in John 14:6 "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me."

The truth about Jesus demands the right response.

But in verse 66, the leaders give the WRONG response.

The high priest tears his robe.

He says, “That's it!! We don't need to hear any more witnesses. He's a blasphemer!”

Under Jewish law the most serious charge that could be brought against a person was that of blasphemy...which under Jewish law was punishable by death.

But, while the Jews were allowed to conduct trials under their own jurisdiction, they did not have the authority to issue a death sentence...

That needed the approval of the Roman government.

So they ship him off to the Roman rulers to get a death penalty verdict against Jesus.

The problem was that the Roman government couldn't care less about blasphemy...

The most serious charge in the Roman world was treason.

So you notice the change in the charge against Jesus from blasphemy to treason.

So they haul Jesus off to Pilate.

We can see that Pilate really struggled with what to do with Jesus.
He faced a huge dilemma.

He finds no basis for handing down a death sentence, yet the vocal crowd egg him on...
With shouts and taunts.

They were only interested in one verdict...guilty...and then death by crucifixion.

The Jews could apply pressure on Pilate by reporting his actions to the emperor, Tiberius, who was quite harsh on governors who mistreated the provincial subjects.

Pilate disliked the Jews, and being used by the Jews in tis way...
So he offered the crowd and alternative.

He would follow the tradition of releasing a prisoner.
Instead of selecting some unknown prisoner,
Pilate deliberately chose the most notorious prisoner he had, Barabbas.

Barabbas appears very briefly on the scene and vanishes again.

We know very little about him, except that he was arrested by Roman authorities for insurrection (which is rebellion against a government authority), and murder.

Matthew says that Barabbas was a notorious prisoner,
Mark says that he was a murderer Mark 15:7
John says that he was a robber in John 18:40

So you get the picture that Barabbas was an evil man scheduled to die the same day Jesus was arrested, tried and condemned to death.

As this day in history began, Barabbas, no doubt, sat in a cell, maybe chained to a wall, waiting.

I'm sure he had no expectations of escaping the cross that waited for him...
Unless he somehow was the one released according to Passover tradition.

It seems Pilate had a custom that during this highest of holy days for the nation of Israel, he would release one prisoner to the people as a show of good faith and to appease them somewhat, for all they had to endure from the Roman occupation during the rest of the year.

But what hope had Barabbas?

There would have been others who had not murdered, not robbers...
Maybe just political prisoners.

I suspect that Barabbas had no plans for the evening.

Barabbas was under the sentence of death.

He had been tried and found guilty, and the Governor himself had pronounced sentence, and placed his seal on the signed death warrant, and there was nothing left but the doing of it.

Imagine how he felt when the guards flung open his cell door and was told he could walk free!

He would have been stunned when one of them said, "Get out, and don't let us see your face again. The Governor has freed you. Another will die in your place"

You see, Jesus really did die in Barabbas' place that day, because the people made a choice.

It was either going to be Barabbas, or Jesus of Nazareth; so when they made their choice, Jesus literally became the substitute for the criminal.

Whether we want to admit it or not Barabbas identifies everyone of us. The Bible says that we have all sinned and come short of the glory of God in Romans 3:23

And Just like Barabbas we were sitting bound in prison with a death sentence placed upon us. Now we may have never done anything as bad as Barabbas, murder, or stealing but sin is sin in the eyes of God

And like Barabbas, all of mankind is under a death sentence.

"All have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God" Romans 3:23

"The wages of sin is death" Romans 6:23

All the world is guilty before a holy God,
and all of mankind is under the curse of the Law,
which demands the shedding of blood and death for the transgressor.

There are no exceptions.

Unless, that is, we can find someone to die in our place.

God's justice demands full payment for sin, which is death.

But in His mercy, He provided a substitute.

He provided a substitute that day for Barabbas.

So, Barabbas becomes a type of us, in that Jesus died in our place also.

Just like Barabbas, we were set free...because Christ became our substitute.

He became a curse for us, that we might be released from the curse of the Law that demanded death for sin.

Paul wrote to the Corinthians, “He made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.”

Barabbas drops out of history for us at this point; but I wonder...
did he ever come to realize that Jesus was not only his substitute on that wooden cross but also as his Lord and Saviour?

The one who stood in his place before a righteous God?

Now the crowd have chosen Barabbas to go free...

And Pilate's dilemma remains.

And so, in verse 22, we get an incredibly important question...

What shall I do, then, with Jesus who is called the Christ?

Pilate didn't want to make a decision...he wanted to put it off.

He wanted someone else to make the decision. (He sent Jesus to Herod)

He wanted the crowd to make the decision

He wanted nothing to do with Jesus. (vs 24)

This morning you might be just like that.

You want nothing to do with Jesus.

Ultimately Pilate had to make a decision.

Same with us... What will you do with Jesus, who is called the Christ?

It is a personal question that demands action.

What shall I do, then with Jesus who is called the Christ?

This is the most important decision that you will ever make in life

No other decision is as important as this one.

All other decisions...

About what you will study, where you will work, who you will marry.

What kind of car you will drive, where you will holiday,;

How you will spend your retirement.

Those decisions are temporal...

But what you will do with Jesus...is eternal

It is a question that every person must answer.

It is a decision about Jesus.

Not about church,

Not about religious ceremony

Not about Rules or regulations

Not about doing good deeds

This is the one question that every person will be forced to answer.
The answer we give while we live on this earth will stand for all of eternity.

We will be judged according to how we have answered this all-important question.
What then will you do with Jesus?

If He really is the Savior of the World,
then He should be the number one person in your life!
You should be reading your Bible!
You should be talking to Him in prayer!

Conclusion

We know our blood boils when we see and read of injustice in the paper.
We want to see fair treatment...and get angry when we don't see it.

In Matthew 26 & 27 we see a trial where abuse of the system got out of hand...
And we rightly cringe at the outcome.

The swift judgment began late on a Thursday night and was all wrapped up by early
Friday morning.
6 brief trials all finished with no hard evidence of guilt.

If you were there...how would you have reacted?
What would you have said and done?

What has changed today?

The problem of what to do with Jesus just will not go away.
No other person in human history forces a decision from us the way the Jesus does.
Pilate, the religious leaders, Barabbas, the crowd
and even we today cannot escape Pilate's question,
'What shall I do with Jesus?'

Jesus experienced the judgment of man so that you wouldn't have to experience the
judgment of God.
He went through a trial and a crucifixion He didn't deserve so that he could pay the
price for your sins.

Jesus loves you this I know, for the Bible tells me so.
Ask Jesus to be your Lord and Savior.
Give your life to the One who gave His life for you.