

Innocence & Injustice

Luke 23:1-25

- ❑ After the “last supper” (*Luke 22:7-38*), Jesus went to the Mount of Olives to pray (*22:39-46*). Anticipating his great suffering, Jesus prayed, “Father, if you are willing, take this cup [of suffering] from me; yet not my will, but yours be done” (*22:42*).

Innocence

- ❑ Jesus knew that he would be arrested, tried, and crucified.¹ But Jesus had done nothing wrong! His innocence is clearly presented in Luke’s account of his trial and crucifixion in Luke 23.
 - *Pilate*:² “I find no basis for a charge against this man” (*23:4*).
 - *Pilate*: “I have examined him in your presence and have found no basis for your charges against him. Neither has Herod [Antipas]³...as you can see, he has done nothing to deserve death” (*23:14b-15a, NIV*).
 - *Pilate*: “I have found in him no grounds for the death penalty” (*23:22*).
 - *Man on cross*: “But this man has done nothing wrong” (*23:41b*).
 - *Centurion*⁴ (*after Jesus died*): “Surely this was a righteous man” (*23:47b*).



📖 Jesus “was without sin” (*Hebrews 4:15*).

Injustice

- ❑ Though Jesus was innocent, he suffered greatly. Luke 22-23 records the injustice he suffered.⁵ Jesus was...
 - Betrayed by Judas (*22:47-48*); mocked, insulted, and beaten by the temple guards (*22:63-65*); rejected and condemned by the Jewish religious leaders (*22:66-71*).
 - Falsely accused by the Jewish religious leaders (*23:1-2, 5, 10*); subjected to the Jews’ insistent demands to crucify him (*23:21, 23*).
 - Ridiculed and mocked by Herod and his soldiers (*23:11*).
 - Denied justice by Pilate (*23:24*); crucified⁶ by the Romans (*23:33*).
 - Sneered at by rulers (*23:35*); mocked by soldiers (*23:36*); insulted by a criminal (*23:39*).



📖 “In his humiliation he was deprived of justice” (*Acts 8:33a; Isaiah 53:8a*).

The Trial⁷

- ❑ After the Jewish religious leaders condemned Jesus (*Luke 22:66-71; Mark 14:55-65*), they took him to Pilate. Read Luke 23:1-25.

¹ “crucified” – executed (killed) by “crucifixion” – death by affixing the living victim to a cross. This was the most cruel form of execution. See “The Passion of the Christ” on the ICF website for details.

² Pilate was the governor over Judea, Samaria, and Idumea from AD 26 to AD 36.

³ Herod Antipas, a son of Herod the Great, was ruler over Galilee and Perea, from 4 BC to AD 39.

⁴ “centurion” – commander of a hundred soldiers in the Roman army.

⁵ Luke does not record everything he suffered. A more complete picture may be gained by reading all of the accounts.

⁶ Though scourging (whipping) is not explicitly mentioned in Luke’s account, it was the normal practice prior to crucifixion, and is mentioned in Mark 15:15. See “The Passion of the Christ” on the ICF website for details.

⁷ Luke focuses on the trials before Roman authorities. Luke does not provide all of the details, but he provides some information that the other Gospel writers do not (e.g., Luke 23:2, 6-12). For more information, see the parallel accounts in Matthew 27:2, 11-26; Mark 15:1-15; and John 18:28-19:16.

- ❑ In Jesus' trial before the Jewish religious leaders, he was charged with blasphemy⁸ (*Mark 14:60-64*), but such charges would not matter to the Roman government. So the Jewish religious leaders accused him of other crimes (*23:2*).
 - “[misleading] our nation” (*v. 2*). However, Jesus did not mislead people, or incite rebellion.
 - “opposing payment of taxes to Caesar” (*v. 2*). However, this was clearly false (*Luke 20:25*).
 - “claims to be Christ, a king” (*v. 2*). However, while Jesus claimed to be the Christ (the Messianic king), he did not plan to overthrow the Roman government (see *John 18:36*).
- ❑ Pilate was not convinced of the accusations, so he declared Jesus innocent (*23:4*). He repeated his opinion two more times (*23:14-15, 22*). However, Jesus' accusers persisted. As the pressure on Pilate increased,⁹ he attempted to make a deal.
 - 📖 “Now it was the governor's custom at the Feast to release a prisoner chosen by the crowd. At that time they had a notorious prisoner, called Barabbas.¹⁰ So when the crowd had gathered, Pilate asked them, ‘Which one do you want me to release to you: Barabbas, or Jesus who is called Christ?’ For he knew it was out of envy that they handed Jesus over to him” (*Matthew 27:15-18, NIV*).
- ❑ Pilate's plan did not work the way he intended. The crowd cried out all together,¹¹ “Away with this man [Jesus]! Release Barabbas to us! ...Crucify [Jesus]! Crucify him!” (*23:18, 21*). After Pilate's attempts to compromise failed (*23:16, 22*), he decided to grant their demand (*23:23*).
 1. What are the different attitudes toward Jesus? (Consider the Jewish religious leaders, the people, Pilate, Herod and his soldiers.) How are they different? How are they alike?
 2. The criminal Barabbas is set free, while the innocent Jesus dies instead. What do you think about this “injustice?”¹² Consider *Romans 3:23-26; 5:8*; and *2 Corinthians 5:21*.
 - 📖 “For God made Christ, who never sinned, to be the offering for our sin, so that we could be made right with God through Christ” (*2 Cor. 5:21, NLT*).
 3. As believers, how can reflecting on the injustice and suffering that Jesus faced help *us* live the Christian life in an unjust and troubled world?



Reflection & Application

- If you were at Jesus' trial, what would *you* think about him? If you were in Pilate's position, what would you do? Why? How do your thoughts about Jesus compare to what the Bible says about him? If your thoughts are different, why? Continue to seek a true knowledge of Jesus.
- Do you get discouraged by the injustice in this world, and the troubles in your life? Reflect on Jesus, who endured the greatest injustice, and take heart. He is able to sympathize with our weaknesses, and He has overcome the world. Read *Hebrews 4:14-16, 12:1-13* and *John 16:33*.

⁸ “blasphemy” – speaking against God. The Jewish leaders condemned Jesus for equating himself with God, or at least associating himself too closely with Him. Of course, as God in the flesh (*John 1:1, 14*), Jesus was justified in this.

⁹ The number of accusers seemed to be increasing. The religious leaders were joined by “the people” (*23:13*).

¹⁰ Barabbas was an insurrectionist (insurgent, rebel) and thief, who had committed murder in an uprising (*23:19; Mark 15:7; John 13:40*). Perhaps the two men crucified with Jesus were also insurgents and thieves, and the three crosses at Golgotha were intended for Barabbas and these two men.

¹¹ Mark writes, “the chief priests stirred up the crowd to have Pilate release Barabbas instead [of Jesus]” (*15:11*).

¹² This illustrates Christ's death for sinners like us (*Romans 3:23; 5:8*). However, the analogy is limited. We do not know anything about Barabbas' faith; but to be truly “set free,” we must trust in Jesus Christ (*Romans 8:1-2*).