

Jesus on Trial

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[0:00] Well, good morning, church. Wherever you may be, turn with us in a Bible, if you have one, to the Gospel of Luke, chapter 22, beginning at verse 63. We'll be reading from there through to chapter 23, verse 25. Luke, chapter 22, beginning at verse 63.

Now the men who were holding Jesus in custody were mocking him as they beat him. They also blindfolded him and kept asking him, prophesy, who is it that struck you? And they said many other things against him, blaspheming him. 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. And they said, what further testimony do we need? We have heard it ourselves from his own lips. 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. And Pilate asked him, are you the king of the Jews? And he answered him, you've said so. And Pilate said to the chief priests and to 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.

[2:38] So he questioned him at some length, but he made no answer. The chief priests and the scribes stood by vehemently 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. Pilate then called together the chief priests and the rulers and the people and said to them, You brought me this man as one who was misleading the people.

And after examining him before you, behold, I did not find this man guilty of any of your charges against him. Neither did Herod, for he sent him back to us. Pilate said, So Pilate decided that their demand should be granted.

He released the man who had been thrown into prison for insurrection and murder, for whom they asked. But he delivered Jesus over to their will.

Pilate said, And that our world is currently facing because of COVID-19.

[4:48] It's not primarily about how to deal with unemployment and financial stress or how to persevere in a job that suddenly has become ten times more stressful. It is not primarily about how to endure physical isolation or how to make the most of an extended season at home with spouse and children.

It's not about how to avoid spreading illness or getting sick oneself or how to discern appropriate boundaries or an appropriate risk to take for the sake of loving God and others. So on the face of it, this passage may not immediately speak to every one of our present circumstances and conditions and conundrums.

But this passage is about a day when the darkness only seemed to get darker. In verse 53 of chapter 22, Jesus said to those who had come out to arrest him, This is your hour and the power of darkness.

And even though the rooster had crowed and the day had dawned, it would be a bitter and evil day when the Son of God would be sentenced to death, when the powers of darkness would seem to prevail.

You know, sometimes when we're overwhelmed by our burdens in the present and by our anxieties about the future, I think it's helpful to hear from someone else that we know and love who is enduring or who has endured a very different kind of trouble.

[6 : 22] Now, it's not that one person's trouble matters and another doesn't. It's not usually helpful to try to rank different kinds of human troubles against each other, but it is helpful to remember that my troubles are not the only ones that matter in this world.

Other people are fighting their own battles, externally or internally, often in ways that are invisible and unknown to me. So this morning, I want us to turn our eyes from our present troubles and concerns to the trial that Jesus, our Savior, endured.

This is a long series of events that we just read. First, Jesus was brought before the Jewish council. Then he was taken to the Roman governor, Pilate. Then Pilate sent him over to Herod.

Then Herod sent him back to Pilate. Then Pilate pronounced his verdict. Then the crowd protested. And so Pilate reversed his initial decision and ultimately issued the death sentence.

But rather than taking each of these events one by one, I want to look at three themes that run through the whole story. First, the sufferings Jesus endured.

[7 : 44] Second, the steadfastness Jesus displayed. And third, the salvation Jesus secured.

The sufferings Jesus endured, the steadfastness he displayed, and the salvation he endured. So first consider the sufferings that Jesus endured.

In verse 63 to 65, Jesus was shamefully beaten by cruel temple officials. Physical pain is hard enough to deal with, and here Jesus was beaten.

But being repeatedly humiliated, shamefully mocked, that can cut even deeper. And the wounds can last even longer than those of a physical beating.

And the Gospels all emphasize not only the physical pain of Jesus' trial and crucifixion, but also the shame and dishonor that was heaped upon him from all sides.

[8 : 53] But that wasn't all. Then in verses 66 to 71, Jesus was forcibly interrogated before hostile religious authorities. Now these leaders were not asking sincere questions.

Three times in chapter 20, they had approached Jesus with hostile questions seeking to trap him in his words. They had been looking for some way to arrest and kill Jesus for some time already.

And it's almost certain that they weren't even following their own recognized legal procedures that were put in place to safeguard the rights of the accused. The Jewish Mishnah from about 200 AD summarizes the legal rights of those who were being tried for capital offenses.

Among other things, it says these, A guilty verdict cannot be finalized in one trial on one day. It was necessary to sleep on it, come back the next day, and then make a final decision.

Also, it says that death penalty cases cannot be tried on the eve of a festival, as in the Passover here. Third, it says that reasons for acquittal, for letting the defendant go, or exonerating him from the charges, must be brought forth before reasons for conviction.

- [10:18] And finally, it says that a blasphemy charge can only be sustained if the defendant has cursed God's name itself. Now, we can't be entirely sure whether all of those procedures were in place in Jesus' day, because that's from a document that comes from a bit later, but in Jesus' trial, none of these were followed.

Jesus' legal rights were denied. And then it goes on, verses 1 to 5, Jesus was falsely accused before the Roman governor.

The Jewish council did not have authority to carry out death sentences. Only the Roman governor, Pilate, could authorize the death penalty, and so the leaders brought Jesus before Pilate and accused him.

We found this man misleading or corrupting our nation and forbidding tribute to Caesar and saying that he himself is Christ, a king. Now, if you've been reading through Luke's gospel up to this point, you know immediately that all these accusations are false and twisted.

Jesus hadn't been corrupting the nation of Israel. It was already corrupt long before Jesus arrived. John the Baptist had proclaimed that even before Jesus came on the scene and called people to repentance.

- [11:41] And the temple leaders were perpetuating that corruption through their love of honor and power. Jesus had never forbade paying taxes to Caesar.

In fact, he had pointed to a coin with Caesar's image on it and said, give to Caesar what is Caesar's. And interestingly, in Luke's gospel, Jesus never publicly claims to be the Messiah, the Christ.

Now, you might ask why because Jesus obviously believed that he was the true Messiah prophesied in the scriptures. But see, in those days, nearly everyone expected that the Messiah would be a military leader who would lead a revolt.

And many men had arisen even in Jesus' time and in the century or two beforehand who had led military, who had claimed to be the Messiah, who had led military uprisings, tried to drive out the Romans and establish an independent Jewish nation.

They had all failed. But that was the meaning, the primary meaning of the term in people's minds in those days. And so Jesus never publicly introduced himself using that title because it was so widely misunderstood.

- [12:54] And because he was such a different kind of Messiah than people expected. So Jesus was shamefully beaten.

He was forcibly interrogated. He was falsely accused. And then that's not all. Verses 6 to 12, Jesus was openly ridiculed. He was brought to Herod.

Herod was the tetrarch, the ruler over Galilee where Jesus had done much of his public ministry and he was in Jerusalem likely visiting to keep tabs on things during the Passover.

So Pilate says, well, I'll send him over to Herod. See what Herod wants to do with him. Maybe Herod will make a decision so I don't have to. Maybe Herod will become an ally even if he doesn't want to decide this case.

Either way, I think it'll be a positive thing. But Herod just saw it as sort of an amusement.

- [13:57] Verse 8, when Herod saw Jesus, he was very glad for he had long desire to see him because he had heard about him and he was hoping to see some sign done by him.

notice that Herod didn't want to hear what Jesus had to say. Herod just wanted to see Jesus do something spectacular.

A miracle or Herod wanted some exciting spiritual experience to be able to check off something else on his bucket list. But when Jesus didn't provide the entertainment that Pilate desired, that Herod desired, Herod decided to make a comedy show out of it himself.

Dressing Jesus up in royal robes, sending him back to Pilate, mocking his claim to be a king. Herod didn't even take Jesus seriously.

And finally, in verses 13 to 25, Jesus was unjustly condemned. Three times, verse 4, verse 15, and verse 22, Jesus heard Pilate pronounce a not guilty verdict.

[15:13] And every time, the leaders objected and every time, Pilate backpedaled. The first time, Pilate sent him over to Herod.

The second time, Pilate offered to punish and then release him. Now that word punish referred to a severe flogging, a whipping, using a leather whip containing pieces of bone and metal.

And the third time, Pilate granted their demand and handed Jesus over to be crucified. Jesus was at the mercy of a corrupt judicial system.

And at the end of the day, justice was not done. So we see Jesus shamefully beaten, forcibly interrogated, falsely accused, openly ridiculed, and unjustly condemned.

Consider the sufferings Jesus endured. But second, consider the steadfastness Jesus displayed.

[16:26] Through all these sufferings that he endured, Jesus didn't crack. He didn't explode in fury and rage.

He didn't crumple up in a ball of despair. He didn't plead guilty to false accusations that were being thrown at him. He didn't break down. Through it all, he remained steadfast. Consider Jesus' steadfastness. Consider how Jesus remains steadfast in his answers, in his words.

At the end of chapter 22, in the beginning of chapter 23, Luke records three questions posed to Jesus, and three answers that Jesus gave.

Now, obviously, Luke is presenting an abridged version, a summary, of the trial proceedings. Matthew and Mark include some other details about the hearing before the council, and John relates a longer conversation between Jesus and Pilate.

[17:30] But Luke highlights three questions, and they all focus on the identity of Jesus. Verse 67, if you are the Christ, the Messiah, tell us.

Verse 70, are you the Son of God then? Verse 3, are you the King of the Jews? These are all questions about the core of who Jesus was claiming to be.

Now, at one level, when you look at Jesus' answers, Jesus doesn't just give a straightforward yes or no to these three questions. Jesus. And if you look throughout the Gospels, when people come to Jesus with sincere and straightforward questions, when people really want to learn from him, Jesus consistently gives people sincere and straightforward answers.

A scribe came to Jesus and said, Teacher, what is the greatest commandment in the law? And Jesus says, love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength, and love your neighbor as yourself.

But sometimes people didn't come to Jesus with sincere and straightforward questions. They approached Jesus with loaded questions, trying to trick him, trying to trap him.

[19:00] And in those cases, Jesus usually did not answer them directly. He often answered a question with another question, or he spoke in a parable, or he directly challenged the motives of the person who was asking.

You see, Jesus did not allow people who were trying to trick and trap him to completely dictate the terms of the conversation. So, we see here, in verse 67, he challenged the motives of the council.

If I tell you that I'm the Messiah, you won't believe. And if I ask you, who do you say that I am, you won't answer. Jesus had already asked them multiple questions, throughout chapter 20 especially, and they had refused to answer him.

Did John the Baptist's authority come from heaven or from men, he had asked? Was it from God or just a human initiative? And they refused to answer.

You see, Jesus challenged them because their problem was not a lack of evidence, but a lack of openness to even consider whether he was the Messiah.

[20:23] And then in verse 70 and verse 3, he again challenged his accusers. You say that I am. You say so. You see, Jesus was challenging them, what do you say?

Where do you stand? Who are you saying that I am? He wants them to consider that all-important question.

But while Jesus challenged the motives of his questioners, he remained steadfast in his claims. Jesus' answers to these three questions were not ultimately evasive or unclear or ambiguous.

It was pretty clear to everyone present who Jesus was claiming to be. Verse 69, the answer to the first question, Jesus says, from now on, the Son of Man shall be seated at the right hand of the power of God.

Throughout his ministry, Jesus had referred to himself as the Son of Man. man. And here he says that he will be exalted, he will reign at God's own right hand.

[21:36] And then when Jesus said in verse 70, in verse 3, when they said, are you the Son of God, are you the King of the Jews, and he said, you say that I am, or you have said so, a similar phrase is used about ten times in the Old Testament, and it always means yes.

It always indicates an affirmative response. So, for example, Pharaoh, another hostile ruler, comes to Moses in Exodus chapter 10, verse 28, and Pharaoh says, get away from me.

And Moses says, as you say, you say so, I won't see your face again. So, when Jesus says, you say so, or you say that I am, he's not being tricky and ambiguous and unclear and avoiding the question.

He's saying, you just said it. Do you realize what you just said? You just said it. So, Jesus remains steadfast in his answers.

But notice how also Jesus remains steadfast in his silence. Aside from his brief answers, to these three questions, Jesus remained silent in the face of his accusers.

[22:59] Why? Well, in the ancient world, probably many people would have recognized Jesus' silence as an expression of self-control or even nobility.

But even more than that, it's how the prophet Isaiah described the suffering servant of God. As we read earlier, Isaiah 53, 7, he was oppressed and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth.

Like a sheep that before its shears is silent, so he opened not his mouth. And by oppression and judgment, he was taken away. And we know that Luke had this chapter in mind because in chapter 22, verse 37, Luke has already referred to that very chapter.

And Jesus has said, the words of this prophecy are being fulfilled in me. Luke wants us to see in Jesus' steadfast silence that he is that suffering servant of God.

The sacrificial lamb who had come to take away the sins of the world. Again, as Isaiah 53, verse 6 says, all we like sheep have gone astray and each of us has turned to his own way and the Lord has laid on him.

[24:32] The steadfast, silent, suffering servant, the sacrificial lamb. The iniquity of us all. And that brings us now to our last point.

The sufferings Jesus endured, the steadfastness he displayed, and finally the salvation Jesus secured. You see, Jesus' steadfastness in his sufferings is not simply a model for us to admire from a distance and look back upon and try hard to emulate and try hard to gather up the courage for us to be steadfast.

No, Jesus' steadfastness in his sufferings and Jesus' steadfastness and Jesus' sufferings are the very means of our salvation. And at the end of this passage, Luke gives us a picture of the salvation Jesus secured.

Both Herod and Pilate had examined Jesus and found him not guilty, but in verse 18 it says, they all cried out together, away with this man and released to us Barabbas, a man who had been thrown into prison for an insurrection started in the city and for murder.

Jesus had been accused of misleading the nation and stirring up the people. But the very people who were accusing Jesus of those things and demanding his death on that basis, in the next breath demanded amnesty for a man who was guilty of those very same things and even more who was guilty of murder.

[26:11] Now some people have questioned whether this whole thing with Barabbas really happened because outside the New Testament we haven't yet found other historical sources that mention Barabbas by name or that describe a custom of Pilate releasing one prisoner at Passover time.

But the name Barabbas was a common Jewish name attested from before the time of Jesus. And many rulers both then and now have exercised their authority to grant amnesty in particular cases.

And all four Gospels Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John testify to the exchange. Even the pagan Roman historian Tacitus though he doesn't mention Barabbas also writes that Jesus was crucified by sentence of Pontius Pilate.

You see, this is not a fairy tale. This all really happened in history. But Luke wants us to see not just that Jesus was really sentenced to death by Pontius Pilate, but Luke wants us to see why.

Why was he given over to death? And he gives us a clue in verse 25, the last verse in our passage. Pilate released the man who had been thrown into prison for insurrection and murder for whom they asked, but he delivered Jesus over to their will.

[27:39] He released Barabbas, the murderer, and he condemned Jesus, the innocent one, to die. And in that verse we see a picture of the salvation Jesus secured.

Jesus, the innocent one, was sentenced to death so that guilty ones might live. Jesus was condemned so that sinners might be justified.

Freed from the guilt and penalty of their sins, 1 Peter 3:18 says Christ suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God.

This is the good news. That Jesus Christ suffered and bled and died in our place and on our behalf to release us from our sin and from its rightful punishment, to release us from the fear of death and condemnation, to make us right with God so that we can live with God, so that we can know that God is with us and God is for us now and forever.

And you might say, how do I get that assurance? How do I get that promise? And the answer is simple, by trusting in Jesus, simply relying on what he's done and receiving the salvation that he has secured as a gift.

[29 : 17] If you want to trust Jesus today for the first time, contact one of us after the service by phone or email so we can pray with you and rejoice with you and help you get to know Jesus better.

But for all of us who have come to trust Jesus as our Savior and Lord, he remains our steadfast Savior today.

and the same steadfastness that he shows here in the face of false accusations and open ridicule and being shamefully beaten and mocked and forcibly interrogated and wrongfully executed, that same steadfastness he continues to hold out to us today as our heavenly advocate.

this is a dark and challenging time that we're living in and each of us may be experiencing that darkness in different ways.

We may be feeling a threat to our physical health or our economic security or our psychological stability or our relational connections or our future plans or even simply our personal freedoms.

[30 : 47] Sometimes we might feel like we're cracking under the pressure. Brothers and sisters, let us look to our steadfast Savior. Look to the one who remains steadfast through his suffering.

Look to the one who has secured our salvation so that we who follow him might live without fear. Look to the one who has promised that we are not alone for he has gone before us and through his spirit he abides with us.

even when the darkness only seemed to get darker Jesus remains steadfast and today he is still our steadfast advocate able and willing to help us in our time of need.

So let's pray. Father thank you for the gift of your son Jesus.

We praise you and thank you for his steadfastness. We praise you for the sufferings that he endured for our salvation.

[31 : 56] That they were not in vain but that he endured them in our place and on our behalf that we might never be condemned before you. That we might never have to fear that you are against us but that we might know that you are with us and for us.

Father we pray that we would look to Jesus fix our eyes on him the author and perfecter of our faith who for the joy set before him endured the cross scorning its shame and sat down at the right hand of God.

We praise you for his steadfastness and we praise you for his victory. We pray that you would increase our trust in him today. In Jesus' name, amen.