

Jason Upchurch - Mark 14:53-65 - The Good News of Jesus's Unjust Trial

As Christians one of the things that is at the forefront of our priorities in life is justice. We should love seeing justice done. And we should hate when injustice happens.

Micah 6:8: He has told you, O man, what is good. And what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?

In that short list of the 3 things the people of God are responsible for justice is at the very top. And it's something that we are to do. Not wish for, not sympathize with. It's not pie in the sky. We are to do it. We are to be just people who promote justice.

We do it in our home with our family and our children when we're dealing with difficult matters. We are to do it in our workplace as we conduct ourselves rightly. We should be just with friends and family. And we do it - inasmuch as we can - with passing laws.

What is justice? Justice is simply treating people how God wants them treated. They are treated how God wants them to be treated. Not how we want them to be treated. Nor how our government necessarily wants them to be treated. But how God wants them treated.

Sometimes that means we treat them gently. Sometimes that means they get the sword of Caesar. Sometimes that means they are shamed. Sometimes that means they are honored. It depends on who they are and what they've done.

I'm reading a great book on criminal justice right now called *Reforming Criminal Justice* by Matt Martens and it's really eye opening about how much the Bible talks about the criminal justice system.

And let me say that there is a lot of nonsense that is being done in the name of justice these days.

Social justice which is basically racism just repackaged. Sadly, the Bible talks about actual social justice, but most of the stuff you hear today is racist nonsense.

Climate justice which says that since it's hot, some people are more disadvantaged than others and we need to pay more taxes to make that go away.

Gender justice which is another word for feminism. Except that some people want gender justice for people who can't figure out what their gender is so the gender justice people are at war with each other. I kid you not, Jodee was reading a book on making sourdough bread the other day and the author actually said that using measuring cups was a sign of patriarchy and inequality.

"Making sourdough bread without measurements is an act of resistance against traditional gender roles Today, yesterday, for our whole lives women have been mothers, housewives, and maybe good cooks, while men are the "chefs"...for me, bread is a source of empowerment and strength."

Measuring cups. To make bread. Solidifies gender roles.

Educational justice, where math is racist and so is science. The list goes on and on and I think we almost cringe now when we even hear the word justice because what usually follows is some woke agenda.

But the reality is that we do want justice because God is a God of justice.

God warns Israel that "Justice, and only justice, you shall follow, that you may live and inherit the land that Yahweh your God is giving you." **Duet. 16:20**

Israel was threatened that if they didn't do justice they would die and their land be taken away. God wants justice. And he wants it for everyone.

Duet. 10:18: He executes justice for the fatherless and the widow.

Because of their economic conditions, usually those without a father or a husband are those most abused by the system. Money often buys a good legal defense - or sometimes a good legal **offense** where you can abuse people. God warned Israel to make sure economic conditions are not a factor in justice.

Exo. 23:6: You shall not pervert the justice due to your poor in his lawsuit.

By the way, the foundational principles of our criminal justice system - and most western criminal justice systems, are built on Christian ethics.

Due process - ensuring that the accused and the accuser are treated fairly is a Christian concept.

Innocent until proven guilty is a Christian concept.

A court appointed attorney if you can't afford one is a Christian virtue.

Proportionality of punishment is a Christian concept. Eye for an eye, tooth for a tooth, life for a life. That's a concept from God's Law. The punishment fits the crime. We don't put someone to death who punched out a tooth. We also don't just punch out the tooth of someone who premeditated the murder of another person. Justice demands proportionate consequence.

Two or three witnesses is from the Law of God. You can't convict someone on hearsay testimony or just the evidence of one person. You need witnesses and evidence and the person can't be a witness against themselves.

Even the 5th amendment is a biblical concept. And the reason God has laid out these principles is because he is a just God.

And what we see happen this morning is a absolute perversion of justice on every level. What the Lord Jesus endured in this mockery of a trial is an utter travesty.

And the big picture here is that if Jesus had not determined to go to the cross, he never would have died. These guys are so incompetent and so blood thirsty that they really don't know what to do with him once he's in their custody. And the only actual incrimination, if you want to call it that, that happens is when Jesus himself claims to be the Messiah. They can't get their act together so they rely on an admission from Jesus. And it's a true admission. It's not false, or a lie. But the religious leaders don't even gather evidence for that, Jesus does.

Had Jesus not been determined to go to the cross, they would have nothing.

John 10:15: I lay my life down for the sheep. He lays it down intentionally, purposefully.

John 10:17: For this reason the Father loves me, because I lay down my life that I may take it up again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have the authority to lay it down, and I have the authority to take it up again. This charge I have received from my Father.

Think about that. Absolutely no one takes Jesus life in the sense that they are going to overturn his will. He will lay it down. And he will take it up. That's an amazing claim. We might have the ability to lay our lives down, but we can't take it back up.

Jesus is in complete control even as he is bombarded with justice. And we see at least 5 ways this morning that injustice is carried out.

1) The first injustice here is that this is a secret trial. Read 53-55

Remember all of this is happening in the dead of night. This is not open to the public.

In the Law, trials had to be held in the hearing of "all Israel." The idea isn't that absolutely everyone had to be present at the trial. But the trial had to be held in the open to be fair. The trial would be conducted by judges or the elders of the town and there would be open examination of claims and evidence.

If the accused was innocent, they were let off and - depending on the issue - the accuser was punished. Everyone would know what happened because it was open.

If the accuser was guilty, their punishment was public whether a beating, financial compensation, restitution or the death penalty.

But whatever the case, trials were open. Even the Jewish code for the Sanhedrin - the court here that tried Jesus - had rules that these guys were violating.

Cases could not be tried at night. If there was a conviction, they were required to wait a day before punishment was carried out. You couldn't do a trial on a Sabbath or festival - this was a huge festival. And the trial could only be held in a few locations and the high priest's personal house wasn't one of them.

That remains the case today. You can go down to the county courthouse and watch people battle it out in the courtroom. Whether it's murder or theft or divorce or whatever, trials are open to the public.

I mean imagine if a high profile trial now happened in the middle of the night on Christmas Eve at a judge's personal home. No cameras, no media, no outside onlookers. And the verdict was guilty before most people even woke up. That's what's going on here.

Everyone knows this is a violation of the law.

We also see that Peter hasn't utterly abandoned Jesus. To his credit, he stays in the vicinity of Jesus although at a distance. He gets into the courtyard through John, actually. John knew the high priest family and got Peter in.

What is somewhat galling is that Peter, for all his brave claims earlier, isn't doing anything to save Jesus.

So this secret trial is a complete violation of justice.

2) The second violation of justice we see is that they've arrested Jesus without probable cause. Read 55-56
So here's what's happened: they've arrested Jesus and now they need to figure out what he did to punish him. That's not how justice works.

In our law, in order to arrest someone you have to have probable cause. Probable cause means that a reasonable person would conclude a person has probably committed a crime.

You could have seen them do something, maybe there's direct evidence, maybe they made a confession. But the idea is that there is some evidence first and then you arrest them. Here, they've arrested Jesus and now they need to figure out what he's done. It's completely backwards.

Again, through the OT Law there has to be some sort of evidence presented before detainment. Some witnesses, some evidence.

Maybe someone blasphemed God. Maybe they picked up sticks on the Sabbath to cook or work. Maybe there is evidence of theft or sexual immorality. There is always evidence for a crime first, and then arrest and trial.

Never the other way around.

And remember the Sanhedrin is something of the Supreme Court in Jewish life. It decided religious matters and civil matters and for Jewish people those often overlapped. They would interpret laws and apply them to

specific situations. It was made up of 71 people, the high priest being the head. These men were supposed to be the hall of justice in all Israel. These were the heroes of righteousness in Israel.

And what this exposes is that the highest court in the land of Israel was so utterly corrupt they wanted to put their own God to death. Jesus had led them out of Egypt and blessed them with many blessings. He came unto his own, and his own received him not. And not only did they not receive him they rejected him and put him through a sham trial.

They are living out the violation that I read earlier: "Justice, and only justice, you shall follow, that you may live and inherit the land that Yahweh your God is giving you." **Duet. 16:20**

No justice, no land and no life. And God took away their land and many of their lives just 40 years later.

At this point, again just to reiterate, Jesus could have called them out on 2 violations. They were holding an illegal nighttime trial and they had arrested him without probable cause of any wrong doing. But doesn't because he's determined to suffer and die for his people.

3) They intentionally bring in false witnesses. **Read 55-59**

The 9th commandment is: You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor. And that is exactly what they are all doing.

They finally have Jesus arrested, they finally have him in their custody and they actually have no legitimate charge against him. There's nothing for them to bring.

So now they have to invent charges and to do that they need false witnesses. And think about **V. 56** for a minute. **Read**

Lots of lies were told about Jesus that night. Lots of false accusations. Lots of slander and gossip and hatred toward our Lord. **Many** bore false witness. Many were liars. the problem was that no 2 of the lies matched.

Now think of the irony of that. The religious leaders are holding this crazy illegal trial in complete violation of God's law. They're trying to hustle in a verdict but they have the gall to say "Yeah, but we need to make sure we have 2 witnesses because that's what the Law calls for." I mean, why even put on that kind of a show? Everything else they're doing is totally illegitimate. The witnesses they'll get are liars anyway why even pretend that justice is happening here?

And I think this is an important point for us to remember whether it's Jesus or us or injustice around us: people still have some idea that justice should happen. Even in the midst of perverting justice, they believe that there should be the appearance of justice.

Which, of course, makes it all the more of a joke. If you've ever been subject to injustice you know part of what is so upsetting is that those committing injustice often still try to appear as though what they're doing is right. They still put on the show. Nothing new there.

And the charges they did bring were so bad they couldn't even get their story straight. The testimony of the false witnesses never matched. **Read 57-59**

There's all these false accusations floating around but no two accusations are they same. You'd think maybe someone could orchestrate this.

The closest they come is an accusation that Jesus threatened to destroy the temple. What they allege is that Jesus said somehow he could level the 40 acre Temple Mount and somehow rebuild the whole thing in 3 days. Now, ironically, Jesus could actually do that. He's God so he can do anything he wants to do. One day he'll burn up the whole cosmos and start over. He'll raise every body of every person who's ever lived. But he never claimed to do what they're saying.

Look at John 2:13-22. Here's the closest we get to this statement. There were two times in Jesus's life that he cleared out the Temple. Once at the beginning of his ministry and once in his final week. This is the first time he clears the place out. **Read 13-22**

Notice what he said. He didn't claim he would destroy the temple. He stated that they would destroy the temple and he would raise it. What's he talking about? He's talking about his own body in his death and resurrection. They will kill him (this temple), and he will raise himself (the temple). And the disciples only understood that after the resurrection.

But the false witnesses **back** in Mark twist that, don't they? They claim Jesus said he would destroy the Temple and then build it again.

See, to attack the Temple or threaten the Temple was essentially blasphemy because it was God's home on earth. To say something against the Temple was treason toward God.

If you remember Stephen from **Acts 6-7** he was called in to the same situation as Jesus because they accused him of blaspheming the Temple as well doing the same thing that Jesus did.

He was stoned for it. In **Mark 14** this is the final accusation that is leveled before Jesus speaks. And it's not a great accusation. The religious leaders believe Jesus is a mere man, so they don't really believe that he could actually destroy the Temple and actually rebuild it. They view it more as a blasphemy charge, which is something they've accused Jesus of before.

So we injustice with a secret trial, no probable cause for arrest, false witnesses giving a ridiculous charge.

4th) Injustice is demanding self Incrimination. **Read 59-61**

The high priest realizes he has absolutely nothing to go on. The witnesses are all over the board, the story that the false witnesses come up with is pretty thin - can't really legitimately kill Jesus on that.

So he demands that Jesus respond. First he wants him to respond to the charges of destroying the Temple. Jesus says nothing. He knows that's a nonsense charge, the high priest knows it's a nonsense charge.

Then he goes in for the kill: Tell us if you are the Christ, the son of the blessed.

What's that have to do with anything? Well, you have to understand that if the high priest wants a legitimate charge that would result in the death penalty there's really only one option: insurrection. Rome was brutal toward someone who wanted to overthrow the government. And since the Jews can't kill Jesus legally, they need Rome to do it. There's only one way they can do that: get Jesus to claim to be Messiah which would mean he's King. Then he would be a threat to Caesar.

Remember when Pilate asks Jesus if he is a king? That's the issue.

In the OT, the Messiah would be a king. He would rule over all the world. All the nations would come to the Messiah. If the high priest could get Jesus to admit that, then he would actually have a charge to bring to the Romans that would result in the death penalty.

So now the charge about destroying the temple doesn't matter because if he can secure an even bigger confession he'll get Jesus killed. But this all hinges on Jesus saying something and so far he hasn't said anything.

Just to pause a minute, again, and say that this whole thing is in Jesus's hands. He's in total control. He knows the temple charge won't get him to the cross, so he ignores that. He also knows that he doesn't have to respond to the charge of being the Christ - the Messiah. He could just stay silent and if he did they would have absolutely nothing to go on. No charge, nothing to incriminate him with.

But Jesus is determined to go to the cross and he gives them everything they want and more. **Read 62**

What did Jesus just admit to? He admitted to being the Messiah. He is the Christ, he is the Son of the Blessed. The Blessed is God.

But Jesus takes it a step further. Remember when we were going through the Olivet Discourse Jesus mentioned that you'll see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven. You remember that? I argued then that that was not Jesus's second coming. Part of the reason I said that was because he says it here to the High Priest. The high priest will see this.

It's been 2,000 years - the High Priest is long dead. He isn't going to see the Second Coming. What's Jesus referring to? He's referring to his ascension and being seated on the throne. **Turn to Daniel 7**. Remember this is Daniel receiving a vision of one like the Son of Man who reigns over all the earth. And he comes on clouds, not to earth, but to the throne of God in heaven. **Read 13-14**

This is a vision of the Son of Man going into heaven to receive a Kingdom. A Kingdom that will never be destroyed. This is the Messiah reigning in heaven next to the Ancient of Days.

This is Jesus after the ascension. If you want the technical term, this is his inauguration or his session. When Jesus sits on his throne.

Jesus dies, rises, ascends and is sitting on the throne of heaven. This is exactly what Jesus is referring to when he answers the High Priest. He's clearly - in no uncertain terms - claiming Kingship and Divinity. He's claiming everything they want him to claim. Caesar is not Lord. Caesar is not king. Caesar is not divine. Jesus is Lord and King and Divine.

That's exactly what Jesus is claiming in front of the High Priest and the whole Sanhedrin. **Back in Mark 14** that's what causes the eruption. **Read 62**

Now, what does it mean that he will see the Son of Man coming with clouds of heaven? I don't think that he'll actually see it. If you remember when we were working through the Olivet Discourse Jesus says in **Matt 24:30** they'll see the **sign** of the Son of Man coming on the clouds. What's the sign? The sign according to Jesus is the unimaginable claim that Jerusalem would be destroyed.

How will the high priest and all these jokers know that Jesus not only rose, but ascended and is reigning at the right hand of power? Their beloved city will be destroyed.

These guys won't physically see Jesus going into heaven, but they will see their beloved city destroyed and that is the unimaginable sign that Jesus has come to the Ancient of Days and is reigning.

This is all they needed. **Read 63-63**

Now, the irony here is that Jesus told the truth. He is the Christ, the Son of the Blessed, the Son of God. And he will be seated at the right hand of power, coming with the clouds of heaven. None of that is a lie because he is the Son of God.

So here, they actually condemn him for being the Son of God. And if you remember, when he is crucified they write the charge against him on a piece of wood above him. What's the charge? King of the Jews.

This is what will actually be his death sentence. He is the King of the Jews.

5) Injustice is they condemn him. Read 64-65

He is spit on, his face is covered so he can't see anything, he is beaten, and mocked. They're not authorized to do any of this. This isn't their job, it's the job of the state. But they do it anyway.

An utter miscarriage of justice. But Jesus knows that. And determines that anyway. Brothers and sisters, if our Lord had not determined to save us in the face of all of this it never would have happened.

If you ever wonder whether or not Jesus wanted to save you, or was determined to save you, you need to look no further than this sham trial. He could have ended it all at any moment.

But he suffered injustice for our salvation.

Pray