

“An Innocent Man!”

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Imagine yourself in Jerusalem over 2000 years ago. Josephus, the notable Jewish historian, estimated that over two million people were there for the great Passover Feast. These people from all over the world flooded into the city to observe the Passover.

Open to John 12. Lots of people jammed the streets of the city, getting ready to celebrate. But as they prepared to observe one of the most important feasts the Jewish people celebrated all year, word came that Jesus was on His way into the city. The crowd gathered as Jesus rode into the city on the colt of a donkey and they begin to wave palm branches and shout their welcome to Jesus.

Look at verses 13-15, *“So they took branches of palm trees and went out to meet him, crying out, “Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord, even the King of Israel!” And Jesus found a young donkey and sat on it, just as it is written, “Fear not, daughter of Zion; behold, your king is coming, sitting on a donkey’s colt!”* These people were excited to see Jesus because they had heard so much about Him. How He taught, the miracles He did, and the people He healed. Many of them believed in Him as the Messiah and the Son of God!

But not everyone was excited! There were people who wanted to get rid of Jesus and some of the people around Him! Look at verses 9-11, *“When the large crowd of the Jews learned that Jesus was there, they came, not only on account of him but also to see Lazarus, whom he had raised from the dead. So the chief priests made plans to put Lazarus to death as well, because on account of him many of the Jews were going away and believing in Jesus.”*

The Pharisees and the Chief Priests were angry! Jesus had become the center of attention and had disrupted their hold on the people. They had to get rid of Him! So they arrested Him and began to put Him on trial!

Open to Luke 22. When Jesus appeared before the Council of the church the hatred they had for Him was evident. Look at verses 67-71, *“If you are the Christ, tell us.” But he said to them, “If I tell you, you will not believe, and if I ask you, you will not answer. But from now on the Son of Man shall be seated at the right hand of the power of God.” So they all said, “Are you the Son of God, then?” And he said to them, “You say that I am.” Then they said, “What further testimony do we need? We have heard it ourselves from his own lips.”* It was obvious to them that as far as they were concerned Jesus was guilty! But there was one problem, they didn’t have the power or right to put Him to death! So they were going to have to take Him to Pilate, the Roman governor.

But that’s where the problems start! Jesus was guilty in their eyes and by their rules, but the non-Jewish rulers didn’t see it the same way! When Jesus first appeared before Pilate, the Jewish leaders thought it was a clear-cut case, but look at Luke 23:3-4, *“And Pilate asked him, “Are you the King of the Jews?” And he answered him, “You have said so.” Then Pilate said to the chief priests and the crowds, “I find no guilt in this man.”*

As far as Pilate was concerned, Jesus was innocent. But the leaders hated Him so much they had to find a way to have Jesus be put to death. When they told Pilate Jesus was a Galilean, Pilate breathed a sigh of relief and sent Him to King Herod, another non-Jew.

Herod was excited to see Jesus and really wanted to see Him perform a miracle for Him. In the 70’s musical, *“Godspell”*, Herod said to Jesus, *“So You are the Christ, You’re the great Jesus Christ. Prove to me that You’re no fool, walk across my swimming pool.”* But Herod didn’t want to have any trouble with the angry leaders, so He had Jesus mocked and made fun of and sent Him back to Pilate because He didn’t see anything in Jesus that made Him guilty! As far as he was concerned, Jesus was innocent!

Look what happened then in verses 13-15, *“Pilate then called together the chief priests and the rulers and the people, and said to them, “You brought me this man as one who was misleading the people. And after examining him before you, behold, I did not find this man guilty of any of your charges against him. Neither did Herod, for he sent him back to us. Look, nothing deserving death has been done by him. I will therefore punish and release him.”*”

But the Jewish leaders weren't satisfied, they wanted Jesus dead! They demanded that Jesus be crucified. They even said they were willing to have Barabbas, a convicted murderer, back on the street so Jesus could be crucified! Pilate couldn't understand and said in verses 22-24, *“A third time he said to them, “Why, what evil has he done? I have found in him no guilt deserving death. I will therefore punish and release him.” But they were urgent, demanding with loud cries that he should be crucified. And their voices prevailed. So Pilate decided that their demand should be granted.”* Pilate sent Jesus to be crucified even though he saw Him as an innocent man!

As Jesus hung on the cross, another person saw Him as innocent, one of the thieves being crucified right next to Him. Look what he said to the other criminal about Jesus in verses 40-41, *“But the other rebuked him, saying, “Do you not fear God, since you are under the same sentence of condemnation? And we indeed justly, for we are receiving the due reward of our deeds; but this man has done nothing wrong.”* This criminal also proclaimed Jesus innocent!

There was one more person in this story that saw Jesus as innocent, the centurion who was present for the crucifixion. As Jesus breathed His last, look at verse 47 to see what the centurion said, *“Now when the centurion saw what had taken place, he praised God, saying, “Certainly this man was innocent!”*”

Jesus was an innocent man! He came to earth to suffer in our place! He took the punishment we deserved for our sins! This Palm Sunday and every day, proclaim your faith in Jesus Christ as your Savior and Lord! The world around you will not see Jesus as anyone special, but you know the truth!

May the words of Jesus proclaimed to the criminal who showed faith in Him, also be the words He proclaims to you, *“Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in Paradise!”* What a Savior! What grace! What a blessing!