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ZION EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH  
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**“GOD ON TRIAL”  
#4 – THE REDIRECT**

Grace and peace are yours from God our Father and from Christ Jesus our Savior. Amen.

In Aaron Sorkin’s book, *A Few Good Men*, the author presents the case of two marines on trial for murder because they were instructed by one of their superiors to teach some discipline on a fellow marine who was lagging in his capabilities and because he was going beyond the chain of command in an attempt to get a transfer to another base. No, it’s not really a military movie and especially not a war movie. It’s more of a legal drama as the defense attempts to prove that the two marines can’t be found guilty of murder when they were just following orders. So, much of the story takes place in a court room with the lawyers asking penetrating questions and witnesses giving their testimony.

As important as testimony is, sometimes a lawyer – either for the prosecution or for the defense – will need to redirect the witness in order to untwist the narrative that the other lawyer attempted to draw up. In *A Few Good Men* the defense attorney does that in a rather way. The prosecution had just used the marine handbook for Guantanamo Bay to prove that there was no instruction on how to conduct a “code red,” the name by which intercompany discipline was called. The point of the prosecuting attorney was since “code red” wasn’t in the handbook, it must not actually exist. The defense then used the same book to ask about the meals. Of course, nothing in the handbook mentioned when or where to eat, so the defense

attorney asked the witness: Do you mean you never get to eat? The witness assured him that he received three square meals a day, thus demonstrating that not everything about being a marine is in the handbook.

In legal jargon, that was a redirect, and it's a debate technique that skilled attorneys use quite successfully.

Now, Jesus had no legal defense team – itself another violation of both the Jewish legal system and the Roman legal system. He was on His own. It's interesting, then, as we consider the details of His trial, Jesus never actually mounted a defense of Himself. It is as though He was intent to allow them to convict and condemn Him – which, of course, He was. He understood fully that this was the way the world would be reconciled to God, which was through His own death in our place. However, as we ponder the trial more deeply, we do hear some amazing redirects from Jesus. Those redirects were always for the benefit of others rather than an attempt to free Himself. It is one of those redirects that we consider in this the fourth installment of our series "God on Trial." This portion of Jesus' trial is in the New Testament book of John 18:28-38:

*(ESV) Then they led Jesus from the house of Caiaphas to the governor's headquarters. It was early morning. They themselves did not enter the governor's headquarters, so that they would not be defiled, but could eat the Passover. (29) So Pilate went outside to them and said, "What accusation do you bring against this man?" (30) They answered him, "If this man were not doing evil, we would not have delivered him over to you." (31) Pilate said to them, "Take him yourselves and judge him by your own law." The Jews said to him, "It is not lawful for us to put anyone to death." (32) This was to fulfill the word that Jesus had spoken to show by what kind of death he was going to die. (33) So Pilate entered his headquarters again and called*

*Jesus and said to him, "Are you the King of the Jews?" (34) Jesus answered, "Do you say this of your own accord, or did others say it to you about me?" (35) Pilate answered, "Am I a Jew? Your own nation and the chief priests have delivered you over to me. What have you done?" (36) Jesus answered, "My kingdom is not of this world. If my kingdom were of this world, my servants would have been fighting, that I might not be delivered over to the Jews. But my kingdom is not from the world." (37) Then Pilate said to him, "So you are a king?" Jesus answered, "You say that I am a king. For this purpose I was born and for this purpose I have come into the world--to bear witness to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth listens to my voice." (38) Pilate said to him, "What is truth?"*

Let's start with the "whole assembly" that led Jesus away (Luke 23:1). This is the Sanhedrin—the chief priests and teachers of the law, the group that put Jesus on trial. They heard Jesus confess that he is "I AM," the true God, but they didn't believe it. In fact, this is what angered them so much that they finally all decided He deserved to die. The hiccup for them is that, since they were under Roman occupation, the Roman government didn't allow them to carry out the sentence. So they brought Jesus to the Roman governor, Pontius Pilate.

Of course, they knew Pilate would never sentence Jesus to death for a religious dispute. So, they fabricated some other accusations, which consisted of two outright lies and one half-truth. The first lie: Jesus was misleading the nation. In fact, He was doing the opposite; He was telling people that salvation was only by grace and could not be earned by works. The second lie: Jesus opposed paying taxes to Caesar. The truth was that Jesus had specifically told them to "give to Caesar what belongs to Caesar," which included the coin that had Caesar's inscription and likeness on it.

What about the half-truth? They informed Pilate that Jesus was claiming to be Messiah, a kind of a king. This was true, of course, as far as it goes. Jesus is the Messiah, and He is the fulfillment of God's promise in Psalm 2: *Yet I have set My King on Zion, My holy hill.* Yet what they were insinuating is that Jesus was going to gather some followers to try and overthrow the Roman government and then to set Himself up in the place of Caesar. This is the one point – this half lie – that Pilate decided was worth investigating.

As the governor whose chief responsibility was to be watchful for any sign of rebellion or insurrection, Pilate had almost certainly heard of Jesus, but you get the impression he didn't bother to understand Jesus' teachings. Suddenly, though, on a Friday early morning, a mob materialized outside his headquarters, shoving forward this plain-looking Man and accusing Him of attempting to overthrow Caesar and therefore worthy of the death penalty. Pilate's initial question asked of Jesus informs us what he was thinking, "Are you the King of the Jews?"

It's at this point that we are informed of most of the testimony that Jesus offers at His trial. Before the Sanhedrin, He only spoke to testify to His divine nature and authority. Other than that, He remained silent. Now, before Pilate, Jesus responds in a back and forth discussion that demonstrates His skill at redirecting. So, to Pilate's question, Jesus asks: *Do you say this of your own accord, or did others say it to you about me?*

The point of Jesus' question was to point out to Pilate that he was unwittingly being used as a pawn of the Jewish Sanhedrin. Pilate wasn't the one who drug Jesus into court in order to carry out his duties of maintaining Rome's authority over Judea. Pilate was being manipulated into a religious dispute, which

was something that the Roman emperor specifically directed his governors not to do.

Then Pilate, perceiving Jesus' point, retorts: Am I a Jew? His point was to insist that he cared little for the affairs of the people he was sent to govern. He was as much as saying, "You can't pin on me your little civil dispute." Then, he takes it further by asking, "*Your own nation and the chief priests have delivered you over to me. What have you done?*" In other words, "Jesus, you're all alone here. Not even your own countrymen are interested in having you. You must be guilty of something."

With that, Jesus has successfully brought Pilate to the main point of what was going on and why. His redirect was successful. That's when Jesus unfolds for Pilate what this was really all about: *My kingdom is not of this world. If my kingdom were of this world, my servants would have been fighting, that I might not be delivered over to the Jews. But my kingdom is not from the world.*

Quite obviously, there was nothing about Jesus that even remotely resembled an earthly king. He was as plain a Man as there ever was. He had no soldiers. In fact, the one follower of Jesus who drew out a sword to try to defend Him, Jesus rebuked, instructing to put his sword back into its sheath. Though many people had welcomed Him into Jerusalem earlier that week on the day we now call Palm Sunday, none of them were there that morning ready to start an armed conflict with the religious leaders or with Pilate's soldiers in an attempt to free Jesus.

Jesus tells Pilate that this doesn't mean His isn't a king. He is truly a king, but not one who came to establish an earthly kingdom. He came to establish His kingdom not over people

but within people – in their very hearts and souls. And the only weapon He uses to establish that kingdom is the truth – which is God’s Word. His intention is not to use swords to keep the world in fear, but to use the Sword of the Spirit to conquer our fear with His abundant grace.

See, we naturally have a rather shallow view of Jesus, which means we also have a very shallow view of God, because Jesus is God. We tend to treat him like a divine vending machine, expecting him to dispense blessings we want us and then getting angry when we put in our money – which amounts to our paltry good work – but then our blessing doesn’t drop. Or we treat Him like a genie in a lamp that is supposed to grant us our three wishes, which means only good things from our perspective, but then we become irritated when He allows troubles and trials to come on us. Perhaps we think we can enjoy his grace without offering grace to others.

The problem—which is the problem we all share—is that we don’t keep in mind that Jesus only intends and desires to be the inward King – that is, the King in our hearts. The Jewish leaders were thinking only about their religious and cultural influence over the people. Pilate was thinking only about his political influence. Because that was their main concern, they rejected the kind of King Jesus came to be. For the Jewish leaders, that means they needed to get rid of Jesus. For Pilate it meant that He could care less what happened to Jesus. Well, we have the same selfish and indifference at work in us. We’re sinners like them. Our sin is keeps our hearts and minds focused on earthly things rather than on spiritual things, but Jesus is a spiritual King who rules in our hearts through His Word – the truth.

In order to be that King in our hearts, Jesus did have to overthrow our enemies, but as His kingdom is spiritual so also our enemies are spiritual, too. The Bible repeatedly speaks

about our enemies – it's a true axis of evil – including: Satan, the sinful nature we all have, the vain philosophies and attitudes of the world, death, and hell. Jesus had to conquer them, and He did through His suffering and death on the cross. That's why Jesus wasn't trying to exonerate Himself either before the Sanhedrin or before Pilate. His redirect to Pilate wasn't for His own sake, but for Pilate's sake, so that Pilate might know that what Jesus was allowing to come on Him would be to establish a kingdom that resides in the hearts of Jesus' disciples where no tyrant or emperor, no mob or religious edict can overthrow. He came to speak the truth, and by it to set up His throne in our hearts.

That truth teaches us, first and foremost, repentance in regard to our sin – especially against our earthly mindset and our treating God and Christ as our genie in the bottle. He didn't come to grant us wishes but to save our souls. His Word redirects our hearts so that we see how vain those earthly treasures and pleasures truly are. Then, by His Word of truth, He redirects our hearts to the far greater blessings which He has made available to us through His cross. These blessings include the forgiveness of all our sin, true peace with God who no longer sees our sins since He remembers them no more, and the certain hope of life in heaven with God free from the sin which so easily ensnares us here and now. When our hearts are redirected by Jesus' Word to these blessings, we call that redirection faith, and where faith exists, there is Jesus ruling as King by grace and not by fear.

Now, there are some who claim that Jesus has a plan one day to establish Himself as an earthly King. They base that on a few passages of the Bible taken out of context. Jesus kingdom is already here, as He told those who listened to Him 2,000 years ago. His kingdom is within you. Jesus has no desire to rule over

an earthly kingdom, which is the very nonsense that the devil offered Him when He tempted Jesus to fall down and worship Him. The only Kingdom Jesus desires to establish and to rule over is in you. He wants to bring His forgiveness, His peace, and His life to fill you and to keep you from your worst enemies. So by His Word He redirects your heart away from temporary, earthly pursuits to pursue those things which are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of the Father, where He will one day bring those whom He ruled by faith. AMEN!