

“Accused for Me” // Matthew 26:57–27:26 // *Instead of Me* #3

Video *Instead of Me* #3

Musical Pad: ⁵⁷ Those who had arrested Jesus took him to Caiaphas the high priest, where the teachers of the law and the elders had assembled. ⁵⁹ The chief priests and the whole Sanhedrin were looking for false evidence against Jesus so that they could put him to death. ⁶⁰ But they did not find any, though many false witnesses came forward. Finally two came forward ⁶¹ and declared, “This fellow said, ‘I am able to destroy the temple of God and rebuild it in three days.’” (he had, of course, made clear that he was speaking of his body when he said that, and they knew that)

⁶² Then the high priest stood up and said to Jesus, “Are you not going to answer? What is this testimony that these men are bringing against you?” ⁶³ But Jesus remained silent. The high priest said to him, “I charge you under oath by the living God: Tell us if you are the Messiah, the Son of God.”

⁶⁴ “You have said so,” Jesus replied. “But I say to all of you: From now on you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Mighty One and coming on the clouds of heaven.” (a reference to a prophecy

in Daniel that indicates the deity of the Messiah—“coming on the clouds of heaven” is a Jewish image for deity.)

⁶⁵ Then the high priest tore his clothes and said, “He has spoken blasphemy! Why do we need any more witnesses? Look, now you have heard the blasphemy. ⁶⁷ Then they spit in his face and struck him with their fists. Others slapped him ⁶⁸ and said, “Prophecy to us, Messiah. Who hit you?”

27:1 When daybreak came, all the chief priests and the elders of the people plotted against Jesus to put him to death. ² After tying him up, they led him away and handed him over to Pilate, the governor.

³ Then Judas, his betrayer, seeing that Jesus had been condemned, was full of remorse and returned the thirty pieces of silver to the chief priests and elders. ⁴ “I have sinned by betraying innocent blood,” he said. “What’s that to us?” they said. “See to it yourself!” ⁵ So he threw the silver into the temple and departed. Then he went and hanged himself.

¹¹ Now Jesus stood before the governor. “Are you the King of the Jews?” the governor asked him. Jesus answered, “You say so.” ¹² While he was being accused by the chief priests and elders, he didn’t answer. ¹³ Then Pilate said to him, “Don’t you hear how much they are testifying against you?” ¹⁴ But he didn’t answer him on even one charge, so that the governor was quite amazed.

¹⁵ At the festival the governor’s custom was to release to the crowd a prisoner they wanted. ¹⁶ At that time they had a notorious prisoner called Barabbas. ¹⁷ So when they had gathered together, Pilate said to

Works Consulted:

“Accused for Me,” James MacDonald

“Substituted for Me,” James MacDonald

“The Pretender,” Andy Stanley

“You Have No Power” Tim Keller

“Pilate, the Crowds, and Barabbas,” John Mark Comer

them, “Who is it you want me to release for you—Barabbas, or Jesus who is called Christ?”¹⁸ For he knew it was because of envy that they had handed him over.

¹⁹ While he was sitting on the judge’s bench, his wife sent word to him, “Have nothing to do with that righteous man, for today I’ve suffered terribly in a dream because of him.”

²⁰ The chief priests and the elders, however, persuaded the crowds to ask for Barabbas and to execute Jesus. ²¹ The governor asked them, “Which of the two do you want me to release for you?”

“Barabbas!” they answered.

²² Pilate asked them, “What should I do then with Jesus, who is called Christ?”

They all answered, “Crucify him!”

²³ Then he said, “Why? What has he done wrong?”

But they kept shouting all the more, “Crucify him!”

²⁴ When Pilate saw that he was getting nowhere, but that a riot was starting instead, he took some water, washed his hands in front of the crowd, and said, “I am innocent of this man’s blood. See to it yourselves!”

²⁵ All the people answered, “His blood be on us and on our children!” ²⁶ Then he released Barabbas to them and, after having Jesus flogged, handed him over to be crucified.

Our driving idea in this series has been that the events surrounding the trial of Jesus are recorded to show us that we are the ones who

are actually on trial. **In these stories we should see ourselves**—and they should make us consider how we are responding to Jesus.

- The **1st week we saw that we are Judas**—using Jesus as a means to an end; and, willing to sell him out for a price.
- The **2nd week we saw that we are Peter**—convinced that we’re one of the good guys, and not so bad that Jesus would have to *die* to save us. We’re convinced that with a little good intention and good effort we can save ourselves.

This week, I want to show you how the **4 primary characters involved in the trial itself represent us** and show us 4 ways people today respond to Jesus.

But first, I want to show you that Matthew **tells the events of the trial in such a way** that show us the **whole thing was a sham**. *Matthew, who was writing for a Jewish audience, indicates 6 ways the trial of Jesus was unjust, even by Jewish standards at the time—they would have picked these up!*

By the way, you know, **this is not the only time that Jesus** has been put on trial! There’s actually been a couple of times, I found. For example,

- In 1970, Arizona lawyer Russel Tansie filed a suit against Jesus to the tune of \$100,000 for damages done to his secretary's house when lightning struck it, because insurance had refused to pay on it, deeming it “an act of God.” So, Tansie said, “Then I’ll just sue Jesus.” He said in this article that he thought he had a strong chance of winning because he was pretty sure “the defendant would fail to appear in court.” But eventually, and wisely, the case was thrown out. I’m pretty sure you don’t want to find yourself in the courtroom opposite to Jesus Christ. I’ve heard the cross-examination can be pretty brutal!
- Well, believe it or not, the trial we’ll look at today is the biggest sham of them all.

The 6 Injustices of Jesus's Trial¹:

- The timing was unjust.** Jesus's trial took place in the middle of the night, with the first phase occurring in Caiphas's (who was the high priest) house sometime around midnight.
 - **Jewish law said that trials could only occur** during the day (officially, between morning worship and the evening meal), so that trials could be public and open to scrutiny.
 - **Furthermore, trials were not allowed** to take place on Feast days because people were traveling and distracted, and Jesus's occurred in the middle of the **Passover**.²
 - **In our day it** would be like Jesus being arrested late Christmas Eve night, and then his trial being held, unannounced, privately, at 2 a.m. later that night. You'd know something sinister was afoot.
- The 'due process' experience was unjust.** The Jewish Sanhedrin (which was the council of the highest ranking Jewish officials were **like Israel's Supreme Court**, and they were supposed to be **impartial judges** in capital cases: they would listen to the accusations and defense and weigh the evidence fairly.
 - But in Jesus's case, they are the ones making the charges! **You can see how that's a problem.**
 - **Imagine you were in a courtroom** where the Judge came down off the bench and led the prosecution then went back to sit in his chair. It's doubtful he'd be able to be impartial.)
 - **Furthermore, official charges were never actually brought** against Jesus. From the moment he was brought in he was just blasted with questions and when he didn't answer the way they wanted they punched in the face.
- Their use of witnesses was unjust.** According to Jewish law, all the witnesses had to agree on the particular details of the crime, and if not, the case would be thrown out.
 - And, **if the witnesses were found to be lying**, they would receive the punishment the accused was supposed to receive. Which definitely raised the stakes a bit.
 - **Well, in Jesus's trial**, the Sanhedrin kept looking for witnesses (which was inappropriate, since they were the supposed to be the judges) and can't really find any, and **the few they did find kept contradicting each other**³ (which means their testimony should have been thrown out.)
 - **Furthermore, Jesus was never given an opportunity** to bring counter-witnesses to his own defense, because, again, the whole thing was done *ad hoc* in the middle of the night.
 - Even **the assembled mob who shouted 'crucify' when given the choice between Jesus and Barabbas**. Yes, in Sunday School Sister Ethel taught me that these were the same people that had shouted "Hosanna" the week before and they had all changed their mind and this proved how fickle humans were. But for the most part these are not the same people.
 - The Gospels tell us that the Jewish leaders had pulled together this mob and manipulated them to shouting "crucify," really before the majority of people could find out what is going on⁴
- The conviction process was unjust.** The conviction was supposed to take place by vote.
 - The practice was that they would vote in order of the youngest to the oldest so that the youngest wouldn't be pressured by the older to vote.
 - To carry out an execution the sentence had to be unanimous.
 - **No such vote** every took place, and we know that **some of the Sanhedrin, like Nicodemus**, objected.⁵

¹ James MacDonald, "Jesus: Falsely Accused for Me," from the series *Jesus in My Place*, preached at Harvest Bible Chapel in 2004.

² <http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2014/april-web-only/five-errors-to-drop-from-your-easter-sermon.html>; Cf. *Killing Jesus*, Bill O'Reilly and Martin Dugard;

³ Cf. Mark 14:56

⁴ Matthew 27:20; Mark 15:11; John 19:6

⁵ John 7:50–51

- Furthermore, Pilate twice gave a verdict of innocence, which was ignored.
- 5. **The sentencing was unjust.** Jewish law required that a sentence of death be carried out by stoning, and the stoning was to be done by the accusers. **If you thought they were worthy to die**, you had to be the ones who killed them! (*Which again, raised the stakes*)
 - Furthermore, the judgment had to sit on the table for 3 days, during which time the Sanhedrin were supposed to fast and pray to make sure they had made the right decision; and, to give any other witnesses with exculpatory evidence time to come forward.
 - **After 3 days**, if none had come forward, they would read out the man's name, his crime, the verdict, the sentence, the witnesses' names, and then call once more for any witnesses that might have some exonerating evidence to come forward.
 - **Only then, if none came forward**, would they carry out the stoning.
 - (*Jewish legal procedures, btw, were quite advanced—tilted decidedly toward the innocent to avoid unjust incrimination. So much so, I read, that many of our judicial procedures today are based on them.*)
- 6. **Pilate's final consent was unjust.** Pilate knew Jesus was innocent, but he was unwilling to act on it.
 - **He knows he's being manipulated by the Jewish leaders**, so, at first, he comes up with what he thinks is a pretty ingenious solution. He appeals to a Jewish custom whereby they would release one political prisoner.⁶ But the crowd chooses Barabbas. So, **27:24** says that **in order to avoid a riot** Pilate consented.
- **Pilate, you see, was on thin ice** as a governor because he had made some really boneheaded decisions.
- **For example:** When he first came into office he wanted to do so with a bang, so he marched through Jerusalem in this huge parade with these large **banners bearing the image of Tiberius Caesar**, his boss, and then he had those banners hung up everywhere in Jerusalem, including in the Temple. Well, to have anyone's image displayed at the Temple, much less that of a pagan emperor, was blasphemy to the Jews, so they were enraged.
- So, Pilate agreed to **meet with them in the amphitheater** to discuss their concerns. Once there, he surrounded them with soldiers and threatened to kill them. The Jews **called his bluff**—many of them laid down and bared their necks. And Pilate caved.⁷
- Then, shortly after that, Pilate needed some money to for a **new aqueduct** so he extorted a huge amount from the Temple treasury. **He, as a Roman, raided the Temple** to pay for one his pet projects. Well, again, the Jews staged a protest, so Pilate sent **Roman soldiers—dressed as normal citizens**—into the crowd, and on the signal they beat many of the Jewish protestors to death.⁸
- So, the bottom line is the **the Jews hated Pilate** and they were looking for an excuse to riot.
- And **Roman Emperor Tiberius** was so annoyed with him that he had officially put him on probation and told him if there was one more flare-up in Jerusalem he would fire him. By Twitter or whatever.⁹
- All this to say, **Pilate consents to the execution of Jesus** not because he believes Jesus is guilty, but to save his own skin.

⁶ "The Roman governor [would not] release **whomever** the people wished, allowing them to choose from all the prisoners in custody at the time. Instead, . . . a few offenders were selected by Roman officials and those names were given to the people as candidates from which to choose. Rome would grant an automatic pardon to the prisoner the people selected from the names proposed to them." (John MacArthur, *The Murder of Jesus*, 179)

⁷ Darrell L. Bock, *Luke Volume 2: 9:51–24:53*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament, p. 1205.

⁸ Ibid. See also R. H. Stein, *Vol. 24: Luke*, New American Commentary, 369.

⁹ Charles Swindoll, *Behold the Man!*, 52–53.

- **27:24** says he was so convinced of Jesus’s innocence that **tried to absolve himself of the guilt by washing his hands**. This was a Jewish symbol, not a Roman one, saying to them that he knew Jesus was innocent. Of course, Pilate couldn’t absolve himself that easily, of course. In his *Inferno*, **Dante depicts Pilate** in the 7th circle of hell, still trying to wash his hands!¹⁰

So, bottom line: the whole trial process was unjust. **Why?** 2 reasons:

1. **God was demonstrating to us in no uncertain terms that Jesus’s death was not brought about by his own sin;** he’s dying because of someone else’s. ***It was my trial he was undergoing.***
2. **Jesus in his trial was identifying** with every one of us who has ever had to undergo injustice—every one of us who has ever been betrayed, overlooked, abused or mistreated. He knows what that is like; and entered into it to show us that he stood with us in it and that he was promising one day to redeem us from it.

Which leads us to...

The Four Kinds of People Exposed by this Trial¹¹

A. The Sanhedrin: “the threatened” (27:18)

- **27:18** says that the Sanhedrin hated Jesus because they were envious of his popularity and authority; he occupied a position they desperately wanted to have.
- **His presence meant** they couldn’t have it their way, so they got rid of him.
- **Of course, it’s easy now to shake our heads and say,** “That’s terrible. I would never have done that.” But maybe that’s because you simply have never been pushed to a point where you actually have to choose between Jesus and yourself as Lord.

- You see, I can stand in here and tell you that Jesus demands absolute control over your life.
- **And you can leave here,** turn it off and not think about it. You can even pat me on the shoulder on the way out, and say, “Nice message, pastor.”
- It’s not like I can force you actually to choose. You can leave Jesus “at church,” so to speak, out of sight and out of mind.
- **But what if you were actually pushed**—to the point that Jesus and your control of your life could not co-exist. One has to give way. What would you choose?
- **The Sanhedrin liked to think of themselves as the good guys,** and Jesus kept insisting that they weren’t—that they were no better than anyone else and needed to be saved like every criminal or prostitute in the Roman Empire. His presence meant they couldn’t hold on to their position of pride. **So, they killed him!**
 - **Again, you can hear the same** message and leave here. And not deal with it.
 - But **what if Jesus’s presence** meant you had to abandon all pretense of pride and own before everyone that you are utterly desperate for God’s grace, and that unless Jesus died for you, you’d be rightfully condemned alongside the worst criminals in history?
- **Growing up, it was always explained to me this way:** *“In every heart there is a throne and a cross: if self is on the throne, Jesus must be on the cross; if Jesus is on the throne, self must be on the cross.”*
- You see, the Bible says that to ignore the calls to the Lordship of Christ is the same, in God’s eyes, as consenting to his execution.
- **You are in only 1 of 2 postures in relationship to Jesus, right now:** surrendered to him, or in rebellion; either on your knees worship, or with your fist raised in the air saying, “Crucify him!”
- **Which of these 2** describes you?

¹⁰ *Canto XXIII*

¹¹ “Substituted for Me,” James MacDonald

Note that this group is composed primarily of religious people. **Rule-followers who just don't want to let Jesus** have control; rule-followers who don't want to own their desperate need of God's grace.

- **I wonder how many people in this group** are in our church? They are decent people. Religious.
- There are only 2 categories: **totally sold out to Jesus**. Or ultimately resistant to him, like the Sanhedrin.
- *"In every heart there is a throne and a cross: if self is on the throne, Jesus must be on the cross; if Jesus is on the throne, self must be on the cross."*

B. Pilate: "the distracted" (27:22)

- Like I said, **Pilate knows Jesus is innocent**, but he is unwilling to act on it because other things are more important to him. And those other things were important, right? **Can't you sympathize?** He wants to keep his job!
- But **honestly, is there anything that compares in importance to the decision** you make about Jesus?
 - You know how sometimes something bad happens to you and it seems so bad until something worse happens, and then it seems like nothing? Like when you break a nail (i.e. when my wife breaks one) and she thinks that's bad, but then you stub your toe and that's worse and you forget about the nail.
 - **UVA sports loss vs.** one of our kids or family getting sick
 - **Or, when you lose a job;** that's one thing; but then when your marriage collapses, or the test results come back positive, then losing your job seems like nothing.
 - **Friend, I guarantee you that 100 years from now,** the only thing that will seem significant is where you stand in relation to Jesus Christ.
- **Pilate represents the person who knows the truth about Jesus** but is just too distracted with other things right now to really take this question seriously.

- He represents **the person who is too distracted** with other things to really consider Jesus!
 - "This is something I'll think about when I'm older," they tell themselves. When I'm an adult. When my career has been settled. When we have kids.
 - For right now, the fun you're having, having a good time with your friends, establishing yourself in your career, or whatever—**those are just too consuming** to give much thought to Jesus.
- **Don't you see how foolish that is?** You're not guaranteed tomorrow. You could die today! **Why would** you gamble with your soul like this?
 - I would say **50% of the people** listening to me today might be in this group. Pilate doesn't reject Jesus outright, just puts him off to the side, so to speak, for a more convenient time.
- **It was not unbelief that sent Pilate to hell; it was indifference.** *
 - **Listen to Spurgeon's warning:** *"Trifle not with Christ, whose hands and feet were nailed to the accursed tree for sinners such as you. Trifle not with his precious blood, for that is your only hope of redemption. Trifle not with the Holy Spirit, for if he should leave you to perish, your case would be hopeless. Trifle not with the gospel; what would the lost in hell not give to hear another proclamation of mercy! The devil does not trifle; he is very earnestly seeking your destruction. God and Christ and the Holy Spirit are not trifling with you, and (I am) not trifling with you either." **Charles Spurgeon***

C. Barabbas: "the spared" (27:20–21)

- **This character Barabbas** might give us clearest picture in all of the Gospels of what this whole thing is about. **Barabbas was a bad man. He was a thief and a murderer; a domestic terrorist;** hated by Jew and Roman alike.
- **And that afternoon, by the choice of the crowd,** Jesus died and Barabbas walked free.
- Think for a moment about **what it must have been like to be Barabbas**.

- You wake up that morning assuming you'll be dead by sundown, but that evening you are sitting down having dinner with your friends.
- **...and this strange man**, who embodied perfect goodness, is hanging on the cross in your place.
- (You see, we know that **3 men** were scheduled to die that day. **On either side of Jesus were two thieves and robbers**, which was the same description of Judas, maybe partners in crime with him. Barabbas was supposed to be the one hanging on that 3rd cross in the middle.)
- **And there he watches it happen.** Barabbas is the 1st guy who could say, "Jesus died—not just for me—but *instead of me.*"
- **Scholars point out that Barabbas' name** is an odd name, because it is very generic: **"Bar" in Aramaic means "son of."** "Abbas" means "father." So, Barabbas means "son of a man." Barabbas is supposed to represent the "everyman."¹²
- **Like Barabbas, we are rebels against the rule of God.** Jesus, a man of perfect goodness, died in our place. He took the cross intended for us.
- **Which also helps us understand why Jesus remained silent through this whole trial.**
 - Why did Jesus refuse to answer the charges brought against him?
 - Any judge will tell you that when you remain absolutely silent in the face of accusation, and make no defense, you are conceding guilt.
 - But Jesus wasn't guilty of what they were accusing him of! Why then did he remain silent?
 - **Because Jesus perceived**—behind Caiaphas' pointing finger—the finger of the Father, pointing at him, accusing him of Barabbas's sin, and our sin.
 - And that was an accusation **he willingly took**—he pleaded **guilty in my place, *for my guilt.***

- *Guilty, vile and helpless we, spotless lamb of God was he! Full atonement, can it be? Hallelujah, what a Savior! **Bearing shame and scoffing rude, in my place condemned he stood! Sealed my pardon with his blood—Hallelujah, what a Savior!***

You know, what is most curious to me about Barabbas's story is that we never find out how he responded. We don't know if he ever turned to Jesus and said, "Thank you so much! I owe you everything!" And **that's because his story** is told to us as a question.

- **What will we do?**
- Will we **fall on our knees in worship** and gratefulness, or **pass on casually**, ignoring the one who died in our place?

Well, there's one final person in here we haven't really talked about yet, and it's Judas, the story of whose suicide is tucked here right in the middle.

(D. Judas: "the despairing"* (27:3–5))

Why is the story of Judas's suicide tucked in this narrative? It breaks up the flow of events.

Maybe it is to show us what every person who rejects Jesus is, essentially, doing to themselves. We either choose Jesus's offer of life or we choose self-destruction.

But I think it's also in there to show us how **utterly unnecessary, and unnecessarily tragic**, Judas's suicide was. When Judas realized how wrong what he had done had been, and tried to give the money back, and couldn't, he probably assumed he could never be forgiven, that there was no hope.

¹² Leon Morris, *Reflections on Gospel of John*, 635.

But he was wrong: How do we know? Peter also had betrayed Jesus. In fact, every one of the disciples had forsaken him. Each of them would be forgiven.

But Judas still can't grasp, as he never had been able to, that Jesus came to reclaim *ruined* sinners. Which is why I call him "*the despairing,*" or "*the unbelieving.*" He didn't believe he could be forgiven.

He doesn't understand that Jesus' death, as awful as it was, was done *for him*, to deliver him from his sin. He didn't understand **that though he was so bad that it was true that Jesus had to die to save him,** Jesus loved him so much that he was ***glad to die*** to save him.

Some of you, I believe, are in the same place—you think that you have done so much damage and made so many mistakes that life is really over for you; God could never really forgive you or have a role for you anymore in his kingdom.

You sit here this morning with a sense of despair, like there's nowhere to go, nowhere to turn. Perhaps, like Judas, you are literally on the cusp of taking your own life.

- **You need to see that Jesus never ever gives up on you**—his grace to forgive is greater than you could ever imagine, and his power to restore the life that is ruined by sin is beyond your wildest hopes.
- **Believing the gospel is coming to realize** that you are more wicked than you ever dreamed and more loved and accepted than you ever dared hope, at the same time, and that though you have indeed made an utter mess of things, probably worse than you realize, there is still more hope for you than you ever dreamed because of the power of Christ to redeem.¹³

But Judas couldn't perceive that, so he killed himself, and, **here's the tragedy**—in so doing he cut himself off from the only hope that was out there.

Judas felt hopeless, like there was nowhere to turn. But there was! You see, in 3 days Jesus was going to get out of a grave with the power to forgive, the power to restore, the power to make all things new. The power to rebuild from the ashes lives that have been ruined by the worst kinds of sin!

(MUSIC)

Imagine if Judas had waited just 3–4 days before he carried out his suicide. To see what God was up to! To give God a chance!

- I mean, **imagine if Peter had found him and Judas had said,** "Peter said, there's no hope. I betrayed Jesus and there's no coming back." And Peter said, "Oh, but there is! I betrayed Jesus, too! But he was dying because of those things. And then he resurrected me and found me and forgave me."
- And Judas, he's looking for you, too. He wants to forgive you."
- **But Judas robbed himself of the chance to experience God's grace** by making the decision to kill himself.

Some of you may be in the exact same situation. Listen, it's no accident you are here today! And **we have pastors** here who would love to talk with you. We would love to show you where that kind of hope is found—the **kind of hope that can put back together** the most broken life and shine rays of light into the deepest chasms of despair.

*Dark is the stain that I cannot hide, what can avail, to wash it away?
LOOK! There is flowing a crimson tide, whiter than snow you can be today!
Grace, grace, God's grace—grace that can pardon and cleanse*

¹³ From Tim Keller, who stole it from Martin Luther.

within! Grace, grace, God's grace, grace that is greater than all my sin!

Let's pray—

Maybe you've never understood what Christ has done, and you're ready to receive him.

- Maybe you **see yourself in one of these characters**—the threatened, the distracted, and you see now who Jesus is and you're ready to surrender.
- **I want to give you a chance to receive him.**

Maybe you are in despair. Can you pray with me right now, *"God, I'll take a chance on you?"* and right now decide to come and talk to one of us immediately after this service?

Prayer to receive Christ / Open up your life to him, "take a chance on him"

