

THE RE-TRIAL OF JESUS OF NAZARETH

Luke 23:1–25

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Luke 23:1–25 (NIV)

“Then the whole assembly rose and led him off to Pilate. And they began to accuse him, saying, ‘We have found this man subverting our nation. He opposes payment of taxes to Caesar and claims to be Christ, a king.’ So Pilate asked Jesus, ‘Are you the king of the Jews?’ ‘Yes, it is as you say,’ Jesus replied. Then Pilate announced to the chief priests and the crowd, ‘I find no basis for a charge against this man.’ But they insisted, ‘He stirs up the people all over Judea by his teaching. He started in Galilee and has come all the way here.’ On hearing this, Pilate asked if the man was a Galilean. When he learned that Jesus was under Herod’s jurisdiction, he sent him to Herod, who was also in Jerusalem at that time. When Herod saw Jesus, he was greatly pleased, because for a long time he had been wanting to see him. From what he had heard about him, he hoped to see him perform some miracle. He plied him with many questions, but Jesus gave him no answer. The chief priests and the teachers of the law were standing there, vehemently accusing Him. Then Herod and his soldiers ridiculed and mocked him. Dressing him in an elegant robe, they sent him back to Pilate. That day Herod and Pilate became friends—before this they had been enemies. Pilate called together the chief priests, the rulers and the people, and said to them, ‘You brought me this man as one who was inciting the people to rebellion. I have examined him in your presence and have found no basis for your charges against him. Neither has Herod, for he sent him back to us; as you can see, he has done nothing to deserve death. Therefore, I will punish him and then release him.’ With one voice they cried out, ‘Away with this man! Release Barabbas to us!’ (Barabbas had been thrown into prison for

THE RE-TRIAL OF JESUS OF NAZARETH

Luke 23:1–25

an insurrection in the city, and for murder.) Wanting to release Jesus, Pilate appealed to them again. But they kept shouting, ‘Crucify Him! Crucify Him!’ For the third time he spoke to them: ‘Why? What crime has this man committed? I have found in him no grounds for the death penalty. Therefore I will have him punished and then release him.’ But with loud shouts they insistently demanded that he be crucified, and their shouts prevailed. So Pilate decided to grant their demand. He released the man who had been thrown into prison for insurrection and murder, the one they asked for, and surrendered Jesus to their will.”

My message this morning is titled “The Re-trial of Jesus of Nazareth.” You see, Jesus sent the Holy Spirit into the world so that the verdict that was made against Jesus could be reversed in our hearts. Jesus says in John 16 that “When the Holy Spirit comes he will convince the world of sin.” Convince the world of sin because a righteous man was condemned. The one who is now at God’s right hand. This verdict against Jesus is a verdict that is always on appeal. It is the most famous trial in human history.

Now we find ourselves, centuries later, sitting in on a reading of the Gospel and suddenly we find ourselves a part of that company that is gathered around Jesus. For, if I understand anything about reading the Bible, it is the fact that we must never treat something like this simply as history, for in reality what happens here is also happening in our own hearts. In fact, today, as we look at the group that has gathered around Jesus and we re-try the case in our own heart, we will find that we belong somewhere in this story. We are perhaps one of the Sanhedrin, for whom Jesus is a threat. Or we are Pontius Pilate, for whom Jesus is a dilemma. Or we are Herod, for whom Jesus is curiosity or even a joke. Or we are the people for whom Jesus is a disappointment. Or we are Barabbas. for whom Jesus is a substitute. We find ourselves in one of those groupings around Jesus of Nazareth.

THE RE-TRIAL OF JESUS OF NAZARETH

Luke 23:1–25

I think we commonly live with the idea, as individual people, that had we been present at the trial and death of Jesus, we would have acted differently. And it's possible that we would have.

However, I think we err both in our understanding of human nature and in our understanding of Scripture if we somehow delude ourselves into thinking that the people who are responsible for the trial and death of Jesus were somehow monsters, were degraded to the point that they were not representative of the broad stream and mass of humanity.

Several years ago, Mike Wallace, in a *60 Minutes* program, furnished a profound insight into the nature of human sin and how much humanity is really like one another. He was introducing a story about the Nazi Adolph Eichmann, a principle architect of the Holocaust. Wallace, at the outset of the program, posed a question that was central in his story on Eichmann. It was this: how is it possible for a man to act as Eichmann acted? Was he a monster, a madman? Or was he perhaps even something more terrifying? Was he normal?

Normal. Eichmann being normal? The executioner of millions of Jews? Normal?

Most self-respecting viewers would not even consider that valid. But a striking answer to Mike Wallace's shocking question came in an interview he had on camera with a man who was a concentration camp survivor, who testified against Eichmann at his trial. A film clip on the program *60 Minutes* from the '61 trial showed him walking into the courtroom, stopping short, and seeing Eichmann for the first time since the Nazi had sent him to Auschwitz eighteen years earlier. He begins to sob uncontrollably and then faints, collapses in a heap on the floor with the presiding judicial officer pounding his gavel for order in the crowded courtroom. Mike Wallace asks: "Was he overcome by hatred? By fear? By bad memories?"

He puts the question to him. "No, none of those things." He explained that when he walked into the courtroom and saw Eichmann for the first time after all those years, he realized, as he saw

THE RE-TRIAL OF JESUS OF NAZARETH

Luke 23:1–25

him as a man in that courtroom that he was no longer the god-like army officer who had sent so many to their death. Rather, he said, “I saw Eichmann as an ordinary man. I was afraid about myself. I saw that I am capable of doing this. I am exactly like him.”

Mike Wallace made a summation in which he said, “Eichmann is in all of us.” It’s a really horrifying statement. But it indeed captures the central truth about our human nature. For as a result of the fall of man, sin is in each of us. Not just the susceptibility to sin, but the actual presence of sin itself.

So we look at these people gathered around Jesus and we say, “They all could be in us.” The Sanhedrin could be in us. Pilate could be in us. Herod could be in us. The crowd could be in us. Preferably, Barabbas could be in us, for whom Jesus becomes the substitute.

Let’s look at each of these in turn.

I. The Sanhedrin represents those who are threatened by Jesus.

They were the ruling political authority allowed. Rome, when it governed provinces, always allowed as much autonomy as possible. And the Sanhedrin was a ruling court of seventy elders of the nation. They could not sentence a person to death. But they had broad ranging powers. Jesus had challenged their authority and had laid claim to being the Messiah. When they had met Him in that crisis week, they had put the question to Him, “By what authority are You doing these things?” And He refused to respond. They knew that the gut issue was over authority. And if He was the authority, then they were not in control and they were not in authority. So they pressed the case against Jesus because they did not want to put themselves under His authority. I suggest to you simply that that attitude is repeated a million times over in the world today. It is still a choice between doing things our way or putting our life under the authority of Jesus. Jesus as the Messiah is one who lays claim to giving us the true understanding of who God is. And we

THE RE-TRIAL OF JESUS OF NAZARETH

Luke 23:1–25

must substitute our judgment of religion and our judgment of doctrine and our judgment of belief to find out what He Himself is saying. We must lay aside our ideas of morals and ethics, whatever they may be, and lay them at His feet and ask for His authority to be prevalent in our life.

The attitude of the Sanhedrin, to be threatened by the authority of Jesus, is a gut issue.

It so happens in our culture we have different ways of dealing with authority with whom we disagree than putting him to death. We simply so often ignore him. In many cultures in the world, I think of Muslim cultures and Marxist cultures where Jesus is still a threat, those who hold on to Jesus are persecuted for their faith. But in the west, in America and throughout Western Europe, those who hold to the Christian faith seriously and take the Bible literally are simply often casually dealt with and Christ is ignored.

G. A. Studdard Kennedy wrote a poem some years ago in which he captured this attitude towards Jesus in our society. A poem he entitled “Indifference,” in which he compares the way Jesus was treated by the religious leadership that prompted His crucifixion versus the indifference in which He is treated in a city like Birmingham, which is a city which represents all cities. He says, “When Jesus came to Golgotha, they hanged Him on a tree. They gave great nails through hands and feet and a Calvary. They crowned Him with a crown of thorns; red were His wounds and deep. For those were cruel and crude days when human life was cheap. When Jesus came to Birmingham, they simply passed Him by. They never hurt a hair of Him. They only let Him die. For men had grown more tender and they would not give Him pain. They only just passed down the street and left Him in the rain. Still Jesus cried, ‘Forgive them for they know not what they do. And still it rained the winter rain that drenched Him through and through. The crowds went

THE RE-TRIAL OF JESUS OF NAZARETH

Luke 23:1–25

home and left the streets without a soul to see and Jesus crouched against a wall and cried for Calvary.”

Jesus is as wounded by indifference to His authority as He is by the direct opposition to His authority. Is the authority of Jesus Christ active and alive in your life? Is there any area of your life where His authority is being resisted? If there is, then you're at the trial of Jesus of Nazareth.

II. The second group around Jesus is represented by Pilate, to whom Jesus is a dilemma.

It is clear, from reading Luke's Gospel, how much of a dilemma Jesus posed for Pilate. For here before him, he knows, is a man not guilty of the charges. In fact, in verse 2, one of the charges made against Him—that He opposed payment of taxes to Caesar—we know is an absolute falsehood. Pilate picked up that it was out of envy Jesus had been delivered. He had before him an innocent man. Yet Pilate also needed to protect his position and, as the old saying goes, “crisis reveals character.” What you are everyday tends to come out when you're in the crunch. And Pilate, throughout his administration as the procurator of Judea, had been a person who, when push came to shove, inevitably made the decision to protect his backside, to protect himself. He was the kind of person who did what was expedient rather than what was right. He had a shifting standard of morality, depending upon what would be convenient rather than what would be true. We learn a little bit more about Pilate through the Jewish historian of the first century, Josephus, who tells us that he was the fifth procurator of Judea. A procurator was a position that was under direct appointment of the emperor. His term of office was about ten years, roughly, from 26 A.D. to 36 A.D. This would mean that Christ appeared before him about mid-way through his administration, at around 30 A.D. The procurator of Judea was a middle- to lower-level management position in the Roman jurisdiction. It would probably have been equivalent to being governor of Manchuria or Siberia. And someday, if you did a good job there, maybe you could

THE RE-TRIAL OF JESUS OF NAZARETH

Luke 23:1–25

get to be governor of California. And Pilate hoped to please his superiors and work his way up the administrative and political ladder. So his promotion depended upon how well he did.

Josephus tells us that already he had gotten off to a bad start as the procurator of Judea. When he first came into Judea and arrived at his capital of Caesarea by the Sea, he had sent his soldiers into Jerusalem, doing something which no procurator before him had done and that is, taking the ensigns or standards of the Roman legions that had on them the images of the emperor as a god; everybody else had agreed not to offend Jewish sensibilities and Rome was careful about this, to give a group autonomy and not offend their own idea of God. But Pilate decided, right off the bat, to show who was boss, so he sends the images of the emperor into Jerusalem. So incensed is the whole leadership of the nation that they come down from Jerusalem to Caesarea to meet with Pilate and Pilate lets them “cool their heels” for five days. On the sixth day, he comes out in his open courtyard, takes his seat on the judgment seat to meet with them. He has told his soldiers to surround the group and, if any body gets out of line, to execute them. Then he lets the leadership know that he is not going to give in and he’s going to let the Roman icons or images stay there and if they don’t like it, he will put them to death. Whereupon the entire mass group of leadership fell prostrate on the ground and bared their neck to the soldiers and said to a man “Then kill us.” Pilate knew that to do that would not set well in Rome—wiping out the indigenous leadership of a nation. So he backed off and removed the standards. But already he had compromised and he was in a delicate position, where the leading emissaries of Judea could go to Caesar with a complaint against him.

The next thing he did was expropriate funds from the temple treasury, religious funds, and divert them to build an aqueduct. Again, there was a cry and an outrage and a mass of people, thousands of people gathered to riot. Pilate simply ordered some of his soldiers into the midst of

THE RE-TRIAL OF JESUS OF NAZARETH

Luke 23:1–25

the unarmed mass of people, dressed as civilians, and they took to murdering people left and right.

So when they the leadership who has had these two previous conflicts with Pilate now comes to him with Jesus, they know they've got Pilate on the horns of a dilemma because, if he turns aside—a prisoner who they say is subverting the nation and advocating insurrection against Rome and non-payment of taxes to Caesar—if Pilate lets Him go, then they have got him on the hook with Rome and his job is through.

So as much as he wants to say, “This is an innocent man,” he knows that to protect his political hide and his job he has to rule against Jesus. Jesus was to him a dilemma.

Christ, for some people, is a dilemma—an innocent person sacrificed on the altar of expediency. An illustration of when we know what is right and what is wrong and elect to do what is wrong in spite of knowing what is right. We've all faced such choices, what's right versus what's convenient. At such times, Jesus tells us to take up our cross.

It's interesting to see what history says happened to Pilate. After his trial with Jesus, we don't find him anymore, except in the Apostles' Creed. Pilate, other than Jesus, is the only other human being mentioned in the Apostles' Creed: “...crucified under Pontius Pilate.” Six years after trying Jesus, he ordered his troops to be present in Samaria at Mount Gerazim and to assassinate many in a mob who had gathered around a false prophet. This time, a complaint was lodged against him for misadministration. Tiberius Caesar recalled him to Rome for trial. And on the way back to Rome, Tiberius Caesar died. A new emperor came on the throne and we then lose track of Pilate, we don't know if he ever stood trial. Some traditions say that he committed suicide and that his wife and he lived with the horror of having condemned this innocent person.

THE RE-TRIAL OF JESUS OF NAZARETH

Luke 23:1–25

The Egyptian church suggested that something different happened to Pilate. From the third century, they believed that Pilate and his wife, who they have a name for—“Procula”—both became Christians, outstanding Christians. In fact the Coptic recognizes both Pilate and Procula as saints, and if you want to celebrate their saint day, Pilate’s is on June 25th and Procula’s is on October 27th. I think that’s kind of neat, though, to think of that—Saint Pilate. And why not? Isn’t that a better way to end the story? To see that this man who sat on judgment of Jesus was himself given the mercy and the grace of God.

For Pilate, Jesus was a dilemma.

III. For Herod, Jesus was a curiosity and then a joke.

So we find Jesus going before this man, Herod. If you read the New Testament, the Gospels and Acts, you can get confused as to which Herod is which Herod. There are actually four Herods in the New Testament. Two in the Gospels and two in Acts. The two in the Gospels are: Herod the Great, who was the greatest of all the Herods, the Herod when Christ was born and who killed the babies of Bethlehem. He was a great builder and tremendous administrator and he had the rule of the whole area. Nobody ever ruled as much as Herod the Great did.

And then there was his son (he had many sons—some of whom he killed), Herod Antipas, who, when he died, was made a tetrarch (“tetrarch” means “part of four”). Herod the Great’s territory was divided, and Herod Antipas got Galilee and Perea.

Then there’s the third and fourth Herod, mentioned in the Book of Acts—Herod Agrippa I, who kills James in Acts 12. And Herod Agrippa II, who tries Paul in Acts 26. That kind of keeps them all straight, I hope.

This is the second Herod, the one who killed John the Baptist, Herod Antipas. There was not a drop of Jewish blood in him. His father, Herod the Great, was an Idumean and his mother was a

THE RE-TRIAL OF JESUS OF NAZARETH

Luke 23:1–25

Samaritan. Therefore, it was appropriate that he, a non-Jew, would rule in Galilee, which was called the Galilee of the Gentiles. The true king of the Jews stands before this Herod, who has not a drop of Jewish blood in his veins.

Josephus again tells us some of the interesting background of this Herod Antipas. He ruled for thirty-five years, from 4 A.D. to 39 A.D. One year, he went on a trip to Rome, several years before he killed John the Baptist. While in Rome, he was visiting his half-brother, Herod Philip. And Herod Philip had married a wife named Herodias, who was the daughter of his brother. This Herodias and Herod Antipas fell in love with one another. So Herod said, “Leave my half-brother and come and marry me.” And she said, “You’ve got a problem. You’re already married. I’ll leave my husband, your half-brother, and marry you if you divorce your wife.” It so happened that Herod’s wife was very well-connected politically. She was the daughter of the king whose headquarters was in Petra, a rock-like mountain fortress that is now in the country of Jordan. So he agreed to divorce her when she got wind of it and made it back to daddy. And Herod, when he married Herodias, married both his sister-in-law and his niece, and John the Baptist said, “That’s not nice!” And he lost his head over it.

By the way, it’s interesting that the father of Herod’s divorced wife simmered with anger for years, and several years after Christ’s death, made war against Herod up in Galilee and smashed him one good! And the local people all took to rejoicing because they thought this was revenge for what Herod had done to John.

Herod was what we might call a religious dilettante. He found John the Baptist fascinating. He was interested in philosophical and theological speculations. In fact, Mark tells us in Mark 6:20, “Herod feared John and protected him, knowing him to be a righteous and holy man.” When Herod heard John, he was greatly puzzled, yet he liked to listen to him. Herod found John an

THE RE-TRIAL OF JESUS OF NAZARETH

Luke 23:1–25

exciting conversation piece. But the problem with listening to religion and listening to God's Word without ever making a decision is that, ultimately, you get into this indifferent sort of an attitude that Herod himself demonstrates. And when push comes to shove, Herod is really not interested in obeying any law other than his own will.

Jesus now stands before him, this man who had killed John the Baptist, who had been sort of a connoisseur of religion. And Jesus refused to give any more evidence to a man who had already refused what evidence of God he had been given by John. So Jesus said not a word to him.

Herod had hoped that Jesus would do a miracle. He had heard about the great reports. The musical "Jesus Christ Superstar," several years ago, put it this way; these words occur in Herod's mouth, "Walk across my swimming pool. Turn my water into wine." And Jesus refused.

Herod must first of all act on the religious knowledge he had and he would be given no more until he acted.

In the fourth act of Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar*, Brutus is trying to enlist Cassius in his aid to assassinate Julius Caesar. He refers in his speech to Cassius, to the power of the ocean tides.

Then adds serious consideration that goes like this: "There is a tide in the affairs of men which, taken at the flood, leads on to fortune. Omitted, all the voyage of their life is bound in shallows and in miseries. On such a full sea we are now afloat and we must take the current when it serves or lose our ventures." Shakespeare is saying that the ocean tides not only have great power, but that they cannot be stopped or retrieved. Their lifting strength comes but for a few hours and then their strength is gone. And if we miss the flood, then we will be left in the shallows and the miseries of having lost our ventures.

Such was the case with Herod. The tide was in, the king of the universe stood before him, and rather than acknowledge that kingship, Herod sought his own and rejected Him and dismissed

THE RE-TRIAL OF JESUS OF NAZARETH

Luke 23:1–25

Him with a crude joke of putting a royal robe on Him, one of his own perhaps, and sending Him back to Pilate.

Herod would not bow the knee before the King of the universe. Herod himself wanted to be king. It's interesting that, while people call Herod a king and we find incidences of this in the Gospel, where people addressed Herod Antipas as a king, as matter of fact, officially, Herod was never given the title "king" by the Romans who did confer the title on Herod the Great and on Herod Agrippa, but never on Herod Antipas. In fact, seven years after he tried Jesus, this Herod Antipas, ruling in Galilee, got word that his nephew down in Jerusalem, Herod Agrippa I, the full-blooded brother of his wife Herodias, this Herod Agrippa, had just been given the title "King of the Jews" by Caesar, and Agrippa I, full-blooded sister of Herodias, says to her husband, Herod Antipas (brother/husband/uncle), "My brother got the title king. You deserve the title of king. Let's get to Rome and get it." And against his better judgment, Herod Antipas made a trip to Rome to appeal to emperor Caligula to be given the title also. But Herod Agrippa, from Jerusalem, had better-placed political connections than Herod Antipas of Galilee and he got wind of it and sent word to Caligula, who was his friend, "Don't treat this guy right." And when Herod Antipas and Herodias arrived in Rome, Caligula exiled them and stripped them of all titles and he wound up in Gaul and died a miserable death.

He wanted to be king and he never made it. But he had a chance to be the son of a king had he embraced Jesus.

Jesus, for Herod, was a curiosity. You can only listen to gospel messages for so long, only collect so much information and then you must act. You cannot just indefinitely simply go on with a curiosity about Jesus. Sooner or later, He is asking you to make a decision about Him from your heart.

THE RE-TRIAL OF JESUS OF NAZARETH

Luke 23:1–25

IV. The fourth group around Jesus are those for whom Jesus is a big disappointment.

This is the crowd. The crowd was yelling, “Crucify Him!” I don’t think it was the same crowd who welcomed Him earlier in the week into the city, the crowd that was waving the palm branches. That was probably a Galilean crowd that had come as pilgrims into Jerusalem, and were according their Galilean prophet great honor. This was a Jerusalemite crowd under the control of the chief priest and elders and scribes. And yet to them, Jesus was certainly a disappointment. Because they figured that the Messiah would come with political strength and with armies and might and overthrow the Roman government. And this Jesus was a big joke. A big disappointment.

Several weeks ago, in a message, I talked to you about how we must deal with our own disappointments with Jesus. That sometimes we presume to think that He must act in a particular way. And one of the things we have to do as a Christian is accept Jesus for the way He is, rather than our preconceived idea of what He is going to be like.

I think it was in that sermon I shared the story of Gail, one of our members, who just a few weeks ago passed away at the age of fifty. In 1982, she was given a blood transfusion while in surgery and that blood had in it the AIDS virus. She had fought that but only in the last year did she know it was AIDS. Gail had painted my portrait and had been close to Jewel and me. It was a rough thing for her to go through what she went through—a lot of struggle, a lot of wrestling with the basic questions of life. I was going through some of my things this week. I have a drawer in my desk. It’s the one part of my life that is really unorganized. I try to be organized in what I do, but I have a drawer in my desk which is deliberately unorganized. It’s about ten inches deep and it’s simply filled with clippings and illustrations. I don’t have a good filing system for the stories I like to use that I think are great, and I come cross and clippings and notes people

THE RE-TRIAL OF JESUS OF NAZARETH

Luke 23:1–25

give me, so I just throw them in there. Now I can hardly get the drawer closed anymore. It's been a number of months since I have thoroughly and meticulously gone through everything in there. I sort of know where things are—like a third of the way down, or wherever. But every once in a while, I just want to do a clean sweep and remind myself of everything that is in there.

As I was going through the drawer this week, halfway down, I discovered a handwritten note that Gail had given me that I had today forgotten about. She had given it to me before she received the word that she had the AIDS virus. This is what she wrote in her own handwriting, “Dr. Gordon tells of an old Christian woman whose age began to tell on her memory. She had once known much of the Bible by heart. Eventually, only one precious bit of the Bible stayed with her. ‘I know whom I have believed and am persuaded that He is able to keep that which I have committed unto Him against that day.’ By and by part of that slipped its hold on her memory and she could only quietly repeat part of it—‘that which I have committed unto Him.’ At last, as she hovered on the borderland, between this and the spirit world, her loved ones noticed her lips moving. They bent down to see if she needed anything. She was repeating over and over again to herself the one last word of the text she remembered. It was this word: ‘Him’ Committed unto Him, the one word she was saying: ‘Him.’” And Gail writes, “She had lost the whole Bible but one word. But she had the whole Bible in that one word.”

The whole Bible in that one word—“Him”—Jesus. Gail writes, “I thought you might enjoy this. Love, Gail.” She and I had no idea that someday I would share this with you. But to me, it expresses the fact that when life does not go as we intended, whatever may be taken from us when it all comes down to it, we still have Him, our most precious gift. And for us, therefore, Jesus must not be a disappointment.

THE RE-TRIAL OF JESUS OF NAZARETH

Luke 23:1–25

V. The last person we focus upon in the trial—Barabbas. He is representative of those for whom Jesus is a substitute.

Barabbas is an insurrectionist. He's a radical, right-winged revolutionary who is going to overthrow the government, kick out the leftist power, and re-establish the independence of the nation. His very name is so suggestive—Barabbas. It's from the word "bar" meaning "son" and "abba" meaning "father." His name literally means "son of the father." And it is appropriate that the real Son of the Father, Jesus of Nazareth, gave His life as a substitute for this man called "son of the father."

Barabbas is representative of all for whom the death of Jesus proves to be a substitute. For if we understand the Gospels at all, all of us, like Barabbas, are on death row. All of us are headed for a godless eternity. A judgment is against us that we are not God's friends. But Jesus comes to die in our place and to take our punishment and to be our substitute. So Barabbas, at the trial of Jesus, represents all for whom Jesus will be a substitute.

When I opened the Scripture reading today, I read that a charge against Jesus was that He claimed to be Christ. That word "Christ" is "anointed one" or "Messiah." It suggests that Christ was God's atoned person to take our place. God's appointed person to bear our sin. God's appointed person to be the sacrifice for us.

I was reading the Wycliffe Publication *In Other Words* some time ago, and yesterday was talking with the editor and was sharing with him the story which I had read in the publication and learned a little bit more about the story from him. It has to do with this designation of Jesus that He is God's anointed one, the Messiah. A Wycliffe Bible translator was at work with his wife, translating the Bible into the language of New Guinea. They had worked among these people for some time and had not seen a response at all. Finally, he began working on the translation of the

THE RE-TRIAL OF JESUS OF NAZARETH

Luke 23:1–25

Gospel of Matthew, and he was at the point of considering not translating the first seventeen verses, because it's a list of names, a genealogy. He thought they wouldn't be interested in that. But he decided, for whatever reason, to go ahead and translate it. He discovered that that began to be the key to the people, because they said to him, "We thought all the time that what you were telling us was the white man's ideas. But you're telling us about a person who has a family just like we have, and has ancestors. We see that this person must be real." So they began to sit up and listen.

But the translator found that they did not have any concept of what the word "Christ" or "Messiah" meant. He was trying to translate the word since it occurs in the first verse of the Gospel of Matthew. He was talking with the elderly gentleman who was assisting him in the translation, a leader of the village. He took time one day to explain at length what the New Testament means by the word "Messiah." He asked the man if he had anything in the culture that was somewhat like the explanation he had just given of Messiah. He brightened up and said, "Oh, yes. I think we do have something like that. When we need a task done, we decide on a special person to perform that task. We then bring that special person into a circle and we all sit around and one of our elders points his hand at that man and says to him, 'You are the one we have set aside to fulfill this task.' From that time on, we refer to that man as 'The man who has a hand put on him.'"

That phrase became the translated word for "Messiah." So that, when the translator translated "Christ" in Matthew, it was "the man on whom God put His hand." The assistant went and told his friends the day he made that discovery, "Do you know what we translated today? We found out what 'Messiah' means! It means 'The one God put His hand on.'" The people were astonished and cried out, "Is it true? Do you mean that that word 'Messiah' is supposed to mean

THE RE-TRIAL OF JESUS OF NAZARETH

Luke 23:1–25

something?” Their whole attitude toward the Christian message changed. Before then, nobody had believed in Christ. After that, many came to believe. The people saw that God had sent Jesus into the world to fulfill a special task. God had put His hand upon Him.

Indeed, we discover anew that God put His hand on Jesus to be the substitute for us. Somehow, we find ourselves again at the trial of Jesus and all the issues of that trial are being retried in our heart. Jesus is to us, perhaps, a threat, because He insists that we be subject to His authority rather than to our own. Is He a threat to you? Is He a dilemma to you? Because you want to go your way and yet you want to declare a faith in Him. Is Jesus a curiosity that you’ve never acted upon? Is He a disappointment? Or is He a substitute? He must be one of these.

Closing Prayer

Our Lord, as we come to You today in prayer, we’d all like to find ourselves receiving You as our substitute, the one who died in our place. But probably in each of us some of the other elements are present. There are times when Your authority is a challenge to us, it causes us to do things that are uncomfortable. You tell us to take up our cross and follow You and, Lord, that means at times laying aside our anger, at times laying aside our feelings, and simply obeying You when it’s not easy. There are times, Lord, when You’re a dilemma. And there are times, perhaps, in people’s lives when, having heard the gospel and the Bible taught, it becomes something interesting, but it’s not something life-changing. And Lord, You’ve come, not to make life more interesting but to radically change our lives from the inside out. So we pray, Lord, that You’ll do that for us. If there are any here that have disappointments, that You have not come through in a manner that they expected, help us, Lord, to deal successfully with those. And when everything else may be taken from us, we still have that one word—Him. You cannot be taken from us. Thank You for laying down Your life on our behalf, for making us sons and

THE RE-TRIAL OF JESUS OF NAZARETH

Luke 23:1–25

daughters of the living God by being our substitute on the cross. Thank You for sending the Holy Spirit to bear witness to our hearts that what was done against You at Your trial was wrong and that verdict is on appeal and one day You, the heavenly Father, the judge of all the universe, will throw forever and for all time the judgment against Jesus out of the heavenly court. And every knee will bow and every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord. Thank You for the privilege of being Your follower disciple. Through You we pray. Amen.