

Who's on Trial?

Luke Series #59

Luke 22:63-23:25

David Sunday

April 6, 2014

Let's bow to the authority of God's Word and hear it proclaimed from the great passion narrative of Luke. I'm going to be preaching from Luke 22:63-23:25. Let's pray for God's help as we turn to the Word together.

Oh Father—our holy God—we pray that what we know not, You would teach us; what we have not, You would give us; and what we are not yet—the image of Christ—You would make us. Conform us to the One Whom we behold in this passage. Open our eyes we pray, that we might see wonderful things in Your Word. We ask this in Jesus' name. Amen.

The setting of this passage is clear. Jesus has been up all night. He prayed with such agony in the Garden of Gethsemane that His sweat was like drops of blood (Luke 22:44). Now it is early in the morning, the dawn of the darkest day in the history of the world—April 3, A.D. 33—Good Friday. Jesus is being dragged from place to place:

- to the high priest's house (vs. 54)
- to the hastily called Sanhedrin council (vs. 66)
- to the Roman governor Pilate (Luke 23:1)
- to King Herod (vs. 6)
- back to Pilate (vs. 11)

The crowds demand that a criminal guilty of murder and insurrection against the Roman government be released and Jesus be crucified (vss. 18-25). Jesus—the innocent One—is condemned to die on a cruel cross.

One of the pillars of our American justice system is that the defendant is presumed innocent until proven guilty. That was not so with Jesus. Over and over again in this passage, Jesus is pronounced innocent but He is condemned as guilty.

Acts 8:33 says, *“In his humiliation justice was denied him...”* The whole event was a shameful farce. One commentator summarized it like this, “It was hurried through in indecent haste. It was held at the wrong time. It was unlawfully convened. There was no attempt at hearing evidence. The accused was not even allowed to state a case. Everything about it that could have been wrong was wrong.”

It raises the question, “Who’s really on trial here?” Is Jesus the One Who is on trial or is there something more going on underneath the surface of this narrative?

I heard a story about a man who was going to visit Paris. A friend of his said, “You have to go to that famous art museum: The Louvre. When you go, you have to see the Mona Lisa.” So the man went. He stood before DaVinci’s masterpiece and looked at the painting for some time. Finally he exclaimed, “I don’t like it!”

Nearby stood a guard who was watching over the exhibit. He replied, “Sir, these paintings are no longer being judged. The viewers are.”

Who is really being judged in the kangaroo court that puts Jesus on trial? Is Jesus being judged? Or are those who are passing judgment on Jesus being judged in their very act of judging Him? Who is on trial in this narrative?

What about today in the 21st century—who is really on the judgment seat? Is it up to us to decide what we think about Jesus? Or is it up to Him ultimately to decide what will become of us? Who is on trial?

Let’s look at the evidence from this narrative. We’re going to explore three points together:

1. The charges brought against Christ
2. The character of Christ’s Prosecutors (those who are accusing and charging Him)
3. The claims that are made about Jesus Christ in this passage

1. The Charges Brought against Christ

The charges brought against Christ are very simple and clear:

In verses 67-71, the people charge Jesus with **blasphemy**. In verse 70 they ask Jesus, *“Are you the Son of God, then?”* He cannot deny it even though they don’t understand what is really entailed in the phrase “the Son of God.” The verse continues as Jesus says, *“You say that I am.”* So in verse 71 they say, *“What further testimony do we need? We have heard it ourselves from his own lips.”*

In Luke 23:1-5, Jesus is brought before the Roman governor Pilate who doesn't care about religious charges like blasphemy but he does care about loyalty to the Roman government. So the people charge Jesus with **treason**. In verse two they say, *"We found this man misleading our nation."* In verse five they say, *"He stirs up the people, teaching throughout all Judea, from Galilee even to this place."* Back in verse two they also say, "...[He is] *forbidding us to give tribute to Caesar,*" which is patently false. Remember Jesus said in Luke 20:25, *"Then render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's..."* But they claim, "He's telling us not to pay our taxes."

In verse two they say, "[He is] *saying that he himself is Christ, a king.*" They charge Him with being the **Messiah**. Now if it sticks, this is something that could get Him into a lot of trouble with the Roman government because when first century Jews thought about the Messiah, they thought of a King who was going to come, overthrow Roman rule and restore the kingdom to Israel. The accusers are hoping Pilate will get that idea and think Jesus wants to overthrow Caesar.

What's interesting about these charges is how Jesus responds to them. Isaiah 53:7 prophesied that He would be *"...like a lamb that is led to the slaughter, and like a sheep that before its shearers is silent."*

Jesus is virtually silent. He only acknowledges Who He is. In verse 70 He says, *"You say that I am [the Son of God]."* Luke 23:3 says, *"And Pilate asked Him, 'Are you the King of the Jews?' And he answered him, 'You have said so.'"* But Jesus mounts no defense of Himself. He allows Himself to suffer this injustice of a trial and offers no protest. He doesn't stand up in His own defense. He doesn't make a case for why these charges are not true. Why is that?

It's because of our question, "Who's on trial?" Blasphemy and treason—who is guilty of these sins? Are these not the original sins of mankind that go all the way back to the Garden of Eden? Remember when Satan came in the form of a serpent in Genesis 3? With what was he tempting Adam and Eve? He told them, "You shall be like God. You could take the place of God" (Genesis 3:5). That is blasphemy.

In Genesis 3:1 Satan said, *"Did God actually say, 'You shall not eat of any tree in the garden'?"* He was tempting them to doubt and disobey the authority of God's Word and revolt against the authority of their Creator.

Blasphemy and treason are the original sins of mankind. Jesus is being charged with these sins, not because He was guilty of them but because we are. He

was standing in our place, assuming responsibility for our guilt and shame. Is that not what we say when we sing:

Bearing shame and scoffing rude,
in my place condemned He stood;
sealed my pardon with His blood.
Hallelujah! What a Savior!

("Hallelujah! What a Savior" by Philip P. Bliss)

I'm the one who is guilty of those sins. Jesus is standing in my place as my substitute.

2. The Character of Christ's Prosecutors

That brings us to the second main point. Who's on trial? Let's look at the character of Christ's prosecutors. We see their character unfolding with many different layers in our passage.

In verses 63-65 there is **brutal hostility** on display. Verse 63 says, "*Now the men who were holding Jesus in custody were mocking him as they beat him.*" Think of how horrified we were to hear of the atrocities in the Abu Ghraib prison in Iraq. Think of how horrified we are to hear of situations of police brutality when the police have someone in their custody who is totally at their mercy and then beaten and brutalized by them. That's what is being done here to our Savior—they are beating Him with their fists. They are pummeling Him. It could have gone on all night long.

Then they add mental and verbal abuse as they blindfold Jesus and play a game of blind man's bluff, hitting Him with their fists and saying, "You say You're a prophet? Prophecy to us, oh Christ! Who just hit You?" This goes on for a while. It is an expression of the hostility, anger and rage in their hearts toward the Lord Christ.

Sadly, that same attitude is on display in our culture today. In his book, The God Delusion, Richard Dawkins says that to believe in any deity is to commit intellectual high treason, but to believe in the God of the Bible is the worst. Dawkins says that God is "a petty, unjust, unforgiving control-freak; a vindictive, bloodthirsty ethnic cleanser; a misogynistic, homophobic, racist, infanticidal, genocidal, filicidal, pestilential, megalomaniacal [that's a hard word], sadomasochistic, capriciously malevolent bully." That's the God of the Bible in Dawkins' mind.

One of our popular late night television entertainers just recently called God “a psychotic mass murderer.” This reveals the hostility and rage that often lurks in human hearts against God and His Christ.

Moving on to verses 66-71 we see another characteristic in the religious leaders and that is **stubborn prejudice**. In verses 66-67, Jesus won't even go through the charade of answering their questions. Look at verse 67, *“But he said to them, ‘If I tell you, you will not believe, and if I ask you, you will not answer.’”*

Their minds are already made up. For the religious leaders, Jesus is a threat to their traditions and positions. They don't even bother to ask if what Jesus is claiming is true because believing in Jesus is not an option for them. Believing in Jesus would mean that they have to repent of what they think, of their pride and their authority.

That's the problem with Jesus. Jesus doesn't come to us on our terms. He doesn't come to advance our agenda. We can't live with Jesus unless we're willing to change and submit to His authority. Sometimes we try to ignore Him, dismiss Him or silence Him, even if we have to do it in the middle of the night.

What's shocking about the stubborn prejudice of these religious leaders is that religion can actually become a convenient way to avoid dealing with Jesus. We can hide behind religion.

Then in Luke 23:1-7, there is the characteristic of **passive avoidance**. We see this in Pilate. He could have ended the matter in verse four, *“Then Pilate said to the chief priests and the crowds, ‘I find no guilt in this man.’”* Okay Pilate, then let Him go! It would be the end of the story. But Pilate is losing control. Things are falling apart outside. There's a mob on his hands. He is under immense pressure. His future is on the line. His political legacy is up for grabs. It is going to cost Pilate something to stand up for Jesus, just like it's going to cost us.

You cannot be with Jesus and against Him at the same time. There's no neutrality or middle of the road. Pilate knows that Jesus is not guilty but it's going to cost him too much to stand up for Jesus. So he passes the buck. We often do so as well. When we realize what it will cost to stand for Jesus we passively avoid Him.

In verse six, Pilate hears that Jesus is a Galilean and he thinks, “Oh yes, Herod can help me out here. That's Herod's jurisdiction.” So he sends Jesus over to Herod.

That brings us to a fourth characteristic on display here in the prosecutors of Christ: **mild curiosity**, or a desire for entertainment. It's interesting to see what Herod

was looking for when you read verse eight, *“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.”*

This man—Herod—had John the Baptist beheaded. He isn't interested in considering Jesus' claims. He doesn't want to submit to Jesus' authority. In fact, there's a good chance that Herod was a little afraid of Jesus here, thinking that maybe he was John the Baptist come back from the dead. But really, he's just a little interested to see if Jesus can perform some sign or do some special trick. He just wants a little bit of entertainment from Jesus. He's mildly curious but only on a superficial level.

Notice how Jesus responds to this mild curiosity and entertainment seeking. Verse nine says, *“So he [Herod] questioned him [Jesus] at some length, but he [Jesus] made no answer.”* Jesus doesn't give Herod one bit of entertainment. He doesn't give Herod what he wants.

Many people today are interested in Jesus but for all the wrong reasons. Pastor Darryl Dash says, “As entertainment, Jesus is profoundly disappointing. If you're looking for a Savior, God in the flesh, Jesus is all of that. But He does not entertain.” If you're looking for entertainment, Jesus didn't come to do that.

This curiosity quickly sours into contempt. Verses 10-11 say, *“The chief priests and the scribes stood by, vehemently accusing him. And Herod with his soldiers treated him with contempt and mocked him.”* We see more contempt and more mocking. How much longer can this go on? It continues, *“Then, arraying him in splendid clothing, he sent him back to Pilate.”* Herod dressed Jesus up like a king just to make fun of Him. A common enemy often makes strange bedfellows. We see that in verse 12, *“And Herod and Pilate became friends with each other that very day, for before this they had been at enmity with each other.”* Mild curiosity turns into contempt.

Finally, the last characteristic that's on display in this narrative is **going with the flow**. We see that in verses 13-25. By the way, the easiest response to Jesus is just to go with the flow. If Jesus is popular then we say, “Yes, we like Him.” But if He's not we say, “Let's move in another direction.”

Pilate has already said in verse four, *“I find no guilt in this man.”* In verses 13-25, Pilate says the same thing three more times. “He is innocent.” Look at verse 14,

"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." Jesus is innocent.

We see it again in verse 15, *"Neither did Herod, for he sent him back to us. Look, nothing deserving death has been done by him."*

Then we see it once more in verse 22, *"A third time he said to them, 'Why, what evil has he done? I have found in him no guilt deserving death...'"* Pilate said repeatedly, "He's innocent!" But outside the crowds are being swept into a fury.

Look at verse 18, *"But they all cried out together..."* This isn't just the religious leaders and high priests anymore. There are teenagers crying out, "Crucify Him!" Innocent bystanders are being swept into it. They didn't even plan to be out there this day. Suddenly they're saying, "Crucify Him!" Women and grandparents are shouting, "Crucify Him!" The crowd is being set on fire by hell itself and all reason is being lost and thrown away.

Look at what verse 23 says: *"But they were urgent, demanding with loud cries that he should be crucified. And their voices prevailed."* Pilate gave in to them. He went with the flow just as so many people in that crowd were just going with the flow.

It forces some serious questions: "Do my beliefs about Jesus change depending on the prevailing winds? Do my convictions about God's Word morph into what is now culturally acceptable? Depending on the pressure I face at work, in school or in my family to change my views, am I ready to stand for Jesus even if the cost is great? Do I have sufficient courage to take my stand when it means going against the flow?"

Who's on trial here? As we look at all the people surrounding this trial narrative and the attitudes of their hearts, we see that our judgments about Jesus reveal a lot more about what is going on inside of us than they do about Him. Our response to Him reveals what is in our character. Maybe there is hostility in our hearts. Maybe it is just stubborn prejudice that won't really grapple with the truth as it is presented to us by God. Maybe there is passive avoidance. We just don't want to have to take a stand.

Maybe there is a curiosity for entertainment or a desire for some religious titillation. We want to get a good feeling or have a good worship experience. It's all about me, me, me, me, me. Maybe there is cowardice. "As long as it won't make me unpopular, then I'll stand for Jesus." Who's on trial? We are on trial.

3. The Claims that Are Made about Jesus Christ

That brings us to the third main point: the claims that are made about Christ in this passage. I want to focus most of all on what Jesus says in Luke 22:69, *“But from now on the Son of Man shall be seated at the right hand of the power of God.”*

When you hear “the Son of Man,” you should think of Daniel 7:13-14 where the prophet Daniel says:

*I saw in the night visions,
and behold, with the clouds of heaven
there came one like a son of man,
and he came to the Ancient of Days
and was presented before him.
And to him was given dominion
and glory and a kingdom,
that all peoples, nations, and languages
should serve him;
his dominion is an everlasting dominion,
which shall not pass away,
and his kingdom one
that shall not be destroyed.*

In verse 69 Jesus is saying, “Look at Me and you’re looking at the **Son of Man**. I am the One Who will sit at the right hand of the Father in the place of divine power and authority. I will rule the universe and judge all nations. Even as I’m going to the cross to die a cruel death, I am confident that My Father is going to raise Me from the dead and I’m going to be Lord of all. All authority is Mine.”

I love the words in verse 69, *“But from now on...”* This is true. Jesus is saying here in Luke, “It has already begun. I am sitting on the throne of judgment. You think I’m on trial before you but one day you will see that you’re the ones who are on trial before Me. You think you are judging Me but in the end, I will be the One Who is judging you. From now on, the Son of Man shall be seated at the right hand of the power of God.”

If that’s true then the real question that matters desperately is not, “What do you think about Jesus? Give your opinion.” The question that really matters is, “What does Jesus think about you?” He’s the Son of Man. He will judge the living and the dead. What does He think? What does He say about me?

We think we can put God on trial but the trial of Jesus proves that it's really the other way around. We need to be reminded of that in our narcissistic, self-absorbed culture. We think so highly of our own opinions about God and the judgments we make.

I'm going to give you an example of this. This is from a contemporary evangelical journal called The Journal of Student Ministries. A few years ago, a youth leader whose name would be recognizable to many of us wrote that he could not accept biblical teaching about the sovereignty of God, about God's wrath against sin and about how it's necessary to confess Jesus as Lord and Savior in order to avoid eternal judgment in hell. He said in this journal:

I refuse to believe any of that... If those things are true, then God might as well send me to Hell. For better or worse, I simply am not interested in any God but a completely good, entirely loving and perfectly forgiving One.

Notice the implication here is, "I'm the one who gets to define what good, loving and forgiving looks like." He goes on:

Such a God may not exist, but I will die seeking such a God, and I will pledge my allegiance to no other possibility because, quite frankly, anything less is not worthy of my worship.

Please, don't get me wrong. I'm well aware that I don't get to decide who God is. What I do get to decide, however, is to whom I pledge my allegiance. I am a free agent, after all, and I have standards for my God, the first of which is this: I will not worship any God who is not at least as compassionate as I am.

(*"The Limits of God's Grace"* as published in The Journal of Student Ministries)

Do you hear what is being said in those arrogant words? "I am the one who stands in judgment. I am the one who sets the standards."

Jesus is making clear in this passage—even as He's being tried by sinful men—that we're not the ones who set the standards God has to meet. We have no right to sit in judgment over God. He is the Son of Man and He's going to sit in judgment over us. That's His right and prerogative.

As we read the whole story, we see there is no god as **compassionate** as this God, the Father Who gives His only Son to make sinful wretches His treasure. He gives His Son for sinful wretches like us who hate Him, despise Him, mock Him, beat Him and crucify Him. How great is this love! How great is this compassion! But let us never forget that He is the Son of Man. He has authority to judge.

As we look to the rest of the passage, we see that He is the **Son of God**. We see that in verses 70-71. We see in Luke 23:3 that He is Christ the King of the Jews Who reigns forever.

We also see repeatedly that He is **an innocent Man**. He is innocent but He's going to die in the place of a condemned criminal.

Those are the four claims about Christ that stand out in this passage. So who is on trial in this narrative? We are. Every single one of us—humanity—is on trial. We read this story and we see a striking illustration of what Bernard of Clairvaux was thinking when he wrote the hymn “O Sacred Head, Now Wounded.” He said:

What Thou, my Lord, hast suffered, was all for sinners' gain;
Mine, mine was the transgression, but Thine the deadly pain.
Lo, here I fall, my Savior! 'Tis I deserve Thy place;
Look on me with Thy favor, vouchsafe to me Thy grace.

(“O Sacred Head, Now Wounded” by Bernard of Clairvaux)

I'm the one who deserves to be condemned. I'm the one who deserves to die.
I'm the one who is under judgment but You, Lord Jesus, stand in my place.

One of the things I love about the Bible is how God gives us so many illustrations of the truth right here in the narrative of the Scriptures. We have one of the most striking illustrations of the truth of this passage in the man Barabbas—the murderer and insurrectionist.

I want you to imagine that you're Barabbas. You're sitting inside your dark, dank and dirty prison cell. It's April 3, 33 A.D. You've been listening to the crowds milling around outside. You're noticing that it's noisier today than it usually is out there. You can hear a lot of commotion. You're watching and waiting. You've been here on death row for a while. Soon the guards are going to come to your prison cell. They're going to take you up the hill to Golgotha—the place of the skull—where you'll be crucified for crimes you have done. You will die the death you deserve to die.

But on this morning, you hear the crowds outside and suddenly realize, “They’re shouting my name. I can’t make out everything they’re saying but I keep hearing, ‘Barabbas! Barabbas!’” Then you hear these words, “Crucify Him! Crucify Him!” repeatedly and think, “Surely my time has come. Surely this is the day that justice will be served.” Then you hear the footsteps outside your cell. You hear the guard’s keys and then there they are at your prison door. They open your cell. The guard stares right into your eyes and you will never forget the words he says next, “Barabbas, you can go home now. You’re a free man. They’re crucifying Jesus of Nazareth instead of you.”

We know nothing about Barabbas’ future faith or eternal destiny. We don’t know anything more about Barabbas and that’s not what’s important for us to know today. What is important for us to know is that each one of us experience by faith what Barabbas experienced in space and time on April 3, 33 A.D.

Each of us is Barabbas. We are the guilty. We are the condemned. We deserve to die. I am Barabbas. You are Barabbas. But there is an innocent One—the holy Son of God, the Son of Man—Who is standing in the place of every one who will recognize his or her guilt. He stands in the place of every one who will say to God, “I am the one who deserves to be condemned. But thank You for giving me a Savior—Your Son—Who took my sins upon Himself so that I could be freed from their penalty forever. Thank You Jesus for paying my debt and dying my death so that I might live with You and follow You forever.”

I’m going to give you the opportunity now to pray like that. Let’s pray to our Father in Heaven Whose love for sinners is so great that He did not spare His only Son but gave Him up for us all. Would you pray this prayer of repentance?

New Covenant Bible Church

4N780 Randall Road, St. Charles, IL 60175

(630) 584-2611 ♦ www.newcbc.org

All Scriptures quoted directly from the English Standard Version unless otherwise noted.

Text provided by sermontranscribers.net ♦ emily@sermontranscribers.net