

The Innocent for the Guilty

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[0 : 0 0] and it's my joy to bring God's word to you today. A special welcome if you're new or visiting with us. We're glad that you're here, and we're glad that you're here not because we're trying to fill seats, but because we're following Jesus together as one community. And as we follow Jesus together, we become convinced that there's no one so good. They don't need God's grace, and no one so bad that they can't have it, which is why we come back week after week to hear what God has to say to us in his word. We're continuing our series in the Gospel of Mark, and you'll remember that the Gospels tell the story of Jesus and his life and his death and his resurrection. And now for several weeks, we've been working slowly through the final week before Jesus' death and resurrection. And I've been telling you several times, you know, every piece that's included here is important because, of course, there's many things that we're not told, and so what is included is included for very particular reasons. Last week, we looked at this sandwich between Jesus' two trials, that is,

Peter's denial of Christ, and we asked this question, why did Peter deny him? And the answer was that Peter relied on himself rather than clinging to God. We saw the great temptation of denying that we are weaker than perhaps we realize, more dependent than we want to admit. We're now moving on beyond that middle to the end of the sandwich, which is the second trial. Remember, Jesus has two trials.

First of all, he has his religious trial, which we've looked at, and now his civil trial, which is before us this morning. And our question is simple. I've already shared it with you and during our confession of faith, why does it matter that Jesus had a trial? Why does it matter for you right now?

Would it not be enough if Jesus had simply died? What if Jesus had been murdered and there was no trial beforehand? What would that mean? It's easy for us to take these things for granted, let them wash over us, but actually these are included here. The sequence, all the events leading up to Jesus' death, matter a great deal. There is a reason that Pontius Pilate shows up in the Apostles' Creed. Peter and Judas do not. The writers of that creed understood something that we are going to look at this morning. What does Jesus' trial mean for you? So with that, I invite you to turn with me to God's Word. We're in Mark chapter 15, starting at verse 1. You can turn with me in your worship guide.

You can turn on your phone. You can turn in your Bible. No matter where you turn, remember that this is God's Word. And God tells us that His Word is more precious than gold, even the finest gold, and it's sweeter than honey, even honey that comes straight from the honeycomb. And so that's why we read it now, starting at verse 1. As soon as it was morning, the chief priests held a consultation with the elders and scribes and the whole council. And they bound Jesus and led Him away and delivered Him over to Pilate. And Pilate asked Him, Are you the king of the Jews? And he answered him, You have said so.

[3 : 1 6] And the chief priests accused Him of many things. And Pilate again asked Him, Have you no answer to make? See how many charges they bring against you. But Jesus made no further answer, so that Pilate was amazed.

Verse 6. Verse 11.

But the chief priests stirred up the crowd to have Him release for them Barabbas instead. And Pilate again said to them, Then what shall I do with the man you call the king of the Jews?

And they cried out again, Crucify Him. And Pilate said to them, Why, what evil has He done? But they shouted all the more, Crucify Him. So Pilate, wishing to satisfy the crowd, released for them Barabbas.

And having scourged Jesus, he delivered Him to be crucified. I invite you to pray with me as we come to this portion of God's Word. Our Father in heaven, we praise you and thank you again that you haven't left us to figure things out on our own, but instead you speak to us clearly in your Word.

[4 : 57] And we thank you even more than that for the grace that we have in Jesus Christ. And we ask that you would, this morning, speak clearly to us. You would help us to see Christ, to understand the grace that He offers us, and to embrace it more and more.

We know as we ask these things that we can't earn them or deserve them, but we still ask them with confidence and with hope because we know that Christ has earned them for us, and so we ask these things in His name. Amen.

We turn now to Jesus' second of two trials, and I've told you before why it is that we have not one but two. A couple weeks ago, we looked at Jesus' first trial, His religious trial, in which the Sanhedrin, the religious court, brought Him up on charges, found Him guilty of blasphemy.

Why then do they need to bring Him before the civil court? Well, it's for a very simple reason. If you remember, at the beginning of chapter 14, their goal is to put Jesus to death.

And what is it that they don't have the power to do by themselves? They don't have the power to give the death penalty. So all of this, this religious trial, is just the beginning, just them kind of getting their paperwork in order so that they can bring Jesus before Pontius Pilate, the one who is actually able to give the death penalty.

[6 : 20] This is the final step in their multi-step plan to get rid of Jesus once and for all. And so that's why we meet Pontius Pilate in verse 1 here.

They bound Jesus and led Him away and delivered Him over to Pilate. Pilate is the Roman governor who's in charge of this area, and so he's the one who actually has the power to do what they want to do.

And they bring before Pilate what they think he's going to bite at. Verse 2, Pilate asks him, Are you the king of the Jews? In other words, they know what Pilate wants, which is to prevent any sort of insurrection in the area over which he's a governor.

So they present Jesus, who they are angry at for blasphemy, as someone who's a threat to the Roman Empire. If Jesus is claiming to be the king of the Jews, what does that say about the actual Roman rulers?

Hey, Pilate, of course you're going to want to do something about this, right? You're not going to want to have someone running around claiming to have the real authority over this region.

[7 : 24] This is something that maybe you're not concerned about on the religious front, but it's something you should be very concerned about on the civil front. So the Jews, in a certain sense, know what they're doing.

They are, as I've said before, playing chess, not checkers. So that's why Pilate asks this question. Jesus gives a strange response, though. He says, You have said so. That doesn't sound like yes or no.

Thankfully, in the Gospel of John, we are given that answer and a longer answer from Jesus. In John 18, Jesus says this, Among other things, My kingdom is not of this world.

If my kingdom were of this world, my servants would have been fighting that I might not be delivered over to the Jews. But my kingdom is not from the world. In other words, Jesus is saying yes and no.

On the one hand, there's something true about this accusation. On the other hand, you, Pilate, have nothing to fear. If I actually were this king that they're claiming that I am, I would not be standing before you.

[8 : 28] My people would have already been fighting for me. My people would have kept me from showing up before you. So Jesus gives this answer that doesn't really help solve the problem.

He is not giving Pilate what he needs to condemn him. And then he surprises Pilate one more time, at least, verses 3 through 5. Again, he remains silent.

Verse 3, The chief priests accuse him of many things, and just like he did during the religious trial, Jesus has nothing more to say. And just like in that trial, Jesus is doing this, reminding us that he is willing.

He is not running or rushing away from the cross. It's Napoleon Bonaparte who said, Never interrupt your enemy when he's making a mistake.

And that's exactly what Jesus is doing here. He remains silent, refusing to interrupt his enemies when they're making a mistake. They think Pilate's playing into their plan.

[9 : 36] All of them are ultimately playing into God's plan. Now we're going to come back to Barabbas in a minute.

That's what happens next. But to understand this passage as a whole, we need to jump forward just for a minute to verses 10 through 15. Verse 10, we see Pilate is not confused, and he does not have the wool pulled over his eyes, for he perceived that it was out of envy that the chief priest had delivered him up.

This is one of several ways we're going to see that Pilate knows Jesus is innocent. We see it also in verse 14. Pilate knows that Jesus is innocent.

And what does he still do? Verse 15, Why does this passage matter?

Of all the things that happened to Jesus in the last week of his life, why is this included? And why do we need to see the process that happens before Pontius Pilate, under whom Jesus suffers?

[11 : 11] We need to see this for one very simple reason, to remind us that an innocent man was found guilty. That is the bottom line and the point of this passage.

An innocent man is condemned. Why is Pontius Pilate mentioned in the Apostles' Creed? Because it is so critical for Jesus to be found guilty, even though he is innocent, so that you, Christian, can be declared innocent, even though you're guilty.

Why is it so important for the Apostles' Creed to mention that Jesus suffered under Pontius Pilate? Because you must know that Jesus was found guilty, even though innocent, so that you could be found innocent, even though guilty.

This verdict matters in the universe. It is not just that Jesus paid the penalty for your sins, although he did.

It is also that Jesus was condemned that you might be set free. It is critical to this story that a civil court finds Jesus guilty.

[12 : 39] In fact, you'll see this on page 8 of your worship guide. On the one hand, Jesus is convicted.

On the other hand, Jesus is innocent. A man who deserves death is released, and a man who gives life is condemned.

A killer goes free, and an innocent man is killed. That is the point of Pontius Pilate.

That's what we mean when we sing that hymn and say, in our place condemned he stood. Hallelujah, what a Savior.

The one who is innocent is found guilty, so that you who are guilty could be found innocent. What happens in Pilate's court matters ultimately in God's court.

[13 : 51] What happens in this episode matters when we stand before an almighty God. And so why does that matter to you today in 2023?

Well, it matters for a few reasons. First of all, it frees us from living a life of trying to justify ourselves. This frees you from spending your life trying to prove that you are innocent.

Otherwise, we are going to spend our lives trying to claw our ways out of a guilty verdict. There's no room, if you don't know this, for admitting failure or mistakes.

Judgment must go somewhere. The guilty verdict must go somewhere. If it does not go on Jesus, you will find someone else to put it on.

You will find someone to shift the blame to. You will find someone else that can take the credit for your mistakes and your sin.

[15 : 11] You cannot stand under the weight of your sin. If Jesus is not there to take it for you, if he is not declared guilty on your behalf, you will find someone to do it.

But, if Jesus really did stand in our place, if Jesus really did take the verdict that we deserve, we can actually do what we did earlier this morning.

We can actually confess our sins. We can actually put an end to blame shifting. We can actually put an end to minimizing and hiding.

Have you ever met a person who's incapable of admitting that he's wrong? Can't handle the suggestion that maybe she's made a mistake?

That is a person who is still working hard to prove that he is innocent. Is that you?

[16 : 22] If you really believe that Jesus took your guilty verdict, if you believe that Jesus suffered under Pontius Pilate, you can freely and openly admit your failure, knowing that you receive not judgment, but grace.

If you don't believe that, then you can't do that. Pontius Pilate and his sentence on Jesus does not just free us from working to justify ourselves, it also frees us from the accusations of the enemy.

I've mentioned it several times recently that part of what we're in in this battle in the world is a battle of truth against lies, and that the voice of lies is the voice of Satan.

I've mentioned multiple times John 8, verse 44, which tells us this, he is a liar and the father of lies. Now, there's a lot of ways that Satan lies, and there's a lot of ways that he works his game.

One of them is this, he lies as an accuser. Revelation chapter 12 talks about this specifically. The narrator says, And I heard a loud voice in heaven saying, Now the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God and the authority of his Christ have come, for the accuser of our brothers has been thrown down, who accuses them day and night before our God.

[17 : 49] Satan wants to accuse you day and night. Satan wants to remind you over and over again of why you are guilty rather than innocent.

I've mentioned the last few weeks a couple things. First of all, there's a sense in which all of us have had conversations with the devil. And as one man has said, everybody has a rap sheet.

What does Satan do with that? Satan loves to remind you of your rap sheet over and over.

Satan loves to tell you that's the truest thing about you. Satan loves to remind you of what you did with that man or that woman.

Satan loves to remind you of those words that you can never take back. Satan will remind you of the times you chose to serve yourself rather than your spouse or your children.

[18 : 58] Satan will remind you of when you acted like Peter and you chose to fear man rather than God. Peter will remind you of the fight that you helped fan into flame rather than putting it out.

Satan will remind you of the years you wasted wandering aimlessly and the times that you abused your body. And we could go on.

Christian, what do you say to the devil when he comes knocking? You can say he suffered under Pontius Pilate.

In my place condemned, he stood. Hallelujah, what a savior. You can tell the truth.

The guilty verdict is no longer yours. Jesus was declared guilty even though innocent so that you could be declared innocent even though guilty.

[20 : 10] That is why it matters that Jesus stands before the court of Pontius Pilate. That is why Pilate gets to appear in the Apostles' Creed when Judas and Peter do not.

That is why Mark tells us this story here in this gospel that we would know the truth. We no longer need to justify ourselves and prove that we are innocent.

We have already been declared innocent in Christ. We no longer need to believe the lies that Satan tells us when he brings up the failures of our lives as accusations and tells us that is what is most true about you because he suffered under Pontius Pilate.

Jesus receiving the condemnation here sets us free. And we don't just see him setting us free. We are also given an illustration of it.

We see it in Barabbas. To make sure we don't miss the point, it is acted out right in front of us. I skipped over verses 6-11 and we are going to return to those now.

[21 : 30] What happens? Well, Pilate comes up with a great strategy. He knows that Jesus is innocent. And maybe he can come up with something that will solve his problems and the Jews' problems.

What about this guy named Barabbas? Verse 7. He was involved in some sort of insurrection. He is a murderer. How about we take that guy, set Jesus free?

And they say, No, we actually want the murderer to be the one who is released. We want the revolutionary. We want the person who has been a rebel.

And Mark shows us that to tell us this. Yes, Jesus is the innocent man who takes the guilty verdict. Who does he take that verdict for?

Jesus is the guilty man who takes the verdict for Barabbas-type people. Christian, in this passage, Barabbas is you.

[22 : 39] Jesus died for murderers and cosmic rebels. Jesus was not suffering for a good, upstanding citizen.

Jesus was suffering for people like this, the rebels in prison who had committed murder in the insurrection. not only do we say, in my place condemned he stood, we also say this, there I am in Barabbas the rebel.

That's the type of person I am. I am a Barabbas-type of person. And if you can't say that, if you must hold Barabbas at a distance, then I would suggest two things.

First, you do not understand the depth of your sin. And second, I would suggest that you do not fully understand the gospel.

Christian, Barabbas is you. Jesus did not come to die for the righteous, but for the unrighteous. Jesus did not come to die for mostly good people who need just a little bit of interior design on their lives.

[24 : 01] No, Jesus came to die for people who have rebelled against God as the creator and ruler of this world and deserve nothing less than eternal punishment.

And that is who he took the place for. An innocent man is put to death and a murderer goes free.

Brothers and sisters, that is the gospel. Remember the principle that Jesus gives us in Luke chapter 7 when he's talking to the Pharisees. He says, the one who's been forgiven much loves much, but the one who's been forgiven little loves little.

There I am in Barabbas, the rebel. And so we see in this passage the scandal of the gospel and the scandal is this, that Jesus dies for people like us.

Jesus dies for rebels and revolutionaries. In fact, that's what we're told in Romans chapter 5. For while we were still weak at the right time, Christ died for the ungodly.

[25 : 13] For one will scarcely die for a righteous person, though perhaps for a good person one would dare even to die. But God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

Christian, while you were Barabbas, Christ died for you. Why does it matter that Jesus had a trial?

Why does the Apostles' Creed tell us that he suffered under Pontius Pilate? For two reasons. One, to remind us, to show us that Jesus was found guilty so that we could be declared innocent.

Even though we are rebels like Barabbas. And so that's why we sing together, I had no hope that you would own a rebel to your will.

And if you had not loved me first, I would refuse you still. And I beheld God's love displayed. You suffered in my place. You bore the wrath reserved for me.

[26 : 16] Now all I know is grace. Let's pray. Our Father in heaven, we praise you and thank you that Jesus did stand in our place condemned.

Now we ask that you would remind us of that truth, that it would free us from our attempts to justify ourselves and it would free us from the lies and the attacks of our enemy.

We ask instead that you would give us great hope and joy and confidence in our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, as the one who saves us and redeems us and frees us. We ask these things in his mighty name.

Amen. I invite you to stand for our closing hymn. I once was lost in darkest night Yet thought I knew the way The sin that promised joy and life had led me to the grave I had no hope that you would own a rebel to your will And if you had not first I would refuse you still But as I ran

My help I'm raised And different to the cause You looked upon My helpless state And led me to the cross And I beheld God's love God's love displayed You suffered in my place You bore the wrath Reserved for me Now all I know is grace Hallelujah All I have is Christ Hallelujah Jesus is my life Now Lord

[28 : 53] I would be yours alone And live so might see The strength to follow your commands could never come from me Oh Father use my ransom life in any way you choose And let my song forever be My only boast is you true Hallelujah All I have is Christ Hallelujah Jesus is my life Hallelujah

All I have is Christ Hallelujah Jesus is my life We end our time together with a benediction and a benediction is simply a good word from God It's a word that's true in a world filled with words that are not true So here now God's good word over you from Hebrews chapter 13 Now may the God of peace who brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus the great shepherd of the sheep by the blood of the eternal covenant equip you with everything good that you may do his will working in us that which is pleasing in his sight through Jesus Christ to whom be glory forever and ever Amen Amen

Amen Amen Amen Amen Amen Amen