

## **The Trial of Jesus Christ**

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**John: The Passion of Christ Series**

**John 18:12-14, 19-23, 28-19:5**

Throughout history there have been dramatic examples of profoundly unjust trials—stories of innocent people railroaded by corrupt prosecutors, convicted on the basis of fraudulent evidence, sentenced by cynical, unjust judges. One of the most tragic stories of an unjust trial was that of Alfred Dreyfus. The circumstances of Dreyfus' trial were these:

France had lost a humiliating war with Germany back in the 1870's. It became popularly assumed in France that the only reason they lost the Franco-Prussian war was because a traitor stabbed them in the back. The traitor was supposedly found in the person of Captain Alfred Dreyfus, a Jewish officer on the General's Staff of the French Army. Dreyfus was accused of selling military secrets to the Germans.

Alfred Dreyfus was wealthy, intelligent, a hard worker. He was living happily with his wife and two children. He didn't gamble, or drink. He didn't keep mistresses. And so his fellow officers viewed him with general dislike and suspicion.

His court-martial turned into a kangaroo court. When the army couldn't produce any real evidence against the Jewish Captain, the prosecution submitted obvious forgeries created by a member of the French intelligence service. The military tribunal, which was anxious to preserve the Army's reputation, accepted the forged evidence and convicted Dreyfus of treason in 1895.

Anti-Semitic French newspapers whipped up the French public in denouncing Dreyfus. One of the saddest scenes in French history was that of Dreyfus, who happened to have been a war hero, standing at attention on an Army parade ground, while his military insignias were torn off of his shoulders, and officers spit in his face. The jeering crowd that came from all over France to witness this court-martial began screaming, "Death to the Jews. Death to the Jews. Death to all Jews." Dreyfus was chained and publicly dragged from the parade grounds and sent to Devil's Island.

Two years later the secret forged dossier, upon which Dreyfus was convicted, was revealed publicly. A French Colonel, named Henry, went public with the fact that he himself had forged the documents on orders from the highest ranks in the French Army. The whole military hierarchy was implicated in this framing of Dreyfus.

A new head of the French Intelligence Service produced documents showing who the real spy was. When this new head of the French Intelligence Service tried to present the incontrovertible evidence of who the real spy was, he was dismissed from his post. But before he was dismissed, he made the evidence public, which forced the

French Army to actually try the real spy in a secret tribunal. The real spy was immediately acquitted.

Public opinion began to shift when the famous French novelist, Emil Zola, published an open letter to the President of the Republic concerning Dreyfus' innocence. The banner headline was titled, "J'accuse," which means, "I accuse." It appeared in huge black letters across the front page of a major French newspaper. Zola named the men, who framed Dreyfus. He wrote the facts of the case. Zola immediately began receiving death threats. He was sued for libel, and he had to flee to England.

Dreyfus was dragged back from Devil's Island, despite the fact that by now it was completely obvious to any right thinking person that Dreyfus was a totally innocent man. He was convicted again in a second trial. The Army and the government simply had no intention of giving this former Captain a just trial. Only after a third trial six years later was Dreyfus finally acquitted.

One of the saddest features of this entire miscarriage of justice was that these kangaroo court proceedings were not only supported by the heads of the French Army and the French government, but also by the Roman Catholic hierarchy in France. The religious leaders of France joined in the condemnation of Dreyfus. In the Jesuit official journal of the day, the Jesuit editor wrote these words:

"The Jew was created by God to act as a spy wherever treachery was afoot."

One Catholic priest wrote these words concerning the Dreyfus affair: "An officer has been guilty of treason. He is a Jew. Accused because he is a Jew, he claims to be a victim of the State, and a martyr of anti-Semitism. But we know that Jewish money is beginning to flow to pay off politicians and professors and newspapermen. The truth has already been decided by the military court. Dreyfus, the Jew, is guilty."

Do you know that the modern Zionist movement calling Jews to return to Israel was born during the Dreyfus Affair? An Austrian Jewish newspaperman named Theodore Herzl, who was covering the court-martial of Dreyfus, was stunned to hear the crowds in liberal France screaming, "Death to the Jews, death to all Jews." He said that he realized then that Jewish people would never find an accommodating home in Europe. He decided that Jewish survival would only occur if Jews had their own homeland.

Of course, unjust trials are not simply a European thing, or a 19<sup>th</sup> century thing. It is also an American thing. Back in the 1930's a train was stopped in Alabama. A sheriff's posse got on board and arrested nine young Black men who were on the train. Two white women were also on the train. They immediately claimed that these nine young Black men had raped them. The young men ranged in age from 12-20. They were taken to a jail in Scottsboro, Alabama. That night a mob gathered outside the jail demanding their immediate hanging. A crowd of 10,000 whites came to Scottsboro for the trial of these nine men.

They couldn't find anyone in town to represent the nine. An attorney, who was a notorious drunk from another state, stepped forward and volunteered to represent the defendants. He had exactly 25 minutes to meet with his clients before their trial. The two women told their stories before an all-white jury. The defense hardly put on a case. After two hours of deliberation, the nine men were found guilty. Eight were sentenced to the electric chair. Only one, the 12 year old, was spared.

The case went up to the Supreme Court. In a landmark decision, the Supreme Court decided that these men, now known as the Scottsboro Boys, were denied due process. They were retried. At the second trial, one of the white women now testified that she had made up the entire story. There had never been a rape. She said she and the other woman were afraid that they would be thrown in jail for vagrancy and prostitution. Nevertheless, the jury turned in a guilty verdict in the second trial. The men received another death sentence.

The trial was surrounded by a wave of lynchings in the south. After two more trials, in which five of the men were convicted again, the Scottsboro Boys were finally paroled fifteen years after their original arrest.

What do unjust trials say about those of us who are the judges? What do unjust trials say about the motivations that drive the prosecution of the accused?

I'm going to continue a series that I began last week on The Passion of Christ – his arrest, his trial, his beating, sentencing, and ultimately his crucifixion. Today we are going to look at the trial of Jesus Christ. Let's pray.

The trial of Jesus Christ had several stages. The first stage was before Jewish authorities, which can be broken up into two or three stages. And then the second phase of Jesus' trial took place before Roman authorities. So we read in John 18:12-14,

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**Then the detachment of soldiers with its commander and the Jewish officials arrested Jesus. They bound him and brought him first to Annas, who was the father-in-law of Caiaphas, the high priest that year. Caiaphas was the one who had advised the Jews that it would be good if one man died for the people.**

Annas, apparently, had been the high priest. According to the Old Testament, the high priesthood was for life. But for some reason, perhaps because the Roman government had deposed him, the priesthood had descended to five of his sons, and to his son-in-law, Caiaphas. Many people believe that Annas, this old man, was really the power behind the priesthood. John, with a deep understanding of Jewish custom of his day, correctly calls Annas the high priest, and Caiaphas, his son-in-law, is also called the high priest. Again, the priesthood was for life.

Why did the Jewish leaders, according to all four gospel accounts, want Jesus killed? There are a number of things the gospel writers tell us. Many of the Jewish leaders

saw Jesus as a false prophet, leading the nation of Israel astray. And the Jewish leaders were particularly upset by Jesus' consistent attack on the Temple, which was a symbol of their authority. The Temple wasn't just a place of religious worship. The Temple was the symbol of Jewish governmental authority. Jesus regularly attacked the Temple.

Because of Jesus' following, there was a real chance that the Roman government would get upset. It could seem that he was fomenting revolution. So the Jewish leaders feared the Roman government coming down on their heads. And at the crucial moment of his trial, it appeared that Jesus actually pled guilty to the charge of blasphemy, claiming to stand along side the God of Israel, suggesting that he, Jesus, was entrusted with the judgment of Israel.

He was leading the people astray. He was attacking the Temple and the national leaders. He was potentially a revolutionary. And he was a blasphemer. And so the Jewish leaders wanted him put to death.

Now, the discussion of Jewish involvement in the death of Christ can hardly be talked about these days because of the disgusting anti-Semitic history of the church. Whether we are talking about the medieval church's claim that Jews were God-killers, or the regular burning of Jewish synagogues following the production of Passion plays, or the church's continual complicity in attacks on Jews. One can hardly talk about Jewish involvement in the trial of Jesus unless you first demonstrate that you have made every effort to walk in the shoes of a Jewish person, and you understand what it feels like to be called a Christ-killer.

In an article that I wrote for our congregation that was printed in the Columbus Dispatch this past Friday, I mention that there could be some good that came out of all of the discussion of anti-Semitism surrounding the film *The Passion*. If Christian people will allow themselves to walk in the shoes of their Jewish brothers and sisters and to grieve over the church's history of anti-Semitism, this movie can be used as a bridge in bringing two historically divided communities together. But if Christians close their hearts, if we in the church say, "I will not allow myself to see things from your perspective," or if we in the church become defensive because things that are precious to us are being attacked, we will lose the opportunity this movie presents.

As a Jewish person, who believes that Jesus is the Messiah of the entire world, both Jew and Gentile, I stand between two communities. I understand the history of anti-Semitism. I also am aware historically that it is undeniable that Jewish leaders were involved in the trial and in the death of Christ. Everyone in authority at the time was involved in the death of Christ. Unjust trials happen because people in power permit them to happen. And the people in power during the unjust trial of Christ were the Jews and the Romans.

But we can't forget that there were two others in power who permitted this trial to happen – the prisoner himself, namely Jesus; and God, the Father.

Everyone in power – Jews, Romans, Christ, and God the Father were complicit in his trial. Each had different motives. But all in authority gave their consent.

I have recently read that when the New Testament writers tell the story of the passion of Christ, they themselves are anti-Semitic. I think that this is a ridiculous charge. It is important to remember that all the gospel accounts, and indeed, all the books of the New Testament, with the exception of two, were written by Jews. All of the first followers of Jesus were Jewish. Remember, even Jesus' mother, Mary, was not a Roman Catholic, she was a Jewish mother. And his father was a Jewish carpenter.

What we read in the gospel accounts is an intense internal debate within Judaism concerning the nature of true Judaism. There was a fight within Judaism itself for the soul of Judaism. This wasn't some outside group attacking Jews. This was a type of civil war within Judaism. And if the words in the New Testament sometimes seem harsh toward the Jewish leaders, or the words coming from the mouth of Jesus seem harsh, or the words of Jesus' Jewish enemies seem harsh, understand that this was the way debate was carried on in the ancient world.

There was a Jewish sect called the Essenes, which was a monastic sect. They lived out in the desert and were most famous for producing what we called "The Dead Sea Scrolls." But this Jewish sect, the Essenes, engaged in some of the most aggressive polemical attacks on first century Jews imaginable. If you think that the Jewish gospel writers are hard on the Jewish leaders, read Essene writings. They go way beyond John Kerry's, "These guys are a bunch of crooks and liars."

So when you read statements that seem harsh towards Jewish people in the gospels, or in Paul, understand that this was an internal debate pitting Jew against Jew about who was a true follower of the Jewish God, Yahweh.

Let me offer you one more thought. It is absolutely the case that anti-Semitism, the persecution of Jewish people at the hands of so-called Christians, far from being sanctioned by the New Testament is one of the sins that drove the nails deeper into the hands of Christ. Do you want to be responsible for driving the nails into the hands of Jesus even deeper? Then indulge your anti-Semitic or racist thoughts or words. Anti-Semitism is one of the sins that put Jesus on the cross.

What was the Roman interest in the trial? It is clear from the scripture that Pontius Pilate, the Roman governor, knew that Jesus was not guilty of leading a revolution against Rome. Pilate, from all that we know of him, seems to have been driven by two contrary impulses. First, from extra-biblical sources we know that Pilate loved snubbing the Jewish leaders. If the Jews were pressing an agenda, Pilate almost always had a knee-jerk reaction against it. Pilate's protest in favor of Jesus, what we read about in the gospels, was not because Pilate cared anything about Jesus, whether he was innocent or guilty, or about justice. His defense of Jesus was purely motivated by an attempt to snub the Jewish leaders. Do you want to know what motivated Pilate? It is this: If the Jews were for it, he was against it. And if they were against it, he was for it.

Then there was a second motivation in Pilate. Like many politicians throughout history, Pilate was concerned about his own survival. When he was pressed, and it was suggested that if he went along with Jesus, he wasn't a friend of the Emperor, Pilate gave in. Again, from extra-biblical sources we know that this was Pilate's motivation. He was constantly vacillating, always choosing the expedient position for his own political survival.

So, who was responsible for the trial of Jesus, the Jewish leaders, or the Romans? Oh yes, I forgot to mention two other parties – the prisoner himself, and also God the Father.

Here is what Jesus says in John 10:17-18,

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**The reason my Father loves me is that I lay down my life—only to take it up again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down and authority to take it up again. This command I received from my Father.**

If Jesus did not choose to be tried, and ultimately to be hung on a cross, he never would have been tried. He could have easily escaped from the Garden of Gethsemane. He said he could have called down twelve legions of angels to protect him. He chose to drink the cup of suffering. It wasn't forced on him. He wasn't compelled. He volunteered for this duty.

And God the Father was behind this trial. We read in John 19:10-11,

**SLIDE**

**Do you refuse to speak to me, Pilate said? Don't you realize I have power either to free you or to crucify you? Jesus answered, You would have no power over me if it were not given to you from above.**

God the Father was orchestrating this trial to accomplish the salvation of the world.

What was on trial? Let's read John 18:19-24

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**Meanwhile, the high priest questioned Jesus about his disciples and his teaching. "I have spoken openly to the world," Jesus replied. "I always taught in synagogues or at the temple, where all the Jews come together. I said nothing in secret. Why question me? Ask those who heard me. Surely they know what I said." When Jesus said this, one of the officials nearby struck him in the face. "Is that any way to answer the high priest?" he demanded. "If I said something wrong," Jesus replied, "testify as to what is wrong. But if I spoke the truth, why did you strike me?" Then Annas sent him, still bound, to Caiaphas the high priest.**

One of the things that was on trial was the sinful, close-mindedness of men and women concerning Jesus. Now, you need to understand that the entire proceeding was fraught with illegalities. It had the form of a trial, like that of the Scottsboro Boys, or Alfred Dreyfus, but there were so many violations of the law. For example, the questioning of Jesus was illegal in itself. Under Jewish law, the accused had a very strong privilege against self-incrimination. In other words, it was completely illegal for the high priest to question the accused. It was up to the court to proffer witnesses of the alleged crime. So when Jesus says in Jn. 18:20,

#### **SLIDE**

**I have spoken openly to the world, Jesus replied. I always taught in synagogues or at the temple, where all the Jews came together. I said nothing in secret. Why question me? Ask those who heard me.**

Jesus is calling the high priest to account. If there is something in my teaching that you think is a violation of Jewish law, call your witnesses.

Now, the whole gospel of John is built on the idea of witnesses, on evidence, on testimony regarding who Jesus is. For 18 chapters John has been building a case that this Jesus is the Messiah sent by God and that we, therefore, should put our faith in him. The witnesses include the miracles wrought by Jesus, the seven miraculous signs. The witnesses include Old Testament prophecies and scriptures that point to Jesus as Messiah. The witnesses include the Jewish holidays, all of which point to Jesus. The witnesses include the prophet, John the Baptist, who is pointing to Christ. Jesus' own words bear witness. The Father speaks from heaven to bear witness. There is witness upon witness, testimony after testimony – all pointing to one conclusion. Jesus is the Messiah sent by God.

But like the military tribunal in the Dreyfus case, and like the jury for the Scottsboro Boys, the high priests and the Sanhedrin were committed to a position already. It didn't matter what the evidence was. Their minds were made up.

See, I believe that people don't reject Jesus because the evidence has been thoroughly considered and rejected. It isn't as if folks investigate the claims of Christ, weigh the evidence, and listen to the testimony, but intellectual honesty demands that they reject the idea that Jesus was the heaven-sent Messiah. People reject Jesus because folks have made up their minds without considering the evidence. There is a prior commitment to refuse to consider his claims.

And one of the bridges that you have to cross in order to place your faith in Christ is the willingness to change your mind and admit that for a number of years you may have been wrong about something as important as God and your relationship to him. It is really hard to admit that for years a position that you've held onto staunchly may, in fact, be wrong. The high priests couldn't do that.

Jesus came challenging everything – the nature of true Judaism, the place of the Temple, and the proper way to lead. Their leaders' pride prohibited them from saying, "We may have gotten it all wrong." And I believe that one of the bridges that every human being has to cross, in order to come to faith in Christ, is the willingness to lay down our pride and admit I may have gotten it all wrong when it comes to something as important as my relationship with God. I may have to revise an enormous amount of my thinking about life.

And if you struggle with that, friend, I sympathize with your struggle. Because as a Jewish college student, I listened to the evidence regarding Jesus as the Jewish Messiah. One of the many issues that I had to face was that the whole way I thought about life might be wrong. That was a very troubling thought. It is not one that I enjoyed having. I hung around with very bright people. I read voraciously. People who I read, and the opinions I listen to, none of them believed in Jesus. So when I was presented with the evidence for Christ, I didn't keep it at arm's length merely because of intellectual honesty. I kept the evidence at arm's length because it was scary to consider that what I thought I knew was wrong. It really takes courage and humility to admit to the possibility that you may be wrong about something as important as your relationship with God.

Do you know, a willingness to consider the evidence and open yourself up to new truth is not just something for a seeker who is considering Christianity? It is also a lesson for every follower of Christ. The truth is friends, some of the most narrow, close-minded people in the world are people who come to Christ and believe that from day one they possess the entire truth. "Now that I've embraced Jesus, I am certain about everything." Have you ever met anyone like that? Are any of you like that? "Because I've read a certain book, or have watched a video series, I now know all the answers to everything."

Do you know that one of the key ways your faith is going to grow is when you move past an absolute certainty about everything to a place of holding on to the essentials, and being very willing to revise your thinking about other issues. I've had to do this over and over as a believer. And I believe that the growth edge of my faith has been entirely linked to a willingness to receive fresh truth, fresh revelation. To look at things from a different perspective and to consider other opinions.

Something else that was on trial that night was religious hypocrisy. Vv.28-32,

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**Then the Jews led Jesus from Caiaphas to the palace of the Roman governor. By now it was early morning, and to avoid ceremonial uncleanness the Jews did not enter the palace; they wanted to be able to eat the Passover. So Pilate came out to them and asked, "What charges are you bringing against this man?" "If he were not a criminal," they replied, "we would not have handed him over to you." Pilate said, "Take him yourselves and judge him by your own law." "But we have no right to execute anyone," the Jews objected. This happened so that the words Jesus had spoken indicating the kind of death he was going to die would be fulfilled.**



Here the Jewish leaders are concerned about ceremonial uncleanness. You ask, "What's that all about?" Many strict Jewish religious observers of that day would not go into a Roman house because Romans commonly were thought to have abortions and flush the remains of their abortions down their sewer systems. It was forbidden by Jewish law to have any inadvertent contact with a corpse, or to walk over the top of a corpse. And if you had inadvertent contact with a corpse, that would render you ceremonially unclean and unfit to take the Passover. Numbers 9 in the Old Testament gets into this.

So here are leaders concerned about ceremonial uncleanness, and yet they are involved in this great travesty of justice, a kangaroo court convicting Jesus. Talk about straining the gnat and swallowing the camel. It's reminiscent of the scene from the Godfather during the baptism of the Catholic infant where Michael Corleone is the Godfather, and he's making these ancient commitments in the Roman Catholic Church, and yet at the very moment that his nephew is being christened, Michael Corleone's enemies are being murdered all over the city. It's like the man in the church who demands conformity to the littlest item in the Bible, and yet is unbelievably cruel to his wife, or has a secret addiction. What is on trial is religious hypocrisy.

There is a wonderful story in the book, "Of Whom the World Was Not Worthy," in which an evangelist named Yakov was witnessing to an older man by the name of Cimmerman, who knew a great deal about the church and politics, and who despised the hypocrisy that he had seen in the church. Yakov began talking with Cimmerman about the love of Christ. Cimmerman replied, "Don't talk to me about Christ. I see those priests over there in all their robes and cloaks and their big crosses on their chests. I know what they are like. They are violent people. Some of them have stirred the crowds to kill my own family. Don't talk with me about the love of Christ. I know what Christians are like."

Yakov said, "May I ask you a question? What if I stole your coat and boots and put them on and broke into a store and robbed it. What if I was chased by the police, but I outran them? What would you say if the police came knocking on your door and charged you with breaking into a store?"

Cimmerman said, "Well, I would deny the charge because I didn't break into the store."

"But what if the police said, 'We know you did because we recognized your coat and your boots from a distance. You just had to have broken into that store.'"

Cimmerman said, "Yakov, leave me alone. I know where you're driving and I don't want to go there."

Over the next number of months, Yakov had an opportunity to demonstrate the love of Christ to Cimmerman, not just to talk about it. Finally one day Cimmerman said, "Yakov, tell me about this Christ. How can I know him?"

Yakov explained what it meant to put your faith in Christ and to trust him as your sin-bearer. Cimmerman knelt down on the ground and received Christ into his life. He stood up and said, "Yakov, you wear the coat and the boots of Jesus very well."

Wouldn't you like that said about your? I know I would love it said of me. "You represent Jesus very well."

Who was on trial that night? Jesus, the King. We read in vv. 33-36,

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**Pilate then went back inside the palace, summoned Jesus and asked him, "Are you the king of the Jews?" "Is that your own idea," Jesus asked, "or did others talk to you about me?" "Do you think I am a Jew?" Pilate replied. "It was your people and your chief priests who handed you over to me. What is it you have done?" Jesus said, "My kingdom is not of this world. If it were, my servants would fight to prevent my arrest by the Jews. But now my kingdom is from another place."**

There was a confrontation between Pilate and Jesus, between a false king and the true king. Here are these two kings having a discussion about the nature of kingship – what it means to be a king and what it doesn't mean. John's main point in this whole text is to identify Jesus as the true Messianic king. That is where his gospel is going. He is piling up statement after statement, witness after witness, and sign after sign pointing to Jesus as the Messianic king. Jesus is the king.

Indeed, in chapters 18 and 19 the word "king" is mentioned in reference to Jesus a dozen times. One of the most misunderstood verses in the scriptures is v. 36 of chapter 18 where Jesus says,

#### **SLIDE**

**My kingdom is not of this world.**

Many Christian people throughout history, many pastors, many mystics have read Jesus' words as meaning that his reign does not have a visible, this-worldly impact. They read these words, "My kingdom is not of this world," and have concluded that we need to keep religion and politics totally separate. Politics deals with this world. Jesus doesn't deal with this world, he just deals with the next world. Jesus is concerned with heaven and politics are concerned with this world, right now.

My kingdom is not of this world. We need to keep religion and education completely separate. Jesus is not interested in having his reign extend to such worldly things as educational curriculum, or science, or government decisions about marriage, or war and peace.

My kingdom is not of this world. People would say, “See, Jesus just exerts his reign over the heart, not over finance, business, or athletics. His realm is the invisible world, the spiritual world, the world of the angels.”

And if there is a trap Christians have fallen into historically, it is the trap that the secularists would like us to fall into. That is the utter irrelevance of Christianity for this world. So many Christians throughout history have allowed life to be dichotomized into the realm that Jesus reigns over – the world of prayer, Bible study and personal devotions, what’s going on inside my heart, and the realm that Jesus really didn’t come to reign over, which is most of real life. I have my faith over here and then my politics over there. You’ll hear this kind of dichotomy, this dualistic thinking from politicians all the time.

“Well, you know my personal view of marriage is...”

“My personal view of abortion is...”

“But I simply can’t let my personal view affect my public stance one iota.”

Jesus is not offering some dualistic view of his kingdom when he says, “My kingdom is not of this world.” He tells us what he meant. He says, “My kingdom is not of this world. Now let me tell you what I mean by that.”

#### SLIDE

If it were, my servants would fight to prevent my arrest by the Jews.

In other words, the kingdom that Jesus reigns over produces a this-worldly change in the tactics of all who come under his reign. Those who claim to be ruled by King Jesus are not going to use violence or coercion in spreading the message of Christ as they did during the crusades. We stop representing Jesus when we use coercion. The this-worldly tactics of Jesus are persuasion, proclamation, and preaching. The this-worldly tactics of Jesus is going around doing good. The this-worldly tactics of Jesus concern the power of signs and wonders.

Jesus says, “My kingdom is from another place.” In other words, his kingdom didn’t derive merely from human descent, although Jesus was a descendent of the true king of Israel, King David. He didn’t gain the right to be called king by virtue of being elected by a majority, or by killing his enemies. The origin of Jesus’ kingdom is with God. God crowned Jesus king.

The point is that Jesus’ kingdom, though it doesn’t come from this world, has a this-worldly practical, tangible impact. You can see the kingdom of Jesus. You can touch the kingdom of Jesus. You can hear the kingdom of Jesus. You can smell the kingdom of Jesus. It’s as this-worldly and real and practical as this podium.

Where do we see the impact of Jesus’ reign in this-worldly terms? We see its impact on the poor, on the least and the last. The kingdoms of this world are always interested in the powerful, the movers and shakers, the people who can get the deal done. The folks behind the scenes, who have the money and who press political

decisions for their own advantage, who like to pull the levers. That's what the kingdoms of this world are about. The kingdom of Jesus is concerned about the poor.

Let me read to you a note that was sent by a woman named Edna to one of our dentists who made her free dentures down at Vineyard's Free Dental Clinic on 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue. She wrote this just this week: *I called your office many times. I guess it was the wrong time. I'm sorry. Oh, I guess you thought you had heard the last of me (with a smiley face). No, this card is to say thanks. Every time I take a bite of food, I think of you and the good job you have done. Your concern, your compassion for others and especially this old lady. God bless you always. [And then she writes] Thank you for your gift. Thank you for my teeth. Edna Chatman*

Is the kingdom of God tangible enough for you? It's as tangible as a person's ability to bite down on food.

The kingdom of Jesus is as practical as the reconciliation of people and the reconciliation of nations. One of the least told stories of the last 20 years is the impact of church leaders on breaking the cycle of violence and retribution and revenge in hot spots all over the world. There are literally dozens of nations around the world in which wars have stopped and blood was not shed because church leaders stood in the gap and made peace. And every time I see a couple that is on the edge of divorce deciding to try to make a go of it, and every time I see church members forgive offenses, I say, "There is the kingdom of Jesus with this-worldly impact."

Do you want to bring the crime rate down? Do you want to bring the divorce rate down? Do you want to bring the rates of sexually transmitted diseases down? Do you want to bring the rate of child abuse down? Pray for Christian revival. It's been proven throughout history. Because of this-world impact, here is what the great St. Augustine said, "The role of the kingdom of God is to inspire men and women to organize their communities in this world in the image and likeness of the heavenly city."

Let me ask you a personal question. Where do you see a this-worldly impact of Jesus' kingdom through you? Where does his reign affect the way you live in practical terms, not in terms of your attitudes, or what is going on in your heart? I'm not talking about the religious realm of your life – praying and Bible reading. I mean in the brass tacks. Where does the reign of Jesus Christ affect the way you work? Does the reign of Jesus Christ affect the way you relate to other races? Does the reign of Jesus Christ change you in relationship to the way you relate to the poor? Does the reign of Jesus Christ make you into a peacemaker?

Who is on trial? The King and the Truth. Vv. 37-38,

#### **SLIDE**

"You are a king, then!" said Pilate. Jesus answered, "You are right in saying I am a

king. In fact, for this reason I was born, and for this I came into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone on the side of truth listens to me.” “What is truth?” Pilate asked. With this he went out again to the Jews and said, “I find no basis for a charge against him.

What is truth? People ask that question when the last thing in the world they want to know is the truth! People always ask for definitions when they are trying to evade a discussion.

I remember years ago I had a conversation with a man whose wife accused him of adultery. He completely denied it and said his wife was suspicious, jealous, and crazy. He’d had enough of it. I said, “Well, I don’t know. Let me pray about what you are saying.” I took the matter to the Lord in prayer and I felt like the Lord said to me, “There’s something going on in this man’s life. You’ve got to dig deeper.”

So I brought the man back into my office and I said to him, “Are you sure there was nothing inappropriate going on between you and this other woman in your office?” He looked at me and said, “What do you mean by inappropriate?” I thought, “That’s an odd response.”

I said, “Well, did you kiss her?”

He said, “I might have.”

I kept notching it up question by question. Finally, I asked, “Did you sleep with her?”

He said, “Well, I might have.”

I was practically sitting in his lap and I said, “That’s what I mean by inappropriate!”

What is truth? What do you mean by “truth?” We ask for definitions when the last thing we want to do is to answer the question.

Jesus came to bear witness to the truth, to point to the truth, and to fearlessly tell the truth to a man, who in his cynicism, rejected the possibility that truth might be standing right in front of him.

When I consider Jesus’ boldness in bearing witness to the truth, I remember a similar moment that took place at the presidential prayer breakfast several years ago. Mother Theresa, who was just a little over four feet tall, tiny, tiny woman, stood in front of an audience of major politicians, big-time attorneys, and corporate executives, and she fearlessly pleaded for the protection of babies in their mothers’ wombs. She called for leaders to take pity on the weakest and to show compassion on the little ones. She challenged political leaders sitting there and she pointed and said, “How can we claim to speak out against violence when we are the most brutal with the most defenseless.”

Reporters there noticed how awkward the moment was for the President and the Vice-President and their wives. Here was this tiny old woman, who had the meekest spirit, and yet she spoke with so much conviction.

Who was on trial that night? The truth was on trial.

Friend, is there any place that God is telling you to fearlessly stand up for the truth? Not in some brash, pompous way, but a place where you know in the deepest part of your being that the truth is being trampled on and you are not going to back down? In your college classroom? In your family? In a situation involving abuse? Is there any place that God has called you to stand up for the truth?

Who was on trial that night? Jesus the substitute. I'll close here.

#### **SLIDE**

**What is truth, Pilate asked. With this he went out again to the Jews and said, "I find no basis for a charge against him. But it is your custom for me to release to you one prisoner at the time of the Passover. Do you want me to release the King of the Jews?" They shouted back, "No, not him. Give us Barabbas." Now Barabbas had taken part in a rebellion.**

Some of you know that Barabbas is an Aramaic name which literally means, "Son of the father." Here is a man who was a violent revolutionary. He probably was responsible for the death of various Romans. Barabbas had proven to be a false son of God the Father. And yet the crowd is screaming for the release and acquittal of the false son of the Father. And they're screaming for the conviction and death of the true Son of the Father, Jesus the Messiah.

In this scene, where the true son bears the penalty, and the false son goes free, we find a glorious picture of the substitutionary work of Christ for us. Here is a picture of salvation – Jesus Christ bearing our penalty, and taking on himself the punishment that is due us. And we who place our faith in him, who are false sons, go free. While he, the true Son of God, bears the penalty by being nailed to the cross. Salvation is Jesus in your place. It is not Jesus pays 50 cents on the dollar and you pay the other 50 cents. Jesus pays 99 cents, but you have to come up with the penny. Salvation is Jesus for you. His righteousness in place of your unrighteousness. His obedience in place of your disobedience. He stands in your place. He takes on himself the punishment due you and me.

Let me close with a story. There is an extraordinary picture of this that took place in WWII. A Catholic priest named Maximilian Kolbe organized shelter for 2000 Jewish people during the Nazi occupation of Poland. Because of his work on behalf of the Jews in Poland, Father Kolbe was sent to a prison camp. He was singled out for particular abuse because of his faith in Christ.

A prison guard once saw him praying the rosary. He asked him if he believed in Christ? He said, "I do." The prison guard struck him with the butt of his rifle. He

asked him again, “Do you believe in Christ?” Again, he received the same answer. Again, Father Kolbe was beaten. It happened over and over again, until he was beaten unconscious.

From the prison camp he was shipped off to Auschwitz. In the death camp, Father Kolbe was beaten into unconsciousness again by a horrible prison guard. One evening there was an escape from Auschwitz. Three prisoners were found missing. As a reprisal, the Nazis selected 10 prisoners to be assigned to the underground starvation bunker. One of the men who was selected to be starved to death began to cry, “My poor wife; my poor children; I will never see them again.”

Father Kolbe, hearing this man’s cry, stepped forward and said, “I will take this man’s place.” And so Father Kolbe went into the starvation bunker and surrendered his life for the life of this stranger. Over the next two weeks people heard an extraordinary thing from that underground bunker. They heard men singing to Jesus. They heard men praying the rosary. They heard men offering prayers for the other prisoners.

Who was on trial before Pontius Pilate? Jesus stepped forward and took the place not for one unfortunate man, but for every one of us. Jesus the substitute. The Christian life begins when you make a clear personal decision to ask Jesus to be your substitute, to stand in your place, to exchange your sin for his righteousness, your disobedience for his obedience, your brokenness for his wholeness, your addictions for his freedom. If you’ve never asked Jesus to be your substitute, will you do that today before God your Father? Let’s pray.

## **The Trial of Jesus Christ**

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**Rich Nathan**

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