

**“Making a Messiah” / Unit 4: Verdicts  
Sermon 2: Their Verdicts / April 7, 2019**

**Key Texts: John 18-19, Matthew 26-27, Mark 14-15, Luke 22-23**

**Key Words: Judas, Annas, Caiaphas, Sanhedrin, Pilate, Reject, Trials, Verdict**

**Summary: We walk through the trials of Jesus and see him rejected 6 times over the course of just a few hours. Their reasons for rejecting him are templates for some of our own. And in the end, our verdict on Jesus will determine God’s verdict on us.**

We’ve been making the case since January. And we’re almost to the coup de grace. Is Jesus really the Messiah, or not? Is he really the Son of God, or not? His audacious claims, His life-altering promises, his outrageous demands ... He was either the most dangerous liar like ... ever. Or the craziest lunatic ... ever. Or he was really was, and is our Messiah, our Savior, and our Lord. And you have to make your call! All of us will have to render our verdict eventually. And here’s the weird thing: According to Jesus, what you do with him will determine what God does with you. My verdict on Jesus will determine God’s verdict on me ... which ... is a really big deal! Because, bottomline: It really doesn’t matter what you guys think of me; in fact, it really doesn’t matter what I think of me; what really matters - what really matters forever is what God thinks of me. And if we could really believe that, life in this world would get a whole lot easier.

So we’re close to the end of the Jesus story ... on earth. Jesus and his disciples have traveled south from Galilee to Jerusalem for the Passover, which was one of the biggest religious festivals in ancient Judaism. The place is packed.

- On Sunday or Monday Jesus rides down the Mount of Olives and up into Jerusalem on the back of a young donkey - the way they expected the Messiah to ride in. Some of the people are stoked! Others are outraged!
- Then Jesus goes into the Temple and starts flipping over tables, and accusing them of desecrating “his house.” “My house,” Jesus says, “will be a house of prayer.” And some of the people were stoked; and others, even more outraged. You see, Jesus was there to pick a fight!

- On Tuesday and Wednesday Jesus goes right back to the Temple, right out in the open: teaching and stirring. His enemies are looking for a way take him down, to take him out. Matthew, and Mark, and Luke record a whole series of these “Controversy Stories.” He’s picking a fight!
- At some point Judas turns. He decides to go over to the dark side, and sell Jesus out. He’s going to tell the authorities when and where they can get to Jesus, with no crowd around to protect him.
- And then, starting with Thursday evening everything slows down. It’s almost blow by blow. We know more about those next 24 hours than about any other 24 hours in history. Multiple accounts - that mesh. Credible eyewitnesses for every piece of the story.
- First, Jesus eats his “Last Supper” with his disciples. It was supposed to be a Passover meal, but Jesus morphs it into something way different ... way bigger, even. He tells them that he is writing the final paragraphs of a new covenant between God and man. Not between God and Israel, but between God and every man, every woman, everywhere, for all time. A new way to do life with God, for God, God’s way. A covenant of grace, purchased by his blood.
- When supper was over, that Thursday evening, he took his disciples to the Mount of Olives, to a place called “Gethsemane” ... to “pray.” Because he knew what was coming next. In fact, he was setting it up. He had come to pick a fight he intended to lose ... for a while ... at least for a couple days. And there in the Garden Jesus prays this incredible prayer: “God, I know what’s coming, and it’s awful! And I’d rather not go through this. But if you want me to, I will.” Have you ever prayed a prayer like that? If you haven’t, I hope you will ... some time.

Well it’s late that Thursday evening, Jesus is praying, and Peter and James and John are dozing, and Judas shows up. This was the time and the place. He shows up with this ... “mob”: Temple soldiers, guards, essentially, a group of thugs recruited by the Chief Priests and the Sanhedrin - which was kind of their Supreme Court. And there in that garden we watch the first rejection of Jesus that night. And it came from one of his own ... with a kiss! Isn’t that amazing! A kiss on his lips, a dagger in his heart! Jesus calls him out: “Judas, you would betray the Son of Man with a kiss?” (Luke 22.48) And you have seen that scene replayed, haven’t you? Maybe you’ve been in that scene, once or twice.

You kiss him with your lips, but with treachery and malice in your heart. God is never fooled by our masks. We look all respectful and honorable on the outside; sometime our hearts are not so pure. And he knows; he always knows.

So, why'd Judas do it? I don't know; we're not sure. Maybe he was disappointed with Jesus. You've been there, you've felt that. Maybe Judas expected Jesus to march into Jerusalem and make things right. After all, he'd seen Jesus still a storm, and heal the sick, and cast out demons, and raise the dead, and feed a whole town with a McDonald's Happy Meal. He had the power! Maybe he expected Jesus to kick out the Romans, and clean out the swamp, and clean up their wall street, and bring justice back to their courts, empty their hospitals, and put a chicken in every pot. And when Jesus didn't ... make things right ... Well, you've been disappointed with Jesus, haven't you? Because Jesus didn't do "Messiah" the way you thought he should. Maybe that's why Judas rejected him. Or ... maybe it was just for the money. There are people that shallow, aren't there?

Anyway, Peter tries to defend Jesus. He actually cuts this guy's ear off. Jesus just scolds him and puts in back. I'm serious it's in there. And then Jesus lets them - he let's them - arrest him. And Peter and James and John, and the others ... they are confused, they are stunned, they are terrified, and they run ... and hide. (John 18.13) So Judas and his thugs take Jesus to the house of Annas. Which is a little weird, it seems, at first. Annas isn't the High Priest any more, but he's kind of like the godfather of Jerusalem. He runs the place ... except for the Romans. He controlled the moneychangers. He controlled the buying and selling of sacrifices in the Temple. Jesus was a threat to his power, and his pocketbook.

He is the second man to reject Jesus that night. First Judas, then Annas. For Judas, maybe he was disillusioned with Jesus. We get that. Or maybe he was just a shallow, greedy jerk. We get that too. For Annas, Jesus was a threat. Jesus was a threat to his money and his power. And Annas loved his money and his power ... even more than he loved his God. And, unfortunately, we get that too, don't we. We've seen it. We've seen people push away Jesus because they love their money and their power way more ... way more ... than they love God. In fact, you've

seen Jesus followers drift away from God because money and power became more important to them than God. And here's the deal, guys: if you want to push Jesus away, you'll find a reason, an excuse. You'll find a way to convince yourselves that he probably really isn't ... God's Messiah, our Savior, our Lord.

(Matthew 26.57) Anyway, after Annas takes his shot at Jesus, he sends Jesus on to Caiaphas, his son-in-law, who was the High Priest at the time. And the Elders and teachers of the law were all there. They kind of made up the core of their "Sanhedrin," which was kind of like the Jewish Supreme Court. And even though they didn't usually meet so late at night, most of them had never had the chance to get so close to Jesus, to isolate him, to pick at him without fear of offending the crowds that were always around him. Now they had the advantage ... they thought. And now they felt that courage that emboldens cowards when they think they have a clear advantage.

Now there are those who try to discredit the accounts of Matthew, and Mark, and Luke, and John. "How do they know what happened that night? How do they know when they weren't there? It's a detailed account. Why should we trust them when none of them were there?" On the other hand, we know that some of those who were there, some of those who part of that Sanhedrin, they became Jesus followers later. Guys like Nicodemus, and Joseph of Arimathea. Do you think they had some stories to tell, some memories that haunted them till the day they died? The details are going to come out when they defect to the early church, aren't they?

Well, most of these guys who are part of the Sanhedrin aren't looking for the truth, they're looking for an excuse. That's actually the way most people are who push Jesus away. They've already made up their minds to kill him, they just have to formulate some charges that will stick. They've got to make it look good, like it's legal, and just, and righteous ... to kill him. Have you been around those kind of guys? I have. People who claim they are looking for the truth, but who are really looking for an excuse. So all these "witnesses" tell about the dastardly things Jesus has said, like when he attacked their temple ... with his tongue.

(Matthew 26.63) But for them it really boiled down to one, big issue. “Okay Jesus, Do you really claim to be the Christ, the Messiah, the Son of God? Yeah, you can work some miracles, and you’re good with words. But do you actually think you’re ... God ... or something? Answer us ... Jesus! Say it out loud!” And they didn’t have a 5<sup>th</sup> Amendment back then. They demanded some self-incrimination. “Spill it out, Jesus! Are you ... he?!” ... And at that moment Jesus held his destiny ... and theirs ... and ours, in his hands. Everybody is leaning in. All of us are leaning in. What is Jesus going to say?

(Mark 14.62) And now it’s time, so he just says it. Guys, you can’t just treat Jesus as a “good man,” or a “great teacher,” and nothing more. He was either the most sinister liar ever, the craziest lunatic ever, or he really was who he claimed to be. Jesus says, “Yeah. I am.” I AM?! Did he just claim to be God himself? The Yahweh, the I AM? Did he? And then he says, “And you will see the Son of Man - you will see me - sitting at the right hand of God himself. And someday you will see me come back riding on the clouds of heaven!” Holy cow! He just out and said it! ... Which is why we only have two viable options: bend your knees, or kill him. Which option do you think they chose?

(Mark 14.63-64) Well, Caiaphas, the High Priest, tore his clothes ... which they figured was an appropriate response to flat-out blasphemy. I know, blasphemy doesn’t bother us nearly as much anymore. We don’t rear our clothes when we hear it. Maybe it should bother us, way more. And when Jesus admitted his ... “guilt,” Caiaphas and his court became the third group to reject Jesus that night. And, I suspect, their motives weren’t all the same.

- Caiaphas was looking for an excuse, a reason to push Jesus away. He had his own box for God; and when Jesus didn’t fit in his little box, he found his excuse to ... crush him. You’ve seen people like that; maybe you’ve been there, done that. You have your mind made up about who you think God is, and not even God will change your mind.
- Or maybe ... maybe they just had too much to lose, like Annas. Maybe it would cost them too much - too much prestige, too much power, too much control, to bend their knees to Jesus. I’m telling you guys, following Jesus requires surrender: absolute,

unconditional surrender ... which is really, really hard for most men. We don't want to surrender to anyone ... even God!

- And I suppose there were others there, other Jewish leaders who just got it wrong. Sometimes good men want to do the right thing, and they get it wrong. We know that 3 days later Jesus walks out of his tomb. And we know that, after that, some of these guys had a real “come to Jesus” moment. Good men, honest men, can get it wrong about Jesus. But at some point, when God's Holy Spirit convicts you of God's truth, and God's righteousness, and God's judgement, I pray you have the wisdom and the humility to bend your knees to Jesus, your Savior, and your Lord.
- And maybe ... probably ... a few of them knew they were doing wrong, but they just kept their mouths shut, and they shouldn't have. Have you ever seen something evil, and you said nothing, and you did nothing? Have you ever felt the guilt and the shame that comes from saying nothing, and doing nothing? Fear can be powerful. Fear can prevent us from doing the right thing. Have you ever seen a man reject Jesus out of fear? He knows the truth, but he won't allow the truth to set him free, because of fear? Any of you right there, right now?

(Mark 14.65) Anyway, they had Jesus blindfolded. And they spit on him, and they beat him, and they mocked him. They spit on the Messiah, they beat their Savior, they mocked our Lord. They spit on God, they beat up the one who had come to die for them, they mocked their only hope. Go figure. ... We still do. ... But they had a problem. They needed Jesus dead, but they didn't have the legal authority to kill him. They needed the Romans for that. So they had a mission, a quest: convince the Roman Governor, a jerk named Pilate, to kill Jesus before the sun went down, Friday night.

(John 18.28) Now this guy named Pilate had been the Governor of Judea for 7 years. His job was to keep the peace, collect taxes, and make sure any threat to Roman power was crushed by any means necessary. And he hated the Jews. He loved antagonizing them; he loved reminding them who had the real power, and who didn't. He hated Jerusalem, so he lived over on the coast. The only reason he was in Jerusalem was because it was the Jewish Passover, and he had to make sure the tens of thousands of people pouring into Jerusalem behaved themselves.

(John 18.29-30) So early Friday morning they take Jesus to Pilate. And he's like, "What's the charge guys? How come you're here at the crack of dawn, trying to get this man dead. And at first they're kind of like, "If this Jesus wasn't dangerous, we wouldn't be here, would we? Do you think we want to be here? Just do your job ... and kill him." But Pilate starts pushing on them, needling them, yanking their chains: "If you have a problem with this guy, you deal with him. If you want him dead, you kill him. And they are like ... This is hard. He's making them grovel. He's making them admit their humiliation. He's wanting them to beg. So they are like: "We can't, kill him, ourselves, legally. We don't have that power." "Ah that's right! You don't! You don't have the right to execute a man in your own country, do you, you little cockroaches!"

(Luke 23.2) So they go deeper. "It's not just us, Pilate, you should want this Jesus dead too! He's telling people they don't have to pay their taxes, he's claiming to be some kind of king ... you know, the kind of guy you're supposed to crush. Are you going to do your job, or not?" Well that gets Pilate's attention, so he takes Jesus inside his palace to question him. Which had to annoy his accusers, because they couldn't follow. They couldn't defile themselves on the eve of a holy day by going into the house of a Gentile. Their hypocrisy was amazing: They are trying to avoid ritual defilement while they are trying to get an innocent man dead! So they had to wait outside, where they couldn't control the conversation inside. And this Jesus was good! Maybe he'd do something or say something that would convince Pilate to let him go. So, they are holding their breath. But Jesus wasn't trying set himself free; he was trying to set us free. He no intention of not dying.

(John 18.33, 36) So Pilate asks Jesus, "Are they right? Are you a King ... are you the King of the Jews? Are you a threat to me, and to Rome?" And Jesus says, "Yeah. I am. I am a King. But I am the not the kind of King you're thinking of. My Kingdom is not of this world, like yours is." And for some reason, Pilate bought it.

(Luke 23.4-5 MSG) So he tells the Jewish leaders, "I'm not going to kill him. I have no reason to kill him. Seems like kind of a harmless fool to me." Which ticks them off. "This guy is stirring up the people! He's disturbing the peace! He's been causing riots all the way from Galilee to

Jerusalem.” They exaggerate a little, because he needing killing, didn’t he? Their disdain for Jesus was righteous, wasn’t it? (Luke 23.6-7) But someone messed up. Someone mentioned he was from Galilee, which was all the out Pilate needed. “Galilee?! That’s out of my jurisdiction. That’s Herod’s. Let Herod deal with him. Cockroaches!”

Now, this Herod was a jerk, too. He was the son of Herod the Great, the guy who tried to have Jesus killed when he was just a tyke, and who rebuilt the Temple in Jerusalem into one of the architectural wonders of the ancient world. When Herod the Great died, some of his sons were given control over some of the territories he governed. And this Herod - the one who got to abuse Jesus next was the Governor of Galilee, and he just happened to be in Jerusalem for the Passover.

(Luke 23.8-11) And Herod was stoked to see Jesus. He’d heard the rumors. He’d heard stories about healings, and exorcisms, and resurrections, and stuff like that. And he kind of wanted a private performance. “Show me your stuff, Jesus! Dazzle me, Jesus! Show me a little David Blaine, or a little David Copperfield. Get some popcorn guys, this might be good!” But Jesus shows him nothing, which annoyed the bejeegers out of Herod. So Herod starts quizzing Jesus, and Jesus says ... nothing. So finally Herod says, “If you won’t play my games, I’ll make you a joke.” A buffoon treating God like a buffoon.

Have you ever seen people like ... Herod? Who laugh at Jesus? Buffoons who treat God like a buffoon? People who refuse to take Jesus seriously at all, who mock him, treat him with contempt? Who treat Jesus, and Jesus followers as circus acts? You’ve seen those guys! And here’s the deal, if Jesus really wasn’t the Messiah, the Son of God, I suppose they are right. If you reject Jesus as your Messiah, your Savior, Your Lord, then he either has to be the most sinister liar ever, or the craziest buffoon ever. But ... what if Jesus really was who he said he was. And what if God really does confirm that ... on Sunday.

Anyway, Herod’s is the 4<sup>th</sup> rejection of Jesus that night. Judas, Annas, the Sanhedrin, Herod. Two more. (Luke 23.13-16) So Herod sends Jesus back to Pilate, and it seems like Pilate is kind of ticked. He calls together all the guys who wanted Jesus dead and he says, “I told you, I don’t think he’s guilty? Herod doesn’t either. So, what if I just beat the

snot out of this Jesus and then just let him go. Would that make you cockroaches happy?” So he had Jesus beaten, flogged, brutalized ... he had his Savior, his Lord beaten, flogged, and brutalized ... the kind of beating that could, in itself, kill a man.

We've never quite seen anything like a Roman flogging. Jesus is stripped, his hands tied above him to a post. One or two soldiers used these “cat of 9 tail” whips: several thongs of leather, onto which pieces of bone, stone, and glass are tied. Beating Jesus from his shoulders to his legs. Bruising, then cutting, then tearing. And when they are done, beating a crown of thorns onto his head, putting a “royal robe” over his shoulders, so they could spit at and mock this so-called King!

And I guess Pilate hopes that's enough ... to satisfy the bloodlust of these cockroaches. Maybe even elicit just a snippet of pity. After all, Jesus is ruined, isn't he? He's been shamed, humiliated, dishonored, disgraced, discredited. He'd probably die from the beating anyway.

(Mark 23.11-14) And this time it is the crowds: the 5<sup>th</sup> rejecters of Jesus that day. We are told that there was a custom back then, whereby the King could pardon a criminal at the feast. Well, Pilate given them an option: Jesus, or this thug named Barabbas. But, Mark says, The leading priests stirred up the crowd - they stirred the crowd -- to demand the release of Barabbas, not Jesus. And when Pilate asked what they wanted him to do with Jesus ... they said, “Kill him, crush him, crucify him!” “Why! He's an innocent man!” But the mob, the crowds, stirred up by these men of power: “Kill him, crush him, crucify him!”

Why did they reject Jesus, even after he was ... ruined, shamed, humiliated, dishonored, disgraced, discredited?

- I think it's possible, maybe even probable, that some of the people in this crowd had been in that other crowd just ... 4 or 5 days before, when Jesus came riding into town on that donkey, stirring up all this excitement - cheering him on, hoping he was really their Messiah. And now, 4 or 5 days later, they are calling for his murder. So meteoric, so fickle! But you've seen something akin to that, haven't you? People who used to honor him as the Savior and their Lord, pushing him away; and sometimes becoming fierce in their

hatred of him. I guess Jesus disappointed them somehow, when he refused to be the kind of God they wanted him to be.

- And it's just as possible that most of these in this crowd were just stooges, plants, lackies for the powerful. How many people have you seen who will do whatever it takes to please and serve the people they worship in place of their God? Have you ever seen a man reject Jesus to please a girl? Or vice versa. Or have you ever seen some guy push Jesus away to get noticed by those who can promote him?

Almost there, one more ... rejection. (John 19.6-8) Pilate tries one more time to set Jesus free: "You take him! I find nothing wrong with him? You kill him, you crucify him!" Can you begin to imagine Pilate's moral bankruptcy? "I think this guy is innocent - maybe a fool, but he's no criminal. If you want this fool dead, you kill him!" And the Jews are like: "But he claims to be ... the Son of God!" "The Son of God!" And now Pilate is getting scared. The Son of God?! Romans had these myths about these sons of the gods - guys like Achilles, Hercules, guys like that. Almost superheroes, super warriors; kind of like Captain America in a kilt. Was this Jesus really ... a threat ... to Rome?

(John 19.9-11) So Pilate questions Jesus one more time. "Who are you, really? Where are you from, really? Answer me! Don't you realize I have power over you? Don't you realize that your life, and your death are in my hands?" And this is so cool. Jesus says, "Really? Really?! Do you think so?"

(John 19.12, 15) And Pilate is scared and confused. And the Jews are like, "If you release this Jesus, you are no friend of Caesar. You are a traitor to Caesar! (Which was a damning accusation!) So crucify him!" And Pilate is like, "Shall I crucify your King?" And this where the accusers reach their lowest low. They said, "We have no king ... but Caesar." Which was way truer than any of them imagined. At that moment, they really did have no King ... but Caesar ... not even God.

(Matthew 27.24, 26) And Pilate washed his hands, as if washing his hands could make him clean. And he said, "I am innocent of this innocent man's blood." As if words could make him clean. And he had Jesus ... crucified. And that was rejection #6: Rejected by a man who was

unwilling to do what he knew was right. To save his own skin? Maybe, probably? But he knew what was right, and he did what was wrong. ... ..

And that's how the second most important day ever unfolded. That's the day they killed our Messiah, our Savior, our Lord ... thank God! An unbelievable 12 hours, or so. Judas, Annas, the Sanhedrin, Herod, the Crowds, and finally Pilate. 6 rejections in about 12 hours! Amazing, isn't it! And for so many different reasons:

- Some, I think, were just disappointed with Jesus. He refused to be the kind of Savior they wanted him to be, so they turned on him.
- For others, it was just greed. Sometimes we love money, we love stuff, way more than we love God.
- For others, Jesus was a threat. He was a threat to their position, their power, their pleasure ... they thought. Jesus just gets in the way, sometimes, doesn't he?
- And sometimes, good men get it wrong, at first. But when they realized he really is who he said he was, eventually they bent their knees.
- And some people pushed Jesus away out of fear, the fear of men. Sometimes we fear the wrong things. It's stupid to fear anything, or anyone, more than God.
- And sometimes - in fact, often, people simply treat Jesus as a joke, a buffoon. ... We'll see ...

But in the end, it really doesn't matter why we push Jesus away, what our excuses are. It all leads to the same place: Doing life without God, living for self, and facing eternity without him. Now ... if Jesus was a liar: I suppose pushing him away is justified. If Jesus was a buffoon: pushing him away makes sense. But if he really is the Messiah, our Savior, our Lord ... do you really think any excuse for pushing him away will cut it?

Little did they know that they were securing their place in history. Judas, Annas, Caiaphas, Herod, Pilate ... We still remember their names. People all over the world still remember their names. There aren't many kids named after them, but our kids will know their names! All of them were trying to make Jesus a footnote in their own little stories. But all of them - all of them -- became a footnote in his! All of them thought they were putting Jesus on trial. Little did they know that, in

reality, they were the ones on trial, that their verdict on Jesus would fix their path into eternity.

As with us. For every one of us, our verdict on Jesus will determine how our story unfolds, and how our story ends. God the Father requires us to render a verdict, on Jesus his Son ... which will determine his verdict, on us.