**THE GOSPEL OF LUKE**

**SUFFERING IN SILENCE**

**Luke 22:63-23:25**

**INTRODUCTION**

During my previous life as a criminal defence lawyer, I had the privilege of participating in a number of trials. I think that most people know that trials are dramatic things. I still remember the solemnity of the moment when I witnessed my first trial as an articling student. But as I started practicing law and doing trials myself, I came to appreciate trials in a completely different way. They’re not just dramatic events. They’re necessary components of a just society.

I remember a classroom discussion on legal ethics during law school where a number of students were challenging the place of trials in our criminal justice system. They thought that trials were a big waste of time and resources, and that they resulted in far too many guilty people going free. In response, my professor said, “Well, would you rather live in a society where once an allegation is made against you, the police come to your house, take you out back and shoot you?”

While he was obviously using an extreme example, I never forgot his point, which was this: the process of coming to a judgment is just as important as the judgment itself. That’s why trials exist. They not only help society reach a just outcome. They help society protect a just *process*. They protect individuals from mob justice. They ensure that both sides of the story are heard. They give the accused person the right to face his accusers, to respond to the charges, and to defend himself before he is judged.

A just process is just as important as reaching just results. When you have a just process, more often than not you’ll reach a just result. But when you don’t have a just process, all sorts of people will become unjustly condemned.

That’s what happened to Jesus in Luke 23. In this chapter, Jesus goes through a series of three trials that are all designed to determine his guilt or innocence, but the problem is that they’re rigged. Jesus is tried three times, and every single time he receives an unfair trial. The result? An innocent man is condemned to death.

That’s what our text today is about. It’s about sinful humanity sending the sinless one to a bloody execution on a cross, because no one cared about the process. They only cared about the result. And the only result they wanted was for Jesus to die. This is one of the worst acts of injustice ever committed in human history, and yet Jesus suffered it all in silence. Why? Because as much as humanity sent him to the cross, it was God who willed it to happen. That’s why Jesus would do nothing and say nothing to defend himself. That’s why he would suffer in silence.

The title of this message is **Suffering in Silence**. My aim today is to show you that **Man’s Injustice Against Christ Satisfied God’s Justice Against Us.** We will have three points today:

1. The Meaning of the Text
2. The Application of the Text

(1) **THE MEANING OF THE TEXT**

One of the main themes of our text today is that Jesus was sent to his death as an innocent man. That’s apparent from the very moment that he was arrested earlier in Chapter 22. As he prayed in the Garden, Judas led a group of priests and temple guards to arrest him under the cover of night. Jesus doesn’t fight them (he actually stops a potential fight from breaking out). Instead, he simply says this:

“Have you come out as against a robber, with swords and clubs? When I was with you, day after day in the temple, you did not lay hands on me. But this is your hour, and the power of darkness.” (Luke 22:52-53)

Jesus knew exactly why they came to him at night rather than during the day. This was an unlawful arrest. If Jesus had been a robber, or a murderer, or any sort of criminal, they would have had no issue arresting him in the daytime. But he wasn’t any of those things. He was completely innocent. That’s why the Jewish authorities acted in secret under the cover of night.

This was a clandestine operation, and it continued as such as Jesus was taken away, blindfolded and beaten, to the first of his three trials. This first trial would be before the Jewish authorities, the council of Jewish leaders known as the Sanhedrin. Jewish laws stated that the Sanhedrin was supposed to hear charges in the Temple, but verse 54 says,

“Then they seized him and led him away, bringing him into the high priest’s house…”

Clearly the Jewish leaders didn’t want this to become public, at least not yet. They wanted to keep this trial a secret until they could get the rest of Jerusalem on their side.

What were they putting Jesus on trial for? This trial before the Sanhedrin was about one issue, which we find in verse 67: “If you are the Christ, tell us.” This wasn’t about what Jesus had done. It was about who Jesus claimed to be.

There’s no question that the Jewish authorities believed in the concept of a Christ. That wasn’t their problem. Their problem was that they didn’t believe that Jesus was the Christ, because he defied their expectations of what the Christ would come to do. They wanted a political saviour. Jesus claimed to be a spiritual saviour. They wanted someone who would bless them and reinforce their authority. Jesus said he would curse them for their abuse of authority. Jesus didn’t fit their mold of who the Christ would be, and therefore, they concluded that he wasn’t the one.

That meant that if Jesus claimed to be the Christ, that would be a massive problem. They couldn’t have someone claiming to be the Messiah going around to the Jewish people telling them that their religious leaders didn’t know God. That would threaten their power and cause their man-made religious order to crumble. And so, with Jesus finally before them, they cut right to the issue as they begin their interrogation. “If you are the Christ, tell us.”

But Jesus knows their hearts. He knows that this isn’t an honest question. They’re not seeking to know God by believing that he is the Christ. They’re not even seeking to have a conversation to learn more. They’re only seeking to find evidence in order to condemn him. That’s why Jesus doesn’t waste his time trying to dialogue with them. He simply tells them, “If I tell you, you will not believe, and if I ask you, you will not answer.”

But then he drops a single statement on them that should have sent a shiver down their spines. With cool confidence, he says in verse 69, “But from now on the Son of Man shall be seated at the right hand of the power of God.” Jesus is quoting Psalm 110:1, which says this:

“The LORD says to my Lord: ‘Sit at my right hand, until I make your enemies your footstool.’”

Jesus is saying that this Psalm is fulfilled in him. He is the one who will sit at God’s right hand. He is the one who will reign as God himself defeats his enemies. And that includes all of them.

Jesus is giving them a glimpse of true reality. It may appear that they are judging him, but in reality, he is the one judging them. He is the one who will not only stand in God’s presence, but sit at God’s right hand, where he will rule as all his enemies are made a footstool for his feet.

The religious leaders didn’t miss the point. They realized that Jesus is upping the ante, so their question, “Are you the Christ?” turns into, “Are you the Son of God?” In effect, they’re asking, “Are you making yourself equal with God? And Jesus, in relatively cryptic fashion, responds, “You say that I am.”

This isn’t a straight up “Yes, I am”, but neither is it “I’m not saying that. You’re the ones saying that.” Jesus isn’t denying it. He’s inviting the council to listen to their own logic. If Jesus is saying that he will sit at God’s right hand, and only one who is equal with God can do that, what does that make him? With that statement, the council pronounces judgment on him. From their perspective, Jesus is guilty of blasphemy due to his own incriminating statements, and they are prepared to condemn him to death for it.

But Jesus didn’t do anything wrong. He spoke the truth, but they weren’t interested in the truth. They should have asked questions and studied the Scriptures to see if this could be true, but they didn’t, because they were only interested in one thing: his death. This wasn’t a fair trial. It was a rigged one, and now they believed they had enough evidence to execute him.

To do that, they had to get permission from Pontius Pilate, the Roman Governor, because they couldn’t execute anyone without a nod from their Roman superiors. And so, they take Jesus to him in Chapter 23, which leads to Jesus’ second trial.

In verse 2, the Jewish leaders bring their charges against Jesus to Pilate’s attention. Notice how the charges have changed from the first trial. They say that Jesus has been “misleading our nation” and “forbidding us to give tribute to Caesar” and “saying that he himself is Christ, a king.” We’re familiar with the third charge, but where did the first two come from? Misleading our nation? What does that even mean? “Forbidding us to give tribute to Caesar”? That one’s just patently false. Earlier in Chapter 20 the scribes and chief priests tried to get Jesus to say this, but he didn’t fall into their trap. Instead, he showed them a denarius, a Roman coin, and asked, “Whose picture is on the coin?” “Caesar’s”. “Then render to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s, and to God the things that are God’s.”

In other words, the Jews aren’t being honest. They’re being manipulative. They’re trying to frame their allegations against Jesus as political concerns in order to get Pilate’s approval, and they’re willing to do anything to get it, even if it means making things up.

But Pilate isn’t so easily swayed. Unlike the Jews, he actually cares about justice, so he begins asking Jesus his own set of questions. Luke doesn’t record the whole conversation here, but he does give us a snapshot of it in verse 3 where Pilate asks, “Are you the King of the Jews?” And Jesus, similar to his answer before the Sanhedrin, replies, “You have said so.”

Once again, Jesus is showing that he’s not interested in having a conversation. He’s not denying that he’s the King of the Jews, but he’s not going to defend that title either. This has a powerful impression on Pilate. He concludes that Jesus isn’t a threat. After all, what king would act as if he were indifferent to his kingship? So in verse 4, Pilate tells the Jews, “I find no guilt in this man.” That’s his verdict. Not guilty.

That’s where the trial should have ended. Jesus was charged. Jesus was tried. And Jesus was found not guilty. But it wasn’t that simple. Verse 5 says that the Jews were “urgent”, saying, “He stirs up the people, teaching throughout all Judea, from Galilee even to this place.”

Pilate’s in a difficult spot. On the one hand, he cares about justice and doesn’t want to condemn an innocent man. But on the other hand, he cares about his power and doesn’t want to sour his relationship with the Jews. So he does what any good politician would do in that situation: he tries to pass off the responsibility to someone else.

That someone else would be King Herod. He happened to be in Jerusalem, perhaps for the Passover festival, and had always wanted to see Jesus. Luke mentioned that Herod sought to see Jesus back in Chapter 9 when Jesus was in the midst of his healing ministry, and now he would finally have that opportunity, which begins the third trial.

The fact that Herod was eager to see Jesus might seem like an encouraging development, but it wasn’t. Some people want to get to know Jesus because they’re genuinely interested in knowing who he is and learning what it means to follow him, but that wasn’t Herod. He wanted to see Jesus for entirely different reasons. Luke says in verse 8 that “he was hoping to see some sign done by him.” He was hoping to be entertained. He was hoping to see Jesus just like he might hope to see a court jester or a magician. He didn’t want to follow Jesus. He wanted to be “wowed” by him.

And so, Luke tells us in verse 9 that “he questioned him at some length”, but this time, Jesus doesn’t even dignify him with a response. He simply stands there in silence and “made no answer”. Even when the chief priests and scribes join in and start “vehemently accusing him”, he didn’t utter a single word in his defence. He’s not going to cast his pearls before pigs, and he’s definitely not going to perform miracles for entertainment.

At this point, Herod decides to take matters into his own hands. If Jesus isn’t going to entertain him, he’ll entertain himself at Jesus’ expense. In verse 11, Luke tells us that Herod and his soldiers “treated him with contempt and mocked him” before they dressed him up with “splendid clothing”, not to honour him, but to humiliate him, before sending him back to Pilate.

This ends the third trial, and while Herod didn’t make an official pronouncement of guilt or innocence, his conclusion was clear: Jesus didn’t do anything to warrant death. He wasn’t guilty of any of his charges. He was innocent.

And so, as Pilate receives Jesus once again, he calls not only the “chief priests and the rulers” but “the people” as well – since these events had become quite public by then – and Pilate summarizes what has happened so far in verses 14-15. They brought Jesus to him, he examined him, and found him not guilty. Then he brought Jesus to Herod, Herod examined him, and found him not guilty. This is an innocent man. He did nothing deserving death. But if it makes them happy, he’ll punish Jesus first. He’ll have Jesus whipped bloody before releasing him. Can’t they be satisfied with that?

The answer is “no”. At this point, they didn’t just want some of Jesus’ blood. They wanted all of it. They would rather have an insurrectionist and murderer released to them than Jesus. They would rather have Pilate show mercy to the evil Barabbas than the innocent Jesus. So they cry out, “Away with this man, and release to us Barabbas”. But Pilate addresses them once more in verse 20, desiring to release Jesus, but they kept shouting, “Crucify him, Crucify him!” That’s all they could do in the moment. Their bloodlust was so high that they couldn’t answer Pilate’s question as he appealed to them a third time. “Why, what evil has he done? I have found in him no guilt deserving death. I will therefore punish and release him.” But they didn’t let up. They were urgent, demanding with loud cries that he should be crucified.

And you know what? Their voices prevailed. On that dark day, the tyranny of the majority would overcome the resolve of that Roman Governor. He may have valued justice, but he didn’t value it so much as to risk a riot or damage his political relationship with the Jews, so he grants them their request. And so, Barabbas is freed, and Jesus is delivered over to death.

As all these events unfolded around him, there was Jesus, standing silently. He didn’t defend himself. He didn’t appeal to Pilate. He didn’t utter a word. Even when he spoke during his earlier trials, his answers were half-hearted, even sad. This is a man who not only knew that he was being unjustly condemned. He had accepted it. And so, he went to the cross in silence, waiting for them to do their evil act. As Isaiah 53:7 said,

“He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth; like a lamb that is led to the slaughter, and like a sheep that before its shearers is silent, so he opened not his mouth.”

(2) **THE APPLICATION OF THE TEXT**

That’s what this text is about. It’s about humanity’s evil acts against the perfect Son of God who did nothing to resist it. For most of you, none of this is new to you. I haven’t said anything to you this afternoon that you haven’t heard already. And yet, as familiar as this text may be, we need to realize that it’s meant to profoundly change the way that we live. This isn’t just biblical data. It’s not just a reminder of the story of Good Friday. It’s a *transformative* text that is meant to change how we relate to sin, and how we relate to God.

So as we turn our eyes now from the text and towards our hearts, I want to suggest three ways that this text is meant to apply to us.

(a) **Be Awakened to the Horrors of Sin**

Jesus’ journey to the cross is meant to awaken us to the horrors of our sin. It was our sin that brought him blindfolded and beaten before the Jewish Council. It was our sin that led him to Herod to be mocked and treated with contempt. It was our sin that led him in front of the crowd of people he loved, only to hear them cry out for his blood.

We sent Jesus to the cross. We are responsible for his suffering. If we hadn’t sinned, he would never have had to suffer.

We all know that sin has consequences. Sinning hurts people. Sinning fractures relationships. Sinning makes us miserable. But the worst consequence of our sin is that it sent Jesus to the cross. There’s nothing worse than that. So when we are tempted to indulge in sin – whether it be pornography or pride – ask yourself this: do I really want to indulge in what killed my Saviour? Do I really want to enjoy what caused him so much pain? Remember that Jesus didn’t just die for our sins. He died *because* of our sins, and that’s meant to make us want to put our sin to death.

There’s another way that this text awakens us to the horrors of sin. When we think about all these injustices committed against Jesus – about the horrible things that the Jews, and Herod, and even Pilate did in knowingly condemning an innocent man to death – we’re not just supposed to think, “What horrible people they were.” We’re meant to think, “That’s me.” We may not have been there, but if we were, we would have done exactly the same thing. The same hatred that they had for Jesus dwells in us, because we’re sinners just like they were sinners. We would have mocked him. We would have beaten him. We would have called for his crucifixion. That’s how sinful we are. That’s how horrifying our sin truly is. As you consider Jesus’ suffering, be awakened to the horrors of sin.

(b) **Be Awakened to the Love of Jesus**

But that’s not all. As we are awakened to the horrors of sin, we are also to be awakened to the love of Jesus. Jesus suffered for our sins, not because he *had* to, but because he *wanted* to. Yes, he had a moment of struggle in the Garden as he pleaded with the Father to save him from the coming suffering, but in the end, he went to the cross *willingly*.

It was his love for us that kept him from resisting. It was his love for us that kept him silent. He didn’t advocate for himself, because that was the only way he could become an advocate for *us*. He made no plea before the ones who judged him so that he could make a perfect plea before the one who will judge us.

You will never know a greater love than this. It’s one thing to suffer for those who love you. It’s another thing to suffer for those who *hate* you. As the Apostle Paul wrote in Romans 5:

“For one will scarcely die for a righteous person—though perhaps for a good person one would dare even to die—but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.”

Love is the greatest need of the human heart. We need to love and be loved. That’s what we were created for. And the only love that will satisfy is the love of Jesus Christ. As sweet as the love is between lovers, or families, or friends, it’s all but a shadow compared to the glory of Christ’s love.

We talk about Jesus’ love a lot. We sing about it. But we haven’t truly grasped it until we see his love through his suffering. But when we do, it will have a profound impact on our love for others: for God, and for the people around us. As 1 John 3:16 says,

“By this we know love, that he laid down his life for us, and we ought to lay down our lives for the brothers.”

(c) **Be Awakened to the Mercy of God**

Lastly, our text today calls us to be awakened to the mercy of God. God is our judge, and he has pronounced us all *guilty*. We have broken his laws. We have disobeyed his commands. We have rebelled against his authority, and what we deserve is *death*.

But in his great mercy, God sent his beloved Son to die on our behalf. When Jesus prayed in the Garden, he pleaded with the Father to remove the cup of wrath from him, yet not his will but his Father’s will be done. And what was the Father’s will? Isaiah 53:10:

“Yet it was the will of the LORD to crush him; he has put him to grief…”

What we saw in the pages of Scripture today was the will of the Lord. The evil was man’s, and man’s alone, because God does not do evil. He is not responsible for evil. And yet, everything unfolded according to the will of God. God is sovereign in such a way that nothing happens except through him and by his will, including the suffering of his Son.

The early church would reflect on this often. In Peter’s first sermon, he said:

“…this Jesus, *delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God*, you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men.” Acts 2:23

And later, as the church prayed after being persecuted, they said:

“…for truly in this city there were gathered together against your holy servant Jesus, whom you anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, along with the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel, *to do whatever your hand and your plan had predestined to take place*.” Acts 4:27-28

The suffering Jesus endured before the Jews, before Herod, and before Pontius Pilate was according to God’s plan. It was what he had predestined to take place. Why? So that he might have mercy on us.

As we read this text, we must see ourselves in the place of the Jews, and Herod, and Pontius Pilate, but we must also see ourselves in the place of Barabbas. We were released instead of Jesus. We received mercy because he was condemned. We live because he died.

This is the gospel. This is the message that we must believe if we are to be saved. We can cry out for mercy and receive it because God has condemned his Son in our place.

So when you feel condemned by your sin, or when you begin to believe the lie that God could never forgive you, look to Christ. Remember that the Son suffered lovingly, and that the Father sent him willingly, so that you might believe in the mercies of God. Believe that God’s mercy doesn’t come from who we are or what we have done. It comes from Christ, and Christ alone, who suffered and died so that we could be forgiven.