

Theme: The Actions of Christ's Passion – “Accused”

Text: Luke 22:66-23:5

As soon as it was day, the elders of the people, both chief priests and scribes, came together and led Him into their council, saying, 67 "If You are the Christ, tell us." But He said to them, "If I tell you, you will by no means believe. 68 "And if I also ask *you*, you will by no means answer Me or let Me go. 69 "Hereafter the Son of Man will sit on the right hand of the power of God." 70 Then they all said, "Are You then the Son of God?" So He said to them, "You *rightly* say that I am." 71 And they said, "What further testimony do we need? For we have heard it ourselves from His own mouth." 23:1 Then the whole multitude of them arose and led Him to Pilate. 2 And they began to accuse Him, saying, "We found this *fellow* perverting the nation, and forbidding to pay taxes to Caesar, saying that He Himself is Christ, a King." 3 Then Pilate asked Him, saying, "Are You the King of the Jews?" He answered him and said, "*It is as you say.*" 4 So Pilate said to the chief priests and the crowd, "I find no fault in this Man." 5 But they were the more fierce, saying, "He stirs up the people, teaching throughout all Judea, beginning from Galilee to this place."

If you're a reader of the Sunday Funnies section of the newspaper, then you're probably familiar with the cartoon *The Family Circus*. One of my favorites was one which showed all sorts of broken items and messes around the house, and over each one of the messes you see the children's words "Not me, not me!" At the bottom of the cartoon, then, you see a fictitious little "ghost-child" named "Not me" walking away from all of the messes.

If you've been around children (or remember being one yourself) then you know how true to life this cartoon can be. You can all but catch a child with his or her hand in the cookie jar and ask them point blank, "Who took a cookie from the cookie jar?" and their immediate response might very well be "Not me!" They could still have part of the cookie in their hand or chocolate chips still smeared around their mouth and still, when accused of disobedience, their natural reaction is to avoid punishment at all costs.

Many people don't fully grow out of this behavior even when they're adults. The news is filled with high-profile cases of people who are beyond a shadow of a doubt guilty of wrongdoing, but, when accused, still try by any means possible to avoid punishment, and insist, "Not me!"

It's true of us at times as well. For example, if we get a ticket for speeding—because we actually *were* speeding—we still might try and fight it in court. Now, if we happen to be accused of doing something that we really didn't do, then we really throw a fit and go to great lengths to declare our innocence.

If we keep these thoughts in mind as we consider our fourth "***Action of Christ's Passion***" we will better appreciate just how differently Jesus reacted to His enemies when He was "**accused.**"

Jesus' trial before the Sanhedrin and Pilate was one of the most blatant displays of injustice in recorded history. The Jewish leaders had already issued their verdict before they hauled Jesus into their presence for this sham of a trial. They wanted Him dead and simply needed to fabricate the right evidence to convince the Roman governor of the same thing, since the Romans no longer allowed the Jews to put people to death under their own laws. If they were allowed, they would have stoned Jesus immediately after their opening round of questions, which are recorded for us in our text from Luke, "**If You are the Christ, tell us.**" (v. 67) and "**Are You then the Son of God?**" (v. 70). Jesus knew exactly what the council intended to do to Him. He said to them, "**If I tell you, you will by no means believe. And if I also ask *you*, you will by no means answer Me or let Me go.**" Even still, He answers the questions of this mock jury with the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth. He plainly tells them that He is the Christ by saying, "**Hereafter the Son of Man will sit on the right hand of the power of God**" (v. 69) and when they followed it up with the question, "**Are You then the Son of God?**" Jesus replied, "**You rightly**

say that I am" (v. 70). Matthew tells us in his Gospel that after Jesus answered, **Then the high priest tore his clothes, saying, "He has spoken blasphemy! What further need do we have of witnesses? Look, now you have heard His blasphemy! "What do you think?" They answered and said, "He is deserving of death" (Matthew 26:65-66).**

Death by stoning was the punishment for blasphemy according to the laws God had given to Moses (**see Leviticus 24:16**). In Jesus' case, of course, this charge of blasphemy was not true. Jesus claimed to be the Son of God and equal with God Himself, because that's exactly who He was. His words were not blasphemy but the truth.

Pontius Pilate, of course, wouldn't care if Jesus had blasphemed or not. The Roman government didn't concern themselves with the religious laws of the people who were under their control. In order to get Pilate to pass the sentence of death by crucifixion on Jesus the Sanhedrin knew that they would have to **"accuse"** Jesus with all sorts of lies and deceptive half-truths. That's exactly what they did. We read in our text, **And they began to accuse Him, saying, "We found this *fellow* perverting the nation, and forbidding to pay taxes to Caesar, saying that He Himself is Christ, a King" (Luke 23:2).** They accused Jesus of the types of "crimes" that would get the attention of the Roman government: insurrection, rebellion, and the establishment of a rival kingdom to challenge Roman authority. Think of how ridiculous these **"accusations"** against Jesus were:

- **"We found this fellow perverting the nation..."** Perverting the nation? If you call teaching people about self-sacrifice, forgiveness, and love 'perverting the nation,' then Jesus was guilty as charged!
- **"...forbidding to pay taxes to Caesar..."** This, of course, was a flat out lie. Just a few days earlier Jesus had answered their question about paying taxes with the words, **"Then give to Caesar what is Caesar's, and to God what is God's" (Luke 20:25 - NIV).**
- **"...saying that He Himself is Christ, a King" (v. 2).** Jesus clearly told Pilate that He was a king, but the Gospel of John also records Jesus' explanation, **"My kingdom is not of this world. If My kingdom were of this world, My servants would fight, so that I should not be delivered to the Jews; but now My kingdom is not from here" (John 18:36).**
- Even their last accusation recorded in our text carried no weight and was simply a half truth, **"He stirs up the people, teaching throughout all Judea, beginning from Galilee to this place" (v. 5).** Jesus was **"teaching throughout all Judea"** and His words were **"stirring up the people"**—not to rebellion—but to faith in Him as their Lord and Savior and to turn away from their lives of sin and unbelief.

Obviously, their accusations didn't stick and Pilate said to the council, **"I find no fault in this Man" (v. 4).** Of course, there never was any fault in Jesus, neither civil nor moral. He was the sinless, innocent Son of God Himself. None of the charges that the Jewish leaders accused Jesus of ever stuck. Pilate himself washed his hands of Jesus blood, and in doing so, admitted that he was turning over an innocent man to be crucified.

So why was Jesus crucified? Because, for one, unlike our own natural tendencies, Jesus did not seek to avoid punishment when He was **"accused"**—even though the accusations were false. He went to the cross willingly and without protest or complaint.

The only accusation that stuck was the only one that mattered. Jesus was **"accused"** by His own Heavenly Father. When He looked at His only Son Jesus on that Good Friday and accused Him of committing all the sins of all people for all times while He hung there on the cross, He found Him guilty! Guilty of all sins: Lies, foul language, verbal and physical abuse, hatred, brutality, torture, abortions and murders; lusts, adultery, and all types of sexual perversions; theft, drunkenness, idolatry, and yes, even blasphemies against God Himself. God found Jesus guilty of all these and more!

“Well, that’s just not fair!” we might protest, “Jesus didn’t do *any* of those things!” Thank God it wasn’t “fair.” We did all of those things! God’s justice demands eternal punishment for committing just one of these sins. That price had to be paid. God’s justice had to be served. But instead of taking out that punishment on us, Jesus willingly stepped in and took all of the “**accusations**” of God’s Law upon Himself. The hymn we are about to sing puts it incredibly well:

*The sinless Son of God must die in sadness; The sinful child of man may live in gladness;
Man forfeited his life and is acquitted—God is committed.*
(Hymn 439 v. 5 LSB; Hymn 143 v. 5 TLH)

God declared Jesus guilty and gave Him the punishment of hell itself while He hung on the cross in the three-hour darkness that covered the earth on Good Friday. Thank God that when Jesus was “**accused**” He didn’t cry out, “Not me! Not me!” even though He had every right to; even though He had done nothing wrong—ever! Because of that God now looks at us and we are “**accused**” of nothing. God declares us “Not guilty! Justified! Forgiven, and set free!” Thank you, Jesus! Amen.