

We live in a society that is hung up on rights. We hear it all the time, "I've got a right to be happy." "I've got a right to enjoy my marriage, and if I don't, I'll find a new partner." "I've got a right to ventilate my feelings and tell you what I think." "I've got a right to a comfortable home, a job with good working conditions, to a nice retirement, and plenty of spending money." Rights.

To people who dwell on "rights," the word "injustice" is very distasteful. We don't tolerate injustice (at least when it happens to us). We fight injustice. And certainly, there are times when we should. But I want you to reflect on a couple of questions.

Did Jesus ever experience injustice? He sure did. How did Jesus respond to injustice? Isaiah 53:7 makes this remarkable observation, "He was oppressed, and He was afflicted, yet He opened not His mouth; He is brought as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so he openeth not His mouth." Jesus endured great injustice. And He calls us to be willing to do the same.

John Paton did just that (story taken from J. MacArthur's "Grace to You" letter, 3/24/95). Paton was a great 19th century missionary in New Hebrides (now known as Vanuatu), a large group of Pacific islands northeast of Australia. After graduating from school and ministering in Scotland, he was sent to New Hebrides with his wife. The land was occupied by cannibals.

When they first set shore, the Patons couldn't speak the language of the native people. They knew that others who had come to New Hebrides were never heard from again. They went knowing that death for the sake of Christ was a very real possibility.

After only a few weeks on the island, Paton's wife gave birth to a baby. But the baby soon died, and a few days later so did his wife. For the next three or four nights, Paton slept on the grave of his family to keep the cannibals from digging them up and consuming their bodies.

Most of us would have thrown in the towel, and thought, "This isn't fair. I've given my all for God's service, and look what I've received in return--injustice." Not Paton. In spite of the disastrous circumstances, he remained in New Hebrides. He devoted the rest of his life to reaching the land with the gospel of Christ. In his autobiography, Paton said that as the result of his ministry, he didn't know of a single inhabitant who had not made at least a profession of faith in Christ.

What made Paton "successful" as a servant of Christ? In part, it was because he accepted the fact that Christ has not called us to self-fulfillment, but to service. Even if that service involves hardship, and even injustice. He knew that the Savior has already left the tracks in which He calls us to walk.

This morning, we're going to ponder the great injustice that Jesus Christ endured. We are currently in a series entitled "The Passion Week of Jesus." Our aim is to investigate what happened to our Savior in those critical seven days of His earthly

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ministry. Mark's gospel is our guide. Mark devoted more than one-third of his book (ch 11-16) to the events in the final week of Jesus' ministry.

Allow me to sketch the events of the Passion week. On the day we call "Palm Sunday," Jesus rode into the capital city on a donkey, to the applause of the emotional crowd. He headed directly for the temple, looked around, then left to spend the night in Bethany (Mk 11:11). On Monday, He cleared the merchandisers out of the temple (Mk 11:15). On Tuesday, He debated with the religious leaders (Mk 12). Burial preparations occurred on Wednesday (Mk 14). The night before His crucifixion, Jesus agonized in the Garden, a most-solemn experience which we pondered two weeks ago.

Then came the climax of injustice. What injustice did Jesus endure? In Mark 14-15, Mark records a series of gross injustices which the Blameless Messiah received.

1. *He was betrayed by a friend (14:43).*

Judas came leading a mob with swords and clubs. For a mere 30 pieces of silver, Judas sold his soul, and betrayed the One Who had invested three years into his life.

2. *He was deserted by all (14:50).*

In His hour of greatest need, Jesus was abandoned by His closest friends, His disciples.

3. *He was given an unjust Jewish trial (14:53).*

We'll probe this injustice in a moment.

4. *He was disowned by Peter (14:66).*

Peter, the man who boldly claimed, "I'll die rather than deny," disowned his Lord 3 times.

5. *He was given an unjust Roman trial (15:1).*

6. *He was abused by Roman soldiers (15:16).*

The horrid abuse was both verbal and physical by soldiers made a game out of suffering.

7. *He was executed as a criminal (15:21).*

To the Romans and to the Jews, Jesus was regarded as a lawbreaker.

8. *He was insulted by the people (15:29).*

The bystanders mocked Him viciously, "If You are the Christ, come down!"

9. *He endured the wrath of God (15:33).*

The Law stated, "Cursed by God is the man who hangs on a tree." (Dt 21:23)

The Lord Jesus experienced grave injustice. May God help us never underestimate the injustices of Calvary. George Bennard penned these words, "On a hill far away stood an old rugged cross, the emblem of suffering and shame; And I love that old cross where the dearest and best for a world of lost sinners was slain. O that old rugged cross, so despised by the world, has a wondrous attraction for me; For the dear Lamb of God left His glory above to bear it to dark Calvary."

We have scanned Mark's account to see an overview of the injustice. Let us now zero in on one specific scene that we might probe the depths of the unfair treatment our Savior encountered. I have in mind the events described in Mark 15:1-15. What injustice did He endure there?

Proposition: Mark 15:1-15 presents two acts of injustice which the Lord Jesus willingly faced in our behalf.

I. He endured an unjust trial (1-5).

A. The Jewish trial was unjust (1).

B. The Roman trial was unjust (2-5).

II. He endured unjust treatment (6-15).

A. Pilate treated Him unjustly.

1. He freed a person who was guilty (6-8).
2. He condemned a person who was innocent (9-14).
3. He feared the crowd more than God (15a).
4. He authorized inhumane treatment (15b).

B. The Jews treated Him unjustly.

1. They chose a menace over the Messiah (11).
2. They allowed envy to corrupt justice (11).

Implications: The Just died for the unjust so that the unjust might be just.

1. We must accept Jesus--He is our Redeemer.
2. We must follow Jesus--He is our Example.

I. He endured an unjust trial (1-5).

Actually, Jesus endured two trials, and both were unjust.

A. The Jewish trial was unjust (1).

V 1 "And straightway, in the morning, the chief priests held a consultation with the elders and scribes and the whole council, and bound Jesus, and carried him away, and delivered him to Pilate." Notice the time indicator--it was in the morning. Jesus had been abused all night. By the time we come to 15:1, Jesus has already been tried in the Jewish "court," by the Sanhedrin (the proceedings are recorded in 14:53-65).

If you think the O. J. case is making a mockery out of justice, consider what happened to Jesus. The Jewish trial was a travesty (see Barclay, 349-50). The Sanhedrin was the supreme court of the Jews, composed of 71 members. Within its membership were Saducees (the priests), Pharisees and Scribes (who were experts in the law), and respected men who were elders. There is no doubt that when the Sanhedrin tried Jesus, it broke its OWN laws. For Jesus' trial, the Sanhedrin did not meet in its own building, which it was required to do. It met at night, which was illegal. It met during one of the Jewish feasts, which was illegal. Their law stated that trial witnesses must be examined separately, and for their evidence to be valid, it must agree in every detail--This was violated in Jesus' trial. If the verdict was death, a night was to elapse before the execution was carried out, so the court might have a chance to change its mind if necessary.

Don't miss this. In their eagerness to get rid of Jesus, the Jewish leaders broke their own judicial laws. They condemned Jesus, then sent Him to Pilate. Why? Because the Jews did not have the power to inflict the death penalty. Only the Romans did.

B. The Roman trial was unjust (2-5).

Who was Pilate? Mark doesn't tell his readers, but assumes they know. Pilate was the Roman governor of Judea. He lived at Caesarea on the Mediterranean Sea, but came to Jerusalem at Passover to be available in case of crowd control problems. The palace of the high priest was in the southwest part of the city (Wessel, 773), and Pilate probably stayed in the palace of Herod in the northwest section of the Jerusalem. After the Jews condemned Jesus, they led Him through the city to Pilate who typically held morning trials.

Notice an important detail. For what crime did the Jewish court condemn Jesus? Blasphemy (14:64). But what crime did they accuse Jesus of before Pilate? Not

blasphemy, but high treason. It's implied by the first question that comes from Pilate's mouth in v 2, "Art thou the king of the Jews?" The Romans wouldn't execute a man for a religious issue like blasphemy, but they wouldn't overlook some person rivaling Caesar by claiming to be king!

How did Jesus respond to Pilate's question? V 2 "Thou sayest it." Then the chief priests railed accusations at Him (3). No doubt, they tried to paint Jesus as a troublemaker, as a political threat to Rome. By the way, v 10 shows that Pilate saw right through the tactics of these prosecuting attorneys (he knew the Jewish leaders could care less about someone causing the Roman government trouble!).

What answer did Jesus give to the false accusations? He didn't. Don't miss v 3, "He answered nothing." Which prompted Pilate to ask in v 4, "Answerest thou nothing? Behold how many things they witness against thee." Still Jesus said nothing (5). And Pilate marveled (5b).

Pilate had never met a "criminal" like this. This "man" was in total control. It was if He wanted to die. He could have avoided death had He defended Himself. But He didn't. Pilate sensed that here was a person who didn't deserve to die, but wanted to die!

Why didn't Jesus defend Himself? Why didn't He demand His rights? Jean Calvin answered that question hundreds of years ago when he wrote, "God's Son stood trial before a mortal man and suffered accusation and condemnation that we might stand without fear in the presence of God (Harmony..., 3:179)."

Let's talk about application. Right now, you may be thinking, "My spouse doesn't make me happy anymore. I have a right to be happy, so I'm chucking this relationship." Or perhaps a young person, "I deserve better parents. They don't deserve to be honored." Listen. The next time you're inclined to think of your "rights," think of Jesus. Think of the unjust trial He endured. There was a second act of injustice He faced on our behalf...

II. He endured unjust treatment (6-15).

In the Roman trial in vv 6-15, the injustice came from two sources.

A. Pilate treated Him unjustly.

READ vv 6-8, "Now at that feast (Passover), he released unto them one prisoner whomsoever they desired..."

Barabbas is a strange name which means "son of Abba" (son of the father). He may have been the son of a famous rabbi. Some manuscripts preserve his name as "Jesus Barabbas" (Jesus was a common Jewish name). Barabbas was a well-known member of a Jewish resistance movement. He may have belonged to the Jewish sect of Zealots, a group which hated and sought ways to eliminate the Romans. Barabbas killed a man, and was captured by the Romans. He was a hero to many of the Jews.

Commentator D.A. Carson (569) suggests it's possible that the two criminals who were crucified with Jesus were co-rebels with Barabbas. The fact that they were crucified indicates they were guilty of more than robbery. Carson offers this suggestion, "The fact that three crosses were prepared strongly suggests that Pilate had already ordered that preparations be made for the execution of the three rebels. If so, Jesus the Messiah actually took the place of the rebel (Jesus) Barabbas because the people preferred the political rebel and nationalist hero to the Son of God."

Pilate committed four unjust deeds that day.

1. *He freed a person who was guilty (6-8).*

Don't forget. Barabbas was a murderer, a guilty man. Yet Pilate set him free.

2. *He condemned a person who was innocent (9-14).*

Why would a government official pervert justice in such a blatant manner?

Because the crowd talked him into it--read vv 9-14.

Pilate was a politician. Thank God for good public officials, but Pilate was not one. He was a self-seeking man who did enough good to keep the crowd off his back and enough evil to mar justice. Pilate didn't ask, "Is it right?" He operated by the question, "Is it safe and popular?" (Wiersbe, 163)

3. *He feared the crowd more than God (15a).*

To any person who has the slighted interest in true justice, v 15 is heart wrenching, "And so Pilate, willing to content the people, released Barabbas unto them, and delivered Jesus...to be crucified." The NIV captures the true nature of Pilate's problem, "Wanting to satisfy the crowd, Pilate released Barabbas."

How could a judge condemn a man he knew to be innocent? Because he feared people more than he feared God.

4. *He authorized inhumane treatment (15b).*

Don't minimize the little phrase, "when he had scourged him" (15). When the Romans scourged a man, they beat him half to death. They stripped and tied the victim to a post, with arms raised and back exposed. A whip of leather straps embedded with bone and metal fragments was used to literally turn the flesh into a bloody pulp. The Jews limited beatings to 40 lashes, but the Romans had no limit. Some men actually died during the scourging. Such was the inhumane treatment Pilate authorized, and Jesus endured.

The injustice came from another source as well.

B. The Jews treated Him unjustly.

In two specific ways...

1. *They chose a menace over the Messiah (11).*

Have you ever wondered, "How could the crowd that shouted 'Hosanna' on Sunday shout 'Crucify Him!' only a few days later?" I want you to notice something. It's likely that the people that showed up at Pilate's hall that morning were not the same people that applauded Jesus in the Triumphal entry. Truly pious Jews had more to do at Passover time than get up early and go to a Roman trial. The crowd at the trial was composed, in part, of fans of the high priest, and in part, of friends of Barabbas.

In fact, many in the mob that day had not come to accuse Jesus so much as they had come to show their support for Barabbas. They were there because they knew Pilate's custom (6). They knew a prisoner would be released. They wanted to make sure it was their hero Barabbas (7). What does v 8 say? The NIV reads, "The crowd came up and asked Pilate to do for them as he USUALLY did."

Pilate did a foolish thing in v 9. He asked a mob for its opinion, "Do you want me to release the King of the Jews?" It's been well said that a mob is a many headed monster (Horace, in Bruner, 1032). Don't miss the strong contrast in v 11. At the priests' instigation, the mob chose a guilty man--a menace--over the Messiah that had healed and helped and brought hope to His people.

Why did the crowd commit such an unthinkable crime against Jesus?

2. *They allowed envy to corrupt justice (11).*

You didn't have to be a brain surgeon to see what was going on inside the heads of the Jewish priests that day. V 10 tells us Pilate saw their motive--They were full of envy.

There's something almost demonic about the mob's response in v 13 (Bruner, 1031). When asked by Pilate, "What do you want me to do with Jesus?" they could have said, "Forget about Him. All we care about is Barabbas." Or, "Do whatever you want with Him." But instead, their brutal reply pierced the air, "Crucify Him!"

Pilate tried to backpedal his way out in v 14, "Why? What evil has He done?" But there is no reasoning with a mob. As someone has said (Bruner, 1032), "When people cannot reason, they emote. The fewer the reasons the higher the volume. In any argument, the quieter side is almost always right."

Envy clouds reason. Envy corrupts justice. Envy ruins relationships, for envy says, "If YOU are in the way of what I want, YOU must go."

Oh beloved, may we never forget that our Savior endured the greatest injustice ever seen on planet earth. He faced injustice in His trial. He faced injustice in the treatment He received. But don't forget something very important. Pilate and the Jewish mob are not the only reasons Jesus suffered such injustice. He suffered because of US. We are guilty, too--every one of us.

The implications of what happened that day can be summed up in one sentence.

Implications: The Just died for the unjust so that the unjust might be just.

Think about it. The Jewish crowd made a choice the day it stood before Pilate. In a sense, it's a choice that every one of us makes--we either choose FOR Jesus or AGAINST Jesus. It's impossible to remain neutral in this choice.

Jesus suffered great injustice in our behalf. How do we choose FOR Jesus? By making two decisions.

1. *We must accept Jesus--He is our Redeemer.*

The Just (that's Jesus) died for the unjust (that's us). Why? So that the unjust might be just (that is, justified before God). Peter put it this way in 1 Pt 1:18-19, "Forasmuch as you know that you were not redeemed with corruptible things...but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot."

Jesus suffered injustice to redeem us. Have you ever accepted Him as your Redeemer?

2. *We must follow Jesus--He is our Example.*

In this age of standing up for our "rights," we need this reminder. In 1 Pt 2:21, with the unjust treatment of Jesus in mind, Peter draws this application, "For even hereunto were you called, because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an EXAMPLE, that you should follow His steps."

Jesus is both our Redeemer and Example. We are not saved BY following in His steps, but we are saved IN ORDER TO follow in His steps. Have you accepted Jesus as your Redeemer? Are you following Jesus as your Example?