

Sermon outline and notes:

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8/22/2010

Mark 14:53-65; 15:1-15a “Guilty of Love in the First Degree”

Intro. This morning we move to the subject of the trial of Jesus. What do you think? Did Jesus receive a fair trial after He was arrested? Was Jesus guilty of the charges laid against Him? We are going to seek answers from this text of Scripture this morning.

Last Sunday I shared with the audience that our Lord Jesus surrendered to the will of God in Gethsemane, and then went out to meet Judas His betrayer. He did not flee into the darkness, but allowed Himself to be arrested by those who plotted His death. In the mean time, the High Priest had issued a call for an unusual night meeting of the Sanhedrin, the ruling council of the Jews. Once almost everyone had arrived at his residence, Jesus faced the first of two phases of His trial before the Council. Today, we will consider His trial before the religious leaders of Israel, and then we will take a look at the civil trial of Jesus before Pilate, the governor of Israel appointed by the Roman Empire.

So let’s consider together the trials of Jesus, and draw some lessons from it. First of all, we see here:

I. THE TRIAL BEFORE THE HEBREWS

This trial was a most unusual trial, for notice with me:

A. The Character of this Trial – In v.55 we read, “Now the chief priests and all the council sought testimony¹ against Jesus to put Him to death....” Here we see that instead of being impartial judges, they were seeking witnesses to lie if necessary to carry out their goal of putting Jesus to death. They were using their judicial and political power to carry out the murder of Jesus.

Why did they want to kill Jesus? Well as 15:10 indicates, they were envious of Jesus. Furthermore, Jesus had denounced them, and exposed them publicly for their hypocrisy, and so they were determined to kill him. As you can see, this trial was not an exercise of justice. There was no intention at all of giving Jesus a fair hearing in order that it might be discovered whether or not the charges against Him were just or unfounded. Hence, this is not a trial but a legal farce, a detestable plot. They devised it and they see to it that it is carried out. You see the hand of these leaders in every aspect of our Lord’s pathway to Calvary. And even when He hangs upon the cross, they are there to mock him (Mark 15:31).

So even before the trial began, we can see the character of this trial. Now let’s see:

B. The Charges Presented – As far as we know Jesus was not charged with anything at the time He was arrested, and at His trial, they were just grasping for any charge against Him that might stick. According to Jewish law, a charge had to be established in the mouth of at least two witnesses. So they brought in some men who were willing to fabricate lies and misquotations. Now let’s look at the charges presented. First, Mark tells us about:

¹ They had to seek testimony because they really hadn’t planned arresting Jesus & putting Him on trial until after Passover. So they had to seek testimony very quickly.

1. Various Unstated Charges - V.56 says, "For many bore false witness against Him, but their testimonies did not agree." How tragic that a group of religious leaders would encourage people to lie, especially during a holy season! Then, some came up with another charge. They said:

2. That He Threatened to Destroy the Holy Temple – The Jews took great pride in the Temple, & treated it as most holy. We read in vv.57-58, "Then some rose up and bore false witness against Him, saying, 'We heard Him say, "I will destroy this temple made with hands, and within three days I will build another made without hands."'" Their accusation in v.58 alludes to the veiled saying of Jesus reported in John 2:19, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up." Now what did these false witnesses do? In addition to misinterpreting they also misquote. They said that they had heard Jesus say that He Himself would destroy the temple. Jesus never said that. Furthermore, they said that Jesus had contrasted "the temple made by (human) hands" with another "not made by (human) hands." These modifiers cannot be found in the language used by Jesus. Their implication was that Jesus was a defamer of the temple, & threatened to destroy the temple, which was the very opposite of the truth. Besides, He was talking about the temple of His body, not the temple in Jerusalem.

Let it never surprise true Christians if they are slandered and misrepresented in this world. They must not expect to fare better than their Lord (Matthew 5:11).

The High Priest was getting upset at the direction of the trial at this point. The witnesses could not get their stories straight. And so he decided to deal with what they viewed as the most serious charge:

3. That He Claimed to Be the Son of God - In v.61 the High Priest asked Jesus point blank, "Are you the Christ, the Son of the Blessed?" To avoid taking God's name in vain, the Jews did not speak the name of God. That is why he said, "Son of the Blessed" instead of "Son of God." Now if Jesus answered with a "Yes," they would charge Him with blasphemy, saying that He claimed to be God.

This time, Jesus did not remain silent. He answered in v.62. He answered, "I am. And you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand² of the Power, and coming with the clouds of heaven." He alluded to the prophecy of Dan. 7:13. In doing so He Affirms that He is indeed the Messiah. The title "Son of man" is messianic according to Daniel's prophecy, for v.14 of that prophecy states, "And there was given him dominion, and glory, and a kingdom, that all people, nations, and languages, should serve him...." That is clearly a reference to the Messiah, who is to rule the earth. They were looking for a Messianic Deliverer now, but because of their unbelief, Jesus warned that He would only take rule of the earth after an interval of some time. Jesus was also in essence warning that some day, He would be *their* judge, for the Messiah is both King & Judge. Will they give heed to the warning? Next we see:

C. The Condemnation Agreed Upon – In v.63 Caiaphas acts as if he has been stricken with grief at the words of Jesus, when in fact he was filled with glee. Now he has the charge he has been looking for. In v.64 we see that the High Priest said, "You have heard the blasphemy! What do you think?" Then Mark reports, "And they all condemned Him to be deserving of death." If Jesus was indeed guilty of blasphemy, then such blasphemy was punishable by death according to the Law of Moses (Lev. 24:16).

However, was their verdict just? There were numerous problems with the trial of Jesus. In fact, it was downright illegal on several technical grounds. It was held at night. It was not held at

² "Sitting at the right hand" is not in Daniel's prophecy, so He may have also been alluding to **Psalm 110:1**, "The LORD said to my Lord, 'Sit at My right hand, Till I make Your enemies Your footstool.'"

the temple, but in the homes of the High Priests. The judges were not impartial, but the judges also acted as prosecutors against Jesus. The witnesses did not even agree. Furthermore, no one was allowed to testify on behalf of Jesus. If time had taken the time, the disciples could have brought in many witnesses for Jesus. Many lepers could have come forward to testify of what Jesus had done for them. Many blind men could say, "I once was blind, but now I see." A man known as Legion could have testified of how Jesus had set him free from the enslaving power of many demons. Lazarus & others could have testified that Jesus had even raised them from the dead! And many here today could stand and give testimony that Jesus is still alive today, for He has changed our lives. This was a travesty of justice. There was & is abundant evidence that Jesus is indeed the Son of God, & thus could not be guilty of blasphemy, or any other sin.

I want to tell you that Jesus was only guilty of one thing. He was only guilty of love in the first degree. He loved you and me so much, He was willing to go through the shame and humiliation of this trial. He was willing to offer no resistance, & even affirm the truth of His deity, though it meant a cross for Him the next day.

So the condemnation of the Council is followed by:

D. The Contempt of the Council – After they condemned Jesus to death, the members of the Sanhedrin showed their cruel, vengeful, sadistic character. In v.65 we read, "Then some began to spit on Him, and to blindfold Him, and to beat Him, and to say to Him, 'Prophecy!' And the officers struck Him with the palms of their hands." It seems likely that some members of the Council began to spit on Jesus. Then, they mocked His prophetic ministry by blindfolding Him, and beating Him and saying, "Prophecy." In other words, who hit you? Then the Jewish arresting officers joined in on the sport & began to strike Him with the palms of their hands. All this was part of the cup which Jesus drank for our sakes.

Too many are still spitting upon Jesus today. Too many are still mocking Jesus today. We see Jesus insulted as one utterly contemptible. Why was this? It was so that we, vile as we are, might have glory, honor and eternal life through faith in Christ's atonement.

Then, in the last phase of the Jewish trial of Jesus, we see:

E. The Conclusion of the Trial - This unanimous verdict was not as yet a formal sentence. Declaring a person guilty and sentencing him are two different matters. In order to create at least a semblance of legality, a short period of time must elapse between these two actions. According to existing regulations, that interval should have been at least a day. But as the Council saw it, such a prolonged delay would have been too dangerous. It could have given the friends of Jesus enough time to organize a revolt in His behalf. Now is the time to act. So early in the morning the Sanhedrin convened once more. V.1 says, "Immediately, in the morning, the chief priests held a consultation with the elders and scribes and the whole council..." The purpose of the "consultation" (*sumboulion*) was to formally sentence Jesus to death, which they did.

But it's not over yet. Since the Sanhedrin was well aware of the fact that they did not have the legal authority to carry out the death sentence, they bound Jesus, led him away, and delivered him to Pilate, the Governor. That's because Rome reserved the right to carry out the death penalty. So lets move on to:

II. THE TRIAL BEFORE THE HEATHEN

Once again, charges must be presented at a trial. So as the leaders of the Council stood before the Governor, the first thing I want us to consider is:

A. The Charges Brought Against Jesus – Even though the Sanhedrin had accused Jesus of blasphemy, they did not immediately press this charge. They felt that a strictly religious charge would make little impression on a pagan. So according to Luke’s account, they quickly advance three *political* charges: Jesus perverts the nation; He forbids us to pay tribute to Caesar; and He claims that he himself is king (Luke 23:2). In reality these three charges amounted to one: “This man is a revolutionary, a seditionist, a politically dangerous person.” Mark’s account focuses on the charge that Jesus claimed to be a king, and by implication, a rival to Caesar.

Pilate could not afford to allow such an alleged claim to kingship to remain unexamined. He had no desire to do the Jews a favor, but he was a self-seeker, wishing to stand well with the emperor. So in v.2 Pilate asked, “Are You the King of the Jews?” The pronoun “You” is emphatic in Greek.³ It is as if Pilate were saying, “*You* are the king of the Jews? How incredible!”

When someone presented a false charge, Christ remained silent. He thus fulfilled the prophecy of Isa. 53:7, “He opened not his mouth.” But the few times the charge presented was true, Jesus would answer to affirm truth. So in the last of v.2 Jesus said, “It is as you say.” From other gospel accounts we know that Pilate initially declared that Jesus was not guilty of the charge of being a rival king to Caesar, largely because He sure didn’t seem to be. This is why we read in v.3 of the many other charges brought against Jesus. Then, in vv.4-5 we read, “Then Pilate asked Him again, saying, ‘Do You answer nothing? See how many things they testify against You!’ But Jesus still answered nothing, so that Pilate marveled.”

Notice that “Pilate marveled.” He marveled because of the great contrast between Jesus and others. It is likely that no other accused man had been so silent before him. And what a contrast between the boisterous, troublesome, aggressive person as Jesus had been pictured by His accusers, and the quiet, dignified, serene individual who was now standing before him. And great is the contrast between the second Adam and the first! Our first ancestor Adam was guilty, and yet tried to excuse himself. The second Adam was guiltless, and yet made no defense at all, because He was determined to die for our sins.

Pilate had a dilemma on his hands. He knew that Jesus was not guilty, but it would be politically difficult for him to go against the leaders of the nations. So he came up with a plan. That leads to:

B. The Choice Presented to the Jews – The background is given in v.6, “Now at the feast he was accustomed to releasing one prisoner to them, whomever they requested.” The idea of setting a prisoner free would seem to be most appropriate in connection with Passover, the commemoration of the deliverance of the Israelites from the house of bondage. V.8 says, “Then the multitude, crying aloud, began to ask him to do just as he had always done for them.” Pilate at this particular moment was most willing to release a prisoner; for, as he saw it, this was a way to get Jesus off his hands. So note:

1. The Presentation of the Choice – In vv.7-11 we see that Pilate offered them Jesus or Barabbas. V.7 says of Barabbas, “And there was one named Barabbas, who was chained with his fellow rebels; they had committed murder in the rebellion.” He belonged to a group of men

³ It is not only spelled out as a separate pronoun, but it heads the question.

committed to do everything they could to resist Rome, even murder. Barabbas was considered a hero to many of the Jews, like Osama Bin Laden is considered a hero to many Muslims. You can tell a lot about a person by asking who their heroes are.

As v.10 indicates, Pilate knew the real reason these leaders were requesting that Jesus be executed. They were envious of His popularity with the people. And since many hoped that Jesus would be their king, he assumed that they would choose Jesus. So notice v.9, "Do you want me to release to you the King of the Jews?" It is clear that his question is really a suggestion that the Jews should ask for the release of Jesus, for He is their King! Surely, now Pilate is going to have his way. Why, even the leaders cannot with any consistency ask for the release of a condemned, violent, murderous insurrectionist, since just a little while ago they have accused Jesus of insurrection. And there was absolutely not even a charge that Jesus had killed anyone. And as to the crowds, Pilate "knows" how they will vote! And then, as Matt. 27:19 relates, there was a sudden interpretation. A message arrives from the governor's wife. While Pilate was being kept busy with the message from his wife, the chief priests took full advantage of the situation. They worked the crowd. They probably intimidated those who at first were inclined to choose Jesus. Next we see:

2. The Pick of the People - Through the instigation & pressure of the chief priests (v.11), the people reacted angrily to Pilate's assumption that they regarded Jesus as their king. More shouted for the release of Barabbas than for the release of Jesus.

Then in v.12 Pilate asked, "What then do you want me to do with Him whom you call the King of the Jews?" Most in the crowd cried out, "Crucify Him!" And by the end of v.14 the crowd has become a riotous mob, a screaming rabble. Notice that "they cried out all the more, 'Crucify Him!'" No emotionally-charged mob is prepared to reason or to use its head or use good judgment. All they can do is cry out, "Crucify him."

Pilate stresses and constantly reiterates in v.14 the truth that in Jesus there is no cause of indictment. Nevertheless, in a few more moments this same Pilate is going to succumb to the persistent clamor of the Jews, and is going to sentence Jesus to die the accursed death of crucifixion. Pilate is a typical example of a cheap politician who is seeking to compromise and to please all sides. What turned the scales so that Pilate finally decided to yield to the mob's clamor was the frightening and diabolical outcry found in John's gospel, "If you release this man (Jesus), you are no friend of the emperor. Whoever makes himself king rebels against the emperor" (19:12). The people's angry statement implied, "We will lodge a complaint against you. We will tell the emperor that you condone high treason against the government. We will accuse you of 'softness toward rebels.'"

Barabbas illustrates the truth of the substitutionary death of Jesus. Barabbas deserved to die. There was a cross waiting for him. He should have died. But at the Passover, Jesus took his place as the Lamb of God! Jesus died on the cross made for Barabbas. And Barabbas went out a free man. The guilty is set free and the innocent is put to death. The great sinner is delivered, and the sinless one remains bound.

We are all by nature in the position of Barabbas. We are guilty, wicked and worthy of condemnation, but "when we were without hope," Christ the innocent died for the ungodly. Our plea must always be, not that we deserve to be acquitted, but that Christ has died for us. And so all you have to do to be set free from the penalty of your sin is to believe in Jesus who died in your place.

So far we have seen the trial of Jesus before the Hebrews. Then we discussed the trial before the heathen. Now let's close by considering:

III. THE TRIAL OF EACH PERSON

Jesus is no longer on trial. Though condemned to death as a common criminal, Romans 1:4 says that He was “declared to be the Son of God with power according to the Spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead.” Likewise, Acts 17:31 says that God “has appointed a day on which He will judge the world in righteousness by the Man whom He has ordained. He has given assurance of this to all by raising Him from the dead.” So Jesus is your judge. The day is coming when *you* will be on trial. The most important question is, “What will you do with Jesus?” Will you reject Him as the Council & the people did? Will you try to avoid making a decision, as Pilate did? Or will you trust in Him as Savior & Lord? Consider with me two main points:

A. It’s a Choice You Cannot Avoid -

1. Illustrated in Pilate - Pilate had tried again and again to bypass Jesus. He discovered that this was entirely impossible. Pilate thought he could avoid making a decision by sending Jesus to Herod, the ruler of Galilee (Luke 23:6-12), but Herod only sent Jesus back after mocking Him. He tried to get the crowd to take Jesus off his hands. That plan failed also. So Pilate was forced to take a stand, and he took the wrong stand even though he repeatedly stated that he found no fault in Jesus. His problem was that he lacked the courage to stand for what he believed. Pilate did not ask, “Is it right?” Instead, he asked, “Is it safe? Is it popular?”

2. Expressed by Jesus - The impossibility of evading Jesus is by Himself expressed in these words, “He who is not with me is against me” (Matt. 12:30). You can’t avoid Jesus. In the great Day of Judgment there will just be two groups, not three. There will be no middle ground.

B. What Will Be Your Choice? - Don’t be like Pilate, this morning. Make the right choice. Believe in Jesus, and confess Him as Savior and Lord! The service of sin and the service of God are continually before us. The friendship of the world and the friendship of Christ are continually pressed upon our notice. Are we making the right choice?

Furthermore, Jesus is too important a person to ignore. Have you examined the claims of Jesus Christ? What is your verdict concerning him? Do you believe that He is the Son of God, the Savior of the world? Or do you believe the claim of some that He was just a religious impostor? But too many do not give Jesus a fair hearing. Make the right choice this morning!

Sources: William Hendriksen, *New Testament Commentary: Mark* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1975); J. Vernon McGee, *Thru The Bible*, Vol. 4 (Pasadena, CA: Thru The Bible Radio, 1983); Larry Pierce, *Online Bible* [CD-ROM] (Ontario: Timnathserah Inc., 1996); J.C. Ryle (1816-1900), *Mark: Expository Thoughts on the Gospels* (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 1993); Dr. Jerry Vines (notes from sermon tape of 6/3/84); Warren W. Wiersbe, *Be Diligent: Mark* (Wheaton: Victor Books, 1987). Other sources listed in the footnotes. Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are from *The New King James Version* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1982).

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