

Jesus Trial

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- [0 : 0 0] Well, good morning everyone. It's great to see you, NBC guys. I've counted the chocolates in my room when you're in the office, so behave yourselves. It's great to see you. You guys are the hardcore. I came in here this morning and I think there were six people sitting in the middle.
- So you guys are the hardcore. You woke up this morning, you looked at the white stuff falling from the sky and you chuckled. You went, shno, shmo, I'm getting to church. And it's great to see you. Thanks so much for coming.
- And I hope you've been blessed just by being here today. I've just had such a wonderful time just singing God's praises and hearing his words, praying to him.
- It's just been such a special time and a climax now that we get to hear from this God who loves us, who sent his son for us and who speaks. And we believe that truth as we come to his inspired word this morning.
- So why don't you turn back to Luke 22, the passage that David read for us. And let's pray just before we get stuck into this this morning. So, Father, we thank you for our time together this morning and we pray that you would be with us now as we turn to your word.
- [1 : 0 7] Lord, we're so aware that we live in a world where there are so many voices that are speaking to us, that are competing for our attentions, who are competing for our hearts, who are competing for our minds.
- But, Father, we want to still ourselves today and ask that it would be your voice that speaks loudest to our hearts and our minds. Father, you are our creator and we need to hear your voice.
- So, Father, we pray that you would speak to us this morning. Help us listen and help us heed. And we ask this in Jesus' name. Amen. Well, to get us thinking this morning, let me tell you a story about an American man called George Wilson.
- So it's 1829. George Wilson and his friend James Porter are arrested in America for trying to kill a government employee.
- The case comes to trial in May 1830. And both men are convicted of six charges, the most serious of which is the attempted murder on that employee.
- [2 : 1 3] Both men are sentenced to death by hanging. So Wilson's mate, James Porter, he was executed on the 2nd of July, 1830.
- And a little while later, it comes to George Wilson's turn. Now, picture the scene. He's preparing himself for the gallows. When all of a sudden, a message comes for his executioners.
- A message comes for his executioners. Stop the proceedings. Stop the proceedings. Stop. Why would we stop? Because we've got a message for you.
- What's the message? This man, he's innocent. He's what? He's innocent. Says who? Says the guy on high. So says the President of the United States.

You see, Andrew Jackson, who at the time was the President of the United States, had heard about George Wilson's case. And had got involved in George Wilson's case. And had found, even though he was guilty of a lot of the other stuff that he was accused of doing, actually he was innocent of the crime that would see him executed.

[3 : 19] Here's the order from on high about George Wilson. The declaration comes on him. That he is innocent. This morning's all about a declaration from on high about a man who is innocent.

See, Luke, as he writes this here, he is writing to document history. And this stuff happened. This is what he's doing. Luke writes to document history. But let's remember, this is God's Word.

This is God's voice that we're hearing this morning. This is the declaration from on high concerning God's Son, Jesus Christ, that he is innocent.

So Luke has written, Luke has written for his generation of Christians. His generation of non-Christians. Luke has written for every generation since then, documented it, proclaiming it the world over, that Jesus is innocent.

And he's not just innocent of some of the crimes, some of the accusations that are against him. Actually, Jesus Christ is innocent of all the accusations that are facing him.

[4 : 28] He's innocent of them all. He's innocent. Here's a question you might be asking in your mind as you hear me say that. In your mind as you hear these verses read. And it's the question that I asked myself before I was a Christian when I read these verses.

And the question is this one. So what? So what? Maybe you used to watch Little Britain. Or that character in Little Britain.

What did she always used to say? I'm aboved. I'm aboved. So here's the question. Why should you be aboved that Jesus is innocent? Because if you think about it, this is just life, is it not?

I mean, bad stuff happens to good people all the time. You just don't need to turn on the news to see that. Bad stuff happens to good people all the time. Good guys do not always win. Justice does not always get served.

So why is Jesus any different from any other person that's ever lived? Is he not just an example of the fact that good guys, more often than not, they finish last?

[5 : 33] I mean, so what? Well, that's a great question to be asking. Actually, it's a question. Maybe you have been a Christian for many, many years. But it's a question I want you to bring your attention to this morning.

So what? Why does it matter? Well, here's what I want to say to you at the outset of this morning. Two things. A, firstly, sorry, we're not doing numbers. We're not doing letters, rather, numbers.

This is the question we're going to try and answer this morning. So what? Why does it matter? But here's the second thing I want to say at the outset. That actually grasping that Jesus is innocent is not just to establish a fact in our minds.

Actually, to understand that Jesus is innocent and why that matters, friends, that is both life transforming and life giving.

So keep that question in your minds. Okay, so what? Here we are. The early hours of Good Friday, AD 33. Jesus, remember the one who is in total control.

[6 : 30] This is where we've got to in the story. The one who's got total knowledge of all things. He's God in the flesh. He's allowed himself to be betrayed by one of his closest friends.

And now at long last, the religious leaders, they've got Jesus in their hands. This man who they've wanted to get rid of for so long is in their control.

And in their minds, the beauty of it was that it was so easy in the end. Jesus didn't even put up a fight when they went to capture him in the Garden of Gethsemane.

He didn't even put up a fight. And what's more, these 12 merry men, or 11 of them at this point, 11 merry men, like woodlice when you lift up a stone, they just disappeared everywhere.

And to cap it off, Peter. I mean, Peter, the guy's name means rock. And he went to jelly when it came to the time for him to nail his colors to the mass as to his association with Jesus.

[7 : 34] Three times. What does he say? First time, I don't know this man. Second time, I don't know this man. Third, I do not know this man. And the cock crows. And that poignant moment that we get where Jesus looks at Peter.

Here is Jesus' trial this morning. Welcome to Good Friday, AD 33.

There's four scenes to Jesus' trial. And this morning, we're just going to try and rattle through these four scenes. And then we're going to, at the end, try and establish, come back to that question, so what?

Now, Luke tells us the timings of this trial. And if you've got your Bible there, follow with me, because he wants us to see how quickly this all happens. The speed at which these events take place.

If you've got it there, verse 66. This is where we pick it up this morning. At daybreak. So roughly six in the morning, on Good Friday, Jesus' trial begins.

[8 : 39] Fast forward to chapter 23, verse 44. At noon. So roughly midday, Jesus is on the cross.

See how quickly that's happened? Just like that. And immediately, I think, we're to smell something fishy as the readers. There's something that's not right here about this trial.

Now, I don't know if you found yourself this week. I'm sure you have. Following the developments between Russia and the UK. I'm praying that that is peaceful. Well, here is what Jeremy Corbyn, writing in The Guardian, said this week.

Leader of the Labour Party. Warns Parliament, and I quote, Not to rush ahead of the evidence. Sensible advice. Not to rush ahead of the evidence.

Well, clearly, nobody told the people that Jesus has trialed that. How quickly all this happens. Six o'clock in the morning, the trial begins. Middays on the cross.

[9 : 43] Just like that. Here's scene number one, verses 66 to 71 of chapter 22. There's a council longing that he would go.

Now, remember, the timing's in your head. It's roughly six in the morning. Word is quickly spread around the Jewish religious leadership. What's the word? The word is bingo. That we've got him.

We've got him in our control. What they don't want is a scene. So what they need to do is deal with Jesus nice and early, so that when all the Passover pilgrims have gathered in Jerusalem for this festival, before they wake, the jobs are good and it's done.

Because as soon as people wake, pile into the city, this whole thing just becomes so much more complicated. But here's the thing. They've got one big problem to overcome.

And that's the Romans. Remember, Rome is in control at this point. The Jews, they don't have power to crucify anybody. The Romans kept that bad boy for themselves.

[10 : 48] And so if these guys, Jewish religious leadership, if they want Rome to play ball, then they need to go to Pilate with something concrete. Because Pilate's not going to entertain any old nonsense.

What they need, and this is important to see, is that they need Jesus to appear to be either a threat to the peace or a threat to Rome.

Now this explains why they do what they do. Look, verse 67. If you are a Messiah, they said, tell us. Verse 17. They all asked, are you the son of God?

You see what they're doing? Trying to get it out of Jesus. How does Jesus respond? Verse 67. Verse 67. If I told you, you wouldn't believe me.

If I asked you, you wouldn't tell me. In other words, I know that your hearts and your minds are made up. But know this, that nothing that you can say or do can detract from who I really am.

[11 : 59] The Messiah, the Son of Man, the Savior of the world, the King of Kings. So I'll save my breath except to say that one day soon you will see me and my glory.

That's the words they're looking for. Even though what Jesus says is the truth. They think he's blaspheming. A crime that he's innocent of.

Now it's fascinating as you read this, that these are the only words of Jesus here that Luke records, that he gives in the defense of his trial. You add it up, three and a half verses, three sentences, 42 words.

That's all Jesus offers in his defense. That's it. And it's not because the cat's got his tongue. Here is Luke showing us that God's mighty King, the one that God said he would send, who would be the suffering servant, is right here.

This is not Jesus going out with a whimper. This is Jesus fulfilling his job description. Scene one, a council longing that he would go. Here's the second scene, verses one to five of chapter 23.

[13 : 07] A ruler wanting to deliver a no. So the religious mob, clutching at that admission they've got from Jesus, they rush him off to Pilate to get the legal authority they need to kill him.

Now Pilate was the appointed Roman governor of the region of Judea. He was normally situated in Caesarea, but for the big occasions, like the Passover festival, he would come to Jerusalem to make sure that nothing kicked off on his turf and on his watch.

The Pilate's only concern as he's presented with Jesus is whether this man is a real genuine threat to a member, either peace or Caesar. It's all he's concerned with.

And the religious mob, we see that they are savvy creatures. Look at the way that they subtly changed their point of attack. Verse two of chapter 23. We have found this man subverting our nation.

He opposes payment of taxes to Caesar and claims to be Messiah, a king. Now here's the question we need to ask. Did Jesus really say that? Did Jesus really say that he opposes payment of taxes to Caesar?

[14 : 18] Well, if you want to flick back to chapter 20, verse 25. Give to Caesar what is Caesar. It couldn't be any clearer. Jesus did not say that.

I mean, that is quite clearly a porcupine that they have made up about him. What do they say? Jesus claims to be a king. Again, Pilate, he's going to listen to king language.

As soon as he hears that word, he's listening to it. I remember Alex and I, we went on a holiday a few years ago to Annick in Northumberland. I don't know if anybody's been to Annick in Northumberland. Lovely part of the world.

Went to this bookshop called Barter Books. Vintage books, armchairs, roaring fire. I mean, honestly, that was in my element. It was great.

Barter Books is famous for one thing. And it's famous for being the place where they discovered the keep calm and carry on. Keep calm and carry on. Keep calm and keep... What is it? Keep calm and...

[15 : 14] It is carry on, isn't it? Doubt myself there. Keep calm and carry on. This is where they found this catchphrase. And the way out of Barter Books, you go to the gift shop and all you can see everywhere, mugs, posters, t-shirts, teddy bears, maybe even one of those foam hands.

All with that catchphrase on it, keep calm and carry on. I was thinking this week, the Roman Empire, if it had a catchphrase, if it had a catchphrase that would be on every single piece of merchandise that you would see at a Roman gift shop if there ever was such a thing, the length and the breadth of the empire.

Do you know what it would be? It would be Caesar Kairos. Caesar is Lord. Caesar is king. This is what the whole Roman Empire is built upon.

So anybody who's even the slightest threat to Caesar Kairos, it's got to be taken seriously. So here is supposedly somebody who claims to be a king.

Pilate's got to listen to that. But despite Jesus' admission that he is a king, verse 3, Pilate looks at him. This weak, unimpressive, arrested human being.

[16 : 25] And he thinks, that's a king? This man is a king? This individual is what this fuss is all about? You got me up at six in the morning for him?

He is no threat. He is no threat. Pilate finds, verse 4, Jesus to be innocent. There is no basis to their charge.

But the religious mob, they go on and they drop in that little detail about Jesus at verse 5. Do you see it? As to where he's from. He's from Galilee. He's from the north.

And it's almost as if Pilate has one of those ding, light bulb moments. Galilee, yes. Galilee, not my jurisdiction.

Yes. Galilee, not my problem. Galilee is King Herod's patch. So this Jewish buck can be well and truly passed to him. That's what he does, isn't it?

[17 : 27] So Pilate, thinking he's seen the last of Jesus, he sends Jesus to Herod. And here we get scene 3. A council longing that he would go. A ruler wanting to deliver a no.

Verses 6 to 12. A king desiring to see a show. Interestingly, Luke is the only gospel writer to include this little account of Jesus before Herod. And Luke tells us, doesn't he, that Herod's absolutely delighted to get the chance to see Jesus for himself.

But the reason that Herod is so delighted is not because he wants to hear the teachings of Jesus. It's not because he wants to become a follower of Jesus.

It's not because he wants to weigh up the words of Jesus. It's in his eyes, Jesus is a traveling circus magician. And I'd love the chance to see him perform a miracle.

So, verse 9, Pilate, sorry, Herod plies him with questions. Interrogates them. Maybe about how he managed to do all those knee tricks. About how he managed to pull off all those miracles.

[18 : 32] As if he's watching an episode of Magic's Biggest Secrets. This is Herod. But Jesus is not interested in entertaining his fancy. Vroomf.

No answer. And he subjects himself. Think of this, God in the flesh. To ridicule and to mocking by Herod.

And his men. Most importantly, verse 15. Herod confirms what Pilate found to be true.

That Jesus is innocent. And so back to Pilate. Jesus goes. I'm sure much to Pilate's delight. Can you imagine that one? Oh, he's back.

A council longing that he would go. A ruler wanting to deliver a no. A king desiring to see a show. And in the fourth and final scene, verse 13 to 25. There's a crowd baying for blood to flow.

[19 : 31] Verse 13. Pilate gathers together this religious mob. An attempt to bring an end to this nonsense. He makes it clear, verse 15.

That both him and Herod, they found no wrong in Jesus. But to satisfy them, he offers to have Jesus punished. I think in the context, flogged and beaten. I have to say, even that seems a harsh punishment for this innocent man.

But in Pilate's eyes, this might just be enough to satisfy the crowd. I'd put an end to this whole thing before it all kicks off. But even that's not enough for these religious sharks.

Who by this point have got the smell of blood well and truly in their nostrils. Now history would tell us that apparently, to diffuse the tension between the Jews and the Romans, there developed this little gesture.

That at Passover, the Romans agreed to release one Jewish prisoner of choice. And so his usual Pilate, in keeping with that tradition, he gives the people a choice.

[20 : 37] The choice? Barabbas? Or Jesus? Barabbas or Jesus? Barabbas, verse 19. A troublemaker?

A political activist? A Roman killer? A robber? And most of all, a murderer? A man who rightly is in prison? Or? Jesus? Can you imagine Pilate presents him with this choice?

In his mind, this is an absolute no-brainer. A guilty murderer? Or? An innocent preacher? Surely these people will go with Jesus. Every time.

Well, not this time. The crowd who have been well and truly stirred up by the religious mob at this point, they want Barabbas released. But verse 20, Pilate says, I want to release Jesus.

But they keep shouting, Pilate again, verse 32, and for the fifth time in this trial, but Jesus is innocent. But the crowd keep shouting.

[21 : 40] And eventually, realizing that this situation is on the verge of getting out of control, and not having the stomach to do the right thing, Pilate gives in. Pilate gives in.

Feel the chill of verse 23. The shouts of the crowd prevail. Barabbas, Luke reminds us again.

Verse 25, The one who is in prison for murder. The one deserving of death is released. Jesus, the one who Luke has gone to length to show us his innocent deserving of life, is condemned.

And in a matter of hours, he will be on the cross. Welcome to the early hours of Good Friday, AD 33. And welcome to Jesus' trial.

A trial that didn't just rush ahead of the evidence. A trial that didn't care two hoots about the evidence. So here we are, back at our question this morning.

[22 : 43] Remember Little Britain? So what? So what? History is full of innocent men who took hits. So what?

Well, here's what I want us to think about as we work towards our close this morning. Is I think Barabbas is the key to understanding what's going on here. Think about it.

But what's gone on is Jesus has taken Barabbas' place. Now I'm sure that that man, Barabbas, has done some dodgy deals in his lifetime.

But surely this is the greatest deal that Barabbas has ever been presented with. Now think about it. Picture the scene. I wonder if they had that moment as Barabbas is released and is walking. Does he eyeball Jesus?

Does he clap eyes on the man who took his place? And does he think to himself, that man is going to die instead of me? Friends, what we've hit here is the wondrous mystery, the mind-blowing truth that's right at the heart of the Christian gospel.

[23 : 51] The truth that Martin Luther, famous Christian theologian from Reformation days, used to call the great exchange. That Barabbas, the one deserving of death, gets life.

And Jesus, the one deserving of life, gets death. And that's exactly what's about to go on as he goes to the cross. This is what Jesus is going to do.

Here's the wonderful truth. That Jesus didn't just take Barabbas' place. Actually, the sinless son of God.

The spotless, perfect lamb of God. The innocent, perfect sacrifice that this, our holy God requires to take the place of the guilty.

He died in the place of every single human being who would come to him and say, I am a sinner and he's my savior. That he took my place and I get his grace.

[24 : 54] That he took my death and I get his life. Friends, if you wanted a hashtag for this morning, this is it. I am Barabbas.

And you are Barabbas. Jesus took our place. I deserved to die. Jesus deserved to live.

And yet here I am, finding myself because of his outrageous grace. I am the one who lives because he died. Here's something cool I learned this week. I love studying the Bible.

Do you know what Barabbas' name means? I mean, son of the father. Think about that for a minute. Son of the father. That Jesus became sin, like we were singing earlier.

So that I, declared right before and adopted by God, could be declared to be a son of God the father.

[25 : 53] This is the gospel. And it's staggeringly beautiful. Because it's the plan of a glorious and good God. There's what.

So let me just ask you three quick questions as we work towards a close this morning. Question number one. And these will be very quick, okay? Question number one. Will you take it? Will you come to Jesus?

And will you accept him as your substitute? Your saviour who offers to take your death in exchange for his life? Have you accepted the great exchange?

Here's question number two. I told you these would be quick. Do you know it? That Jesus took my place for my every sin. I mean, this is how it's worked out for me this week.

As I felt the guilt of my sin, the weight of it, just thinking, Graham, you idiot. You've done it again. You've done it again. There's times where I'm thinking, I can't believe I just said that again.

[26 : 56] Those times where I'm sitting there thinking, I can't believe I just thought that again. What a failure of a man. I'm reading these verses this week. It's almost as if I could hear the voice of Jesus telling me, Graham, see that evil thought?

Yeah, I took your place for that. See those evil words? Yeah, I stood in your place for that. That unkind word, yeah, I took your place for that.

Friends, here's the incredible truth this morning. That in Jesus Christ, we have a saviour who specialises in grace. This is the kind of incredible saviour that we have, that specialises in showing grace to failures like me and like you.

Question number three. Will you share it? This is great news. This is good news. And as we work towards Easter, God calls us to share it. When people ask you, you know, I wonder when they ask you what the cross is all about, what do you say?

When our children ask us what the cross is all about, what do we say? When our friends ask us, when our colleagues ask us what the cross is all about, what do you say? I found personally this idea of substitution to be one of the most helpful ways of explaining the gospel to my friends.

[28 : 11] I think of a guy who I've been reading the Bible with for four years now. The first time I got to explain this to him, we're sitting having a coffee and what's on the coffee table? It's just two coffee cups. And he asked me what's going on at the cross.

And I said, friend, this is me. This is me, sinful, deserving of death. And this is Jesus, sinless, son of God, deserving of life.

What happened on the cross is that Jesus came across and said, let me take your death. And in exchange, let me give you my righteous life.

A great exchange. Friends, how can you explain that to your friends? There's just one really easy way that I've found to explain this idea to my friend. Do you get it?

Do you know it? Will you share it? Incredible, the gospel. I hope it continues just to thrill our hearts as we go forward. Every single day of our lives.

[29 : 10] Just as we close, let me take you back to George Wilson. Remember him? The American man declared to be innocent of a crime that would see him hanged. Gifted the presidential pardon.

That's incredible. Do you know what's even more incredible than that? He turned it down. He turned it down. Staggering, isn't it? He went to his death at the gallows.

Now, for all the Googling in the world, believe you me this week, I cannot find a single reason as to why he did that. A man going to his death, apparently for no reason.

But as Luke has shown us the innocence of Jesus this morning, as God has declared his son to be spotless, he is telling us that this truly innocent man taking the death penalty, it wasn't without a reason.

Let's finish with the words from Isaiah 55. Isaiah speaking roughly 600 years to God's people. Roughly 600 years before Jesus is on the scene about how God would send a king to save his people.

[30 : 19] And here's what the king would be. He was oppressed and afflicted, yet did not open his mouth. He was led like a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before its shearers is silent, so he did not open his mouth.

By oppression and judgment he was taken away, yet who of his generation protested? For he was cut off from the land of the living. For the transgression of my people, he was punished.

Oh, to see the pain written on your face, bearing the awesome weight of sin, every bitter thought, every evil deed, crowning your blood-stained brow, this, the power of the cross, that Christ became sin for us.

He took the blame. He bore the wrath. We stand forgiven at the cross. Let's pray together. Maybe just in the silence now, before we close our service, now is the time maybe to bring your prayer before this awesome God.

Amen. Father God, we thank you so much that you have loved us so incredibly, that you would go to the lengths of sending Jesus, your son, to be our saviour.

[32 : 02] And as we've seen this morning, as our substitute, help us this week to both know and to treasure just what an incredible friend we have in Jesus.

And so this is our prayer. Father, thank you that you hear us because we pray in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.