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Sermon Notes

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Injustice and Justice on Eternal Display

Mark 14:53-65

In today's account, we see the beginning of the trials of Jesus Christ before human authorities. God on trial before man... as man probes him and accuses him and demands an answer from him.

Beyond that, we see the stunning irony of the trial of Jesus Christ before a human court. The only perfect man that has ever lived, standing on trial for his life before a deeply wicked and corrupt judicial system.

We have here infinite irony. Perfect God on trial before sinful man. And both the greatest display of injustice in history as well as the greatest display of justice. Injustice at the human level... because Jesus had done nothing wrong at all. But justice at the divine level because God had put the sins of the world on his perfect Son and crushed him for those imputed sins. Sins he didn't commit himself... but sins which he perfectly bore as our substitute, and then died as a display of God's perfect justice.

How can the greatest display of human injustice in history also be the greatest display of divine justice in history? That is what is before our eyes in the text this morning

I. God on Trial Before Man; Man on Trial Before God

A. C.S. Lewis: *God in the Dock*

1. The phrase "in the dock" is British for "on trial"

"Ancient man approached God as the accused person approaches his judge. For the modern man the roles are reversed. He is the judge: God is in the dock. [Man] is quite a kindly judge: if God

should have a reasonable defense for being the god who permits war, poverty, and disease, he is ready to listen to it. The trial may even end in God's acquittal. But the important thing is that man is on the bench and God in the dock."

2. Massive role reversal!

B. Human Beings Put God on Trial Every Day

1. Especially in the issue of human suffering
2. God "owes me an explanation" or even, "God owes us an apology"
3. Elie Wiesel in his book on the Jewish holocaust said openly that the horrific level of Jewish suffering made him strong in his accusations of God

"This day I ceased to plead. I was no longer capable of lamentation. On the contrary, I felt very strong. I was the accuser, God the accused."

4. Job himself got to this point in his sufferings:

Job 31:35-37 I sign now my defense-- let the Almighty answer me; let my accuser put his indictment in writing. ³⁶ Surely I would wear it on my shoulder, I would put it on like a crown. ³⁷ I would give him an account of my every step; like a prince I would approach him.

So much so that when God answers Job from the whirlwind, he says:

Job 40:2 "Will the one who contends with the Almighty correct him? Let him who accuses God answer him!"

5. Man in his pain feels every right to put God on trial and demand explanations from him

C. Jesus' trials are a picture of this reversal

1. Jesus, the glorious incarnate Son of God standing on trial before wicked men
2. They demand answers from him, accuse him of crimes, condemn him to death, slap him, spit in his face

D. BUT the future holds something quite different!

1. The entire human race will be arraigned before Jesus who is the Judge of all the Earth

John 5:22-23 the Father judges no one, but has entrusted all judgment to the Son, ²³ that all may honor the Son just as they honor the Father.

Matthew 25:31-32 When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, he will sit on his throne in heavenly glory. ³² All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate the people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats.

2. So... picture Annas, and Caiaphas and the men who spit in Jesus' fame and slapped him... and indeed Pontius Pilate on their knees before Jesus' glorious Judgment Seat!

First, let's focus on the massive miscarriage of justice in his trials before the Jewish religious leaders... the greatest injustice in the history of the world

II. Jewish Injustice in Jesus' Case

A. An Overview of Jesus' Trials

1. Two phases, each with three parts... six total trials
2. Phase 1: a religious trial before the Jewish authorities
3. Phase 2: a secular trial before the Roman authority
4. A sharing of blame at the human level... both Jews and Gentiles equally responsible for the death of the Son of God

B. Each of These Trials Had Three Parts

1. Phase 1: The Religious Trial
 - a. Step 1: arraigned before Annas at his private residence (John 18:13-24... kind of like a one-man grand jury to identify the charges against Jesus)

- i) Annas was the true power behind all the evildoing among the Jewish religious authorities
- ii) He had been High Priest until AD 15, when the Romans removed him
- iii) But his sons or son-in-law were established as High Priests after him... keeping the power within the family
- iv) Caiaphas, the High Priest that year, was his son-in-law
- v) When Jesus was brought to Annas's home, Annas tried to get him to incriminate himself... he probed him about his doctrines; Jesus demanded that Annas bring witnesses; Annas then moved Jesus on to the next stage of the trial

- b. Step 2: the first trial before the Sanhedrin, with Caiaphas presiding... that is the trial recorded here in Mark 14
- c. Step 3: the same group reconvened just before dawn to pronounce final sentence on Jesus, as recorded in Matthew 27:1

2. Phase 2: The Secular Trial

- a. First, before Pontius Pilate
- b. Second, before Herod Antipas (tetrarch of Galilee, who was in Jerusalem at the time... Luke 23:6-12)
- c. Finally, before Pilate one last time at which Pilate pronounced final judgment on Jesus, washing his hands of his blood

C. All of these trials were scandalous miscarriages of justice!

- 1. Jews and Romans both prided themselves on their enlightened systems of justice
- 2. Yet both broke many rules in their books to get Jesus killed

D. Jewish Justice Established by Moses... Codified in their writings

- 1. As the Jews were about to enter the Promised Land, God wanted to establish a model society governed by his holy laws

2. The commandment, “Love your neighbor as yourself” along with the ninth commandment, “You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor” were the basic building blocks for this just society
3. Key: Deuteronomy 16

Deuteronomy 16:18-20 *Appoint judges and officials for each of your tribes in every town the LORD your God is giving you, and they shall judge the people fairly. ¹⁹ Do not pervert justice or show partiality. Do not accept a bribe, for a bribe blinds the eyes of the wise and twists the words of the righteous. ²⁰ Follow justice and justice alone, so that you may live and possess the land the LORD your God is giving you.*

4. The Sanhedrin established for the purpose of justice
 - a. Any community with at least 120 men could form their own council to try cases
 - b. Council came to be known by the Greek term for “sitting together”—*sunedrion*
 - c. Goal was to guarantee justice for everyone accused of a crime
5. Capital crimes had to be proven by clear testimony from witnesses

Deuteronomy 17:6 *On the testimony of two or three witnesses a man shall be put to death, but no one shall be put to death on the testimony of only one witness.*

6. False witnesses punished severely

Deuteronomy 19:16-19 *If a malicious witness takes the stand to accuse a man of a crime, ¹⁷ the two men involved in the dispute must stand in the presence of the LORD before the priests and the judges who are in office at the time. ¹⁸ The judges must make a thorough investigation, and if the witness proves to be a liar, giving false testimony against his brother, ¹⁹ then do to him as he intended to do to his brother.*

7. Rabbinical law required the sentence of death could not be carried out until the third day after the trial, and the council members were

to fast on the intervening day; this gave additional time for evidence that might be used for the defense of the convicted man

a. This is also why a capital trial could never occur during a Jewish FEAST, because the Sanhedrin could not fast during that time

8. Witnesses had to give the exact date, time, and location of the incident
9. There was always a presumption of innocence... the defense of the accused was handled with great care
10. If the verdict of death was not overturned, an officer of the council escorted the prisoner to the place of execution; a herald went ahead of the slow-moving procession declaring in a loud voice, "This man [stating the name of the convicted man] is led to punishment for such and such a crime; the witnesses who have sworn against him are [name and name]; if anyone has evidence in his favor, come forward quickly."
11. At the place of execution, the convicted man was urged to confess his crime; then a powerful sedative drink was given to dull his senses and make his death less painful.
12. In addition
 - a. No trial could begin or continue into the night
 - b. In the Sanhedrin, when the vote for conviction was taken, it would proceed from the youngest to the oldest, so the youngest would not be unduly influenced by the older members of the council
 - c. If the vote was ever unanimous, the accused was immediately set free, because the necessary element of mercy was lacking
13. In all of these things, they operated under the principle: "The Sanhedrin is to save, not destroy, life."
14. The goal was not merely justice but mercy wherever possible

E. All of This Thrown Out the Window in the Case of Christ

1. MASSIVE INJUSTICE at every point!
2. The Sanhedrin violated virtually every principle of justice and mercy when it came to the trial of Jesus Christ
3. Jesus was effectively condemned before even coming to a trial... the Jewish leaders had already tried and convicted Jesus illegally and unjustly in their own minds long before he stood before them
4. The trial was a mere formality to maintain the appearance of justice
 - a. Jesus was illegally tried before first being charged with a crime
 - b. He was tried at night and in private
 - c. He had no defense counsel
 - d. There were many false witnesses and none of them was held accountable for their false testimony
 - e. He was executed the same day he was tried and sentence... no chance at an appeal; no opportunity for the council to fast to be sure they were doing the right thing
 - f. It was hastily thrown together with the barest semblance of justice because there was NO JUSTICE IN IT AT ALL!
 - g. Furthermore, they treated Jesus with tremendous disgrace... mocking him and spitting upon him... something that should never be done in any case

F. The Perfection of Jesus Christ

1. Jesus the only perfect man that has ever lived
2. Jesus, filled perfectly with love at every moment both for God and for others
3. Jesus, who poured out his life every moment in service for the poor, broken-hearted, pain-filled
4. Jesus, the only man who has ever perfectly obeyed the Law of Moses

Jesus said directly to his enemies: ***John 8:46 Can any of you prove me guilty of sin?***

1 Peter 2:22 He committed no sin, and no deceit was found in his mouth.

G. The Prideful Hate of the Jewish Leaders

1. Because he testified that what they did what evil
2. Because he exposed their righteousness as a sham, calling them “whitewashed tombs”
3. Because he cleansed the Temple twice, overturning the tables of the moneychangers, thus hitting what they cared the most about
4. Because he exposed their wicked oppression of the poor
5. Because they were jealous of his miracles and his popularity with the people
6. Because they were afraid of the Romans taking away their place and their nation because they were threatened by him
7. Caiaphas’s Prophetic Conclusion

John 11:50 “You do not realize that it is better for you that one man die for the people than that the whole nation perish.”

So... the leaders had all come to the same conclusion long before this:

Matthew 26:59 The chief priests and the whole Sanhedrin were looking for false evidence against Jesus so that they could put him to death.

H. The Facts of the Corrupt Trial

1. Mark skips the first step... the brief arraignment at Annas’s home, and goes right to the first trial before the Sanhedrin

Mark 14:53 They took Jesus to the high priest, and all the chief priests, elders and teachers of the law came together.

It is the middle of the night... completely illegal

2. Side note on Peter:

Mark 14:54 Peter followed him at a distance, right into the courtyard of the high priest. There he sat with the guards and warmed himself at the fire.

3. The quest for witnesses

Mark 14:55-56 The chief priests and the whole Sanhedrin were looking for evidence against Jesus so that they could put him to death, but they did not find any. ⁵⁶ Many testified falsely against him, but their statements did not agree.

- a. Very difficult to get the false witnesses together at 3 in the morning, but money talks
- b. Undoubtedly these false witnesses were ready to testify for a fee
- c. However, their statements did not agree
- d. So these false witnesses should have been prosecuted by the Laws of Moses for breaking the ninth commandment
- e. But there was no real quest for justice that night

4. The false witnesses that came the closest

Mark 14:57-58 Then some stood up and gave this false testimony against him: ⁵⁸ "We heard him say, 'I will destroy this man-made temple and in three days will build another, not made by man.'"

5. But look at this...

Mark 14:59 Yet even then their testimony did not agree.

6. What Jesus actually DID say

- a. As recorded in John 2, at the beginning of his ministry Jesus cleansed the Temple the first time
- b. Jesus' enemies challenged him

John 2:18-20 "What sign do you show us for doing these things?" ¹⁹ Jesus answered them, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up." ²⁰ The Jews then said, "It has taken forty-six years to build this temple, and will you raise it up in three days?"

So... look carefully. Did Jesus claim to be able to destroy the physical temple of Herod and rebuild it in three days? NO, his words were "YOU destroy this temple; I will raise it up in three days."

The destroying of the temple would be THEIR part, the raising of it in three days was HIS part.

Clearly this was speaking of the very thing they were seeking to do that night of injustice... killing his body; and the very thing he would do on the third day – raise up his own body from the dead

7. So for this reason, the false witnesses were bickering about what Jesus said and tried to shape their testimony accordingly.
8. Yet the second part of their words was amazingly close to what the author of Hebrews would say about the true tabernacle in heaven

Mark 14:58 We heard him say, 'I will destroy this man-made temple and in three days will build another, not made by man.'

Hebrews 9:11 When Christ came as high priest of the good things that are already here, he went through the greater and more perfect tabernacle that is not man-made, that is to say, not a part of this creation.

Jesus' death and resurrection perfectly fulfilled the animals sacrificial system and is for us the heavenly tabernacle by which we sinners draw near to a holy God.

I. The Frustration Comes to a Climax

Mark 14:60 Then the high priest stood up before them and asked Jesus, "Are you not going to answer? What is this testimony that these men are bringing against you?"

1. Again, this was completely illegal
2. The high priest, Caiaphas, is not satisfied with the wretched attempts by the false witnesses, so just like Annas had done earlier, he tried to get Jesus to incriminate himself by his own words with NO witnesses or evidence

J. Jesus' Deafening Silence... ***"Jesus remained silent"*** (vs. 61)

1. Jesus would not grace their wicked injustice with a single word
2. This was also a direct fulfillment of the prophecy in Isaiah 53

Isaiah 53:7 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.

K. The High Priest's Final Attempt... and Jesus' Sublime Answer

Mark 14:61-62 Again the high priest asked him, "Are you the Christ, the Son of the Blessed One?" 62 "I am," said Jesus. "And you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Mighty One and coming on the clouds of heaven."

1. The Gospel of Matthew tells us that Caiaphas charged Jesus with a solemn oath to tell the truth:

Matthew 26:63 "I charge you under oath by the living God: Tell us if you are the Christ, the Son of God."

- a. Unbelievably hypocritical... this oath was the most serious they could administer... "As Almighty God lives and as he knows the truth, as you live in the presence of this holy God... TELL THE TRUTH!!" Yet this wicked man and all his wicked cronies were paying false witnesses to lie and execute an innocent man
 - b. The question: Are you "the Christ"... that's one thing; but even worse, "The Son of God"... which they never would have said the Christ was, but which Jesus had claimed again and again
 - c. The High Priest is luring Jesus to his death
2. Jesus' stunning answer
 - a. Mark alone has this statement: "I AM"... an overt claim to deity
 - b. It harkens back to God's revelation of his name to Moses at the burning bush in which he said "I am who I am"

- c. Twenty-one times in the Gospel of John, Jesus uses this important phrase, "I am"... "*eigo eimi*" in the Greek... most famously here

John 8:58 "I tell you the truth," Jesus answered, "before Abraham was born, I am!"

- d. At that moment, his enemies picked up stones to stone him... it was a clear claim to deity
- e. So now, at the critical moment in his trial, standing before the religious authorities of the nation of Israel, he claims overtly to be God in the flesh
- f. Jesus knew full well this would be his death sentence; but he said it anyway because it was TRUE and because they needed to believe that it was true for their own salvation:

John 8:24 I told you that you would die in your sins; if you do not believe that I am ..., you will indeed die in your sins."

- g. The sublime courage of Jesus at this moment
- h. BUT he didn't just leave it there!
- i. He went on to make this amazing prophecy

L. Jesus' Prophetic Claim

Mark 14:62 "And you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Mighty One and coming on the clouds of heaven."

1. Combination of Psalm 110 and Daniel 7
2. Psalm 110, David wrote, "**The Lord said to my Lord, sit at my right hand until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet.**" Jesus had used Psalm 110 to prove that the Messiah was not merely the Son of David, since David calls him "Lord"... and for God to invite him to sit at his right hand is the place of deity
3. Also, Jesus is alluding to the "Son of Man" vision in Daniel 7

Daniel 7:13-14 "In my vision at night I looked, and there before me was one like a son of man, coming with the clouds of heaven. He approached the Ancient of Days and was led into his presence. ¹⁴ He was given authority, glory and sovereign power; all peoples, nations and men of every language worshiped him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion that will not pass away, and his kingdom is one that will never be destroyed.

4. This is the most significant prediction of the deity of the Christ... because he is HUMAN (called "Son of Man") and he comes into the presence of God and receives from him the right to rule over the entire world and to be WORSHIPED by every nation on earth
5. Jesus couches both of these in terms of a PROPHECY...

In the future (literally "hereafter") you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of Power and coming on the clouds of heaven

A prediction of the Second Coming of Christ and of Judgment Day

6. This shows the significance of the Son of Man prophecy in Daniel 7... Jesus reached for it at the critical legal moment of his life

M. Unbelief and Rejection

1. All the Jews there should have fallen before Jesus in worship and accepted his claims as the Son of God... his miracles and his perfect life and teachings were enough, along with the many prophecies he'd already fulfilled
2. But they would not come to him that they might have life
3. The high priest's reaction led the way to their formal condemnation

Mark 14:63-64 The high priest tore his clothes. "Why do we need any more witnesses?" he asked. ⁶⁴ "You have heard the blasphemy. What do you think?" They all condemned him as worthy of death.

4. The high priest tearing his robes was a fake show of grief and zeal for the glory of God... as if he couldn't stand hearing God's glory torn down by such blasphemy

5. BUT what really was going on in his mind was, “AT LAST... we’ve GOT YOU!”
6. They violated the laws by having a MOB vote... not one at a time, not written down, not after fasting and prayer... just impulse and rage
7. Here was their official verdict: he’s WORTHY OF DEATH
8. Here was fulfilled this tragedy of tragedies

John 1:10-11 He was in the world, and though the world was made through him, the world did not recognize him. ¹¹ He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him.

N. Wicked Mockery

1. What follows is utter shamefulness... human sin at its worst

Mark 14:65 Then some began to spit at him; they blindfolded him, struck him with their fists, and said, "Prophecy!" And the guards took him and beat him.

2. To spit in someone’s face was the ultimate display of disrespect... stripping that person of humanity
3. Worse, they acknowledge his powers as a wonder-worker, but they mocked it... they blindfolded him and tried to get him to say who was striking him with their fists or slapping him
4. Again, such treatment of a prisoner was completely illegal
5. But everything they’d done that night was illegal... the greatest display of injustice in human history

YET... think what Joseph said to his brothers about their selling him into slavery:

Genesis 50:20 You meant it for evil, but God meant it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives.

At the human level, this is a repulsive display of wickedness; the intentions of all these men was nothing but evil toward Jesus

But God meant it... planned and orchestrated it... for the eternal good of all, the saving of lives for all eternity

AND also to display his own perfect justice!

III. God's Justice in Jesus' Case

A. Assertion: the Death of Christ was the Greatest Display of Justice in History

B. Doctrine

Romans 3:25-26 God presented him as a propitiation through faith in his blood. He did this to demonstrate his justice, because in his forbearance he had left the sins committed beforehand unpunished - ²⁶ he did it to demonstrate his justice at the present time, so as to be just and the one who justifies those who have faith in Jesus.

C. The Sins of the Old Testament Saints were never dealt with by God

1. The wages of sin is death... not just physical death, but eternal condemnation from God
2. Yet David committed adultery with Bathsheba and avoided the eternal death penalty

2 Samuel 12:13 Nathan replied, "The LORD has taken away your sin. You are not going to die."

3. God IN HIS FORBEARANCE (astonishing patience) had left David's sin unpunished
4. So also Moses' murder, Manasseh's horrible idolatry and slaughtering of his children to Baal, Nebuchadnezzar's tyranny and idolatry, Rahab's prostitution, etc.
5. All those sins UNPUNISHED... simply forgiven and covered up

D. Until the Death of Christ

1. God dealt with those sins fully by putting them on Christ

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

2. The death of God's precious beloved Son is the greatest display of his commitment to justice... greater than any time he killed a tyrant or rescued an oppressed victim or brought down an evil empire or vindicated a poor widow
- 3. God's commitment to justice is seen in the fact that he'd rather kill the perfect Son he loved than allow sinners like us into heaven without atoning for our sins**

Genesis 50:20 You meant it for evil, but God meant it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives.

IV. Applications

A. Be Appalled at Human Injustice

1. The wicked injustice displayed toward Jesus is the worst example of a tragically normal tendency
2. Every day in this sin-cursed world, people display wretched injustice toward each other
3. Especially those in positions of power, if they are not restrained by God's grace, will use those positions of power selfishly, plundering the poor and weak
4. The oppressed all over the world cry out for justice... in the parable of the persistent widow, God is especially concerned about the injustices toward his own precious people

Luke 18:7-8 And will not God bring about justice for his chosen ones, who cry out to him day and night? Will he keep putting them off? ⁸ I tell you, he will see that they get justice, and quickly.

B. Understand that Salvation is Not Justice but Mercy

1. If we demand justice from God we should realize justice means our condemnation

Romans 9:14-15 What then shall we say? Is God unjust? Not at all! ¹⁵ For he says to Moses, "I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion."

2. Jesus drank God's righteous justice that should have been poured out on us for our great wickedness and sins
3. All the harsh treatment Jesus received is what we deserved for our sins!

C. God Cannot Be Mocked, Neither Can He Be Judged

1. "God in the Dock" = God on trial
2. Sinners put God on trial every day
3. But the reality is that God is the Judge of all the earth... and someday we will stand before him

Romans 14:10-12 we will all stand before God's judgment seat. ¹¹ It is written: "'As surely as I live,' says the Lord, 'every knee will bow before me; every tongue will confess to God.'" ¹² So then, each of us will give an account of himself to God.

4. Are you ready for that day?!