

"I FIND NO GUILT IN THIS MAN"

I. Introduction

- A. Notice how many times Jesus is declared to be without guilt in this passage.
1. If we look ahead and include the words of the thief who was crucified alongside Jesus and of the centurion who stood guard at the foot of the cross, there are seven declarations of Jesus' innocence in chapter 23.
 2. Five of these come from the lips of Pontius Pilate.
 3. This is especially significant when we consider that Pilate was the official representative of Rome, the civil ruler in Israel.
 4. Pilate had the power of the sword, the power to render judgments and execute justice.
 5. And while he repeatedly declares that Jesus is innocent, he still condemns Jesus to death.
- B. Luke is not merely reporting historical events in telling us this.
1. He is calling our attention to the theological meaning of these events.
 2. He is telling us that although Jesus did nothing to deserve death, he was condemned to die so that we could be set free from condemnation.
 3. This is even illustrated by the fact that Barabbas, a man who really was guilty of the charge of which Jesus was falsely accused, was acquitted at the very moment when Jesus was condemned to die.

4. This is the doctrine of penal substitutionary atonement, the doctrine that says that Jesus bore the penalty that we deserved when he died on the cross.
5. In the words of John Calvin, "So then, the Son of God stood, as a criminal, before a mortal man, and there permitted himself to be accused and condemned, that we may stand boldly before God."

II. Subjected to a Prejudiced Court

- A. As Luke tells us about Jesus' trial before the council, the Sanhedrin, one thing that is quite clear is that the Jewish leaders had already decided upon their verdict.
 1. This is a prejudiced court.
 2. Jesus is presumed guilty from the start.
 3. They begin their interrogation by trying to get Jesus to incriminate himself by declaring that he is the Christ.
 4. Jesus knows their hearts.
 5. He knows that they have already made up their mind about him.
 6. He knows that they are going to take anything that he says and use it against him.
 7. Nevertheless, he says this: "from now on the Son of Man shall be seated at the right hand of the power of God."
 8. That statement draws upon two important messianic texts from the Old Testament.
 9. The first is Psalm 110, which begins with the words, "The LORD says to my Lord: 'Sit at my right hand, until I make your enemies your footstool.'"

10. The second is Daniel 7, where the prophet has a vision in which he sees one like a son of man approaching the throne of God, then sees this son of man figure being given an everlasting dominion that will never pass away.
 11. In alluding to those texts, Jesus was declaring himself to be the Messiah.
 12. And he underscores this by answering the Jewish leaders' question if he is the Son of God by saying, "You say that I am."
 13. By answering their question in that way, Jesus simultaneously affirms his messianic identity while also distancing himself from the political associations that were entwined with the messianic expectations of the Jewish leaders.
- B. The Jewish leaders took Jesus' words to be blasphemy, which was a capital offense in Israel.
1. Of course, the one possibility that they did not even consider was that Jesus could be telling the truth.
 2. Could it be that he really is the Messiah?
 3. His life, teaching, and ministry bore compelling testimony in support of his messianic identity, but their prejudices caused them to brush all of that aside.
 4. In their minds, the mere fact that Jesus was standing before them was evidence enough to rule out the possibility that he truly was Israel's Messiah.
 5. How could Jesus be the one whom Daniel said would be served by all peoples, nations, and languages, if he was standing trial before them?
 6. How could he be the Christ if his life was in their hands?

7. The idea of a suffering Christ was utterly unthinkable to them, even though it had been foretold in messianic prophecies like Psalm 22 and Isaiah 53.
8. The Jewish leaders do not take the time to weigh the evidence that suggested that they were wrong about Jesus.
9. They simply assume, rather than prove, his guilt.
10. As commentator William Hendriksen puts it, as soon as they hear Jesus admit that he is the Messiah, their thoughts are essentially, "We've got him now."

III. Accused of False Charges

- A. While the Sanhedrin's declaration that Jesus was guilty of blasphemy amounted to a death sentence, they did not have the authority to carry out that sentence.
 1. They needed Pilate to find Jesus guilty of a capital offense under Roman law.
 2. Pilate served as prefect over Judea from AD 26-37, being appointed by the emperor Tiberius.
 3. Pilate made his home in Caesarea, but he had to stay in Jerusalem during the Jewish festivals in order to keep a close watch on the city when it was filled with so many pilgrims.
 4. Extra-biblical sources tell us that Pilate was a severe governor even by Roman standards.
 5. In fact, it was his violent overreaction to an innocent gathering of Samaritans that resulted in his removal from his position several years after Jesus' crucifixion.
 6. Pilate certainly had no affinity for the Jewish people.

- B. The only charge that the Sanhedrin had against Jesus was his claim to be the Christ, which they deemed to be blasphemous.
1. But they could not bring Jesus before Pilate with that charge.
 2. Pilate would not care about matters that had to do with the Jewish religion.
 3. So instead of saying that Jesus claimed to be the Messiah, the Jewish leaders told Pilate that Jesus was misleading the people, that he was forbidding them to pay tribute to Caesar, and that he was declaring himself to be a king.
 4. They knew that Pilate would take these as political accusations, and not as matters pertaining to the Jewish religion.
 5. They wanted Pilate to condemn Jesus as an enemy of the state.
 6. There is significant irony to this.
 7. The Council branded Jesus a blasphemer because his claim to be the Messiah failed to conform to their ideas about who the Messiah would be.
 8. They were looking for a Messiah who was a political deliverer, but Jesus did not fit that bill.
 9. Yet here they are, handing Jesus over to Pilate and accusing him of claiming to be a political deliverer, something that they know for a fact is not true.
- C. After hearing these accusations, Pilate asks Jesus directly, "Are you the King of the Jews?"
1. Once again, Jesus answers by saying, "You have said so."
 2. By answering in this way, Jesus again affirms his messianic identity while also indicating that Pilate's notion of what it means to be the King of the Jews is very different than what Jesus means when he

accepts that title.

3. The apostle John elaborates on this in greater detail in his account of Jesus' trial before Pilate, where we read that Jesus said to Pilate, "My kingdom is not of this world."
 4. Jesus did not mislead Pilate.
 5. He made it very clear that he was not the kind of figure that the Jewish leaders accused him of being.
 6. He made sure that Pilate knew that he was not an enemy of the state.
 7. And Pilate got the message.
 8. He could see that Jesus was not guilty of what he was being accused of.
 9. Therefore, after examining Jesus he said that he found no guilt in him.
- D. While Pilate could see that Jesus was innocent, the persistence of the Jewish leaders put great pressure on him to bend to their will.
1. If he refused, they could have gone to the emperor and accused Pilate of taking an insurgent under his protection.
 2. We know from other ancient texts that the emperor Tiberius was quick to be suspicious of others, and he may very well have removed Pilate upon hearing such a report.
 3. So what does Pilate do in response to this predicament?
 4. He hands the matter off to someone else.

IV. Made into a Spectacle

- A. The someone else to whom he sent Jesus was Herod Antipas, whom the Romans had appointed as tetrarch over Galilee and a portion of the Transjordan.
1. Herod Antipas was one of the sons of Herod the Great.
 2. He was the Herod who put John the Baptist to death.
 3. We were told back in Luke 9 that when Herod heard about the miraculous signs that Jesus was performing, he feared that perhaps Jesus was really John raised from the dead.
 4. Apparently Herod had gotten over his fears by this point, and now he is curious to see Jesus.
 5. He isn't interested in hearing what Jesus has to say, but he hopes that Jesus will perform some miracle to amaze him.
- B. Luke tells us that Jesus did not answer any of the questions that Herod asked him when he was brought before him.
1. Jesus held his peace, even though the chief priests and scribes were standing there making all sorts of accusations against him.
 2. He made no attempt to defend himself against their false charges.
 3. Jesus remained silent because he knew that Herod was not interested in the truth.
 4. His curiosity about Jesus was simply a matter of wanting to see something spectacular and entertaining.
 5. And when Jesus refused to cooperate, Herod and his soldiers made him into a spectacle for their amusement by treating him with mockery and contempt.
 6. As Luke relates this, he also adds one other interesting side note, saying, "And Herod and Pilate became friends with each other that

very day, for before this they had been at enmity with each other.”

7. This reminds us that there is a natural camaraderie among those who despise Jesus Christ and his gospel.
8. As J.C. Ryle puts it in his comments on this verse, “whatever the cause of [their] enmity, it was laid aside when a common object of contempt, fear, or hatred was brought before them. Whatever else they disagreed about, Pilate and Herod could agree to despise and persecute Christ.”

V. **Condemned without Cause**

- A. When Herod sends Jesus back to Pilate, Pilate is once again shouldered with the responsibility of rendering a judgment about Jesus.
 1. Once again, he declares Jesus to be innocent, and he tells the Jewish leaders that he will inflict some lesser punishment on Jesus as a warning against stirring up trouble, and then he will release him.
 2. But the Jewish leaders refuse to back down, and they demand that Barabbas be released to them instead of Jesus.
 3. In making this demand, they are invoking a custom that the Roman prefect had established in hopes of keeping on good terms with the Jews.
 4. The custom involved releasing a prisoner of the people’s choosing during the Passover feast.
 5. The prisoner mentioned here is a man named Barabbas, who is identified by Luke as a rebel and a murderer.
 6. He was a revolutionary, a man involved in a plot to overthrow the Romans.
 7. Insurrection was an ongoing problem for the Romans in Palestine.

8. The Jews chafed under Rome's yoke.
 9. This would come to a head less than forty years after Jesus' death, when a large-scale revolt was eventually crushed by the Roman general Titus, who laid siege to Jerusalem and destroyed the temple.
- B. We are told by the other Gospel writers that a crowd had begun to gather to witness Jesus' trial.
1. It may be that this was a crowd that the chief priests, elders and scribes had rounded up themselves.
 2. It could also be that Barabbas was a popular figure and that some of his followers were determined to ask Pilate to grant the paschal amnesty to him.
 3. What is clear is that the crowd simultaneously called for Barabbas to be released and for Jesus to be crucified.
 4. As you know, crucifixion was a horrific way to die.
 5. It was a means of execution that was reserved for slaves and political rebels.
 6. Barabbas was a political rebel, but Jesus wasn't.
 7. In asking for Barabbas' release and Jesus' crucifixion, the crowd was asking Pilate to release the man who really was guilty of insurrection, and to crucify the man who was charged with insurrection but was really innocent.
 8. As we noted earlier, this drives home the fact that Jesus' death on the cross was a matter of penal substitution.
 9. As you meditate upon this passage, you should see yourself in Barabbas.

10. He was the one guilty of insurrection, but Jesus was the One who died under that very same charge.
11. In the same manner, we are the guilty ones, but if we trust in Christ we are set free from all condemnation.

VI. Conclusion

- A. Jesus Christ was the only innocent man who has ever lived.
- B. Jesus had every right not to go to the cross.
- C. He was entitled not to die.
- D. But he gave up that right so that he could die in our place.
- E. In the words of Martin Luther, "He died for me; he made his righteousness mine and made my sin his own; and if he made my sin his own, then I do not have it, and I am free."