

The Trial of Jesus

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Preacher: Colin Dow

[0:00] Amen. We're going to read now in God's Word in Luke chapter 22. For those of you who are new to our church, on a Sunday morning we work our way through a gospel and we work through it passage by passage by passage, verse by verse by verse so we miss nothing.

And we hear everything about Jesus because our lives are all about Him anyway. Luke chapter 22, verse 66, page 883.

When day came, the assembly of the elders of the people gathered together, both chief priests and scribes, and they led Him away to their council and they said, If you are the Christ, tell us. But He said to them, If I tell you, you will not believe. And if I ask you, you will not answer. But from now on the Son of Man shall be seated at the right hand of the power of God.

So they all said, Are you the Son of God then? And He said to them, You say that I am. Then they said, What further testimony do we need? We've heard it ourselves from our own lips.

Now into chapter 23, Luke 23. Then the whole company of them arose and brought Him before Pilate. And they began to accuse Him, saying, We found this man misleading our nation and forbidding us to give tribute to Caesar and saying that he himself is Christ, a king.

[1:33] And Pilate asked Him, Are you the king of the Jews? And He answered Him, You have said so. Then Pilate said to the chief priests and the crowds, I find no guilt in this man.

But they were urgent, saying, He stirs up the people, teaching throughout all Judea, from Galilee even to this place. When Pilate heard this, he asked whether the man was a Galilean.

And when he learned that he belonged to Herod's jurisdiction, he sent him over to Herod, who was himself in Jerusalem at that time. When Herod saw Jesus, he was very glad, for he had long desired to see Him, because he had heard about Him and he was hoping to see some sign done by Him.

So he questioned Him at some length, but he made no answer. The chief priests and the scribes stood by, vehemently, intensely accusing Him. And Herod, with his soldiers, treated him with contempt and mocked Him.

Then, arraying him in splendid clothing, he sent Him back to Pilate. And Herod and Pilate became friends with each other that very day, for before this they had been at enmity with each other.

[2:47] Heavenly Father, we bow in your presence. May your word be our rule, your spirit our teacher, and your greater glory our supreme concern, through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Amen. Bit of a spoiler. This evening I'm going to preach a sermon like none I've ever preached before. I'm a bit nervous about it, actually, about how to become a Christian.

And if you have any friends who you think would like to know about how to become a Christian, tonight's the night you should bring them. Make sure you do everything you can to invite your non-Christian friends along this evening to hear the message of the gospel.

Luke 22, from verse 66 to 23, verse 12. The trials of Jesus. Above the Old Bailey in London stands a gilt bronze statue of a lady holding a sword in her left hand and a set of scales in her right.

It's the statue of justice. The unbiased standard of justice expected of every court in the United Kingdom.

[4:07] Without fear or favour, every citizen of the UK has the right to expect a fair trial where innocence is presumed, but guilt must be proved.

For all its failings, and there are many, our justice system is the bedrock of our civilised society. What does it say about the society in which Jesus lived when he received the most unfair trial in all history?

There was no presumption of innocence. Those who judged him were biased. Unjustice was denied him. The trials of Jesus were a sham designed to kill him before guilt was even established.

Now, of course, Jesus knew this was going to happen, and if we knew our Old Testaments, we'd know it also. Jesus would be led like a lamb to the slaughter. This morning, I want us to briefly consider these three trials of Jesus and understand what lay behind the death sentence they passed on him.

First, bias lay behind the first of these trials in chapter 22, verses 66 to 71. Inertia, or indecision, lay behind the second in 23, verses 1 through 7.

[5 : 30] And disappointment lay behind the third in verses 8 to 12 of chapter 23. They say that justice, if it's to be true justice, must be unbiased, but when it comes to the trial of Jesus, bias was obvious.

Bias, inertia, disappointment. When we judge Jesus, are we taking our unspoken bias into our decisions?

Are we judging who he is and what he did fairly and without any kind of bias at all? So, first of all, then, from chapter 22, verses 66 to 71, bias, bias.

From the beginning of his public ministry, Jesus was hated by the Jewish rulers. He was hounded by the Pharisees and the Sadducees. From an early stage, they wanted to kill him.

They hated him. But now, with Jesus' arrest, they had the opportunity to vent their fury. The night had passed, and Jesus had been tortured and mocked.

[6 : 40] Peter had denied him three times. The elders of the people dragged Jesus before the Jewish supreme legal court, the Sanhedrin. It was made up of the most powerful people in the land.

An exhausted Jesus stood alone before the judges of Israel. If there was anywhere, he should have expected justice. It was here. These were the wise men of Israel.

These were the judges of the people of God. The trial didn't begin with the question, If you are the Christ, tell us, in verse 67.

It had begun many years before that with their hatred and desire to kill Jesus. Everything about their attitude to Jesus was biased.

But for the sake of their reputations, they had to be seen to be treating Jesus fairly. Remember, Jesus stands alone. He has no one to defend him.

[7 : 40] His guilt is presumed. And they ask him, If you are the Christ, tell us. Now, they're asking a question which, if they had opened their eyes to the things Jesus had said and done, they'd have known the answer to.

Had they seen Jesus feeding 5,000 with five loaves and two fish? Had they heard his parables?

Had they seen him casting out demons and bringing dead people back to life again?

Had they heard his powerful sermons about the love and forgiveness of God? Had they seen him

healing lepers and the deaf? Had they heard the confession of Peter, You are the Christ of God?

They may not have believed that Jesus was the Christ, although they had all the evidence to prove he was. But they knew that Jesus and his followers believed that he was the Christ.

They just wanted him to condemn himself by admitting it publicly. Now, Jesus, filled with the Spirit, knew that the Sanhedrin had no interest in a fair trial.

[8 : 46] So, he says to them, If I tell you, you won't believe, and if I ask you, you won't answer. With all reverence, Jesus knew that in their eyes, he was damned if he did and damned if he didn't.

What's the point of arguing with those whose minds are closed because of their hatred toward him? He knows that the Sanhedrin have already made up their minds to kill him.

So, he says, From now on, in verse 69, The Son of Man will be seated at the right hand of the power of God. Even though Jesus hasn't directly answered their first question, he calls himself now the Son of Man.

Jewish code for Christ. And knowing what they had already decided to do to him, Jesus says, He will soon be seated at the right hand of the power of God.

He tells the Sanhedrin that having killed him, he will then be seated at God's right hand in heaven. The seat of divine power, strength, and justice.

[9 : 52] Jesus stands before them alone and undefended. He stands in weakness. He stands in weakness. But the day will soon come, after the Jewish rulers have crucified him, that he will be raised to God's right hand, the position of universal kingship and authority, and rather than they judging him, he will judge them.

This petty council of so-called judges have no power over Jesus. As we've constantly seen, he is in control of them, not the other way around.

But Jesus knows his time has come, the day of his crucifixion, so he submits himself to their hatred. They're frustrated at how Jesus keeps on outfoxing them.

So they ask him straight, Are you the Son of God? Son of God, Son of Man, Christ. They're all Jewish titles for the Messiah. It's like a judge directly asking the accused in a court of law, So did you do it, Son?

Jesus, fully aware that even if he had said no, they'd have found some other way to condemn him, said to them, You say that I am. He's letting them know that he knows what they're up to, that he knows they've already made up their minds about his guilt because they hate him.

[11 : 20] And what I find interesting is exactly what Jesus says. Look at verse 70 with me. The last words he says to them, You say that I am.

You say that I am. When we hear these words, I am, ego eimi, we are to automatically associate them with the divine name of God, the name Yahweh, ego eimi.

These are words a religious Jew would never take upon his lips, I am. But Jesus did. Jesus stands alone before them, but he is stating in no uncertain terms who he is.

I am. God himself. That's who I am. It means that that day, Israel was standing in judgment upon its God.

The Jesus standing before them was the God who had created the universe, the God who had loved their forefather, Abraham, the God who had rescued them from their slavery in Egypt, the God who had committed himself to them in covenant love.

[12 : 39] They stood over him and condemned him with the words, what further testimony do we need? They hated their God without a cause.

They had judged him before this trial had ever begun. They had made up their minds before ever they had considered any evidence.

And with the greatest arrogance, they condemned their God. And ironically, ironically, they did it in the name of God.

They, the religious leaders, thought they were honoring God by condemning God.

And that's what human religion always does. It turns men against God in the name of God.

[13 : 38] In the name of God, terrorists flew planes into New York's Twin Towers on 9-11. In the name of God, thousands of Christians in our world today are persecuted for their faith in Jesus.

In the name of God, the moors of the south of Scotland were filled with the bodies of Christian martyrs in the late 17th century. Religious hatred, in particular hatred of Jesus Christ, has always been the curse of our world.

Why do so many people today judge against Jesus? Why do they assume a position of judge and put Jesus in the dock as some kind of criminal?

It's because they begin from a position of bias. They hate the God whose face they see in Jesus. His forgiveness, His love, His mercy. They'd rather Him be someone else.

Some would rather Him be harsh and legalistic. Others that He'd let sin go unpunished and let them get away with anything in life. Still others because bad things have happened to them in life and they want to punish God for it.

[14 : 59] But bias comes before judgment and rather than allowing God His rightful position as judge, they judge Him. That's what the Sanhedrin did to Jesus.

That's what happens today. Perhaps even here, bias drives us to reject God and condemn Jesus. Secondly, from chapter 23, verses 1 through 7, inertia or indecision, maybe indecision is a better word.

The Jewish leaders knew that they didn't have the authority to execute criminals. Because they were occupied by the Romans, it was only the Roman leader in Jerusalem who could give them that permission.

So they dragged Jesus to Pilate, the chief Roman authority in Judea. As a Roman province, Judea was always a third of the side of the Romans, so Pilate had to tread carefully.

He's a politician. He's not a religious figure. So his primary interest is in maintaining Roman control over the province of Judea.

[16 : 10] The Jews who brought Jesus to Pilate bring their false accusations against Him. Verse 2, We found this man misleading our nation and forbidding us to give tribute to Caesar and saying that he himself is Christ, a king.

Now on both accounts, they're being deceitful or what one of our politicians said when he was caught in the lie, economical with the truth. Jesus never commanded that anyone deny their tribute to Rome.

Rather, he promoted the practice. Remember? Give to Caesar what is Caesar and to God's what is God's. He paid his own taxes.

He never once promoted violent insurrection against the Romans. Of course, the second, Jesus did claim that he was, of course, on the second, rather, that Jesus is the Christ, he did claim that.

But the kind of Christ he said he was was non-violent. Non-violent. Not an insurrectionist. Not a rebel. Having failed to convict Jesus using their own twisted religion, the Sanhedrin now tried to get Pilate to condemn Jesus using politics.

[17 : 26] Pilate was no fool and he knew how deceitful and conniving these Jewish leaders could be. So he took nothing at face value and he asked Jesus, are you the king of the Jews?

To which Jesus replied, you have said so. They're accusing Jesus of being a political revolutionary. But one look at the Jesus who stood before Pilate that day, beaten, bruised, bleeding, exhausted, would have told Pilate that this Jesus standing before him was no threat to his power.

This Jesus stands before him in weakness. Hardly a king ready to stand up against the power of Rome. Jesus was never a muscle-bound meathead.

He was no Achilles or Greek hero. He's a normal bloke. He's been already beaten and bruised. Pilate can see that Jesus is no rebel or revolutionary which is why he says, I find no guilt in this man. I find no guilt in this man.

[18 : 39] Now that should have been it. Right? The highest jurisdiction of the land, the Roman procurator of Judea, has found Jesus innocent. That should have been enough.

But in verse 5 we read of the Jewish leaders that they were urgent. This could be translated as they insisted. They became strong or even violent.

The Jewish leaders were not willing to abide by Pilate's ruling. The whole situation is turning nasty. It risks turning into a riot. The Jewish leaders angrily complain.

He stirs up people teaching all throughout Judea from Galilee even to this place. Galilee. Ah. This gave Pilate the chance he was looking for both to protect himself from starting a riot while still washing his hands of Jesus' innocent blood.

Pilate knew that whatever the Jews were accusing Jesus of, it wasn't a political threat to him, so he sent Jesus to Herod, King Herod of Galilee, the co-opted ruler of Galilee, the northern region of Galilee.

[19 : 52] Under the Roman system of government, regional government was delegated to local leaders and kings, and Herod had been delegated by Rome to look after the northern region of Galilee.

So rather than ending what he knew was a sham and deceitful trial, Pilate protected himself by washing his hands of Jesus and sending him to Herod.

And the reason Pilate didn't stop the trial of Jesus is because he didn't want to make a decision. He didn't want to make a decision. He wanted to protect himself against reputational loss.

He didn't want to be known as the Roman leader who couldn't stop the Jews from rebelling against Rome. So he used his power not to do the right thing, but to do nothing at all.

He wanted to keep control of these Jewish rulers while knowing that Jesus had done nothing worthy of death, so he let others make the decision for him. By making the decision he did, Pilate made no decision at all.

[21 : 04] Even though he knew Jesus was a righteous man, because he didn't want to rock the boat, he did not acquit Jesus. Now there are many people today who know the truth about Jesus but they do not put their faith and trust in him and become Christians because they do not want anything about their lives to change.

They want to hold power. They don't want to be told what to do by the Bible. They don't want Jesus as their king. They want to get on with their normal lives without anyone getting in their way.

So for reasons of inertia and indecision, they do nothing with Jesus. They don't do the right thing by putting their faith in Jesus even though they know he's the Christ and died on the cross to take away sin.

They do nothing. But as we'll see next week, God willing, they can't put off their decision forever. Sooner or later, like Pilate, they'll have to make a final decision.

But by then, of course, it may be too late. That might be you today. That might be you. Putting off a decision for Christ for years, decades, a lifetime.

[22:20] You think you've got time. You're happy with the way things are in your life right now. You don't really want things to change. You don't want Jesus on the throne of your heart. So you put off your decision.

you don't realize that in God's goodness, you're just putting off the decision until the next time, but maybe by then it will be too late. Now is the day of salvation.

Now is the appointed time. Don't let others make your decision for you like Pilate did. Make your own decision.

Choose to have Jesus as your Lord and Savior. Inertia or indecision. Well, thirdly and lastly, disappointment.

Disappointment. Chapter 23 from verse 6 to 12. Herod, king of Galilee, was a nasty man.

[23:21] He happened to be in Jerusalem at the time because it was Passover. This Herod was not the same Herod who had commanded the slaughter of the infants in Bethlehem, but he was the Herod who had a reputation for being a vicious man and had commanded the execution of Jesus' cousin, John the Baptist.

In effect, Jesus has gone from the frying pan into the fire. There had been something about John the Baptist's preaching which had fascinated Herod, but when John the Baptist condemned Herod for marrying his sister-in-law, Herod had him beheaded.

But with whatever fascination Herod held John the Baptist, he held Jesus even higher. The difference between Jesus and John the Baptist was that Herod had heard Jesus had performed many miracles and signs and he desperately wanted to see Jesus do something supernatural. Maybe Jesus could spit a rabbit out of a hat. Maybe Jesus could make gold out of lead like an alchemist. So Herod questioned Jesus, asking Jesus to do something miraculous.

In verse 9 we read, but Jesus made no answer. Jesus made no answer. Jesus isn't Herod's slave. Jesus is no conjurer.

[24:43] Jesus is no magician. He's his own man. And Herod's deeply disappointed in a Jesus who doesn't do what he wants him to, so he turns against Jesus.

Herod's disappointed by Jesus who doesn't do what he wants him to, so he turns against Jesus.

The Jewish leaders, again standing beside him, spoke lies into his ears.

Jesus didn't do what Herod wanted him to do, so Herod turned against him. Herod and the soldiers jeered, ridiculed, and mocked Jesus. They dressed him in a royal robe as an ironic joke.

They made him look stupid, and all because Jesus had disappointed him. Jesus wouldn't perform tricks for him. And then Herod had him sent back to Pilate.

He used Jesus as a bargaining chip because up to this point him and Pilate had been enemies. By sending Jesus back to Pilate, Herod was publicly acknowledging Pilate's authority over him.

[25:47] It's obvious from this passage that Herod took the charges against Jesus no more seriously than Pilate did. He didn't believe them. But because Jesus wouldn't do miracles and signs for Herod, Herod sent him back to Pilate.

Why do some people reject Jesus? Some people reject Jesus because he's not the kind of Christ they want him to be. He's not the kind of Christ they want him to be.

This is perhaps the most uncomfortable of the three reasons Jesus was denied justice during his trials. I have met many people, many people for whom I have the deepest sympathy.

They've been through the most difficult circumstances in life. They've lost children and they are deeply bitter about it. And I don't want for one second to minimize their pain.

It's the type of pain I've never had to endure and I don't think I could. But sometimes you hear them saying if God was real and if as you say he loves me none of this would have happened to me.

[27:05] God is real and loves me none of this would have happened to me. I had dreams but my dreams have turned into nightmares and I'm deeply disappointed in a God who let it get this far.

Jesus isn't the kind of God they wanted him to be. He hasn't done what they wanted him to. He's not rescued them from grief or from depression or from suffering.

He hasn't saved them from the troubles common to mankind even though of course Jesus never promised he would. But because he doesn't do what they want him to they harden their hearts against him.

And again I don't want to minimize anyone's suffering which is why this is the most understandable of the three reasons for rejecting Jesus. It's understandable but it's so very wrong. Jesus never promised to save us from the troubles of this world. He promised to be with us in the troubles of this world. To strengthen guide and comfort us in times of darkness and grief and pain. [28 : 13] in my experience limited albeit the most hardened against Jesus and the Christian gospel are those who are hiding secret disappointment and extreme pain.

God hasn't done what they wanted him to. God hasn't saved them from trouble so they reject him. Now if you find yourself in this position today please don't blame Jesus. Please don't blame Jesus. Go to Jesus instead and find in him strength guidance comfort. You know we'd be pretty shocked if our legal system in Great Britain was led by people characterized by bias and decision and disappointment but these were the people who judged Jesus and that ultimately from a human perspective is why Jesus died on the cross. It was a gross miscarriage of justice. It was a set of sham show trials before a set of unqualified and unrighteous judges. But ever since then Jesus has been judged in these ways. Chances are if we stop someone in the street and ask them why don't you believe in Jesus it will resolve down into one of these three reasons. Bias inertia or disappointment. [29 : 44] What we want to notice however is that Jesus was never the victim of these trials. Never the victim. He was always in control. He chose when to speak and he chose when not to speak.

He could have called down the armies of heaven to destroy these judges but he didn't. Rather with great humility and meekness he submitted himself to their crooked judgments because his ultimate mission was to go to the cross to die for disappointed indecisive and biased human beings like us. He went to the cross to take our sins upon himself to forgive us and give us eternal life. As we close I want us to notice that bias and decision and disappointment are negative emotions. They're negative. By contrast I want us to notice that Jesus is none of these things. He is righteous, merciful and loving, fair, compassionate and good.

The day is coming when we shall not stand in judgment upon Christ but Christ shall stand in judgment upon us. I pity the Sanhedrin, Pilate and Herod on that day for Jesus' judgment of them shall not be like their judgment of him.

[31 : 14] He will be scrupulously fair and righteous. There shall be no revenge for there's no revenge in God. There shall however be justice.

when it comes our time to be judged by Jesus what shall that excuse be for having not put our faith and trust in him?

We have surely had many opportunities but for reasons of bias, indecision or disappointment we chose against him. In love once more from this pulpit through his word Jesus comes to us by his spirit and he offers us forgiveness and eternal life in the cross.

Before it's too late even as Jesus stands before us will you believe and trust in him? Let us pray. Lord Jesus as we think of the sham trials to which you were exposed we are shocked and yet we recognize that every one of us sit in judgment upon you every day.

If you don't do what we want you to do for us we get angry and disappointed. Help us rather oh Lord sit under your judgment and the judgment of your word.

[32 : 34] We thank you that you are loving, fair and compassionate. You are righteous, good and merciful. Bless your word to us we pray and drive it home with power into our hearts.

In Jesus name. Amen.