

Week of February 26-March 3

RAILROADED

Scripture Reading: Read Mark Chapter 14

In today's Scripture reading (as well as tomorrow's), you'll have the opportunity to see Mark's take on the arrest and trial of Jesus. You'll walk with Jesus in Gethsemane, view Judas' betrayal and witness Jesus' arrest. You'll see Jesus taken to the high priest, appear before the Sanhedrin to be tried, and be brought to Pilate, the Roman governor, who gave the order to be executed by crucifixion.

What you may not see, however, is the fact that many laws were broken along the way to accomplish this end. Jesus was railroaded! The term, "railroaded" means to convict (a person) in a hasty manner by means of false charges or insufficient evidence. Bible teacher, Don Stewart, explains that at least eight violations occurred: 1) **There was no possibility of a fair trial** - The high priest and the religious leaders had already plotted ahead of time to kill Jesus. They were not examining Jesus as impartial judges but as prejudiced opponents. 2) **A capital trial at night was illegal** - When a potential death penalty was considered, the trial could only be held during the day. 3) **The religious leaders should not have looked for witnesses after the trial started** - According to Jewish law, the witnesses should have come forward first and then the trial would be held. 4) **The religious leaders should not have looked for false witnesses** - Even though looking for witnesses was wrong, looking for false witnesses was out of the question if the accused was to have a fair trial. 5) **The false witnesses should have been punished** - They violated one of the Ten Commandments and, according to Deuteronomy 19, they should have received the punishment they intended for the one they falsely accused. 6) **The judgment should have been delayed till the next day** - They pronounced judgment immediately but according to Jewish law, they should have waited at least one day. 7) **There was not supposed to be a trial on the day before the Sabbath or before Holy Days** - Since a verdict in a crime that deserves the death penalty must be delayed one day, it was illegal to try someone the day before the Sabbath or Holy Day since the verdict couldn't be rendered on one of those days. 8) **They never truly considered Jesus' testimony** - Under oath, Jesus claimed to be the Messiah. The religious leaders, who should have been impartial, never considered the possibility that he was telling the truth. Also, no witnesses on his behalf were given. When Jesus was brought before Pilate, he initially found him not guilty. In fact, according to the gospel of John, three times, Pilate declared that he found no basis for a charge against him. Pilate knew the charges were trumped up and not based in truth. Unfortunately, he caved in to the demands of the crowds and sentenced Jesus to be crucified.

So, why did all these events get recorded in the gospels? Most likely, it was for two main reasons: 1) **They were true historical events** - in other words, it's what really happened; 2) **They reveal that Jesus was innocent of any crime.** It is this last point that is both theologically and evangelistically important. Over and over again, the Bible makes it clear that Jesus died for our sins. Only a perfect sacrifice would be acceptable to the Father. If Jesus had sinned, we could not be saved. He was the sinless lamb of God who took our sins upon his back (I Peter 1:19; II Corinthians 5:21; Hebrews 4:15). By declaring him innocent, Pilate, a Roman official, made it clear that his death was not for any crime he had committed. He was innocent and railroaded into crucifixion. This allowed Jesus to fulfill the role of the Suffering Servant presented by Isaiah (Isaiah 53) while at the same time overcoming the hurdle of how a supposedly crucified criminal could be the Messiah. He wasn't a criminal. He is the Savior.

Action Step: Rent the "Jesus" film or the "Passion of the Christ" and view it through the lens of today's devotional.

Prayer Focus: Give thanks to Jesus for his willingness to experience injustice on your behalf so that you could be forgiven.

Take-a-way: Jesus was treated unjustly so that you could be treated mercifully.