

INNOCENCE ON TRIAL | LUKE 23:1–25 | PASTOR MARK BOFILL | 9/13/2026

I. Accused Before Pilate (1-5) | II. Abused Before Herod (6-12) | III. Abandoned For Barabbas (13-25)

INTRO: What happens when guilty men put the Innocent One on trial? — In Luke 23, the Judge of all the earth stands before the judgment of men. Jesus is accused, mocked, and condemned—yet the evidence declares: **HE IS INNOCENT!** — Pilate knows it. Herod confirms it. Yet the crowd cries, “*Crucify Him!*” — The issue was never the evidence—it was **what they would do with Jesus**. And that same question confronts us: **What will we do with Jesus?** / Today’s message: **INNOCENCE ON TRIAL.**

I. ACCUSED BEFORE PILATE (1-5) – **READ:** The religious leaders have already decided Jesus must die! But because **Rome controlled Capital Punishment**, they needed Rome to approve their verdict.

A. The Accusers Present Their Claim (1-2): Pontius Pilate **was the Roman governor of Judea**, serving under Emperor Tiberius. His role was to maintaining Roman law, and keep political peace.

- The Sanhedrin accused Jesus of blasphemy, but **REPACKAGED their accusation to make it political**. Notice their Three Accusations (2): “*We found this fellow perverting the nation, and forbidding to pay taxes to Caesar, saying that He Himself is Christ, a King.*”
1. **Accused of Perverting the Nation** – Lie! He was actually **Saving the Nation**. – In (Acts 17:6b-7), the early Church was Accused for similar charges : “*These who have turned the world upside down have come here too. 7 ...and these are all acting contrary to the decrees of Caesar, saying there is another king—Jesus.*” (This is how **the world still views Christianity!**)
 2. **Accused for Forbidding Paying Taxes** – Lie! – Jesus never told people not to pay Caesar... “*Render therefore to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s, and to God the things that are God’s.*” (Luke 20:25)
 3. **Accused of being a King** – Lie! He actually **IS THE KING!** – However, they presented this His title to Pilate in a way **to infer** that Jesus was making some kind of insurrection against Caesar. In (John 19: 12b), they said: “*If you let this Man go, you are not Caesar’s friend. **Whoever makes himself a king speaks against Caesar**.*” – (They couldn’t condemn Jesus with truth, **so they manipulated the truth**)

B. The Answer Reveals His Claim (3): Pilate’s **Questioning** immediately focuses upon the one accusation that matters politically: **KINGSHIP!** “*Are You the King of the Jews?*” > Jesus **does not deny being King**. – In (John 18:36-37) Jesus plainly, “*You rightly say that I am,*” then declares that “*His KINGDOM is NOT OF THIS WORLD!*” – (Rev 19:16) tells us that He is **KING OF KINGS and LORD OF LORDS!**

1. Jesus also declared His Reason for coming into this world (John 18:37b), “*to bear witness to the TRUTH!*” and “*everyone who is of the Truth hears His Voice!*”
 - Earlier in JOHN, Jesus told some Pharisees. “*He who is of God hears God’s words; therefore, you do not hear, because you are not of God.*” (John 8:47)
2. Jesus’ Statement of Truth caused Pilate to ask the Question: **What is Truth?** (John 18:38) – Yet, **Truth EMBODIED** stood right in front of him as he asked the question!

C. The Assessment Clears Their Claim (4-5): Pilate **could “... find no fault in Jesus,”** even though they charged Him with blasphemy (4) – **That Statement is Enormous!** – The governor conducted his political investigation and concluded that “*There is no legal case here.*” **JESUS WAS INNOCENT!**

1. Jesus is not merely innocent because Christians say so. His Roman judge declared Him innocent!

- **This matters tremendously to the Gospel** > Jesus could bear our sin precisely because He HAD NO SIN of His own. – (1 Pet 2:22) *“Who committed no sin, nor was deceit found in His mouth.”*

2. As Pilate declared that... (5), *“they became even more indignant.”* They were **AGITATED!** – Their only true **VALID** claim was that *“He stirs up the people with His teaching!”* (Which was a good thing!)

P/A: **Does the Truth about Jesus Christ and His mission Stir You Up?** > Are you offended at the Teaching of Jesus Christ > **Have you even examined Him yet?** – Jesus’ statement: *“You rightly say that I am a King”* is **TRUE!** **And if you believe it,** it is a **Life Transforming Truth!**

- There is an important difference between **Recognizing** Jesus as a King and **Submitting** to Jesus as **Your King.** – Many people acknowledge Jesus historically. Some admire Jesus morally. Others respect Jesus religiously... **But do you Know Him PERSONALLY!**

SEGUE: The Jews ACCUSE Jesus, Pilate EXCUSES Him, and next Herod wants to be AMUSED by Him!

II. ABUSED BEFORE HEROD (6-12) – **READ:** When Pilate hears **GALILEE** (6-7), his ears perk up! **Galilee means JURISTRICTION!** – He sees an opportunity to **PASS** Jesus on to someone else!

P/A: And that’s what many still do with Jesus: **PASS the decision to someone else—or PUT Jesus off until later.** > But Pilate eventually discovered what we all must realize: **You can pass Jesus on, but you CANNOT ESCAPE your decision about Him!**

A. Herod Anticipates Entertainment (8): **This is HEROD is Herod Antipas,** son of Herod the Great. – He ruled Galilee and Perea. / **He is also the Herod** who imprisoned and beheaded John the Baptist.

1. Herod had heard about Jesus for some time (8). – He *“...desired for a long time to see Him.”* **WHY? Repentance?** ... No. **Worship?** ... No. *“...he hoped to SEE some Miracle done by Him!”*
2. Herod was interested in Jesus— but **NOT Surrendered to Jesus!** > **Herod wanted the miraculous without the Messiah, Christ’s power without Christ’s authority.**

P/A: **That Danger Still Exists!** > We can enjoy teaching, worship, prophecy and Christian events. **Yet never let Jesus confront our sin.** – Don’t seek Jesus for a **SHOW...** seek Him for a **CHANGED HEART!**

B. Herod Asked Questions (9-10): **BUT Jesus,** *“answered him **NOTHING!**”* – **This silence is striking!** **WHY?** ... Because, Herod had already received light when John the Baptist had confronted him. Herod rejected that light! > **NOW the WORD made flesh stands before him**—and the **WORD** says **Nothing!** (Isa 53:7) *“He opened **NOT His mouth.**”* **Christ’s Answer was “Judgment” Wrapped in Silence!**

P/A: **Never take lightly the Privilege of Hearing God’s Truth.** – **Repeated Exposure** without response can **Produce Hardness,** much like the **Chief Priests** and **Scribes** of (v.10)! – The question is not: *“How many sermons have I heard?”* **it’s...** *“What have I done with what God has already shown me?”*

C. Herod Answers with Scorn (11-12): They treated Jesus *“with contempt and mocked Him”* (11) – The Greek word used is *exoutheneō*—to regard as nothing, despise, or **treat as worthless!**

1. They treat Jesus as **Worthless;** they dress Jesus in a **Gorgeous Robe** to make fun of His **Royalty** (cf. Ps 22:11). > **Yet, WHAT they mock is actually true... He really is King!**
2. Then Herod sends Him back to Pilate (12) *“That very day Pilate and Herod became friends with each other...”* Why is this so? Because **hostility toward Jesus** creates strange alliances! ...

P/A: The World may Disagree about almost everything, yet find Common Ground in rejecting Christ's authority! But notice, **Jesus does not Retaliate**... He does not Defend His Reputation! > **He Entrusts Himself to His Father.** (1 Pet 2:23) *"When He was reviled, did not revile in return... but committed Himself to Him who judges righteously."* (Jesus was Accused and Abused by **MEN**, BUT Greatly Used by **GOD**!)

SEGUE: Now, the darkest moment of the trial: the **Innocent is condemned**, and the **Guilty** walks free.

III. ABANDONED FOR BARABBAS (13-25) – **READ:** *Pilate gathers Jesus' accusers once again to restate the facts of official examination (13-14a). "You brought this man **AS ONE** who misleads..."*

A. Pilate Announces His Innocence (14b-17): He **AGAIN** declares Jesus **FAULTLESS** (14b), mentioning that even Herod found no guilt in Him (15). – Jesus had done nothing deserving death!

1. ANYONE who honestly examines the evidence gets the same conclusion: **JESUS IS INNOCENT!**
2. **Pilate's Proposed Resolve (16-17):** Though **"Convinced"** Jesus was **INNOCENT**, Pilate chose **COMPROMISE**: i.e., *chastise Him, then release Him*—to satisfy the crowd. > **But if Jesus is Innocent —Release Him!** > Pilate's attempt at compromise **Sacrificed Justice** to please the crowd! (*Save his job*)

P/A: Compromise rarely begins with complete surrender. It begins with a small adjustment. **Pilate knew what was right**—but wanted to keep everybody happy. **That is dangerous leadership!** – Paul said, *"For if I still pleased men, I would not be a bondservant of Christ."* (Gal 1:10)

B. The People Ask for Barabbas (18-19): *"they all cried out... away with this Man, and release to us Barabbas."* He was a prisoner for rebellion and murder > He was not falsely accused ... **He is GUILTY!**

- Pilate presented the crowd with **A Choice:** Jesus the Innocent OR Barabbas the Guilty. > **They choose Barabbas!** – This is one of the clearest pictures of **Substitution in Scripture**. **Barabbas deserves the Cross.** Yet the Guilty one walked FREE, while the Innocent ONE Took his Place!
- This is the Gospel Message! – **WE are Barabbas... we are the guilty ones! Jesus is the Innocent One who took Our Place!** > He took the Condemnation that belonged to US, so we could receive the freedom that belonged to Him. (*cf.* 2 Cor 5:21)

P/A: Salvation does not mean God overlooked our sin—Our sin was judged, and Jesus PAID OUR penalty **IN FULL** on the Cross! (1 Pet 2:24) *"Who Himself bore our sins in His own body on the tree"*

C. Pilate Appeals—The Crowd Persists (20-23): Pilate tries again to release Jesus (20), but they answer: **"Crucify Him, Crucify Him!"** (21) ... **A double emphatic... a determinized hatred!**

1. The Greek word **stauroō** means **to Crucify—to Fasten to a Cross!** (*They wanted this for Jesus!*)
2. Pilate tries a third time (22) *"Why, what evil has He done? I have found no reason for death in Him"*
3. Notice that the **CROWDS PREVAILED! (23)** – With loud voices they **insistently** demanded **"Crucifixion."** – I believe this unyielding crowd was **driven by Demonic Influence!**
 - Notice the Danger of This Crowd: **Volume begins replacing truth.** They are **loud!** > But loud does not mean **Right!** Popular does not mean **True!** Majority does not mean **Godly!**

P/A: As Christians, we must decide whether our Convictions are going to be **Shaped by Scripture** or **Slanted by Society**. The pressure of a crowd is powerful. > The crowd says: "Everybody accepts it..."

“Everybody does it...” “Times have changed!” **But Truth is not always determined by a popular vote!**

- Scripture says, **“Let God be true but every man a liar.”** (Rom 3:4)
- Do not ask: “What is everybody saying?” Ask: **“What does God say?”**

D. Pilate Abandons His Conviction (24): **Finally, intimidated by the commotion,** (Matt 27:24) tells us that **“Pilate took water and washed his hands before the multitude, saying, “I am Innocent of the blood of this just Person.”** — **“So, Pilate “gave sentence” that it should be as they requested.”** – This may be the Most Tragic Statement about Pilate in the passage. > **He knew** Jesus was innocent. > **He said** Jesus was innocent. > **He tried to release Jesus.** > **But Eventually: “Pilate Gave Sentence!”**

- **Pilate Condemned a JUST MAN, the Son of God... to Crucifixion on a Roman cross!**
- **Pilate did not lack Information... Pilate lacked CONVICTION!** > As a Result, **He ABANDONED Jesus for Barabbas!** (*Knowing the right thing was not enough... He failed TO DO the right thing!*)

E. The Prisoner is Pardoned—The Innocent Condemned (25): **Luke deliberately emphasizes the Contrast.** – The murderer is released > The Messiah is delivered!

1. Instead of the **ANOINTED ONE**, the people would rather have a **CONVICTED MURDERER** to go free!
 - **It is no different today!** A faithless mankind would rather Satan run free to wreak havoc in the world, rather than for a Righteous King to reign over them.
2. Yet, behind man’s injustice, **God was Accomplishing Redemption!** > Men rejected Jesus and delivered Him to death—but the **INNOCENT ONE ON TRIAL** was giving Himself to save the guilty. (1 Pet 3:18) **“Christ also suffered once for sins, the just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God.”**

FINAL THOUGHTS: When we look at **INNOCENCE ON TRIAL**, do not merely leave saying: **“What terrible people they were.”** – Instead, **ASK:** **“WHO is Jesus to me?”** An Irritation or an Innocent Savior!

- **Don’t be a PILATE**—Convinced but Compromised.
- **Don’t be a HEROD**—Curious but Unchanged.
- **Don’t be LIKE the CROWD**—Loud but Lost.
- **Come like BARABBAS**—guilty, empty-handed, and receiving a freedom you could never earn.

The **INNOCENT CHRIST** offers guilty sinners **the exchange that Barabbas experienced:** **His condemnation** for your freedom... **His righteousness** for your sin... **His life** for your death!