

The Twelve: The Triumph of Divine Justice, Part 1

Luke 6:16-19

Like many of you, I have conversations with people, unbelieving people who don't believe in Christ, don't believe in Christianity, and I talk to them about Christianity. Sometimes I'm trying to help people understand the Gospel, understand certain sections of Scripture. Sometimes I am responding to questions or even, even objections raised against the Christian faith. Like many of you, I've heard a lot of reasons over the years of why people reject Christ, why they don't want to become Christians. Way too many hypocrites in the church. I don't want any part of that. I was hurt by church people at one time, so I'm never going back. Who needs that? Or this one, what about the Crusades? All those, all those wars in the name of Christ? So much ignorance and bloodshed all in the name of God. I don't want any part of that.

What do we understand, Judas Iscariot, when we look at church history. We realize not all who take Christ's name are

truly Christians. There are many hypocrites. There are many people who come into churches who will turn around and hurt others even in the name of Christ. There are some who will, in the name of Christ, go to war. It's not consistent with the Bible. Jesus said, "You'll know them by their," what? "by their fruits," right? You'll know them by their fruit.

The first fruit to grow in the soil of true faith is the fruit of love. Love for God and love for others and the kind of love that's described biblically is the kind of love that God has shown to us in Jesus Christ. It's a sacrificial love. It's self-effacing. It's others benefitting. There is absolutely no self-interest in *agapé* love whatsoever, that's Christian love and it only grows in the heart of someone who's truly been regenerated, who then puts their faith in Jesus Christ, repents of their sins, that is the only soil out of which that love will grow. But that's the love that Jesus Christ demonstrated when he died on the Cross for all who believe and follow him. That's the love that Judas Iscariot, frankly, never had. His actions revealed that. That's the love that hypocrites, whether they're in the church or outside the church and believe me, there are a lot of hypocrites outside the church, you know that as well as I do,

but that's the kind of love that hypocrites are not able to show, because it's not in their hearts.

In all the objections I've dealt with in talking about the Gospel over the years, you know what I never hear? I never hear people who reject Christianity because of Jesus Christ. For those who know anything about Jesus, they are loath to criticize him. Why? Because his integrity is absolutely and utterly beyond reproach. Jesus Christ is completely and utterly perfect. Whether friend or foe, ally or enemy, zealous loyalist or devious betrayer, we see all through the Scripture the same thing, the universal testimony about Jesus Christ is to his impeccable character, his faultless innocence, his spotless perfection.

And that's what we're going to study this morning: the universal testimony of the righteousness of Jesus Christ. Because we need to understand how the crucifixion of Jesus Christ was the greatest injustice ever perpetrated in the history of mankind. It was a crime from start to finish; from the conspiracy, to the betrayal and arrest, to the trial and the sentencing, to the execution, and even to the lies that tried to cover up the resurrection, it's a crime. At the root of it all,

were sins of jealousy and greed, envy and covetousness, pride and self-centeredness.

And listen, that's what we need to realize, every single one of us, the sins that nailed Jesus Christ to the Cross, they are the same sins resident in all of our hearts. They're the same reasons and the motivations for all of our sins, as well. Those sins led to the greatest injustice against the Son of Man, the Son of Man, who never sinned, ever.

So the first point, if you'd like to jot some things down in your notes, just a little bit of a framework to hang your thoughts on, here's the first point: Let's hear first from the testimony of friends, Jesus' friends. The testimony of friends. If I could go all through the Scripture and take a lot of time, a lot of time talking about the testimony of Jesus' friends, but I just want to site two in particular: Peter and John. Peter and John, out of all the disciples, they were Apostles and out of all the Apostles, they were kind of in that inner circle of close, close friends of Jesus Christ. They were in that most intimate circle of his Apostles.

So let's start with the Apostle John. The Apostle John is the longest living of all the twelve. He lived until about AD 98 or so. And in John's first epistle, he starts by affirming the

fact that his testimony about Jesus Christ is a firsthand account. What he saw in Jesus firsthand, up close and personal, was not only sinless and innocent perfection, but divinity. It says in 1 John 1:1 and following, "That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon and touched with our hands, concerning the word of life," that's Christ, "the life was made manifest and we have seen it, and testify to it and proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and was made manifest to us."

John says this Jesus is the Christ all through his epistles, and he says that anyone who says otherwise about Christ is a liar and is anti-Christ. And he is saying this in the face of his fellow Jews, who crucified Christ. Such boldness, such strength! He's saying it in the Greco-Roman world where they scoff at a crucified Messiah. He says Jesus is the Christ, and anyone who says otherwise is a liar, he's anti-Christ. Why? Because he knows, having seen and heard and touched and been around him, that Jesus is righteous. His testimony about God is irrefutable and unassailable. 1 John 2:23, "No one who denies the Son has the Father." They are connected. Whoever confesses the Son, though, has the Father also. So whatever judgment you come to about Christ, that is the same judgment you

must have about the Father. The two are linked. Not only is Jesus Christ the Righteous One, but he has become the propitiation for our sins. Jesus satisfied the wrath of God against us, deserved for our sins. He did so by dying on the Cross.

According to John, Jesus is the one who laid down his life for us, which is how we know what love is. Jesus was able to lay down his life for us on our behalf because he is the spotless Lamb, because he is the Christ, because he is Son of God and Son of Man, fully God, fully man. He is the one who came in the flesh. Everyone who believes Jesus is the Christ has been born of God. Jesus is the one who is true; he is the Son of God. 1 John 5:20, "He is the true God and eternal life." Which is why 2 John 9, we must abide in the teaching of Christ because doing so means that we know God and we have both the Father and the Son. If you're familiar with John's writing, you know that almost every phrase that I've quoted is coming directly from those epistles.

There's a second friend who knew Jesus well, it was the Apostle Peter and like John, Peter also spoke with superlative praise about the perfections of Jesus Christ. Peter called him precious, comparing him to a sacrificial lamb that he says is

without blemish or spot. He said Jesus was “in the sight of God chosen and precious.” Peter commended Jesus to us as exemplary in every way. We’re to follow him. He called him “the shepherd and the overseer of our souls.” Peter testified to the sinless perfection of Jesus when he wrote this in 1 Peter 2:22 to 24, “He,” that is Jesus, “committed no sin, neither was deceit found in his mouth. When he was reviled, he did not revile in return; when he suffered, he did not threaten, but he continued entrusting himself to him who judges justly. He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. By his wounds you have been healed.”

Listen, think about that testimony of Peter, who saw Jesus intimately, closely, for three years. He never committed a sin, not one syllable of deceit in his mouth. Is that like you? Is that like me? We’ve never seen anybody like that. Being reviled, never reviling in return; when we suffer, not threatening, not pushing back at all. We can pull a lot more from Peter’s writings regarding his testimony to the absolute perfect innocence of Jesus Christ.

But I want to point out just one more text because it demonstrates the boldness of his testimony. This testimony of a close a friend and the testimony that he had in the face of a

potential and, and likely an actual opposition and hostility to him. After Peter's shameful denial, after the arrest of Jesus and during the trial, you know that Peter fled, when the sentence of death was handed down and carried out by the Romans, but after Peter saw the risen Jesus Christ, he became one of the boldest witnesses in the bunch.

He used that bold nature to confront his own nation, the Jews, the very ones who put Jesus to death. And he told them this, in the Book of Acts in Chapter 2, "Men of Israel, hear these words. Jesus of Nazareth, a man attested to you by God with mighty works and wonders and signs that God did through him in your midst, as you yourselves know, this Jesus delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men." Jews and Romans complicit, together, in the death of Jesus Christ.

That is basically the whole world, Jew and Gentile alike; that's Peter, John, the testimony of friends, and you say, Oh, sure, that's exactly what you'd expect Jesus' friends to say about him, right? Of course they're going to be loyal. They've got a vested interest in the outcome. Some cynical types might call that a conflict of interest, right? They stand to profit on this Gospel.



What did Jesus' enemies say about him? That's the second point for your outline: the testimony of enemies. The testimony of enemies. Let's start by considering Jesus' main opponents, the Jewish leadership and they're represented here by the ruling body called the Sanhedrin. Turn in your Bibles to Mark 14. Mark 14. We'll get some insight, even here, into the, some of the opinions and conversations among the religious leadership in that day. It's not a, it's not at all a pretty picture. It's kind of what you might have assume to be going on in the, the bowels of politics, right? That's exactly what was going on here. The Sanhedrin, they were a body of lawyers and politicians. They were the, the best theological and legal minds in the land, and they, they held the confidence of the people. Sanhedrin consisted of men from two of the main religious parties in the land, the Pharisees and the Sadducees. Meetings of the Sanhedrin were presided over by the high priest and in many ways, it was a profoundly thoughtful body of religious and political leadership in Jerusalem, a very powerful group of men. And they were overseeing the most important city of the world.

Members of the Sanhedrin had, throughout Jesus' ministry, they had deployed scribes and Pharisees, and basically this is a squad of lawyers and religious zealots. They sent them out to spy on Jesus as he conducted his ministry. They sent them there

to challenge him, and finally to try to catch him in some contradiction, of biblical error, or some doctrinal contradiction issue, or some bad behavior. They hated Jesus most pointedly because the people were listening to him instead of them. They held the ear of the people. They held the confidence of the people, and that's now starting to shift over to Jesus Christ, and they did not like that. That means the loss of power and influence and guess what? Money. Money.

These guys are politicians, and they're theologically, biblically informed politicians at that. They're no dummies. They realize as politicians that no one is squeaky clean. With all their knowledge of the law, surely they'd be able to dig up some kind of dirt on this so-called Messiah, right? So far they're finding that difficult because they couldn't ensnare or trap Jesus on any point of the law and yet rather than bowing before him as Messiah, they wanted him dead. Look at Mark 14:1, "It was now two days before the Passover and Feast of the Unleavened Bread. And the chief priests and the scribes were seeking how to arrest him by stealth and kill him, for they said, 'Not during the feast, lest there be an uproar from the people.'"

So here the Jewish leaders, they're in a bind; they're talking, they're scheming, they're planning together, they're

proposing different strategies, they're thinking about the right tactics to use to remove this religious interloper from their midst. Because they're religious leaders, no doubt they're praying about it too. It's part of their fervent prayers, offering up even sacrifices in the temple asking for God's help in ridding the land of yet another false Messiah, this Jesus. Just then, as they're thinking, you know what? Let's do it after the festival. We don't want to cause an uproar from the people; just then opportunity came knocking.

It must have seemed to them that God was answering their prayers in the form of a man named Judas. Skip down to verse 10, take a look there, "And then Judas Iscariot, who was one of the twelve, went to the chief priests in order to betray him to them." Ah, answered prayer! "When they heard it, they were glad and promised to give him money. And he sought for an opportunity to betray him." After visiting the chief priest, this meeting right here where they conspired to together and started to concoct a plan that would betray Jesus, do you know what Judas did? He went back to the Apostles. He went back to join Jesus and the Apostles at the Last Supper. He actually sat there eating bread with them, carrying on polite conversation, sharing pleasantries and jokes. He, he actually allowed his Savior, his Lord that he proclaimed, allowed him to wash his feet. He

reclined there among all the other believers. He ate bread with them. He raised the cup in fellowship. But it was all external. Judas' heart was not with them; it never was. So even during that meeting, before Jesus actually taught his true disciples, during that meeting, he peeled away from the fellowship so he could meet with the religious leaders, plan how he would deliver Jesus over to them.

After Judas had met with them, look at verse 43. Skip way ahead in chapter 14 to verse 43. We're going to see Judas enter the scene again. He's at the head of the arresting party. Judas is leading the ones who are going to arrest Jesus, the soldiers and those who deployed from the chief priests, he's going to lead them to, gets, Gethsemane where he knew Jesus would be. Look at verse 43, "And immediately, while he was still speaking," Jesus was still speaking, "Judas came, one of the twelve, and with him a crowd with swords and clubs, from the chief priest and the scribes and the elders. Now the betrayer had given them a sign saying, 'The one I will kiss is the man. Seize him and lead him away under guard.' And when he came, he went up to him at once and said, 'Rabbi!' And he kissed him. And they laid hands on him and seized him."

Stop reading there. What an insidious sign! So coldhearted. So indifferent to all the love that Jesus had truly expressed toward Judas all through the three years he had been with him; all signs of sacrifice, no signs of favoritism, even. Jesus loved all of his disciples to the very end, even washing their feet. And he comes and betrays the Lord Jesus Christ with a kiss, a kiss of friendship, a kiss of trust. Well, they immediately took Jesus to the high priest, to Caiaphas, who presided over the Sanhedrin. Caiaphas convened the council right away in the middle of the night.

In keeping with their hypocrisy, they conducted all of this dirty business at night out of the public eye. But they hit a snag. Look at Mark 14:55, just turn a page there, "Now the chief priests and the whole council were seeking testimony against Jesus to put him to death, but they found none." They're putting together their case against Christ. It sounds like they're kind of cobbling it together on the fly, doesn't it? Well, they are. This is completely backwards. They realized they needed, in order to put him to death, they needed to charge him with a capital crime. They had to establish guilt for an offense that would allow them to put him to death. Here they've already determined the sentence; now they just needed to reverse engineer this thing and throw together this phony trial, more

like an interrogation, actually, trying in vain to establish guilt. This all proved harder than they thought. So they sought testimony. They had to gather them pretty quickly.

And I want you to first notice in thinking about just that verse, notice that in seeking testimony against Jesus, there is no mention about asking Judas Iscariot to testify. Why not? Isn't Judas Iscariot the perfect inside man? I mean if anyone could have gathered all the dirt on Jesus in his inner circle, it would have been Judas, right? After all, he'd been traveling with this inner group of Jesus' disciples since the very beginning. He was specially selected by Jesus, numbered among the twelve Apostles. He is the ultimate insider. He's the mole deep deep inside the camp. He could be a whistleblower for their cause. Even better, Judas came to them. He came willingly. He came eagerly to betray Jesus. But Judas also came secretly. And if they had put Judas on the witness stand, you know what would eventually come out? That the Sanhedrin had used dubious means to make a baseless arrest of Jesus without probable cause and for money.

There is no probable cause that Jesus had committed any crime, any offense the law of Moses. In fact, when Jesus was arrested, he exposed that very thing, that they didn't have

cause to arrest him. He said in Mark, you can see it there in Mark 14:48-49, he told the arresting party when they came, "Have you come out as against a robber, with swords and clubs to capture me? Day after day I was with you in the temple teaching, and you did not seize me. But let the Scriptures be fulfilled."

Look, if they had had probable cause to arrest Jesus, they would have done so, and they would have done it publicly in the sight of everyone. If Jesus had said something blasphemous, heretical or even erroneous, they could easily defend taking him into custody, but they had nothing on him. Most devious-minded people like this would be begging for an insider like Judas Iscariot to give them all the hidden dirt on Jesus so they could put together their case. They didn't put him on the witness stand because that would expose their hypocrisy, duplicity, their conspiracy, their paying for Judas to come and betray him. It would expose their whole thing as a sham and a fraud.

But they didn't even interrogate him. They didn't even try to find out what is in Judas, what does he know, what could we use. Something strangely suspicious about building a case against Christ, but ignoring the only available testimony of a true insider, a hostile insider, one who has collaborated with you? And since they decided against his involvement, the halls

of the courts became filled with the contradictory voices of false witnesses.

They had here a charade of respectability and justice to uphold and maintain. Judas was an unacceptable risk to that. It might taint their respectable image. They needed to keep him at a distance. Look back again at Mark 14:55, "Chief priests, the whole council seeking testimony against Jesus to put him to death, but they found none. For many bore false witness against him, but their testimony did not agree. Some stood up, bore false witness against him, saying," Ah! "We heard him say, "I will destroy this temple that is made with hands, and in three days I will build another, not made with hands." Yet even about this their testimony did not agree."

Look, when you're trying to build a case against someone and it's all based on a fabrication, when it's all based on a lie, I guess you shouldn't be too surprised when this chorus of testimonies don't agree with one another; when they contradict each other because error, by its very nature, is logically inconsistent and contradictory. The law of Moses, very specific about what should've happened at this point. Deuteronomy 17:6, Moses says, "On the evidence of two witnesses or of three witnesses the one who is to die shall be put to death; a person



shall not be put to death on the evidence of one witness." Two or three witnesses, testimonies in agreement with one another. They form a collaborative witness against the offender in a capital crime. But no one is permitted to be put to death on the basis of a single witness. Again, in Deuteronomy 19:15, "A single witness shall not suffice against a person for any crime for any wrong in connection with any offense that he has committed. Only on the evidence of two witnesses or of three witnesses shall a charge be established."

Isn't it amazing they couldn't come up with two? Not finding any agreement among those who testified against Jesus, what should the Sanhedrin have done at this point? Summarily, they should have dropped the case immediately. They should have released Jesus with a public statement of his innocence. But no, look what happens. The high priest steps up, lest anybody register a voice of protest at this travesty of injustice, the high priest intervenes to interrogate Jesus. Look at verse 60, "Yet even about this their testimony did not agree. The high priest, he stood up in the midst and he asked Jesus, 'Have you no answer to make? What is this that these men testify against you?' He remained silent and he made no answer."

At this point, had Jesus continued that course to remain silent, if he had refused to open his mouth, the Sanhedrin, they would have been forced to release Jesus. They would have been unsuccessful in trying to reverse engineer this case because they couldn't put him to death without a believable, credible charge. And that was necessary to sell this thing to the Roman governor so they could get Jesus executed, to say nothing of selling this thing to the Jewish nation.

So here the high priest tries again, one more time. This time, though, Jesus breaks his silence. This time he speaks up. He's clarifying the basis of their rejection of him, and he's providing them with the real reason they have against him, the real reason they wanted to charge him and sentence him to death and then execute him on the cross.

Look at Mark 14:61, "He remained silent," made, "made no answer. But again the high priest asked him, 'Are you the Christ, the Son of the Blessed?' And Jesus said, 'I AM, and you will see the Son of Man seated at the right hand of Power and coming with the clouds of heaven.' The high priest tore his garments and said, 'What further witnesses do we need? You have heard this blasphemy. What is your decision?' And they all condemned him as deserving death."

Look, what is the offense there? What is the charge? Blasphemy, right? He simply answered the high priest's question in the affirmative. "Are you the Christ, the Son of the Blessed?" Matthew records the high priest's demand for an answer, he say, as, "I adjure you by the living God," which is why Jesus answered conforming himself to the prescriptions of the law. "I adjure you by the living God, tell us if you are the Christ, the Son of God." And so by God, Jesus said, "I AM." Jesus told the truth. They called it blasphemy.

His answer, "I AM." it's interesting. It's *ego eimi* in the Greek. It's an explicit reference to the divine name Yahweh: I AM. That's something that almost resulted in his being stoned in the past on the spot because he claimed equality with God. This time it actually is going to result in his crucifixion. And notice, not only did Jesus' answer in the affirmative, "I AM," *ego eimi*, he also claimed for himself the Messianic title, "Son of Man." He even warned them there as they're about to make a decision that would guarantee future regret for them, "You will see the Son of Man seated at the right hand of the Power and coming with the clouds of heaven."