

Glory in His Face: Heavenly Intercession

Luke 22:63–3:5

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Now if you would please, take your Bibles and turn with me to the gospel of Luke, Luke's gospel, chapter 22.

We're going to read from verse 63 through 23 verse 5. This is the Word of Almighty God:

Now the men who were holding Jesus in custody were mocking him as they beat him. They also blindfolded him and kept asking him, "Prophecy! Who is it that struck you?" And they said many other things against him, blaspheming him.

When day came, the assembly of the elders of the people gathered together, both chief priests and scribes. And they led him away to their council, and they said, "If you are the Christ, tell us." But he said to them, "If I tell you, you will not believe, and if I ask you, you will not answer. But from now on the Son of Man shall be seated at the right hand of the power of God." So they all said, "Are you the Son of God, then?" And he said to them, "You say that I am." Then they said, "What further testimony do we need? We have heard it ourselves from his own lips."

Then the whole company of them arose and brought him before Pilate. And they began to accuse him, saying, "We found this man misleading our nation and forbidding us to give tribute to Caesar, and saying that he himself is Christ, a king." And Pilate asked him, "Are you the King of the Jews?" And he answered him, "You have said so." Then Pilate said to the chief priests and the crowds, "I find no guilt in this man." But they were urgent, saying, "He stirs up the people, teaching throughout all Judea, from Galilee even to this place."

Amen, and we praise God for this reading from His holy Word. Let's bow our heads as we pray.

Our Father, we praise You that You have spoken in Scripture. We now ask, as

we turn our attention to its message, that the same Spirit who inspired these words would illuminate our understanding that we may embrace the Gospel and, in repentance, trust in Jesus, and be enabled by it to live for Your glory, newly dependent on the resources of the Redeemer who intercedes at Your right hand for us. In Jesus' name we pray, amen.

I suppose if you were to ask the average non-Christian on the street what they think about evangelical Christians they may say they are obsessed with sin and they may even point to particular sins as high on our obsession list. But I want to say that the greatest sin ever committed is the terrible abuse of power that led to the condemnation of the Lord Jesus Christ. And we read a section of the trial hearing - the authorities of the day, with Jesus in their power. And the holy, harmless, and undefiled Lamb of God, the Lord Jesus, the Lord of glory is condemned by them. As you'll recall, we have been working through a series of sermons thinking about the glory of Christ as it shines upon us in His person and His work. We've looked at the glory of the incarnation - that God became a Man in the Lord Jesus Christ. We've looked at the glory of His compassionate heart towards us. We've looked at the glory of His obedient life and atoning death and the glory of His resurrection. And last time, if you'll recall, we thought together about the glory of Christ's ascension, His coronation processional if you like, ascending from earthly ministry to heavenly rule. But tonight I want us to think about a further glory that shines in the face of Christ - the glory of what is called His heavenly session. The glory of Jesus sitting at the right hand of God, His ongoing work, the work He accomplishes right now as we gather to praise His name at the right hand of the Father.

And Luke 22, the passage that we read, is one place where our Lord speaks to us about His ongoing heavenly ministry. And what's so helpful about the way that He does that is its context. We're going to see that actually, although it's Jesus who is on trial here, it is our guilt that is really being exposed. Although the soldiers and the Jewish ruling council and Pilate, and a little later in the passage, Herod, although they all appear to be in control, though Jesus seems to be entirely in their power, in fact it's really Jesus who rules, it is really Jesus who judges, and as I hope we'll see together, it is only Jesus who can possibly rescue us from God's guilty verdict. So let's look at the passage together. I want you to see in the first place that this is a passage, clearly on the surface of it, about Jesus being judged - Jesus judged. But then secondly, it's also a passage that tells us that one day the judges will be judged. Jesus judged, the judges judged, and then finally I want to show you that Jesus sitting at the right hand of God does not and need not speak to us a message only of judgment but it also speaks of a wonderful hope for us all. Jesus on trial, Jesus judged, one day the judges will be judged, but Jesus reigning at the Father's right hand need not be merely a message of judgment; it also offers wonderful hope.

JESUS JUDGED

So first of all, Jesus judged. It is the darkest night of Jesus' life. Judas, remember, one of His twelve intimate disciples has betrayed Him, the others have deserted Him, Peter to whom He was very close has denied Him three times, swearing that he didn't know Jesus, and we join the story in verse 63 as Luke gives us a window into Jesus' experience while in custody. "Now the men who were holding Jesus in custody were mocking him as they beat him. They also blindfolded him and kept asking him, 'Prophecy! Who is it that struck you?'" It is a picture, isn't it, of abject defeat. Jesus has been preaching and teaching and prophesying and working miracles and healing and here He is now in jail. The contrast is stark. And His captors show their utter contempt for His claim to supernatural power as they beat and mock Him mercilessly. And then in 66 to 71 the court at last assembles. The Sanhedrin, the Jewish council of elders, chief priests, and scribes, takes its seat and the cross examination of Jesus begins in earnest. "If you are the Christ, tell us" - verse 67. "Are you the Son of God?" - verse 70. And as Jesus responds they pass sentence. "What further evidence do we need? We've heard it ourselves from His own lips" - verse 71. Of course the great irony that Luke wants us to see is that for all the malice of the Jewish council here, for all their posturing and flexing of their muscles notwithstanding, they are themselves quite impotent to carry out sentence. They are a conquered people, remember. They must now press their case against Jesus before the judgment seat of Pilate, the Roman governor.

In chapter 23, the next chapter, in the first five verses we now see Jesus on trial before Pilate as they bring the Lord before him and start to accuse Him. Pilate only has one question - "Are you the King of the Jews?" Almost certainly he is concerned that Jesus is perhaps guilty of insurrection and sedition; maybe He is another false messiah trying to lead a revolution against the Roman governors, but one look at the pathetic figure standing before him, now bloody and broken and weak, that he quickly dismisses the idea as ludicrous. "I find no guilt in this man." The Jews for their part continue to press their case and when Pilate learns that Jesus is from Galilee, under Herod's jurisdiction, a quick way out suddenly appears to him - "I'll send Him off to Herod. Let Herod deal with this nuisance case." Later in the story Luke tells us that Herod treats Jesus with the same contempt. In fact, just for kicks it seems, he finds some old royal robes and dresses Jesus like the king he so obviously was not, at least to first appearances, and then he punts the case back to Pilate once more.

And in chapter 23:13-16, we could hear a rather weary Pilate summarizing what has happened. "I tried him, Herod examined him, neither of us found him guilty of any of the charges you all are leveling against him. I'm going to let him go." And the Jewish leaders now erupt with such vehemence that Pilate quickly has to change direction. Verse 20 of chapter 23 tells us why. We're told "he desires to please them." After trying rather feebly to free Jesus one more time, Pilate completely capitulates to the demands of the mob and he releases, remember, he releases Barabbas and hands Jesus over to be crucified. The one man who is

in fact guilty of the kind of militant violent revolt against authority is the one who is released, and the one who is innocent is condemned. It is, of course, a travesty of justice, a show-trial in which judge and jury and prosecution alike have collaborated and colluded in advance to ensure that Jesus would be condemned. The Jewish leaders are filled with malice. Herod is depicted as a debauched thrill seeker. We are told that he longed to see Jesus but only so that he could have Jesus perform some miracle. He's looking for a show. He wants Jesus to perform like a court entertainer. And Pilate, for his part, is driven by the need to please. Like many a politician, he has to keep ahead of public opinion, to play politics even with the lives of others. And Jesus, who does He appear in this whole tale? He appears to be the pawn in everyone's game - a wretched, pathetic model of utter powerlessness. Jesus judged.

THE JUDGES JUDGED

But more is going on here than meets the eye. We get our first hint of that in verse 65 of chapter 22. Here is Luke's commentary on the abuse that Jesus suffered from the hands of His jailors just before His trial. They are beating Him and mocking Him and Luke says, "They said many other things against him, blaspheming him." It is not simply that Jesus is being mocked. He is being blasphemed. The soldiers have no idea what they're really doing, do they? The object of their derision is the God of glory made flesh. The only one who can be blasphemed, had they understood, theirs would not have been words of insult but doubtless words of confession and repentance, not of mockery, but of adoration. They would not have lifted their fists in anger against Him; they would have bent their knees in worship before Him. Luke wants us to see that as the trial of Jesus gets under way, the real power does not lie where at first it appears. The real power lies with this Man, the object of the malice of the people around Him.

The clearest statement, of course, of who's really in control here comes in verses 67 to 69 of chapter 22. Jesus is being examined - "If you are the Christ, tell us." Look at His reply. He knows their hearts. "If I tell you, you will not believe and if I ask you, you will not answer." He knows they will never honestly engage with His words nor respond to His questions, but that will change. "What they do not see," He declares to them, "from now on the Son of Man shall be seated at the right hand of the power of God." The cross will give way to glory, and Jesus who now appears to be in their power, will take His place at the right hand of the power of God, the seat of authority and absolute rule. Of course the in background to Jesus' statement stands two important Old Testament passages - Psalm 110 verse 1: "The Lord said to my Lord, 'Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet.'" And Daniel 7:14 which we looked at last Lord's Day Evening. Daniel, remember, sees a vision of the Son of Man coming to the throne of God, the Ancient of Days, and there he receives absolute dominion and power and authority over all people. "This is who I really am," Jesus is telling them. "This is my destiny." The ones you think to sit in judgment

upon, He will ascend to the judgment seat in heaven, and you will appear before Him for sentence one day.

Jesus is King and Jesus is the real Judge. Jesus is the one who will prosecute God's suit against the world in rebellion against Him. If this passage shows us Jesus on trial, it also teaches us that right now, in heaven, Jesus sits as the ultimate Judge of all. They're sitting in judgment as creatures upon their Creator. They pass sentence as sinners upon their only Savior. They condemn their true and rightful King. It is ridiculous actually. It's fundamentally ludicrous, displays the arrogance that would be laughable if it were not so tragic. They sit in judgment on the Judge of all the earth. Again and again, I've had conversations - maybe you have too - with non-Christian friends who will consider the claims of Christ and then they'll say something like this - let's see if you've heard this line before. "I could never worship a God who..." and then fill in the blank. "I could never worship a God who condemns homosexuality. I could never worship a God who doesn't accept all religions as equal. I could never worship a God who demands so much of me."

But you see what we're saying when we talk like that. We have established a court where we preside as prosecution, judge, and jury, and we put Jesus Christ in the docket. It is a claim to moral and spiritual autonomy and equality, even superiority. "If God wants me to worship Him," we're saying, "if Jesus wishes to have any claim on my affections, then He must meet my standards and He must pass muster in the court of my private judgments." It is a stunningly arrogant claim. And this passage is teaching us that those who make it will one day find, to their utter dismay, that the Christ they dismiss and disdain, along with the elders and the soldiers and Herod and Pilate, this Christ is in fact their infallible Judge. They do not judge Him; He will judge them.

HOPE FOR US ALL

Jesus judged, the judges judged, but then lastly hope for us all. The image, this image of Jesus presiding at the right hand of God as Judge of all the earth is not all that we can say about Jesus' present work as ascended Lord. If you have your Bibles with you, let me take you for a moment to another trial, in the same courtroom actually, where another man is unjustly condemned. Turn to Acts chapter 7. Stephen, a deacon of the New Testament church, the early church, the church in Jerusalem, has just made his defense before the same court assembled, not too terribly long after Jesus was likewise tried and condemned. And in Acts 7 verse 54, the people who hear him give his defense are enraged. And look at Stephen's response. Listen to this. This is what Luke says about Stephen's response to the rage of those who are arrayed against him in the court. "But he, full of the Holy Spirit, gazed into heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God. And he said, 'Behold, I see the heavens opened and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God.'" It was

the same declaration that sealed Jesus' fate in Luke 22 and now it seals Stephen's fate also. They cry out, they drag Stephen out of the city, and there they stone him to death.

But did you notice the one difference, the glaring difference between what Stephen saw and what Jesus told those who judged Him? "Jesus declared, 'The Son of Man will be seated at the right hand of God' - seated as Judge. But in Stephen's vision, where is Jesus? Is He seated in the posture of a Judge? That's where judges sit; on the judgment seat. Stephen is on trial for his life, the high priest is seated on his throne at the head of the council. Even today in a modern courtroom the judge takes his seat. The only people who stand are who? The prosecution and the defense attorneys. But Jesus is not seated in the posture here of a judge. He is standing beside the throne. This is what so captures and rivets Stephen's gaze. Jesus here adopts the posture of his defense attorney in the only courtroom that has eternal value. The tribunal in which he stands at that moment, the earthly court, seemed to Stephen then small and pathetic and weak and of little real significance compared with the heavenly courtroom that now fills his vision. And there standing at its center is Jesus Christ. While the earthly court condemns him, in the only court that matters he has one to plead his cause and secure his vindication.

In 1 John chapter 2 verses 1 and 2 the apostle John says, "We have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous, and he himself is the propitiation for our sins and not for ours only, but for the whole world." That is, that is an amazing statement because it tells us that Luke 22 and 23, Jesus' arrest and trial and condemnation and crucifixion, a travesty of justice though they were, were much, much more. They were a propitiating sacrifice, securing salvation for everyone in this room and around the world that believes the Gospel, securing vindication, justification, in the court of heavenly justice so that Jesus Christ might have an infallible argument to plead on your behalf. Whatever the accusations of the devil, whatever the condemning voice of your own conscience, Jesus speaks for your defense, believer. He is your advocate and His arguments can never be gainsaid.

You are, perhaps, rehearsing a long litany of personal failure, but Jesus, before the throne, rehearses His obedience in blood. You are aware of besetting sin that seems to have its claws in you and will not let you go. And your conscience is seared. But Jesus pleads His blood and righteousness in the courts of heaven for you. Satan delights to remind you of that harsh word, that selfish act, that lustful gaze, but Jesus says to God the Father, in your case as you trust in Him, "Every sin is paid for in full." Justice satisfied. "There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus." Jesus, our advocate, knows that there is no double jeopardy with God. Once sin's penalty has been exacted and payment made, it cannot be demanded a second time. All of those for whom He died, He prays and intercedes for and acts as their advocate with the Father. It is an infallible defense. No argument could ever be made to counter it. What good

news. No argument can ever counter the plea of Jesus Christ for you. He merely points to His wounds and says, "Abba, I have purchased her with My blood and her sin is paid for." If Jesus stands in your defense, you could not be more secure in the love and favor of God. If Jesus stands at your defense, you could not be more beloved nor more secure in the sight and favor of God.

Brothers and sisters, you see the options now before you. Jesus Christ, tonight, is either seated as your Judge or He stands in your defense. He either presses the righteous suit and legal case of God against you in the heavenly courtroom, or He pleads His blood and righteousness in your defense. Do you have an advocate with the Father who ever lives to make intercession for you? Is Jesus standing tonight to plead your cause or is He seated on heaven's throne as your terrible Judge? All those who turn to Him in faith discover that He is the former, pleading their cause, interceding on their behalf. And all who remain in rebellion against Him will find that He sits as Judge over them forever. May God be gracious to you that you may leave this place knowing that you have an advocate in Jesus Christ.

Let's pray.

Our Father, we adore You that in Jesus there is an advocate who intercedes for sinners who trust in Him, who has made perfect propitiation, who has satisfied the just wrath of God, and need only point to His atoning work to secure our righteous verdict. For us all, help us to trust Him and cling to Him and receive and rest on Him as He is offered to us here in the Gospel. In Jesus' name, amen.

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