

The Innocent One

[Announce Text] Please Open your Bibles to Luke 23:1-25. [Page 883-884](#)

[Scripture Introduction] Good morning, my name is Brett Sweet and I'm one of the pastors here at Grace Christian Fellowship where we exist to glorify God through gospel-centered worship, evangelism, discipleship, and community. We are continuing our series through the book of Luke.

[Prayer for illumination] Please pray with me...

[Illustration] Clemente Aguirre-Jarquin made a bad decision. He had been drinking, ran out of beer, and went next door to his neighbors to see if they had anything to drink. After entering their home, he found the bodies of two women. He tried to revive them- getting their blood on his clothing. He was afraid that the murderer was around, so he picked up a chef's knife in case he needed it for self-defense. This was the murder weapon with his fingerprints. Then he left. As an illegal immigrant, he didn't want to call the police. But the police found him, found the knife, his bloody clothing, and had testimony of Samantha the daughter and granddaughter of the victims. Samantha claimed that Mr. Aguirre-Jarquin had acted in a threatening manner in the past. The jury was certain that Mr. Aguirre-Jarquin was guilty. During the punishment phase of the trial he shouted from his seat, "They're trying to kill me for no reason. I didn't do it. I didn't kill nobody." He maintained his innocence. He was sentenced to death. But it seemed only two people could be certain of his innocence. Clemente Aguirre-Jarquin and the killer.

And while he waited on death row. The killer, a woman with documented mental illness and self-described demonic influence, began to confess. Mr. Aguirre-Jarquin was innocent. More and more people became certain of it. Samantha, the daughter and granddaughter of the victims was the real killer.

Our system is good, but because there are sinners involved and they are not all-knowing. It's not perfect. This story and others can be found on the website of the Innocence Project, who do good work trying to right wrongs that have happened in our criminal justice system. The innocent should go free. But can we be certain of innocence? Do you convict people in your mind before you hear the real story? Do you plug your ears? Does it bother you when the innocent are punished? Or do you wonder if Jesus is as good as Christians claim Him to be? Well, you are in

the right place to be challenged and helped. Luke 23:1-25 is Luke and the Holy Spirit telling us this:

[Proposition] Be certain of Jesus' innocence.

Luke does not want us to doubt. He says that in chapter 1:1-4. So, we're going to see Jesus on trial like Clemente Aguirre-Jarquín. And there are a lot of verses. There are a lot of points- 7 of them, today. But we will look at them quickly because they are all so obvious from God's Word. 7 aspects of Jesus' trials to help us be certain of Jesus' innocence.

[Component #1] The accusers of Jesus

v. 1 looks back to chapter 22 and v. 10 confirms who this whole company is who has brought Jesus to Pontius Pilate. Look at v. 10

The chief priests and scribes stood by vehemently accusing him.

So the accusers of Jesus are the Sanhedrin. The religious leaders, with the support of their people, are Jesus' accusers. These accusers want Jesus dead, but they don't have the authority to condemn Jesus to death. Only Romans could do that. So these accusers of Jesus bring Jesus to Pilate.

Be certain of Jesus' innocence. We've looked at the accusers of Jesus. Now,

[Component #2] The charges against Jesus

Jesus is on trial, and Luke lists the charges that His accusers bring against Jesus. Look at v. 2

And they began to accuse him, saying, "We found this man misleading our nation and forbidding to give tribute to Caesar, and saying that he himself is Christ, a king."

So there are three charges. Let's look at them quickly:

[Charge #1] Misleading our nation-

The religious leaders claim that Jesus is misleading, and the Greek word can also be translated as subverting, perverting, or corrupting the nation. Are they saying that Jesus is a false prophet? Or that He's turning them away from Rome? Probably their charge is that He's disturbing the peace. From Galilee to Jerusalem

in v. 5 is like literally saying, “The Whole World” in these people’s minds. But the reality is that Jesus has been the only one properly leading the nation. He’s challenging the corrupt leaders.

[Charge #2] Forbidding to give tribute-

The stakes are high if this is true. If nobody pays taxes, the Roman empire will collapse. But this is a false charge. It’s a flat out lie. And the accusers know it. In Luke 20:20-26, Jesus told the people that since Caesar’s image is on the coins, they should pay that coinage in taxes to Caesar.

But the real issue is

[Charge #3] Calling Himself Christ-

Our last sermon showed us that Jesus is the Messiah. The Christ. No matter what others think. The idea that He is a type of King, which He is. Is a huge threat to the Romans. What’s crazy is that His accusers would have wanted a Jewish King rather than a Roman ruler, but they are so bigoted and partial and evil that they act like they are on the side of the rulers that they hate.

Be certain of Jesus’ innocence. We’ve looked at the accusers of Jesus. The charges against Jesus. Now let’s read and listen to

[Component 3] The testimony of Jesus.

Look at v. 3 with me

And Pilate asked him, “Are you the King of the Jews?” And he answered him, “You have said so.”

Jesus is asked if He is the Messiah. The Christ. The Promised One. The King of God’s people. And Jesus gives a short a simple testimony. And it’s a qualified endorsement. Jesus says to Pilate, “You’ve said it. Yes, I am the Christ if you understand what Christ means.” But Jesus’ testimony reveals that He’s not a political threat. And Jesus does not crack under pressure either. He doesn’t cave. And Gentile readers like us admire that about Jesus. So he agrees with charge 3, but it’s also not a crime.

[Illustration] Imagine getting pulled over. You have a taillight out. The police officer walks up to your car and shines a flashlight inside the vehicle. He looks in

your eyes, but then he sees another set of shining eyes staring back at him. They are the eyes of your ferocious Beagle or Corgie or Doodle mix. And he asks, "Is that your dog?" He's raised a charge. And your testimony is, "Yes." You confess the truth to the question, but it's not a crime to have a dog in the car. Though for some of us it feels like that.

That's what's going on here. Jesus' testimony is true. He confesses to being the Christ. But if the Christ is the Biblical Christ, it's not a crime.

Be certain of Jesus' innocence. We've looked at the accusers of Jesus. The charges against Jesus. The testimony of Jesus. Now let's look at

[Component #4] The Two Judges of Jesus

Luke tells us in Acts 4:27-28 that evil men, including Pilate and Herod, are acting precisely as what God had predestined to take place. But let's look at these two judges.

[Judge #1] Pilate.

vv. 4-6 Show us Jesus before Pilate. The Jewish historian, Josephus, who was no fan of Jesus or Christians, tells us that as governor, Pilate has the ultimate power of life and death in his hands, no one can really disagree. It's his opinion that really matters. And Pilate tells us in v. 4 that He finds "no guilt" or "nothing" against Jesus. But we see also that Pilate is weak in character. He wants to run from responsibility. He's a pawn for the people around him. He caves when things look like they're against him. He's very different than Jesus.

[Application] A word to men for a second. Are you more like Jesus or more like Pilate? Do you take responsibility for things, or do you try to pass the buck all the time? God is calling us to be like Jesus. To do the right thing. To be agents of truth. Men with spines. Men who resist evil in the world around us. Not men who just go with the flow.

There are two judges of Jesus in these trials. Judge #1 is Pilate. From a human perspective, he's most important. But there is a second judge. Let's notice him.

[Judge #2] Herod.

This is mentioned only in Luke's gospel. It's a detail the Holy Spirit wants us to have. Herod lives in the Hasmonean palace that is about a 10-minute walk from where Pilate has Jesus. And we know from earlier, that Herod is not a good guy. He killed John the Baptist. Jesus has called him a fox. When Pilate sends Jesus to Herod, it is a brilliant political move. It involves the highest levels of Jewish leadership. He gets the opinion of someone with more knowledge of the situation.

And Herod is happy to have Jesus stand before him. But Herod doesn't care about the truth. He wants a show. He wants entertainment. So even though Jesus is with Herod for quite a while- v. 9 tells us that Herod questioned Jesus at some length. But Jesus isn't here as a performer. And Herod's beheading of John has proved that he's not a force for truth and justice, so Jesus keeps his mouth shut- which also fulfills the prophecy of Isaiah 53:7. Remember that Jesus has been beat up already, so when they dress him in shiny or splendid royal clothing, Jesus is not an impressive sight. This is all a big joke. If Jesus won't put on a show, they'll make a show out of Him. Even though Jesus is innocent.

Be certain of Jesus' innocence. We're looking at a lot. His accusers- the religious leaders and their followers. The three charges- misleading people, forbidding to pay taxes, claiming to be Christ. The testimony of Jesus- that He is the Christ. The two judges of Jesus- Pilate and Herod. Now let's look at the key theme of our passage

[Component #5] The verdict of Jesus.

Look at these verses with me:

v. 4- The Pilate said to the chief priests and the crowds, "I find no guilt in this man."

vv. 14-15- (Pilate) said to them, "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. Neither did Herod, for he sent him back to us. Look, nothing deserving death has been done by him."

v. 22- A third time he (Pilate) said to them, "Why? What evil has he done? I have found in him no guilt deserving death. I will therefore punish and release him."

The verdict of Jesus. Is. That. Jesus. Is. Innocent. Luke wants us to get this. Jesus is innocent. He is a good guy. He is the best who's ever lived. He's sinless. Pilate sees it. Herod communicated the same thing. Jesus is innocent. Pilate wants to warn Jesus by giving him a beating so that He doesn't cause problems in the future.

Luke wants the verdict to be very clear. Jesus is innocent. Jesus is innocent. Jesus is innocent.

Be certain of Jesus' innocence. We've seen five things. The accusers of Jesus. The charges against Jesus. The testimony of Jesus. The two human judges of Jesus. Very importantly, the verdict of Jesus. Now let's see

[Component 6] The jury for Jesus

When you read vv. 18-24, we see something that is the height of injustice. No legal proceeding with any effort at truth or justice would do what we see here. The jury of Jesus is the same exact group of people who are Jesus' accusers. The religious leaders, their allies, and followers. There will be no justice.

This jury of accusers are being told that Jesus is innocent. But they shout in v. 21- "Crucify! Crucify him!" They shout in v. 18- "Away with this man! Release to us Barabbas"

And then we read the sad fact about this jury in vv. 23-24

But they were urgent, demanding with loud cries that he should be crucified. And their voices prevailed. So Pilate decided that their demand should be granted.

The jury of Jesus knows that Jesus is innocent. But that's not what they want to talk about. When there is Mob rule, there is only chaos. When efforts to reason with truth and evidence are met with simply louder shouts- and this happens all the time with the radical political left right now, injustice will prevail. And the innocent will suffer.

Be certain of Jesus' innocence. Accusers. Charges. Testimony. Judges. A verdict of innocence. Jury. And now

[Component #7] The sentence for Jesus.

If Pilate gave the jury of accusers what they wanted what is the sentence?

v. 21- *but they kept shouting, "Crucify, crucify him!"*

And vv. 24-25- So Pilate decided that their demand should be granted. He released the man who had been thrown into prison for insurrection and murder, for whom they asked, but he delivered Jesus over to their will.

The sentence for Jesus was crucifixion. To be nailed to a cross. To be given a slave's death. To experience the shame of being paraded through the streets and mocked. To hang as a sign of public warning and ridicule. To die a slow agonizing death through blood loss and asphyxiation. Gasping and choking and gagging.

[Application] I suspect that there are people in this room. People of every age group. Retirees. Working adults. Teens. Children. That might at least feel this: "Yeah, we get it. Jesus was innocent. This was a very awful day. But what does that have to do with me? How is this relevant to my life in Spokane in 2023? Doesn't this only matter to Jesus?"

I can tell you one person this mattered to: Barabbas. This section of Luke's gospel has irony the size of a fully loaded aircraft carrier. Barabbas has been in prison for the very crimes that Jesus is being wrongly convicted of. Insurrection- that is, misleading the people and acting like the Roman King should not be followed. You can imagine him in a cell or in chains. Or both. And the Roman guards taunting him, "We've got a cross for you, Barabbas. We've got a cross with your name on it! The cross beam is on its way over. The Sun is rising on your last day, Barabbas." And then a tiny bit of news comes in about an innocent man being on trial. And perhaps he asks the same question, "What does this have to do with me?" And the answer. It turned out. Is: everything.

The innocence of Jesus has a variety of applications for us, but the most relevant one is this. The innocence of Jesus is important: if *you* are guilty. And the truth is, you know you are. There are things about you that you wish weren't there. There are things in your past- things you've done, things you've said, things you've thought. And your conscience becomes aware of God's Word and you can feel it strike you in the heart. You've sinned. And you continue to sin. Because, apart from God's Spirit, that's what's inside you. The bad things are so many. The good things could have all been done better.

1 Corinthians 10:31 comes with a command:

So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.

And the end of Romans 14:23

For whatever does not proceed from faith is sin.

And James 4:17

So whoever knows the right thing to do and fails to do it, for him it is sin.

[Illustration] I haven't seen it, but a number of critics claim that the TV show, *Breaking Bad*, is the greatest show ever. It's a show about a chemistry teacher, named Walter White, who becomes a meth dealer, and the whole point of the show was to show the main character's descent deeper and deeper into darkness. Where a husband and father becomes a murderer. It's a show that Christians would probably do well to avoid. But what makes the show so good, the critics say, is the writing. The creator, Vince Gilligan, was also one of the main writers. And good writers tend to be fairly good thinkers. He's not a Christian, but listen to what he says:

"I feel some sort of need for biblical atonement, or justice, or something. I like to believe there is some comeuppance, that karma kicks in at some point, even if it takes years or decades to happen. My girlfriend says this great thing that's become my philosophy as well. 'I want to believe there's a heaven. But I can't not believe there's a hell.'"

There's something in him that seems to need to believe in justice. Even in Hell. We all feel that because that's the true reality of God's universe crashing into us. And that's what we read in

Romans 6:23

For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

[Application] Romans 6:23 confirms that Vince Gilligan is on to something. That's why the innocence of Jesus matters. Your sin deserves an eternal death of constant, unending dying. Because you're like me. And Barabbas. You're a sinner and you're guilty. But there is eternal life because the Innocent One takes the place of the guilty. We don't know what happened to Barabbas. Maybe he just thought he caught a break. But what about you? When Jesus died, He died as an innocent substituting Himself for the guilty. This is relevant to you. And when you

see the relevance, the Holy Spirit will have you look at the Innocent One and say, "Yes! Jesus was Innocent, but His death wasn't just a tragedy of human injustice. It was part of a divine plan to pay for the sins of the guilty. To pay for my sins. I can do nothing but rely on Jesus to carry my guilt and remove it from me." And every day, you get up and you look in the mirror. And the face that is looking back at you continues to be the face of a guilty man or woman. And then you preach the gospel to yourself- "Guilty, Yes! But the most relevant thing is not my guilt, but that the Innocent One was treated as my sins deserve. Oh, glorious Jesus! Thank you." And this frees you from needing to perform all the time. This cements the reality that you are always, always, always, be treated better than you deserve. This opens your heart up to joy.

And the cosmic justice that is interwoven into each one of us notices the irony that should lead us to our application that requires deep thinking. Questions of irony that have application:

What's more blind: Justice or sin? Justice is regularly represented as a statue of a lady with a blindfold on. Usually holding scales for weighing evidence, and often holding a sword to punish evil. That blindness is meant to represent impartiality and truth. But if Jesus is Innocent, we see that justice is not so blind as sin. Human sin is the root problem in our world. We have a pretty good justice system here. But there are sinners in every part of it. So in our desire to seek justice for all members of our society, we must always recognize the reality of sin first.

Who's really king? This passage sure makes it seem like the kings of this earth are. They seem so powerful. But Pilate and Herod are almost only remembered because of the events around the life of Jesus. Most of the Caesars and Louis's and Charles' and Nicholas' have been forgotten. But Jesus said, "You have said that I am king." And He remains king. So you need not fear Presidents or Governors or Mayors. The irony is that those who look like kings aren't. And the One who looks unimpressive. The One with scars and wounds is. So we must prioritize obedience to Him.

Who's really the judge? This passage makes it seem like human courtrooms have the final say. But Jesus is not only going to die. He's going to be judged by God as Innocent and therefore raised for our justification. So God will bring true cosmic justice. You are concerned about being judged by your friends on the playground.

Or your supervisor at work. Or the people in the seat behind you. Or when they see your unkept house. The Bible tells us that Jesus is the Judge. And He can spot innocence and guilt. He can relate to you when you are treated unjustly. And He has compassion when you deserve to be treated with full and final justice because He took that for you.

Who's really rebelling? This passage makes it clear that people thought that Jesus was a rebel. Maybe He was in some sort. But the core reality is that Jesus is perfectly aligned with God's will. All these people around Him are the real rebels. Jesus is no insurrectionist against Caesar or the law of God. All these people are insurrectionists and rebels against God. And this applies to you and me too. We are not morally neutral. We're hostile to God. We don't care about His truth if it gets in our way. So we should always have a healthy distrust of ourselves and our opinions. We should want Christians around us to ask us hard questions and require real answers from us.

Who's really powerful? It seems like religious leaders and political leaders and mobs have power. But they really don't accomplish anything here. Jesus is going to die and be raised and He's going to pour out the Spirit in a way that *really* upsets the Jewish power structure and Roman Empire. A gospel of grace that preaches the Innocence of Christ and His death for the guilty is going to be the source of real power. Not guns or bombs or legislation. Not even systems of education like public or private schools or homeschooling. Though it makes sense that those have a place in society.

Who can be trusted? Doesn't it seem like there are no good guys left? In politics? In the news? On dating sites? In church leadership? There has been an Innocent One. Everyone around Him, a lifetime of witnesses, affirmed it. He can be trusted. He is worth following. So, find churches that make a big deal about Him. Who point to Him. Who try to relate everything to Him.

[Conclusion] When Clemente Aguirre-Jarquín was declared innocent, it impacted more than just him. All of his family and friends were rejoicing. A weight was lifted off of them as well. And the same goes for those who are certain that Jesus is the Innocent One. Christians recognize that since Jesus didn't plead His own innocence for His own sake, He can plead it for His family and friends. Being certain that Jesus is innocent empowers our faith to begin the Christian life and to

continue in relationship with Him every day. He can appeal to His innocence as the grounds for pardon of sins, unbroken fellowship with the Father, and an unending life of joy.