

Injustice to the Just One

“It's not fair!” How many times do we hear those words, especially in the home or on the playground. “It's not fair – he had two turns and I only had one!” “She had a much bigger slice than me – it's not fair?” “How come he gets to play outside while I have to do chores? It's not fair?” It's very revealing about the sinfulness of our human hearts that from the earliest ages we expect and demand to be treated fairly, but are far less concerned with treating others fairly. If justice is really about fairness for all, then we'd complain if someone got a smaller slice than we did.

As we grow older, we become more sophisticated in the ways we say “It's not fair!” We talk about prejudice and oppression, and lawlessness and nepotism, and corruption. But it's still the same thing – a desire that the world would treat us fairly. Just like when we're children, we're less concerned about being treated too well at someone else's expense than we are at being treated badly with someone else profiting.

As we grow older, not only is our idea of justice and fairness more sophisticated, but it also becomes more twisted, more perverted, more tied up in all the knots that our prejudices and selfishness and wrong thinking introduce. After decades of thinking like this, what I think I deserve, and what God knows I deserve look very different. What I think my neighbour deserves from me, and what God actually expects from me regarding my neighbour, are very different things.

So we keep saying “It's not fair” but we tend to get further and further away from what God means by fair.

When those words are said in my home, my children know what I will say. “Life isn't fair. Don't expect it to be fair. There's only one Person who is fair, and that's God.” In fact, there isn't complete justice this side of eternity. God will perfectly balance out the scales, but He will do it in His time, not in mine.

One of the greatest paradoxes of all is this: God will bring justice to the universe, through His Son bearing our injustice. The Son of God was unjustly treated, unfairly treated, and ultimately bore on the cross all our injustice. He experienced treatment He did not deserve, so that we could avoid the treatment we did deserve.

We judge the injustice of an act not only by what is done, but to whom it is done. When a man steals some bread and receives a 20 year sentence, we might feel that though he has done wrong, the punishment is too severe, it is unjust. But what if the man had done no wrong, if He was truly innocent, not in the way we speak of innocent civilians, or innocent bystanders, but truly innocent? What if a truly innocent person is treated badly?

What we see in the time between Gethsemane and the Cross is how the innocent Jesus was unjustly treated. Everywhere along the line, Jesus could have, and from a pure justice point of view, should have shouted, “It's not fair. I don't have to go through with this! I am doing this world a favour, I am giving them unearned kindness, and not only are they not thanking me, they are abusing Me! I am not going to take this!”

But instead, we find that, according to Peter, Jesus... *when He was reviled, did not revile in return; when He suffered, He did not threaten, but committed Himself to Him who judges righteously; (1Pe 2:23)*

So to unfold the account from the betrayal in the Garden, all the way to Pilate giving the order to

crucify Christ, it is one long chain of injustice, which Jesus bore meekly, patiently, and for our sakes.

I want us to see four places of injustice: injustice in the garden, in the Jewish courtroom, in the Jewish courtyard, and the in the Gentile Courtroom. In each case, I want us to see what was done to Jesus, and how He responded.

I. Injustice in the Garden

43 And immediately, while He was still speaking, Judas, one of the twelve, with a great multitude with swords and clubs, came from the chief priests and the scribes and the elders. 44 Now His betrayer had given them a signal, saying, "Whomever I kiss, He is the One; seize Him and lead Him away safely." 45 As soon as He had come, immediately he went up to Him and said to Him, "Rabbi, Rabbi!" and kissed Him. 46 Then they laid their hands on Him and took Him. 47 And one of those who stood by drew his sword and struck the servant of the high priest, and cut off his ear. 48 Then Jesus answered and said to them, "Have you come out, as against a robber, with swords and clubs to take Me? 49 "I was daily with you in the temple teaching, and you did not seize Me. But the Scriptures must be fulfilled." 50 Then they all forsook Him and fled. 51 Now a certain young man followed Him, having a linen cloth thrown around his naked body. And the young men laid hold of him, 52 and he left the linen cloth and fled from them naked.

Jesus has just completed the most agonising prayer time of His life, experiencing and embracing the meaning of the cross. And each time He came back to Peter, James and John, and found them sleeping. Now He comes back, and they are joined by the other disciples.

At this point, Judas appears. Now this is probably how things unfolded. Judas had promised the Sanhedrin he could provide them with an opportunity to arrest Jesus secretly, since they did not want to do in in public. Judas had no doubt wanted to betray Jesus in the privacy of the Upper Room, where they had the Last Supper. Judas got up, walked through Jerusalem as quickly as he could, told them that Jesus was in a room and it was a prime time for a quiet and hasty arrest. We don't know how long it took to assemble the soldiers and thugs they needed, but eventually they were together and headed back to the Upper Room. Judas no doubt wanted to just point them to the door and slip away, so that he would not be implicated. But upon arriving, Jesus and the disciples had left. Judas, now looked foolish, so he quickly told them that he knew of a place where Jesus liked to go. He then arranged that when they reached the place, he would go ahead and approach Jesus as if he had just been left behind by the others, and greet Jesus with the customary kisses of affection. That's how they would know which one Jesus was, and they could spring out of the bushes, arrest him, while Judas could look as if he was as surprised as the rest of the disciples.

Cowardly, deceitful and not at all what Jesus deserved for years of investment into Judas' life. How did Jesus respond to Judas' big facade? He gently asked him, "*Friend, why have you come?*" (Mat 26:20). He gently responded to this big display by asking, "*Judas, do you betray the Son of Man with a kiss?*"

And out of the bushes springs this group, a large group, armed to the teeth, as if Jesus was a dangerous outlaw, known for His violent responses.

Peter's response is the opposite of Christ's. Peter lashes out with a sword, cuts off the ear of the servant of the high priest Malchus. Jesus tells Peter to stop, reminds his disciples that those who live by the sword will die by the sword. He heals the ear, and tells Peter, if I wanted, I could call for seven legions of sword-bearing angels. But if He did that, if He fought against this injustice, then the Scriptures would not be fulfilled.

Look at Christ's calm and wise response to this injustice. They are arresting him at night, armed to the teeth, secretly. Jesus challenges them with this. I did not teach in secret, nor did I have private clandestine meetings. You had opportunity to lawfully arrest me in front of everyone if I was truly a lawbreaker. I never caused a public riot or acted as a physical threat to anyone, and here you are, armed to the teeth, arresting me in secret.

Now Jesus experiences another injustice: those disciples who said they would die for Jesus, all flee. Only Peter and John follow from a distance, but these men who had pledged life and death allegiance forsake him. One young man is singled out here by Mark. 51:

Now a certain young man followed Him, having a linen cloth thrown around his naked body. And the young men laid hold of him, 52 and he left the linen cloth and fled from them naked.

Many believe this was none other than Mark himself, a young man who had been present at the Supper, and followed them, and fled when under threat of arrest. Injustice in the garden: a betrayal, a cowardly arrest, and the forsaking of his disciples.

II. Injustice in the Jewish Court

53 And they led Jesus away to the high priest; and with him were assembled all the chief priests, the elders, and the scribes. 54 But Peter followed Him at a distance, right into the courtyard of the high priest. And he sat with the servants and warmed himself at the fire.

55 Now the chief priests and all the council sought testimony against Jesus to put Him to death, but found none. 56 For many bore false witness against Him, but their testimonies did not agree. 57 Then some rose up and bore false witness against Him, saying, 58 "We heard Him say, 'I will destroy this temple made with hands, and within three days I will build another made without hands.'" 59 But not even then did their testimony agree. 60 And the high priest stood up in the midst and asked Jesus, saying, "Do You answer nothing? What is it these men testify against You?" 61 But He kept silent and answered nothing. Again the high priest asked Him, saying to Him, "Are You the Christ, the Son of the Blessed?" 62 Jesus said, "I am. And you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Power, and coming with the clouds of heaven." 63 Then the high priest tore his clothes and said, "What further need do we have of witnesses? 64 "You have heard the blasphemy! What do you think?" And they all condemned Him to be deserving of death. 65 Then some began to spit on Him, and to blindfold Him, and to beat Him, and to say to Him, "Prophecy!" And the officers struck Him with the palms of their hands.

Jesus is now taken to be tried by the Jewish religious rulers. According to John's Gospel, Jesus went first to Annas, the father-in-law to the High priest, Caiaphas. Annas tried to get Jesus to incriminate himself, and Jesus rightly insisted that Annas call for witnesses who had heard Jesus teach. They struck Jesus for asking this, and then Jesus is sent off to Caiaphas, where the Sanhedrin has gathered to try Jesus. Doug Bookman lists out eight ways in which this trial was illegal according to standard Jewish judicial practice.

- “1.) The trial was held in the wrong place - a private home, rather than in the temple precincts, or some public place where witnesses might be easily brought.
 - 2.) The trial was held at night, when it was difficult (if not impossible) to subpoena witnesses at that hour; in fact, there is no record that any attempt was made to hear witnesses concerning this Jesus of Nazareth, thus high-handedly violating the most basic canon of Hebrew jurisprudence (Dt 17:6);
 - 3.) The trial was convened with undue haste.
 - 4.) False witnesses were sought and bribed.
 - 5.) There was no careful warning of witnesses concerning the results of perjury.
 - 6.) Attempts were made to force Jesus to bear witness against Himself.
 - 7.) Jesus was not released when witnesses against Him disagreed among themselves.
 - 8.) Execution was carried out immediately, without allowing time to find witnesses in support of the accused.
- The point: the Sanhedrinists did not convene to try Jesus, but to condemn Him; the outcome was determined before the trial commenced”

Even with all this injustice, and with bribed witnesses, they could not get a charge to stick. So finally, the High priest put Jesus under oath to tell them if He was indeed the Messiah, the Son of God. Jesus answered truthfully, and once they heard that, they took it as evidence that He was blaspheming, since in their minds, He could in no ways be the Messiah.

What kind of human court could act as if it knew who the Messiah would be, and then condemn Jesus for blasphemy when He was not the Messiah in their eyes? Lawless injustice.

Moreover, Smith tells us that "It was...required that after condemning a criminal to death the Sanhedrin should mourn and fast all that day; but no sooner was Jesus condemned than those grave counsellors, the custodians of Israel's law and faith, arose from their seats and [surrounded] Him with [insults]. They spat on His face, they buffeted Him, they blindfolded Him and, striking Him, challenged Him, as He was a prophet, to divine who smote Him. And the officers of the court abetted their superiors in the brutal sport."

Later, seeking to re-write history, the Talmud would state that "Yeshu was led through the city for forty days, proclaiming that He had been sentenced to stoning for being a sorcerer and a deceiver, and inviting any who would come to his defence to do so."

How did Jesus respond to this injustice? *"60 And the high priest stood up in the midst and asked Jesus, saying, 'Do You answer nothing? What is it these men testify against You?' 61 But He kept silent and answered nothing."*

Luke's Gospel tells us that in the morning, they would convene to give this trial a facade of legitimacy, and condemn Jesus again, this time by asking Him once more, Are You the Messiah?

In the face of three illegal Jewish trials, Jesus did not defend Himself. He only answered truthfully when He needed to.

III. Injustice in the Jewish Courtyard

66 Now as Peter was below in the courtyard, one of the servant girls of the high priest came. 67 And when she saw Peter warming himself, she looked at him and said, 'You also were with Jesus of Nazareth.' 68 But he denied it, saying, 'I neither know nor understand what you are saying.' And he went out on the porch, and a rooster crowed. 69 And the servant girl saw him again, and began to say to those who stood by, 'This is one of them.' 70 But he denied it again. And a little later those who stood by said to Peter again, 'Surely you are one of them; for you are a Galilean, and your speech shows it.' 71 Then he began to curse and swear, 'I do not know this Man of whom you speak!' 72 A second time the rooster crowed. Then Peter called to mind the word that Jesus had said to him, 'Before the rooster crows twice, you will deny Me three times.' And when he thought about it, he wept."

During this time, Peter was in the courtyard, waiting for the outcome. A servant girl remembers Peter and identifies him as one of Jesus' disciples. Peter denies it.

A second time, a servant girl identifies Peter as belonging to the outlaws. Peter denies it.

And as Peter sat and tried to mingle in, his accent gave him away. He was from the north, from Galilee. And what would a Galilean be doing in that courtyard, except he was one of Jesus' disciples. So they again say, "You must be one of them!" Peter is cursing, swearing, vehemently denying all knowledge of Jesus.

Luke's Gospel tells us that when the cock crowed, Jesus turned and looked at Peter. Peter's heart was broken. But what did the Lord do in the face of such injustice? Here Peter, the rock, had three times denied Jesus. Jesus had calmly predicted it.

And when Jesus rose from the dead, He met Peter and some of the others at the Lake of Galilee.

There He asked Peter, "Peter, do you love Me?" And how many time did He ask Peter that? He asked Peter that question three times, allowing Peter the opportunity to publicly deny his own three denials.

Jesus, unfairly treated by His best friends, repaying evil with good.

IV. Injustice in the Gentile Court

Mark 15:1 Immediately, in the morning, the chief priests held a consultation with the elders and scribes and the whole council; and they bound Jesus, led Him away, and delivered Him to Pilate 2 Then Pilate asked Him, "Are You the King of the Jews?" He answered and said to him, "It is as you say." 3 And the chief priests accused Him of many things, but He answered nothing. 4 Then Pilate asked Him again, saying, "Do You answer nothing? See how many things they testify against You!" 5 But Jesus still answered nothing, so that Pilate marvelled.

Early in the morning, the Jewish leaders take Jesus to Pilate. The Jewish nation did not have the right to execute people. Capital punishment was the right of their overlords, the Romans. So to have Jesus executed, they needed to find a crime that Rome would punish. In their own kangaroo court, they had condemned Him for blasphemy, but they knew that would mean nothing to Pilate. So, they came up with another charge, one they had condemned him for in their own court, but which they could now conveniently come up with in Pilate's presence. They accused Jesus of teaching people to not pay taxes to Caesar, and of being a king.

So Pilate asked Jesus, "Are you the King of the Jews." Jesus said, "As you have said." And John's Gospel tells us that Jesus told Pilate that His kingdom was not of this realm, otherwise He would have His own army.

Pilate finds no guilt In Jesus being that kind of king. And as the priests and scribes add vicious charge after vicious charge, Jesus has nothing to say. He will not dignify lies with a response. As Peter says, when He was reviled, He did not revile in return; when He suffered, He did not threaten, but committed Himself to Him who judges righteously;

At one point, Pilate hears that Jesus was from Galilee, and thinks he can pass this whole trial off to Herod, since Herod had jurisdiction over Galilee. Herod was glad to see Jesus, and wanted to see a sign. But Jesus had nothing to say to the one who had cut off John the Baptist's head. He had cut off the voice of God to him, and Jesus had nothing to say to him. He simply endured the accusations, and finally Herod just fell in with the mood of the mob, dressed Jesus in a purple robe and sent him back to Pilate.

6 Now at the feast he was accustomed to releasing one prisoner to them, whomever they requested. 7 And there was one named Barabbas, who was chained with his fellow rebels; they had committed murder in the rebellion.

8 Then the multitude, crying aloud, began to ask him to do just as he had always done for them. 9 But Pilate answered them, saying, "Do you want me to release to you the King of the Jews?" 10 For he knew that the chief priests had handed Him over because of envy. 11 But the chief priests stirred up the crowd, so that he should rather release Barabbas to them.

Pilate tried again to release Jesus by offering to have Jesus be the Passover prisoner who would be released. Barabbas was a convicted murderer, and the crowd wanted his unjust pardon over the just release of an innocent man.

12 Pilate answered and said to them again, "What then do you want me to do with Him whom you call the King of the Jews?" 13 So they cried out again, "Crucify Him!" 14 Then Pilate said to them, "Why, what evil has He done?" But they cried out all the more, "Crucify Him! 15 So Pilate, wanting to gratify the crowd,

released Barabbas to them; and he delivered Jesus, after he had scourged Him, to be crucified.

At least five times, Pilate stated, “ I find no fault in this man”. But the crowd grew more and more vocal, and more and more insistent. Pilate tried one more tactic. He had Jesus scourged. That is, he had a Roman soldier use a Roman whip and have Jesus scourged, which would have torn His body, and caused something close to death. He brought out the wounded, bloodied Jesus, and presented Him to the nation, seeing if the sight of a man wounded and physically close to death would placate them.

But it did not. It only provoked their bloodlust, and made them cry out even more for His unjust death.

Pilate could have put an end to their injustice, but the text tells us that he wished to gratify them. When they threatened to blackmail him, by saying that pardoning Jesus would make Pilate an enemy of Caesar, it was too much for the cowardly ruler. He washed his hands, again claimed that he found no fault in Jesus, and delivered Jesus to be crucified. Whether or not he washed his hands, his was the final say. He determined where Jesus would be crucified or not, and he chose, against all the Roman laws of justice, to let it be.

Here, at the last barrier between Jesus and His murder, Jesus faced another injustice. A Roman ruler, who perverted justice to protect his own position.

How did Jesus respond to this? Just as the prophet Isaiah had predicted 800 years before.

Isa 53:7 *He was oppressed and He was afflicted, Yet He opened not His mouth; He was led as a lamb to the slaughter, And as a sheep before its shearers is silent, So He opened not His mouth.*

As we face some forms of injustice in the world, the writer of Hebrews tells us:

“**Heb 12:3** For consider Him who endured such hostility from sinners against Himself, lest you become weary and discouraged in your souls.

It's not fair. No it isn't. A world in which innocent Jesus gets treated that way isn't fair. But if He hadn't, then there would be no mercy, only justice and every sinner would get what every sinner deserves, which is eternal death. Instead, because the just suffered unjustly for the unjust, the unjust can be declared just by Him.

We give thanks, we admire, we love the one who suffered unjustly for us. And when we face injustice, we take our cue from Jesus.

1Pe 4:19 *Therefore let those who suffer according to the will of God commit their souls to Him in doing good, as to a faithful Creator.*