

“Broken Justice”

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The stories seem to make the headlines each and every day. But no matter how many times we hear them or read about them, they always bother us. We have a hard time dealing with injustice.

The sense of outrage over injustice normally increases with the seriousness of the injustice, though truthfully even for adults we're typically more concerned about injustices we've suffered than about those endured by others. Still, we know when something isn't fair. We worry about people being wrongly accused and being made to pay a price for something they didn't do.

But what makes gets us even angrier is when someone gets away with murder or for some reason escapes prosecution. We hate injustice.

A sense of outrage over injustice is one of the things that makes the whole Passion story of Jesus so troubling. The whole, sad story is nothing but a series of gross injustices. It's hopelessly and profoundly unfair. Jesus came willingly to earth and to suffer and die that all people might live, but even His closest friends and His enemies didn't accept this gift and were totally unjust. Since we're talking about broken justice, who exactly was unjust?

Judas. Judas walked with Jesus for three years and had stood at His side and listened to Him preach and saw how He cared for the people around Him. Judas was known as the treasurer of the disciples. He had control of the funds and made sure everything was taken care of.

We don't know if there was something Jesus said or did that caused Judas to want to stop His ministry by betraying Him or if he just had a desire to meet his own wants. Judas' betrayal was a pivotal point in having the whole story fall into place.

Peter. For all Jesus had done for him, it's incredible Peter would deny even knowing Jesus. And he did it three times! It was Jesus Who pulled Peter out of the water when he started to sink. It was Jesus Who named Peter as one of His closest disciples. Because of this, Peter got to see so much more than many of the disciples. But in that moment of questioning, Peter put his own skin ahead of his Savior, Jesus Christ and denied knowing Him.

Sanhedrin. The Sanhedrin was the ruling body of the people of Israel. They had strict rules that had to be followed in any criminal trial, and they made an effort to keep *some* of them. They tried to get a quorum together, and they did their best to wait until daylight to pass a death sentence because that was the rule.

They had an agenda that wasn't centered on justice but their control of the people. Jesus was a problem to be eliminated. The plan was simple. They only had to convict Him of some false teaching or blasphemy, but they couldn't even find two witnesses to agree on a common charge! The sentence of the Sanhedrin was unjust. Jesus wasn't guilty of any crime, much less a crime deserving death. Yet, He was condemned.

Pilate. The miscarriage of justice gets even worse with Pilate. The Roman governor got dragged into the mess because Rome liked to remind the locals who actually had the power. While the Sanhedrin was given control to rule and enforce their laws, they couldn't practice capital punishment.

They needed Pilate to sign off on their death sentence. Pilate wasn't stupid though. He knew what was going on, and recognized the Jewish leaders had a different motive

other than the desire for justice. At least twice, Pilate specifically declares: *“this man has done nothing wrong”*. He knew that Jesus was absolutely innocent. Justice demanded, therefore, that Jesus be released.

But in the face of their pressure, he caved. He knew what was right and just didn't do it. He chose injustice over justice. It was wrong. In spite of his training in the law, he failed.

Who else seems to be unjust? **God!** The accusation of injustice is leveled not at the Sanhedrin or Pilate, but at God. Jesus is the Only man who ever lived, fulfilled God's Will, and kept the Law perfectly. He didn't deserve to die, but He did because God the Father allowed it.

While we might see a lot of injustice happening Jesus' final week, the fact is that, at the heart of it, what happened on Good Friday set one final standard of justice:

divine justice, **God's** justice.

It's true that Jesus hadn't done anything to deserve the sentence of death, much less the terrible death of crucifixion. Jesus was perfect. He never fell short of God's Will. He didn't deserve to die, but He did. And that death was actually part of God's eternal, just plan.

St. Paul helps us understand God's justice, *“God made Him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in Him we might become the righteousness of God.”* That verse is extraordinary! It makes extremely clear the working of God's plan. God did it for us in love!

As Jesus took the world's sins on Himself, He became the sin-bearer. The sins of all were put on Him, and He was driven outside the community and cut off in the absolute wilderness of hell itself.

We may hate the injustice that we see at work in the world. But we can all rejoice that because of His perfect love and incredible mercy, God chooses not to give us justice. The truth is because of our failures and sins, we deserve hell.

But, because of love, Jesus gets hell and we get eternal joy and honor. Luther called it the *“blessed exchange”*. It's pure grace and it's the reason we're here rejoicing for God's goodness to us. By every standard, Jesus' death was a sham of human justice, but by God's standard it was a perfect satisfaction of holy and divine justice.

The system of justice wasn't broken after all. It was working perfectly all along. The cross was the restoration of justice. It set all things right again. And because the cross worked God's justice, you receive restoration. You're forgiven and united with God again. You're made just. That's the amazing justice of your loving God!