

I Find No Guilt in Him

John 18:28-40

B.I. There is one spotless and holy Mediator between God and sinners, the man Christ Jesus.

LTS: Psalm 66

Working through this part of John's inspired narrative of Jesus' life and teaching gives us a tremendous opportunity to learn some things about the gospel that do not naturally flow out of other texts of Scripture. Last week we learned about two particular gospel terms: Propitiation and Substitution.

"Propitiation" we learned speaks of "a sacrifice that turns away the wrath of God and thereby makes God propitious (or favorable) toward us."¹ We saw this last week when Jesus asks Peter, "The cup which the Father has given me, shall I not drink it?" He was referring to the cup of divine wrath by which (in Isaiah's words) the Father will crush His Son in an act of holy and just wrath against sin.

"Substitution," on the other hand, speaks of the amazing reality that Jesus drank the cup of the Father's wrath NOT for His own sins, but for ours. He suffered and died in our place as our substitute. Theologians sometimes refer to this as vicarious atonement because Jesus suffered and died on the cross vicariously, that is, in the place of another; namely, you and me.

This morning I want to introduce you to one more terms that helps us understand Jesus and what He sought to accomplish by His life and death. That term is Mediator. Since sinners are by nature alienated from God because of our sin, we need someone to stand between us and God to "mediate" a settlement and bring about peace. In the O.T. this was the role of the priests. The Priest's job was to stand in the gap between man and God and offer an acceptable sacrifice on behalf of sinful men to atone for our sin. But there was a problem. A human priest could only represent man. He couldn't adequately represent God. The O.T. priesthood, therefore, was deficient. In order for sinners to be fully reconciled to God there had to be a more excellent Priest. But there's more.

Having a better Priest is wonderful, but the blood of bulls and goats could never take away sin, so there also had to be a more excellent sacrifice. You see, even if the blood of certain animals could atone for our sins, we would still have a problem, because Jesus said (Matt. 5:20), "Unless your righteousness surpasses that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will not enter the kingdom of heaven." Then He explains further on (48), "Therefore you must be perfect even as your heavenly Father is perfect."

¹ Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine*, (Zondervan, 1994), 575

Now we understand that having our all our demerit expunged from our record by means of a sacrifice is not enough if we lack the positive merit (righteousness) that God requires. This too is why Jesus came. He came as our Great High Priest to offer the perfect sacrifice and to provide the righteousness God requires. But how did Jesus provide the righteousness we need? Well, He did it by living a perfectly righteous life from the moment He was born to the moment He breathed His last breath. Paul's letter to the church in Rome wrestles primarily with this question, Where do sinners get the righteousness they desperately need, don't have, and can't earn? Paul's answer is "Christ for righteousness." He explains in Rom. 5:19,

For as through [Adam's] disobedience the many were made sinners, even so through the obedience of [Jesus] the many will be made righteous.

The active obedience of Jesus Christ is what supplies the righteousness we need to be reconciled us to God. Two verses later (in Romans 5) Paul ties it all together when He exalts that "God made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf that we might become the righteousness of God in Him" By His sacrifice our demerits (our sins) are forgiven, and by His righteousness we are declared righteous in Him by grace, through faith. This is the "mediatorial" work of Jesus Christ. He came to represent men to God as our Great High Priest, our once-for-all Sacrifice, and our perfect righteousness. Hence Paul can say (1 Tim. 2:5) "There is one God, and there is one Mediator between God and man, the man Christ Jesus."

This morning, I want to focus on this last point regarding the righteousness or the active obedience of Jesus Christ. He lived for 33 years in absolute obedience to His Father. Every aspect of Jesus' life and character was perfectly righteous. As Adam was perfect in the Garden, so Jesus was perfect in the manger. Unlike Jesus, Adam gave himself over to sin. And unlike Adam, Jesus never sinned. Hence the author of Hebrews can write (Heb. 4:15),

For we do not have a high priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but One who has been tempted in all things as we are, yet ...without sin.

The passage this morning highlights this fact through a suspense-filled narrative. No matter what the Jewish leaders do to make Jesus out to be guilty of crimes punishable by death, no one is able to demonstrate that Jesus is anything but guiltless and innocent of all accusations.

There are three main sections to this passage and I have labeled them:

- I. The Guiltless One is Accused (28-32)
- II. The Guiltless One is Interrogated (33-38)
- III. The Guiltless One is Rejected (38-40)

I. The Guiltless One is Accused: (28-32)

Read 28-32

1. John has already pointed to Jesus' righteousness earlier at the home of Annas in chapter 18 when (22) the officer at his first hearing punches Him in the mouth. Jesus responds (23) by saying, "If I have spoken wrongly, testify of the wrong; but if rightly, why do you strike me?" To this, no one gives an answer. No one could testify that what He said was in any way inappropriate or inaccurate.
2. After the hearing at Annas's house, they hurried Jesus across the courtyard to Caiaphas's house because he was the official high priest that year. We can't see this in John, but there is evidence in the other gospels that when they got to the home of Caiaphas they called for a recess. The Sanhedrin was going to need to ask the Romans to execute Jesus so they were going to have to present a credible case against him. However, they had already violated some of their own laws regarding how a trial should proceed. They couldn't chance breaking the law again by condemning Jesus under cover of darkness, so they recessed for a few hours.
3. Early in the morning, however, they reconvened. In Luke 22 we get the heart of that hearing. Turn with me to Lk. 22:66-71.

When it was day, the Council of elders of the people assembled, both chief priests and scribes, and they led Him away to their council chamber, saying, ⁶⁷ "If You are the Christ, tell us." But He said to them, "If I tell you, you will not believe; ⁶⁸ and if I ask a question, you will not answer. ⁶⁹ "But from now on THE SON OF MAN WILL BE SEATED AT THE RIGHT HAND OF THE POWER OF GOD." ⁷⁰ And they all said, "Are You the Son of God, then?" And He said to them, "Yes, I am." ⁷¹ Then they said, "What further need do we have of testimony? For we have heard it ourselves from His own mouth."

4. Jesus was right. If He claimed to be the Messiah they would not believe Him. And if He asked them to give serious consideration to the proofs of His Messiahship, they would not answer. They were out for blood. The facts simply did not matter. Nevertheless, He assured them that the time was coming when the Son of Man would sit at the right hand of the power of God. We can infer that He meant one day the tables would be turned and they would find themselves sitting under His judgment.
5. Having now accused Him of being worthy of death without being permitted even a single witness on his behalf, they rushed him to the Palace of Pontius Pilate, a place that was known as the Praetorium. Normally, Pilate lived a considerable distance away in Caesarea. Whenever there was a major Jewish feast, however, the governor always took up temporary residence in Jerusalem in case there was any trouble erupted. It was still early in the morning.
6. At this point John reveals the ironic hypocrisy of these religious leaders. He tells us (28) that the Jews would not enter Pilate's house "so that they would not be defiled, but might eat the Passover." The moral irony is disgusting. As one author writes, "They were

taking extreme precautions to avoid ritual defilement, while at the same time preparing to murder that Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world.”²

7. But no one seems to notice the absurdity (not to mention illegality) of it all. They simply press on with their evil plot against Jesus. When they arrive at Pilate’s house, it seems the governor was expecting them. That’s probably because he was the one who had to grant approval to send soldiers to help arrest Jesus in the first place. In any case, the Jewish leaders seem to think that Pilate will easily give them what they want. They were wrong.

8. The first thing Pilate does is ask for the formal charges. He says (29) “What accusation do you bring against this man?” Now that is really the point, isn’t it? Under the inspiration of the H.S. John is emphasizing Jesus’ righteousness. The religious leaders are unrighteous. Pilate will also prove to be unrighteous. But the man who stands before them all is the sinless Son of God. This was the testimony of Jesus’ whole life.

- When the angel announced his coming to Mary he said, “The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High shall overshadow you; for that reason the holy child shall be called the Son of God” (Lk. 1:35)
- At Jesus’ baptism God the Father announced from the sky, “This is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased” (Mat. 3:17).
- When Jesus addressed the demon possessed man the demons themselves cried out, “Let us alone! What business do we have with each other, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are – The Holy One of God” (Lk. 4:34).
- One of the thieves who gets crucified near Jesus will this very day rebuke the other thief saying, “We indeed are suffering justly, for we are receiving what we deserve for our deeds; but this man has done nothing wrong” (Lk. 4:41).
- And even the Roman centurion who would be put in charge of the crucifixion will, at the end of the day (Luke tells us) “praise God saying, ‘Certainly this was an innocent man’” (Lk. 4:47).

9. Pilate is discovering this for himself, but even now he knows what the Sanhedrin are doing and He was unwilling to be their puppet. So he asks for a formal indictment. This is one of the few proper legal procedures followed by anyone in Jesus’ trial. And as I read this record it’s hard not to be shocked at the utter arrogance of the Jewish leaders. They respond (30), “If this man were not an evildoer, we would not have delivered Him to you!” In other words, they are saying, If you know what’s good for you, stop asking questions and do what we demand. Despite their religious costumes and sanctimonious

² Tom Constable, “Notes on John,” *Dr. Constable’s Notes*, Sonic Light, <http://www.soniclight.com/constable/notes/pdf/john.pdf>, (accessed Feb. 68, 2016), 323

words these were not men of God. They were no better than mobsters and thugs working the system to rub out their enemies. Pilate, however, is not impressed.

Read v. 31

10. Now their intentions are clear. They want Jesus dead. And they want Rome to do the dirty work. You see, the Romans had granted the Sanhedrin the right to pass judgment upon their citizens, but they were not permitted to execute the death penalty. Yes, there were times when they did it anyway. There were at least a couple of times when they sought to stone Jesus to death. And in the case of Stephen (Acts 7) they actually succeeded! In fact, I think this is what Pilate was actually encouraging them to do. When He says, "Take Him yourselves and judge Him according to your law," He was probably saying, "Feel free to take care of the matter yourself. Rome will look the other way." But that's not what they wanted.

11. You see, they really didn't want to miss dinner. They didn't want to become ceremonially defiled by touching a dead body, or getting blood on themselves, or anything else. More importantly, they knew that many of the people liked Jesus and that it itself had kept them from arresting him before. There might be an uprising against them! They couldn't take that chance. But if they could get Rome to kill Him, that would be perfect. Not only could no one say that they had killed Jesus, but the Jew's knew that Moses said in Deuteronomy (21:23) that anyone who is hung on a tree is cursed! So if Rome would kill Him, He would not only be dead, but cursed as well! No longer do they want to stone Him. Now they want Him hung on a cross.

12. Once again we see the mighty hand of providence superintending the whole event. Before the creation of the world God had ordained that Jesus would die for His people by crucifixion. Thus John comments (32), this was "to fulfill the word of Jesus which He spoke signifying what kind of death He was about to die." Jesus knew the Father wanted Him to die by crucifixion and He had explicitly told his disciples so. On their way to Jerusalem He specifically said (Mat. 20:18-19),

"Behold, we are going up to Jerusalem; and the Son of Man will be delivered to the chief priests and scribes, and they will condemn Him to death,¹⁹ and will hand Him over to the Gentiles to mock and scourge and crucify Him..."

13. You see, the righteous One came to die as a law breaker, though His whole life was perfect in every way. Four hundred years earlier the prophet Isaiah had predicted this of the Messiah when he wrote (Isa. 53:9), "His grave was assigned with wicked men, Yet He was with a rich man in His death, Because He had done no violence, Nor was there any deceit in His mouth"

14. Later on the apostle Peter will pick up on Isaiah's words to exhort us on how to suffer in a manner worthy of the Lord. He writes (1 Pet. 2:21-22) "For you have been called for this purpose, since Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example for you to follow in His steps,²² WHO COMMITTED NO SIN, NOR WAS ANY DECEIT FOUND IN HIS MOUTH."

15. You see beloved, it was not just Jesus' death that is important to us. It is also His sinless, holy life. The reason He lived 33 years was to fulfill all righteousness then die for all our unrighteousness. Oh what grace! Oh what mercy! "Amazing love, how can it be, that thou my God should die for me."

16. So we see The Guiltless One is Accused. Second...

II. The Guiltless One is Interrogated: (33-38)

1. Before we read the next section it might help to remember part of Luke's written testimony. The Jews realize that Pilate is not simply going to do what He is told. He is insisting that they present formal charges. They need to come up with something that will stimulate the Roman's appetite for justice more than an accusation of blasphemy would. Therefore, they quickly fabricated new charges of sedition. Luke writes, "They began to accuse Him, saying, 'We found this fellow perverting the nation, forbidding to pay taxes to Caesar, saying that He Himself is Christ, a king'"³

2. Of course anyone who followed Jesus could bear witness that none of this was true. After all it was Jesus Himself who, when asked about whether people should pay their taxes, famously said, "Pay unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's." There was not truth to these allegations.

3. But Pilate was concerned about the accusation of Jesus claiming to be a king. Was that true? What kind of king does He think He is? Should Rome be concerned? So Pilate brings Jesus into the palace to be interrogated.

Read. 33-35

4. "What have you done," indeed! That's the question John wants us to wrestle with. What has Jesus done? And Jesus had already answered that question (John 14:31), "I do exactly what the Father commanded Me." No other human being could ever make that claim. But Jesus did. His whole life was governed by obedience to the Father and He never once altered course. The only thing that Jesus has ever done is obey His Father. In this sense He came as the light of the world, but "men love the darkness rather than the light because their deeds are evil" (John 3:19).

- Once again in this exchange we witness Jesus exercising complete control over Himself and His circumstances. When you read the literature on Roman trials you discover that everyone – whether innocent or guilt – took on the posture of groveling for mercy. But no Jesus.
- When Pilate asks Him a question that put His life in the balance, the interrogated man became the interrogator. Jesus turned the question on Pilate. There is no fear of man here. There is no groveling. There is no declaration of being "framed" or counter accusations against his captors. Jesus may be the one whose hands are

³ John MacArthur, *The Murder of Jesus*, (Nashville, Word Publishing, 2000), 167

bound, but He is the freest Person in the whole narrative.

5. Notice how Jesus answers.

Read 36-38

6. Next week we will come back and explore the implications of Jesus as King, but here its important to understand that Pilate's interrogation revealed no guilt in Jesus. Whatever it meant for Jesus to be King, it apparently presented no threat to Rome or anyone else. And Pilate is not hesitant to say so!

Read 38

6. These are the words John does not want us to miss. "I find no guilt in Him." There it is again. Even under formal interrogation Jesus is found holy, harmless, undefiled, and separated from sinners. He is the righteous Son of God.

7. So we have seen the guiltless One Accuse, Interrogated, and finally....

III. The Guiltless One is Rejected: (38-40)

1. John assumes we have read the other Gospel accounts so he doesn't tell us the entire story. But somewhere in here Pilate finds out that Jesus is from Galilee which is under the jurisdiction of Herod Antipas. Pilate hopes to pass Jesus off to him so he sends him bound to Herod whose residence is on the other side of the Temple. Herod had wanted to have an audience with Jesus hoping to see him perform a miracle, but when they meet Jesus refuses to say a single word to him. So Herod dresses him in a beautiful robe as a kind of mockery of his claim to be king.

2. It seems that as Jesus is paraded back and forth across the Temple area more and more people discover what is happening so the crowds outside of Pilate's palace grows greater and great. In Luke's account after Jesus returns Pilate addresses the crowd (Luke 23:13-16):

Pilate summoned the chief priests and the rulers and the people,¹⁴ and said to them, "You brought this man to me as one who incites the people to rebellion, and behold, having examined Him before you, I have found no guilt in this man regarding the charges which you make against Him.¹⁵ "No, nor has Herod, for he sent Him back to us; and behold, nothing deserving death has been done by Him.¹⁶ "Therefore I will punish Him and release Him."

3. Pilate didn't want to have anything to do with the execution of this innocent man, so he came up with a plan. Knowing that many of the people admired Jesus (think Triumphant) he thought he could make an offer that the masses would surely take advantage of to save Jesus. So he announces (Read. 39-40).

4. In all of this Jesus never spoke a word in His own defense. Rather, He simply kept entrusting Himself to God who judges righteously (Peter says).

5. You see beloved, no matter what Pilate did, nothing could keep the Father's plan of redemption from playing out exactly as He had ordained. Jesus our Great High Priest had come as mediator between God and men. Yes He would die as a condemned criminal, but He would die as One who lived a perfectly righteous life so that we could be declared righteous in Him.

6. Paul explains the theological significance of all this when he writes (Rom. 5:5-10),

For while we were still helpless, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. ⁷ For one will hardly die for a righteous man; though perhaps for the good man someone would dare even to die. ⁸ But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. ⁹ Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from the wrath of God through Him. ¹⁰ For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life.

7. You see beloved, there is more to worshiping Jesus than praising Him for His sacrificial death. We also exalt with equal wonder and glory over His righteous life! The "active obedience" of Jesus Christ from the day He was born till that moment on the cross where He declared "It is finished," Jesus fulfilled all righteousness so that we who are sinner could be declared righteous in Him.

8. If you do not belong to Him this morning, I plead with you to stop trusting in your own righteousness. Self-righteousness will only condemn you. Believing that your sin isn't bad enough to send you to hell will condemn you. By His infinite mercy and grace God has provided the righteousness you desperately need, don't have, and cannot earn. And He has provided it in Jesus Christ. Turn from your own false righteousness and fly to Jesus who alone has accomplished everything on your behalf! Come to Him in humble faith and repentance and He will receive you today.

B.I. There is one spotless and holy Mediator between God and sinners, the man Christ Jesus.