

## Luke 23:1-31 – Guilty or Innocent?

Clint Le Page

Main Point – Jesus the innocent was counted guilty, so we the guilty can be counted innocent, now praise him.

God gave me a strong sense of justice, that's been there since I was a boy.  
I find it really hard, and can be angry, when people are treated unfairly.  
I really don't like it when the guilty go free, and the innocent suffer injustice.  
What about you?-----

A movie that really moved me emotionally, was, **The Green Mile**.(SLIDE)  
You've had 27 years to watch it, so sorry for spoiling the ending.  
It's fiction, yet the innocent John Coffey is falsely accused, and wrongly executed.  
(SLIDE) **Just Mercy**, is based on a true story, of someone seeking freedom after being wrongly convicted.

There's many other true stories affecting real people, where the innocent have been found guilty, by justice systems.-----

It feels so wrong when the innocent are punished as guilty.-----

But that's what we've just read about, haven't we?

Jesus, was innocent, but accused and then condemned to die.-----

What purpose could God have had in that?-----

And what difference does it make to us today?----- We'll think about this.-----

We're considering what Luke's Gospel says about the events prior to Jesus' death.

And this Good Friday morning to remember our Lord's death on the cross.-----

Last Sunday, in Luke 22, we saw that while Jesus followers all fail, as do we;  
Jesus never did.

We read about Jesus being betrayed by a friend, denied and abandoned, then condemned by the Jewish religious court.

They believe Jesus is deserving of death.

But the Jewish leaders need the Roman governor Pilate, to approve the death penalty.

Which brings us to Luke 23, our passage today, and **my first point**,

**Accusations**.(SLIDE)-----

It's early morning when the whole Jewish Sanhedrin bring Jesus to Pilate.

**V2**, they accuse Jesus of, **1**, misleading or corrupting our nation.

It's an accusation of false teaching.

They accuse Jesus of **2**, opposing payment of taxes to Caesar.

But if you read **Luke 20 (SLIDE,v20ff)**, you'll see is a blatant lie.

It's false witness the Jews are guilty of here.

Thirdly, they accuse Jesus of claiming to be the Messiah, a king.

Now Jesus is the Messiah, the Christ, the promised King.(SLIDE-Lk 9.20f)

But he hasn't gone around preaching that.

People said he was, days earlier on Palm Sunday, (SLIDE-Luke 19.38).

But he's not been going around saying that himself, or publicising it.-----

Pilate asks Jesus, '*Are you the King of the Jews?*'

And Jesus doesn't answer him clearly.-----

More details of their conversation are found in John 18-19.-----

But Jesus was not a threat or rival-king to Caesar, and Pilate knows it.-----

So the Jews in **v5**, with their earlier attempts failing, bring other accusations.

They accuse Jesus of **fourthly**, stirring up the people, with his teaching.

It's a charge of causing political unrest.

The mention of Galilee though, leads Pilate to try and handball the case to **Herod** – who was responsible for Galilee.

**V8** tells us Herod was very pleased to see Jesus.

But how does Jesus respond to Herod's interrogating questions?---- With no answer. Even when the Jewish leaders, who followed Jesus to Herod's place, kept passionately accusing him; he does not answer.

Just like **Isa 53v7** promised the Suffering Servant and Messiah would do,(**SLIDE**)

He was oppressed and afflicted, yet he did not open his mouth.

Like a lamb led to the slaughter

and like a sheep silent before her shearers, he did not open his mouth.-----

Jesus is innocent of the charges, but he won't explain or defend himself.-----

**V8** makes clear Herod just wanted Jesus to perform a miracle for him

And when Jesus won't act like a circus monkey, or put on the personal magic show, look at **v11**, he's treated disrespectfully and cruelly.-----

They mock him and put him in dress-ups to have their fun with him.-----

In all this Jesus shows triumphant trust in God.-----

He's then sent back for what is really a second trial before Pilate.

Pilate then says in **v14**, the Jewish leaders and people have been accusing Jesus of misleading the people.

But what does Pilate think of these charges?-----

Is Jesus guilty of these things?-----

**Is Jesus, guilty or innocent, Point 2.(SLIDE)-----**

Back in **v4** Pilate said, for the first time, 'I find no grounds for charging this man'.

No cause for guilt, no crime.

In other words, in my non-legal, layman's terms, he's innocent.-----

The charges should have been dismissed and the prisoner freed at this point.

But Pilate was a weak man, in a vulnerable political position, and he's pressured.

When that 4<sup>th</sup> charge comes in **v5**, he tries to handball the problem to **Herod**.

But as we saw, Herod wasn't interested in the truth of who Jesus is, and whether or not he's guilty of the charges.

To Herod and his soldiers, Jesus is a joke.

But he's not deserving of death.

So Herod sends him back to Pilate to deal with.-----

In **v14-15**, Pilate says for the second time, '*I find no grounds to charge this man*'.

Jesus is not guilty, and done nothing to deserve death.

And Pilate says Herod thought he was innocent of the charges too.-----

Still, the Jewish leaders and crowd of people in **v18**, have a request.

They ask for the one guilty of murder and rebellion, Barabbas, to be released, and for Jesus to be crucified.

Then a third time, **v22, for the third time**, Pilate says, What's he done wrong?

I find no basis for the death penalty.-----

Jesus is not guilty, not guilty of any of it.

Still, Barabbas is set free, and Jesus is given over to the murderous will of the people,

**v25**. It is so unfair!-----

All of the people **abuse their power**.

Pilate and Herod, the soldiers, and the crowd of everyday people with their loud voices in **v23**; they all abuse their power, to the harm of Jesus.

All abuse their power, except one; except Jesus.-----

Not one person stands up for him. No one!-----

**No one is interested in truth or justice.**

Everyone has a selfish agenda.

The only righteous person is the one who's accused and on trial.

The whole system is a circus.-----

And **in our society**, it seems many people, and many in positions of power and influence, are not really interested in truth or justice either.-----

Even in matters of life and death.-----

Thousands of Unborn human lives are not valued and protected, or treated justly.-----

Nor are the lives of people in certain places.

In the media we hear about violent attacks in Melbourne, and News affecting Western countries, like war in the middle-east, and an airplane crashing into a NY fire-truck, killing 2.

Why did we not hear that 3 weeks ago, **(SLIDE)** 200 people were slaughtered by Islamist terrorists in a **Christian-majority town in Nigeria?**-----

At least 300 others were abducted, and dozens of Christians beheaded.-----

The persecution and murder of Christians is not reported in our media.-----

In Australia many people don't care if some things are true, only '*what difference does it make to me?*'-----

In our *me-centred* culture, people often only think, what's in it for me.-----

The hearts of human beings haven't changed.-----

In Luke 23, all these people interacting with Jesus, don't care about the truth.

There is no one righteous here, but one. Jesus is the only righteous one.-----

Everyone else is guilty of sin here, but not Jesus.-----

What about us?

**Point 3, Are we guilty or innocent?**-----

I think we can too often be quick to look down on all these people in the story who wrong Jesus.

We might think, 'I'd never have joined the crowd calling for Jesus' death'.

But we need to see that there's no one standing with him, speaking for him, & doing right.

Remember last week, all his disciples left him, and fled, and failed.

Only Jesus stayed faithful.

Now we've seen everyone else acting unjustly and with selfish interests.

And we're no different.

We've all done wrong, all failed, all sinned.-----

It's important for us to see that we should count ourselves among the guilty sinners too.

We're not innocent like Jesus.

We've failed to love God, stay faithful to God.

Even as Christians, saved by Jesus, we fail to live with Jesus as Lord over choices we make every day.-----

None of us are without sin, are we?-----

And Romans 3 says, that is God's verdict about us all:

**Rom 3.23(SLIDE)**

all have sinned and fall short of the<sup>[9]</sup> glory of God.

We've all wronged God and fallen short of his holiness, & the obedience he deserves.

Do you confess that that is true of you?-----

**As Isa 53.6 says, (SLIDE)** We all like sheep have gone astray,

each of us have has to our own way; and...-----

the Lord has laid on him (punished him for) the iniquity of us all.-----

This is what the apostle Paul explains in **Rom 3.24(SLIDE)**,

[people] are justified freely by [God's] grace through the redemption that is Christ.

<sup>25</sup> God presented him as [literally the propitiation] by his blood, through faith.

The CSB's translation of 'mercy seat' is not clear or helpful.

Jesus' life given, is the sacrifice which turns aside God's wrath and takes away our sin.

How do we receive and experience this?-----

The end of **v26** says, God will 'justify the one who has faith in Jesus.'-----

I asked at the start, what was God's purpose in allowing the innocent Jesus to be condemned as guilty and die?

And what difference does it make to us?----- This is it!-----

To be **justified** by God is to be right in God's sight, it's to be accepted by and get his thumbs up.

To be justified is to receive life and not death.

Reconciliation with God, not eternal separation.

Heaven and not hell.

Because God looks at us, Just as if we'd never sinned.-----

And the only way sinful people can be justified by the righteous God, is if their sin is punished and laid on a sacrifice and substitute.

And that's what happens in Jesus' suffering and dying.

He is counted as guilty, condemned as guilty. He dies as the guilty one.

Our punishment for our sins is laid on him. **(2Cor 5.21-SLIDE)**-----

But there's more. His righteousness is credited to us.

His right-relationship and sinless record, is counted as ours.-----

### **We are like Barabbas.**

He is guilty and yet goes free; counted as innocent.

Jesus is innocent but is counted as guilty.-----

We are like Barabbas, for we are guilty, but counted as innocent and forgiven.

Even though we have done no work of our own to deserve this.

That is the glorious good news of justification by faith.-----

The question is, *Have you put your faith and desperate dependent trust (DDT) in Jesus?*-----

If you have put dependent trust in Jesus, then brothers and sisters, every day, lean into that comforting truth.

The suffering and death for sin that you deserved, was taken by Jesus.

He was punished in your place.

You are saved by eternal judgement and hell by trusting in and following him.-----

By believing in him the guilty go free.-----

Christ was counted & killed as guilty, so we could be counted as innocent, in God's sight.

It is the glorious good-news of the Gospel. And makes All the difference.-----

So if we are guilty in ourselves, but through Christ we are declared innocent, and justified in God's sight, **how should we respond?**-----

Surely it must be with praise, and sincere gratitude.

With us being deeply grateful.

With our heart being filled with thankfulness, for him who bore my pain.

Who plumbd the depths of my disgrace and gave me life again.-----

A passage we read last week was 1 Peter 2.

And in **1 Pet 2.24 we read.(SLIDE)**

He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree; so that, having died to sins, we might live for righteousness.

Jesus bore our punishment for sin and died, so that we would 'live for righteousness'.

Live rightly, live to please God.

God counts us justified n' right in his sight.

Now he says, live out who I've declared you to be. Live rightly.

And we do that by living like Christ.  
 By saying 'No' to sin.  
 By living all for Jesus.  
 All of life all for Jesus, and to glorify God.-----

I grew up going to church with my Mum and 3 younger brothers.  
 And I've known and sought to follow Jesus as long as I can remember.  
 One of my brothers, **Garreth** though, had a period from about 15 years old on, where he walked away from the Lord.  
 He thought he was a Christian, but actually pursued a path of partying, drinking and living for pleasure.  
 But in God's grace the Lord revealed himself to my brother in a very personal way.  
 And one Easter, when the rest of us were away camping, Garreth was moved to go and look at this painting in my brother Nathan's room.(**SLIDE**)  
 The painting is called, 'Forgiven'.-----  
 It shows that our sin nailed Jesus to the cross, but he loves and forgives.-----  
 Garreth looked and saw a guy holding a hammer and nail, and yet he is being held by Jesus.  
 Like for me, my brother saw himself in this painting, knowing I have disobeyed; I have let Him down; I've ignored Him at times.  
 Garreth says, I had the veil lifted from my eyes, and came to see my sin and brokenness before God.  
 And my brother heard Jesus saying to him, "I did this for you".-----  
 Our Lord Jesus forgives and restores.  
 As my brother experienced when he turned away from sin and put his trust in Jesus that day.-----  
 But God continued to do a work of grace in my brother's life.  
 Garreth's life changed.  
 He came back to church. He started living with different priorities.  
 And praise be to God, Garreth is now a servant-hearted follower of Jesus; who works hard and with integrity in his job, who serves his family and church, with generosity and faithfulness and sacrifices.  
 He's living his life for Jesus.-----  
 I hope you will too.-----

#### **My 4<sup>th</sup> and final point this morning is, Weeping and Warning.(SLIDE)**

Briefly, coming to the last part of our passage, **v26**.-----  
 Jesus was too weak to carry his own cross.  
 Carrying the cross to the place of execution was to add to the punishment, like being made to dig your own grave.-----  
 Jesus was unable to, which was why Simon from Cyrene, a north-African from modern-day Libia carried it.(**SLIDE**. He likely became a follower of Jesus, Mk 15.21)-----  
 Despite the blood loss, exhaustion and pain, notice how Jesus in **v28**, still has love for others.  
 This is a long speech for someone who's been awake all night, on trial, beaten, bullied, and flogged to the edge of his life (Mark 15.15).  
 There's a large crowd following him, including women who are mourning and wailing.  
 And Jesus turns to them and says, '**Daughters of Jerusalem**, don't weep for me, but weep for yourselves and your children.'  
 He is again, not thinking about himself, but effectively urging them to get right with God while they have time.  
 This shows Jesus' love for human beings.-----

Jesus looks beyond his present personal suffering, to a future time, when the consequences for human sin will be felt by all.

The majority of women Jesus refers to here, are not likely the female followers of Jesus from Galilee, mentioned in **v55**.

They're women from Jerusalem, who may not have yet found forgiveness.

And Jesus **warns them** of two future times.

He's talking firstly about the Roman siege on Jerusalem, to come 40 years later.

Like Jesus said in **Lk 21 v17ff(v20,23-SLIDE)**, that time of war and famine, suffering and violence, pain and death, will be devastating.

And you'll be blessed if you don't have kids then.----

And people will wish the mountains fell on them and they died instantly.

But that judgement on the Jew, and Jerusalem is only a taste of the final judgement.

In Lk 23.30 Jesus quotes **Hosea 10v8(SLIDE)**

Words also quoted in Rev 6.

When King Jesus returns, he will end this present world and bring the final judgment.

And that will also be a time when people wish the mountains fell on them (**Rev 6.16-SLIDE**)

People will fear the wrath of the Lamb, King Jesus.-----

So in **Luke 23.31**, Jesus says, if people do this when the wood is green, what will happen when it is dry?-----

Most likely Jesus means, if such terrible things happen when times are good, how bad will it be when times are bad for everyone.

In other words, a far worse time is coming for you Jews, and for the world.-----

When Christ comes again, it will be a terrible and fearful day, for all who are not his people.(2 Thess 1.7-10)

Then, *Who can stand?*-----

Only those who are justified by grace through faith in Jesus.-----

So Jesus says to the women in Jerusalem, weep about that day.

And get right with God now before it's too late.-----

And **We need to take sin seriously.(SLIDE)**

We need to take the suffering and judgement to come seriously.-----

We need to get right with God now.

Be justified by faith now.-----

Now is the time to turn to Jesus in desperate and dependent trust.-----

Now can be the day of salvation for you.-----

Jesus got what we deserve, so we could get what he deserved.

Trust him. Or brothers and sisters, choose to keep on trusting him.-----

And then you have encouragement, and thankfulness and hope.-----

He was counted guilty for us, so we could be counted innocent.

Ask God to help you know how big that is.

How wonderful that is.

Ask God to help you feel that.

And fill you with gratitude, and praise.

And a desire to live for righteousness, live for Jesus.-----

Let's pray