

The Scandal of Easter

BIG IDEA– the innocent (Jesus) willingly dies in the place of the guilty who are set free

1. Intro

- It seems like all of Australia is talking cricket at the moment
 - Not because we are thrashing the South Africans or Steve Smith has just hit a gazillion runs ...
 - But because of the scandal that erupted last weekend that involved Steve Smith, David Warner and Cameron Bancroft hatching a plan to roughen up the surface of the ball using sandpaper to try to get it to swing
 - And it seems most of Australia is outraged by this
- The newspapers, politicians, former players, twitter, Facebook ... everyone is expressing their disappointment and disgust that our national cricketers would resort to cheating to try and win a test match
 - “It’s just not cricket!”
- After the initial shock and outrage ... the conversation has turned to what penalties should be imposed
 - People want to see that justice is done ... and this incident is not just swept under the carpet
 - It seems CA has done just that ... imposing 12 month bans for Smith and Warner and 9mths for Bancroft
- There’s much we can say about how people have reacted to this incident ...
 - But one thing it highlights is that we quite rightly value justice in our society
 - We’re scandalised when justice is not upheld ... and we applaud when justice is done
- The message of Easter is one of the greatest scandals of human history ... because it details the greatest injustice ever done
- And if we’re outraged by something as trivial as a game of cricket ... then you definitely need to come to terms with the scandal of Easter
 - Because not only was there a great injustice that first Good Friday 2000 years ago that ought to outrage all of us
 - But the shocking thing is that God would deliberately allow such an injustice to happen for the benefit of you and I

- And so if you're a person whose moral standards means you're scandalised by injustice and you want to see justice triumph ... then you need to understand the scandal of Easter
 - Because without it ... you'd be condemned by the very same moral standards of justice that you value
- This morning I want us to look at the Scandal of Easter under two headings
 - The Innocent Condemned
 - The Guilty Set free
- As we do ... I pray you'll see how the
 - Injustice that Jesus endures
 - Saves us from the justice you and I should endure

2. The Innocent Condemned

- Day of the Passover
- Jesus has
 - shared last meal with his disciples
 - gone to the garden of Gethsemane to pray because he knows what's about to unfold
- One of his disciples Judas has accepted 30 silver coins from the religious leaders to betray him
- Jesus faced a kangaroo court that condemned him of blasphemy
- Yet because the Jews were under Roman rule, they had no authority to execute Jesus ... only the Roman Governor, Pontius Pilate could do this
- And so, the religious leaders quickly arrange for Jesus to be sent to Pilate

- **Judas**
- When the implications of Judas' betrayal of Jesus hit home, suddenly Judas is filled with remorse
 - He regrets what he did and tries to unravel the situation
 - He thinks by handing back the money, the deal with the religious leaders can be called off and Jesus released
 - But it's too late
- And even though he betrayed Jesus, Judas declares in v4 that Jesus is innocent
 - He knows Jesus
 - He's sat under his teaching and leadership for three years
 - He knows exactly what Jesus is like
 - He knows it's only because of his own wickedness and the wickedness the religious leaders that Jesus has been condemned

- **Chief Priests & Elders**

- Of course, the chief priests and elders also knew Jesus was innocent
- Not only did they use false evidence and false witnesses to condemn him ... they had to resort to bribing Judas to have Jesus arrested
- And so when Judas throws their money back at them ... their response reveals their hearts and condemns them
- They say in v6
 - *"It is against the law to put this into the treasury, since it is blood money."*
 - In other words, they admit the money was a bribe to bring Jesus down
- Of course the great hypocrisy is
 - They're more concerned with keeping the Law about what they do or don't do with the money
 - Than they are with what the Law has to say about false witnesses and murder
- Despite knowing Jesus is innocent ... they carry on with their plot to kill him

- **Pilate & His Wife**

- The same is true for Pilate and his wife
- When the soldiers brought Jesus to Pilate he questions him
 - v14 - "Are you the king of the Jews?"
 - "Yes, it is as you say," Jesus replied
- However, when the religious authorities level their accusations at him he remains silent
- Pilate quickly realises there's no basis for charges against Jesus for 'he knew it was out of envy they had handed Jesus over to him'
- He too knew Jesus was innocent
- He even remonstrated with the crowd who wanted him to crucify him saying
 - "Why? What crime has he committed?"
- Now ... while Pilate was deliberating on what to do with Jesus ... Pilate's wife has a dream
- So she sends Pilate a message telling him
 - "Have nothing to do with that innocent man."
 - Pilate's wife confirmed what he already knew – that Jesus had done nothing wrong
- But Pilate was crowd pleaser
 - His reign as the governor of Judea was on tender hooks

- He was at pains to ensure those in authority above him thought he was doing a good job
- The last thing he wanted was a rebellion or word getting back to Rome that he wasn't able to control the Judeans
- So ...
 - *'When he saw that he was getting nowhere, but that instead an uproar was starting, he took water and washed his hands in front of the crowd. "I am innocent of this man's blood,"*
- Despite what he knew to be true ... he gave into the religious leaders and the crowd and handed him over to be crucified
 - Washing his hands of the crowd's insistence that an innocent man be condemned
- **Implication**
- Judas, the religious leaders, Pilate's wife and Pilate himself were all enemies of Jesus ... but they all knew he was innocent
- And yet ... all of them played their part in condemning Jesus to death on the cross
- **Illustration**
- At the end of WWII when it was revealed that 6 million Jews had been killed in concentration camps ... how did the world respond?
 - Outrage!
- Why?
 - Because of the injustice of innocent people dying at the hands of those who knew they were innocent and yet carried on with their evil plot regardless
- **Application**
- We quite rightly value justice
 - And we're outraged when we see injustice ... particularly when a person is accused and condemned for something for which they're innocent
- Yet ... Jesus Christ
 - the Son of God
 - one who was without sin
 - perfect, holy and righteous
 - was condemned to die on a cross
- It was a scandal!

3. The Guilty is Set Free

- But that not the greatest scandal of Easter
- The greatest scandal is not that the innocent is condemned ...
- The real scandal that the guilty is set free

- When Pilate is questioning Jesus, it becomes clear Jesus is innocent ... but it's also clear that the religious leaders and the crowd want Jesus dead
- So Pilate comes up with a plan that he thinks will get him off the hook
- Matthew tells us in v15 it was the custom of the governor during the Passover festival to release a prisoner chosen by the crowd
- So he brings out Barabbas
 - The other gospels tell us that Barabbas was an insurrectionist and a murderer
 - That is, he was part of a failed rebel coup to overthrow the Romans government
 - And so he's been justly imprisoned awaiting execution for treason and murder

- Matthew also tells us in v16 that Barabbas was a 'notorious prisoner'
 - It seems Pilate chose him because he was the worst of the prisoners
 - And his hope is that by pitting Jesus against Barabbas ... they'd all come to their senses and realise how irrational and immoral they were ... and how it would be absolute lunacy to free the worst of criminals while at the same time condemning the innocent

- But that's just what they did
 - Spurred on by the religious leaders, the crowds cry out for Barabbas to be set free and Jesus be crucified
- And when Pilate responds
 - "Why? What crime has he committed?" asked Pilate. But they shouted all the louder, "Crucify him!"

- And so Pilate
 - Fails to fulfill his duty as governor and judge
 - He overlooks the evidence ... and allows his desire for popularity and acceptance to prevent him from doing what he knows is right
- And so Barabbas, the guilty ... is set free!

- How outrageous is that!

- Pilate would prefer a man who has murdered and tried to overthrow his own government to be set free ... purely for political gain
- It's a scandal!
- And if the Jerusalem Daily Mail had been reporting on it ... it would have been front page news
- If this had happened in today's world, Ray Hadley and Alan Jones would have would've been calling it an 'outrage' the next day on the radio
- There is no justice is there?
 - An innocent man is knowingly condemned
 - And a guilty man is knowingly set free
 - It's crazy
- Can you imagine how Barabbas would have felt that morning, when he got dragged out of his cell and put before the crowd with Jesus and Pilate ... and all of a sudden he gets this glimmer of hope that he might be released!
 - How his heart would have started to race
 - How he might of started to dream or imagine the possibility of him not going to the cross himself
- And then the crowd starts shouting his name to be released ... and then they start calling out for Jesus to be crucified instead
- And when Pilate gave the order for Jesus to be crucified ... instantly Barabbas would have realised ... he was free!
- Can you imagine the look on Barabbas' face and what might have been going through his mind when that verdict was announced?
 - Knowing that he was guilty and fully deserving of death
 - And seeing Jesus ... a man declared innocent by the judge ... and knowing Jesus was going to go to the cross in his place!?
- I can only imagine it was a look of disbelief and wonder and awe
- Barabbas had been saved from certain death
 - He was like a smoldering stick plucked from the fire
 - Because Jesus Christ would go to the cross in his place
 - Jesus would die the death Barabbas should have died
 - Christ's death in his place meant he was set free
- Because of Jesus
 - Barabbas doesn't get the death he deserves
 - Instead he gets the life he didn't deserve
- Why?
 - Because the innocent dies in the place of the guilty

Application

- Friends, I hope you feel the weight of that
- Because in case you didn't realise it ... you and I are Barabbas

- Now you and I may not be guilty of murder & rebellion like Barabbas ...
 - But we're all guilty turning our backs on God
 - We all know in our hearts ... that we've failed to love God and love our neighbour
- Sure ... we have our good moments where we'll show love and kindness to people from time to time
- But the honesty of it is ...
 - There's lots of things we've done that we shouldn't have
 - There's lots of things we should have done but we didn't
 - Steve Smith would acknowledge that that is true
- We are flawed individuals ... and we fall short of who we want to be ... let alone who God calls us to be
- The Bible calls that sin ... and our sin is what alienates us from God

- Now here's the problem
- If we believe in justice ... and we rile against injustice ... then that means you and I must also face justice for what we've done
- If we ...
 - want justice to come to those who cheat in test match cricket
 - want justice to come to the person who king hits another in a bar
 - want justice to come when a politician is found to be corrupt
 - want justice to come to the person who rips you off
- If that's true ... then by our very **own standards** ... we know that that we must too must face justice with God
- And it would be a great injustice for us to get off scot free for our sin

- We'd be hypocrites to demand justice to come to others ... and not expect justice to come to us
- Likewise, we'd be hypocrites to call for justice in this world ... and not expect there to be justice for the world to come

- And so, the uncomfortable truth is ... because God is perfect and pure and righteous ... he **will** act justly
 - And the Bible tells us that the just punishment for sin is death¹

¹Rom 6:23 – the wages of sin is death

- But the story of Barabbas teaches us ... that Jesus Christ has saved from that death
 - Because Jesus Christ would go to the cross in our place
 - Jesus would die the death you and I should die
 - Christ's death in our place means we are set free
- The great exchange that occurs between Jesus and Barabbas is in effect the great exchange Jesus does for all of us
- Because of Jesus
 - we don't get the death we deserve
 - we get the life we don't deserve
- Why?
 - Because the innocent dies in the place of the guilty
- In other words, our flaws are not fatal ... our failures are not final ... and there can be hope for our futures
- 1 Peter 3:18
 - *For Christ died for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God.*
- Friends that's what the Bible calls 'grace'
 - Grace is getting what you and I don't deserve
 - Grace is when you and I deserve God's justice ... but that justice falls on Jesus instead
- We sang about this in our first song this morning
 - *This is amazing grace,*
 - *This is unfailing love*
 - *That You would take my place,*
 - *That You would bear my cross.*
 - *You would lay down Your life*
 - *That I would be set free.*

4. Conclusion

- Nathan Tasker is an Australian song writer ... he wrote this song 'Call me Barabbas'
- In it he sings this
 - So call me Barabbas 'cause that's who I am
 - All I deserve has been given to Him

The guilty set free, the innocent must die
A lifetime of sin is all that I know
I should've been killed but Jesus let me go
And I can't forget the death of that Man
It set free Barabbas, and that's who I am
○ So call me forgiven 'cause that's who I am
all I deserve has been given to Him
the guilty set free the innocent must die
a lifetime of love is all that I know
I should've been killed by Jesus let me go
and I can't forget the death of that Man
it set free Barabbas and that's who I am.

- The great scandal of Easter is that Jesus Christ would die on a cross in the place of Barabbas ... the innocent for the guilty
- But an even greater scandal ... would be if you and I ...
 - being people who believe in justice and
 - knowing that we deserve to face God's justice
- Would be willing to face God's justice on our own ... rather than allow Jesus to take face it for us

- But if you are willing to turn to Christ
 - If you willing to turn and make Jesus Christ your Lord ... then he will also become your saviour
 - Because like Barabbas ... when you look to Jesus ... you know that he went to the cross in your place
 - And because the innocent dies ... you the guilty ... can go free

PRAY