

# Sermon Notes

## March 28, 2021

### The Trial of Jesus Christ

#### Introduction

Recent years have seen an unprecedented interest in the inner workings of America's justice system. Not so long ago, the notion of bringing live television cameras inside the courtroom was highly controversial. Now we have Court TV, an entire cable channel devoted to nothing but courtroom cameras and criminal justice. Or sometimes injustice.

Even before the advent of cameras in the courtroom, it was clear that the finest courts of earthly jurisprudence sometimes convict the innocent or exonerate the guilty. Take, for example, the case of Randall Dale Adams, who was convicted and sentenced to death in 1977 for the murder of a Texas policeman. A 1988 documentary, "The Thin Blue Line," raised troubling questions about police handling of his case and helped win him a new trial just hours before his scheduled execution that year. In 1989 he was released from prison when the prosecutor in the case dismissed all charges against him, acknowledging the lack of any real evidence to convict him.

An even more disturbing case was that of Kirk Bloodsworth, sentenced to death for rape and murder in the 1980s. After nearly a decade on death row, Bloodsworth was released in 1994 when sophisticated DNA tests proved beyond question that he was innocent of the crimes for which he had been condemned to death.

We're rightly appalled and outraged by such cases, and yet they do not appear to be diminishing. Nearly every week, it seems, some new, gross miscarriage of justice is dissected on "20/20," "60 Minutes," "48 hours," or a similar network news magazine. Americans' confidence in their criminal justice system may be at an all-time low. Modern society's concern about justice gone awry is nothing new. Notorious cases of innocent victims who were wrongfully imprisoned or executed litter the pages of history, from the biblical account of Naboth, who was framed and executed by Ahab in ancient Israel, to the witchcraft trials of medieval history, right down to the present age.

And on the other side of the ledger, history is filled with accounts of guilty people let off by courts of "justice". It ranges from ancient aristocrats who routinely got away with murder, to modern organized-crime bosses who use bribery and intimidation to manipulate the system. Human courts have an uncanny knack for turning justice completely on its head. The wicked frequently prosper while the righteous suffer wrongfully. Nowhere is that seen more graphically than in the arrest, trial, and crucifixion of Jesus Christ. No victim of injustice was ever more innocent than the sinless Son of God.

And yet no one ever suffered more agony than He did. He was cruelly executed by men who openly acknowledged His faultlessness. Yet at the same time Barabbas, a murderous, thieving insurrectionist, was set free.

It was the greatest travesty of justice the world has ever seen.

## 1. Consider the facts

A. Jesus Christ was the only truly sinless individual who ever lived.

- In fact He was the most innocent, blameless, virtuous man of all time.
- He "committed no sin, nor was deceit found in His mouth" (2 Peter 2:22).
- He was "holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners" (Hebrews 7:26).
- And yet the torment and punishment He suffered in His death was infinitely more heinous than anyone else has ever suffered.
- He bore the full weight of retribution for human evil.
- He suffered as if He were guilty of humanity's worst offenses.
- And yet He was guilty of nothing.

B. And so who was responsible for Christ's death? Who killed Jesus?

- The answer to this question has many facets.
- First, there is no doubt the religious leaders of Israel were responsible for Jesus' death.
- Matthew 26:3-4 tells us that "the chief priests and the elders of the people assembled in the palace of the high priest, whose name was Caiaphas, and they schemed to arrest Jesus secretly and kill him."
- The Jewish leaders demanded of the Romans that Jesus be put to death (Matthew 27:22-25).
- They couldn't continue to allow Him to work signs and wonders because it threatened their position and place in the religious society they dominated, so "they plotted to take his life".
- Second, the Romans were the ones who actually crucified Him (Matthew 27:27-37).
- Crucifixion was a Roman method of execution, authorized and carried out by the Romans under the authority of Pontius Pilate, the Roman governor who sentenced Jesus.
- Roman soldiers drove the nails into His hands and feet, Roman troops erected the cross, and a Roman soldier pierced His side (Matthew 27:27-35).
- Third, the people of Israel were also complicit in the death of Jesus.
- They were the ones who shouted, "Crucify him! Crucify him!" as He stood on trial before Pilate (Luke 23:21).
- They also cried for the thief Barabbas to be released instead of Jesus (Matthew 27:21).
- Peter confirmed this in Acts 2:22-23 when he told the men of Israel, "You, with the help of wicked men, put him to death by nailing him to the cross."
- In fact, the murder of Jesus was a conspiracy involving Rome, Herod, the Jewish leaders, and the people of Israel, a diverse group of people who never worked together on anything before or since, but who came together this one time to plot and carry out the unthinkable, the murder of the Son of God.

2. Ultimately, and perhaps somewhat amazingly, it was God Himself who put Jesus to death.

A. This was the greatest act of divine justice ever carried out, done "by God's deliberate plan and foreknowledge" (Acts 2:23) and for the highest purpose.

- Jesus' death on the cross secured the salvation of countless millions and provided the only way God could forgive sin without compromising His holiness and perfect righteousness.

- Christ's death was God's perfect plan for the eternal redemption of His own.

- Far from being a victory for Satan, as some have suggested, or an unnecessary tragedy, it was the most gracious act of God's goodness and mercy, the ultimate expression of the Father's love for sinners.

- God put Jesus to death for our sin so that we could live in sinless righteousness before Him, a righteousness only possible because of the cross.

"God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God" (2 Corinthians 5:21).

B. So we who have come to Christ in faith, are guilty of His blood, shed on the cross for us.

- He died to pay the penalty for our sins (Romans 5:8; 6:23).

- In the movie *The Passion of the Christ*, the director, Mel Gibson, was the one whose hands you see actually driving the nails through Christ's hands.

- He did it that way to remind himself, and everyone else, that it was our sins that nailed Jesus to the cross.

- It is easy to look at the cross and conclude it was the worst miscarriage of human justice in the history of the world.

- And it was.

- It was an evil act, perpetrated by the hands of wicked men.

3. But even before the crucifixion of Jesus was His trial.

A. The night of Jesus' arrest, He was brought before Annas, Caiaphas and an assembly of religious leaders called the Sanhedrin.

- After this He was taken before Pilate, the Roman Governor, sent off to Herod, and returned to Pilate, who finally sentenced Him to death.

B. There were six parts to Jesus' trial.

- There were Three stages in a religious court and then there three stages before a Roman court.

- Jesus was tried before Annas, the former high priest, Caiaphas, the current high priest, and the Sanhedrin.

- He was charged in these "ecclesiastical" trials with blasphemy, claiming to be the Son of God, the Messiah.

C. The trials before Jewish authorities, the religious trials, showed the degree to which the Jewish leaders hated Him because they carelessly disregarded many of their own laws.

- There were several illegalities involved in these trials from the perspective of Jewish law.

- 1) No trial was to be held during feast time.

- 2) Each member of the court was to vote individually to convict or acquit, but Jesus was convicted by acclamation.

3) If the death penalty was given, a night must pass before the sentence was carried out, however, only a few hours passed before Jesus was placed on the Cross.

4) The Jews had no authority to execute anyone.

5) No trial was to be held at night, but this trial was held before dawn.

6) The accused was to be given counsel or representation, but Jesus had none.

7) The accused was not to be asked self-incriminating questions, but Jesus was asked if He was the Christ.

- The trials before the Roman authorities started with Pilate after Jesus was beaten.
- The charges brought against Him were very different from the charges in His religious trials.
- He was charged with inciting people to riot, forbidding the people to pay their taxes, and claiming to be King.

- Pilate found no reason to kill Jesus so he sent Him to Herod.

- Herod had Jesus ridiculed but, wanting to avoid the political liability, sent Jesus back to Pilate.

- This was the last trial as Pilate tried to appease the animosity of the Jews by having Jesus scourged.

- The Roman scourge was a terrible whipping designed to remove the flesh from the back of the one being punished.

- In a final effort to have Jesus released, Pilate offered the prisoner Barabbas to be crucified and Jesus released, but to no avail.

- The crowds called for Barabbas to be released and Jesus to be crucified.

- Pilate granted their demand and surrendered Jesus to their will.

- The trials of Jesus represent the ultimate mockery of justice.

- Jesus, the most innocent man in the history of the world, was found guilty of crimes and sentenced to death by crucifixion.

4. But that's not the full story.

A. The crucifixion of Christ was also the greatest act of divine justice ever carried out.

- It was done in full accord with "the determined purpose and foreknowledge of God" (Acts 2:23) and for the highest of purposes.

- The death of Christ secured the salvation of untold numbers and opened the way for God to forgive sin without compromising His own perfectly holy standard.

B. Jesus Christ was no mere victim of unjust men when He hung on the cross.

- Though murdered unjustly by men whose intentions were only evil, Christ died willingly, becoming an atonement for the sins of the unjust, just like the murderers who killed Him.

- His was the greatest sacrifice ever made.

- It was the purest act of love ever carried out.

- And ultimately, it was an infinitely higher act of divine justice than all the human injustice it represented.

5. But at the core, Jesus' death was an act of the Son's submissive obedience to the Father's will.

A. And Jesus Himself was in absolute control.

- He said, "I lay down My life that I may take it again. No one has taken it away from Me, but I lay it down on My own initiative. I have authority to lay it down, and I have authority to take it up again. This commandment I received from My Father" (John 10:17).

B. Do not think for a moment that anyone could kill Jesus against His will.

- The divine plan could never be short-circuited by human or satanic plots.