

The Ultimate Trial

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[0:00] Let's read together in Luke chapter 23. Luke chapter 23. And we shall read from verse 13 to verse 25.

! You'll find us on page 883 of the white Bible, Luke chapter 23.

Pilate addressed them once more, desiring to release Jesus.

But they kept shouting, crucify, crucify him. A third time he said to them, why? What evil has he done? I have found in him no guilt deserving death.

I will therefore punish and release him. But they were urgent, demanding with loud cries that he should be crucified. And their voices prevailed. So Pilate decided that their demand should be granted.

[1:42] He released the man who had been thrown into prison for insurrection and murder, for whom they asked. 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.

Amen. When it comes to the trial of Jesus, one wonders who exactly is on trial.

When you're going for a job interview, you shouldn't just think of yourself being interviewed, but of those who are interviewing you.

You're not just being interviewed, you're interviewing. Your prospective employers may be interviewing you to see what kind of person you are, but you're also interviewing your prospective employers to see what kind of people they are.

[2:48] They may offer you a job, but because you don't get the impression from them that they'd be good to work for, you decide not to take the job. They don't trial in an interview as much as you are.

And in the same way, when it comes to Luke chapter 23, 13 through 25, we're asking the question, who exactly is on trial? Is it Jesus who stands accused?

Is it Pilate, the Roman proconsul? Is it the Jewish leaders? Is it even Barabbas, the criminal, whose place Jesus took on the cross?

You may have come to church to put God to the test today, to see whether you can trust Him with your life. But in reality, it's not God who's on trial today.

It's you. It's not you offering yourself to God as long as He's worth it. It's God offering you His Son today because He's worth it.

[3:52] This is the final trial of Jesus, this passage, and today is the ultimate trial for you also. It's not your innocence which will acquit you before God.

It's your faith in a Jesus who was condemned on your behalf. As we observe this most tragic and pathetic of trials, the worst abuse of justice in history, we don't merely stand by.

We participate. Watching the way they speak and act, we cry out with words of advice and challenge to each party. To the Jewish leaders, we cry out, await your judgment.

To Pilate, we cry out, have the courage of your convictions. To Barabbas, we cry out, live in gratitude. And to Jesus, we cry out, we believe in you.

Of course, we've got the advantage over those present that day. We know how the story ends, and still yet we cry out, somehow hoping that someone else hears us.

[4:57] Somehow hoping that we even listen to ourselves. So, when we think of the Jewish leaders, we want to cry out to them, await the judgment.

Await the judgment. The Jewish leaders had always hated Jesus. From the beginning of his ministry, they envied his popularity with the common people.

Jesus challenged their understanding of the law. He stripped back all the traditions and demanded, challenged them with the truth that the heart of a man's religion is the religion of a man's heart. Jesus challenged what it meant to be truly Jewish, not just outwardly and genetically, but inwardly, following in the footsteps of Abraham, who was justified, not by the works of the law, but because he believed in the promises of God.

Their disagreement with Jesus grew into hatred. They tried to trip him up, posing him impossible questions about the law, but he defeated them every time. Their hatred grew into a ruthless desire to kill Jesus.

[6:05] When, through the treachery of Judas, rather, they arrested Jesus, they thought their path to his execution was straightforward.

So, having condemned him, they passed him over to Pilate, the Roman proconsul, but Pilate declared Jesus innocent, and then passed him over to Herod, king of Galilee, who also declared him innocent, and passed him back to Pilate again.

Suddenly, the plans of the Jewish leaders were unraveling. It looked to them as though Pilate was going to let Jesus go. On four occasions in our passage, Pilate declares Jesus innocent.

In verse 13, he gathers together the chief priests, the rulers of the people, who had been present in the courtyard before, the night before, and he delivers this verdict. You brought me this man as one who was misleading, deceiving the people, and after examining him before you, behold, I find this man not guilty of any of your charges against him.

Neither did Herod, because he sent him back to me. Look, nothing deserving of death has been done by him. I will therefore punish him and release him. Having examined the facts of the case, neither Pilate nor Herod found any basis for a charge against Jesus.

[7:31] And certainly, nothing serious enough as to warrant crucifixion. So here's the verdict of the Roman proconsul. He's the highest authority in the world, because behind Pilate's words lie the words of the Roman emperor.

However, if Pilate says Jesus is innocent, Jesus is innocent, and that should have been the end of it. But the Jewish leaders found another way to condemn Jesus using a Passover tradition, that a criminal could be released to them at that time.

And they exploited this tradition to plead for the release of a guilty terrorist called Barabbas, who was to be executed, and his replacement by the innocent Jesus.

In verse 18, we read that they cried out together. They'd obviously thought about this before, and now they play their trump card. Away with this man and release to us Barabbas.

Pilate did not want to condemn Jesus. That's clear from this passage, but the Jewish leaders keep on crying out, crucify him, crucify him. Once more, Pilate declares that he found nothing worthy of death in Jesus, but it made the crowd shout only the louder.

[8:52] We read in verse 23 that they were urgent. They were demanding with loud cries, insisting that he should be crucified. The scene's descending into chaos.

Pilate realizes that if he doesn't do something, there's going to be a riot and perhaps a rebellion. He's beginning to lose control, and all because the Jewish religious leaders are baying for Jesus' blood.

They're like hungry lions, bloodthirsty wolves. They're not going to settle for anything less than the crucifixion of Jesus. Now, I want to make a very important distinction here, and listen up, listen very carefully.

It wasn't the whole of Israel who wanted to kill Jesus. It was the political and religious elite. By and large, the common people were sympathetic to Jesus and his message.

Over the course of the last 2,000 years, the Jews as a race have been called Christ killers over the crucifixion of Jesus.

[9:58] And it's justified the most terrifying type of anti-Semitism. But it wasn't the Jews as a race who crucified Jesus. It was the Jewish ruling and political elite.

It was the Pharisees, the Sadducees, the chief priests, the elders of the people. We cannot use the crucifixion of Jesus as a justification for any form of anti-Semitism or hatred of the Jews as a race. After all, Jesus and all his early followers were Jewish. The man who died for us on the cross was Jewish. Any Christian who is anti-Semitic is a disgrace to the faith he professes to hold. brackets off. Take that on board. However, what these religious leaders did was the most serious of betrayals.

They were crucifying their Messiah. They were crucifying their Christ to death. Urgently crying out for Jesus to be executed. How short-term their vision.

[11 : 10] Time and time again during his ministry, Jesus had spoken of the consequences to Jerusalem, the capital city of rejecting him. He's spoken of how one stone would not be left on another, how there would be days of trouble for Jerusalem such as they had never seen before.

These Jewish leaders put Jesus on trial, but they don't actually realize it's Jesus putting them on trial. They're on trial.

and by their words and their actions, they prove themselves guilty of rebellion against God. Their fate will be terrifying.

No race has ever been hated like the Jews are even up to this day. No city has ever been ruined like Jerusalem was.

In AD 70, the Romans destroyed the city of Jerusalem and massacred its peoples. The city streets of Jerusalem ran red with blood.

[12 : 14] The religious elite of Jerusalem were annihilated. They never rose again. Their temple was destroyed, never to rise again. Earlier, as Jesus foresaw Jerusalem's fate, he stood looking over the city and he wept.

And we want to cry out to these religious and political elite of Jerusalem as they shout for Jesus' crucifixion. We want to cry out over the last 2,000 years, await your judgment.

Your judgment is coming. You wait for it. We dare not reject or ignore the judgment of God upon those who reject Jesus and fail to recognize him as Lord.

It's a fearful thing for spiritually that endure the physical torments of Jerusalem. Cut off from God and by God their future is darkness and fire.

Nearly 200 years ago now, the famous Scottish minister Andrew Boner met up with his best friend Robert Murray McShane one Monday morning just outside Dundee.

[13 : 29] And McShane asked Boner, Andrew, what did you preach about yesterday? To which Boner replied, I preached about hell.

McShane then famously said to Boner, aye, but did you preach it with tears in your eyes, Andrew? Did you preach it with tears in your eyes, Andrew?

And we want to cry out to the religious and political elite of Jerusalem, await the judgment, but we do so with tears in our eyes. And we want to cry out to the people who reject Jesus in our own day and refuse to recognize him as Lord, await the judgment, but we want to do so again with tears in our eyes.

God takes no pleasure in the death of the wicked and neither do we. And yet he still calls us to call out our warning to those who refuse Christ.

Await your judgment. Second to Pilate, to Pilate, we want to say to him over these last 2,000 years, have the courage of your convictions, Pilate.

[14 : 38] Have the courage of your convictions. Pilate was a complicated man. Appointed by the emperor Tiberius to be Roman proconsul of the troubled region of Judea, tradition tells us that he was a vicious and violent man.

He had at his disposal a sizable Roman force which could easily overwhelm any large-scale Jewish rebellion. To have reached his position of authority, Pilate had tread on many heads.

He wasn't a nice man. He wasn't a weak man. But as with most in his position, he was a consummate politician. He had his eyes set on career advancement, maybe hoping that by showing how well he governed Judea, he'd be promoted to a more senior position in the Roman government.

And he lived in the imperial palace in Jerusalem. The Jewish leaders did not have the authority to execute criminals. They had to obtain Pilate's approval.

We saw this from last week, that Pilate, having examined Jesus, declared in chapter 23, verse 4, I find no guilt in this man. However, he didn't want to start a rebellion, so he sent Jesus to Herod, but Herod was of the same opinion as Pilate.

[15 : 57] So sent Jesus back to him for the ultimate judgment. And when Jesus is returned to Pilate in verse 13, in the declaration we've already read, Pilate said to the Jewish leaders, I did not find this man guilty of any charges against him, and nothing deserving of death has been done by him.

Pilate offers to punish Jesus and then release him, the punishment would have been perhaps a public flogging. But what Pilate offered was not enough.

The Jewish leaders demanded Christ's execution. We read in verse 20 that Pilate actually wanted to release Jesus. And then in verse 22, when the Jewish leaders tried out for the release of Barabbas at Jesus' expense, Pilate says to them, why?

What has Jesus done? I found no guilt in him deserving of death. Clearly, Pilate did not believe for one second that Jesus was guilty of the things the Jews were accusing him of.

Pilate believed Jesus was innocent. By contrast, Barabbas was a convicted terrorist. Barabbas, as we'll see in a moment, had been thrown into prison for an insurrection and for murder.

[17 : 19] Barabbas was a danger to the Roman state. He was a nationalist terrorist who had stirred up rebellion against the Romans and had murdered Roman sympathizers, perhaps even Roman soldiers.

To release Barabbas was dangerous, and Pilate, who had probably delivered Barabbas' sentence of execution himself, knew it. By releasing Barabbas and condemning Jesus, Pilate was going against both his own conscience and the laws of the Roman Empire.

But, as he watched the Jewish leaders getting nasty and the mob turning into a riot, Pilate failed to keep control. And he meekly agreed to the demands of the Jewish leaders.

He failed to hold to the courage of his convictions. He knew Jesus was innocent, but he allowed himself to be pressured by others into condemning Jesus to death.

According to tradition and history, Pilate was not promoted from Judea, but was demoted and died by his own hand some 20 years later. Pilate cuts a tragic figure, this powerful man, pathetic, because he allowed himself to be pressured into rejecting Jesus by others.

[18 : 41] Now, what about us today? What about us today? Perhaps you know that Jesus is who he says he is, you know he's the son of God, and you know why he came.

He came to save sinners by his death on the cross, and you know that he's the savior you've always needed, but you don't commit yourself to him because you worry too much about what other people will think.

Perhaps your family and friends, your fellow students, you worry about what they're going to say to you. You don't want to stand out from the crowd. You know we want to call out to Pilate, and we want to call out to each other.

Have the courage of your convictions. Don't let other people pressure you into rejecting Jesus. have the courage of your convictions.

Thirdly, Barabbas. Barabbas, live in gratitude. The name Barabbas means son of a father.

[19 : 54] It's an Aramaic name, son of a father. In fact, it may be a kind of generic name. It may be their way of saying John Smith or John Doe.

We don't really know what this man's name was. According to another account of Barabbas, we believe that this man had another name. He was called Jesus Barabbas.

So when it came time for the Jewish leaders to choose someone to be released to them at the Passover, their choice was between Jesus Barabbas or Jesus Christ.

And they chose Jesus Barabbas. Now, Barabbas was a vicious man, psychopath, murderer, terrorist. It's thought that he had been responsible for a Jewish uprising in Jerusalem which had cost the lives of many Roman soldiers.

The Romans had engaged in reprisals, punishing not just those who had been involved in the rebellion but other innocent parties. Barabbas had been condemned to death for his part in the insurrection and the truth is that the Jewish leaders themselves wouldn't have been shedding any tears over it.

[21 : 04] Someone who brings upon them the wrath of the Roman army, even if he is a Jewish nationalist, is an inconvenient pain to them. So, Pilate's been condemned to death by crucifixion and he deserved it.

He deserved it. He's rebelled against the Romans, he has terrorized and murdered people, he is a vicious and bloodthirsty psychopath. psychopath. By contrast, you have Jesus.

Jesus uses his power to love and heal people, spoken about not killing his enemies but loving them and praying for them. He's an altogether innocent man and yet when it comes down to it, the Jewish leaders try out for the release of the psychopath and the condemnation of a savior.

And so, even though Pilate was unhappy about it, Barabbas, the psychopath, goes free and Jesus, the savior, is crucified.

Luke here is introducing us to the central element of the Christian gospel. If you don't get this, you have to listen. What theologians call substitutionary atonement or to put it most simply, Jesus took my place on the cross.

[22 : 28] Jesus took my place on the cross. Rather than Barabbas, who deserved it, being punished, Jesus, who was innocent, was punished instead.

In a very real sense, Jesus died for Barabbas because he died instead of Barabbas. Jesus was condemned, Barabbas went free.

Our savior was killed and the psychopath is released. Here is the central message of the Christian gospel that on the cross, Jesus is dying for sinful people, bearing the punishment they deserve because they're sinners.

It should have been Barabbas on the cross, but it wasn't. Jesus took his place. The Bible tells us that all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God.

All deserve to be punished because of our sin and unrighteousness. But Jesus, the righteous one, took the punishment we deserved. He died so we could be forgiven.

[23 : 34] He took the penalty so we could go free. He was punished so we could have eternal life. For us, for us, for us, that's the message of the gospel.

Even as Jesus said, the Son of Man did not come to be served but to serve and give his life as a ransom for many. And over the centuries, we want to cry out to Barabbas, Barabbas, leave your wicked, murderous, psychopathic ways behind you and live in gratitude to Jesus.

Jesus died for Barabbas and now it's time for Barabbas to show his gratitude to Jesus by living an altogether different way of life, no longer hating but loving, no longer killing but healing.

Barabbas live in gratitude. Jesus died for sinners on the cross, millions and billions of us. And having died for us, he now calls us to believe and trust in him for salvation.

What kind of gratitude do we show him if we live as though he had never died for us? That what he did in suffering, Calvary's pain, makes no difference to us at all.

[24 : 58] Rather, because Jesus died for us on the cross, we want to live in gratitude to him. As the Apostle Paul will later say, in view of God's mercy, we offer ourselves up to him as a living sacrifice.

We want to live in faith and love, in grace and holiness, obedience and righteousness. Through this amazing example of Jesus taking Barabbas' place, we want to cry out to each other here today.

Live in gratitude. How will Jesus' cross change the way you live? How will the cross change your life? Barabbas, live in gratitude.

And then lastly and briefly, Jesus, we believe in you. We believe in you. You know the thing that comes across in this passage?

Is that Jesus does not say a word. The silence of Jesus. Albeit Luke has probably compressed all the proceedings, Jesus doesn't say a word.

[26 : 13] He's altogether silent before his accusers. It reminds us of the prophecy in Isaiah. He was led like a lamb to the slaughter and like a sheep before it, shears his silence so he didn't open his mouth.

His silence, however, must not be interpreted as his doing nothing. Remember who the Jesus on trial is. He is the incarnate Son of God.

He is the Word of God made flesh. God among us, Emmanuel. He's not just another poor boy. He's not a misunderstood revolutionary.

He is the God who in the beginning created the heavens and the earth and all out of nothing. He created the stars and the moon, the earth and all the seas, and all life on earth, including all human life.

He created Pilate, and he created the chief priests, and he created the Pharisees, and he created Barabbas. With a word, he could have called down an army of angels from heaven to do away with all his accusers.

[27 : 22] He could have turned the day into night and accused them all. Never once does he use his power to do harm. Never once does he use his power to do harm, only to heal.

What amazes us here in this passage is how he allows himself to be judged, how he allows himself to be beaten, how he allows himself to be condemned. His silence indicates his submission and obedience to the mission he had been set by his heavenly father to give his life as a ransom for

many, to seek and to save the lost, to die as our substitute for us on the cross.

Jesus allows himself to undergo the torture and all the death because without his death, we whom he loves would not have life.

So Jesus meekly submits to the hatred of these unrighteous men, not for himself, never for himself, but for you. As you take a look at Jesus standing before Pilate, see the love in his bloodshot eyes for you.

See the compassion in his bleeding face. And here his thought process, I must submit. I must die for these people. I must be crucified. I must bear the punishment of God for them, for there's no other way for them to be saved other than that if I bear the cross on their behalf.

[28 : 55] And over the centuries, billions of Christians having been forgiven of all their sin and given eternal life to the cross of Jesus, we want to cry out to Jesus in worshipful praise.

My Jesus, I believe in you. I believe in you. For no one else has ever done what he did for us, and no one else could have ever done what he did for us.

He was silent before his accusers. He meekly submitted to their torture and condemnation, and he did it for us. Surely today we join our cries with those of the worldwide church, as together we cry out to Jesus, I believe in you.

On that fateful day, Pilate and the Jewish leaders thought that they were putting Jesus on trial, but the reality is it was he who was putting them on trial.

And today, the living Christ is here by his Spirit and his Word, and he's asking us and challenging us, which of these four cries apply to us?

[30 : 09] Pilate, Pilate, and I await your judgment, for you have rejected me. Have the courage of your convictions, for your swithering. Live in gratitude, because I've saved you.

Or I believe in you. Maybe one's true. Maybe two's true. Maybe even three are true. But as we close with tears, with McChain's tears, let me plead with you in the light of all we've learned today in the love of Jesus.

Your response isn't that of the first. Awake your judgment, for you've now learned everything that you need to believe and trust in Jesus for salvation. When I was a wee boy in Gospy, there was an old man called Eric Mackay in the next village of Rogert.

Rogert's such a small village, you blink and you miss it. And Eric was a very simple man. I'm not sure what the modern politically correct way of saying simple is.

You might say mentally challenged. He was a devout Christian. He used to wear a hairnet, he was completely bald, and his teeth were so rotten he used to wash his mouth with hand soap.

[31 : 30] Very strange looking man he was. But at prayer meetings, he would always say these words, and he was a local man. I don't think he'd ever been outside Sutherland.

He'd always say these words, Lord help us to stick with our winners. Ben Campbell will know what that means. Muriel Crowell if she's here too. Lord help us to stick with the winners.

For Eric and for every Christian, Jesus is the ultimate winner. And today the Spirit of Christ is present, and he says, will you stick with me?

Jesus. Because I'm the winner. Let us pray. Our loving Heavenly Father, as we read this text written 2,000 years ago, it's as fresh to us as though it's tomorrow's newspaper, although it's far better news than anything we'll read tomorrow.

Because it teaches us about a Jesus who silent before his accusers recognized that unless he went to his death, there'd be no life for us.

[32 : 38] And Lord, we want to come to you today, and we want to ask that if any of us are undecided about where we are with Christ, you would help us to have the courage of our convictions and to put our faith and trust in him.

And if any of us have already believed in Jesus and yet are not living a life which honors him, we pray that you would help us to live our gratitude to him.

And for those of us who are Christians, we believe, O Lord, in you. We believe in Jesus and we worship you, Lord Jesus. Lord, our greatest prayers for those who have rejected Jesus for so many years and who await judgment that they cannot themselves imagine.

And we pray that you would turn their hearts today to you. We ask these things in his name. Amen.