

Good Friday

Jesus on Trial: The Sentence

John 19:16

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Scripture

Five years ago I began what I planned to be a seven-year series of messages. It is based on the book by James Montgomery Boice and Philip Graham Ryken that is titled, *Jesus on Trial*.¹ My goal is to teach on seven important aspects of the trial of Jesus Christ: the diabolical *conspiracy* to kill him (which I covered five years ago); his night-time *arrest* in the Garden of Gethsemane (which I covered four years ago); the short *resistance* that the disciples mounted in his defense (which I covered three years ago); the *witnesses* who accused him of blasphemy during his ecclesiastical trial before the Jewish Sanhedrin (which I covered two years ago); the *verdict* reached in his civil trial by the Roman governor Pontius Pilate (which I covered last year); the *sentence* of death that his enemies demanded (which I plan to cover this evening); and his *execution* by crucifixion (which I plan to cover next year).

Pontius Pilate believed that Jesus was innocent of all charges against him. He said to the Jewish religious authorities, “You brought me this man as one who was misleading the people. And after examining him before you, behold, I did not find this man guilty of any of your charges against him. . . . Look, nothing deserving death has been done by him” (Luke 23:14-15). But the mob cried out for the death of Jesus by crucifixion, and so Pilate said, “I have found in him no guilt deserving death” (Luke 23:22).

But the mob was even more urgent, demanding with loud cries that Jesus should be crucified. Pilate never actually officially handed down a sentence of death. He could not because Jesus was not guilty of any crime. However, Pilate eventually gave in to the demand of the crowd and condemned Jesus to die.

The Bible simply states the sentence of death in John 19:16:

¹ James Montgomery Boice & Philip Graham Ryken, *Jesus on Trial* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2002).

¹⁶So he [i.e. Pilate] **delivered him over to them to be crucified.** (John 19:16)

Introduction

A *sentence* is defined as follows: “The judgment formally pronounced by the Court or Judge upon the defendant after his conviction in a criminal prosecution, imposing the punishment to be inflicted.”²

Review

If you had been privy to what was going on behind the scenes regarding the trial of Jesus, you would have been aware that it all began with a *conspiracy*. The religious leaders and the political leaders had conspired together to get rid of Jesus. But they were having great difficulty doing so because of Jesus’ immense popularity with the people. However, a stunning development took place when one of Jesus’ own inner circle of friends stepped forward to betray him to the authorities. Judas Iscariot volunteered to betray Jesus for some unknown reason.

Then, on the evening of 15 Nissan, 30 AD Jesus was *arrested* in the Garden of Gethsemane. A large band of soldiers had managed to arrest Jesus without too much trouble.

The brief *resistance* from Jesus’ disciples did not amount to much. Jesus was quickly taken into custody, and a hasty trial was convened. Actually, there were two trials on the night of Jesus’ arrest. The religious leaders tried to find a way to accuse Jesus of some offense of which he would be guilty, for as Mark said, “Now the chief priests and the whole council were seeking testimony against Jesus to put him to death” (Mark 14:55).

Most of the testimony presented at the ecclesiastical trial was

² From Black’s *Law Dictionary*, quoted in James Montgomery Boice & Philip Graham Ryken, *Jesus on Trial* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2002), 85.

vain testimony. Many bore false *witness* against Jesus, and their testimony did not agree (Mark 14:56). The high priest must have been beside himself because he could not get two witnesses to agree on their testimony. So, he did something that was entirely improper in a capital trial: he himself intervened. He asked Jesus if he was the Christ, the Son of the Blessed. Jesus said he was, and the Sanhedrin accused Jesus of blasphemy.

Because the Jewish Sanhedrin could not put someone to death, they therefore sent Jesus to the Roman governor, Pontius Pilate, for a civil trial.

But Pilate found nothing deserving death had been done by Jesus (Luke 23:15). In fact, he insisted, “I have found in him no guilt deserving death” (Luke 23:22). But the religious authorities persisted, and eventually Pilate’s *verdict* was to deliver Jesus over to them to be crucified (John 19:16). Basically, Jesus was sentenced to death because he claimed to be the Son of God.

Lesson

Tonight, I would like to examine the claim of Jesus to be the Son of God that resulted in his sentence of death.

I. The Divine Testimony

First, let’s look at the divine testimony about Jesus’ identity.

First, God the Father testifies that Jesus is his Son. At Jesus’ baptism God the Father said, “This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased” (Matthew 3:17). Later, on the Mount of Transfiguration, God the Father said something similar, “This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased; listen to him” (Matthew 17:5). God never testified in this manner about anyone else. This is weighty testimony.

Second, the Holy Spirit testifies that Jesus is the Son of God. While in the Upper Room with his disciples, and before his arrest, Jesus said of the Holy Spirit, “But when the Helper comes, whom I

will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth, who proceeds from the Father, he will bear witness about me” (John 15:26). The Holy Spirit has done so in the inspiration of the New Testament, which is his testimony about the identity of Jesus Christ.

And third, Jesus himself testifies that he is the Son of God. Any court should allow a person to testify on his own behalf. Gathering the many instances of Jesus’ testimony together, Boice and Ryken say we could hear Jesus say something like this:

I have already given my testimony. On one occasion the leaders of Israel challenged me to give an accounting of myself, and I did this so clearly (saying, “Before Abraham was born, I am!” [John 8:58]) that they immediately tried to stone me. On another occasion I taught in Solomon’s porch, saying, “I and the Father are one” (John 10:30), and again they wanted to stone me. Just this week, in my final moments with my disciples, I answered Philip’s question, saying, “Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father” (John 14:9). And last night when the high priest asked, “Are you the Christ, the Son of the Blessed?” I replied, “I am! And you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Mighty One and coming on the clouds of heaven” (Mark 14:61-62). It is for this claim that I am being tried and for which I will be sentenced to die.³

And so the divine testimony is that all three Persons of the Trinity testify that Jesus is indeed the Son of God.

II. The Human Testimony

And second, let’s look at the human testimony about Jesus’ identity.

What do the people in Jesus’ day say about him? What do they think about the identity of the One who stood before Pilate?

Boice and Ryken line up several people to testify.

Matthew, what do you think? You wrote one of the Gospels.

³ James Montgomery Boice & Philip Graham Ryken, *Jesus on Trial*, 92.

You are a Jew, and the Jews confess only one God. You are not likely to ascribe deity to any man without clear evidence.

Matthew replies, “I believe that Jesus is the divine Savior of whom the Old Testament speaks. I have said so publicly. I said that his birth was in fulfillment of that great prophecy of Isaiah, which says, “The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel. . . God with us” (Matthew 1:23; cf. Isaiah 7:14).

Mark, what about you? You traveled with the apostle Peter. You received firsthand information about Jesus from him. What do you think about the identity of Jesus?

Mark answers that he too is on record, having introduced his Gospel with these words, “The beginning of the gospel about Jesus Christ, the Son of God” (Mark 1:1).

Luke, what about you? You are a physician. You are not inclined to flights of fancy or exaggeration. We would like to hear from you too.

Luke replies that he has given us the most scientific language of the four Gospels, and that he has recorded some of the most exalted titles ever given to Jesus: “Son of the Most High” (Luke 1:32), “Son of God” (Luke 1:35), and “Christ the Lord” (Luke 2:11).

John, what is your testimony? We know that you were very close to Jesus.

John replies that he has written the most explicit words of all, stating, “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made. In him was life, and the life was the light of men” (John 1:1-4). Further, he is also on record as saying, “Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name” (John 20:30-31).

John the Baptist, what is your testimony? You are Jesus’ first

cousin. What do you say?

John the Baptist says, “I have seen and have borne witness that this is the Son of God” (John 1:34).

Martha, sister of Mary and Lazarus, Jesus often stayed in your home in Bethany, what do you say?

Martha says that she told Jesus himself, “Yes, Lord; I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God, who is coming into the world” (John 11:27).

And *Peter*, you were the leader of the apostles, what is your answer? What did you tell Jesus when he asked you, “Who do you say that I am?”

Peter, speaking for the rest of the apostles, said to Jesus, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God” (Matthew 16:16).

Jesus never corrected anyone who said that he was the Son of God. He could have but he did not. And the reason he did not is because he was indeed the Son of the living God.⁴

Conclusion

So, this Good Friday, what is your testimony about Jesus? Do you believe that Jesus is the Son of God? Or do you believe that Jesus was just a man, a good man perhaps, but just a man nonetheless. You may think he was a great teacher, prophet, or moralist, but that is all he was.

Pontius Pilate, along with the religious authorities and crowd, essentially sentenced Jesus to die because they believed his claim to be the Son of God was false.

Every one of us is also called to make a judgment about Jesus’ identity. But our judgment will not affect the destiny of Jesus but, rather, our judgment about Jesus will affect our own destiny.

Let us make the right decision about the identity of Jesus. Amen.

⁴ James Montgomery Boice & Philip Graham Ryken, *Jesus on Trial*, 91-95.

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equip them for their **ministry** in the church
and life **mission** in the world,
in order to **magnify** God's name.*

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