

### 40 Days of Prayer, The Trials, Mark 14:53-65, 15:1-15, 4/2/23

If you have raised children then you know that around the time a child turns 1 they have mastered the word 'NO!', but by about 2 they have mastered the phrase 'No fair!'" Because it seems by the age of 2 or 3 that human beings believe they have already become arbiters of justice. When my wife was teaching the 2-3s class here at our Brandywine Valley Preschool, she had a walking rope that had rings on it that the children would hold as they walk to recess or the gym. And each ring on this rope had a different pattern or color on it than the next one...and it started to become an issue because when little Susie wanted the ring that little Jack had, guess what she would say, "No fair!" And some of these adorable, innocent little bundles of joy turned the classroom into a courtroom arguing over who should get which rings. And so Shannan came up with a brilliant idea- she brought this ring rope home and we covered all the rings with the same blue tape, ended that issue!

Well we can laugh about the cute little 2-3-year-old courtroom attorneys arguing about fairness, but are we really much different? When I'm driving my economical Honda Civic and I pull up next to the guy with one of those new Broncos. Love those...no fair! But you aren't different, How about when the coach puts in their kid over yours even though you swear that yours is much better. And of course there are far more serious matters...you have tried to stay healthy but you still get sick, or the stock market turns just at the wrong time when you were trying to retire, a depression you can't shake when others seem happy, pain or grief enters your life and hangs around...and we say, "No fair!" We too look at life like a courtroom and we are the arbiters of justice. When we look at the circumstances of our lives, when bad things happen, when it seems like evil is winning, we put God on trial- "God, where are you in these unjust, unfair circumstances of my life or the life of my family, or in our world?"

And this is the problem, the question we are confronted with this morning as we are taken into another courtroom, where we see Jesus is on trial. And if there was ever a case to be made that someone was being treated unfairly, unjustly it would be Jesus in this courtroom. And if anyone had the right to be the arbiter of what is fair and just it would be Jesus. And yet, Jesus' actions and his perspective on his circumstances leave the people who witnessed him amazed, because it was completely counterintuitive. So today, as Jesus faces the pinnacle of unfairness and injustice that will ultimately lead to his death, we will learn the secret to facing even the most unfair circumstances of life.

Mark's gospel focuses on two trials that Jesus faced. **Mark 14:53-65**: On Thursday night into the early hours of Friday morning, Jesus stands before the religious courtroom on the 2<sup>nd</sup> floor in the Palace of Caiaphas, High Priest of Israel and the Sanhedrin (the religious rulers), remember from last week Peter is in the courtyard below denying Jesus as this is taking place. **Mark 15:1-15**: On Friday morning Jesus stands before the civil courtroom of Pontius Pilate, the appointed Roman judge of occupied Israel.

Mark 14:<sup>55</sup> *The chief priests and the whole Sanhedrin were looking for evidence against Jesus so that they could put him to death, but they did not find any.*

<sup>56</sup> Many testified falsely against him, but their statements did not agree. The leaders of Israel are trying to throw charges at Jesus to see what will stick, this is a set up. And false witness after false witness, likely paid off like Judas was, are coming forward but they are contradicting each other. You say, "Well if they wanted him dead, why didn't they just kill him? Why go through all this?" These men feared the Jewish people- several times Mark tells us that they wanted to seize him and kill him but feared the crowds because Jesus was popular. And so these religious leaders were crafty, they knew that the best opportunity they had to get rid of their Jesus problem was to get the Romans to do it legally, not in a religious court but a civil court. And so they are trying to find a charge that would get him executed under the Roman law. But so far, nothing is working.

<sup>60</sup> Then the high priest stood up before them and asked Jesus, "Are you not going to answer? What is this testimony that these men are bringing against you?" <sup>61</sup> But Jesus remained silent and gave no answer. Just as Isaiah 53:7 prophesied, that the Messiah, He was oppressed and afflicted, yet he did not open his mouth; he was led like a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before its shearers is silent, so he did not open his mouth.

Again the high priest asked him, "Are you the Messiah, the Son of the Blessed One?" <sup>62</sup> "I am," said Jesus. "And you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Mighty One and coming on the clouds of heaven."

<sup>63</sup> The high priest tore his clothes. "Why do we need any more witnesses?" he asked. <sup>64</sup> "You have heard the blasphemy. What do you think?" They all condemned him as worthy of death.

<sup>65</sup> Then some began to spit at him; they blindfolded him, struck him with their fists, and said, "Prophecy!" And the guards took him and beat him.

Well they got what they were looking for because turn to <sup>15:1</sup> Very early in the morning, the chief priests, with the elders, the teachers of the law and the whole Sanhedrin, made their plans. So they bound Jesus, led him away and handed him over to Pilate. They found something that they thought would stick...In response to the direct question of Caiaphas- "Are you the Messiah, the Son of the Blessed One?" Jesus not only answered in v.62 "I am", but he also was claiming to be the fulfillment of Daniel 7's vision of the Son of Man. A prophesy about the coming of a Divine King, seated on the throne, who would come at the end of the age to execute judgment on the nations and reign forever and ever. Jesus was saying, "I'm not only Israel's judge and king, I'm the judge and king of the whole world." Aha! That's it, see Caiaphas knew that the Roman courts weren't concerned about the charge of blasphemy, which is a religious issue, but the Romans would care about the charge of political insurrection against the Roman powers, about the claim of being the king and lord of all nations, a claim that only Caesar could make. And so this is what they tell Pilate. <sup>2</sup> "Are you the king of the Jews?" asked Pilate. "You have said so," Jesus replied. <sup>3</sup> The chief priests accused him of many things.

<sup>4</sup> So again Pilate asked him, "Aren't you going to answer? See how many things they are accusing you of." <sup>5</sup> But Jesus still made no reply, and Pilate was amazed. In the same way Jesus was silent before the religious court, Jesus does not defend or attempt to justify himself before this civil court. And Pilate was amazed because he had never seen anything like this. There was no bartering, begging, justifying, pleading for his life or for justice. Jesus was calm and clear headed, accepting of his circumstances as unfair and unjust as this were, it was almost as if Jesus knew something that Pilate didn't...(we will come back to that). And what we go on to see is that Pilate is perplexed because he knows Jesus is innocent of these charges, because he can discern that Jesus did not come to lead a political revolution against Rome, and yet meanwhile the Jewish leaders were inciting a riot with the Jewish people to turn on Jesus. How would they get the Jews to turn on Jesus and begin shouting crucify him? I mean just the week before they were celebrating Jesus' arrival to Jerusalem on that Palm Sunday and now they want him crucified? Well, likely they were telling the crowds, "Look, Jesus is a charlatan, he's not the Messiah, if he was, he wouldn't be in chains, captive to the Romans, he would have already called down the angels and led a revolution by now, he's a fake just like we've been trying to tell you!" And so ultimately, Pilate gives in to the pressure of the mob and releases Jesus to be crucified.

Do not miss the overpowering tragic irony of the unjust circumstances Jesus is in. Listen to how one author puts it, "Jesus, who is, indeed, king of the Jews in a deeply spiritual sense, has refused to lead a political uprising. Yet now, condemned for blasphemy by the Jews because of his spiritual claims,

he is accused by them also before Pilate by being precisely what he had disappointed the crowds for failing to be- a political insurgent."<sup>1</sup>

That's as far as we want to go in the text today, because I want to come back to Pilate's response- he's amazed that Jesus isn't trying to justify himself, he's calm in the face of such unfair and unjust circumstances. What is it that Jesus knew that Pilate didn't know? The answer comes to us from John's account of his trial before Pilate in John 19. <sup>10</sup> "Do you refuse to speak to me?" Pilate said. "Don't you realize I have power either to free you or to crucify you?" <sup>11</sup> Jesus answered, "You would have no power over me if it were not given to you from above.

Jesus is in a sense saying, "The only reason you were able to do this to me is because God is allowing you to do it in order to fulfill His good and perfect plan for my life and for the sake of the whole world. Your actions are evil, unjust, unfair...but none of that changes God's perfect and good plans, in fact, they are happening right on schedule."

See this question about how God could allow unfair circumstances takes us into one of the great mysteries of the universe- that is **How do God's sovereignty and man's free will fit together?** Now lots and lots of ink has been spilt over the last 2000 years on this topic...and it continues, my son Nathan's student small group has been debating sovereignty and free will the last few

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<sup>1</sup> Walter W. Wessel, "[Mark](#)," in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, 773

weeks. And wherever you land on that debate, your answer has to take into account the the consistent claim of the Bible, which is: **That every person alive has genuine free will. Yet somehow, God superintends all of man's free will to make sure His sovereign plans are accomplished** right on schedule. And Jesus' trial and crucifixion is Exhibit A.

In Acts 2, Peter is giving a sermon to the Jewish people about that very same trial and execution of Jesus just days before. Listen to what he says. **Acts 2:23 "Men of Israel, this man (Jesus) was handed over to you by the predetermined plan and foreknowledge of God."** That settle's it- God's sovereignty...

**Acts 3:13 "You handed Him over to be killed, and disowned Him before Pilate, even though Pilate had decided to let Him go."** Oh that settle's it man's free will...

**Acts 3:18 "This is how God fulfilled what He had foretold through all the prophets, saying that His Messiah would suffer."** The Bible is saying that: Caiaphas and the Sanhedrin who pushed for Jesus' crucifixion knew exactly what they were doing. The Jewish mob that went along with it chose to do so by their own free will. But the Bible is also saying that God was in total control all the time, allowing their actions and Pilate's decision to fulfill His perfect plan for Jesus' life. Jesus believed this, and saw every circumstance in life through this lens. And it's not just how God works for Jesus, Joseph in Genesis saw his life circumstances through the very same lens, and so did Esther, and Naomi and Ruth, and so did the Apostle Paul even when he was on house arrest, chained to a Roman guard. This is the key to facing life's seemingly unfair circumstances.

**#1 – Trusting that God is in absolute control of every circumstance that comes into our lives – working out His perfect plan for our lives – whether we see it or not.**

**#2 – Trusting that God is bigger than the most unfair things people do to us and the most challenging trials we face in life.**

**#3 – Trusting God will take all that we see as unfair and unjust...even great evil and tragedy... and use it for our ultimate good...even if we don't see it until eternity.**

**Do you really believe that nothing will come into your life today that He did not either allow or decree for your ultimate good?** Here's where we get off track: When just like the 2-year-old saying "No fair!" who doesn't really know fair, we become the arbiter of justice instead of God. We think we can predict the future and how what we deem is unfair will turn out. We think we know better than God what is good for us. We think that good and fair means "health, prosperity, ease, wealth, beauty, upward mobility" meanwhile good to God may mean character, integrity, perseverance, people coming to Christ, or a deeper joy that you can't see yet. And when God isn't working according to our sense of good and on our timeline, we put him on trial. When we do this, we attempt to reduce the all-powerful, all-sovereign, all-good God who holds time and space in the palm of his hand- to either a magic genie or a tyrant...in other words, you turn him into a god of your own creation and imagination, not the good, sovereign God of the Bible.

But when we really believe that God is bigger than our circumstances, that we don't know better than him about what is fair and good, we don't have the crystal ball- we can loosen the grip on our circumstances and get a refreshing perspective like Jesus. Now does that mean we just throw our hands up in resignation to do anything to change our bad or unfair or unjust circumstances? No- work just like Esther did, just like Paul did to change your circumstances. But trust the process and the outcome that God's plans for your ultimate good are still right on schedule. "God I can't see it yet, and this is painful, this is causing me stress, or grief- but I trust that you aren't done with yet. I trust you with my circumstances." I trust you with my diagnosis and my tenuous future. I trust that I can still be generous even in the uncertain economic times because you are good. I trust you with my singleness... You don't always get to see the good that God is up to right away or maybe you won't until eternity, but sometimes he gives you a glimpse in hindsight. About 9 years ago, we were really loving our life in Northern VA- going pretty well in ministry, and family, and we had a great friend group, small group together- babysitting swap. But something began to happen, some of our closest friends, one by one, started moving away. And it was hard for us, sad- man we had such a good thing. But looking back we realize what God was doing in our lives, he knew that in order to get our attention, he had to start uprooting our sense of stability, he had to make things uncomfortable in order to prepare us for a new call. I don't know if I would have returned the phone call to Craig Montgomery if not for those circumstances.

Do you really believe that nothing will come into your life today that He did not either allow or decree for your ultimate good? Now you say, well how can I really trust that God is good and sovereign and that he will take all this evil and injustice and unfair circumstances and use it for my ultimate good? Look to Jesus. You know I skipped over one part of the trial- do you remember that Pilate presented another person to the mob to be punished that Friday, His name was Barabbas. He was true criminal, he tried to start a revolt, he murdered people and was arrested. What was fair and just? Fair and just was Barabbas being declared guilty and put to death. J.C. Ryle, "Instead the guilty one is set free and the innocent one is put to death. The great sinner is delivered, and the sinless one remains bound. Barabbas is spared, and Christ is crucified. We have in this striking fact a vivid emblem of the manner in which God pardons and justifies the ungodly."

He does it, because Christ hath suffered in their stead, the just for the unjust. They deserve punishment, but a mighty Substitute has suffered for them."<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> J. C. Ryle, [Expository Thoughts on Mark](#), 339–340.