

To Seek and to Save the Lost

Jesus Before Pilate – Again!

Luke 23:13-25

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Scripture

Jesus was betrayed by Judas and arrested by the religious authorities in the Garden of Gethsemane on the Mount of Olives. He was taken to the high priest's house where Peter denied knowing him three times before the rooster crowed. Then Jesus was subjected to a religious trial before the Jewish Sanhedrin, where he was found "guilty" of blasphemy. But since it was not lawful for the Jews to put anyone to death (John 18:31), they sent Jesus to Pilate for a civil trial. Pilate found no guilt in Jesus. When Pilate heard that Jesus was from Galilee, he sent him to Herod. Herod also found that nothing deserving death had been done by Jesus. And so Herod sent Jesus back to Pilate. This was how Jesus came before Pilate – again! Pilate was then coerced by the Jews to condemn Jesus to death.

Let's read about the injustice of Jesus' death sentence in Luke 23:13-25:

¹³ Pilate then called together the chief priests and the rulers and the people, ¹⁴ 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. ¹⁵ Neither did Herod, for he sent him back to us. Look, nothing deserving death has been done by him. ¹⁶ I will therefore punish and release him."

¹⁸ But they all cried out together, "Away with this man, and release to us Barabbas"— ¹⁹ a man who had been thrown into prison for an insurrection started in the city and for murder. ²⁰ Pilate addressed them once more, desiring to release Jesus, ²¹ but they kept shouting, "Crucify, crucify him!" ²² 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." ²³ But they were urgent, demanding with loud cries that he should be crucified. And their voices prevailed. ²⁴ So Pilate decided that their demand should be granted. ²⁵ 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. (Luke 23:13-25)

Introduction

What, in your mind, is the greatest injustice in the world? To be sure, we live in a world full of love, hope, joy, and delight. But it is also a world full of heartache, pain, disappointment, and sorrow. Some would say that poverty is the greatest injustice in our world today. Others would say that it is starvation. And still others would say that racism, or child abuse, or inequality towards women, or sex trafficking, or war is the greatest injustice in the world. Vincent A. Gallagher, in his book titled, *The True Cost of Low Prices*, said, "It takes great courage to open one's heart and mind to the tremendous injustice and suffering in our world."

You may be able to think of other injustices in our world. But surely the greatest injustice in the world is the injustice of Jesus' death sentence. Jesus had never done anything wrong in his entire life. He was completely sinless. He never ever thought a sinful thought. He never ever said a sinful word. And he never ever committed a sinful deed. It is impossible for us to comprehend completely what it means to be totally sinless, as Jesus was. And yet he was condemned to die as a criminal of the lowest order.

Lesson

The injustice of Jesus' death sentence in Luke 23:13-25 shows us how Jesus was convicted, despite his innocence.

Let's use the following outline:

1. The Conclusion of Pilate (23:13-16)
2. The Choice of the Jews (23:18-23)
3. The Condemnation of Jesus (23:24-25)

I. The Conclusion of Pilate (23:13-16)

First, notice the conclusion of Pilate.

After his first interview with Jesus, Pilate sent him to Herod because Jesus was from Galilee, and Herod was responsible for Galilee. Herod was glad to see Jesus because he had heard about him, and he was hoping to see some signs done by Jesus (Luke 23:8). Herod took Jesus to be some kind of magician or con artist, and he was curious to see for himself how Jesus performed his miracles. But Jesus refused to say a word to Herod. Someone has said that Herod is the only person in the entire Bible to whom Jesus never responded when asked a question. When Herod realized that Jesus would not perform or answer his questions, he and his soldiers treated Jesus with contempt and mocked him (Luke 23:11), and then sent him back to Pilate.

Pilate must have been disappointed when Jesus was returned to him. He really did not want to have anything to do with Jesus. He had already said that he found no guilt in Jesus (Luke 23:4). He had tried to pass the hot potato to Herod, hoping that he would deal with Jesus so that Pilate would not have to do so. Nevertheless, Jesus' return to Pilate confirmed his own initial assessment of Jesus' innocence. So we read in Luke 23:13-15:

¹³ Pilate then called together the chief priests and the rulers and the people, ¹⁴ 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. ¹⁵ Neither did Herod, for he sent him back to us. Look, nothing deserving death has been done by him."

Pilate, using the Roman legal system of justice, did not find Jesus to be guilty of any charge. And Herod, using the Jewish legal system of justice, did not find Jesus to be guilty of any charge either. We can be sure that Jesus was completely innocent of any wrongdoing because Herod treated Jesus with contempt and mocked him. He had no soft spot for Jesus. He would happily have condemned him, if there

was even the smallest iota of any wrongdoing in Jesus. But there was none. So, because Jesus was found to be doubly innocent by two leaders, we can have great confidence that Jesus was indeed innocent.

Then Pilate put forward a proposal that was designed to save Jesus, and get the Jewish religious leaders off his back. He said to them, **“I will therefore punish and release him”** (23:16). Apparently, under Roman law it was permissible to give a person charged with a crime a light beating, along with a warning, so that the accused person would watch his behavior more carefully in the future. Pilate was hoping that by suggesting a lesser punishment than the death sentence he would be able to appease the Jewish religious leaders. Of course, to punish someone who is innocent is a travesty of justice.

It may be helpful to know that Pilate was a ruthless leader. Shortly after he had begun his role as Procurator in Judea he created a lot of ill will with the Jews. His predecessors had always had their Roman soldiers remove the images of Caesar from their standards when they marched in the city of Jerusalem. The reason for this was that the Jews believed that such images violated the law regarding images, and they wanted no part of images that asserted that the image on the standard was a god. So, when Pilate refused to do so, the Jews started a riot. The Roman soldiers came out to squash the riot, but the Jews laid themselves down on the ground and bared their necks to the Roman swords. They were willing to die for their belief that one should not make any image to represent God. Pilate was forced to relent, and he called the soldiers back and had them remove the images from their standards.

On another occasion Pilate got the Jews upset when he took money from the temple treasury to pay for an aqueduct that he was building. The Jews who objected were beaten by Roman soldiers.

Pilate eventually was removed from office when he ordered his cavalry to attack Samaritans who were gathering for worship on Mt. Gerizim. Scores died in that attack.

Apparently, while on his way to Rome Pilate reportedly took his own life.

So, Pilate was a ruthless leader. Why then was he working so hard to get Jesus acquitted? It may have been that Pilate was seeking to be even-handed in applying Roman law. There was clearly no evidence that Jesus had done anything wrong. He knew that, and Herod confirmed that. And so it would have been wrong to punish Jesus.

Another reason why Pilate worked so hard to get Jesus acquitted is that he did not like the Jewish religious leaders. He had had several run-ins with the Jewish religious leaders, and he did not like them.

But there is another reason why Pilate worked so hard to get Jesus acquitted. His wife's dream. Matthew tells us in his Gospel, "While he was sitting on the judgment seat, his wife sent word to him, 'Have nothing to do with that righteous man, for I have suffered much because of him today in a dream'" (Matthew 27:19). We don't know what Pilate's wife dreamed. We don't know how she knew that Jesus was a "righteous man." We don't know the nature of her suffering because of the dream. All we know is that she said to her husband, "Pilate! Have nothing to do with Jesus. He is innocent!" Here again is another assertion of Jesus' innocence.

Now, it is important to note that Luke wants his readers to see the complete and total innocence of Jesus. In every possible way, he wanted his readers to know that Jesus was fully and completely innocent of any wrongdoing.

How we should thank God for the clarity that God's Word gives us about the perfect innocence of Jesus. In just a few hours, Jesus was about to die as "the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world" (John 1:29). And he could only do so if he were "a lamb without spot or blemish" (1 Peter 1:19). We would have no hope of salvation if our Savior were not without spot or blemish. Praise God that Jesus was completely and perfectly innocent in every way!

Let us take to heart the words of Bishop J. C. Ryle:

The circumstance before us may seem of trifling moment to a careless Bible reader. It ought however to commend itself to the heart

of every well-instructed Christian. We ought to be daily thankful that our great Substitute was in all respects perfect, and that our Surety was a complete and faultless Surety.¹

II. The Choice of the Jews (23:18-23)

Second, observe the choice of the Jews.

Pilate had earlier called together the chief priests and the rulers *and the people* (23:13). Perhaps he had hoped that the people would back him in his initial assessment of Jesus' innocence. But notice what happened in Luke 23:18-22:

¹⁸ But they all cried out together, "Away with this man, and release to us Barabbas"— ¹⁹ a man who had been thrown into prison for an insurrection started in the city and for murder. ²⁰ Pilate addressed them once more, desiring to release Jesus, ²¹ but they kept shouting, "Crucify, crucify him!" ²² 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."

So, for the third time Pilate found Jesus innocent (23:22). There simply was no doubt about the innocence of Jesus.

When we look at the other Gospels, we learn why Pilate capitulated to the demand of the Jews. In John 19:12 we read, "From then on Pilate sought to release [Jesus], but the Jews cried out, 'If you release this man, you are not Caesar's friend.'" The Jews had Pilate over a barrel. They knew that he was already in hot water with Caesar. Pilate's relationship with the Jews was not good, and Caesar did not treat Procurators well who did not rule well. **But Pilate noticed that the Jews were urgent, demanding with loud cries that Jesus should be crucified. And their voices prevailed (23:23).**

Jesus should have been released. But he was not. He was unjustly sentenced to death. The question is: who is responsible for the injustice of Jesus' death sentence? The Bible makes it clear that the

¹ J. C. Ryle, *Expository Thoughts on Luke*, vol. 2 (New York: Robert Carter & Brothers, 1879), 456.

Jewish people were responsible for the injustice of Jesus' death sentence. When the apostle Peter was preaching on the Day of Pentecost, he said to the people of Jerusalem, "you crucified and killed" him (Acts 2:23). Later on, Peter said to them of Jesus, "whom you delivered over and denied in the presence of Pilate" (Acts 3:13).

But in addition to the Jewish people, the Jewish leaders were also responsible for the injustice of Jesus' death sentence. Peter said this to the Sanhedrin, the Jewish leaders who were out for Jesus' blood, when he identified Jesus as the one "whom you crucified" (Acts 4:10) and "killed by hanging him on a tree" (Acts 5:30).

But, it was not only the Jewish people and their leaders who were responsible for the injustice of Jesus' death sentence. It was also the Romans, Pilate, and the soldiers, along with Herod, who were responsible for Jesus' death. They knew that Jesus was not guilty of anything deserving of death. Why, he was not even deserving of a lesser punishment; he was completely and utterly innocent. And so Pilate and the Romans were culpable as well for the injustice of Jesus' death sentence.

Commentator Michael Wilcock makes the following conclusion, "All are guilty, not only the Jews. Frivolous Herod and feeble Pilate are guilty too, and so is treacherous Judas. And so is Peter. And so are the rest of the disciples. All are sucked into the vortex of Satan's cosmic plan for the destruction of the Son of God."²

Each one of us has to decide what we will do with Jesus. The Jews were furious in their hatred of Jesus and they certainly wanted him dead. I don't imagine you would be here today if that was your attitude. Pilate initially did not want Jesus dead, and he tried to save him. In the end, however, he capitulated and did the wrong thing, and had Jesus crucified. The real problem with Pilate is that he was confronted by the Truth himself, but he did not believe in him. As commentator Philip Ryken said, "Pontius Pilate recognized that Jesus was an innocent man, yet he refused to receive him as the Savior or worship him

² Michael Wilcock, *The Message of Luke*, The Bible Speaks Today (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1979), 196.

as the King. Sadly, he never did solve his problem, but ended up doing the wrong thing with Jesus.”³

So, what will you do with Jesus?

III. The Condemnation of Jesus (23:24-25)

And third, look at the condemnation of Jesus.

Sadly, **Pilate decided that the demand of the Jews should be granted. He released Barabbas, the man who had been thrown into prison for insurrection and murder, for whom they asked, but he delivered Jesus over to their will (23:24-25).**

Luke frequently used irony in his Gospel. One irony is that Jesus had been accused of insurrection. Of course he was completely innocent of any insurrection. However, Barabbas had been found guilty of **insurrection and murder**.

The other irony is that Barabbas' name means “son of the father.” As Kent Hughes said, “The people cried out for the release of one called ‘son of the father’ and rejected the One who really is the Son of the Father!”⁴

What we have before us is a wonderful illustration of the principle of substitution. Bishop Ryle puts it this way:

Two persons were before him, and he must needs release one of the two. The one was a sinner against God and man, a malefactor stained with many crimes. The other was the holy, harmless, and undefiled Son of God, in whom there was no fault at all. And yet Pilate condemns the innocent prisoner and acquits the guilty! He orders Barabbas to be set free, and delivers Jesus to be crucified.⁵

We are Barabbas. We are guilty of all kinds of sin against God

³ Philip Graham Ryken, *Luke*, ed. Richard D. Phillips, Philip Graham Ryken, and Daniel M. Doriani, vol. 2, Reformed Expository Commentary (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2009), 562.

⁴ R. Kent Hughes, *Luke: That You May Know the Truth*, Preaching the Word (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1998), 369.

⁵ J. C. Ryle, *Expository Thoughts on Luke*, vol. 2, 458.

and one another. We deserve to be sentenced to die for our sins and be sent to hell for eternity. Jesus, on the other hand, is the sinless, guiltless Son of God. God is willing to set us free if we put our trust in the Lord Jesus Christ. What a wonderful exchange that is!

Commentator F. W. Krummacher invites us to consider the result of Pilate's decision:

Barabbas and Jesus change places. The murderer's bonds, curse, disgrace, and mortal agony are transferred to the righteous Jesus; while the liberty, innocence, safety, and well-being of the immaculate Nazarene become the lot of the murderer. Barabbas is installed in all the rights and privileges of Jesus Christ; while the latter enters upon all the infamy and horror of the rebel's position. Both mutually inherit each other's situation and what they possess: the delinquent's guilt and cross become the lot of the Just One, and all the civil rights and immunities of the latter are the property of the delinquent.⁶

This is an illustration of our salvation. Philip Ryken applies this truth in the following way:

Like Barabbas, we were dead in our sins and doomed to die; but an exchange has taken place in which Jesus takes our place so that we can take his. The Innocent One is condemned to die in our place. The true Son of the Father takes upon himself the guilt of all our sin and therefore is condemned to suffer the wrath of God. He does this by dying on the cross. But at the same time his crucifixion is our justification; his condemnation is our pardon; and his bondage is our release. This is the gospel: Jesus dying in our place, as our substitute, suffering the death that we deserved to die.⁷

The exchange of Jesus and Barabbas is such a powerful irony. And it is such a powerful picture of substitution.

⁶ F. W. Krummacher, *The Suffering Savior*, (1856; reprint Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 2004), 270-271.

⁷ Philip Graham Ryken, *Luke*, 567.

Conclusion

Therefore, having analyzed the injustice of Jesus' death sentence in Luke 23:13-25, we should praise God that he is our substitute.

A letter from the early church has survived. It is called *Epistle to Diognetus*. There is a lovely description of substitution in the letter. It reads as follows:

He himself took on him the burden of our iniquities. He gave his own Son as a ransom for us, the holy One for transgressors, the blameless One for the wicked, the righteous One for the unrighteous, the incorruptible One for the corruptible, the immortal One for them that are mortal. For what other thing was capable of covering our sins than his righteousness? By what other one was it possible that we, the wicked and the ungodly, could be justified, than by the only Son of God? O sweet exchange! O unsearchable operation! O benefits surpassing all expectation! That the wickedness of many should be hid in a single righteous One, and that the righteousness of One should justify the many transgressors.⁸

This is the gospel! It teaches us about the wonderful exchange that is possible when we ask Jesus to take our place. He will pay the penalty for all our sin. And we are declared righteous and set free!

Have you put your trust in Jesus? If not, will you do so today? Amen.

⁸ Epistle to Diognetus, quoted by Douglas Jones and Douglas Wilson in *Angels in the Architecture: A Protestant Vision for Middle Earth* (Moscow, ID: Canon, 1988), 66.

Mission Statement

The Mission Statement of the Tampa Bay Presbyterian Church
is:

*To bring people to Jesus Christ
and membership in his church family,
develop them to Christlike maturity,
equip them for their ministry in the church
and life mission in the world,
in order to magnify God's name.*

Sermons by Rev. Freddy Fritz

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PRAYER:

O Lord our God, thank you for the perfect innocence of your Son, Jesus Christ. Thank you that he never ever did anything wrong in his entire life. He was completely sinless. He never ever thought a sinful thought. He never ever said a sinful word. And he never ever committed a sinful deed.

And yet, he was sentenced to death. And he died to pay the penalty for our sin. Oh, God, how we thank you!

Please grant faith and repentance to anyone here today who has never yet asked you for Jesus to be his or her substitute.

And for this I pray in Jesus' name.

BENEDICTION:

May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all, now and always. Amen.

CHARGE:

Now, brothers and sisters, go and serve God wholeheartedly!