

JESUS: THE SERVANT AT WORK

VOLUME THREE

STUDY FIFTEEN

Who's on Trial Here?

Mark 15:1–5; Luke 23:1–12

When you look at it theologically, Jesus wasn't judged by the Sanhedrin or Pilate or Herod Antipas, or the crowd that screamed, "Crucify Him!" They were judged by Him.

—Pastor Charles R. Swindoll

S*OMETHING* within us craves justice.

We feel relief when a teacher silences a bully who's berating other students. When a detective solves a crime and the police nab the thief. Or when the judicial system removes the handcuffs from the wrists of an innocent person.

We recoil, however, when we hear that an innocent, defenseless person was mistreated and abused. Accounts of injustice are difficult to read. That's why the account of Jesus' unjust treatment is so upsetting.

Each step in Jesus' journey to the cross has been agonizing. His rejection, betrayal, abandonment, and arrest were the first sips of the bitter cup of sin that, in Gethsemane, He said He would drink.

After His arrest came the trials—prosecutions that violated every code in the Jewish and Roman judicial systems. He stood alone as members of the Sanhedrin shouted their verdict, "Guilty! . . . He deserves to die!" (Mark 14:64), and then circled Him like ravenous beasts, spitting at Him, blindfolding Him, and beating Him. Oh, the brutality . . . but this was just the beginning.

In the passage for this *Searching the Scriptures* Bible study, we'll watch Jesus face His judges with calm courage. In reality, however, He wasn't on trial before them; they were the ones on trial. He is the Holy One who alone is qualified to judge. His response to His accusers was remarkable. He faced injustice with faith in God's plan and a kind of divine peace that He makes available to us when we must endure our own injustices.



INSIGHT FOR LIVING



Scan to listen to
Chuck's message.

The Bible-Teaching Ministry of Chuck Swindoll
Study 15 • Page 1

SEARCHING
THE
SCRIPTURES
BIBLE STUDIES

Who's on Trial Here?

Mark 15:1–5; Luke 23:1–12



PREPARE YOUR HEART

“Never stop praying” (1 Thessalonians 5:17). Below, release your anxious thoughts at the feet of your Savior. Receive His sure provision of abundant joy, inexplicable peace, supernatural strength, and godly wisdom.



TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

No single gospel writer included all the details of Jesus' trials, so we must weave together the accounts for a complete tapestry. Jesus was never once proven guilty, only judged as guilty—ironically, by those who were themselves guilty.

Jesus' first trial was before Annas at about 2 a.m. Then at approximately 3 a.m., Annas sent Jesus to Caiaphas and members of the Jewish council, or Sanhedrin, assembled at Caiaphas' house. They pronounced Jesus guilty and then beat Him mercilessly. Finally, sunrise put an end to their cruel sport, and they hauled Jesus to the Chamber of Hewn Stone at the temple area for His third trial—which is where we pick up the account in this study.



Observation: Jesus Before the Sanhedrin, Pilate, and Herod

The previous study included two helpful charts—“Gethsemane to Golgotha” and “The Trials of Jesus.” You may wish to refer to these charts as you read about the remaining trials that led to Jesus' execution.

The Sanhedrin on Trial Before Jesus—Mark 15:1; Luke 22:66–23:1

Enter the courtroom of the Sanhedrin as an observer and read the proceedings in [Mark 15:1](#) and [Luke 22:66–23:1](#).¹

Who's on Trial Here?

Mark 15:1–5; Luke 23:1–12

To issue a formal verdict, the council had to convene during daylight hours in their official chamber. However, it was all for show—a contrived attempt to stamp a measure of legitimacy on their illegal nighttime trial at Caiaphas' house. What did Mark and Luke write in regard to the time of day? Why meet so early? Why the rush? What do you observe in their questions and Jesus' answers?

The Sanhedrin had seventy-one men, thirty-five on each side in the court with the high priest presiding in front. Their jurisdiction was limited to Judea, and they could rule only on matters of Jewish law. The purpose of this charade was to officially convict Jesus of blasphemy, sentence Him to die, and decide how to persuade the Roman authorities to execute Him—for Roman law prohibited the Sanhedrin from executing prisoners.

What a statement Jesus said in front of this assembly! And that lit their fire. They said, "Are You the Son of God, then?" Now this is His moment to move away from pressure. But look at the calm courage of Jesus. And He said, "Yes, I am." —Pastor Chuck Swindoll

Pilate on Trial Before Jesus—Matthew 27:11–26; Mark 15:1–15

Matthew mirrored Mark's account of Jesus' trial before Pilate (Jesus' fourth trial). Read the two accounts side by side and, in the chart below, write your observations of the events as each writer describes them. Note the similarities and particularly note the key details that Matthew added, which were not found in Mark.

Jesus' Trial Before Pilate in Matthew and Mark	
<i>Matthew 27:11–26</i>	<i>Mark 15:1–15</i>

Who's on Trial Here?

Mark 15:1–5; Luke 23:1–12

Did you notice that Pilate never declared Jesus guilty? On what basis did Pilate sentence Jesus to die by crucifixion? What was the real reason for Pilate's judgment?

*Pilate's whole life is a muddle of self-serving pandering to the public's interest. He gets confronted by One in whom he can find no fault, talking truth. And he's in a jam. Not only does he realize the man is innocent, he realizes Jesus has answers he himself does not have. So what does he do? It is his responsibility to call the verdict, but he says to the crowd, "You people decide."
—Pastor Chuck Swindoll*

Herod on Trial Before Jesus—Luke 23:1–12

Luke recounts Pilate sending Jesus to Herod Antipas (Jesus' fifth trial). Read [Luke 23:1–12](#). Herod Antipas was the corrupt tetrarch of Galilee and Perea. He was the drunken ruler who ordered John the Baptist's execution (Mark 6:14–29). By sending Jesus to Herod, what did Pilate hope would happen? Describe what occurred in this trial before Herod. Why do you think Jesus remained silent?

You don't answer a fool. Jesus knew no answer would satisfy or would bring Herod to faith. And so, Herod, who could have simply said, "Send Him back to Pilate," decided to insult Him. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll

After Herod was finished with Jesus, he sent Him back to Pilate (Jesus' sixth and final trial). Now, imagine Pilate—who thought he had gotten rid of Jesus—seeing Jesus walking through the door, mockingly dressed like a king! What was Pilate to do with Jesus? What additional information about Pilate's interactions with Jesus do you find in John's longer account in [John 18:28–19:16](#)?

Who's on Trial Here?

Mark 15:1–5; Luke 23:1–12

Pilate's wife thought, Out of sight, out of mind. Wash your hands and walk away. That will never remove our accountability. The only way to find relief, however, is through faith in Christ. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Interpretation: Who's on Trial Here?

In the opening line, Mark stated the theme of his gospel: “This is the Good News about Jesus the Messiah, the Son of God” (Mark 1:1). Through His miracles and teaching, Jesus proved Himself to be the Messiah, the Son of God. Throughout Mark's account, the central issue was faith. Would people accept or reject Jesus, believe or not believe?

The issue of faith came to a climax in the highest court of the Jews when Jesus declared His identity to the Sanhedrin. They asked, “So You are the Son of God?” He replied, “You say correctly that I am” (Luke 22:70 NASB). What's the significance of Jesus' answer? What choice did the religious leaders have? What was at stake? Who's really on trial here?

Jesus then stood before Pilate, who was also faced with the same faith decision. Deepen your understanding of Pilate by turning to the comments on Mark 15 in Pastor Chuck's commentary *Insights on Mark* or by consulting *Constable's Notes* at netbible.org. Describe Pilate's character and political problems. What was at stake if he believed in Jesus? Who's on trial here?

Pilate was heavy-handed and anti-Semitic. He lusted for celebrity status. He put his career before principle and people. Ultimately when the riots continued, Caesar removed him. Tradition has it that he took his own life by hanging. This was the man sitting in judgment over Jesus. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll

Who's on Trial Here?

Mark 15:1–5; Luke 23:1–12

Jesus also stood before Herod Antipas, the morally bankrupt king who married his brother's wife and who ordered the decapitation of John the Baptist. Read the section "Antipas and Jesus" at the end of the article "[Herod](#)" in the *Encyclopedia of the Bible* at biblegateway.com. What's your impression of Herod's character? What did dressing Jesus in "a royal robe" to mock Him before Pilate reveal about Herod's heart? What was at stake if he believed in Jesus? Who's on trial here?



Correlation: The Righteous Mistreated by the Unrighteous

Jesus' followers still endure injustice today. What do you discover from Jesus' response to unfair treatment when you compare the gospel accounts with [1 Peter 2:18–25](#)?



Application: You and Me Standing Before Jesus

Think about Jesus' unjust sufferings. How does His attitude toward unjust suffering challenge the way you think about and react to unfair treatment?

What has the Holy Spirit taught you about your own heart as you observe the power-thirsty Sanhedrin in their unjust trials of Jesus?

Who's on Trial Here?

Mark 15:1–5; Luke 23:1–12

Keep this in mind: they were power-mad, arrogant religionists. They were not redeemed. They were threatened by Jesus exposing the hypocrisy in their actions and the deception in their motives. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll

Herod was only interested in himself. How can you guard your heart against caring more about yourself and what people think than what is right?

Pilate tried to wash his hands of Jesus' innocent blood when he sentenced Jesus to die. Ironically, it was the same innocent blood that could have cleansed his own heart from sin. From Mark's account of Pilate, what lessons do you glean for your own spiritual life?

On the cross, Jesus bore the sins of everyone in the world, including the sins of those who sent Him to the cross. Jesus loved His enemies enough to die for them. As you close this study, think of those you know who have been pushing Christ away. Take some time to pray for them, that their hearts will soften toward Jesus, the One who loves them more than they could ever know.



A FINAL PRAYER

Heavenly Father, as Your Son entrusted His case into Your hands, I entrust my life into Your hands. Help me to be totally devoted to You and to live my life to please You. In Jesus' name, I pray. Amen.

ENDNOTE

1. To learn more about Pastor Chuck Swindoll's *Searching the Scriptures* Bible-study method, go to the web page "[How Does Pastor Chuck Swindoll Study the Bible?](https://www.insight.org/how-does-pastor-chuck-swindoll-study-the-bible)" at [insight.org](https://www.insight.org).

For the 2027 broadcasts, this *Searching the Scriptures* Bible study was developed by Mirlenda Noëlliste in collaboration with Bryce Klabunde, vice president of *Searching the Scriptures* Ministries, based upon the original outlines, charts, and transcripts of Charles R. Swindoll's messages. Copyright © 2011, 2026 by Charles R. Swindoll, Inc. All rights are reserved worldwide. Duplication of copyrighted material for commercial use is strictly prohibited.

[insight.org](https://www.insight.org)

Insight for Living
Study 15 • Page 7

[illegible]